

Closing Keynote:

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Punya Mishra

Director Innovative Learning Futures, Learning Engineering Institute

Professor, Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching & Learning Innovation

Arizona State University

Introduction

Thank you for that kind introduction. It's an honor to be delivering this closing keynote at the International Day for Digital Learning. As we've heard throughout today's sessions, we face significant challenges in creating equitable digital learning environments, particularly in low-resourced contexts. The focus on incremental yet meaningful approaches that support learning in subtle but significant ways resonates deeply with me and connects directly to work I've been engaged in with a project called Silver Lining for Learning.

Today, I'd like to share with you the story of this project - a global initiative I've been working on with my colleagues Chris Dede from Harvard, Kurt Bonk from Indiana University, Lydia Cao from University of Toronto, and Yong Zhao from the University of Kansas and University of Melbourne. Through this project, we've documented hundreds of innovative educational approaches worldwide that embody exactly what this International Day for Digital Learning is celebrating - practices that promote learning equity in diverse contexts, creative uses of available technologies, and the agency of teachers and learners in overcoming systemic challenges.

The Birth of Silver Lining for Learning

Silver Lining for Learning began in March 2020, the week that everything shut down due to the pandemic. Yong sent us an email and said, "We know something about online learning. It's exciting that people will now be forced to do online learning, but they're not going to do it well and they're going to blame the medium. We need to do what we can to help people to do a good job of meeting the challenges of COVID with high quality online learning."

So we said every Saturday we'll get together and we will present things that are happening all across the world that we think are powerful and transformative in terms of learning technologies as models that can help people as they're struggling to cope. And then in five or 10 weeks when the pandemic's over, we'll stop doing this.

Well, that wasn't a great forecast. We've now actually finished over 225 episodes. None of us anticipated that we would be going on for this long or that we would have reached the scale that we have in terms of the number of guests and different topics.

Format and Approach

Our episodes have an unusual format. They're not like a webinar where somebody's giving a speech, they're not like a conference panel where three people are giving shorter talks and then there's some

discussion among them. This is like the kind of conversation you might have at dinner if you went to a conference and you met a few people that you hadn't known before and you decided as a group to go to dinner, and over dinner you just started talking informally about what each of you were doing and why it was interesting and how it might relate to what the other people are doing.

Our conversations last roughly an hour and have many kinds of pointers to ways that people can continue to be involved with that particular topic if they're interested. And then over time, because we have episodes that are on similar topics, we refer people back and forth in the whole database to different kinds of things going on.

There's also blog posts that are on the website and other kinds of resources. The episodes are available both in video form and as audio podcasts so that you can listen to them if you're driving a car or doing something else where video is not a great idea.

All of this is done with zero funding. We have no sponsors, we have no organizations that are involved. It's really just us as individuals. The great thing about that is that we aren't answerable to anybody. We do what we want to do and so far people have liked it well enough that we have had a growing audience and a growing impact in terms of what we're saying.

The range of topics is very very broad because each of us as co-hosts has somewhat similar interests but also different interests, and we have different networks of people whose work we know. So between all of us we're able to bring forward a wide range of topics. We're able to contact through firsthand knowledge a wide variety of speakers, and we've really been able to present a very broad-based overview of what's going on in the field.

Stories from the Field

Nepal: MOOCs and Student Transformation

One of our most fascinating episodes featured kids from Nepal, teenagers who took MOOCs to learn English to get ready for college. They got Harvard certificates and Stanford certificates. These are 12-year-olds, 13, 14, 15-year-olds and they're defining self-directed learning better than my graduate students were.

These kids were really excited about taking these English MOOCs, but it wasn't just English MOOCs because COVID happened. They had to take all their classes in an online format and their teacher named Bayman from Motherland Secondary School inspired them to form a network of kids learning via MOOCs. Some of these kids didn't just take one MOOC, not just two, not just five - some took over 100 during COVID and were sharing with each other their learnings and prepping for college.

A couple now are in college settings. They've been accepted to universities in the US for college or other places around the world. We had these kids back on about a month after the initial episode to get an update on what's happening in their lives four years later.

This episode shows that learning is more massive and scalable, and these kids were inspired by their teacher. So one teacher can change the world or a country by leadership that they're providing and

encouraging students to learn in a different way, in an informal way, in a massive way, in this case in an online way.

In the Nepal case, it's kind of a focus more on informal learning, non-traditional forms of learning, but there's a reconnection back to the classroom. So we have both formal and informal learning taking place.

The WEQUIL App: Learner-Led Innovation

Families around the world are looking for alternative education for their children beyond traditional brick-and-mortar schools. Examples of alternative education include homeschools, microschools, learning pods, learning co-ops etc. Educators around the world are building solutions to leverage their strengths to serve students who can uniquely benefit from what they provide.

Frustrated by the challenges of remote learning during the pandemic, two young sisters—Sumay Lu, 14, and Aila Lu, 11—took matters into their own hands. Instead of waiting for the education system to adapt, Sumay and Aila founded their own online homeschooling platform, which has since grown into the WEquil App, a digital learning platform, now serving families, students, and educators in nearly 50 states and more than 50 countries.

They provide a complete technology solution for homeschoolers, educators, microschool founders, and edupreneurs who lead hundreds of personalized learning communities on their platform such as clubs, classes, co-ops, learning pods, and microschools, streamlining communication, security, payments, assessments, and more!

Wildlife Filmmaking in Rwanda

Another fascinating episode focused on a Rwanda Wildlife film-making course. Filmmaker David McGowan, along with a former student, a community leader, and a film expert, discussed their project that aims to empower local communities by teaching filmmaking skills. Participants learn to document and share conservation efforts and cultural stories, particularly those related to mountain gorillas and the environment. By providing equipment and training, the project fosters local voices and sustainable storytelling, addressing the need for conservation messages to come directly from the people most connected to the land. This episode beautifully illustrates how technology and creative media can amplify indigenous knowledge and create pathways for communities to tell their own stories in powerful ways.

