Five Design Elements for Rethinking School:
A Toolkit for Educators

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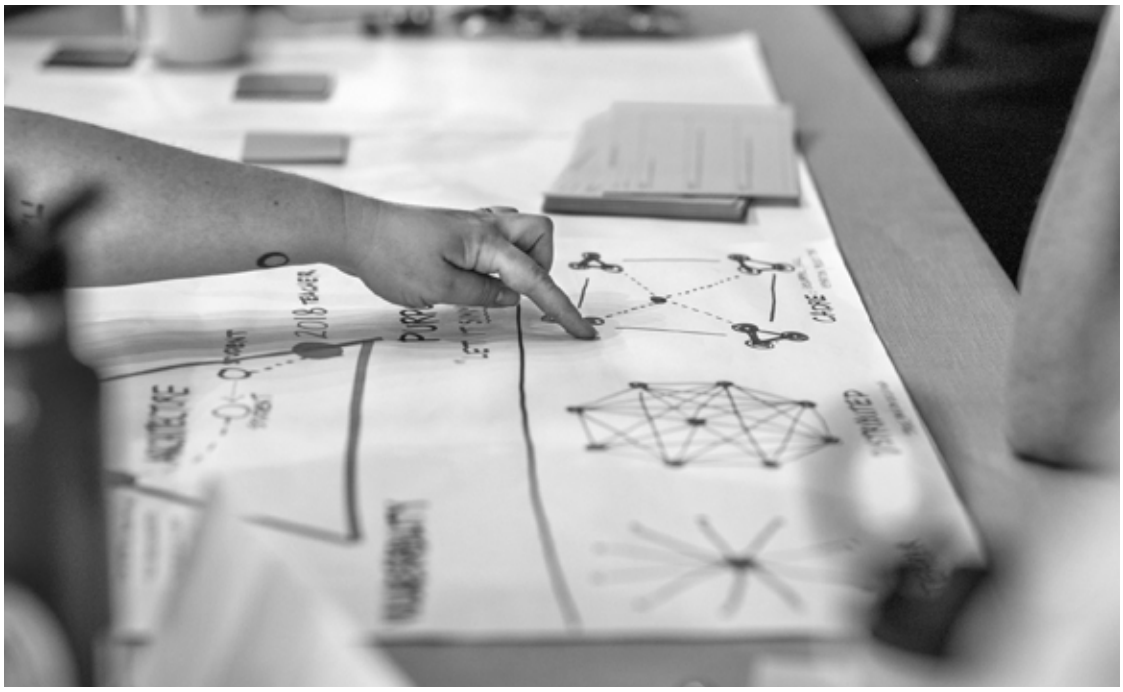
Introduction



Much of the current discourse about education, whether public, charter, or independent schools, focuses on how schools must adapt, shift, and change to serve the needs of modern learners. And, we're seeing new school models and designs surface in many places around the world. The education landscape is changing.

Many educators are thinking about modernizing school design, and we are asking ourselves large, complex questions about current models and sustainability while seeking new ways to reimagine school. Further, we're asking whether we're serving students as well as we can, especially in preparing them for a changed world. Even more fundamentally, we're focused on what learning can look like and how it can flourish in a changing world.

What does it mean to imagine school differently? to rethink school? In order to continue and expand on our most popular professional learning course we've ever offered, we designed GOA's Rethinking School Toolkit. We're hoping it will spur conversation and create opportunities for action not only within your schools but also across broad and diverse educator networks.

What's here?

Our team distilled five elements of modern schools from our student and professional learning programs and what GOA member schools are pursuing. Within the toolkit, you have an overview and resources for five elements:

- **Assessment**
- **Content**
- **Place**
- **Student's Role**
- **Time**

How to use this toolkit?

Just like tools in a toolbox, take out what you need when you need it. However, if you want a starting sense of new thinking on any element, browse through the element's overview. We designed the questions at the end of each section to support conversations at your schools and organizations.

Assessment

“In contrast to backward-looking assessments of learning, next genassessments empower students and teachers to move learning forward - in other words, they are assessments for learning.”

Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC)

Rethinking assessment invites us to, as Grant Wiggins wrote many years ago, “Begin with the end in mind.” What should students know and be able to do at the end of the course? the unit? the assignment? the project? What varied types of assessments will best measure student competencies? And particularly those competencies they’ll later apply and transfer to other settings? What are the ideal means for measuring growth? Further, how can assessment be formative and enable students to actively digest and apply feedback in order to learn more? Push their ideas and understandings further?

Competency-based learning or mastery-based learning invites designing diverse, authentic assessments, in which students solve relevant problems, explore ideas and questions with real-world audiences, and focus on ideas and projects that reflect their passions. But they’ll do so while building competencies that have relevance and application well beyond a particular setting or project.

