

Teacher Metamorphosis

School administrators who do not want a whole-sale insurrection as they move schools towards consumerized learning need to be as inclusive as possible with the ideas in this book.

Merely implying that teachers need to change is enough to get you hints of revolution. And it's not that they need to change – that would not be a proper way to say it. It's that the world is changing, and they need to develop the skills to be something more.

What's being asked by schools is a metamorphosis into a new being, with new super-powers, including being equipped with knowledge about consumerized learning and what it means *for* them. What do they get out of it? Ideally, they get the magical ability to provide truly individualized learning automatically *and* gain back tons of free time, including time to pay attention to all the learners for real.

The shift to teachers as digital lesson planners without true consumerized learning objects is taking a great toll. It *appears* to most teachers to be an unfettered free-for-all to use any app and create lessons at will from as many free open education resources (OER) as possible. In fact, it is a greater burden than most realize. As Michele Alvarez, a charter school teacher with twenty-five years of experience said in the Visalia Times Delta newspaper on February 6, 2015, “The teachers are exhausted. We’re being overworked and the district is taking advantage of their definition of

Key Points

- Teachers need to know that real consumerized learning makes them a superhero with individualization capabilities for every student and gives a ton of their time back.
- Teachers get the magical ability to provide truly individualized learning automatically and gain back tons of free time, including time to pay attention to all the learners for real.
- Leaders have several ways to give hope to teachers to help them to transition.

“The teachers are exhausted. We’re being overworked and the district is taking advantage of their definition of what is a professional day since we’re not hourly employees.”

*Michele Alvarez
Teacher, Charter Alternative
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what is a professional day since we’re not hourly employees. We’re only paid for 7 hours of work. They’re assigning more work and mandating more work than can be completed. They’re getting lots of work that we’re mandated to do for free.”

The article also cited Karl Kildow, the president of Visalia Unified Teachers Association, addressing the school board saying, “Teaching is a contracted profession which regularly extends beyond usual work hours. Grading, lesson plans, after school meetings and more are done on a teacher’s own time typically. But with the adoption of new curriculum, textbooks, planning resources and more, the workload has been extended tremendously this year.”

“There’s a host of things an educator has to do,” Kildow continued. “It’s part of the gig. The issue for us is the district has continued to pile on things that take time outside of that seven hours. And particularly this year, that outside time has even doubled or tripled depending on the assignment they have. It’s affecting personal life, it’s affecting health.

“More regularly now than ever before (I) hear of scenarios where teachers have to choose between personal family functions and classroom prep time outside of classroom time, with work usually edging the other out.”

“When we have people who must choose between their daughter’s dance recital or getting ready for the next day, something’s gone wrong,” Kildow said. “Those are the stories I’m hearing now, people having to make those choices.”¹

To this point on how teachers’ lives are changing, Elliot Soloway, a professor from the

Department of Computer Science and Engineering at the University of Michigan, wrote to the Learning Counsel in August 2016 to say “Apropos of our conversation there (at a recent conference), here is a quote we recently copied down quickly from a conversation with a 3rd grade teacher”:

“In the absence of textbooks, individual teachers are forced to spend hours searching the internet for resources. The process is not only time consuming, but much of the material online has little to no editorial oversight. With no textbooks, every teacher becomes an improvisational curriculum designer, which they try to do on-the-fly while also teaching their classes every day. When this amount of effort is multiplied by all the teachers doing the same thing around the country, it is clear that the wheel is being reinvented nightly, to the detriment of both the students and the teachers.”

This is a tale of woe told nationwide as schools shift to digital curriculum. The Learning Counsel asked one superintendent in Boston to “do the math” of what it was really costing his district. He did, as a roomful of other senior educators coaxed him on. At the estimated twenty-five percent of teacher time spent searching around and custom building lessons out of free open education resources (OER), his cost across all teachers was in the tens of millions. It was easily enough to have paid for software development professionals to not just purchase, but to *build* custom sophisticated digital curriculum content with educational rigor.

