The Top Three Challenges Facing School Leaders
in
2015.

The State of Education Today.

We have been talking about 21st Century Skills, 21st Century Learning and 21st Century Schools for 20 years and now almost two decades into the 21st Century many schools around the world are still set up to cater for 19th and 20th Century learners.

It's time to stop talking and take action!

Our schools are made up of Generation Z students[1] a whole new breed of young people. Smarter than previous generations and equipped with more knowledge and skills to utilize one of the most significant tools of our time, the Internet. Generation Alpha[2], children born in 2010 along with ipads, iphones and apps have started school this year and will be entering universities and colleges by 2030. Social researchers claim that babies born into Generation Alpha will be the most formally educated generation in history and truly the millennial generation. Born and shaped fully in the 21st Century, they will be the first generation that in record numbers[3] will see in the 22nd Century whilst being significant catalysts for change along the way.

It is therefore imperative to ask ourselves some urgent questions.

- Are we empowering these new generations to be global citizens and global leaders?
- Are we encouraging, supporting and assisting young people to embrace learning and create sustainable, purposeful, happy futures?
- How do we as educators maintain focus on what is really important for our learners of today?

This White Paper from Think Strategic provides thoughtful insights on the three top challenges facing educators today and it lists actions that will make a difference to schools and to future generations.

The Challenges

Challenge #1. It's Time to Change!

"Across the developed world, a consensus is emerging. Schools may have delivered in the past, but they're certainly not working for today, they were established in a different age and for a different set of purposes." Katherine Prince[4].

We must educate for the digital age and the global society now. Students should have the best chance to be successful in today's world and become responsible, productive and happy global citizens.

Economist, Andrew McAfee[5], looks forward to a time of great flourishing where we prepare our students for jobs of the future. McAfee, a Montessori educated child, maintains that students must be deeply engaged in learning, exploring and problem-solving. Many educators would agree, however, research shows that developed countries are failing to engage and motivate students[6].

Clayton Christensen[7], Harvard Business School Professor and one of the world's experts on innovation and growth believes there are three underlying causes[8] that we must address:

- o Students nowadays think and learn very differently to past generations, yet we place them in schools based on a system for people of foregone eras that compels teachers to teach many students in the same way and at the same pace. Most of the students either are not learning at all or are learning in a very inefficient way.

- o The prosperity of the western world is having a large impact on student motivation. We know that those living in poverty are motivated to see education as a vehicle of change and advancement. We can see examples of disengaged youth in USA, UK, Canada, Australia and Europe. Christensen's research shows it is also beginning to affect Japan, Singapore and Korea.

- o Shifting the goal posts. What was defined as a good school 30 years ago wasn't defined as a good school 20 years ago. The kinds of innovations that are targeted right at the goal posts in one era become irrelevant in the next. Our schools have been improving, but we keep changing the meaning of improvement.

Added to this a fourth factor has recently emerged. The 2014 UNESCO report,[9] released late in 2014, highlights the fact that 58 million children in the world do not go to school and 123 million children and youths do not receive an adequate education, despite the UN Millennial Goal[10] of primary education for all children to be achieved by 2015.

Education around the world requires significant change!

Challenge #2 Personalized Learning.

Advances in neuroscience are predicting new notions of performance and cognition[11].

Schools have been trying strategies like differentiation and inclusion for almost 20 years now and computers have been introduced into schools since the mid 80's to revolutionize classrooms. Despite genuine efforts there are those who believe that Differentiation[12] has failed and we have not maximized the potential of technology integration to meet the needs of individual students.

Christensen argues that the key to revolutionizing the classroom is not just by adding technology, but also to strategically consider the ways that technology is utilised to enhance learning. He believes that future schools must be student centric and adapt to the students' different interests, types of intelligences and ways of learning.

Alan November[13] author and international leader in education technology recommends setting the tone for powerful, engaging and self-directed learning. Larry Rosenstock[14], co-founder of High Tech High, one of a group of charter schools that is lauded as a model example of how formal education can embrace inquiry-based, truly student-driven, project-based learning, advises, "Have kids doing work that's important to them instead of this antiquated notion of content. Catch yourself every time you're systematically mis-predicting who can and who can't do what among your students. We mis-predict among race, gender, socio-economic status, and standardized test. It's not democratic and it's not moving us forward."

Katherine Prince[4] believes that we are moving toward a diverse learning ecosystem in which learners and their families will be able to customize their learning journeys to an unprecedented extent, creating learning playlists that reflect their needs, interests, and values. Radical personalization could become the norm as we develop ever-deeper understanding of cognition and motivation and have more tools at our disposal to understand what is happening with learners and to tailor instruction and supports to meet their needs.

Personalization and customization of learning is critical for 21st Century learners.

Challenge # 3. Education for Sustainability.