Explore

- Assessment Design: A Matrix to Assess Your Assessments (article)
- Assessment for Learning (Initiative)
- Beyond Basic Skills: The Role of Performance Assessment in Achieving 21st Century Standards of Learning (report)
- Evolving Assessments for a 21st Century Education (report)
- Innovation Playlist (Initiative)
- Leaders of their Own Learning by Ron Berger, Leah Rugin, and Libby Woodfin (book)
- Looking Under the Hood of Competency-Based Education: The Relationship Between Competency-Based Education Practices and Students' Learning Skills, Behaviors, and Dispositions (report)
- The Promise of Performance Assessment: Innovations in High School Learning and College Admission (report)
- The Pursuit of Deeper Learning: At this California Charter School, Students are Evaluated Based on Yearly Portfolios, Not Test Scores (article)
- Why Competency-Based Learning Matters, Now More than Ever (article)
- Why You Can Pass Tests and STILL Fail in the Real World (video)

Discuss

How might assessment design inform and foster student learning in new ways?

Content

“The product of deeper learning is transferable knowledge, including content knowledge in a domain and knowledge of how, why and when to apply this knowledge to answer questions and solve problems. We refer to this blend of both knowledge and skills as ‘21st-century competencies.’”

Education 3.0: 7 Steps to Better

Schools are rethinking what has often been the dominant presence of content in classrooms. Many schools are beginning to define mastery of academic content as the ability to apply and transfer that knowledge to new contexts. Further, schools are privileging transdisciplinary skills, such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and problem solving. Research now reveals that in addition to mastery of academic content, noncognitive skills are essential for success in college and career.

Content is no longer the dominant organizational approach to school learning. How do we privilege transdisciplinary skills as much as the content itself and increase the potential for knowledge application and transfer? Further, our approach to content knowledge changes when pursued in tandem with teaching problem solving, communication, and collaboration skills.

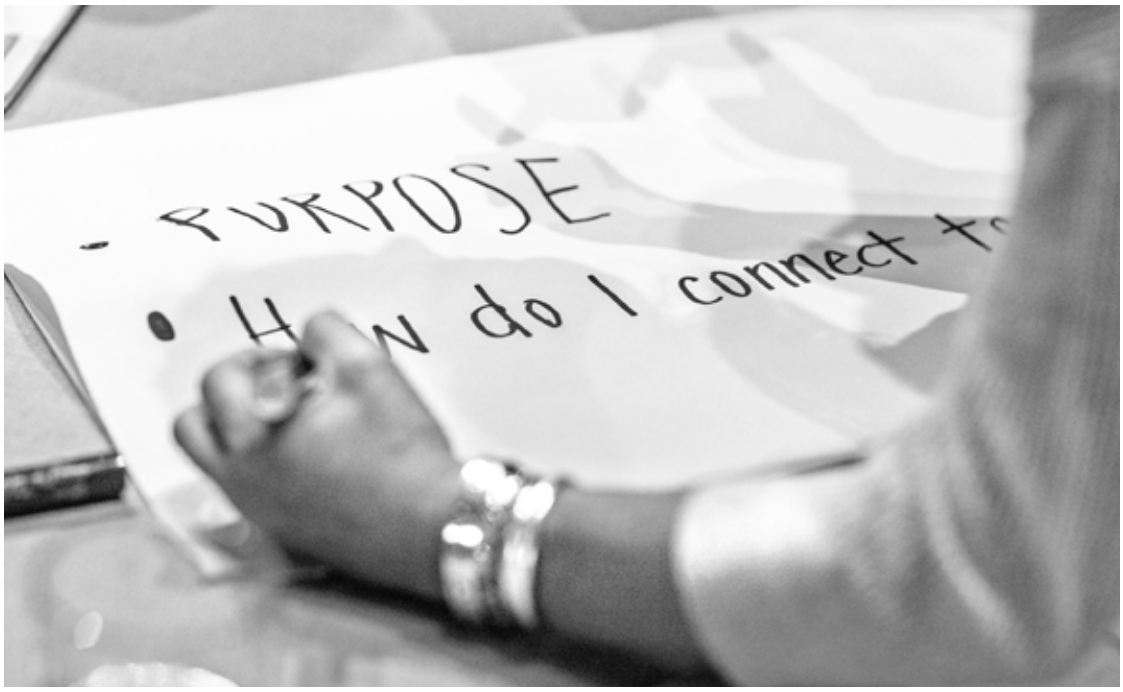
Explore

- A Pernicious Myth: Basics Before Deeper Learning (article)
- Changing the Subject: What and How Students Should Learn in the 21st Century (video)
- Could Subjects Soon Be a Thing of the Past in Finland? (article)
- Deeper Learning Outcomes (initiative)
- Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental Framework (report)
- Memorization is Still Important, even in Deeper Learning (article)
- Partnership for 21st Century Skills (initiative)
- Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners: The Role of Noncognitive Factors in Shaping School Performance: A Critical Literature Review (report)

Discuss

How might we rethink our approach to content by aiming for knowledge transfer and development of transdisciplinary skills?

