

Changes #trending, opportunities knocking in education sector

 By Josh Adler 18 Jan 2013

I'm quite new to education, but completely immersed and have much to say. I thought I'd focus my crystal ball on a broad range of education industry issues, and wanted to avoid at all costs penning another "Have you heard about [Khan Academy?](#)" piece, (But now that that's done)...



1. Practice-based learning takes centre stage

I'm now convinced, beyond any doubt, that experiential learning is the most powerful way to develop young people. You can sit through lectures, read, debate, even watch videos - but nothing is as immersive as allowing students to try the hand at something. For example, at [African Leadership Academy](#) where I work, we create elaborate, simulated environments in which students can create and run businesses and non-profits, design products and pitch save-the-world ideas.

I see more and more schools trying to bring experiential learning into their toolbox.

2. Blended learning goes experimental

If you've not heard yet how blended learning is the future of the classroom, you must have been asleep. According to experts, students will be watching videos at home and doing homework in class (now known as [the flipped classroom](#)

I'm not convinced either way yet, but my prediction for 2013 is that blended learning, through all sorts of trial-and-error approaches, will get experimented with in earnest. It will take years before we know what really works and in which contexts, but it's going to be lots of fun to watch.

3. Business people enter education management

Perhaps this trend is to validate my own decisions but I think due to the excitement and investment going into education globally, people from business are going to enter the education space in droves. This isn't new - people from business have been doing teaching gigs for ages - but that's not what I'm talking about.

I didn't enter the space to teach. I came to help manage and grow an institution that seeks to change the future of our continent through its approach to developing the next generation. Expect to see former business execs entering education institutions at all levels in 2013. (If you're thinking about it, and [need a nudge, ping me.](#))

4. Education data and impact

In my recent [Tech4Africa](#) talk, I explained why I feel tech and finance have innovated faster than any other sectors - particularly social development. It's because the activity of money and bytes are very easily measured, enabling better decisions more frequently. Sectors such as education or social justice simply aren't measured as easily.

However, the world of data and analytics has exploded, and I see the beginnings of this starting to touch education. We'll be measuring many more data points in 2013, not only about learners and learning, but school facilities, teacher home environments and other stuff. The prospects of this get me completely geeked out as an [Open Data](#) pundit, and I'm excited to work with people across the education landscape on this in the years ahead. (again, ping me!)

5. Access vs quality? Winner = access

Access will continue to trump quality in terms of what most new innovations will deliver for a simple reason - it's easier to solve. The [massive open online course MOOC revolution](#) solves the access problem in a new and innovative way, and I think the rationale is sound for now.

My view is that MOOCs will provide access to many, creating a new world of learning at the tertiary level. But it won't solve key issues around the supporting environments required from teachers and family for primary and secondary schools. Sadly, poor communities will become even poorer, without access to the tools and infrastructure to access the learning opportunities MOOCs may provide.

6. It's about the teachers, dammit

This is less a trend than a wish or request - but it could turn out to be both. Most of the innovation we're seeing in the [EdTech space](#) is around delivery of learning directly to students through technology. The idea seems to be that the best schools have the best teachers (what nonsense), and why not get them to teach EVERYONE!?

I think this is a stupid idea on principle. Imagine that, in 50 years, the only way anyone knows how to think about fractions is the way [Salman Khan's](#) 2011 video explains it. But I digress.

My hope - and I plan to ensure we do it with any distance education we do at ALA - is to focus as hard on teachers as we do on learners. In fact, I hope the EdTech community in particular takes note. Please, start empowering teachers to empower learners. This is one area where "cutting out the middleman" is going to be an unmitigated disaster.

7. Curriculum mashups

Never have I seen the potential for the mashup concept as I have within education materials. Teachers who have online access can pull together webpages, videos, readings and their own lesson plans into powerful new curriculum designs. These can be shared, reused and improved.

Watch this space in 2013; it's going to go stratospheric and viral this year as curriculum-sharing becomes as easy as [SlideShare](#) through tools such as [Gooru](#), which is making the first steps around curated educational content.

8. Teacher unions get scared

It's no secret - teacher unions that protect poor performers are one of the biggest obstacles in the way of improving education. And that's not only in South Africa with SADTU; this issue permeates the American education system, too.

I believe that, in 2013, pressure from many sides is going to start to become a heavy burden, and changes are afoot. We will be watching the news with interest to see how governments and unions square off in 2013, and what progress is made.

9. Business steps in

In SA, the education crises (textbooks, results, minimum norms and standards, etc) of 2012 is top of mind in boardroom discussions when considering where skills are going to come from in the future.

In 2013, the penny will drop as industries realise that the only way to get the skills they need in the short term is to train young people themselves. I predict small training academies will begin to crop up to plug learning and functional gap heavily subsidised by industry. It's a great opportunity for those willing to take the plunge.

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