Shaping the Futures of Learning in the Digital Age

Introduction: Shaping the Futures of Learning in the Digital Age

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Abstract: The ShapingEDU community was established in 2018, with a call to action for a global gathering of Dreamers, Doers and Drivers. This diverse group came together and began to form a new vision for the pathways to the future of a more connected and relevant global approach to education. Emerging from this group was the vision that learning and teaching are inherently human activities, and that even in an increasingly digital and regulated world, all learning should support and enhance our development as people, communities, and societies. This brief introduction outlines the driving factors that brought forth the call for proposals, and provides a contextual grounding for the first selection of papers to be included in this first installment of the special issue.

Keywords: *ShapingEDU, humanizing, learning*

> *ShapingEDU is a community of dreamers, doers, and drivers shaping the future of learning in the digital age. The vision is for changemaking individuals from a wide variety of learning-focused organizations across the world to collaborate on big ideas for transforming education. By deliberate design, ShapingEDU is action-oriented and believes the future is what we invent it to be.* (https://shapingedu.asu.edu)

Introduction

The ShapingEDU community was established in 2018, with a call to action for a global gathering of Dreamers, Doers and Drivers. In April of that year, 129 leading practitioners, theorists, and thought leaders came together at SkySong in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Behind the call was a small team of inspired and inspirational educators based at Arizona State University. With the vision of ASU's Chief Information Officer (CIO), Lev Gonick, and the dynamic community-building capabilities of Samantha Becker guiding the mission, the Dreamers, Doers, and Drivers came together and began to form a new vision for the pathways to the future of a more connected and relevant global approach to education. The resultant neighbourhoods began to focus on the primary concerns for the future of learning - that became the inaugural 10 Actions to Shape the Future of Learning in the ShapingEDU Skysong Communique and represents our origin story.

The 10 actions that were identified are as follows:
1. Promote access and equality
2. Connect education and the workforce of the future
3. Build constellations of innovation
4. Recognize all forms of learning
5. Personalize learning
6. Humanize learning
7. Bolster intergenerational leadership for learning futures
8. Foster immersive learning
9. Innovate artificial intelligence applications
10. Embed data-driven approaches for student success (ShapingEDU, n.d.)

Underpinning the ideas that emerged from that first meeting was a unified vision that learning and teaching are inherently human activities, and that even in an increasingly digital and regulated world, all learning should support and enhance our development as people, communities, and societies. These ideas were aggregated in our 2019 ShapingEDU Memorial Union Communique, and they represent our commitment to human values, innovation, and action.

It was after the 2019 event that the call went out for this Special Issue, which was to be launched when we met again in 2020. At that time we were unaware of the looming relevance of

our commitment: *Education leaders must continuously explore and anticipate possible outliers that will impact every facet of teaching and learning* (ShapingEDU, 2019).

As we came together in 2020, the early influences of the COVID-19 pandemic were being felt. Some of us had been excluded from travelling, and preparations were made to accommodate virtual participation with those collocated at our regular meeting site at ASU. Over the course of the three days of activities the entire gathering transitioned to a fully online event. That set the scene for the global experience over the months following.

As an editorial team we were affected. As founding ShapingEDU members within the original 130 dreamers, doers, and drivers, we were all intending to put the final touches to this special issue so it could be launched at the 2020 ShapingEDU gathering, we were all profoundly affected by the rapid changes in circumstances and ways of working that we suddenly faced. Our regular work, and family responsibilities took on an urgency as we began to mitigate and adapt to the effects of the pandemic; our priorities shifted to ensuring we could work, communicate, and support others; our working days became a flurry of missions and responsibilities that saw us all working extended hours, and meeting at all hours of the day and night. Like the rest of the world, we were coming to terms with a rapidly reimagined way of living and working.

In many ways, it was because this group comprised of people who were used to working at the bleeding edge of educational technology in practice, and were adept at community engagement, and had the lived experience of being innovators and early adopters that we were able to not simply ride out the storm but to set new goals and new questions that would carry us well beyond the crisis we were experiencing.

Now, as institutions and schools around the world are diving into their new normals, we are able to return to the task of launching this Special Issue of *Current Issues in Education.* The submissions selected for this edition are unintentionally prophetic. They were all created prior to the realisation of the COVID-19 interruption to our lives. And as such, they highlight the foresight and vision of our community in relation to global priorities in education.

