



Expanding  
**minds**  
and Opportunities

Leveraging

**the**

# Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success

This article is an excerpt from the groundbreaking book, ***Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success***. This landmark compendium, edited by Terry K. Peterson, PhD, is composed of nearly 70 research studies, reports, essays, and commentaries by more than 100 researchers, educators, community leaders, policy makers, and practitioners.

Collectively, these writings boldly state that there is now a solid base of research and best practices clearly showing that quality afterschool and summer learning programs—including 21st Century Community Learning Centers—make a positive difference for students, families, schools, and communities.

Together, the collection of articles demonstrates the power of quality expanded learning opportunities to:

- **promote student success and college and career readiness;**
- **build youth assets such as character, resilience, and wellness;**
- **foster partnerships that maximize resources and build community ties; and**
- **engage families in their children's learning in meaningful ways.**

For information on how to order the full book, download sections and individual articles, or explore the topic areas, visit **[www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds](http://www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds)**.

## About the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project

The Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project is a 50-state initiative harnessing the power of networks and leaders to help schools and communities leverage the time beyond school to accelerate student achievement. A partnership of funders led by the C.S. Mott Foundation support the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project. More information about the book and the project, as well as additional resources, can be found at [www.expandinglearning.org](http://www.expandinglearning.org).

**Milton Chen**

Senior Fellow, The George Lucas  
Educational Foundation

## **The Rise of *Any Time, Any Place, Any Path, Any Pace* Learning: Afterschool and Summer as the New American Frontier for Innovative Learning**

Pause for a just a second. . . . Take a moment to think about the sheer number of fundamental changes and major trends that have affected our students, families, and education over the past decade.

Some might acknowledge that we're lucky to be living in a unique time in history—a time in which global, social, and economic forces in the early 21st century have rewritten the rules we lived by in the 20th century, in politics, economics, and now education, globally. Others might see these changes as challenging, perhaps even frightening.

Regardless of your perspective, these changes are dramatically changing what our students and their families face in order to be equipped to live, learn, and succeed in the 21st century. New types of learning opportunities, partnerships, and time and space configurations are emerging. The wave of the future is evident in new and expanded options for learning after school, over the weekend, and during the summer through new school-family-community partnerships.

We have crossed over what was once a distant horizon, barely a glimmer in a futurist's eye. A new landscape of learning is coming into sharper focus. As NYU lecturer and author Clay Shirky (2009) says in his marvelous TED talk, "The moment we're living through is [seeing] the largest increase in expressive capability in human history." Everyone—notably in our younger generation—can now be a producer of knowledge and not just a consumer of someone else's version of it. Today's learners were born digital and are used to having the world of information at their fingertips and in their pockets.

2010 may mark the first year of the 21st century in education, when we crossed the chasm between the analog and digital worlds in education. Educators and policy makers in the United States and abroad are embracing a new willingness to think differently

about education, what I call the Thinking Edge of innovation in schools (Chen, 2010). Today, we can see, much more clearly than even 3 years ago, how learning can occur “any time, any place, any path, any pace.” Schools and homes continue to be important places for learning, but not exclusively.

Many education experts, such as Bob Wise from the Alliance for Excellent Education, Michael Levine from the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop, and Alexis Menten of the Asia Society, understand the importance of the “third learning space,”

the many places where students learn in ways not bounded by the schedule of the school day, the limitations of the four classroom walls, or the location of one’s home. These places include afterschool programs, museums, science centers, libraries, parks, and anywhere students can connect with the Internet and their “learning partners.”

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The real issue behind the achievement gap is an “experience gap”: students living very narrow lives within a tight social and geographic network. The expansion of their “experience portfolio” requires more learning time and contact with more caring adults who can show them the wider world. These are strengths of afterschool programs that leverage time during afternoons, evenings, weekends, and summers.

President John Hennessy of Stanford University has described its model students as “T-students” (Auletta, 2012): students who not only have a tremendous breadth of interests, knowledge, and skills, but also an impressive depth of knowledge in a particular domain. A T-shaped education

should start early, giving our youngest students the broadest possible exposure to many learning experiences and places, spanning the arts, history, literacy, sports, and the STEM disciplines, creating the long, horizontal part of their T. Social/emotional learning should be a vital platform for developing persistent, confident, and collaborative learners. Through these varied experiences, students are more likely to discover their true passion that can lead to deep expertise, the vertical part of that T.

Taking project-based and place-based learning to its ultimate expression, students can now pursue personalized, passion-based learning. This should be the goal of a 21st century education: to find one’s passion and develop it. While traditional schooling offers limited courses and extracurriculars that do not map fully onto students’ many interests, afterschool programs can expand their options and help them locate more experiences and mentors in their communities and online.

Two recent examples of the power of the “third learning space” come to mind. I joined a team from the California Afterschool Network in a site visit to an afterschool program at an elementary school in San Jose. We were using the visit to inform our thinking about a website that would offer training and activities for STEM education. We observed 4th-graders, organized in small teams, in animated conversations about the best way to build a “marble roller coaster” using a marble and foam tubes, doing hands-on physics and engineering. What impressed me most was how quickly, once given the goal of the activity and the materials, these young students were able to design, test, and improve their roller coasters—and how much they enjoyed it.

I also recently participated in an evening videoconference with a group of high school students near San Francisco at the Redwood City Peapod Academy, whose partners include the Black Eyed Peas, Adobe Youth Voices, and the International Education & Resource Network (IEARN). The American students, largely Latino, spoke with two separate groups of boy and girl students in Pakistan during their morning, quickly learning about cultural values that prohibit girls from traveling and limitations on broadband Internet access.

I told the Pakistani students that I was honored to witness this exchange, since it was my first time speaking with students there. When Osama bin Laden was taken there weeks later, I'm certain all of those present that evening thought of those students and how more online student exchanges like it could contribute to a more peaceful world.

The rise of the afterschool and summer learning movement continues to be a bright spot in the new landscape of American education. Often delivered through school-community partnerships, the programs encompassed by this movement help to engage and broaden students' experiences from their lives in school or at home. This is a distinctly American invention, fueled by the commitment and perseverance of thousands of local educators and a broad spectrum of nonprofit, public, and private partners. Some may try to rein in this innovative movement to make learning look more like that offered during a typical 20th-century school day, but that would be a move in the wrong direction in light of global, social, and economic forces prevalent in the early 21st century. The afterschool and summer learning movement is a key driver of break-the-mold efforts to provide children with any time, any place, any path, any pace learning opportunities and is thus on the leading edge of the future of education.

But . . . let's keep this a secret from policy makers in Finland and Singapore. If they understand the types of creative learning going on in this "third learning space," they will create these places and programs for every child in their countries. On the other hand, perhaps we should learn a lesson from them and scale the innovations we've "Made in America" to every child here.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Milton Chen** is senior fellow and executive director, emeritus, at The George Lucas Educational Foundation in the San Francisco Bay Area ([edutopia.org](http://edutopia.org)). He also serves as chairman of the Panasonic Foundation and the education committee of the National Park System Advisory Board. Chen's 2010 book, *Education Nation: Six Leading Edges of Innovation in Our Schools*, was selected as a top book of the year by the American School Board Journal.

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