Grassroots Organizations in India

We did a fascinating series of four episodes focused on educational innovation in India. These episodes showcase the incredible diversity of approaches being developed to address India's complex educational challenges.

In episode 129, we explored student-centered learning in India, acknowledging the nation's vast scale, complexity, and diversity. The conversation highlighted the work of two organizations, Avishkar Foundation and In Kilab Foundation, dedicated to revolutionizing education by fostering a

love for science and math and nurturing problem-solving skills in marginalized communities. The guests shared their personal journeys from engineering to education, their approaches to creating supportive learning environments, and the challenges they face, including navigating the caste system and assessment-driven education. Ultimately, they seek to empower students by fostering belief in themselves and connecting learning to their lived experiences, emphasizing the importance of critical thinking and self-efficacy.

Episode 130 examined 21st-century learning within the Indian educational context. The episode featured guests from organizations like Quest Alliance and Reap Benefit, who discussed their work in fostering self-learning pathways and civic engagement among young people. Key themes included addressing persistent problems like dropouts and child marriages, promoting learner agency, and navigating the complex relationship between NGOs and the state education system. The discussion explored how to create effective and transformative learning environments that empower Indian youth to solve local problems and develop crucial skills.

In episode 138, we focused on experiential learning initiatives in India. Our guests from "Make a Cut" and "Inspirit VR" discussed their programs aimed at providing hands-on and immersive learning experiences to underserved youth. Their models emphasize locally sourced materials and virtual/augmented reality to amplify youth aspirations. They addressed the challenges of overcoming traditional educational models and deficit-based thinking, while highlighting the need for cultural shifts that recognize the value of creativity, critical thinking, and self-efficacy. A key theme revolved around integrating these innovative learning approaches into core curricula to enhance understanding and address the aspirations of today's youth.

Episode 123 explored teacher development and women's empowerment in rural India. The episode introduced two non-profit organizations, Ashwath Learning Communities and Sajja Sapna. These organizations aim to provide quality education and growth opportunities for rural women, addressing gender inequality through community colleges and teacher training programs. The discussion explored the philosophical and operational challenges of working in this context, emphasizing the importance of trusting the potential of rural women and creating equitable learning spaces. Ultimately, the episode showcased innovative approaches to empowering marginalized communities through education, addressing issues of internalized oppression and promoting agency.

Social-Emotional Learning in Chile

Eventuras, a Chilean non-profit born from addressing a major issue in vulnerable schools: disruptive student behavior. Our guests were Francisca Astudillo and Francisca Saéz, founders of Eventuras, and Sofia Larraín, one of the pioneering teachers Eventuras has worked with and who has become a local SEL advocate and trainer. Along the journey, Eventuras realized that behavioral issues were an expression of a lack of socio-emotional skills, but that this was just the tip of the iceberg, revealing deeper challenges like a lack of problem-solving abilities, social skills, low self-esteem, depression, and dropout rates. Hence, Eventuras was founded to help vulnerable schools systematically implement SEL. In their 5 years, they have identified and tackled key barriers, bringing evidence-based programs to Chile, rigorously addressing this issue.

Creativity, Play and Learning

We did episodes 62, 63, and 64 all focused on the idea of creativity and play. These three episodes don't see learning, play and creativity as isolated acts but as deeply social experiences that thrive in supportive environments. They're also a critique of traditional education at some level, proposing fresh socially rooted perspectives on creativity, joy and learning.

The first episode dispels this myth of the lone creative genius - that there's this individual who can be creative - but rather looks at it more from social interaction and engagement with the surroundings. This leads into the look at the importance of unstructured outdoor play, which we showcase through the "an play" model from China.

The third episode in this set talks about this idea of self-directed learning, arguing that children thrive in environments where they're trusted to guide their own learning journeys. That's actually a theme we see in other episodes in Silver Lining as well.

There's this recurring tension in some of these conversations between structured education and organic learning, between institutional rules and individual freedom. But the examples here, one from China, one from the SV Valley School, illustrate that these ideas can work across diverse cultural settings. They paint a picture of learning as a natural process that blooms in the right conditions rather than through top-down control.

AI in Education

Now we've talked a lot about AI—that's the big thing. So a lot of our episodes in the recent past have looked at the role of AI in education, have looked at how artificial intelligence can both be something that can help educators but also the kind of potential risks associated with it. How do we train the next generation of teachers? There's a whole bunch of episodes we have around that. In fact, I think two or three episodes ago, we focused on a very unique program looking at AI literacy.

The ones that I have on screen here that you can see are four episodes. There are these National Institutes that have been funded here in the United States—people doing work around AI for inclusive education, using AI for adult learning, using AI for engaged learning, and for students working together. So foundational research in this area, development of new tools.

The National Institute for adult learning that I mentioned here—they have developed this app which is now being used across community colleges in a wide variety of courses as a cognitive partner rather than a replacement for the educator. These are people who are usually working full-time while they're trying to go to school, so they are juggling a lot of things, and their schedule doesn't necessarily match the schedule of a college or a university. So how can we make intelligent support available to them is really powerful.

Afghanistan: Education Under Adversity

We also have three very independent stories that emerged from episodes 140, 51, and 95. These are incredibly inspiring stories of learning and education in extremely difficult times and how technology and global collaboration can actually create educational opportunities. All three of them are connected through the country of Afghanistan, and they are both grassroots and institutional responses.

The Asian University for Women's special programs in Bangladesh for Afghan women, Classrooms Without Walls which actually started with a COVID project and then expanded out to Afghanistan, repurposing virtual teaching methods that were initially developed for Australian teacher training and then adapted for a project called "Flowers for the Future" where teachers and students build virtual classrooms using Zoom and Google Classroom.

