



CONNECTED LEARNING: REIMAGINING THE EXPERIENCE OF EDUCATION IN THE INFORMATION AGE

We are living in a historical moment of transformation and realignment in the creation and sharing of knowledge, in social, political and economic life, and in global connectedness. There is wide agreement that we need new models of education suited to this historic moment, and not simply new models of schooling, but entirely new visions of learning better suited to the increasing complexity, connectivity, and velocity of our new knowledge society. Fortunately, we are also able to harness the same technologies and social processes that have powered these transformations in order to provide the next generation with learning experiences that open doors to academic achievement, economic opportunity, and civic engagement.

Specifically, we now have the capability to reimagine where, when, and how learning takes place; to empower and motivate youth to pursue knowledge and develop expertise at a pace, to a degree, and on a path that takes advantage of their unique interests and potential; and to build on innovations across a growing spectrum of learning institutions able to support a range of learning experiences for youth that were unimaginable even 15 years ago.

We propose a new approach to learning -- connected learning -- that is anchored in research, robust theories of learning, and the best of traditional standards, but also designed to mine the learning potential of the new social- and digital media domain and the heart of which is aimed at the following questions:

- What would it mean to think of education as a responsibility of a distributed network of people and institutions, including schools, libraries, museums and online communities?
- What would it mean to think of education as a process of guiding youths' active participation in public life that includes civic engagement, and intellectual, social, recreational, and career-relevant pursuits?
- How can we take advantage of the new kinds of intergenerational configurations that have formed in which youth and adults come together to work, mobilize, share, learn, and achieve together?
- What would it mean to enlist in this effort a diverse set of stakeholders that are broader than what we traditionally think of as educational and civic institutions?

Connected learning is a work in progress, building on existing models, ongoing experimentation, and dialog with diverse stakeholders. It draws from social, ubiquitous, blended and personalized learning, delivered by new media, to help us remodel our educational system in tune with today's economic and political realities. Connected

learning is not, however, distinguished by a particular technology or platform, but is inspired by an initial set of three educational values, three learning principles, and three design principles.

At the core of connected learning are three values:

- Equity -- when educational opportunity is available and accessible to all young people, it elevates the world we all live in.
- Full Participation -- learning environments, communities, and civic life thrive when all members actively engage and contribute.
- Social connection -- learning is meaningful when it is part of valued social relationships and shared practice, culture, and identity.

In order to realize these values, connected learning seeks to harness and integrate the learning that young people pursue in the spheres of interest, peer relations, and academics based on the following three learning principles:

- Interest-powered – Interests power the drive to acquire knowledge and expertise. Research shows that learners who are interested in what they are learning, achieve higher order learning outcomes. Connected learning does not just rely on the innate interests of the individual learner, but views interests and passions as something to be actively developed in the context of personalized learning pathways that allow for specialized and diverse identities and interests.
- Peer-supported – Learning in the context of peer interaction is engaging and participatory. Research shows that among friends and peers, young people fluidly contribute, share, and give feedback to one another, producing powerful learning. Connected learning research demonstrates that peer learning need not be peer-isolated. In the context of interest-driven activity, adult participation is welcomed by young people. Although expertise and roles in peer learning can differ based on age and experience, everyone gives feedback to one another and can contribute and share their knowledge and views.
- Academically oriented – Educational institutions are centered on the principle that intellectual growth thrives when learning is directed towards academic achievement and excellence. Connected learning recognizes the importance of academic success for intellectual growth and as an avenue towards economic and political opportunity. Peer culture and interest-driven activity needs to be connected to academic subjects, institutions, and credentials for diverse young people to realize these opportunities. Connected learning mines and translates popular peer culture and community-based knowledge for academic relevance.

Connected learning builds on what we've long known about the value and effectiveness of interest-driven, peer-supported, and academically relevant learning; but in addition,

connected learning calls on today's interactive and networked media in an effort to make these forms of learning more effective, better integrated, and broadly accessible. The following design principles involve integrating the spheres of interests, peers, and academics, and broadening access through the power of today's technology.

- Shared purpose -- Connected learning environments are populated with adults and peers who share interests and are contributing to a common purpose. Today's social media and web-based communities provide exceptional opportunities for learners, parents, caring adults, teachers, and peers in diverse and specialized areas of interest to engage in shared projects and inquiry. Cross-generational learning and connection thrives when centered on common interests and goals.
- Production-centered -- Connected learning environments are designed around production, providing tools and opportunities for learners to produce, circulate, curate, and comment on media. Learning that comes from actively creating, making, producing, experimenting, remixing, decoding, and designing, fosters skills and dispositions for lifelong learning and productive contributions to today's rapidly changing work and political conditions.
- Openly networked -- Connected learning environments are designed around networks that link together institutions and groups across various sectors, including popular culture, educational institutions, home, and interest communities. Learning resources, tools, and materials are abundant, accessible and visible across these settings and available through open, networked platforms and public-interest policies that protect our collective rights to circulate and access knowledge and culture. Learning is most resilient when it is linked and reinforced across settings of home, school, peer culture and community.

The urgent need to reimagine education grows clearer by the day. Research has shown that too many students are disengaged and alienated from school, and see little or no purpose to their education. Business leaders say there is a widening gap between the skills of the workforce and the needs of businesses seeking competitive advantage. Additionally, technology and the networked era threatens to stretch the already-wide equity gap in education unless there is decisive intervention and a strong public agenda

The principles of connected learning weren't born in the digital age, but they are extraordinarily well-suited to it. Connected learning seeks to tie together the respected historical body of research on how youth best learn with the opportunities made available through today's networked and digital media. Connected learning is real-world. It's social. It's hands-on. It's active. It's networked. It's personal. It's effective. Through a new vision of learning, it holds out the possibility for productive and broad-based educational change.

To find out more about the connected learning community and ongoing research, please visit connectedlearning.tv and clrn.dmlhub.net.

