The Thinking Behind the ReSchool Colorado Game

The ReSchool Colorado game was designed to explore the possibilities of unique pathways for learning in a new system of education. With our partners from Greater Good Studio, we tested multiple iterations until we landed on the current version. We think its strength is reflected in the game's ability to easily shift to new models based on a community's needs and interests.

We share our thinking behind the game for two reasons: to provide more details about how we landed on the design and to help organizations consider ways they may be able to adapt this concept to the context of their community.

Why a game?

Thinking differently is hard. The ReSchool Colorado team learned this early in our efforts to design and launch a new system of learning. We continue to combat this challenge by employing strategies, such as people-centered design, that push our thinking beyond replicating current practices or implementing well-researched claims.

As tricky as it is for us, we recognize it is equally challenging for others to wrap their heads around a new paradigm of education by simply listening to an explanation of how these ideas fit into a comprehensive learning system. The game enables others to immerse themselves as a learner, bundling together experiences and resources to align with their unique profile and the demands of a competency-based framework. In what we hope is a safe, tangible, and playful way to test out ideas, we've been able to show the potential, and the challenges, of a new system. In turn, players have been able to grapple with questions and ideas that are relevant to them.

The game was also designed to accelerate a process of understanding people and the context of their communities. Our commitment to people-centered design often represents a lengthy, intense process. We began to wonder how we might craft a shared experience that made transparent how people think about resources in their community and how they assign a value to different learning opportunities. The dialogue that commonly parallels play has led to observations that have helped us deepen our understanding around the necessary infrastructure and the new behaviors that we will need to cultivate in order to support learners on a customized pathway.

The core components of the game parallel the basic design of ReSchool:
- The learner remains at the center,
- The framework shapes a valuable, cohesive narrative
- A greater variety of learning opportunities is available to each learner
- A learner advocate serves to aid learners and their families in navigating and coordinating diverse learning experiences

It Begins With The Learner

We committed a significant amount of time to make sure the learner remains central to the experience. The learner profile, which now plays out as a dynamic persona that is redesigned with each round of play, morphed over time. Beginning with multiple pieces of information that we think a learner advocate would need in order to support a family's and student's growing agency, we discovered quickly how complex managing each hand of play could be. We then erred on the side of too much simplicity, naming only their age and the town they resided in. Based on comments during prototyping,

we realized that organizing the unique characteristics of a learner in the game is not any different from the challenge a teacher or a school faces when responding to the same important learner characteristics.

In the end, our decision to highlight the education experience of the learner at the start of play, as well as a significant detail of their life was driven by feedback from prototyping earlier versions of the game. As in any personalized learning environment, who your learner is matters. We tried to add depth to the learner profile through the process of choosing an interest and a challenge card, both of which help players, and learners, shape a path of rich experiences.

How can our learning inform your efforts?
Consider:
- What do the children and young adults that you work with consider significant about whom they are as a learner?
- What are the challenges and interests of the learners that you serve?
- How might you capture the education (or learning) experiences beyond default descriptors, such as industry certification?
- How might play change if you organize learners as a cohort, empowering a learner advocate to "manage" the uniqueness of each learner in more efficient and effective ways?

Framing The Learning

Central to the game and the new system is a competency-based framework. ReSchool's Framework for the Future of Learning is shaped by four research-backed domains chosen to ensure that all learners develop success in the educational, economic, social and civic tasks of adulthood. Drawn from the cognitive sciences, learning theory, and research on child and youth development, these domains collectively serve to build agency, to cultivate a strong sense of self and to acquire a core set of transferable competencies learners need to adapt to rapid changes and new opportunities. (Please go to ReSchoolColorado.org and visit the Library for more on the Framework).

DOMAINS	SKILLS*		
ACADEMICALLY PREPARED	PROBLEM SOLVING	COMMUNICATION	TECHNOLOGY
SELF MANAGER	GRIT	INITIATIVE	AUTONOMY
SOCIALLY INTELLIGENT	CONFIDENCE	TEAMWORK	EMPATHY
SOLUTION SEEKER	DECISION MAKING	CREATIVITY	ADAPTABILITY

Abbreviated framework for gameplay designed by Greater Good Studio

Integrating the Framework into the game proved to be almost as challenging as transitioning to a competency-based system. In earlier versions, learning goal cards represented a single skill within one of the four domains. This required that a learner begin with goals aligned to the Framework instead of a

career or life aspiration. This approach limited the pathways players were building and didn't show the relevance of why these skills matter. Although we moved to color-coding the domains and the learning resources to make obvious the connection between the two, we still struggle to demonstrate the importance of the competency-based framework in play. Often the players focus on finding the activity that matches the learner's goal and may not recognize the learning value of the experience.