What's remarkable here is how technology helps education overcome certain very strong barriers. From the hybrid models to the virtual classrooms of Classroom Without Walls, these episodes show that education can transcend in very profound ways physical and political limits.

These are incredibly moving episodes. Once they are done, I just sit back and take a breath because you realize the courage, the dedication, the passion, the commitment that all these people are bringing into these educational spaces. When you get to hear from the students who are taking advantage of these for their own growth and then passing it on - similar to what we saw in the Nepal MOOC project - it's not just about my learning but I can also peer mentor, I can grow and develop the next generation of educators.

There's a powerful message that comes through about the role of resilience and learning, whether in traditional classrooms or conflict zones, that learning is a social participatory process that will find ways to thrive. This is a deeply human thing that we do. The conversations with a young woman in Afghanistan talking about how they wrote a book of poetry and then got it translated and now it might actually be getting published are deeply inspirational.

Technology and human connection can create these meaningful learning experiences. Education, when we often think about it, is about knowledge transfer, but it's so much more than that. It is about crafting spaces which may be physical or virtual where people can come together and connect and hold on to hope for the future even under incredibly difficult times.

Key Insights and Lessons

What I'd like to do now is step back from the specifics and look at the whole body of work in Silver Lining for Learning as a growing and evolving resource.

The episodes I've highlighted represent less than 10% of our complete database. There's an incredible amount of material that speaks to a broad range of topics across global education. We began this series during the darkness of COVID, looking for inspiration from bottom-up innovations worldwide. Even now, in different challenging times, we continue to find hope and joy in these stories. There's no extrinsic reward for doing Silver Lining for Learning, but intrinsically, these are powerful learning experiences for us.

What makes our collection unique is that these innovations typically fly below the radar. They're not the kind of work you'd find in edtech journals, scholarly conferences, or even practitioner gatherings. While there's valuable top-down knowledge in our field, we're capturing bottom-up knowledge from practitioners who aren't focused on publishing or presenting. We're finding and amplifying voices that might otherwise never be heard.

Silver Lining for Learning has organically evolved into a pedagogical resource. Under a Creative Commons license, educators can use these episodes in various ways - excerpting segments for courses, creating thematic collections, or using them as rich video case studies. I'm using these in my classes, and my students are not only enjoying them but suggesting new applications and even creating their own podcast series inspired by our format.

Lessons Learned

First, the episodes featuring students have been particularly powerful. The maturity and creativity of these young voices is truly inspiring. Their perspectives reveal education in ways experts simply cannot.

Second, looking across the range of models - formal and informal, student-centered, learning-centered - we see that edtech empowers an enormous diversity of innovations. Too often we only look at what's visible "under the streetlight" instead of exploring the darkness to find these remarkable experiments that could transform education.

Third, we've learned that educational change happens in pockets, not monolithically. Rather than asking "what does Finland do and how can America copy it?", we see that education is multidimensional and culturally contextual. Solutions don't simply translate between settings. The most powerful approach is nurturing small pockets of innovation - like schools-within-schools - that can grow organically within their unique contexts.

We want Silver Lining for Learning to be as participatory as possible. We're always seeking new episodes and guests, and we welcome volunteers to help expand our impact - whether through suggesting guests, improving our website, or helping create shorter highlight videos. This is a labor of love at the edges of our primary professional work, and we'd be delighted to have others join us in this effort.

Most importantly, all the people we feature are approachable. If you watch an episode and want to connect with anyone you see, just let us know. That's the ultimate purpose of this work - creating connections between educational innovators worldwide who are each making their dent in educational change, progress, and reform.

Aligning with UNESCO's Mission

As we conclude this International Day for Digital Learning, I hope these stories from Silver Lining for Learning provide a meaningful complement to the important discussions we've had today about digital learning realities in low-resourced contexts.

What connects our work with UNESCO's mission is the shared recognition that transformative education rarely comes from grand technological panaceas, but rather from these "incremental yet meaningful methods" that are too often overlooked. Whether it's teenagers in Nepal creatively using MOOCs, community-based initiatives across India empowering marginalized populations, filmmakers in Rwanda enabling local storytelling, or educators creating virtual classrooms for students in Afghanistan - these examples show how human ingenuity, coupled with thoughtful use of available technologies, can advance learning equity.

These stories remind us that centering the voices of those in unequal, low-resourced settings isn't just about understanding challenges, but about recognizing their innovative problem-solving approaches. The teachers, students, and community leaders in our episodes aren't passive recipients of educational technologies - they're active agents using digital tools to create new learning possibilities, often with minimal resources.

Silver Lining for Learning itself exemplifies the bottom-up innovation we've been discussing today. We have no funding, no institutional backing, no formal structure – just five educators coming together out of curiosity, care, and passion. What began as a short-term response to the pandemic has evolved into a four-year journey documenting over 200 episodes of educational innovation worldwide. We've created this resource entirely through volunteer efforts, meeting on weekends, working around our primary professional responsibilities, driven solely by our belief in the power of sharing these stories.

This approach mirrors what we've seen in the educational innovations we document – resourcefulness in the face of constraints, creativity without substantial funding, and impact that comes not from scale but from authentic connection and purpose. It demonstrates that meaningful contributions to educational equity don't always require large budgets or institutional structures – sometimes they simply require commitment, relationships, and a willingness to listen and amplify voices that might otherwise go unheard.

As UNESCO's frameworks and resources continue to guide global efforts toward equitable digital learning, I believe that documenting and amplifying these grassroots innovations must be part of our collective approach. Only by connecting high-level policy with ground-level innovation can we truly create education systems that serve all learners.

I invite you all to explore the Silver Lining for Learning episodes, to connect with the remarkable educators and innovators we've featured, and to consider how their approaches might inform your own work in creating more equitable digital learning environments. Together, we can ensure that technology serves as a bridge to educational opportunity rather than another barrier to overcome.

