



The 60 Year Curriculum: Developing New Educational Models to Serve the Agile Labor Market

Chris Dede | Timothy E. Wirth Professor in Learning Technologies at the Graduate School of Education, Harvard University

While many individual institutions have been developing models to serve their specific communities over the long term, it's critical to come up with a broader approach that ensures all individuals can gain access to reskilling opportunities over the course of their lifetimes.

With the sponsorship of Harvard's Division of Continuing Education (DCE), I'm participating in an initiative centered on **The Sixty Year Curriculum** (60YC). The Dean of DCE, **Hunt Lambert**, is leading this effort to transform lifelong learning, which is now a necessity in our dynamic, chaotic world. The 60YC initiative is focused on developing new educational models that enable each person to reskill as their occupational and personal context shifts.

The average lifespan of the next generation is projected to be 80 to 90 years, and most people will need to work past the age of 65 to have enough savings to retire.[1] Teenagers need to prepare for a future of multiple careers spanning six decades, plus retirement. Educators are faced with the challenge of preparing young people for unceasing reinvention to take on many roles in the workplace, as well as for careers that do not yet exist.

On-the-job learning is familiar to most adults; many of us take on tasks that fall outside of our academic training. As a professor in learning technologies, I've had to reinvent my teaching and research every few years because of advances in digital technologies, increasing globalization, and shifts in society. But our children and students face a future of multiple *careers*, not just evolving jobs. I tell

my students to prepare for their first two careers, and think about which is a better foundation as an initial job—but also to build skills for adopting future roles neither they nor I can imagine now.

A **2017 report** commissioned by Pearson and conducted by the UK-based innovation foundation Nesta predicted what the working world will be like in developed countries when the pupils currently starting elementary school begin their careers. This time period spans only the initial stage of these graduates' employment, yet the report describes a future—a little more than a decade away—that is quite different from the present: a workplace strongly shaped by globalization, data-intensive decision making, advances in digital tools and media, and artificial intelligence.

Given this rate of change, education's role must be long-term capacity building—enhancing students' interpersonal and intrapersonal skills for a lifetime of flexible adaptation and creative innovation—as well as short-term preparation so that they are college- or career-ready. Education must also advance two other goals beyond preparation for work: to prepare students to think deeply in an informed way, and to prepare them to be thoughtful citizens and decent human beings.[2] Big Data, social media, and technological developments are revolutionizing how we think, how we learn, and how we communicate—reshaping all three of these educational goals.

The importance of thinking strategically about education is highlighted in a **2012 report** by the US National Research Council, which posits that flexibility, creativity, initiative, innovation, intellectual openness, collaboration, leadership, and conflict resolution are essential for every individual in 21st-century life and work. These conclusions are echoed and placed in a global context by a recent **OECD report**.

The 60YC initiative centers on the least understood aspect of this challenge: What are the organizational and societal mechanisms by which people can reskill later in their lives, when they do not have the time or resources for a full-time academic experience that results in a degree or certificate? Thus far, attempts to address this issue have centered on what individual institutions might do. For example, in 2015 Stanford developed an aspirational vision called the **Open Loop University**. Georgia Tech followed in 2018, with its model for Lifetime Education.

The hallmarks of these and similar models center on providing a lifelong commitment to alumni that includes periodic opportunities to reskill through services offered by the institution; microcredentials, minimester classes, and credit for accomplishments in life; personalized advising and coaching as new challenges and opportunities emerge; and blended learning experiences with distributed worldwide availability. Some of these services will require partnerships and collaborations with organizations outside academia that have complementary strengths and missions. Further, the institutional emphasis in these models shifts to skill and competency acquisition rather than disciplinary topics and knowledge communication—the student’s goal is to develop a suite of skills and strategic attitudes to make a difference in the world, rather than just attain formal academic certifications to meet the immediate requirements of a particular occupational role.

Models like these are a necessary step forward, but they are not sufficient because they focus on a single institution’s ability to serve its alumni, rather than on meeting the more general need to equip and help adults from any background at any stage of their lives. 60YC is exploring a model in which a coalition of extension schools might accomplish this broader task by working together to extend their mission. Another delivery model could be regional higher education coalitions (a parallel to Western Governors University in their focus on cross-institutional cooperation). I believe a possible third approach is to reinvent unemployment insurance as “employability insurance,” funding and delivering this through mechanisms comparable to health insurance. Physical wellness requires both preventive and curative care, and advice. Maintaining meaningful, financially sustainable employment in the face of occupational instability and displacement necessitates similar types of ongoing support.

Much remains to be understood about how 60YC might become the future of higher education. In my opinion, the biggest barrier we face in this process of reinventing our models for higher education is *unlearning*. We have to let go of deeply held, emotionally valued identities in service of transformational change to a different, more effective set of behaviors. This is both individual (an instructor transforming instructional practices from presentation and assimilation to active, collaborative learning by students) and institutional (a higher education institution transforming from degrees certified by seat time and standardized tests to credentials certified by proficiency on competency-based measures). Unlearning requires not only novel intellectual approaches, but also

individual and collective emotional and social support for shifting our identities—not in terms of fundamental character and capabilities, but in terms of how those are expressed as our context shifts over time.

I hope higher education will increase its focus on the aspirational vision of 60YC as an important step towards providing a pathway to a secure and satisfying future for our students.

https://evollution.com/revenue-streams/professional_development/the-60-year-curriculum-developing-new-educational-models-to-serve-the-agile-labor-market/?utm_campaign=EvoLLlution%20Newsletter&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=68530942&hsenc=p2ANqtz--mqHFjfh1d81rMRdUXfzG-C9RSmbq4ezxYzm7W-9ZH9L6HTF_fgScNhVw-SQA6Y0zi4NcVHtkdmyu08PK5hcDyKXYaeyGvd4mCsFg-xXo_mK9JsA&hsmi=68530942