

Educating for Self-Determining Learners: Why? What? What will it take?

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Increasingly, we need self-determined learners, who are genuinely empowered with shared responsibility, intrinsically motivated, and engaged in deep learning that really sticks. What will it take to move beyond the observable examples of those few individuals that have risen to meet this challenge? What will it take to enable the reconceptualization of the role of teacher and learner? What will it take to redesign and transform learning and schools to prepare students for successful participation in the world of their time? This paper/session will explore the challenges and opportunities awaiting the brave.

There is an increasing level of dialogue about, what is needed to prepare our young people to be successful participants in a world of their time. Many agree that our young people will need something additional to the present educational outcomes traditionally provided. While the idea of developing 21st Century capabilities is frequently proposed, what progress have we made, especially at any scale to genuinely embrace the concept of 21st Century learning? Do we have a clear understanding of what 21st Century learning is and how we would enable this type of learning?

What are the conditions that will enable the best learning to prepare our young people well? What does quality teaching and learning look like? Who will have agency of the learning and why?

Why do we need to look at teaching and learning differently?

We are all aware at how exponentially the world is developing and changing. Successful navigation and participation in this ever changing world, demands a broad range of capabilities of a high order. There is an increasing level of alignment of thinking about the capabilities that will enable more successful participation in this ever changing world. The nature of the changing world has brought a substantial shift in the nature of young people, what they need and expect from learning and how it is enabled. The circumstance surrounding our young people brings new challenges and opportunities for learning that has relevance and engages them.

Our young people tell us in so many ways that they want to;

- have real relationships,
- their interests and talents recognised and valued,
- be valued for who and how they are,
- have time: time to play, explore, be curious, takes risks and learn from their mistakes,
- be inspired, connected and creative,
- learn by doing, for the learning to be real, challenging and relevant for to their lives and world,
- learn at different times and in different places, with experts and in the real world well beyond the traditional classroom walls,

- learn at just their right pace and in a way that is their preference, personalised,
- be involved in determining the best ways to demonstrate what they are learning, how they get and give feedback
- **basically have a say in their learning, including the what, when, where, how and why and generally to have less restrictions on how they go about their learning.**

Do our young people have a right to ask and or demand how learning is for them? Will learning engagement and outcome improve if we listen to and respond to what our students are saying?

Could learning that is highly intentional and explicit about building increasing capacity for the learner to have greater agency for learning be key to improved preparedness and successful participation of our young people? While we have pockets of examples and some engage in dialogue around the concept of student agency, the opportunity is significantly untapped.

Will our present agendas and views of quality teaching and learning be sufficient, be best to prepare every student well for participation in the world of their time?

What could it look like?

If we believe that by listening to our students and responding accordingly we will improve the opportunity to engage them more successfully, we need to be open to the idea of reconceptualising and redesign what learning might look like. We will need to engage with students to develop solutions for how to enable what they desire and or demand as learners. Learners that know how to learn and are intrinsically motivated will learn quickly, the learning will be deep and will stick, they will be learners for life.

For each student to genuinely feel they are listened to and their preferences are considered we need to genuinely start with each student and build out from there. For students to have a greater determination for how learning is for them, we would need to be highly intentional about developing their capacity to know how to learn and how to be more self-determining.

Students would need to;

- be open to believing in themselves and developing real relationships with others including adults, they want to develop a strong sense of being valued for their uniqueness as well as feeling they belong,
- develop a sense who they are and who they want to be more of and why,
- learn how to develop and pursue interests, talents and a purpose for learning,
- learn how to develop personalised learning plans and pathways, to set learning actions/goals to achieve the intended learning,
- learn how to engage and organise learning in a multi-disciplinary approach,
- learn how to learn, learn to be a deep inquirer and higher order thinker,
- learn the dispositions and approaches to negotiate greater levels of decision making and responsibility for their learning, to practice grit and confront avoidance behaviour,
- know and practise the capabilities that will be demanded, to be successful in their world,
- learn about and practise being entrepreneurial,

- learn to network and collaborate with others for learning,
- develop confidence and capacity to learn well beyond the classroom walls,
- continually challenge themselves to step out of their comfort zone,
- learn how to and make decisions about how best to demonstrate their learning in a range of ways and mediums,
- to reflect and self-monitor actions, learning engagement and outcomes.

Teachers would need to;

- be open to reconceptualising the role of teacher, learner and others that can add to the learning experience,
- be open and up for developing a deep relationship no matter what, with a small number of students and hang in with them for a number of years,
- be prepared to engage families with real and frequent opportunity to be connected and supportive of the learning,
- be prepared to enable learning to unfold one student at a time, to genuinely personal learning through personal learning plans, to trust themselves and the learner that things will be successful over time,
- intentionally and explicitly teach students to learn how to be a learner and how to take increasing responsibility for the agency of learning,
- know some curriculum deeply to enable rich learning, assessment, and feedback as well as knowing some additional curriculum sufficiently to support and contribute to the assessment of multidisciplinary inquiry,
- explicitly teach and provide frequent experiences for higher order thinking,
- practice being and enable learners to be more entrepreneurial,
- be a powerful listener, coach, mentor, mediator, explicit teacher, networker, collaborator and reflector, to be an ongoing learner,
- seek and provide frequent feedback for growth and learning

Having been provoked with some propositions and possibilities for enabling self-determining learners we could go on to develop further propositions through exploring the implications for others that have responsibility and opportunity to lead the educational shift that will genuinely set each and every learner up to successfully navigate and participate in the world of their time.

- Principals would need to?
- Schools would need to?
- Curriculum writers would need to?
- Jurisdictional/system leaders would need to?
- Politicians would need to?
- Universities would need to?

Acknowledgement

The ideas presented have been inspired and shaped through engaging with students and teachers as coach within a range of Australian schools including some implementing the Big Picture Learning design. Elliot Washor's and Charles Mojlowski's recent book, *Leaving to Learn, How Out-of-School Learning Increases Student Engagement and*

Reduces Dropout Rates, elaborates in greater detail on many similar ideas, Elliot Washor is co-founder of Big Picture Learning.