Thank you for your attention and for your commitment to this vital work.

2. Silver Lining for Learning Presentation

Introduction

Welcome everyone to my presentation about Silver Lining for Learning. I'm excited to share with you the story of this project that I've been working on with my co-hosts: Chris Dede from Harvard, Kurt Bonk from Indiana University, Lydia Cao from University of Toronto, and Yong Zhao who's affiliated with both the University of Kansas and the University of Melbourne.

Origins

Silver Lining for Learning began in March 2020, the week that everything shut down due to the pandemic. Yong sent us an email and said, "We know something about online learning. It's exciting that people will now be forced to do online learning, but they're not going to do it well and they're going to blame the medium. We need to do what we can to help people to do a good job of meeting the challenges of COVID with high quality online learning."

So we said every Saturday we'll get together and we will present things that are happening all across the world that we think are powerful and transformative in terms of learning technologies as models that can help people as they're struggling to cope. And then in five or 10 weeks when the pandemic's over, we'll stop doing this.

Well, that wasn't a great forecast. We've now actually finished over 213 episodes. None of us anticipated that we would be going on for this long or that we would have reached the scale that we have in terms of the number of guests and different topics.

Format and Approach

Our episodes have an unusual format. They're not like a webinar where somebody's giving a speech, they're not like a conference panel where three people are giving shorter talks and then there's some discussion among them. This is like the kind of conversation you might have at dinner if you went to a conference and you met a few people that you hadn't known before and you decided as a group to go to dinner, and over dinner you just started talking informally about what each of you were doing and why it was interesting and how it might relate to what the other people are doing.

Our conversations last roughly an hour and have many kinds of pointers to ways that people can continue to be involved with that particular topic if they're interested. And then over time, because we have episodes that are on similar topics, we refer people back and forth in the whole database to different kinds of things going on.

There's also blog posts that are on the website and other kinds of resources. The episodes are available both in video form and as audio podcasts so that you can listen to them if you're driving a car or doing something else where video is not a great idea.

All of this is done with zero funding. We have no sponsors, we have no organizations that are involved. It's really just us as individuals. The great thing about that is that we aren't answerable to anybody. We do what we want to do and so far people have liked it well enough that we have had a growing audience and a growing impact in terms of what we're saying.

The range of topics is very very broad because each of us as co-hosts has somewhat similar interests but also different interests, and we have different networks of people whose work we know. So between all of us we're able to bring forward a wide range of topics. We're able to contact through firsthand knowledge a wide variety of speakers, and we've really been able to present a very broad-based overview of what's going on in the field.

Key Episode Highlights

I'd like to highlight a few of our most impactful episodes:

Nepal MOOCs Experience

One of our most fascinating episodes featured kids from Nepal, teenagers who took MOOCs to learn English to get ready for college. They got Harvard certificates and Stanford certificates. These are 12-year-olds, 13, 14, 15-year-olds and they're defining self-directed learning better than my graduate students were.

These kids were really excited about taking these English MOOCs, but it wasn't just English MOOCs because COVID happened. They had to take all their classes in an online format and their teacher named Bayman from Motherland Secondary School inspired them to form a network of kids learning via MOOCs. Some of these kids didn't just take one MOOC, not just two, not just five - some took over 100 during COVID and were sharing with each other their learnings and prepping for college.

A couple now are in college settings. They've been accepted to universities in the US for college or other places around the world. We had these kids back on about a month after the initial episode to get an update on what's happening in their lives four years later.

This episode shows that learning is more massive and scalable, and these kids were inspired by their teacher. So one teacher can change the world or a country by leadership that they're providing and encouraging students to learn in a different way, in an informal way, in a massive way, in this case in an online way.

In the Nepal case, it's kind of a focus more on informal learning, non-traditional forms of learning, but there's a reconnection back to the classroom. So we have both formal and informal learning taking place.

Creativity, Play and Learning

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that thrive in supportive environments. They're also a critique of traditional education at some level, proposing fresh socially rooted perspectives on creativity, joy and learning.

The first episode dispels this myth of the lone creative genius - that there's this individual who can be creative - but rather looks at it more from social interaction and engagement with the surroundings. This leads into the look at the importance of unstructured outdoor play, which we showcase through the "an play" model from China.

The third episode in this set talks about this idea of self-directed learning, arguing that children thrive in environments where they're trusted to guide their own learning journeys. That's actually a theme we see in other episodes in Silver Lining as well.

There's this recurring tension in some of these conversations between structured education and organic learning, between institutional rules and individual freedom. But the examples here, one from China, one from the SV Valley School, illustrate that these ideas can work across diverse cultural settings. They paint a picture of learning as a natural process that blooms in the right conditions rather than through top-down control.

Learning in Difficult Contexts - Afghanistan

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These are incredibly moving episodes. Once they are done, I just sit back and take a breath because you realize the courage, the dedication, the passion, the commitment that all these people are bringing into these educational spaces. When you get to hear from the students who are taking advantage of these for their own growth and then passing it on - similar to what we saw in the Nepal MOOC project - it's not just about my learning but I can also peer mentor, I can grow and develop the next generation of educators.

There's a powerful message that comes through about the role of resilience and learning, whether in traditional classrooms or conflict zones, that learning is a social participatory process that will find ways to thrive. This is a deeply human thing that we do. The conversations with a young

woman in Afghanistan talking about how they wrote a book of poetry and then got it translated and now it might actually be getting published are deeply inspirational.

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Reflections and Lessons Learned

What I'd like to do now is step back from the specifics and look at the whole body of work in Silver Lining for Learning as a growing and evolving resource.

