How People Learn: Implications for Motivation & Practice

Keynote Address

May 18, 2011

at

Nellie Mae Education Foundation’s 2nd Convening for District Level Systems Change Grantees:

“Student Centered Learning – Making Success Inevitable”

Professor Susan P. Curnan
Chair, MBA & MPP Programs
Director, Center for Youth and Communities
The Learning Pyramid*

Passive Teaching Methods

- 5% Lecture
- 10% Reading
- 20% Audio-Visual
- 30% Demonstration

Participatory Teaching Methods

- 50% Group Discussion
- 75% Practice
- 90% Teaching Others

Average Retention Rates

*Adapted from National Training Laboratories. Bethel, Maine
Thank You!
For sharing your insights and questions with me in an attempt to make the most of this hour together.

- Heidi Early-Hersey, Maine School Administrative District #60 (MSAD60)
- Kevin Perks, Maine School Administrative District #60 (MSAD60)
- Mel Arsenault, Jobs for Maine’s Graduates, Inc Portland (JMG)
- David Leo-Nyquist, Burlington/Winooski, Vermont
- Janice Jackson, Randolph, Massachusetts
- Dr. John Freeman, Pittsfield, New Hampshire
- Susan Bradley, Pittsfield, New Hampshire
- Elsa Doré, Central Falls, Rhode Island
- Jan Goldsberry, Sanford, Maine

And Mary S. Harrison, Lynn D’Ambrose, Jessica Spohn, NMEF
These Are No Ordinary Times

The conditions and the facts are both

Alarming & Encouraging
These Are No Ordinary Times
What’s Alarming?

- Grim economic crisis
- Dramatic social, political, economic consequences make achieving the “American Dream” an impossible prospect for many
  
  - E.g.,
    - 30% of students do not graduate from high school on time – a national catastrophe by any measure
    - For African American and Hispanic students, on time graduation is even worse – a 50:50 proposition
    - An epidemic of anti-gay harassment & violence in schools and cyberspace has made traditional education a risky business for lesbian and gay youth
    - The number of children living in poverty continues to rise (15.5M)
    - Teen employment rates plummeted to lowest levels in 60 years.
    - One in four high school graduates attend college and only about half of those who start will finish.
These Are No Ordinary Times
continued

President Obama said, “This is a prescription for economic decline.”

“The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in American Schools” (McKinsey) concluded that the persistent achievement gaps facing our country impose “the economic equivalent of a permanent recession.”

Our Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, said, “In the long run, the only solution to the economic crisis is to educate our way out of it.”
What’s Encouraging?
A Virtual “Knowledge Explosion”

• Research is driving a more holistic “student-centered” approach to education requiring partnerships and systems thinking.
What’s Encouraging?

Your words! Innovating Under Pressure.
“We are keenly aware of the boldness and complexity of this initiative and are committed to building capacity in the Foundation to lead this work and in the communities to carry it out.”

-Mary Sylvia Harrison, Vice President for Programs
Thought Leader Letter, May 2010
"For every complex question, there is a simple answer – and it is usually wrong."

-Anonymous
Nellie Mae Education Foundation

DLSC Logic Model

Wednesday, October 13, 2010
Innovating Under Pressure
DLSC in New England

Moving From
Initial Conditions

Ill-suited legal, reg. org architecture of current US K-12 Public Education System
- Credits for seat time
- State stds & assessments divorce academics from real-life learning
- Test-driven learning environs limit flex in CIA
- Inequitable funding formulas
- Wider community often unwelcome, as consequence many local edu systems are ill-equipped for SCL
- Yet, there are “beacons of innovation”

Moving To
DLSC Long-Term Outcomes

Increased acquisition of 21st Century knowledge and learning skills
- Reduced drop out rates
- Higher graduation rates
- High post-sec enrollment w/o remediation
- Higher academic achievement (measured in appropriate ways)
- Reduced achievement gaps
- Innovative use of technology for SCL
- Sustainable, productive district-community relationships
- New models of local education systems foster broader change

moving from
initial conditions

DLSC strategies

Planning

Phase 1

Pilot

Phase 2

Implementation

Phase 3

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Good work, but I think we need just a little more detail right here!
UNPACKING THE MIRACLE

What do our students need to make success inevitable?

To be:

- Safe
- Healthy
- Well Educated
- Prepared for Adulthood

AKA: Ready for College, Work and Life
My Take on Youth Development: (the short answer)

“Creating conditions where all youth can thrive and successfully transition to healthy, productive, economically viable adulthood.”
Think about your own development and learning.
When did you learn the most?
Where? What were you doing?

“The hardest to learn is the least complicated…”
-Indigo Girls
How Do People Learn?

Three Take Aways:

#1 In Relationship

#2 In many ways, in many places & environments, at all times of night and day, all their live long life

#3 When they are living, learning, working and playing in safe, healthy environments with high expectations, nurturing supports and opportunities
How Do People Learn?

#1 In Relationship

**Research** says:

👩‍🏫 Learning does not take place in the absence of a relationship.

**Students/Learners** say:

👩‍🏫 “I don’t care what you know ‘til I know that you care.”
In order to develop normally, a child requires more complex joint activity with one or more adults who have an irrational emotional relationship with the child.

Somebody’s got to be crazy about that kid.

That’s number one.

First, last, and always.

- Urie Bronfenbrenner
Developmental Building Blocks

- Sense of belonging (attachment)
- Mastery (achievement)
- Independence (autonomy)
- Generosity (altruism)
- Interdependence
What are the Levels of Youth Participation?

- Youth initiated – shared decisions
- Youth initiated and directed
- Consulted and informed
- Assigned but informed
- Tokenism
- Decoration
- Manipulation

Source: International Youth Foundation
Just imagine if we all believed in ourselves and worked together — young people, adults, seniors, all cultures, all religions — all sharing our gifts and talents . . . We have everything it takes.

