

Solutions for Modern Learning

The New Pillars of Modern Teaching



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Introduction

Technology and Pedagogy

Step on a plane or a bus. Enter a coffee shop or a grocery store, or just walk down a busy street. No matter where we step, we can see people on their smartphones, laptops, and handheld devices. Everywhere we turn, we see people accessing information and making connections.

I get it. In fact, most of us are doing the same thing. Technology has become a natural part of our lives. For educators, it's only when we start to think about it in relation to our teaching—to pedagogy—that it gets harder to understand.

That's the purpose of this book. It's written for educators who notice how ubiquitous technology has become but who are wrestling with what that means for their teaching. I wrote it to help us understand the “why” behind it all. I wrote it to answer the questions many of us are asking: “In an era when our students have so much access outside our schools, why do we need to bring it inside? Why do we need to use these tools in our classrooms?”

I believe the answers to these questions are nothing short of revolutionary. In fact, I think they lie at the heart of the coming change for us and our students. They explain why our traditional pillars of pedagogy—instruction, curriculum, and assessment—are artifacts of an era of scarcity and no longer make sense when learners have access to an abundance of online resources for learning. In today's world, our students' success after they graduate will directly depend on whether they have gained a new set of skills for learning, skills that require us to rethink our teaching. We'll need to give up some control in order to empower our students to (1) design their own instruction, (2) curate (find, group, organize, and share) their own curriculum, and (3) gather feedback. Equally important, we need to look in the mirror and reflect on the extent to which technology will empower our learning, as well.

This is a book about pedagogical change, and that's something I care deeply about. That's because I've walked in your shoes. I've taught middle and high school, undergraduate and graduate courses, led after-school programs and activities, spent nights and weekends preparing for classes, and worked to rethink policies and programs that weren't in the best interests of my students. In short, I'm a teacher.

The Beat of the Ed Tech Drum

As teachers, we hear it all the time: the beat of the educational technology drum. Global spending on classroom technology reached \$13 billion in 2013, the highest it's ever been (EdTech Times, 2014). At this point, half of U.S. public school districts have adopted bring your own device (BYOD), and many private schools have implemented one-to-one student computing (Schaffhauser, 2014). The headlines and book titles urge us to flip our classrooms, blend our learning, and personalize our instruction. We can feel it. We can feel the pressure to start using the next new tool. We can feel the demand to use technology in our classrooms.

Although the data show we have more devices available to us in our schools than ever before, they also illustrate that the changes in our teaching practice are largely cosmetic—the digitization of what we already do. We're uploading homework to learning management systems, replacing overhead projectors with presentation software, and substituting online searches for trips to the library's card catalog. Yet when it comes to teaching and learning, students' experiences remain relatively unchanged. In fact, a 2014 national survey of over six million U.S. teachers and students reveals the limits of how we're using technology in the classroom. For example, 81 percent of students are never asked to share content online with an audience, 74 percent spend less than one hour per year on online research, and 96 percent spend less than one hour per school year learning how to use social networks to access information. Nine out of ten teachers never ask students to collaborate online with students at other schools, and eight out of ten don't ask students to get feedback online ("Technology and Learning Survey," 2014). These aren't isolated statistics.

For all the talk about *how* to incorporate the latest technologies into our classrooms, there's little talk about *why* our established pedagogical practices need to change. There's also been little space to pose the questions, questions like: Why is this moment different than countless other times that something new has come along? Why are these technologies changing the nature of learning? Why are they important to us and to our students? Most importantly, why is this urgent enough that we should spend the time and the energy to change our pedagogy in significant ways?

We need to grapple with *why*, and we need to do it quickly because technology *has* deeply changed learning by irrevocably altering the relationship between learners and their learning. In fact, this change is so momentous that it has laid the

groundwork for the end of teaching as we know it, upending the three traditional pillars of pedagogy—instruction, curriculum, and assessment—and ushering in three new pillars: *design*, *curation*, and *feedback*. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Let's start with *why*.

Start With Why

We can't underestimate the importance of understanding *why* when it comes to prompting significant and lasting change. In fact, thought leader and author Simon Sinek (2009) argues that until we understand why we need to do something—the “purpose, cause or belief”—we'll rarely commit wholeheartedly to the *what* or the *how* (p. 39). He contends that we're neurologically wired to find out “why.” After studying the characteristics of successful organizations, Sinek learns that we'll eagerly take on challenges associated with complex change—the hard work, the overwhelming feelings, even the threat of failure—when we understand their purpose. If the vision for *why* inspires us, we're all in.

