



It's time to Rethink Learning

The [Education Commission](#) estimated that by 2030, more than half of the world's children and young people (800 million) would not have the skills or qualifications necessary to participate in the emerging global workforce.

The need for lifelong learning has been evident for years based on the rapid pace of development, an increasingly dynamic society, and the impact of technology on our work and life. While foundational skills are a must, it is increasingly important to focus on the whole learner and help students develop holistic skills, including 21st century skills like communication, collaboration, problem-solving and creativity. These skills for [holistic development](#) also contribute to success and happiness in one's personal life.

Education systems were starting to address these needs, albeit at varying degrees, even before the pandemic.

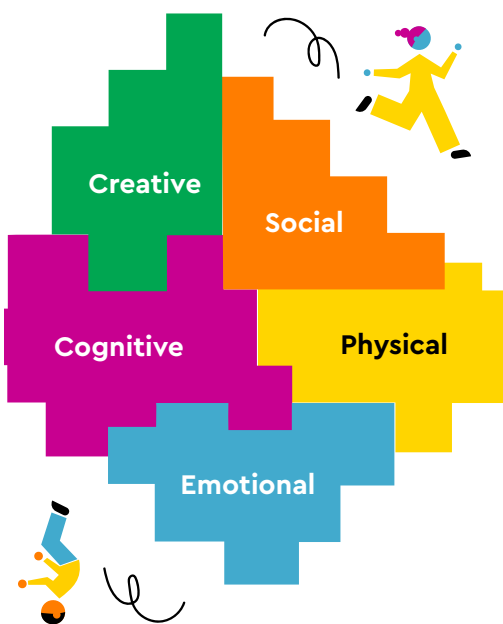
The unprecedented challenges we faced last year thrust educators to work through emergency remote learning initially, then gradually into some form of hybrid learning and in-person learning with COVID-19 restrictions, with millions of students alternating between these scenarios. The level of disruption further [highlighted the inequities and inadequacies within the education system](#), showing us just how much of an uphill battle learning is for some students.

The various learning scenarios have had another unfortunate outcome. Students have been deprived of the social and emotional fabric that is most crucial

during their formative years. There have been some strong examples of how educators are adopting innovative instructional practices, but there is also ample evidence of students disengaging and not thriving in pure digital settings. As schools bring students back into the classrooms, educators are grappling with safeguarding the emotional wellbeing of students, rebuilding their confidence around learning and restoring their sense of community through meaningful and collaborative moments. Increasingly, there is the realisation that beyond simply addressing the gaps, now is the time to bring about transformational changes to K-12 education.

To get there, we must Rethink Learning. The need for cultivating a growth mindset and love for lifelong learning

is even more accelerated now. We need teaching and learning that engages all students and ensures equitable learning outcomes for students of all social identities and backgrounds. What if we could rethink the way we teach? And what if we could rethink the physical classroom experience for what it can uniquely deliver through social, collaborative and playful learning – to make learning more enjoyable, to build resilience and create environments that naturally weave in life skills? The focus on whole-learner development in an integrated manner can be daunting. But it can be done. We have seen successes even in our current, challenging times that showcase how a thoughtful approach that combines learning outcomes, engagement and collaboration can be achieved.



These five [skills of holistic development](#) help children navigate and thrive in an ever-changing world.

Rethink How Students Learn with Purposeful Play

Purposeful play is rooted in the pedagogical approaches such as project-based learning, which are known to increase student learning outcomes and, at the same time, enable a love of learning. It encourages students to systematically explore, experiment and continually iterate.

[Students benefit](#) from opportunities to connect ideas, nurture creativity and apply their knowledge and skills. Playful learning experiences provide a way for students to naturally discover and engage in these learning experiences. And when students are engaged, learning becomes more motivating, memorable and meaningful. Students feel empowered to learn and explore without worrying about a wrong answer or finding the one right answer. To rethink the learning

experience, we need to consider how to consistently create engaging, playful experiences in classrooms.

Setting children up for lifelong success through play isn't achieved by making just one or two changes. It's achieved by rethinking our approach to learning and understanding that learning through purposeful play, whether during early childhood or in adolescence, is what will help students develop skills that will carry them into the future.

Purposeful play uses pedagogies that are intentional about experiences in the classroom and that promote curiosity, all while allowing students to have agency in their learning.

These approaches allow students to learn by doing and develop their skills.

