Chapter 19
Creating Tension: Orchestrating Disruptive Pedagogies in a Virtual School Environment

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ABSTRACT
This chapter will critically examine the disruptive pedagogies being employed during the initiation, transition, and extension phases of a virtual school culture and its impact upon the virtual school community, pre-service, and ultimately, in-service-teachers. Through the virtual, it is intended that pre-service teachers (who have a placement at this school of ideas) may be able to experience new ways of teaching and learning and, in turn, start to step away from their schooled pasts in order to reflect upon, critically assess and then enact needed change. As pre-service teachers are the potential creators of yet unchartered pedagogies, they are a vital resource. Provocation will be examined using an Action Research model.

INTRODUCTION
Teacher educators are responsible for preparing aspiring novices for the educational systems they will enter as well as challenging the norms of those systems by interrogating how well they meet the needs of substantially new kinds of learners requiring interdisciplinary, global, multimodal and project-based learning. These two roles of the teacher educator are often at odds with one another. It is the role of provocateur that this chapter addresses.

By creating Lathner Primary, a virtual school, it was our intention that the physical environment, the authentic learner-centred ideas and lecturers’ face-to-face interrogation of the norms of teaching would assist in altering pre-service teachers’ views of schools.

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BACKGROUND

Much has been written about changing mindsets and practices around an industrial model of teaching and learning that dispenses information and normalizes students, content and practices (Fullan, 2007, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2009; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). While educators recognize and accept that today’s learners are radically different and require learning that responds to the rapidly changing socio-cultural, technological and global conditions, little has altered in reality. Research also emphasizes the centrality of the teacher in the learning process (Hattie, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2009). Responsive teachers start by getting to know their student’s strengths and learning styles, attitudes and interests and only then do they address mandated curriculum, programs and standards.

Teachers need to reconceptualize what schools can become so that today’s learners explore, problem solve and design new knowledge within a range of learning communities. New kinds of responsive teachers reflect upon and then enact teaching and learning practices that do far more than merely replicate past practices that no longer serve learner needs. Rather, they create and implement innovative practices that reflect real world issues. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) suggest that the teaching profession has not yet come of age. They question whether the next decade can ‘develop its own visions of and commitments to educational and social change, instead of simply vetoing and reacting to the change agendas of others.’ (p. 103)

New ways of learning ‘outside’ of formal schooling continue to bring about fundamental changes to the ways in which learners interact with others, and how identities are enlarged and strengthened by local and global connectedness. Linda Darling-Hammond’s (1998) statement over a decade ago holds even greater credence today. Darling-Hammond says that ‘today’s schools face enormous challenges … [they] are being asked to educate the most diverse student body in our history to higher academic standards than ever before’ (p. 6). Twenty-first century learners are accustomed to self-regulated learning, learning that provides choice in what they learn, where they learn and when they learn. These students are digital natives, “wired” as Prensky (2005) describes them. They have grown up with access to a wide range of digital technologies that allow them a range of social networks locally, nationally and globally, along with vast amounts of information at their fingertips.

While teachers are aware of the dramatic changes in 21st century learners there is often an inability to let go and, at times, a resistance to disrupt the norms of schooling so tightly ingrained in teachers, parents and students’ consciousnesses. Judith Butler draws upon Foucault’s (1969) work in the ways that linguistic constructions create our reality through the speech acts we participate in every day. While our reality is a social construction, teachers continue to perform these learned constructions. By embodying them, artificial conventions appear to be natural and necessary. They are, one might suggest, artificial habits of mind and they embed themselves in language, relationships and professional practices. They become powerful manifestations of our identities. Thus the task of re-culturing teachers and schooling, as Fullan (2001) recommends, is an enormous and often painstaking one.

Yet education is also the ideal platform to enact transformations through critical reflection; to provoke change to become as Boler (1999) argues, less encumbered by constraints. As well as building sustained innovations at Lathner Primary, we wanted to enact disruptive innovations so that systemic change could be realized. These disruptive innovations need to unsettle the comfort of known, routinized ways of thinking and behaving.

Adopting a pedagogy of discomfort is likely to produce fear of change and defensive anger (Boler, 1999). Such reactions should be interpreted as a defence of one’s investments in dominant cultural
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