The Transformation of Schooling: A Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

Progressive change in education is often limited by leaving in place long standing school structures such as the classroom, the stop-go nature of schooling and the essentialist approach to planning. The author argues that technology is a key to altering these long standing aspects of schooling and suggests that UnEarth is particularly suited for this role because it is based on developing communities of difference as well as knowledge sharing and storage. UnEarth links students within the classroom to students outside, develops a building approach to schooling based on what students have learned in previous years, and allows teachers to personalize the curriculum.

Keywords: Educational Change, Knowledge Sharing, Personalized Curriculum, Storage, Technology, Teacher Development

INTRODUCTION

The problem of school change has been with us forever (Sarason, 1990). From Dewey (1929), to Sarason (1990), to Fullen and Hargreaves (1996), to Cookson and Schneider (1995), to Lowe (1995), to the Department of Education (2009) and Wrigley (2011) the problems and potential solutions to school change have been well articulated. At best, as the Ford foundation (Petrovich, 2008) has found, these changes have altered schooling in minimal ways and even when significant change has occurred, it has been short lived. The result of this stasis is that historically and currently the best predictor of school change is still socio-economic status (Protor & Dalaker, 2002; Berliner, 2005). Race is not far behind as a key factor in school success with African-American’ and Latino cultures’ having disproportionate high numbers in special education classes and disproportionate low numbers in Honors and Advanced Placement classes (Oaks, 2007). And this account ignores how African-American males and women in general get socialized in schools such that possible futures are constrained and thought to reside outside of their “normal” identity formation (Fordham, 1996). The record of school reform and change therefore raises enough questions to encourage educational actors of all stripes to search again, to research, the underlying assumptions and practical solutions associated...
with the school change process. I too have been concerned with change and specifically change aimed at increasing educational success for all students regardless of SES, race and gender among other variables. This concern has led to my development of a global learning community—UnEarth.

UnEarth (Gitlin, 2014) is a project I started 7 years ago that views difference as a benefit to be enhanced not a problem to be solved. My intention is to produce an internet site based primarily on four assumptions: In contrast to networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or e-learning courses, the first assumption concerns the importance of a) sharing knowledge among communities of difference (e.g., bringing together parents, students, teachers, and professors, professionals and clients/patients to connect their knowledge and act on education, schooling, and institutions of all kinds). To encourage communities of difference to push against normative boundaries such as classrooms, departments, disciplines, clinics, law offices and corporations, etc., it is essential to embrace the view that diverse groups and cultures have something to contribute in terms of knowledge sharing. UnEarth does not begin a priori with the belief that a certain group knows more than others or knows better than others (Olson & Craig, 2005). Rather, the assumption is that groups bring differing orientations, possibilities, and limits to the knowledge sharing process. This acceptance of value across difference, not value as hierarchically distributed across groups and cultures, is a key to allowing these communities of difference to connect in more democratic and collaborative ways (Borman & Greenman, 1994). Further, the assumption concerns the importance of b) installations for change go hand in hand with a reconsideration and a reworking of what is the classroom or more generally the space for the change (Heidegger in Mitchell, 2010). Further, UnEarth assumes that c) change requires, in part, an open text (Hejinian, 2000). An open text encourages change participants to go beyond any prior notion of what is desired and related actions associated with change. Within an open text format the change process is likely to occur in ways not known nor structured by the author or predetermined assumptions of the change process, thereby allowing long standing notions such as the classroom or office to be reconsidered conceptually and practically. E-learning and other networking sites do not leave these empty spaces and thereby direct participants to move explicitly in a particular direction. It is no accident, for example, that Facebook is primarily about images, given that image sharing is a central feature, focus and category of the network. By leaving empty spaces, UnEarth moves the network beyond solely trying to achieve this or that to giving members a significant amount of creative freedom (e.g., what communities are formed and therefore how knowledge is shared and used on the network) to develop ways to facilitate learning and learning ambitions.

Because UnEarth also stays with the student, client, patient, etc. and allows this individual to create a record of their learning experiences and accomplishments as well as changing learning desires, the teacher/professor “other” can get to know the “student” in ways
Students’ Questioning and Creativity: How Are These Related?
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