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What makes our collection unique is that these innovations typically fly below the radar. They're not the kind of work you'd find in edtech journals, scholarly conferences, or even practitioner gatherings. While there's valuable top-down knowledge in our field, we're capturing bottom-up knowledge from practitioners who aren't focused on publishing or presenting. We're finding and amplifying voices that might otherwise never be heard.

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A few key lessons stand out:

First, the episodes featuring students have been particularly powerful. The maturity and creativity of these young voices is truly inspiring. Their perspectives reveal education in ways experts simply cannot.

Second, looking across the range of models - formal and informal, student-centered, learning-centered - we see that edtech empowers an enormous diversity of innovations. Too often we only look at what's visible "under the streetlight" instead of exploring the darkness to find these remarkable experiments that could transform education.

Third, we've learned that educational change happens in pockets, not monolithically. Rather than asking "what does Finland do and how can America copy it?", we see that education is multidimensional and culturally contextual. Solutions don't simply translate between settings.

The most powerful approach is nurturing small pockets of innovation - like schools-within-schools - that can grow organically within their unique contexts.

We want Silver Lining for Learning to be as participatory as possible. We're always seeking new episodes and guests, and we welcome volunteers to help expand our impact - whether through suggesting guests, improving our website, or helping create shorter highlight videos. This is a labor of love at the edges of our primary professional work, and we'd be delighted to have others join us in this effort.

Most importantly, all the people we feature are approachable. If you watch an episode and want to connect with anyone you see, just let us know. That's the ultimate purpose of this work - creating connections between educational innovators worldwide who are each making their dent in educational change, progress, and reform.

As we approach five years of Silver Lining for Learning, we look forward to continuing this journey of discovery and connection. Thank you for your attention, and I hope you'll check out our episodes.

Ep 129

student-centered learning in India, acknowledging the nation's vast scale, complexity, and diversity. The conversation highlights the work of two organizations, Avishkar Foundation and In Kilab Foundation, dedicated to revolutionizing education by fostering a love for science and math and nurturing problem-solving skills in marginalized communities. The guests, Sandhya Gupta and Eshwar Bandi, share their personal journeys from engineering to education, their organizations' approaches to creating supportive learning environments, and the challenges they face, including navigating the caste system and assessment-driven education. Ultimately, they seek to **empower students** by fostering belief in themselves and connecting learning to their lived experiences, emphasizing the importance of **critical thinking and self-efficacy**.

Ep 130

21st-century learning within the Indian educational context. The episode features guests from organizations like Quest Alliance and Reap Benefit, who discuss their work in fostering **self-learning pathways and civic engagement** among young people. Key themes include addressing persistent 19th-century problems like dropouts and child marriages, promoting **learner agency**, and navigating the complex relationship between NGOs and the state education system. Ultimately, the episode explores how to create effective and transformative learning environments that empower Indian youth to solve local problems and develop crucial skills.

Ep 138

xperiential learning initiatives in India. Azra Ismail of "Make a Cut" and Aditya of "Inspirit VR" discuss their programs aimed at providing **hands-on and immersive learning**

experiences to underserved youth, and their models emphasize **locally sourced materials** and **virtual/augmented reality** to amplify youth aspirations. They address the challenges of overcoming traditional educational models and **deficit-based thinking**, while highlighting the need for **cultural shifts** that recognize the value of creativity, critical thinking, and self-efficacy. A key theme revolves around **integrating these innovative learning approaches into core curricula** to enhance understanding and address the aspirations of today's youth.

Ep 123

teacher development and women's empowerment in rural India. The episode introduces two non-profit organizations, Ashwath Learning Communities and Sajja Sapna, represented by Arushi Mittal and Surabi, respectively. These organizations aim to **provide quality education and growth opportunities for rural women**, addressing gender inequality through community colleges and teacher training programs. The discussion explores the **philosophical and operational challenges** of working in this context, emphasizing the importance of trusting the potential of rural women and creating equitable learning spaces. Ultimately, the episode showcases innovative approaches to **empowering marginalized communities through education**, addressing issues of internalized oppression and promoting agency.

Rwanda Wildlife film-making course. Filmmaker David McGowan, along with Roger (a former student), Greg (a community leader), and W. Jong (a film expert), discuss the project's origin, purpose, and impact. The course aims to **empower local communities** by teaching them filmmaking skills so they can document and share conservation efforts and cultural stories, particularly those related to **mountain gorillas** and the environment. By providing equipment and training, the project hopes to foster local voices and sustainable storytelling, addressing the need for conservation messages to come directly from the people most connected to the land. The discussion also touches upon funding challenges and the potential for broader distribution and impact, including the establishment of a local film festival.

Version old. Silver Lining for Learning Overview

The four of us welcome you. Thank you for coming to this opening session. We are four of the five co-hosts for the Silver Lining for Learning series. Professor Yong Zhao was not able to join us today. Our plan for the session is that I will present some origin story about Silver Lining for Learning - how did we start and where are we now in our journey - and then each of us as co-hosts will describe a few episodes that are favorites of ours. That way you can learn more about us and you can learn more about the kinds of episodes that we have on the show and get some sense of the diversity of episodes.

After that, we will all talk about some of the ways in which the episodes as a group provide a valuable kind of case study for the field and offer many opportunities for the field in terms of capacity building. We'll each introduce ourselves as we speak.

I'm Chris Dede. I'm a senior research fellow at Harvard Graduate School of Education where for 22 years I was the Worth Professor of Learning Technologies.

In March 2020, the week that everything shut down, some of us - Kurt and Puna and I and Yong - all connected. Yong sent us an email and said, "We know something about online learning. It's exciting that people will now be forced to do online learning, but they're not going to do it well and they're going to blame the medium. We need to do what we can to help people to do a good job of meeting the challenges of COVID with high quality online learning."

