



# VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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## The Professional Transition of Teaching for the Creative Economy

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There is no replacement, and there never will be, for a great teacher. A great teacher is, and always has been, so much more than just a conveyor of knowledge. Great teachers are mentors, disciplinarians, curators, community leaders and a shoulder to cry on in the tough times. I know teachers in rural Kentucky who independently send food home with their students to make sure those children have a meal every evening. Teachers are not just our conveyors of literacy, culture, science, discipline, ethics, civility and so much more; teachers are not just our core social safety net for the most vulnerable amongst us; teachers are not just the front lines of our economic future. Teachers are, fundamentally, humans who make other humans better. Are we prepared to replace all of that with a computer inside a robot? I certainly hope not.

Technology is making some industries obsolete and it will continue to do so, but teaching will not be among them. Computers and off-shore workers are good at routine, low-skill, location-independent tasks. Without a doubt, these globalizing forces will have an impact on education as computers and off-site workers will supplement on-site teachers in various ways. Local teachers, however, are irreplaceable, and they have a secure home in the future of the American economy.

Teachers, though, need to understand that their role will be different in the future. As we industrialized public education, we narrowed the tasks of any one particular

teacher. Teachers taught a single grade level or a single subject. They taught one lesson in a one-hour block, with bells at either end. Their products had to pass a quality assurance test at the end of the year. They passed off responsibilities for guidance, art, physical movement, counseling and discipline to other personnel who performed each of those as a sole task unto itself. By all counts, this industrial system of teaching performed more than admirably, catapulting the United States into the position of a global industrial leader. Nearly all kids had some sense of shared history. Most kids could read. A majority could sufficiently write. Some had decent mathematics skills. A select few even pursued the creative arts and sciences and found professional positions later in life.

**“Teaching is not rocket science. It is, in fact, far more complex and demanding work than rocket science.”**

- Richard Elmore  
Professor of educational leadership  
at Harvard Graduate School of Education

In today’s creative economy, though, we must transition teaching once again. The creative skills reserved for the few must now be encouraged of the many. Kids must have customized learning plans, managed through intelligent learning management systems, adapted daily to their growing skills. Within these systems, teachers must teach to mastery before moving children forward. Teachers must develop locally contextualized content, reinforced with globally relevant online modules. This content must also have practical, real-life implementation





and students must provide performance-based assessments to community members. Thus, teachers must let students take ownership of their learning, which includes co-creating content and assessments. Teachers also must take deeper responsibility for some children, serving in an advisory capacity throughout their educational program. Teachers must work together more deeply to structure time and content across disciplines and standards to adapt a very rigid, structured system into a more adaptive, but still equally robust system. Luckily, nearly all of these required skills are already characteristics of great teachers. In fact, many teachers will feel quite liberated and rejuvenated moving beyond the era of drill and kill test-prep.

Achieving these goals will mean more flexible scheduling, broader content expectations for each teacher, deeper ongoing professional learning, extensive comfort with technology and online teaching, leadership across multiple responsibilities, community integration and more robust organizational and management skills. Our systems of teacher preparation are currently inadequate for this task, especially as the higher education market drives toward low-cost, low-touch, pre-service teacher options. We need our universities and our state regulatory systems to provide leadership during this expectation shift, including, when necessary, the closure of irresponsible pre-service teacher programs. What we do

not need, however, is embracing the temptation to jump at each shiny new silver bullet in teacher preparation. This is a long-term goal requiring long-term structural change and should thus be approached with a long-term mentality by our governmental leaders.

By the year 2025, our classrooms are going to be a diversified mix of learning environments, not the rows of boxes that one can see in a school today. There will still be schools and there will still be some classrooms, but there also will be a variety of additional learning environments in both physical and digital forms. Teachers will be expected to have the skills to succeed across all of these environments. Thus, in many ways, we are somewhat returning to pre-industrial expectations of teachers, but now with the supports and demands of a profession and the capabilities of the information age.

The core expectation that we should all have of teaching in the next decade is a much deeper professionalization of the field, relying less on governments to regulate the trade of teaching and more upon teachers themselves setting and exceeding their own professional expectations.

For the United States to build the creative learning system that we desperately need, we must be able to trust the judgment of teachers in the way that we trust the judgment of architects, accountants, lawyers and other professions. Teachers have long since proven their skills in making the human lives they touch richer for the experience and now seek to be treated among the great American professions. The opportunity now awaits. If teaching, within the next decade, is able to transition and sustain the creative educational system that our economy demands, they will have earned their place. ▽