

The Potential of Neighborhood Learning Centers (in 500 words)

Creating the knowledge base and skill sets necessary to resolve the challenges of our times will require encouraging as much formal and informal meetings as possible between neighbors—and people living in the same local community.

Neighborhood Learning Centers can be a:

- 1) multi-purpose support center for implementing Community Visioning Initiatives
- 2) neighborhood meeting place and workshop center
- 3) critical part of a low cost lifelong learning education system (which could include questionnaires and surveys, Community Visioning Initiatives, Neighborhood Learning Centers and neighborhood learning networks, locally owned newspaper primarily focused on community service, etc)
- 4) critical part of making best use of the knowledge and abilities each of us has to exponentially accelerate solution-oriented activity at this time of unprecedented challenges

What if there needed to be a reversal of the urbanization trend, and a demographic shift from megacities to more ecologically sustainable villages, towns, and small cities (with much more potential to achieve carbon neutral economies)? What kind of curriculum and experiential learning (apprenticeships, training, volunteering) would be most appropriate to create the educational experiences necessary to make such a transition?

Educational institutions, and other organizations, could increase their existing efforts, or take up the call, to develop related curriculum and offer classes, workshops, and training. If many colleges and universities assisted with organizing local Community Visioning Initiatives—with many supporting Neighborhood Learning Centers—the positive multiplier effects would be visible around the world.

What we need more of now are collaborative problem solving processes which help citizens understand that the investments of time, energy, and money (the “votes”) each of us make in our everyday circumstances become the larger economy. And that wisely directed, such “votes” can result in countless ways of earning a living which contribute to the peacebuilding, community revitalization, and ecological sustainability efforts necessary to drastically reduce GGE (Greenhouse Gas Emissions), and minimize other related challenges. Citizens from every variety of circumstances can learn how to wisely cast such “votes”—through workshops and meetings at Neighborhood Learning Centers during a Community Visioning Initiative, and through other local learning experiences.

Creating many Neighborhood Learning Centers can provide places—in local neighborhoods—for discussion, information sharing, mutual support and encouragement, fellowship and friendship, so that the exchanging of information and resources can make significant contributions to the process of building “close-knit” communities of people... communities with a healthy appreciation for each others strengths, communities with a well-developed capacity to resolve even the most difficult challenges—and communities which demonstrate a high level of compassion for their fellow human beings.

If the goal is to resolve the unprecedented challenges ahead, then it would seem necessary to exponentially increase the number of actively engaged citizens—citizens who (thus) have a much more comprehensive sense of civic duty. It’s not like mobilizing for war, where there will be drill sergeants and basic training, but people should begin to realize: problem solving on a scale most of us have never known before means there is a lot of work to do.