So we said every Saturday we'll get together and we will present things that are happening all across the world that we think are powerful and transformative in terms of learning technologies as models that can help people as they're struggling to cope. And then in five or 10 weeks when the pandemic's over, we'll stop doing this.

Well, that wasn't a great forecast. We now have actually just finished episode 213. We have 214 coming up this Saturday. None of us anticipated that we would be going on for this long or that we would have reached the scale that we have in terms of the number of guests and different topics. It truly is a global and international overview.

There are many things that have "international" in the title, but they turn out to be largely domestic in one country or another. This is truly an international series that really provides a kind of perspective on what's happening around the world that we have not seen elsewhere, and that perspective is expressed in different ways. The episodes are roughly an hour long and they have an unusual format.

We have an unusual format - they're not like a webinar where somebody's giving a speech, they're not like a conference panel where three people are giving shorter talks and then there's some discussion among them. This is like the kind of conversation you might have at dinner if you went to a conference and you met a few people that you hadn't known before and you decided as a group to go to dinner and over dinner you just started talking informally about what each of you were doing and why it was interesting and how it might relate to what the other people are doing.

So we have conversations of that type with our guests. Those conversations last roughly an hour and have many kinds of pointers to ways that people can continue to be involved with that particular topic if they're interested. And then over time because we have episodes that are on similar topics we refer people back and forth in the whole database to different kinds of things going on.

There's also blog posts that are on the website and other kinds of resources. The episodes are available both in video form and as audio podcasts so that you can listen to them if you're driving a car or doing something else where video is not a great idea.

All of this is done with zero funding. We have no sponsors, we have no organizations that are involved. It's really just us as individuals. The great thing about that is that we aren't answerable to anybody. We do what we want to do and so far people have liked it well enough that we have had a growing audience and a growing impact in terms of what we're saying.

The range of topics is very very broad because each of us as co-hosts has somewhat similar interests but also different interests and we have different networks of people whose work we know. So between all of us we're able to bring forward a wide range of topics. We're able to contact through firsthand knowledge a wide variety of speakers and we've really been able I think to present a very broad-based overview of what's going on in the field.

Episode Highlights from Hosts

The other episode that I highlight, and this again is fairly recent, is typical of the episodes where we're looking not so much at a large Institute in its work but at a single project. Francisca Castudillo was a master student at Harvard with me about six years ago. She went back to Chile and involved some colleagues in developing a novel intervention in fifth and sixth grade classrooms for marginalized students in terms of their social emotional skills in response to major challenges that schools were having in classroom management with students.

It's a wonderful intervention. We had a terrific conversation with them about it. Beyond being widely implemented in Chile now, other countries are looking at either doing this or something similar to this, which is something else that we stress in our episodes - that these are not brands. Many of the projects are also models where they could be adapted and used in a different way in a different country.

So the chance to talk with these young, passionately interested educators about "Venturas," which is the intervention that they have for social emotional learning, was really exciting and fun. And like many of our episodes set in a global South country where resources are scarce, this is a story about overcoming severe resource challenges and nonetheless making a big difference in education.

Nepal MOOCs Experience

Mukes and Nepal - that was a fascinating episode. I'm sure Puna is very excited about it too. We had kids from Nepal, teenagers who took MOOCs to learn English to get ready for college. They

got Harvard certificates and Stanford certificates. These are 12-year-olds, 13, 14, 15 year olds and they're defining self-directed learning better than my graduate students were.

These kids are real excited about taking these English MOOCs, but it wasn't just English MOOCs because COVID happened. They had to take all their classes in an online format and their teacher named Bayman from Motherland Secondary School inspired them to form a network of kids learning via MOOCs. Some of these kids didn't just take one MOOC, not just two, not just five - some took over 100 during COVID and were sharing with each other their learnings and prepping for college.

A couple now are in college settings. They've got accepted to universities in the US for college or other places around the world. That was fascinating. In that particular show we had these kids back on about a month ago to get an update on what's happening in their lives four years later.

The first one just shows that learning is more massive and scalable, and these kids were inspired by their teacher. So one teacher can change the world or a country by leadership that they're providing and encouraging students to learn in a different way, in an informal way, in a massive way, in this case in an online way.

In the Nepal case, it's kind of a focus more on informal learning, non-traditional forms of learning, but there's a reconnection back to the classroom. So we have both formal and informal learning taking place.

What's nice, what's interesting I think about Silver Lining for Learning is we highlight non-traditional forms of learning that you might not be readily aware of that might be happening in different places around the world. We've been on all continents I think around the world and dozens of countries. But it's not just traditional K-12 or university forms of learning, it's what's happening on the margins, on the edges that are inspiring, enhancing, and transforming learning in new ways.

The young people as well as the older more experienced people that we're interviewing and having conversations with are providing the options and the menu for what is possible for anyone to learn. That's what's interesting about Silver Lining for Learning - we're giving the possibilities for learning. Learning today can take place in many ways, shapes or forms. Anyone can learn anything from anyone else at any time.

Creativity, Play and Learning

My name is Puna Mishra and I'm currently director of Innovative Learning Futures at the Learning Engineering Institute at Arizona State University. I'm also a professor in the Teachers College.

When we were discussing which episodes to pull up, that was seriously a challenge. I mean we have 200 plus episodes. What I'm going to focus on is sort of two sets of three episodes. We did episodes 62, 63, and 64 all focused on the idea of creativity and play, and then the next set is going to be something quite different.

These three episodes don't see learning, play and creativity as isolated acts but as deeply social experiences that thrive in supportive environments. They're also a critique of traditional education at some level, proposing fresh socially rooted perspectives on creativity, joy and learning.

Glavu and Clap in their episode dispel this myth of the lone creative genius - that there's this individual who can be creative - but rather look at it more from social interaction and engagement with the surroundings. This leads into Schalberg and Harper's look at the importance of unstructured outdoor play, which we showcase through the "an play" model from China.

