

FORGING YOUTH-CENTERED FUTURES

BRINGING YOUTH VISIONS TO LIFE



WHAT MIGHT THE FUTURE OF LEARNING LOOK LIKE

if it reflected the aspirations of youth? While adults usually have the biggest say in the design of education systems and learning experiences, children and youth are directly affected by adult decision-making and advocacy.

That's why **Tomorrow — a campaign powered by Remake Learning** — calls us to center the voices of youth. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and strive to remake learning in ways that reflect the changing nature of the world, how might we leverage youth ideas about how education could and should change over the next 10 years?

The Tomorrow campaign's organizers asked KnowledgeWorks and SLB Radio Productions to gather youth perspectives. How might kids remake learning for a post-pandemic future? What advice might they have for adults? What approaches and strategies might they want us to use as we build futures focused on them?

THIS BRIEF PRESENTS THOSE PERSPECTIVES.

A RELATED SLB RADIO PRODUCTIONS
PODCAST SERIES CREATED AND
HOSTED BY YOUTH FEATURED MORE
YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON THE
FUTURE OF LEARNING.

DESIGNING THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

This publication builds upon the youth insights presented in **Forging the Future of Learning: The Kids Have a Lot to Say.**

The strategies in this publication were generated during a collaborative workshop attended by adults and youth. Participants represented a wide range of sectors, organizations and perspectives involved in learning. Workshop participants ideated on designs for artifacts from the future: objects, places, practices, policies or roles that depict what learning could look like in the future.

To imagine what these designs might look like, workshop participants played a modified version of **The Thing From The Future.** They were tasked with identifying artifacts from the future that embodied a key element or elements of the aspirations surfaced by youth, along with strategies for making those artifacts real.



KEY ELEMENTS OF YOUTH-CENTERED FUTURES

Youth who shared their insights articulated broad aspirations for the future of learning. When workshop participants explored how to design and create youth-centered futures, the key elements below served as anchors.



RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships with and among peers, educators and mentors involved in learning.



PERSONALIZATION OF LEARNING

Learning that is oriented around each learner's needs, interests and goals.



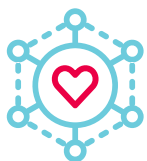
LEARNER SUPPORTS

Assistance and interventions that address learners' needs.



LEARNING LOCATIONS

The places and spaces where learning happens and their key features and functions.



LEARNING CULTURES

The guiding beliefs and values that shape how a learning location operates and what it feels like to be there.



CREATING YOUTH-CENTERED FUTURES

The future is unknowable. But we can use our knowledge about change to make informed assumptions about what the future might hold – and to exercise our own agency in shaping it. We can help steer in- and out-of-school-time learning towards the kinds of futures that youth want to see.

Drawn from ideas generated during a workshop co-hosted by KnowledgeWorks and Remake Learning, the following designs imagine possible futures that reflect the desires and needs of youth. Related strategies suggest ways of bringing these and other designs to life, creating youth-centered learning not just in the future, but right now.



RELATIONSHIPS:

Relationships with and among peers, educators and mentors involved in learning

WELCOMING: TEACHING AN ALIEN is a future curriculum intended to build relationships between learners and adults. It asks learners to teach an alien lifeform by translating the alien's language into their own.

The process of teaching a different life form builds empathy — a critical component of relationships. In teaching the alien, learners also create media in the form of audio recordings or videos for parents, caregivers and other adults to consume. These media help learners show what they have learned in the process. By giving adults insight into what the learner has been working on, the media also create opportunities for adults to provide feedback and to ask further questions.

