



## Commentary

# The New Pedagogy: Students and Teachers as Learning Partners

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### ABSTRACT

There is currently a powerful push-pull factor in schooling. The push factor is that school is increasingly boring for students and alienating for teachers. The pull factor is that the exploding and alluring digital world is irresistible, but not necessarily productive in its raw form. The push-pull dynamic makes it inevitable that disruptive changes will occur. I have been part of a group that has been developing innovative responses to the current challenges. This response consists of integrating three components: deep learning goals, new pedagogies, and technology. The result will be more radical change in the next five years than has occurred in the past 50 years.

There is currently a volatile push-pull dynamic intensifying in public schools. The push factor is that students are increasingly bored in school and ever more so as they go from grade to grade. My colleague, Lee Jenkins, has been asking thousands of teachers across grade levels how enthusiastic their students are about school. In kindergarten the figure is about 95% satisfaction; and then it goes steadily down until it bottoms out in grade nine at 37%. This represents a tremendous amount of bored students. For teachers one could say that there is only one thing worse than being bored and that is “having to teach the bored.” Moreover, the last two Met-Life surveys (2008 and 2010) have shown a dramatic decline in teacher satisfaction, plummeting from some 54% to 40% or less. Thus, school, as it is currently organized and experienced, is psychologically and literally “pushing” students and teachers out of school.

At the same time the digital world of learning and entertainment is exploding, most of it outside schooling. Explosion is the word. What is becoming available is enormous, and easy to access. The pull here is incredibly irresistible, but not necessarily productive in the sense that it is largely ungoverned. Given the push-pull tension we need to avoid either of two extreme reactions. One counterproductive move is to try to rein in students—not a chance against the allure of technology. Another is to marginalize teachers on the grounds that technology can replace them. This too would be a mistake, as mere immersion in the land of information does not make one smarter.

So we are left with a fundamental problem: the dynamic push-pull phenomenon is rapidly reaching a breaking point. Enter the “new pedagogy.” In my book, *Stratosphere* I suggested that the learning solution would have to meet four criteria. They must be:

- i) Irresistibly engaging for both students and teachers
- ii) Elegantly efficient and easy to access and use
- iii) Technologically ubiquitous 24/7
- iv) Steeped in real-life problem solving (Fullan, 2013a)

This new engagement is in pursuit of “deep learning goals,” which we have referred to as the 6cs: critical thinking and problem solving; communication; collaboration; creative thinking and imagination; character education; and citizenship (Fullan, 2013b). It is clear that schooling would have to be radically overhauled to meet the four criteria above and to enable learning to flourish.

## The New Pedagogy

There are fundamental structural and policy matters to be considered in relation to standards, assessment, governance, and organization of schooling. In this brief paper I want to indicate the starting point—what we call “the new pedagogy.” By definition we only have a preliminary directional notion of what it might look like. In fact I am working with a group of partners to help map out this task.<sup>1</sup> Here we just see the beginning point that can be stated in the following paragraphs.

The basic notion is teachers and students as learning partners. We get an inkling of this in one of the clusters that John Hattie (2012) compared from his

meta-analysis of over 1000 research studies. At one point he combines certain instructional practices as “teacher as facilitator,” and as “teacher as activator,” and shows their “effect sizes.” He suggests that effect sizes less than .40 are not worth considering, and those above .40 are of increasing interest. This is what he found:

**Teacher as Facilitator** (.17 effect): simulations and gaming; inquiry based; smaller class sizes; individualized instruction; problem-based learning; web-bases; inductive teaching

**Teacher as Activator** (.60 effect size): reciprocal teaching; feedback; teacher-student self-verbalization; meta-cognition; goals challenging; frequent checks on effects of teaching

These findings are provocative and raise several critical questions concerning the new pedagogy. First, they say to me that the reason that the first cluster had such a weak impact is that they were used so to speak “poorly pedagogically.” Put another way, the guide on the side is a poor pedagogue; or we don’t want “a guide on the side” anymore than we need a “sage on the stage.” More proactive partnership will be required.

Second, it is not clear exactly what the new pedagogy would look like. In general terms I would take it as teacher as “change agent or activator,” and student as proactive partner in learning. Not only would this require radically new learning relationships between students and teachers, but also *among* them. The next step, and that is what we are working on, is to map out what this new learning relationship would look like—what it is, and why it would be good for learning.

Third, how can this new learning relationship be developed in a way that it positively affects deep learning goals, such as the 6Cs cited above.

Fourth, Hattie did not even examine the possible role of technology. Two items on his list are simulations/gaming and web-based. They were both in the weak impact category. I would surmise that the main reason is that they were used passively as the teacher as guide on the side. The new question by contrast is, with a strong teacher-learner partnership, how could technology be used to deepen and accelerate learning.