The world and its resources are finite. According to Alan Atkisson[15], author and sustainability expert, we could reach a population of 9, 10 or even 12 billion. AtKisson and his team work with organizations, governments and schools around the world urging people to think long term about how we will all live

within the boundaries of our planet and share prosperity and the right to be healthy and happy with all nations.

We started teaching environmental awareness in the 80's and education for sustainability came along in the late 90's but sadly there remain many people, organizations and governments today who are not making responsible choices for our planet or for humanity. We have failed to achieve the UN Millennial Goal[9] of primary education for all children to be achieved by 2015 and according to Dr. Josephine M. Kim[16], author, Harvard Graduate School of Education lecturer and expert on at-risk youth, we will have more people dying of depression and depression-related illnesses in the future. Kim, an expert on multicultural, mental health and educational issues called on school leaders at the recent November 2014 EARCOS Leadership Conference to take action to stem the alarming increase of youth suicide in our schools and universities.

Our aim must be to prepare our students to thrive in the 21st Century as citizens of the world contributing towards a just, peaceful and sustainable future.

What Can Be Done?

Action #1. Become a Change Agent

Schools must become change agencies and activate teams of innovators, change agents and transformers to create the future for 21st Century learners. Sir Ken Robinson[17] makes a very good case for changing education by changing one school at a time. It is time for all school leaders to take action.

Yong Zhao[18], an internationally known scholar, author, and speaker has focused on the implications of globalization and technology on education. He has designed schools that cultivate global competence, developed computer games for language learning, and founded research and development institutions to explore innovative education models. In his book, World Class Learners[18] Zhao outlines how students need to be able to think like entrepreneurs, be resourceful, flexible, creative and global to succeed in our ever-changing world.

Zhao[18] encourages schools to cultivate independent thinkers who are willing and able to use their learning differently to create jobs and contribute positively to the globalized society. Teachers, administrators and parents can implement strategies immediately to:

> ➢ understand the entrepreneurial spirit and harness it,
> ➢ foster student autonomy and leadership,
> ➢ champion inventive learners with necessary resources, and
> ➢ develop global partners and resources.

Take Action:
- Look around at your teachers and students, consider their talents and identify the innovators, change agents and transformers.

- Organize a group of innovative teachers, senior students and parents to complete a simple audit of your school asking your students:
  - how they learn best,
  - what they think the school is doing well,
  - what the school should stop doing, and
  - what innovations they can suggest to improve student learning, student motivation and student engagement.

- Invite representative senior students and teachers onto your executive meetings to review the findings with you.
- Analyze the survey data to create strategies together to improve student learning, student motivation and student engagement at your school.
- Empower talent groups, working parties or innovation teams to trial or pilot some of these strategies and review with your faculty and student body.
- Communicate regularly with faculty, students and parents. Communicate successes and celebrate with the school community.
- Embed the most effective strategies that improve learning outcomes such as motivation and engagement in school life.
- Remember Seth Godin's tip, "Leadership is the art of giving people a platform for spreading ideas that work." By giving students the liberty to make meaningful decisions and explore nontraditional learning opportunities, Zhao believes today's students will become tomorrow's entrepreneurs solving global problems and creating jobs for the future.

Some strategies worth considering:

- Research the characteristics of Gen Z and Gen A, find out how they best learn. Invite generational experts and thinking experts like Jennifer Abrams, John Joseph, Julia Atkin into your school to train teachers and parents. Facilitate regular collaborative meeting times for teachers to plan and share ways to meet the needs of their students.

- Research innovative, flexible, welcoming learning spaces and create a list of recommendations for the school executive or school board. Invite some creative architects along to the meetings.

- Be creative and strategic with budgeting. Maintenance and replacement funds can be put toward creating new purpose built rooms or buildings.

- Focus on learning environments that are highly adaptable to allow large and small group work, peer-to-peer learning, individual exploration, learning in a technology infused environment, with movable furniture and walls to allow easy change, and accommodations for outdoor learning environments. As Mark Quattrocchi[19] says, "The 21st century workplace is dynamic and interactive, requiring critical thinking, collaboration and creativity of its inhabitants, who today, are our students. With an understanding of multiple intelligences and how teachers use varied modalities of learning, our learning environments must reflect this

change."

- Review the whole school curriculum to ensure relevant, significant and engaging global topics are embedded from Kindergarten through to Grade 12 using inquiry and project-based learning to ask the really BIG questions. As Indira Ghandi[20] said, "The power to question is the basis of all human progress."

- Review the community service program in your school. If you don't have one, create one that interacts with children around the world. Young people really enjoy connecting with children around the world and it opens their eyes and hearts to different cultures, religions and languages. Use the UN Millennial goals to start some compassionate action student-led initiatives at your school.