How Do People Learn?

#2 In many ways, in many places & environments, at all times of night and day, all their live long life

Research says:

We must take different ways of knowing and learning, multiple intelligences and temperaments into account when creating conditions for young people to thrive. And remember, some people “think their way into a new way of acting, and some act their way into a new way of thinking.”

“Learning is constant…and where, when and with whom learning happens should be the variables. This is what we aspire to and want for all children.”

- Nick Donohue, President & CEO
The Nellie Mae Education Foundation

Students/Learners say:

“I learn by doing.” “I like to sit quietly and read.” “I want to work in a group.” “I hate school, I can learn more by watching and talking to people doing really important things.” “I want work work – ‘earn and learn’.” “I want to help my community.”
How Do People Learn?

#2 In many ways, in many places & environments, at all times of night and day, all their live long life

continued

NMEF says:

1. Curriculum, instruction and assessment embrace 21st century knowledge and learning skills
   Learners are actively engaged in meaningful, authentic tasks that build skills in critical thinking, problem solving, and communication as well as core subject areas. Learning opportunities are designed with the learner in mind, feasibly differentiated to attend to variations in prior experience, learning style and needs.

2. Community assets are harnessed to support and deepen learning
   The schools walls are permeable—benefiting from multiple outside individual, organizational, and technological resources. Learner’s experiences build their cultural and academic identities through meaningful exposure to a variety of workplaces, role models, career pathways, community leaders, peer teachers, apprenticeships, internships, college courses, and projects.

3. Time is used flexibly and includes learning opportunities outside the traditional school day and year
   Time is fully utilized to optimize student learning as well as provide time for educators to engage in reflection and planning. Students have equitable opportunities to learn outside of the typical school day and year in a variety of settings and can receive credit for this learning based on demonstration of skills and knowledge.

4. Mastery-based strategies are employed to allow for pacing based on proficiency in skills and knowledge
   Progress is based primarily on acquisition of competencies, rather than a student’s age, hours on task, or credits. Mastery approaches transfer primary responsibility for learning to the student, and provide ongoing information on progress toward goals.
Think about the Individual Temperament, Too! – For Youth and for Partnerships

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicators Can Be Useful:

- **Extraversion-Introversion** scale tells us how we prefer to focus our attention
- **Sensing-Intuition** scale tells us how we like to acquire information
- **Thinking-Feeling** scale tells us how we make decisions
- **Judgment-Perception** scale tells us how we orient toward the outer world
How Do People Learn?

#3 When they are living, learning, working and playing in safe, healthy environments with high expectations, nurturing supports and opportunities

Research says:

Assets that predict adult success include:

- **Physical development**
  - Good health habits, risk management skills
- **Intellectual development**
  - School success, critical thinking, decision-making, life skills, vocational skills
- **Psychological and emotional development**
  - Good mental health, positive self-regard, self-regulation, coping skills, autonomy, effective time management
- **Social development**
  - Connectedness, sense of place, attachment to pro-social institutions, ability to navigate cultural contexts, commitment to civic engagement

What Can We Do to Help Students Thrive?

Ensure that places youth spend time have:*  
- Physical and psychological **safety**  
- Appropriate **structure**  
- Supportive **relationships**  
- Opportunities to **belong**  
- Positive **social norms**  
- Support for **efficacy and mattering**  
- Opportunities for **skill-building**  
- Integration of **family, school and community efforts**

*Features of Positive Developmental Settings

Research shows that youth with supportive relationships on entering high school are 5 times more likely to leave high school ready for their next stage than those with weak relationships…

…and those seniors who were ready at the end of high school were more than 4 times likely to be doing well as young adults.

- Finding Out What Matters for Youth: Testing Key Links in a Community Action Framework for Youth Development
Communities should provide an ample array of program opportunities...through local entities that can coordinate such work across the entire community...[and]

...put in place some locally appropriate mechanism for monitoring the availability, accessibility, and quality of programs...

When we think about it, there is no alternative to working in partnership to build a better education system if

- We are truly “student-centered” and dedicated to preparing New England’s learners for success – educationally, economically and as engaged citizens.
- But how do we close the gap between what we know and what we do?
Where to Start?
Three Magic Questions

• Who are our students?
• What 21st Century outcomes do we need to achieve?
• What mix of educational experiences, supports and opportunities do we need to provide?
MOVING FROM ...

Deficit \rightarrow TO \rightarrow Asset
**Whose Job is Youth Development?**

- Families
- Schools and training organizations
- Youth-serving organizations
- Businesses
- Faith-based organizations
- Libraries, parks, recreation departments
- Health professionals and organizations
- Community-based health and social service agencies
- Government child welfare, health, employment and juvenile justice agencies
- Law enforcement
- THE WHOLE COMMUNITY!
Everyone has part of the answer, no one has it all.
Whose Job is Youth Development?

Youth have much to offer and can be powerful catalysts for change, and they should be actively engaged in the creation of safe, just and prosperous communities.
Challenge to You - Prove the Possible

Take a systems change approach to “close the gap between what we know and what we do.”

“The knowledge of how to combine is the mother of all other forms of knowledge; on its progress depends that of all others.”

-de Tocqueville

Public Demand ● Model Development ● Policy Change
The core responsibility of those who deal in public policy... is not simply to discover as objectively as possible what people want for themselves and then to determine and implement the best means of satisfying these wants. It is also:

• to provide the public with alternative visions of what is desirable and possible,
• to stimulate deliberation about them,
• provoke a reexamination of premises and values, and thus
• to broaden the range of potential responses and deepen society’s understanding of itself.

Tikkun Olam
“Repairing the World”