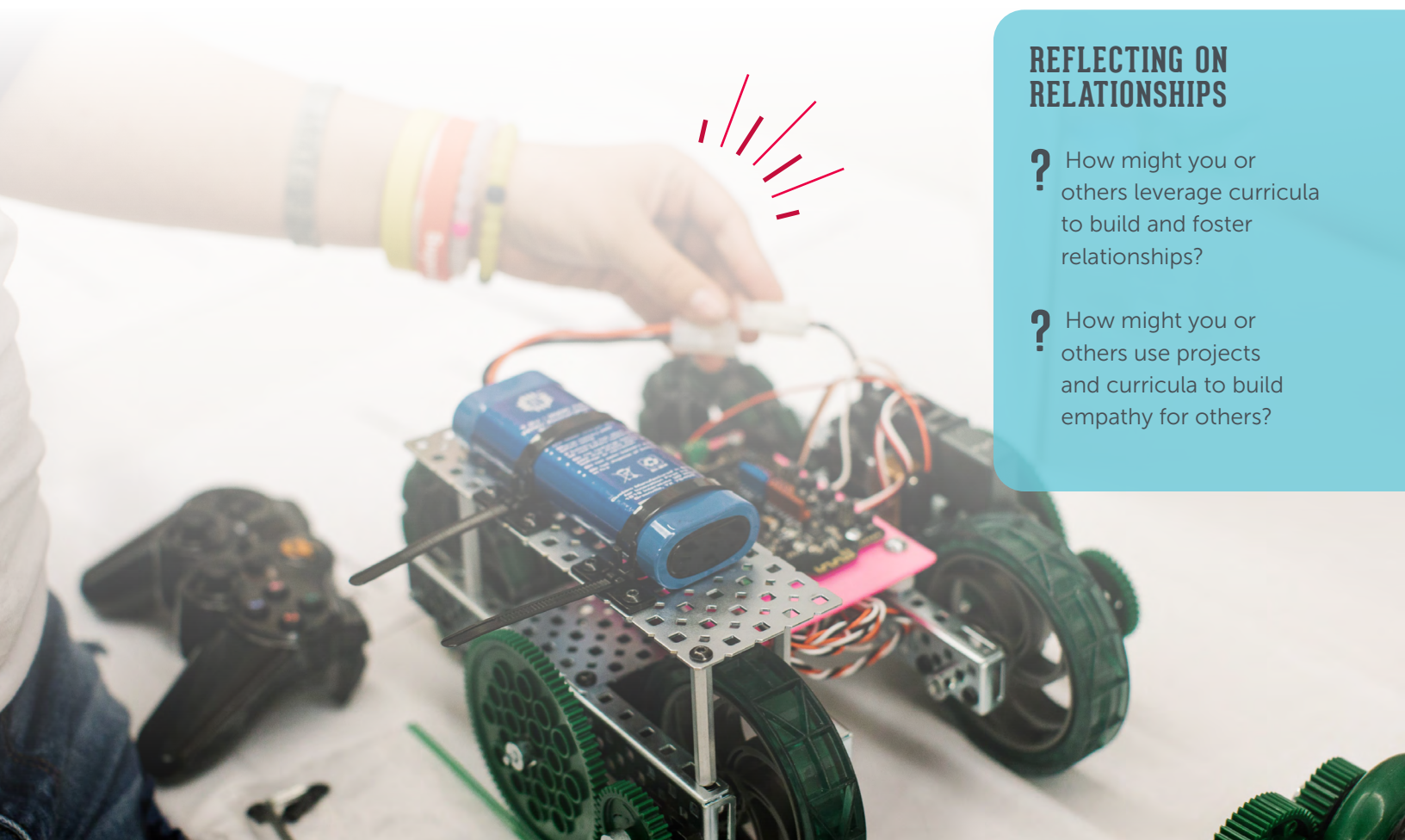
The curriculum itself is highly flexible, allowing for personalization in how learners approach translating the alien's language and in what they might teach the alien. This flexibility allows for learners to collaborate with others, which is a key ingredient in relationship building.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR RELATIONSHIPS

- + Craft self-directed learning experiences that connect people and foster empathy.
- + Identify multiple ways for learners to demonstrate their skills and knowledge.
- + Involve parents and caregivers in engaging with demonstrations of knowledge.
- + Give learners flexibility in deciding how to approach their work.

REFLECTING ON RELATIONSHIPS

- ? How might you or others leverage curricula to build and foster relationships?
- ? How might you or others use projects and curricula to build empathy for others?



PERSONALIZATION OF LEARNING:

Learning that is oriented around each learner's needs, interests and goals

PersonalizED: LEARNER-LED PERSONALIZED LEARNING GROUPS

PersonalizED is a network of learner-led, teacher-supported personalized learning groups. Consisting of learners from multiple schools around the same area, groups gather virtually or in person to enhance the learning experiences offered by their schools.

Each group meets regularly to identify ways of augmenting or altering members' school assignments to reflect their interests and goals through personalized study and supports. Members also rely on the groups to hold themselves accountable to their plans. Area teachers receive stipends to assist them.

In addition, members make wide use of experts in their communities and engage in peer-to-peer learning, broadening their definition of "educator." Beyond sparking engagement among youth, PersonalizED aims to bring the practices of personalized learning into schools through a youth-led, bottom-up approach.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR PERSONALIZATION OF LEARNING

- + Activate peer-to-peer learning and leadership through supportive structures.
- + Compensate teachers for taking the initiative to extend student supports.
- + Connect in-school learning experiences with out-of-school experts and mentors.
- + Include students in planning that affects them.

