

# **International and Economic Developments: The Afterschool Potential to Prepare Our Students to Succeed in the Future**

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Opening remarks for a special convening of national afterschool and education leaders

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**We are convening at a most opportune and critical time. It potentially could be a tipping point. And you could help push us over that tipping point.**

**The afterschool movement has grown and is growing due to local, state and federal actions as well as expansions by non-profits, community based organizations and foundations. We now have 9000 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers and eight years ago we had 10. California in the next few months will have 4000 to 5000 afterschool programs. This state is in an incredible position to set the tone for what quality afterschool programming for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century should look like.**

**We have 31 state afterschool networks. Many mayors and city councils are interested in afterschool. NY, CT and SC have increased state appropriations for afterschool this year. WA and WI have studies recommending that they include afterschool and summer learning in their school finance formulas.**

*Even with this expansion, some 14 million young people still go home alone afterschool. Polls on the other hand, support continued expansion of afterschool to close the achievement gap and keep kids safe.*

**And what also is interesting to me is that more and more studies show the positive impact of afterschool if the programming is engaging, involves school-community collaboration, uses projects and themes, hires motivated staff and works on real world issues. They often are school connected, but their activities and style are different from the typical school day.**

**At the same time, we are seeing increasing interest and concern about the lack of international knowledge and understanding among American students. Indeed we may be waking up to realize in almost every area of our lives the world is shrinking and Friedman's theory that the world has become flat and interconnected is real.**

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**The problem is that we are stuck in a 19<sup>th</sup> Century time frame for learning and youth development. To meet all the learning and youth development demands we simply must have more learning time and more learning partners and we have to as the Japanese some time say “smell the future.”**

**Here the interesting marriage of afterschool and developing skills for an international marketplace of ideas and commerce can come together. You can make it a marriage of love or convenience. Either way I think we have to find away to work together if our children and youth are going to be successful be prepared for the economy and citizenship in these rapidly changing times.**

**There are some powerful trends and changes that are affecting very directly our daily lives, jobs, society and in turn confronting public policy and you as education, afterschool and community leaders.**

**Opportunities and experiences in afterschool with community and perhaps international partners can and should help deal with these trends and changes. Drill and kill in afterschool and in the summers won't get us to where we need to be in preparing for these changing times.**

**We should be very mindful of the advice of one of our great thinkers and scientists of all times, Albert Einstein said: “We cannot solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them”**

## **Powerful Trends and Discoveries**

**I want you now to take out a piece of paper. I am going to read you a quote from a person with national and international influence. I want you to write down what type of person or who specifically might have said the statements that I am quoting:**

**This leader describes some of their most important work “attending dreaming sessions” and “working on imagination breakthrough projects.” The website of this leader’s organization describes their organization’s culture as “open” and “energizing” and “ a sense of possibility that allows for a freedom beyond mere invention.” It’s a “quest” that requires “passionate” people who are “curious” and “resourceful.”**

**Please write down either the person’s name or write down the specific name, organization or institution this leader is head of. This leader could be our host, George Lucas, or one of his colleagues like Milton Chen who is a co-convenor of this meeting, but it is not. Now let’s hear some of your answers.**

Some more hints. This leader is not a college president. The company is not Disney, nor is it Microsoft. This leader and his organization do not produce designer clothes or hand-held video games.

Any new answers with these added clues? The leader is Jeffrey Immet, the somewhat new CEO of General Electric—a company that is one of the grandfathers of corporate America and an employer of 310,000 workers worldwide.

His words highlight the massive transformation going on. Somehow we have to help our students of all ages to get ready for these changing times. Perhaps learning to adapt and be successful as individuals and communities may well be the challenge of our times.

Levy and Murnane in the book *The New Division of Labor* (2004) estimate a “..continued decline in moderately skilled and less skilled labor” jobs. Job growth they argue is and will be in “..occupations in which computers complement expert thinking and complex communication to produce new products and services.”

Richard Florida (2002) coined a short hand description for a critical set of people in this new economy. He called them, the “creative class.” This group represents about 30% of America’s workforce and earns the highest salaries. Those in this “class” produce “new forms and designs that are readily transferable and widely useful.” They include “creative professions” who engage in creative problems solving, drawing on complex bodies of knowledge to solve specific problems.”

