

Transforming Education: *for the love of learning*

Imagine innovations that allow students to gain credit for the process of learning what they personally love, and not just getting a better score on what they must learn.

It's been written that if you grew up using something then you'll never consider it "technology;" it's just how life is. The fact that we can find an answer to almost every informational question on this device that fits in the palm of our hands blows us away. However, our students aren't that impressed.

Certainly there have been transforming technologies over the course of human history: the spring-wound clock, the printing press, the automobile. Yet we're wondering if our current educational fascination with computer technologies is truly worthy of the word "transformational."

It's not that we don't love our gadgets. We can't imagine writing this article without our computers and the Internet, which we are using to send drafts back and forth. We wouldn't think of leaving home without our smart phones. It may be that the transformation we are most interested in really has little to do with technology, although it can certainly be assisted with it.

We're most interested in a transformation in what we think of as a quality education. We don't think technology is transformational if it is used only as a sustaining innovation of the current model of education. There is a difference between transforming and improving education.

The transformation we are interested in has more to do with building the capacity for students to identify what they believe can be passed on to others. That's different than improving on what we are

already doing. Let's not mix up transformation with improvement.

We submit that the cornerstone difference between improving education and transforming it revolves around something that seems too often missing in today's schools: a love of and passion for learning and what can be done with what one learns. To be clear, there is nothing wrong with improving our current educational model, but when one invokes the word transformative, one expects more than just improvement.

Valuing the desired curriculum

We are improving the current educational model when innovations are used to solely produce better results of the required and assessed content. We are transforming education when innovations are used to provide a depth of individualization of learning for the student that includes valuing not only the required curriculum (what the student must learn), but also the desired curriculum (what the student wants to learn).

Imagine transforming innovations that open the door for students to gain credit for the process of learning what they personally love, and not just getting a better score on what they must learn!

Transformation in education has a kinship to the idea advanced

By Glen Warren and George Manthey

by Clayton Christenson in his book, “Disrupting Class”: that there are innovations that either sustain the current product or service – called sustaining innovations – or disruptive innovations that bring about real change.

In April 2009 at the Milken Institute Global Conference a panel discussion titled “Transforming Technologies” convened with facilitator Michael Horn, co-author of “Disrupting Class.” He started off with an objection to the title. He shared with the panel and the audience that although technologies play a key role in transforming education, “It is not the only thing.” Michael advanced a new title to the panel: “Transforming Innovations.”

In “Disrupting Class” (2008) the authors argue that online learning will become a “transforming and disruptive innovation.” Disruptive innovations are defined as those that replace “expensive, complicated and inaccessible products or services with much less expensive, simpler and more convenient alternatives.”

They believe that “online learning is a disruptive force that can transform the factory-like structure of American schools. Out of the transformation, a new model will emerge that is highly personalized, student-centric and more productive, providing better results at the same or lower cost.”

Online instructional design

David V. Loertscher, a professor of school of library and information science at San Jose State University, made this observation about blended learning: “Blended learning is indeed a potential major shift in education, but there is a major problem with the instructional designs used online. If one is to read a chapter, view a lecture, do a worksheet, and perhaps participate in an online discussion, then the dropout rate and what is learned will be small. High Think models that are collaborative in nature, constructivist, and join personal expertise with collaborative intelligence need to form the basis of online instructional designs. Online can’t be deadly boring like the face-to-face classroom can be. It has to be more engaging, more powerful, creative, collaborative, real, and more project oriented. Then it becomes disruptive.”

Innovations and technology offer new and fresh ways to improve upon the work of educating students on the required curriculum, the stuff that we are all held accountable for our students to learn. Improving is good! Continuous improvement is even better! But transformative education impacts something at the core of the educational soul, the belief that education does more than dispense knowledge. It builds hope for the student’s future, faith in the student’s value to the world, and must be rooted in a love for learning that will not quit.

We think this kind of transformation is needed. We think educators should be leading the way. But consider some of the things that may be done to us.

The Critical Thinking Bill

SB 402 would require each curriculum framework to describe how content can be delivered to intentionally build creativity, innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration and

communication into and across each content area, to the extent the description is deemed appropriate by the state board. Come now. Do educators need politicians to be telling us that critical thinking and problem solving need to be returned to the classroom? Shouldn’t we be requiring this of our students already?

Implementation of online learning

Another symptom of the need for real transformation is the common implementation of online learning, blended or otherwise, does not include a teacher librarian, the information literacy specialist teacher. Some think that in the world of Google, students will learn information literacy by osmosis, or worse, by untrained personnel. The Library Association of the University of California published a letter to the California State Board of Education stating that undergraduates within the UC system were not prepared or equipped to access, evaluate, integrate and use information.



With the flood of information that is flying toward our students, how is it that we are not going to provide competent supervision? Who will be there to ask a student who walks into the virtual or brick-and-mortar library, “What do you want to learn?”

We know that we must measure student learning, collect data, and respond to any lack of required achievement. However, we also know that not everything we measure is most important. In fact, there are matters that are not measured that might be as important (perhaps more) as those things that we do measure.

Advancing the unmeasured values

Most of us became educators because we had a love for students, a faith in education, and a hope for the future of our students. These things may not be measured in standardized tests, but they are foundational to the work we do.

Transformational innovation advances the unmeasured values. That’s the transformation we think our students deserve. That’s the transformation we think the world requires. For the love we have for our students and the hope we have for this world, let’s not settle for any transformation that does less. ■

Resources

Christensen, Clayton; Johnson, Curtis & Horn, Michael. (2008). *Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation will Change the Way the World Learns*. McGraw-Hill.

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