

Future Focus: 3 Skills for Tomorrow's Classroom

As a manager in Steelcase's WorkSpace Futures, Andrew Kim has spent more than five years visiting schools and universities around the country, talking to educators and administrators, as well as studying online learning. He combines research and insights into the world of work and education to advance our understanding of educational environments.

When visiting primary and secondary schools and universities around the country, I see educators using active learning as a way to teach newly-prized 21st century skills. The "4 Cs," critical thinking, communication, creativity and collaboration, are being added to the "3 Rs," reading, writing and arithmetic. Now, with a focus on the future of education, we are asking: What's next?

If the "4 C's" are the focus for today's learners, what skills will students of the future need to develop? Through research, observations and conversations, I've narrowed in on three skills that may prepare future learners for a highly unpredictable, hyper-competitive world.

1.

SELF-AGENCY

Organizations will need to be more nimble and adaptable. We can expect to see the continued shift from command-and-control organizations to self-learning organizations with flatter structures and more distributed decision-making. In these new organizations, employees will need to be skilled in self-directed learning and have an increased sense of self-agency.

With the rise of maker spaces in schools, our education system is starting to create learning experiences that help students shift their mindset from being consumers of knowledge to being creators. Not only do maker spaces help teach kids tech skills and instill interest in science and engineering careers, they also have the potential of teaching learners a sense of empowerment and that they can impact the world.

Edward Clapp, a researcher from Harvard School of Education, has been studying maker spaces through a multi-year research initiative called Agency By Design. He sees agency as one of the real advantages of maker-centered learning. Similarly, Stanford d.school educators shared with us the benefit of students learning design thinking is gaining a sense of agency and impact on the world.

2.

PARADIGM SHIFTING

While the average human lifespan continues to increase, we see the reverse trend with the average lifespan of public companies. Boston Consulting Group's analysis comparing human lifespans and the lifespans of public companies showed that while human life spans have nearly increased 50 percent between 1950 and 2010, corporate life spans have decreased by half.

Creative thinking within a given context may no longer be enough.

In an intense, ever changing marketplace, companies must be prepared to innovate their business models. Companies can no longer compete solely on incremental innovation. Disruptive innovations are changing how companies compete with one another. Organizations will need employees who can imagine complete paradigm shifts. Creative thinking within a giving context may no longer be enough. Employees will need to harness their mind and think of new possibilities for their industries.

3.

HUMAN-TO-COMPUTER COLLABORATION

As technology hardware and artificial intelligence continue to improve at high speed, the nature of collaboration will change. We'll not only need to learn how to collaborate well with others, but we'll need to learn how to collaborate with machines.

An early sign of how our interaction with machines may evolve can be found in the results from free style chess tournaments.

In free style chess tournaments, humans can collaborate with other humans and computers in any combination. The surprise winner of the “no-rules” free style tournament wasn't the grand master chess player collaborating with a computer. Rather, it was a team of amateur players working with a team of off-the-shelf computers. The lesson being that the process of collaboration — when we choose to interact with other humans and how we choose to interact with computers — is vital.

To learn more about how education is changing and how educators and students are adapting, visit steelcase.com/education.

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