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## Here Comes 2013: The Big Themes in Learning

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Here are three big stories concerning education and learning that you'll be hearing about in the year ahead—and some pointers on how to think about them.

### 1. SMART USE OF TECH.

Computers have been present in classrooms for a number of years now, of course, and in 2013 excitement about their potential to transform education will keep running high. Bulky desktop models will continue to give way to mobile devices like laptops, tablets, and even cell phones, and more schools will be experimenting with “[BYOD](#)”—telling students to “bring your own devices” to school. Innovative teachers and administrators will find ever more ways to integrate technology into instruction—from simulating science experiments on the screen, to turning boring math and vocabulary drills into enjoyable games, to promoting online collaboration among students on history and language-arts projects.

At the same time, the runaway enthusiasm about edtech will begin to be tempered, I predict, by a more realistic

sense of what computers can do for students, and what they can't. Young people will still need to interact with classmates and teachers face to face. They will still need physical activity and hands-on experience with physical objects, whether in the art room or the science lab. And given all the time that kids spend staring at screens in school and out, they will still need plenty of time to be un-networked and unplugged.

## 2. ADVANCE OF THE COMMON CORE.

Forty-five states have now adopted the [Common Core State Standards](#), a set of academic expectations for what students in each grade should be learning in their math and English classes. The Common Core initiative has been controversial from the start, and it is sure to remain so as the messy business of implementing the standards in real classrooms proceeds during 2013. Part of the reason the standards have occasioned so much debate is that the content that's taught in American classrooms has historically been left up to local control.

But consider these three reasons why nationwide guidelines are a good idea: 1) Americans need to be able to move around. Millions of children change schools each year, and a consistent set of expectations will help ensure that they won't fall behind or become confused or bored because of

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the move. 2) Americans need to be able to talk to one another. We're a rich and varied country, and we're sure to stay that way in 2013 and beyond. But having a "common core" of knowledge that we all share will ease communication and break down barriers. 3) Americans need to compete with the rest of the world. School systems in countries regularly outscore the U.S. on international tests, such as those in Singapore and Finland, have national curricula that build knowledge over time in a logical and systematic fashion. In order to compete in the global economy, American schools need the same.

## 3. LEARNING OUT OF SCHOOL.

More than ever before, 2013 will bring a recognition that learning can happen anytime, anywhere—not just in a classroom and not just during the school day. This coming year, we'll see a greater focus on the "informal education" that happens in places like science museums and nature centers. We'll continue to explore, for ourselves and with our children, the wealth of information and ideas available on the web (while finding ways to avoid its abundant falsehoods and nonsense).

And if you thought you heard a lot about [MOOCs](#) in 2012, just you wait. MOOC stands for "massively open online course," and more and more universities across the country will join Stanford, Harvard, MIT and other leading institutions of higher learning in offering such courses to anyone with an Internet connection. More and more individuals will enroll, sampling classes on subjects from artificial intelligence to contemporary poetry, and collectively as a society we'll have to continue to grapple with the radical democratization of education that these developments entail. How do we deal with cheating and plagiarism in online classes? Should colleges award credit to students who learn from online courses and can demonstrate their skills? How do we wrap our heads around an educational universe in which a degree from Harvard costs upwards of \$100,000, but some of its most popular classes can be had for free?

Predictions are always dicey, of course. But no matter what 2013 may bring, one thing is certain: education's

reputation as a sleepy, slow-to-change sector of society is gone. Keep your eyes on education and learning over the coming year, because a lot of exciting and disruptive change is on its way.

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