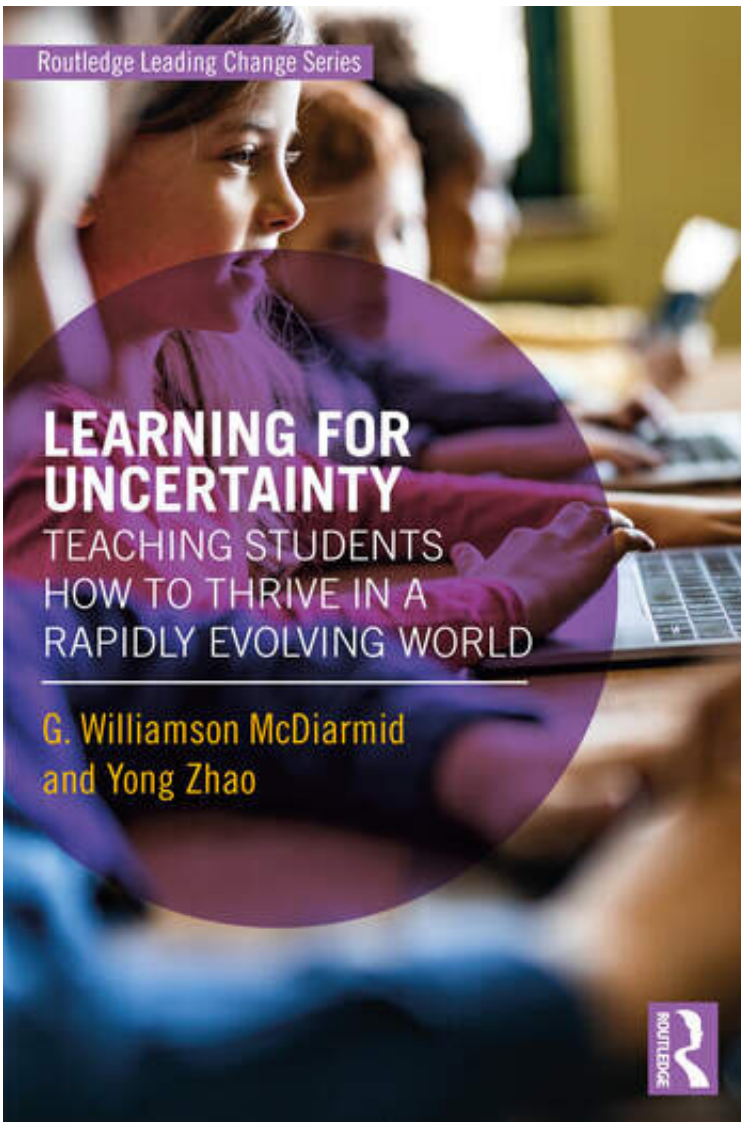


# New book explores how schools can prepare students for an uncertain future

February 22 2022, by Mike Krings

---



Credit: Routledge

As technology evolves and changes the world at a faster pace than ever before, two veteran educators have written a new book that explores how schools can prepare young people for a globalized future that is still taking shape.

["Learning for Uncertainty: Teaching Students How to Thrive in a Rapidly Evolving World."](#) by G. Williamson McDiarmid and Yong Zhao, explores how today's [education](#) system is not preparing students to be citizens of a changing world but that educators can prepare students for the future, even when they're not sure exactly what it will be.

"If I tell you I'm going to prepare you for the future, that implies I know what the future is," said Zhao, Foundation Distinguished Professor in the School of Education & Human Sciences at KU. "But the future is uncertain. The main idea of the book may not be new, but it is interesting and vital to think about. What is the future? We need to think about, "If we live in a world where technology is changing and can make our lives better or worse, what kind of education do we need?"

The COVID-19 pandemic largely changed day-to-day education. Students and teachers were forced to rely on technology to learn and teach from home. There were varying levels of success, but the pandemic illustrated the need for educators and students to adapt to new technology. Just as today's [school](#) is different than it was just two years ago, the workforce students will enter will continue to change as well, as technology changes or eliminates some jobs while creating new ones that educators cannot yet envision.

The opening chapters of "Learning for Uncertainty" examine why the future is so hard to predict as well as the bright side and dark side of what may come to pass in coming years. For example, [social media](#) has enabled people to communicate in ways previously unimaginable and allowed students to access knowledge on their own, but it has also

fostered mistrust among fellow citizens and proliferation of misinformation. It has also allowed big companies to compile huge amounts of personal information about individuals.

McDiarmid and Zhao illustrate how educators need to prepare students to be citizens of a global world. By teaching students how to be curious, creative and make rational decisions, educators can produce [young people](#) able to engage in society as well as understand and defend democracy and liberty. Students able to thrive in that world will be socially and mentally flexible, good at communication and teamwork. Those skills, plus being able to take criticism, attend to diverse voices and being open to continuous learning will be essential, they wrote.

"We are losing that piece of "How do you live in a democracy and defend its values?" Zhao said. "We also talk about geopolitics and how you can help students live as a citizen, not just of the United States, but of the world. You have to live with other people—it's inevitable. We can't just retreat or go fight. We have to change how we see students as global citizens and help them make rational decisions."

The authors also explore how today's educational system is still rooted in preparing students for the economy of several decades ago. Through technology, students today are much more capable to find information on their own, determine what they are interested in learning, develop "side hustles" and change norms in ways previously unimagined. The authors then explore ways educators and schools can embrace those potentials and help develop such skills instead of clinging to the traditional roles of classrooms and curriculum. One of the most critical ways to do that, the authors wrote, is to recognize the unique profiles and abilities of students, then foster those strengths instead of trying to provide the exact same education to every [student](#).

A pivot toward the future is necessary where schools do not over-rely on

assessing literacy and numeracy with supplemental classes in sciences, physical education and other traditional subjects, the authors wrote. Instead, schools should hold on to those still relevant subjects while preparing students to prepare for a world challenged by [climate change](#), inequality and geopolitical conflict. McDiarmid and Zhao then wrote how the pandemic showed the urgent need to be able to embrace changing technology and argued that schools should not abandon it as they reopen. Educators need not worry that technology is replacing them or changing their curriculum but instead embrace that students have tremendous access to information from around the world, so they can guide students in taking ownership of their learning via technology.

Finally, the authors look to how educators can embrace such a future. They intend not to provide definitive solutions but rather stimulate conversation on how students could be educated for an uncertain [future](#). Changes and ideas for how to achieve it will be needed in all areas of education, including schools, curriculum, pedagogy, opportunities to learn, assessment and policymaking.

Zhao and McDiarmid, Alumni Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and Distinguished Chair of Education at East China Normal University, both have multiple decades working in education and higher education in institutions around the world and, combined, have written 34 books and more than 150 journal articles. Their newest book, part of the Routledge Leading Change series, is intended to contextualize the change that is happening in the world now, and the transformation needed in education to prepare students for the world they will inherit.

"We are in a very interesting and challenging time. This is a great time to make big changes. Changes can take place in what students should learn, how they should learn, and where learning should take place," the authors write. "Schools and teachers should also be making changes. And

of course, assessment needs changes as well. The big message is that schooling can no longer continue as it has been. Students have to be more in charge of their learning. And schools need massive transformation."

Provided by University of Kansas

Citation: New book explores how schools can prepare students for an uncertain future (2022, February 22) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-02-explores-schools-students-uncertain-future.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.