**The Quest For Change**

I’m on a quest. It’s not like Jake and Elwood’s, “We’re on a mission from God,” in *The Blues Brothers*, but close. Although I’ve not hit a wall in my learning, there are knowledgeable resources (YOU!) available to spur, contradict, and inspire additional learning. This is the purpose for a PLN, right? As I started my educator PLN list, it grew to over 75 names including Heads, Ass’t Heads, Principals, Counselors, Teaching/Learning Directors, Ed Tech, and Consultants. I feel fortunate to have worked with and come to respect so many professionals dedicated to education.

And we have something in common. We’ve led or experienced school change initiatives. Which brings me to the initial essential questions on my quest: **Why is change in education so [expletive deleted] slow? How can we accelerate change?**

Over the years, I have admittedly developed a fixed mindset about the slowness of change in education. I talk about it, blog about it, complain about it. Educators everywhere have claimed ad nauseam that education is mired in archaic practice. Some of the challenge for change may lie in this John Muir quote, “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.”

Flash forward to 2020/21. We are living in historical, pivotal times buffeted simultaneously by a world-wide pandemic, social justice issues, and American Democracy under assault, literally. Instead of seeing this as an opportunity to change, status quo education is worried about “falling behind” and “catching up.” If we needed any more proof of the failings of education, Covid-19 has laid them bare. I refer to the failings as Education’s Emperors.

 Education’s Emperors

 • Equity: multi-systemic failure

 • Need for Well-Being: relationships matter, F2F matters

 • Standardized Testing: not necessary

 • Traditional Grades: ineffective

 • Curriculum: siloed, bloated, little relevance

Through your own pandemic school journeys, you have wrestled with these Emperors trying to make do, making decisions on the fly. Like Hans Christian Andersen’s folk tale, does it take a little boy to point out that Education’s Emperors have no clothes? Of course not. But, if not now, when?

**We’re The Best!**

Another common denominator we share is the experience working in or with international schools. Truly, our schools are at the top of the academic pyramid. We’ve mastered test-centered education. With a slight modification to Tina Turner’s hit song, “We’re simply the best! Better than all the rest!” At HS graduations, attendees scan the program counting the acceptances to the Ivies or top UK universities. If you took a poll of the audience, there would be little enthusiasm for systemic change. Again, our research and professional consensus say this isn’t good enough anymore.

However, fear of losing the lofty traditional pedestal can create inertia for real change. So, we’ve entered Paradigm Paralysis, kind of a Twilight Zone, around change. We tinker around the edges with our Maker Spaces, a new elective class on Social Justice, or appointing a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) committee. These are worthy ventures and do help shift focus. But, I wonder if our communities consider them “add-ons” to their own perceived purpose of school, which they get from perusing the graduation program.

There is only so much creativity, innovation, and change that can be made inside the box of status quo education. And it is not enough. Even for schools at the top of the testing pyramid.

This brings me to more essential questions: **With the need to redefine success away from testing, rankings, etc., what should be the new measures of learning? How do we shift emphasis/acceptance to these different components?**

Although we publicly share creative and innovative student talents, it is external exam scores, the number of AP/IB courses, teachers with advanced degrees, and other comparative traditional rankings that are placed in prominent positions on our websites. How many schools actively (time, treasure, talent) support wellbeing across the community, track their goals, and share findings? I don’t count a couple of generic questions concerning “happiness” buried in an annual survey as meaningful data.

If only given one change arrow for my quiver, I’d take dead aim at the “highly-selective college admissions process.” This does strike at the traditional heart of international schools. I see the admissions process as the “tail that wags the dog” and a gigantic roadblock to moving schools forward.

**One Piece of Advice**

Many schools say that we are preparing students for the future. Are we? Does our school actively (time, treasure, talent) explore what that future may look like? That’s futures thinking, forecasting. We strategically plan on a linear path without a deep dive into what the future may hold 10 years from now. *The Institute For The Future* explains, “The point of futures thinking is to use the future as a space to rethink what's possible so that we're not shocked or blind-sided by unexpected consequences, and more importantly, to give ourselves the freedom to invent new ways of doing things.”

Assisted by futures thinking/forecasting, we can evolve our highest aspirations unyoked from the tyranny of today, tomorrow, even next year.

**One Resource**

The resource is my web page list dedicated to the [Future of Learning](http://www.bradlatzke.com/future-learning/). Over the years, I collected a wide range of resources. Sharing is caring.

**One School**

Take a look at [Verso International School](https://www.verso.ac.th/). They opened doors on a new campus in the highly competitive Bangkok market in August 2020. I was fortunate to work in the school’s developmental stage with Founding Head Cameron Fox and his learning design team. Utilizing a human-centered approach, learning is interdisciplinary, project-based, and highly personalized. The future is now at Verso and we have much to learn about change in education from their journey.

**One Last Question**

Years ago, George Couros created a chart comparing [Schooling vs Learning](https://georgecouros.ca/blog/archives/4974). It makes the distinction that schools and learning are not synonymous. So, my last question is: **How do we shift focus and actions from schooling to learning?**

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**The Quest- Summing Up**

**Essential Questions:**

• Why is change in education so slow? How can we accelerate change?

• With the need to redefine success away from testing, rankings, etc., what should be the new measures of learning? How do we shift emphasis/acceptance to these different components?

• How do we shift focus and actions from schooling to learning?

**The Request**

Dialogue with me on my quest to learn more about these questions. I’m genuinely interested in learning about your experiences, thoughts, and hopes around change in education. As I mentioned in the beginning, I’m seeking your feedback to “spur, contradict, and inspire further learning.” I’m open to any format (maybe not TikTok) that works for you; email, Skype, Zoom, etc. As I seek what you are really thinking and not the sanitized versions we sometimes must give in public, you have my promise of total confidentiality. I will share what I learn back with you while respecting the confidentiality promise. And I do plan to blog or publish my learning from you and others sometime in the future. Please feel free to use the questions or text from this reading in your schools or workplace.

Thank you so much for listening and considering my request. I look forward to hearing from you initially at [bradlatzke@gmail.com](http://bradlatzke@gmail.com). My website is [BradLatzke.com](http://www.bradlatzke.com/).

All the best and take care, Brad