REFLECTING ON PERSONALIZATION OF LEARNING

- ? How might you foster personalized learning from the ground up?
- ? How might you engage youth in developing classroom practices?



LEARNER SUPPORTS:

Assistance and interventions that address learners' needs

SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS enable learners to curate their own webs of support by selecting with whom they want to interact. These networks use existing social media platforms to foster supportive relationships among learners, educators, caregivers and community members. Any given adult might interact with multiple youth — and youth might interact with one another — as determined by the person at the center of the web.

These social support networks piggyback on social media platforms' existing features, thereby keeping barriers to access and implementation low while enabling those in learners' webs of support to send messages, share information and connect with one another. The networks do, however, add two unique features: a custom notification system that lets those in each network know of potentially urgent communications, and user authentication designed to ensure safety in line with the Online Child Protection Act.

Youth can turn to these networks whenever they feel the need. Simple icons let them signal the need for support without having to get into detail. Designated adults can then reach out to check in. Youth who would not otherwise be able to access these networks can borrow devices for a year at a time.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR LEARNER SUPPORTS

- + Create structures that let youth designate trusted advisors.
- + Find simple, low-risk ways of enabling youth to reach out for support.
- + Leverage existing technical tools to provide customized supports.
- + Equip more adults with the tools and training needed to individualize student supports.

REFLECTING ON LEARNER SUPPORTS

- ? How might you leverage existing technology in new ways to meet learners' needs?
- ? How might you create conditions that encourage learners to reach out for support without feeling stigmatized?



LEARNING LOCATIONS:

The places and spaces where learning happens and their key features and functions

SPACES THAT SPARK LEARNING are learning environments designed by learners, for learners. The spaces are intended to create the conditions for optimal learning through flexible, configurable designs that help learners relax and feel at ease. Students lead conversations about how the spaces can support their learning. Learners also engage in co-design.

While each space is individually designed, they all share common traits. Each space seeks to tap into all five senses using biophilic design, which connects people and nature within built environments. Sometimes, this approach might mean creating an outdoor learning space. These spaces also typically make use of natural light and green design to minimize environmental impact. In addition, they often contain configurable furniture, such as standing desks, that lets learners decide how to best use the space for learning. Educators participate in professional development that helps them co-create ways of maximizing their support of learners in these spaces.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING LOCATIONS

- + Engage learners as partners in reconfiguring existing learning spaces or designing new ones.
- + Purchase configurable furniture, along with décor that appeals to multiple senses.
- + Use green design principles when building or retrofitting schools and other learning locations.
- + Reduce barriers to nature by increasing ventilation, maximizing natural light and adding plants.

REFLECTING ON LEARNING LOCATIONS

- ? How might you partner with youth to co-create spaces of learning?
- ? How might you bring more natural elements into your learning locations?



LEARNING CULTURES:

The guiding beliefs and values that shape how a learning location operates and what it feels like to be there

LEARNING CULTURES QUILTS help learners and educators express their personal cultures of learning. The quilts can represent a classroom, school, district or some other learning location. Together, their squares add up to a diverse, tangible representation of a place's overall learning culture.

Learners and the adults involved in their education make squares or submit their ideas for them. The squares show each person's skills, interests, goals and desires for learning. They can serve as points of connection among viewers of the quilt who might share similar interests or as points of inspiration for viewers who might be exposed to new aspirations and ways of supporting learning.

Each idea, big or small, is represented in the same-sized space, and each contributor's idea is given equal weight. With buttons, threads and textures often weaving across their surfaces, the learning cultures quilts emphasize individuality in the context of a whole. Designed to be handled, not hung on a wall, they invite open-ended interaction.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING CULTURES

- + Consider creative projects that people in your place of learning might use to represent their personal learning cultures.
- + Invite learners, educators and community members to contribute specialized skills to support projects' co-creation.
- + Design ways for people to reflect on the learning cultures reflected in these projects.
- + Consider how you and others might make your learning culture feel welcoming and foster belonging.

REFLECTING ON LEARNING CULTURES

- ? How might you directly involve youth in shaping and defining a place's or group's learning culture?
- ? How might you collaborate with youth to represent the learning culture of your institution or organization?



TIPS FOR REMAKING LEARNING

Beyond the strategies detailed above, workshop participants identified cross-cutting insights to keep in mind as people work to create youth-centered futures. These insights can help us lead and contribute to change across a wide variety of contexts.



CLARIFY YOUR DESTINATION

The path forward can be uncertain, but the intended destination should not be. What future of learning are you working towards? If your strategies do not express desired attributes of that future, you might be on the wrong path.



