

Imagine a New Learning Paradigm

By Starr Sackstein on October 12, 2017



- 1) Based on the context, what does the word 'paradigm' mean? Explain.
- 2) Which yellow highlighted statement is most important? Explain.
- 3) Which item on the 'environment for modern learners' is most important? Explain.
- 4) Which item on the 'environment for modern learners' is least important? Explain.
- 5) Would students learn more in this type of 'environment'? Explain.
- 6) Is there a relationship between how hard you work on your education and improvement in your MAP scores? Explain.

When children start exploring the world they live in, they are invigorated and curious. They ask questions, make messes and figure out how things work.

No one has to tell them how to do that. It is an innate calling to understand what is happening around them and make meaning in ways they don't even have words for yet.

The older they get, and the more structured learning becomes, at times, they less curious they grow.

Or maybe it's the system/structures/expectations that limit their abilities to express the curiosity they feel. They demonstrate this in a variety of ways whether it is imaginative play with their friends creating elaborate games with changing rules or building with their Legos or designing computer games and mobile applications.

The simple fact is that students can do more than we think they can and often when we think we are helping them, we're holding them back.

That isn't to say that scaffolding isn't necessary throughout the learning process, but it is to say that maybe if we take off the shackles and trust the process, students will likely surprise us.

One of the biggest challenges in this new paradigm is educator control. The structures that are in place often put the wrong learners in the lead position, forcing students to do things a proscribed way in lieu of experimentation and practice which encourage students to discover new learning.

Perhaps it's time for us to look at schools that promote expeditionary or experiential learning, not just in some spaces that seem to lend themselves easily to maker environments, but to see all content through this lens.

If we want to prepare our modern learners for the world we are sending them into, we need to stop treating them like they are emerging into a newly industrialized world. The American system doesn't work. I'm not sure it ever did unless the goal was to build compliant, direction followers.

Our current world needs innovators. People who can solve problems because they see them differently and can understand different resources. They aren't limited by what they know, only by what they can imagine. So we have to foster environments that allow them to imagine.

Building modern learners makes sure to promote environments that are:

- **Collaborative in nature.** Students need to work with each other and the educator to build necessary problem solving and communication skills.
- **Connected and interdisciplinary.** Allow students to make transparent connections across content because all of the learning is inherently linked.
- **Tech enhanced.** Students are using whatever devices they have available. Whether school issued computers, tablets or laptops or student owned smart devices, students need to learn how to use these tools for learning. Use play as a means to learn and build frustration and failure tolerance.
- **Reflective.** Students need time to think about the learning and understand the growth and process. This isn't to say they won't think about content, but they must think about what they know and can do and set goals based on where they need to go next.
- **Safe.** We need to promote cultures in our spaces where kids feel able to be open and honest and take major risks in their learning. So teachers can build these environments through relationships and expectations developed together with the students.
- **Creative.** The atmosphere must prize innovation and thoughtfulness. Instead of saying no because a teacher is uncomfortable with a student idea, the teacher must say yes more and allow for students to take risks with their ideas, being allow to make mistakes without evaluation, just with feedback.
- **Open.** We have to reimagine what the physical spaces look like too. No more rows of student drones. More collaborative furniture, open spaces, color and other stimulating and thoughtful wall coverings that inspire. We must go beyond pithy posters created from the outside, to student generated art and learning that promotes and celebrates the learning happening in the space.
- **Competence compatible.** Instead of leveling students up by age, students should be allowed to accelerate based on levels of mastery so as to keep them moving at a pace that is more natural and fluid rather than arbitrary. It favors mastery of skills and learning content over seat time and allows students to co-create and design the learning and success criteria based on standards.
- **Flexible.** It considers every learner and provides multiple opportunities with feedback for every child to be successful in the time and pace that works for him and/her.

We've lived inside of the current structure for way too long and it is failing way too many children, even the ones who are successful at playing the game of school (maybe even especially them).

As we continue to acknowledge the nuance of learning and adjust expectations accordingly, **student engagement and ownership over their own learning will improve.** It's time to de-emphasize testing as a means of accountability and start working with the community to build relationships that apply the skills being learned and also better our surroundings.

What does the ideal learning environment look like to you? Please share.