Place



"PLACE gives youth a true sense of place - the world is at their fingertips but PLACE allows kids to look around them and make a direct impact."

People Leading Across City Environments (PLACE) at Catlin Gabel School Schools

Schools are rethinking where students learn. By rethinking place, schools can redefine the classroom and move it well beyond a conventional definition. Place-based education also focuses on leveraging local assets such as parks, museums, public spaces, and local businesses to create experiential, hands-on learning opportunities outside of school buildings and campuses. Further, reimagining place invites leveraging online spaces for learning pursuits, enabling greater flexibility in regards to when and where they happen. Both approaches support each other with students' researching local places prior to using them, working in them, and experiencing them. Through virtual reality, students can also explore and learn about places anywhere in the world.

Place-Based Education (PBE) takes advantage of geography to create authentic, meaningful and engaging personalized learning for students. Place-Based Education is defined by the Center for Place-Based Learning and Community Engagement as learning that "places students in local

heritage, cultures, landscapes, opportunities and experiences, and uses these as a foundation for the study of language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum."

Schools that are rethinking place are also thinking through new ways to use space on campus. From creating interactive libraries with modern technology to building makerspaces and dedicated settings for woodworking and entrepreneurship, schools are using space on campus in new and unique ways.

Just as schools are leveraging the richness of their geographic place (local partnerships, local problem solving, and more), so too are they using online spaces to connect students beyond their home environments.

Explore

- Colorado Apprenticeship Program Turns the Factory Floor into a Classroom (article)
- Extending School Far Beyond the Classroom Walls (article)
- Leaving to Learn video and book to promote internship-based and out of school learning
- Pittsburgh: Where the City is the Classroom (article)
- What is Place-Based Education and Why Does it Matter? (article and report)

Discuss

How might places - virtual and real world - become vibrant resources to support student learning?

Student's Role

"To personalize learning, the roles of the teacher and the learners change. The learner owns and drives his learning with the guidance of a teacher as a partner in learning. The learner may also seek others to support his learning as mentors or advisors. These others could be a parent, a mentor, someone from the community or even another learner."

Learning is Personal for Your Child by Barbara Bray

Schools are increasingly putting learners at the center of their own learning, encouraging student ownership over their own work. In some schools, students define and create their own projects, lead expeditions, plan and create internship opportunities, or launch their own entrepreneurial ventures. As the students plan and lead their learning, the role of the teacher changes. Teachers become guides and partners. Research underscores how when learners drive their own learning, there's greater engagement, increased intrinsic motivation, higher expectations, impressive self evaluation of work, and genuine problem solving.

Explore

- Four Ways Work Will Change in the Future (article)
- Locally Grown, Globally Sustained: Students Spark Change Through Online Projects (article)
- Making Learning Personal: The What, Who, WOW, Where and Why (book)
- Shadow a Student Challenge, a campaign to encourage empathy by having school educators shadow students for a day and then reflect on the student learning experience (website)
- Share Your Learning, a campaign dedicated to having students show their work through performance-based assessments, student-led conferences, and student-led exhibitions (website and videos)
- Six Must-Have Elements of High-Quality Project-Based Learning (article)
- Student-Centered Learning definition from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation (website)
- The Future of Learning - Networked Society from Ericson (video)
- What Students Know that Experts Don't: School is all About Signaling, Not Skill-Building (article)

Discuss

How might students drive their own learning to foster autonomy and agency?

Time

Schools are rethinking how to structure learning time through innovative and creative scheduling. For example, in competency-based learning (CBL), students advance when they demonstrate competency rather than because time allotted for a concept or unit has ended. Adaptive technology and CBL enable personalizing the learning pace for each student so that time constraints don't thwart developing competence. The Nellie Mae Education Foundation captures how competency-based learning is "based primarily on mastery of skill or body of knowledge, rather than age, hours on task, or credits earned."

In moving from coverage and calendar to competence, CBL also invites schools to think even more broadly about time and to consider and determine when classes, grades, and school communities are best served by meeting together at the same time in the same place.