- Research social entrepreneurialism. Consider sending leading interested teachers off to attend conferences on Social Entrepreneurship. Be a part of the new wave of social innovation. [21]

- Create vehicles for 'student voice' to be a regular feedback loop to the school administration including student-directed leadership programs.

- Review flexible timetabling and room usage options to allow for inquiry based interdisciplinary projects and student centered learning.

- Ensure you are a technology-amplified organization with reliable and fast access to and from the world blending geographic and virtual communities with flipped classrooms and Bring Your Own Device, BYOD, usage.

- Develop Professional Learning Communities and Teams. Recruit quality teachers with a growth mindset and a can-do attitude.

- Invite powerfully innovative people into your teams. Utilize the 2020 Forecast[11] to get involved in actively creating the future of learning. Our ability to meet the social, economic, health, and climate challenges of the next several decades depends on our ability to collaborate with others.

- Learn from pioneering schools. There are pockets of innovation and change in schools around the world. Geelong Grammar in Australia has worked with Psychologist, Martin Seligman to create a mindfulness program K-12. High Tech High in the USA, developed by creative educators including Larry Rosenstock, use technology and project-based learning to motivate and challenger students. Beijing International School has created an innovative Futures Academy, to inspire creativity, encourage flexibility and cooperation, and prepare students for their futures, not ours! Look out for these schools, there are many more, why not learn from them?

A word of caution, think strategically about how your teams can achieve some of the above over the next 2, 3, 4 or 5 years. Don't try to do it all at once. It may be time to create an innovative 21st Century Strategic Plan that the whole school community can access and feel a part of.

Action #2 Personalized Learning.

Katherine Prince[4], who is also the mother of a Generation Alpha child believes schools should radically personalize learning and offer places where the learning ecosystem adapts to each child's needs:

- individuals, not institutions, drive the flow of learning resources,
- the learning ecosystem supports all students in accessing the right learning experiences and supports at the right time,
- "school" takes many forms, with some kids attending schools that look a lot like many schools do today, some kids assembling custom mosaics of learning experiences, and everything in between,
- physical learning hubs provide safe places for kids to go while functioning as portals to the broader community and to learning resources beyond the community's boundaries, and
- every child moves at his or her own pace while engaging in interest-based collaborative learning.[22]

Take Action:
- Take Prince's ideas to revolutionize teaching and learning at your school. Create a shared belief system with your teachers for personalized learning [23]

- Train your teachers to create classrooms of the future with flexible learning spaces and Blending Learning to offer Flipped Classrooms, Online Learning, Open Education Resources, Technology Integration[24].

- Demolish your traditional library and create Learning Commons and Inquiry Centres. Model and celebrate different ways of thinking and immerse students in brain-based learning, inquiry based learning, play-based learning PBL, game based learning and project based learning with real life application.

- Develop Professional Learning Communities to support teachers and allow for collaboration and teacher Professional Development. [25]

Remember too many children fall through the cracks. Schools must adapt to each child's needs by becoming an inclusive school.

Action #3 Think Sustainability and Think Mindfulness
Education is the key transformer to a more just and sustainable world. Compass Schools[26] is a collaborative movement to embed sustainability as a core mindset and value system in schools and education systems.

The AtKisson Group[27] have created sustainability thinking tools and they believe that graduates from schools in which sustainability is deeply understood and fully embraced will be instrumental in discovering how we can successfully decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, ensure socially equitable and just development for everyone, restore and regenerate vital life-supporting ecosystems, and reorient the global agenda from a primary focus on Gross Domestic Product, GDP, to one that is focused on significantly improving overall human happiness, wellbeing and Gross National Happiness, GNH, as Bhutan models.

To facilitate this collaborative movement, Compass Education offers School Sustainability Leadership Training to equip the entire learning community to effectively understand and act for sustainability. Sustainability is articulated in all aspects of the school learning community, through the five portals of governance, operations, networks and partnerships, teaching and learning, and buildings and grounds.

By using a whole-school approach schools practice what they teach, and sustainability is reinforced in policy and actions; consequently, sustainability values are 'caught, rather than taught.'

Take Action
- Become a Compass School
- Embed Mindfulness into the curriculum

Conclusion

This White Paper prepared by Maxine Driscoll of Think Strategic provides a vision for the future and offers proactive strategies for change. It has summarized and analyzed the thoughts and ideas of outstanding educators and innovators. It provides a roadmap for change. By becoming change agencies, embedding personalized learning, and sustainability and mindfulness into the curriculum schools will prepare learners to be resilient global citizens in the 21st Century.

We need to shift our focus towards a culture of collaboration, cooperation, and creation in which each of us has the opportunity, and the responsibility, to create our collective future.

If you would like assistance with 21st Century Strategic Thinking, Strategic Planning, Leadership Training or Leadership Coaching contact Maxine at maxine@thinkstrategic.com.au or http://www.thinkstrategicforschools.com

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