One other thinker that is connecting many of these issues and trends and connecting them internationally is Thomas Friedman. In his book, *The World is Flat*, Friedman concludes with: “We Americans will have to work harder, run faster, and become smarter to make sure we get our share. ...On such a flat earth, the most important attribute you can have is creative imagination—the ability to be the first on your block to figure out how all these enabling tools can be put together in new and exciting ways to create products, communities, opportunities and profits. That has always been America’s strength, because America was, and for now still is, the world’s greatest dream machine.” (p. 469)

## **We Need to Help Our Students Develop Additional Skill Sets to be Prepared for and Succeed in the Future**

It appears to me that for our young people to be successful in this new circumstance, new economy and on this “flat world,” they need much broader and deeper skill sets. Yes they need to read, write, and do math and science well.

*While these basic skills are necessary, they are insufficient for the times. Our young people also need to be more creative and innovative. And they need to be able to see and understand the world through wider lenses than their own community, state and nation.*

**The playing field for jobs and peaceful coexistence, whether we like it or not, now involves much of the world. How can anyone play well in this enlarged field if they do not know the players, they do not know the settings (e.g., the culture and geography) and something about their languages?**

**Other countries are beginning to figure this out. Why isn't it possible to teach all American students English and one or two or three other languages? The European Union has agreed that their students, in all 25 countries, will know three languages: their native language and 2 others.**

**Every day in China, two times as many Chinese students study English than American students study English. And they are not giving up the study of their own language.**

**Their attitude and actions toward international trade may help explain why in just 17 years, America's trade deficit with China grew from \$6 billion to almost \$200 billion. I am not an economist, but it doesn't seem like we can keep going in this direction.**

**It also shows that we need to help our students to think and work entrepreneurially, preparing for an international marketplace of ideas and commerce. And what better tool to understand other cultures and to be entrepreneurial than the arts and music with an international connection? Yet we are cutting them out of the regular school day.**

**Particularly in light of all these trends, challenges and issues, it is sort of amazing that many still think of school, learning and youth development as an 8 AM to 3 PM, 175-180 days per year enterprise in America.**

**Further, it makes even less sense when we are already paying for the construction and maintenance of the school buildings and arts and sports facilities. We are already paying for the libraries, music rooms, school theatres and art rooms (if they have them), computers, and laboratories--all sitting in locked schools most hours and most days of the year.**

**And in the summers somewhere nearby, all the school buses are also sitting idle. At the same time many arts and cultural groups, tutors, science and health groups are crying out to serve more children and youth? They need low-cost or free space and equipment. They can't provide transportation.**

**Clearly we cannot help prepare our children and youth for these changing times, by looking at learning and development time in the same old ways. That is why *afterschool and summer learning*, developed through school-community partnerships, has to be a *new essential opportunity* in preparing for these changing times.**

**We also are learning what works best in afterschool and summers is often project-based learning, more connected to the real world, and include a technology base. All of these elements would work very well in developing international skills. What's more, many skills that kids will need apply to global work teams, taking another's perspective, researching effortlessly with tech assistance, learning language skills, debating issues of the particular moment—can be encouraged in afterschool settings perhaps as well or better than in classrooms.**

**While we wait for the formal education systems to respond, there is a giant challenge and opportunity for all of us who care about youth development and extended learning—to begin to expose our kids to the larger world beyond US borders.**

**Also during much of this time many parents are worried sick about what their children and youth are doing in the out-of-school time before they get home from work. For those parents “Home Alone” is not a funny movie. And 14 million American children go home alone almost every day (Afterschool Alliance, 2004). And almost as many parents who have a place for their children to go after school, say they would send them to an afterschool learning program if they were engaging, interesting, and secure. And those parents want their children to have the opportunity to learn new skills and abilities. How about learning about other languages, cultures, developing creativity, virtual and real international exchanges, and being engaged in the arts then, too?**

**As I close, it might be helpful to look at some advice another great philosophers told us about how to deal with change.**

**Dilbert: Change is Good; you go first.**

**Our job for the next couple days is to develop some strategies to make a very interesting marriage of afterschool and international education that will prepare our children for these rapidly changing times in jobs, society and citizenship requirements. Since you are part of the “creative professional class, I think you are more than up to the challenge. And this could make all the difference in the world.**