Fifth, and finally, what about the implications for costs. The per-pupil cost of education in the current model is breaking the bank; and when you look closely

it is inefficient as well as ineffective. I had a throwaway line in my book that said, “welcome to the stratosphere where you get twice the learning for half the cost.” This now seems to be an underestimation of the cost of running the new pedagogy. Take three obvious time and cost savers that could come together. One, to put it crassly, is *student labor*—in the new system students help teachers with technology; they help other students as tutors and co-learners; and they help themselves through taking on a greater share of learning as partners. None of this costs a single penny. Also, because the new pedagogy harnesses learning resources 24/7, the *learning day* is effectively doubled or more. Lastly, technology can achieve new efficiencies as it reaches more learners, more easily just as the MOOCs<sup>2</sup> are doing in higher education. All in all the new system will be cheaper, easier, deeper, and more engaging.

Taken together these five implications represent a new learning agenda that is as exciting as it is daunting. This work will draw new energy that will expand geometrically as it feeds on itself. This is what Clayton Christensen means by “disruptive innovations.”<sup>3</sup> The scenario is this: the status quo is beginning to reach the limits of its yield (the push factor above); people still are committed to continuous improvement of the existing system (albeit with marginal results); along comes disruptive innovations (e.g., digital product); these early versions, to use Christensen’s critical observation, are “inferior products” (compared at this early stage to existing versions); and what ensues is a “rapid learning cycle” where innovations are tried, discarded, refined, and ever improving.

## Future Directions and Considerations

The question for the field of education is how it can best participate in this rapid learning cycle while working in an otherwise less and less functional system. The general conclusion for me is that this will be a messy period in which the best stance is to become a reflective doer and learner. One way of cutting this is to think of working simultaneously on continuous improvement and on innovation. In the “Great to Excellent” paper (Fullan, 2013b), I recommended that Ontario “continue” to go deeper in improving literacy, mathematics, and high school graduation, while it simultaneously engaged in “focused innovation” in relation to the 6Cs, and to early learning.

Relative to the 6Cs we need to shift from the perennial superficial homage to the 21st century learning skills, that has been going on for at least a quarter of a

century, to the development of what it means to actually implement them in practice. This will entail the hard operational work of defining what each of the skills actually means (and their interrelationships), identifying and developing what learning would actually look like, and assessing the learning outcomes therein. This is of course the new pedagogy agenda.

Similar detailed work will have to be carried out relative to early learning. The critical importance of early learning—prenatal to age five—has also been known for a long time. For more than a quarter of a century we have known that careful attention to the early years will pay off economically at least seven times the investment, not to mention the myriad benefits for individuals and society that will accrue. In Ontario we are implementing full-day kindergarten (FDK) for all four and five year olds in the province. There are some 250,000 children in question. Half of them are being currently served with the remaining 50% to be incorporated in 2013 and 2014. Focused innovation does not just pertain to structure and capital, or to getting the education force in place (early childhood staff and teachers), but also to the everyday learning curriculum and assessment. In operational terms, what does “play-based inquiry look like,” what does it accomplish, and how does it feed forward to grades one and beyond. This is of course part and parcel of the evolution of the 6Cs curriculum.

From a change perspective we have to work at both the micro and macro levels and their interconnections. At the micro level the watchwords for the new pedagogy are precision, specificity, and clarity. We have to develop in practice what this new work looks like, not in order to prescribe it, but to know what it means and to be clearer about how to do it, assess it, and learn from it.

The macro level involves what we have been working on since 1997—what can be called “whole system change” (WSC). The content of WSC is beyond the terms of reference of this paper. Two things can be said briefly here. One is that we know a good deal about how to improve the whole system in terms of raising the bar and reducing the gap for *all* students, which includes factors such as: a relentless focus on a small number of ambitious goals; a positive non-punitive stance toward the sector that places accountability more in the position of being a motivator; transparency of results and practice including the use of data for improvement, and for public accountability; ongoing investment in capacity building (professional learning); learning from implementation across the system; the development of an infrastructure and related fostering of leadership on all levels; and a general sense of vertical and horizontal partnership committed to immediate and continuous improvement.

The second thing that can be said is that no system in the world has developed such an infrastructure as we have just described that was developed to stimulate and serve the kind of innovative teaching and learning that I am portraying in this paper.

In short, we have our work cut out for ourselves. At the same time the direction and nature of the change is reasonably clear, while the development and implementation of solutions is as exciting as it is daunting. What could be a better learning proposition—high risk, high yield in the context of an unavoidable challenge.

## Notes

1. See *Partnership for New Pedagogies for Deep Learning*, including the M. Fullan and M. Langworthy White Paper, <http://www.newpedagogies.org/>, as well as M. Fullan and K. Donnelly, *Alive in the Swamp, Assessing Digital Innovations in Education*. London: NESTA; and Oakland, CA: NewSchools Venture Fund.
2. Massive Open Online Courses
3. Please see: <http://www.claytonchristensen.com/key-concepts/>

## References

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- Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers*. London: Routledge.
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