A recent study from [Lucas Education Research](#) shows that students in project-based learning classrooms across the United States significantly outperformed students in typical classrooms.

With purposeful play, schools can address learning through an integrated approach that is woven throughout the whole learning experience.

A [Brookings Institute report](#) connects playful learning with 21st century skills, showing that a focus on play engages students, builds skills and promotes learning successfully.

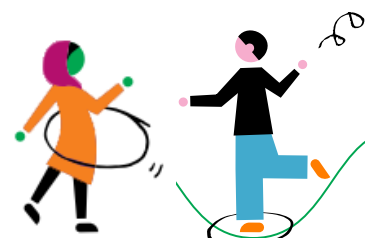
Many educators are expecting the pandemic to have lasting effects on students' mental health, according to [Education Week](#). Effects include an inability to focus, anxiety, a lack of

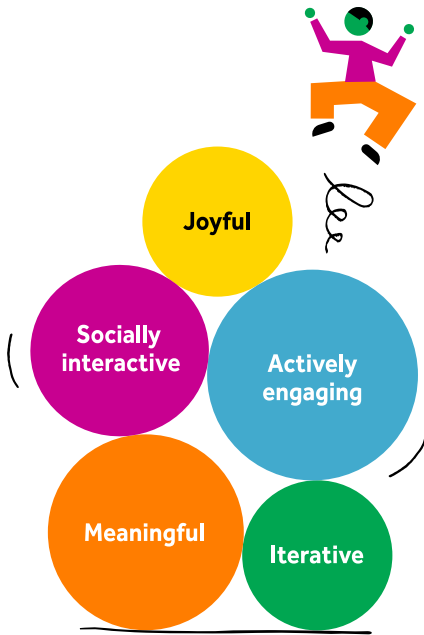
friendships and, for younger kids, the inability to articulate how they are feeling – all of which adversely affect kids' confidence and, ultimately, their ability to learn.

Purposeful, collaborative play experiences can help students feel like they are part of a community again, building their social and emotional skills through peer interactions. Furthermore, incorporating student choice into the learning process has been shown to reduce exclusion, prevent teacher burnout and increase learning outcomes, including in core subjects. Even better, purposeful play helps students develop a love of lifelong learning.

Creating an Equitable Learning Environment through Play

The pandemic has exposed deep institutional inequities that are now impossible to ignore. We need new ways that are intuitive, inclusive and adaptable to engage students, regardless of their learning abilities or socioeconomic status. One of the many ways of addressing these inequities is through purposeful play. A [report](#) by the LEGO Foundation shows that learning through play can close achievement gaps between children from more and less advantaged groups, helping all children develop important skills they will need to succeed at any life stage.





Learning through Play

All students can succeed in play. And all students can enjoy the [benefits of learning when they are playing](#), which can help tackle equity challenges. Creating situations where students can learn through play in school provides space for students to create ways of thinking – like how to deal with uncertainty – that will benefit them throughout their lives.

Indeed, social engagement is central to human nature. As the [Brookings Institute found](#), social engagement encompasses everything we do to get along with others, control our impulses, build communities and promote diverse cultures. Learning through collaborative and social play will help students develop these critical skills.

Purposeful Play Develops a Lifelong Love of Learning

It's time to Rethink Learning and how we empower students to take ownership of their learning. The good news is the pedagogical approaches that are part of learning through play

are proven to drive improved learning outcomes. The fact that they also generate enthusiasm, motivation and a lifelong love of learning means that we owe it to our children to embed them in our approach to learning.

This outcome is what drives LEGO® Education to develop a systematic approach to STEAM learning that aims to develop the whole child. Teachers are provided hands-on STEAM learning solutions that include rich professional learning options, standards-based lesson plans and LEGO Education materials which together allow teachers to build a classroom experience that helps children understand how the world around them works.

We know that changing instructional practices can be daunting, which is why we created competency-based professional development: so that all teachers can freely benefit from the skills they need to be successful. The result is a learning experience that truly delights teachers and students alike, where knowledge grows, skills flourish and students fall in love with learning.

Holistic skills graphic reproduced from the LEGO Foundation's *Skills for Holistic Development*, <https://www.legofoundation.com/en/why-play/skills-for-holistic-development/>
 LTP graphic reproduced from *Learning Through Play: Increasing impact reducing inequality*, The LEGO Foundation, 2021, p. 9
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