

THE SCHOOL IN THE CLOUD

DOCUMENTARY DISCUSSION GUIDE

Thank you for viewing *The School in the Cloud*! We hope that you enjoyed the film and that it prompts you to reflect on the future of learning in your own classroom and school. We have provided the following discussion guide to aid in your reflection. We recommend that you answer the questions in conversation with colleagues, parents, administrators, and, of course, with students. The documentary *The School in the Cloud* is available for purchase at <https://new.tugg.com/titles/the-school-in-the-cloud>.

SELF-ORGANIZED LEARNING

1. How does technology change education? How should technology impact our assessment system?



If school were to be about the biggest questions that humankind faces today, if school were to be about what we don't know, rather than long lists of what we do know, the School in the Cloud would be a major and vital resource for children.

2. Is the internet a threat or a catalyst to learning?

In his 2020 book, *The School in the Cloud*, Sugata Mitra writes about conducting Self-Organized Learning Environments (SOLEs) for the first time in Buenos Aires, Argentina:



It was here that I conducted the first SOLE sessions in Spanish. Mabel Quiroga translated and the children and I had a whale of a time. It is here that I discovered that a SOLE would work in any language, provided there were enough online resources in that language.

3. What role can SOLEs play in English language acquisition? Do you think children could learn any language through SOLEs? Why or why not?
4. What impact can learning from technology have not only on children's achievement scores, but on their aspirations?
5. Why is it important that the children learn in groups? How do the members of a group help guide the SOLE?
6. In the film, Sugata Mitra says, "I'm willing to take a bet that the evil influences of the internet, which will of course be there, will be considerably less than the good it does." What are the risks of allowing children to search freely online? Do you agree that the potential benefits are worth the risks?



We found that if children work on large, publicly visible screens, there is not much need for any filter or other policing mechanisms to prevent "misuse" (usually a euphemism for access to internet pornography or other undesirable images). Groups of heterogeneous children, i.e. boys and girls together, working in a public space where any passersby can see what they are doing, tend to focus on things that will not get them into trouble.

MINIMALLY INVASIVE EDUCATION

7. Sugata Mitra reports that children's scores in India raised from 30% to 50% after the introduction of a friendly mediator, who admired the children using the "method of the grandmother." Why do you think the Granny Cloud was so effective?
8. What is a teacher's role in Schools in the Cloud? How do you think the role of teachers will change as the internet is incorporated into more schools?

9. The documentary reports the critical importance of designing “big questions” to drive students’ curiosity and inquiry online. How do you craft these big questions?



Children who are used to doing SOLE sessions will not need much instruction or encouragement. They generally love it—if you do it right.

THE ROLE OF RESEARCH



A long time ago, it was a problem to carry coal up to the top of a mine in a colliery. George Stephenson solved the problem by improving upon the steam engines and the locomotives already in use at the collieries of his day. Stephenson’s machine was huge and sat on top of the colliery, pulling a rope tied to wagons of coal that moved up a track. Then he made the engine small enough to mount on to one of the wagons so that the whole thing, engine and all, could move along the track. No one understood how it worked, but the coal went up the slope to where it had to go. When he first demonstrated it, people said, ‘It will never start.’ Then, when his engine, the Rocket as it was called, started to roll, they said, ‘It will never stop.’ Scientists began to frantically search for how the steam engine worked. A new branch of physics called thermodynamics was discovered and went on to change our view of the entire universe!

Stephenson solved the problem first; the research came later.

10. How much research is necessary before a teaching or learning strategy should be tried and implemented?
11. How do you approach implementing a new strategy in your classroom/school? What success indicators do you look for?
12. What do the competing narratives about the Hole in the Wall (that of its success as a “sign” of the future of learning, and that of its failure to be sustainable) show about the nature of research in education? Do you side with either perspective?

SCHOOLS IN THE CLOUD

13. The documentary shows Schools in the Cloud in both India and the United Kingdom. What factors do you think contributed to their success in each location? Could Schools in the Cloud work anywhere in the world?
14. Consider the story of Priya, the young girl who attends the School in the Cloud in Chandrakona. What difference could the School in the Cloud make in her life?
15. What do you think will happen to Schools in the Cloud in the future?
16. The documentary shows that the School in the Cloud in Korakati encounters many problems with acquiring reliable internet access—and as a result, learning stalls in Korakati. Why do you think that is? What is responsible for the turnaround in Korakati, when it “comes back to life”?
17. What will it take for Schools in the Cloud in remote areas such as Korakati to succeed?



The School in the Cloud in Korakati is in wonderful shape. It is full of children. SOLEs and the Granny Cloud have ensured rapid improvements in children’s reading comprehension and internet skills. [...] But Korakati cannot fund itself. If there is any place that needs urgent help, it is here.

18. The documentary shows teacher Amy-Leigh Douglas at George Stephenson High School asking her students, “If you had to design a room for learning, what would you want?” If you could design your own space for learning, what would it look like? How would it feel for you and your students?
19. Are you considering starting your own School in the Cloud? If so, what have you learned from the documentary to guide in building and running your own?
20. At the end of the documentary, Sugata Mitra says, “That’s the best thing that a research project can do . . . not so much produce the answers as produce the next set of questions.” What further questions does the School in the Cloud raise for you? What are your next steps in finding the answers?



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