Gray and Bloom talk about this idea of self-directed learning, arguing that children thrive in environments where they're trusted to guide their own learning journeys. That's actually a theme we will see in other episodes in Silver Lining as well.

There's this recurring tension in some of these conversations between structured education and organic learning, between institutional rules and individual freedom. But the examples here, one from China, one from the SV Valley School, illustrate that these ideas can work across diverse cultural settings. They paint a picture of learning as a natural process that blooms in the right conditions rather than through top-down control. What does that mean for us as educators in these spaces is an important question for us to think about.

Learning in Difficult Contexts

Now this next set is something very different. These are three very independent stories, and so the cluster is not as deliberate that we had planned, but it's more emergent out of the various conversations that we have had. These happened over episodes 140, 51, and 95.

These are incredibly inspiring stories of learning and education in extremely difficult times and how technology and global collaboration can actually create educational opportunities. All three of them are connected through the country of Afghanistan, and they are both grassroots and institutional responses.

The Asian University for Women's special programs for Afghan women, Classrooms Without Walls which actually started with a COVID project and then expanded out to Afghanistan, repurposing virtual teaching methods that were initially developed for Australian teacher training and then adapted for a project called "Flowers for the Future" where teachers and students build virtual classrooms using Zoom and Google Classroom.

What's remarkable here is how technology helps education overcome certain very strong barriers. From the hybrid models to the virtual classrooms of Classroom Without Walls, these episodes show that education can transcend in very profound ways physical and political limits.

These are incredibly moving episodes. Once they are done, we literally speaking - for myself - just sit back and take a breath because you realize the courage, the dedication, the passion, the commitment that all these people are bringing into these educational spaces. When you get to hear from the students who are taking advantage of these for their own growth and then passing

it on - similar to what was described in the MOOC project - it's not just about my learning but I can also peer mentor, I can grow and develop the next generation of educators.

There's a powerful message that comes through about the role of resilience and learning, whether in traditional classrooms or conflict zones, that learning is a social participatory process that will find ways to thrive. This is a deeply human thing that we do. The idea of play, creativity and self-directed learning - some of these conversations with this young woman in Afghanistan talking about how they wrote this book of poetry and then got it translated and now it might actually be getting published - are deeply inspirational.

Technology and human connection can create these meaningful learning experiences. Education, when we often think about it, is about knowledge transfer, but it's so much more than that. It is about crafting spaces which may be physical or virtual where people can come together and connect and hold on to hope for the future even under incredibly difficult times sometimes.

It's very moving to have some of these conversations and to interact with some of our guests. Those were the two sets which are very different from each other - one set which is broadly theoretical and ideas-oriented though instantiated in certain practices, and the second which are dealing with the ground realities of a very difficult political and social situation but still managing to find our way through it.

Reflections on the Project

What we're going to do now is step back from the specifics with each of us talking about some of our favorite episodes to look at the whole body of work in Silver Lining for Learning so far as a growing and evolving resource.

Just a couple points I'd make on the front end. The first is that even with these individual descriptions from four of us, that's less than 10% of the complete database. There's just an incredible amount of material here that you can find through searches or by just browsing that speak to a very broad range of topics.

The second thing that I would say is that these really are a ray of hope in the darkness. We began the series looking in a very dark time with COVID for inspiration from what people are doing bottom-up across the world, and we still are living in dark times in some ways - different dark times - and again we find so much inspiration and joy. There's no extrinsic rewards for our doing Silver Lining for Learning, but intrinsically these are powerful experiences for us in our own learning.

The third thing that I would say - and we wrote an article about this that's available on the Silver Lining for Learning website, published in a scholarly journal (we've gotten several scholarly awards for the series) - is that these are not things that typically you would find in an edtech journal or in a scholarly conference or even in a practitioner conference. These are largely innovations that are happening below the radar.

There's top-down knowledge in the field that you get from courses and conferences and reading and videos, but then there's bottom-up knowledge that you get from people like us going out and finding all these things that are happening worldwide that are never going to appear in journals or videos or conferences because the people doing them - that's not how they think about their work. The fact that we're finding those and bringing them to light is exciting.

What we didn't have in mind when we started that Silver Lining for Learning has become is a pedagogical resource. It can be used under a Creative Commons license. You can excerpt things from a single episode and use them in a course. You can take a series of related episodes and use them in a course, and they're cases if you will - rich video cases that people can draw on.

What we've experienced ourselves and also discussed in the episodes themselves is that there's many possible pedagogical uses of these videos. It's not just a matter of saying "here's something that's an hour long, you can watch it and you can see what's happening." There's a lot of ways creatively to take these episodes and to build knowledge from them through crosscutting themes and through going deeper and having several episodes kind of surround a topic and gain deeper knowledge about it.

I'm using these in my classes. If you'd like examples just go to my homepage and look at the syllabi or just write to me. My students are doing and enjoying it. Actually they're taking over and suggesting things to me that could be done with these videos, so that's inspiring too. Some of them are creating their own podcast shows, just taking a look and then going that next step and thinking about what they could do. As each season gets added to the mix, there's all sorts of new themes emerging, all sorts of new frameworks that they can think about, new trends in education.

I think one thing that we should mention is not just that it's being used in courses but also a whole group of people who stepped up and volunteered to take all the backlog of our episodes and create all the podcast episodes for it. The people are attributed on the website, but I did want to give a shout out to them as well because that was a lot of volunteer effort in making sure all of these episodes were available so that people could use it in the ways that we've been talking about.

Just a few lessons learned that come out of this - I think that as we look across as co-hosts the episodes, the episodes that featured students have been particularly powerful, not in any way to disparage experts or practitioners or other people who've done wonderful episodes for us, but young voices and the maturity and the creativity of some of these students is truly truly inspiring.