When we launched the call for proposals for this special issue, we were living in another world – one that predominantly viewed online learning as experimental – or second class. What happens when the alternative choice becomes the mainstream reality, nearly overnight? For starters, we leverage the extensive body of research on effective pedagogy. Next, we consider new visions for ideal future states for education, especially from the people who have been living and doing that research.

The global ASU ShapingEDU community of practice is brimming with education changemakers. Our shared vision for the future of learning is a framing for the new normal we need to create. The articles submitted by these changemakers resonate today more than ever as they reflect the shifts that need to happen – from small steps to seismic efforts.

Special Issue Summaries

Over the coming months, we will be releasing the special issue articles in installments that capture specific calls to action for shaping the future of learning in the digital age. This first installment underscores the vitality of humanizing learning, no matter what form it takes. Making learners feel welcome, embracing inclusive practices, and leading with authenticity are core to helping learners thrive. It is in this same spirit that we welcome you, special issue readers, to dream big with us.

The first contribution of this installment entitled "Humanizing Online Teaching to Equitize Higher Education" by Michelle Pacansky-Brock (Foothill-DeAnza Community College

District), Michael Smedshammer (Modesto Junior College), and Kim Vincent-Layton (Humboldt State University) addresses the gaps in traditional online learning and presents a model for humanized online teaching based on a theoretical framework that draws from Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), social presence, validation theory, and Universal Design for Learners (UDL). This paper discusses real teaching examples that explore a range of humanizing strategies to promote non-cognitive components of learning, and also addresses the identification of meaningful professional development around humanized online teaching.

The second contribution from Tom Haymes (Ideaspaces), entitled "The STAC Model: Rethinking Basic Functionality of Informal Learning Spaces" explores the realm of the "Third Space" and the role these often-underutilized spaces can play in student success, and argues that these spaces can be identified as a key facilitator for student success. In this paper Haymes provides the STAC (Stickiness, Toolsets, Adjacencies, and Community) Model that can be used as a framework for prioritizing design and technologies within any contextual space to retain students into said learning environment.

Third, Karen Costa presents a multimedia exploration entitled "The Value of Imperfect Videos" in which she shares her philosophy of creating imperfect videos as a tool for humanizing learning. Costa explores how this strategy is aimed at connecting with new and traditional learners. This contribution to the special issue also stands out as a unique video-based contribution, which by its own nature explores contemporary ways of engaging with our diverse and talented ShapingEDU community.

Fourth, Heather McCullough, and Kim Buch, University of North Carolina at Charlotte present the work and recent findings of their Center for Teaching and Learning on a recently implemented micro-credential option for faculty and graduate students. In this paper McCullough and Buch explore the increasing role of micro-credentialing in higher education, and discuss the outcomes and implications on professional development through the lens of the Teaching Certificate Program at UNC Charlotte. This paper offers a contemporary look into the observations, and identification of future challenges of higher education institutions moving towards or adopting micro-credentialing strategies.

The fifth contribution to this first special issue installment is "Spatial Computing: Creating the Future of Learning" by Emory Craig (Digital Bodies) and Maya Georgieva (The New School). In this article Craig and Georgieva position spatial computing as the fourth paradigm of the digital revolution and discuss the potential to change the landscape of learning. The authors position the reader to think beyond the simple use of the underlying technologies (as interesting and complex as each of those may be) and to think about the deeper connection to learning, and development of social interactions in a truly virtualized environment. The paper presents a critical line of inquiry that explores the potential to leverage new and emergent technologies to transform the human experience.

These pieces, and the ones that will follow over the next couple of months, also explore the futures landscape and raise thought-provoking questions and scenarios that challenge the reader to think critically and openly about the anticipated journey we are collectively embarking on.

As the editors of this special issue, we would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the realization of this publication. Not just the courageous and hard-working contributors but all those who have travelled with them through our community. Every idea, every thought in this issue was informed and influenced by the relationships, the discussion, the commitments to action, and the considered, critical evaluation of all the work of all our community.

The authors of the works presented have courageously challenged us to reconsider our purpose and practice in education, they offer new ways of seeing, and alternative pathways to the outcomes we all hope for. They have set about to highlight the way markers, and the emerging shifts that will be required to ensure that the digital age of learning also serves as an amplification of our collective humanity, connectedness and responsibilities to our future; they shed light on the pluralities of our dependence upon each other and the planet that supports us; they unify us while accepting all our differences and nuances of being.

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