

Teaching and Learning that Stands the Test of Time

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Please forgive me if this month's PD Page feels more like a mélange of thoughts and ideas but I am afraid that is exactly how my brain seems to be operating right now. Perhaps it is all of the "Google-ing" I have been doing? (See closing quote by Nicholas Carr on the next page.)

At the risk of offending all of you concrete sequential thinkers out there, I humbly lay out some of the thoughts and ideas that are currently occupying my abstract random thinking in hopes that at least some of it may strike a chord with you.

Two "big" ideas that I seem to be dwelling on lately:

1. How do we best prepare students to succeed "tomorrow"? In a world that we currently may not even be able to imagine?
2. How do we TRULY measure

student learning? What do the "grades" we assign truly mean?

These questions have caused me to be very interested in two topics that have lots of folks writing and researching about:

- *Learning for the 21st Century*
- *Assessment for Learning*

I must confess that the amount of professional reading that I manage to do this time of year is not quite the amount I would wish it to be. But my exploration of these two big ideas led me to a bit of an epiphany while watering the poor "lone" plant in my office the other day...as I stood there, my eye fell on two precious possessions that have been in my work space over the past number of years. The first, my great-

great uncle's "Grade 2 Math" book dated 1912. The other is a framed photograph of my great-great grandfather who was the first schoolmaster in my hometown (a gift from a proud relative when I became the principal at our local middle/high school).

As I watered the wee plant, my eyes met those of my rather stern-looking distant relative who had shared a passion for education. I began to wonder what he might be thinking if he were able to stand in my shoes in 2008? How would the art and science of his teaching be impacted? It was at that moment it occurred to me that perhaps it might not be impacted as greatly as we might think. Yes, the tools we use to teach have definitely changed, but have the fundamentals of student engagement, motivation and

20th Century Classroom	21st Century Classroom
Time-based	Outcome-based
Focus: memorization of discrete facts	Focus: what students Know, Can Do and Are Like after all the details are forgotten.
Lessons focus on the lower level of Bloom's Taxonomy – knowledge, comprehension and application.	Learning is designed on upper levels of Bloom's – synthesis, analysis and evaluation (and include lower levels as curriculum is designed down from the top.)
Textbook-driven	Research-driven
Passive learning	Active Learning
Learners work in isolation – classroom within 4 walls	Learners work collaboratively with classmates and others around the world – the Global Classroom
Teacher-centered: teacher is center of attention and provider of information	Student-centered: teacher is facilitator/coach
Little to no student freedom	Great deal of student freedom
"Discipline problems" – educators do not trust students and vice versa. No student motivation.	No "discipline problems" – students and teachers have mutually respectful relationship as co-learners; students are highly motivated.
Fragmented curriculum	Integrated and Interdisciplinary curriculum
Grades averaged	Grades based on what was learned
Low expectations	High expectations – "If it isn't good it isn't done." We expect, and ensure, that all students succeed in learning at high levels.
Teacher is judge. No one else sees student work.	Self, Peer and Other assessments. Public audience, authentic assessments.
Curriculum/School is irrelevant and meaningless to the students.	Curriculum is connected to students' interests, experiences, talents and the real world.
Print is the primary vehicle of learning and assessment.	Performances, projects and multiple forms of media are used for learning and assessment
Diversity in students is ignored.	Curriculum and instruction address student diversity
Literacy is the 3 R's – reading, writing and math	Multiple literacies of the 21st century – aligned to living and working in a globalized new millennium.
Factory model, based upon the needs of employers for the Industrial Age of the 19th century. Scientific management.	
Driven by standardized testing mania.	

Adapted from <http://www.21stcenturyschools.com>

learning changed? I wonder?

This leads me to my next “big” question...

What are the fundamentals of teaching and learning that would “stand the test of time”?

Unfortunately, the NBTA News deadline looms before my great-great grandfather and I have had a chance to come up with a definitive list of these fundamentals, but we promise

to get back to you after our next “plant watering” session together.

In the meantime, here are a few items (on the previous page) I have found that may prompt you to create your own list.



“It is hardly surprising that parents, teachers and students often discuss or dispute grades, with the constant threat of panic or conflict if the grade drastically dips. What is shocking is how rare the following question is asked: Does this grade reflect whether or not the student has actually learned something?”

**Paul Barnwell, 6th Grade Teacher
Education Week, June 2008**

“...(W)hat the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation. My mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles. Once I was a scuba diver in a sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski.”

Nicholas Carr

Is Google Making Us Stupid? (Atlantic Monthly, July/August 2008)

Recommended Website: The 10 Principles: Assessment for Learning: http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_4336.aspx