

Message for Teachers and Other Education Professionals

Think about the best parts of your role as a teacher, administrator, or another position in a school community. Now think about those parts of the job that really detract from the pleasures and rewards. What if you could do more of the best parts and none of the bad?

Think about the current COVID 19 crisis and how that has affected your job and the best parts of your job. What if a similar crisis—or any number of other crises that hit schools and districts every year such as floods, tornados, hurricanes, and wild fires—didn't have to detract much if any from the best parts of your job? What if ongoing crises such as poverty, violence, opportunity gaps, and funding shortfalls also didn't detract? And what if your efforts in a school community could have meaningful impact on addressing these same challenges and crises?

That's what school and education redesign could and should mean for you. The vast majority of people working in education are doing so because they want to positively affect the lives of children; they want to help them learn, grow, and develop; they want to see students unleash their potential and grow into happy and successful adults. Does that sound like you?

Unfortunately, the vast majority of educators spend as little as 20-30% of their time actually engaged deeply in these things. While some spend more than that, it is very rare to spend even as much as 80-90%. The remainder of their time is spent on numerous other tasks almost all of which result from the current school model. Even the time teachers spend conducting direct instruction for their students often doesn't directly facilitate effective learning for every student.

In short, the expertise, knowledge, and passion of most teachers and other education professionals is barely being leveraged. We could do so much better and so much more if we redesigned schools with the specific intention of fully leveraging this expertise, knowledge, and passion.

If you're a teacher or other education professional, you should be on the leading edge of school redesign because, other than the children, you have more to gain directly than anyone else. Yet you also cannot do it on your own or just within your classroom.

Consider what happens when you want to make changes in your classroom to more effectively help your students learn. Most schools will allow you to make changes as long as you stay on schedule with delivering the curriculum, maintain the daily schedule, ensure all rules and policies are followed, and don't cause any sort of disruptions for anyone else. Of course, this is the case because the first priority is delivering the curriculum and everything else is aimed at fulfilling that purpose or must not interfere with that purpose.

So, what would happen if the first priority was for students to learn and everything else was aimed at supporting that purpose and could not in any way detract from that purpose?

First of all, schools would not and could not look anything like they do now because the current model is actually counter to what is known about child development, brain development, and learning. That's also why every attempt to improve schools for the past several decades has failed to fulfill its expectations. Regardless of how incredible and even research-supported the idea, forcing it into the current model compromised the idea while driving up the cost of implementation. Even initiatives that resulted in some gains had shortcomings or didn't last because, again, they had to be shoe-horned into the existing school model.

That is one reason teachers have been so frustrated over the years with new ideas and initiatives. They've lived through idea after idea and seen them all fall short only to be replaced by something else that would fall short.

The only solution is to redesign the school model from the ground up. Start from scratch but inform the work with research and experience. And one absolutely critical element of any design is going to be the presence of adults who care about the students, have knowledge and understanding of how learning occurs as well as things students will need to learn, and who want to see those students unleash their potential. That, to me, describes teachers and other education professionals.

So, how do we redesign the school model? I'll lay out that process in a series of accompanying articles and posts.