DEVELOPING HUMANITY
Education's Emerging Role

By **Michael Fullan**

In 2012, I noticed two rumblings in the status quo that were connecting in an unwitting conspiracy. One was the push of boredom of traditional schooling that showed that student engagement in school steadily declined from Kindergarten to Grade 10 where barely more than one-third of the students were actively involved. The second force was the emerging draw of the external digital world that instantly drew young people to a seemingly limitless world.

At that time, five years ago, it was like reading tea leaves. It was hard to predict where it might go. To capture it in its beginning state I wrote *Stratosphere: Integrating Technology, Pedagogy, and Change Knowledge* (Fullan, 2013). With my slight habit of hyperbole I wrote, "My prediction is that around 2013 the quality and abundance of … these innovations will explode." (p. 75) I did not know what I was talking about in detail, but knew that I wanted to be on the scene. Actually in the scene as it happened.

We then created New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (NPDL) (www.npdl.global). New pedagogies refer to different and deep learning partnerships between and among students, teachers and families; deep learning itself involves immersing learners in the 'Competencies,' known as the 6 Cs: Character, Citizenship, Collaboration, Communication, Creativity and Critical Thinking.

We set out to establish a living learning laboratory where schools and their 'systems' could develop NPDL-like innovations on the ground by which they, and all of us, could learn as we go. We developed protocols and rubrics with just enough focus to shape but not control the work. We wanted groups to join because they thought they wanted to go in this direction, not really knowing what 'this' really entailed.

We now have some 1000 schools participating from seven countries. Ontario is a big player with close to 20 boards involved and many more engaged in deep learning. It is important to emphasize that this is a *system strategy* in two senses. First, groups of schools join, which leads to whole district engagement. Second, schools enter knowing that not only will they develop, but also that they are committing to learning from and contributing to the learning in other schools; indeed they now are part of changing the system.

One might think that our team is 'leading' NPDL, but the truth is that it is leading us. Our strategy, we now realize has 'strengthened the middle' (districts and groups of schools), and 'liberated the bottom' (teachers, students and families).

In this article I want to highlight the biggest surprise of the lot: that deep learning, when immersed in real problems locally and globally, uncovers, cultivates and yields a natural tendency among young people to 'help humanity.' This was not in our design. It happened organically, and I would say inevitably.

A few examples, and I hasten to say that these are not ad hoc 'problem-based learning' projects but are instead part and parcel of the total curriculum:

A school in **Australia** built its learning around what they called 'enigma missions.' One group studied autism because they knew people who were autistic; another took up the issue of homelessness and drew some important conclusions leading one student to say, "I feel so complete,' not in the sense of being done but in having brought something valuable to fruition.

In poor **Uruguay**, schools were given simple robotic kits with YouTube-like instructions. One small group solved the problem of birds eating vegetables from the garden by constructing a simple robot that vibrated when birds came near. One 10-year-old observed, "I am supposed to help humanity so I decided to start in my own neighbourhood."

In **Ontario**, one group focused on how to improve city life; another studied the concept of "beauty in life" in all its forms. We find also that students are becoming 'change agents,' literally causing change in pedagogy and learning environments. For instance, the principal of a high poverty elementary school who entered his office one morning and found an iPad on his desk with a sticky note that said, 'play me.' The video was from his Grade 1 students describing their ideas for changing the learning environment in their classroom so that they could learn better.

We literally cannot keep up with the myriad of instances of this kind of explosive learning that on the one hand springs up simultaneously and independently across the NPDL world, and on the other hand spreads like contagion. But there is something more profound happening.

Developing Humanity

There is a new kind of leadership at the school, district and system level that is required to 'run' with these new developments. It requires learning and leading in equal measure (Fullan, 2016). These leaders encourage and allow innovation, participate as learners, help take stock of what is being learned, and otherwise 'liberate the bottom.'

There are at least six factors that conspire to give these developments the potential of being profound forces for radically transforming the education system.

First, **education becomes real-life, real time for students**. They become attracted to today's issues that come to mean something personal – indeed igniting their passion, engagement and excitement. The 6Cs in action enable this immersion.

Second, **it is about hands on doing** – making something meaningful happen.

Third, **it generates new life and meaning for teachers and other educators**.

Fourth, **it draws in students who are traditionally disaffected by traditional schooling**. We call this the 'equity hypothesis' and are now actively testing it – the new experiences generate motivation and involvement of all students.

Fifth, **parents and families are now connecting to schools** because of and through their children and the new learning that is occurring.

Finally, **we are discovering/uncovering that young people by and large are intrinsically motivated to 'help humanity,'** not for altruistic reasons but rather because this is how they want to be as humans. Young people – the millennials if you like – are least committed to the status quo, and more committed to making changes, locally and globally.

Deep learning of the kind described in this article is giving young people the vehicle to learn and lead today. They are literally becoming better citizens today for tomorrow.

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