TAKE THE FIRST STEP

Big things often start small, and what feels like a small step to some can be transformational to others. You do not have to see the whole path to start moving forward.



REPURPOSE WHEN HELPFUL

New and creative uses of existing technology can create major impacts. Instead of waiting for or investing in new technology, consider how you might innovate by applying existing tools in the context of fresh problems or new goals.



HANG ON TO WHAT WORKS

It is not all about change; many current practices and offerings are likely to be aligned with your aspirations for the future. Be sure to preserve or extend what is working in addition to innovating and designing new offerings.



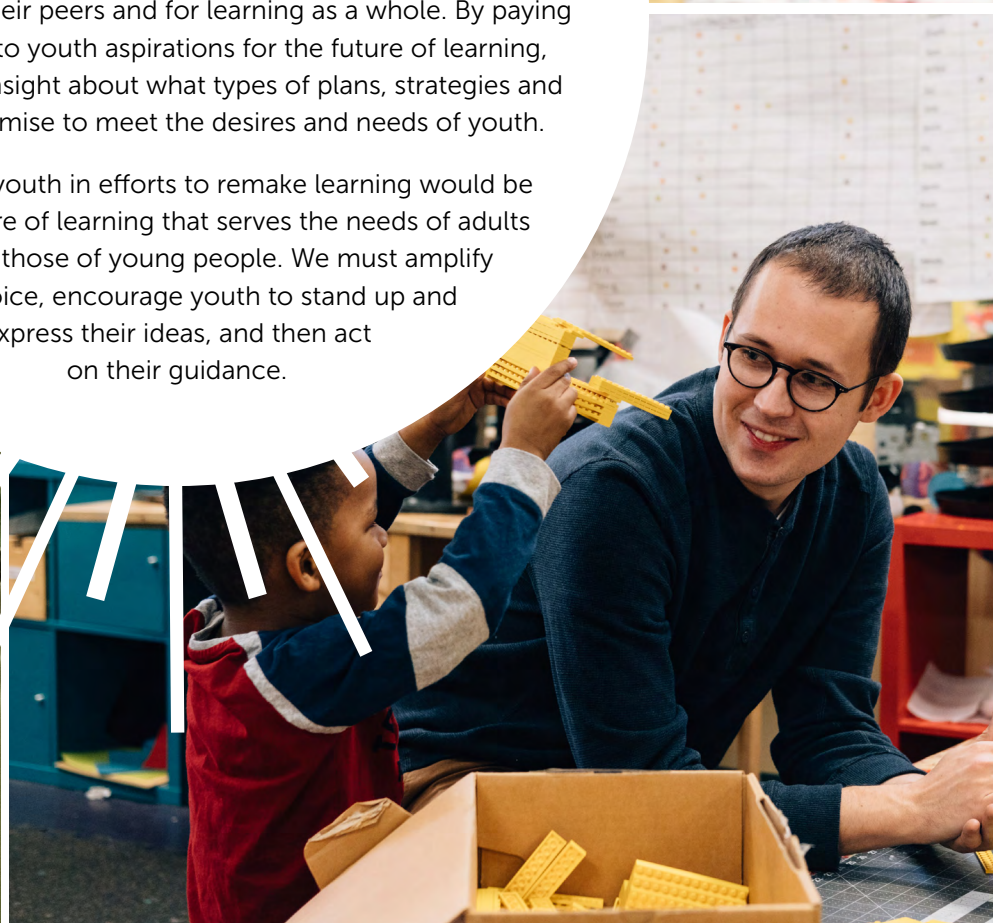


PLACING YOUTH AT THE CENTER

Youth are the end-users for K-12 education and the broader learning ecosystems connected to it, but they are often left out of conversations about remaking learning.

Youth have deep insights into changes in learning that could be beneficial to their peers and for learning as a whole. By paying close attention to youth aspirations for the future of learning, adults can gain insight about what types of plans, strategies and innovations promise to meet the desires and needs of youth.

To not center youth in efforts to remake learning would be to build a future of learning that serves the needs of adults rather than those of young people. We must amplify youth voice, encourage youth to stand up and express their ideas, and then act on their guidance.





Remake Learning is a network that ignites engaging, relevant and equitable learning practices in support of young people navigating rapid social and technological change. Learn more at RemakeLearning.org.



KnowledgeWorks is a nonprofit organization that partners with learning communities to create the future of learning, together. Learn more at KnowledgeWorks.org.



SLB Radio Productions, Inc. is a nonprofit founded in 1978 that uses audio to equitably gather and share authentic reflections from children, youth and members of other communities whose stories are often marginalized. Learn more at slbradio.org.