Overall, just looking at the range of all of the models of education - formal and informal, student-centered, learning-centered - it shows that edtech really does empower an enormous range of innovations, and that too often we just look at what's available under the street light instead of wandering off into the darkness and finding all of these interesting things that are inspiring and that provide models that could be used to make things better.

Silver Lining for Learning is definitely something that we want to make as participatory as possible. We're always looking for new episodes and new guests. I see in the comments that

people are making recommendations - we will certainly look at those. We're happy to have people volunteer ideas for what might be on the show.

Our impact is limited by the fact that this is kind of a hobby for all of us. It's something that we do at the edges of our primary professional work. Each of us is really quite busy with an active professional life. So if there are ways that you'd like to be involved in helping us to make the website better, to make our outreach better, to help us take longer videos and turn them into short videos that might have a different kind of impact, we would be delighted to have you join us as a co-volunteer in this effort, and we hope that you will reach out for that.

I'll second the comment that we'd love to have anyone self-nominate to be on the show - send us an email. It's great seeing the people here from Berlin, from Sarja, from Luxembourg, from Woodstock, from Nairobi, from Brazil, from Chile - all over the world. This is wonderful. This is just like Silver Lining for Learning because it's about what's happening in education all over the world.

I just want to second something that was said - the fact that you guys are all joining us from across the world means each of you knows at least one or more teams or groups or individuals who are doing interesting work. So just drop us an email and make the connection and we would love to have them as guests on the show.

That's always a challenge for us - continuously looking for guests, though it's funny how many connections we have. Kurt's Rolodex is pretty deep and so is Chris's, so we manage to always get great guests, but we are always looking for interesting examples. We did a whole set of themed shows on India about nonprofit organizations working in India which was a set of three or four shows which were fabulous.

So we would love to do something on Brazil or wherever you are at, so that we can get a more rounded picture. This is a chance to promote the awesome work that's happening in spaces that often do not get the spotlight. It's really a task of pleasure for us to be able to do this. If you would have told me when we started that we would be doing this four years from now, I would not have believed you, but here we are almost five years now.

Q&A Session

This reminds me of a higher ed person named John Idon out in California. He told us about a group his son works for - Zoom - and I think he's a CTO of Zoom, and this group formed that were media production people to kind of brainstorm during the pandemic how to produce online events and that sort of thing. This group is still going - it's called Office Hours Global and they meet all the time, like every day of the week there's like a different theme. I've dropped into a couple of their sessions and it's a really interesting format.

The idea of these conversation circles is really interesting. These professional conversation circles as a way of staying engaged and being renewed and learning at the same time is really important. I loved how it's a non-traditional activity for academia. I think those kinds of things

need to happen more often, so I'm really glad to hear that that's something that is worthwhile to you personally and professionally.

My question for you is, where do you see this going? I would like to see more teachers in the US at least, or more institutions of learning in the US, looking and actually applying things from around the world. We've talked about Finland ad nauseum for years, and we still don't implement some of the things that they do like their media literacy curriculum or their emphasis on play. How do we get teachers and people in the US to look outside and bring some of the learnings inside?

I agree with you, and I think that part of the problem is that there's this belief that if something powerful is happening in education, it's coming out of an elite university or it's coming out of an incredibly well-resourced group in some kind of a global North country.

What we find in Silver Lining for Learning is often the most creative ideas are coming out of global South countries where there isn't the kind of organized resistance to change that frequently takes place in the global North. These are things that are truly scalable because they don't require special resources and unusual circumstances to succeed - they're designed for marginalized situations, and so when marginalized situations are everywhere, they can be used.

So we really need to get past the kind of elitist attitude about where innovation comes from in education and humbly look to places that are frankly doing more with less than typically we are.

I will add on to that. What Silver Lining for Learning has highlighted is truly inspiring for people who want to innovate in the education space by looking at what people who have less resource have done in their community. I think it is a powerful pedagogical tool to teach educators, for example in the classroom for pre-service teacher programs, but also for in-service teachers that are battling with a lot of challenges on the front line, to look for inspirations in what's happening in other parts of the world.

Do you remember that program from the UK - was it Teachers TV? - where they had a teacher teach a lesson and then they met with a coach and dissected the lesson, and the whole process was filmed? I thought it was a brilliant way of providing some really sound pedagogical coaching in a virtual way. It didn't continue - I think some group absorbed it but it never continued - and I thought that I like the creative uses of multimedia to make everything more equitable and accessible to teachers. That's what you're doing with these conversations too - you're bringing to light all these wonderful case studies.

If I can just add one quick thought that I have taken away from doing this for four years, and I think it builds on something that was said, which is that very often we think of education in very monolithic terms. Like, what does Finland do and how can America do it?

What I think these episodes have really shown me is that change and things happen in smaller pockets, and that education is such a complex multi-dimensional, culturally contextually grounded thing that solutions that work in one place don't just magically translate over necessarily.

That's what makes our field so exciting and interesting. I think it is that approach - for instance, we had some examples of schools within schools, so within a larger institution you have a smaller group which is doing something different. So thinking that way in terms of innovation rather than thinking "oh we're going to do this one big thing" - at least for me that's been a huge takeaway.

These pockets of innovation happen which I think need to be nurtured and supported, and they will evolve with time and grow and change. I think that's a really powerful way of thinking about it rather than "how do we change the whole thing in one go," because it's a very complex network of systems that are interacting with each other.

Not only that, these are all approachable people. Anyone could have lunch with them and get ideas from them. They're all willing to be contacted. So if you watch an episode and would like to be connected to any of the people, any of the folks that you see in there, or learn more about them, send us a note and we can connect you to them.

This is what's happening - each of us is making our difference and making our dent in educational change and progress and reform and so forth, and it's clear in each of these weeks. And you were mistaken - we're almost near five years. In another few months it'll be five years completed in the Silver Lining for Learning episodes.