



VIEWS & VISIONS

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Goodbye, Yabba Dabba Doo!

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Gregg Behr is executive director of The Grable Foundation, a Pittsburgh-based foundation dedicated to improving the lives of children. Administering a grant-making portfolio advancing early-childhood education, education reform, out-of-school time support and informal learning, Mr. Behr has partnered extensively with educators and community leadership to support pioneering efforts on behalf of youth.

Nationally, Mr. Behr is a trustee for GreatNonprofits.org and Grantmakers for Education. He is a former board chair of Grantmakers for Effective Organizations. In Pittsburgh, Mr. Behr serves as a trustee for A+ Schools (a public education watchdog group) and the Women and Girls Foundation of southwestern Pennsylvania. Previously, Mr. Behr served as board chair for the Mentoring Partnership, Grantmakers of Western Pennsylvania, and WQED Multimedia's Community Advisory Board.

In 2013, the Western Pennsylvania Forum of School Superintendents presented Mr. Behr with its Voice of Advocacy Award. In 2012, he was honored with a doctorate of humane letters from Saint Vincent College. In 2010, Mr. Behr received the Lay Leader Award presented by the Pittsburgh chapter of Phi Delta Kappa – the same award once given to one of his heroes, Fred Rogers.

I can already hear my two-year old daughter as a teenager, mimicking my words back to me, “Back in my day, we didn’t have robots teaching us Mandarin...” Okay, that might be an outlandish scenario, but with each passing day I’m less certain that it is.

As a kid, I regularly watched cartoons and included among my viewing rotation was *The Jetsons* – a Hanna-Barbera original about a family living in the year 2062, aided in their daily routines by robotic contraptions and curious inventions. I’m sure I wasn’t the only big-eyed youngster who watched this animated glimpse into the future and imagined possibilities for my own adulthood; I fully anticipated growing into a world similar to the one enjoyed by young Elroy Jetson.

That hasn’t come to pass exactly, though I’m in no way knocking these still-early years of the Internet. Research scientists and sociologists have already opined about this wondrous creation and its impact on everything from learning to logistics to revolutions. I’m sure they’re right. But, I’m equally convinced that we’re accelerating toward times remarkably unlike our own. We may look back upon these days as still being more like those of the Stone-Age *Flintstones* than the futuristic *Jetsons*. In fact, I hope that’s true.

For my daughter’s sake, I hope it’s true that she won’t graduate from a traditional brick-and-mortar high school 16 years from now, just as I did 20 years ago – not because she’s untalented and incapable, but rather because her class (and her classroom) have moved on from an Industrial Age-approach of teacher-to-student

instruction to one that activates her learning and rewards her mastery of skills differently. That shouldn’t mean that she won’t be surrounded by all sorts of teachers, mentors and caring adults along the way – she’ll need them. Instead, it should also mean that she’s immersed in settings in and out of school, at libraries and museums and in our home, that interest, test and provoke her to learn.

If I am going to prepare her – if *we* are going to prepare her – for a world in which people are already using 3D printers to make edible food and artificial body parts (“What!?”), then we are intellectually and morally called to remake learning.

I’m not so naïve to think that classrooms as we know them will – poof! – disappear. My daughter will probably receive grading reports from a teacher and a diploma from a school; but she might also earn and prize digital badges from a museum, certification from online tutors and other credentials that are valued and validated by higher education, workplaces and families.

So, what gives rise to such amateur prophecy? Glimpses of the future taking hold in schools, museums and libraries across our hometown of Pittsburgh.

Look first to the Elizabeth Forward School District, south of Pittsburgh, where district leadership has reinvented some of its learning spaces. Its middle school was the first public school in the nation to install a SMALLab embodied learning environment in which digital games are projected onto a classroom floor and engage students in learning subject matter ranging from fractions to prefixes. Its high school is among a few nationwide to transform its library into a





1) Elizabeth Forward School District's high school has transformed its library into a multimedia lab with recording and production studios; 2) Teens can create and share digital media in the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's labs; 3) The Children's Museum of Pittsburgh's MAKESHOP allows children to work alongside teaching artists and technologists; and 4) At Elizabeth Forward School District's middle school, the SMALLab projects digital games onto a classroom floor

multimedia lab complete with recording and production studios, coding stations and digital equipment. And the district is the first anywhere to introduce graduate-level courses inspired by Carnegie Mellon University that teach game design to high school students.

The courses combine STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) with the Arts (STEAM) to teach interdisciplinary thinking. Why should we take notice? Because corresponding with these investments, Elizabeth Forward has almost completely erased its drop-out problem; raised math and reading proficiency levels by four and three percent, respectively; and increased enrollment in summer enrichment programs by 500 percent. The school district has re-ignited its students' passions to learn.

Look next to the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh. Its MAKESHOP is a rich and supportive informal learning environment for children and families to make actual "stuff" alongside teaching artists and technologists. Activities include sewing, woodworking and circuitry, as well as such technology-infused tasks as computer programming, laser cutting and stop-motion

animation. MAKESHOP represents authentic hands-on, project-based learning. It's a place where kids can tinker, play and invent – imparting problem-solving skills and persistence. Wonderfully, this new learning lab isn't limited to Pittsburgh's North Side, as the Children's Museum has taken MAKESHOP on the road to regional schools and parks, with plans to establish satellite sites at West Liberty University and the Wheeling Children's Museum.

Look last to the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, where librarians are re-inventing what a trove of books might mean to kids. In the Library's labs, for instance, teens can now create and share digital media like never before. Books, of course, are still central to achieving literacy and fluency, but so too are cameras, robots and software. Librarians now mentor teenagers in interest-driven projects as the teenagers, themselves, become curators and producers.

What the Elizabeth Forward School District, the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh and the Carnegie Library share in common is their participation in the Pittsburgh region's Kids+Creativity Network. More than 100 schools, libraries, museums and out-of-school programs in this network,

from West Virginia's Mingo County to Pittsburgh's urban neighborhoods, are remaking learning and changing what it means to learn. Together, they are integrating hands-on practices like those of MAKESHOP with digital practices like those of the labs – often weaving together the arts and sciences just as Elizabeth Forward School District has done – to bridge the technical left brain with the artist right brain, so that kids develop skills necessary for navigating futures we can't possibly foretell.

The Kids+Creativity Network stands at the forefront of education innovation. While still building kids' skills in the tried-and-true subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic, today's innovators – like those in the Kids+Creativity Network – are simultaneously attending to learning that helps kids develop critical thinking, tenacity and resourcefulness. They're thinking more like the *Jetsons* and less like the *Flintstones*. So, goodbye "yabba dabba doo," and hello Elroy! Our kids deserve that future.

Learn more about the Kids+Creativity Network at www.remakelarning.org 