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Reinventing Schools: It's Time to Break the Mold by Charles Reigeluth and Jennifer Karnopp

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Reinventing Schools: It's Time to Break the Mold

by C.M Reigeluth, & J.R. Karnopp,
Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2013
145 pp.

Review: *Reinventing schools: It's time to break the mold.*

by Marilyn Chu, Western Washington University

Making the argument for fundamental change in the U.S. educational system due to inadequate preparation of our students in relation to global measures of performance isn't new. Comparing and contrasting the different assumptions underlying the outdated industrial age model of schooling versus the current information age needs of learners, has also been explored in more depth elsewhere. The contribution of *Reinventing Schools* to current thinking about educational change efforts begins with a reminder of the obvious core areas that have the possibility of refocusing schools on *student learning*.

The authors make the case, through three examples – a school, a school district, and a school model – that have implemented features of a learner-centered paradigm, along with evidence of effectiveness for increased student academic success, by focusing on the following:

- *student learning progress*, not on a time based exploration of topics,
- *learner-centered instruction*, customized for individuals in both content and methods,
- *an expanded curriculum* centered in projects and collaboration with peers,
- *new roles* for teachers as guides, mentors, facilitators and co-learners,
- students as self-directed, with *digital technology* playing a central role,
- *a nurturing school climate* with ongoing multi-year relationships with teachers and
- *new organizational structures* for the school as community learning cooperatives with integrated human services. (Reigeluth & Karnopp, pp. 57-59)

The final suggestion of rethinking the school as part of a new organizational structure is perhaps the most provocative. It is the only area discussed by the authors that addresses the need for a fundamental shift from a hierarchical, factory-model of school structure to one that is decentralized, customized, and community-driven. Grades, grade levels, class periods and courses would all be eliminated as antithetical to what is needed in the information age. The authors propose small schools of teachers, to be called *guides*, collaboratively running their own schools in management teams. The small schools would act as specialized learning cooperatives that are part of a larger cluster of schools. Maximum choice would be allowed for families to find the best schools for their children's interests and needs. Strangely, the authors do not address the common situation of teachers not

reflecting the local community demographics, culture, and economic class context and seem to assume that if offered, families will contribute their viewpoints.

Who manages all of this? A learning center agency supports rather than supervises the schools, with the local school district board setting and monitoring the attainment of community standards. Unfortunately, the authors have chosen two of the three educational examples from private or charter schools. Only the Chugach School District in Anchorage, Alaska, is offered as a public school example of achieving high academic outcomes, with a majority Native Alaskan population focused on customized and collaborative projects. All students have individualized learning plans with integrated learning standards. Since the 300 students are dispersed over 22,000 remote miles, and technology is central to instruction, it may take other case examples to motivate most US education school systems to adopt fundamental structural changes.

Educators seeking a framework to be more learning-centered, will find in the final two chapters support for understanding the change process and systems thinking. Here the authors revisit Senge (2012) and his urging to remember to look beneath the surface events to observe ongoing patterns and forces that influence our mental models. This emphasis helps to explain why changing a single school in a district is rarely sustainable, as larger forces usually pull the school back to the district's factory-school model.

In an easy-to-read style, the authors make the case that changing mindsets is the place to start in order to alter currently outdated educational systems. In other words, educational systems change begins as a collective learning process for the stakeholders: students, families, teachers, and administrators. It is this section that would help any change agent in a school and should be read and re-read. Detailed change principles with criteria to consider, such as consensus-building, stakeholder ownership, political support, readiness, capacity and culture, leverage, process expertise, time, money and technology, are outlined.

The question this book may help the reader to consider most is; *What comes first, change through behavior or change through beliefs?* Whatever your answer, and especially if your answer is *both*, this text will support your own reflections with ample concepts and evidence to consider.

Reference

Senge, P. M. (2012), *Schools that learn: A fifth discipline fieldbook for educators, parents and everyone who cares about education*. New York, NY: Crown Business.