

Redesigning Schooling

What kind of teaching for what kind of learning?



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EDITION

Guy Claxton & Bill Lucas

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Introduction

Schools are in need of redesigning. While some are giving their students a genuinely fitting start to life in the 21st century, many are not. We have not yet achieved the critical mass of thinking and practice that will change the system as a whole.

The people who will be doing the requisite thinking and exploring necessary and effective shifts in practice, are school leaders and their support staff. Politicians are not in a good position to do this, because their time horizon is based on the election cycle. Genuine radical change is certainly too slow and too complicated to be reduced to sound bites and election winners. Even academic educationalists, sadly, won't do it either, because they do not have the requisite sense of urgency. Their bent is mostly to be cautious, balanced, analytical, argumentative and reactive, rather than committed, imaginative and practical. With a few exceptions, they will not take the lead.

It is therefore crucial to inspire and encourage school leaders across the country to seize the change agenda and be bold and thoughtful in exploring new directions. Leadership teams know schools well, they know children well, and they have both the understanding and the

staying power to see through innovations that will genuinely take root and make the requisite difference. We hope this booklet will distil what we have learnt about school improvement from these leaders into a rallying cry for many others.



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Our discussion is structured around four fundamental questions, which sit at the heart of the redesigning schooling process. Every school leader needs to consider the following:

1. What are, for your school, the desired outcomes of education (DOEs)?
2. What kinds of learning, in your school, with your students, will deliver your DOEs?
3. What kinds of teaching will lead to the kind of learning that is needed?
4. What kind of leadership is required to create the kinds of teaching and learning desired and so ensure that students leave your school with your DOEs?

The first of these four interlinked questions is obviously of central importance. Every school needs to have a clear, precise specification of the knowledge, abilities, attitudes and values which it wants all its young people – especially those who are not going to be ‘winners’ at the examination game – to have acquired by the time they leave.

You cannot move on to the second until you have answered it carefully. Different kinds of learning processes are needed to deliver different

kinds of outcome. The practical understanding of Ohm's Law needed by an electrician is different from the decontextualised, paper- or screen-based performances required by a university-level physics course, for example. More fundamentally, the learning that develops a deep disposition to be curious, say, is different from the learning that results in a passive, compliant attitude towards knowledge.

Teaching is a way of engaging different kinds of learning processes in learners' minds, so you can't say what kind of teaching your teachers need to do, to deliver your DOEs, until you have responded to the second question.

Whether you create a studio environment, sit students around a Harkness table or set up role-play situations isn't a matter of some nebulous idea of 'good teaching'. It depends on stimulating and engaging the kinds of learning that will deliver the outcomes you said you valued. This third question is complex because its answers are also dependent on a combination of research, experience and personality, as well as on a range of assumptions and beliefs about the teaching process.

Only when you have some clarity about the first three questions can you begin to prioritise the leadership strategies that will cultivate the necessary kinds of teaching. If you decide that you want students to play a greater role in designing and monitoring their own education (because you have decided you want to build qualities of independence and self-evaluation, say), you may have to organise ongoing professional learning in the school so that teachers become more confident in sharing increasing amounts of control with their students. (The evidence that orchestrating the nature of professional learning is one of the most important roles for school leaders has been widely promulgated by Dylan Wiliam; see, for example, Wiliam 2011.)