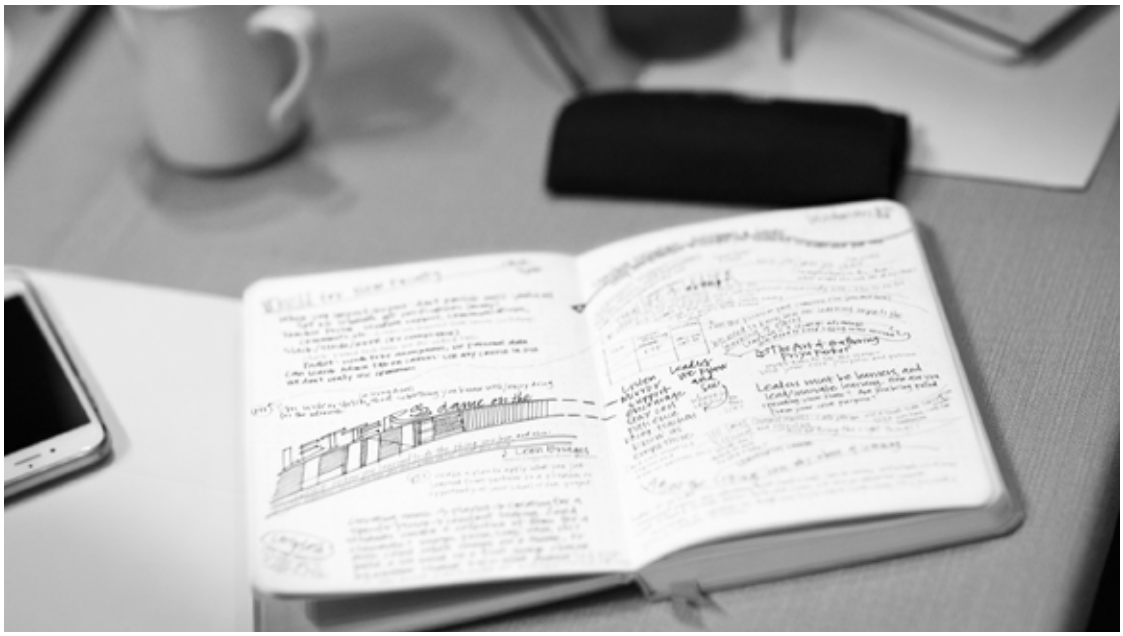
Explore

- How Might We Rethink Time to Empower Learners? (article)
- Is It Time for Schools to Rethink, Well, Time? (article)
- No Grades, No Timetable: Berlin School Turns Teaching Upside Down (article)
- The Apollo School: What 21st Century Learning Looks Like (article)
- Time, Insights, and Intensives (article)
- Unlocking Time (website with resources)
- Will This Be On the Test? Rethinking Online Education (article)
- Why a School's Master Schedule is a Powerful Enabler of Change (article)

Discuss

How might students navigate learning experiences at their own pace?
Whenare they best served in a group setting?

Activities for Rethinking School



Here we outline several ways to explore the five Rethinking Schools elements further. You can pursue them on teams of different sizes, as a whole faculty, or on your own.

Design and conduct a school anthropology project

Directions: Spend 10 to 15 minutes walking through your school. Try to do this during a time this week when you won't be interrupted or when you can walk silently (even if it's in the hustle and bustle of the school day). The goal is not that the school is quiet, but that you are. This can be when school is or isn't in session.

Choose one of the five design elements to look for and focus on as you walk.

Reflect on the following questions:

- Where is the element present?
- How might a student experience the element? A teacher? A parent?
- Where and how is the element working well in your school?
- How does the element connect to the direction and design of your school's moving forward?
- In what ways is the element connected to your school's mission and vision?

Conduct student empathy interviews

Directions: As a small group or a faculty, decide on a specific element or elements for investigation with students. Design a survey or focus group questions and set out to learn more from students. In particular, aim to gain empathy for the learner experience, a potential source for new ideas or new modes of thinking as well as considering how students can be involved in the design of school. While aiming to understand the learner experience can take many forms, it can also be as simple as setting aside 20 minutes to have lunch with a student and ask questions about school design with a focus on one or more of the five elements.

Create a Rethinking School book or study club

Directions: As a small group, form a Rethinking School book or study club. Examine articles and resources in this document, or choose one book to read and share insights and ideas through small group or faculty meeting time. Then, as a team, determine new ways to share your learning outside of your school. How can you share what you learned with students, families, and the community? Leverage in person and social media tools to connect and share with others what you are discussing.

Explore other schools through field visits

Directions: Divide faculty into teams of 5 or 6 participants to visit innovative schools in your region. Create a protocol for visits and a way for staff members to write down and share their field work. Each team spends a half day conducting a school visit. In the afternoon, the participants convene back together in different groups (i.e. not with the same people who were with them on the school visit) and conduct a design seminar to share out key learnings, find commonalities and differences and develop next steps based on school visits. There may also be innovative ways to do virtual school visits with schools in other locations, around the world.

Stay connected

Stay connected to GOA. We offer online and in person professional learning experiences for school-based teams and learning organizations. Follow GOA on Twitter @GOALearning and stay in the know by signing up for the GOA newsletter. Thank you for Rethinking School with us.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