



Learner's Name: Aimee Park

Age: 16

Location: Cambridge, Massachusetts

How would you summarize your background?

I live with my dad and my grandma -- my mom's mother. My mom died when I was seven, in one of those flu pandemics that was sweeping around the world in the early 2010s. My dad's pretty cool -- he researches nanotechnology at a lab here and is into some pretty cutting-edge stuff. I'm really close to my grandma. She was always really involved in my life, but she moved in with us after my mom died to help my dad raise me.

Tell me more about your experiences and your family's background.

My family is from Korea originally. On my mom's side, my grandfather emigrated here after the war, and my grandma joined him a few years later. My dad's family came in the early 1980s, when he was still in "grade school," so his dad could work at one of the car companies. My grandma tries to keep me in touch with some of the traditions.

It's important to me to know our history, but I have to live it in a way that makes sense today. I belong to a social network of other girls my age whose families are from Korea. We're just girls chatting, but they get where my family's coming from. And I can stay in touch with my cousins that way too, those who live in Korea and those who live in Germany.

How do you like to learn?

I guess I must be a pretty collaborative learner, as I always seem to be making connections around things I care about. I'm a doer too. I don't see why I can't make a difference now. There doesn't have to be a divide between studying and contributing.

How would you describe your current learning experiences?

I've been lucky to assemble a grid of learning experiences that reflects my interests. I do a lot with science and design because of my interest in prosthetics, and I also spent part of my time in a regional eco-school that focuses on sustainability. I say "in," but I only go there one or two times a week, depending on what I'm doing. The rest of the time, I stay connected with my learning journey mentor and the other students who are my learning partners in other ways.

I'm really curious about the new prosthetics and other devices that help people innovate around disabilities. I just think it's cool that we can do so much to keep people from having to be sidelined, especially with all the birth defects from the toxic materials that are all around us. So I take part in digital communities where people can share ideas and work on real, meaningful projects together. No one cares how old I am, it's what I have to contribute that counts. My dad is making me wait until I'm eighteen to get any enhancements, though, the way kids used to have to wait to get tattoos.

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I don't stop at invention. I am an activist too. My friends and I -- and other people we haven't met before -- connect through our mobile devices to stage actions. I'm also participating in the annual community planning process, where we work together across lots of different media to keep an eye on what's happening and decide how we can be a "smart region" with good chances of keeping people healthy, whatever hits next. That's not part of my formal learning plan, as my personal education adviser says I would be overloaded if I had to self-assess my learning outcomes every week or two.

Please give me an overview of your learning history.

I've had a lot of different kinds of learning experiences. They were more traditional when I was younger, partly because we had less money to pay for them and partly because people were still kind of freaked out about letting young kids direct their own learning. It was like everyone had to put safety over the fun of learning. After my mom died, I was homeschooled by a health-screened tutor for a couple of years because my dad was so freaked out about another pandemic.

What do you find most motivating?

I like engaging people of all ages around things that interest me, and I figure out how to make it fit with my learning plan. Sometimes my personal education adviser seems baffled, but she does a good job of helping me do structured studies in combination with my community work and my prosthetics design.

What you hope to do when you are older?

I want to make a difference, and make something that's useful for people. I love what I'm involved in, but I do feel pressure from my family to take it more toward the prosthetics rather than the community side of things. They still have the expectation that I do something really professional. The girls in my Korean-American network say that's pretty common.

I'd really like to combine data and art and activism and design in some new way, but that would be too radical, even for my dad, much less for Grandma.

What questions do you have for me?

How can you support me in exploring the full range of my interests for the future while making sure that I'll be equipped to support myself in today's world? How can you help me demonstrate what I know, when so much of what I love to do is hands on in various communities?