> **How can our learning inform your efforts?**
> **Consider:**
> - What learning do the resources and experiences represent beyond the skill named on the cards?
> - How might you capture and share evidence of the learning that individuals complete through engaging with the different resources and experiences?
> - How might assessment look in a system modeled in the ReSchool game? Who leads the assessment and reports on the results?

A Full Canvas of Opportunity

The collection of resources was by far the most interesting piece to build out. We have completed a number of landscape scans in different communities so we could see what potential learning opportunities existed to support learners. We were often surprised by the variety of experiences that were already in place. Our initial plans reflected some of this specificity (e.g. "The Economics of Energy" Seminar, offered at the Science Museum; App Programming, a coding drop-in program offered at the Public Library, Internship with Deputy Probation Officers Program at the Justice Center, etc.). We discovered, however, that the specificity of the resources made it difficult to respond to the dynamic nature of the game and ensure every learner had the right resources to build out their pathways. Although not expected, this raised new questions for us around how to ensure that learner's needs and interests were met with the existing structures and providers. For example, would it require adding new learning providers or supporting those with a quality program to respond to a variety of needs?

As different versions of the games emerged, we shifted to more general resources and left it up to the players to add the context they needed to make the experience relevant. This adds a powerful, personalized narrative to the game and reflects the same level of agency we hope to honor in the system. Families and learners make informed choices and assign personal value to those experiences as it relates to their goals.

Prototyping also led to the addition of "situations" cards as a resource. In earlier models of the game, colleagues noted that things were a bit "easy". Life and learning is more complicated. Situations require a shift in gameplay, signaling the need for reflection and collaboration from peers and the learner advocate.

> **How can our learning inform your efforts?**
> **Consider:**
> - What specific learning opportunities already exist in your community? Use the wild cards to add these to the game, modeling the possibilities in your community.
> - How might some of the resources named in the game be met by the community or by sharpening courses or opportunities within a school?
> - How might learners talk about and share the value of the learning experience beyond what was planned and expected?
> - How do the experiences build on each other, lending to pathways that result in attaining a specific goal or career choice?

The Learner's Advocate

We've written extensively on our growing understanding of the learner advocate and the supporting network. (Please go to ReSchoolColorado.org and visit the Library for more). At this stage, it's difficult for us not to see the role of the advocate serving as the backbone of the system and the game. The advocate was very present in early versions, labeling and coaching choices extensively, almost to the point where the learner had a very small role in building their pathway. As the game evolved, we placed more responsibility on the learner to choose and share the rationale for their choices, matching the resources with the framework as a means to represent quality and value. The advocate seemed to "pop up" when learners were faced with situations, guiding and coordinating the other resources in play.

Interestingly enough, with zero changes to the game, we've observed the facilitator's role adjust to serve a player's needs similar to a learner. In addition to framing and handing out cards, the facilitator often begins to question players around what stands out to them as important to building their pathway, or how a resource may help meet their goals and needs. We've observed that a team of players quickly becomes a cohort of learners and the facilitator models strategies for learners to take on greater responsibility and work collaboratively to ensure peers have access to the resources that will serve them best.

> **How can our learning inform your efforts?**
> **Consider:**
> - What are the skills of an advocate that emerge from playing the game?
> - What support might a learner advocate need to ensure learners and families cultivate the agency to meet their goals and aspirations?
> - How do you build the autonomy and independence of the learner within your current context?

The game has served as an effective and efficient tool in which to co-construct a system that places the learner at the center. With each round of play, we continue to glean new insights and to find new ways to use the pieces of the game to develop new versions. In so many ways, the game's ability to respond to the uniqueness of each learner and each community mirrors the system we hope to launch.

We're eager to keep learning and hope you'll join us in this dialogue. The ReSchool Colorado Game is available to download in the Library at ReSchoolColorado.org. We invite you to share your experience via a short survey at http://bit.ly/295B4At and on Twitter with the hashtag #ReSchoolCO.