Arguments for technology use in the classroom focus on outcomes such as increased student engagement; higher student achievement; increased productivity; enhanced communication among teachers, students, and parents; economic competitiveness; global connectivity; and closing the achievement gap. These are important points (and I'll talk about some of them in this book), but they're not enough to prompt a major change in teaching practice.

As teachers, we're often asked to do things differently. We're asked to adopt a new assessment, to prioritize different instructional strategies, or to develop and implement new curricula. These directives can feel overwhelming, patronizing, or like one more thing to do. After experiencing a number of failed fads, many of us are tempted to adopt the mantra, “This too shall pass”—especially when we can't find a direct connection between a new initiative and our students' success. We need to know *why*.

Three New Pillars of Pedagogy

For me, the hunger to understand the bigger picture led me to pursue a master's and then a doctorate in education at Teachers College, Columbia University, with a focus on teacher learning. In our cohort, we steeped ourselves in the writings of educators, researchers, and pedagogical theorists like Herbert Kliebard, Annette Lareau, Joe Kincheloe, Henry Giroux, Gloria Ladson-Billings, John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and more. Eager to understand how the advent of technology might be changing teacher practice, I focused my research on K–12 teachers doing just that. Between my research, my students, and my own teaching and learning, I began to

think about how increased connectivity had the potential to close the gap between the learner and the learning.

By the time I was teaching educators in Columbia's graduate program in the late 2000s, it was clear to me that technology wasn't a new fad. It was the catalyst for a full-blown paradigm shift, the kind that comes along and upends *everything*. It's a shift that's been muffled by the ever-louder ed tech drumbeat and all the technologies and all the money being spent on them. The drumbeat has drowned out how revolutionary the change really is because the change is about more than efficiency, speed, and economics. It's about empowerment.

In short, technology has made possible a radical change in who owns or organizes the learning. To be clear, ownership of learning is a responsibility that is always shared between teacher and learner, but scarce learning options available in the preInternet age made that ownership challenging for the learner. Often, learners had access to a single teacher, worked from a single source of content (textbook), and had limited opportunities to receive feedback. As a result, even though teachers were struggling with low student engagement for most of the 20th century, they were taking tighter and tighter control over the three traditional pillars of pedagogy. Similarly, even though learners can now own their learning, their schools are still teaching them to wait and to let those long-standing pillars support their learning instead.

Now these three pillars are crumbling. Twenty-first century connectivity empowers students to organize their learning in ways that mirror their experiences outside school. As the old pillars crumble, we have an unparalleled opportunity to rethink our pedagogy and build new pillars to replace them. We get to surrender the tight control that's been the hallmark of traditional pedagogy and instead empower learners to *design* their instruction, *curate* their own curriculum, and *gather feedback* to assess their development.

Contrary to what many might think, this change doesn't diminish teachers' value. In fact, it enhances it. Although our students have some of the skills they need to own their learning, they can deepen and expand those skills working alongside their teachers. Yet, as teachers, we can provide this expertise only if we personally know how to use technology to design, curate, and gather feedback for our own learning.

About This Book

As we move forward in this book, I want to focus on the three new pillars of pedagogy. The first takes us from *instruction to design*, the second from *curriculum to curation*, and the third from *assessment to feedback*. Chapter 1 outlines why we need to change pedagogy. Chapters 2–4 will discuss each change at length, drawing

on real-world examples and relevant stories. Each of these three chapters consists of five sections.

1. An introduction that provides context for the traditional teaching pillar
2. A comparison that illustrates the need to switch from the traditional pillar to its innovation (for instance, “Transition From Assessment to Feedback”)
3. A compelling story of what the new pillar looks like in action
4. Recommendations for ways to use the new pillar, along with guided discussion questions to support learning
5. Recommendations detailing how we can help students use the new pillar, including guided reflection questions to ask ourselves

Following that, chapter 5 discusses the importance of iteration and failing fast as strategies for scaffolding this kind of learning for ourselves and our students.

Each chapter is written to serve as a resource for reflection and discussion among educators. Schools, districts, service agencies, colleges of education, state departments of education, and organizations may find this book helpful. *The New Pillars of Modern Teaching* is intended to meet the needs of diverse sets of teams, such as leadership teams, academic departments, professional learning communities (PLCs), parent groups, instructional coaches, administrative groups, university classes, and more.

Who’s ready for new pedagogies?