Notable Fact:

“In our efforts to ensure a positive experience for our teachers and avoid resistance to adoption, we started our Learning Management System (LMS) implementation by introducing teachers to the most simple communication, collaboration, and assignment submission tasks in the LMS. In retrospect, it would have been a good idea to provide teachers with brief preview-demos of our digital library search and personalization features. Many of our teachers were unaware of these tools.

“In some cases, teachers were unaware of the more than 1½ million high-quality digital learning objects from more than 30 publishers, searchable by topics and learning standards. A number of teachers did not know until recently that they can link assessment questions to specific learning standards. Upon completion of a properly meta-tagged assessment, the library automatically produces a list of potential resources for re-teaching and re-learning. Such preview-demos would have provided teachers with a powerful incentive to learn more and move at a faster pace.”

*L. Beatriz Arnillas, MFA, SPHR
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There are systems emerging to create greater efficiencies. Knowstory has been built expressly to create the story of a teacher's own inventory of digital learning objects, however they have been created. When a teacher associates to a school, they join a community forum of shared learning objects and inventory controls, while still retaining their own independent page and lists. Analysis of coverage models can be done, and more. Being a social forum, Knowstory allows users to see what others use in other schools, rate objects, and promote their own special mixes. It is built, in other words, to bring structure to the chaos and changing learning object universe for individual teachers and institutions.

Give Hope

The answer for administrators includes giving hope to teachers about their future. They need the relief of consumerized learning to lead towards differentiated learning for each and every student. In this future, teachers function as learning tour guides, chefs, designers, air traffic controllers, or orchestral leaders of digital courseware and objects. They do not have to be “all” as classroom leader, finding and building all their own digital curriculum. They can win at directing students' learning from the software.

Leaders can also give hope in these ways:

- Paid professional resources can be funded to ease their burden. Learning Management Systems and single sign-on solutions can help make sense of all of the learning objects.
- Have everybody use Knowstory to keep a dynamic inventory of everything and watch what is working nationally.
- Try to find the good courseware that is super awesome (consumerized) and giant collections sites with tons of learning things all seamlessly accessible.
- Admit that Open Education Resources (OER) is great but can be a burden when teachers have to be in charge of every little thing while riding the bucking bronco of changing technology.
- Time can be dedicated and paid to help get teachers through the transition.
- The transition to tech will be never ending and teachers' jobs will need to be remodeled to provide for the regular acclimation to tech use.
- Assist teams and even online professional support groups to be used.
- Support development of skills that give teachers the ability to freelance digitally as well as be creative so that they have

long-term viability even working from home and even if they ever disassociate from the institution.

- Allow the mixing of digital learning objects into an artful and practical scope and sequence. This is itself the new “know-mixing,” just like music playlists, and is a sellable commodity in the future, divorced from the content – the list in sequence and projects and tests around it. This is the secret sauce of custom learning for any subject, and when customized to individual learners, is the new teaching or mentoring online or in person with supervised screen learning.
- Shun awkward terminology that points just to generic pedagogy, like blended, virtual, flipped, or online in favor of celebrity for the individual teacher. Use words that describe new person-to-person realities, such as “Guide,” “Mentor,” “Mixer,” “Pro,” “Agent,” and other titling conventions that make much ado about the new glamour of consumerized learning brought to you by (insert teacher name here).
- Teach teachers that they are part of a team—not alone. Individually they are important, but as a team and group, they are unstoppable in creating a great experience hub for students that competes with fully online consumerized learning.
- Let them know that teaching online, being a student’s guide rather than source of all

knowledge, is the new “thing” happening globally and that the future is wide and bright for those roles.

At a Learning Counsel discussion in San Diego, Kim Knight, a teacher and instructional coach from Beaumont Unified School District, told a story about how her school started a 1-1 initiative so that every student had a computer. Teachers were on their own to build out a software set of lessons. One day a central office administrator trotted by and mentioned that she could use a log in for a math system. She checked it out. She started to use it as supplemental for students, a sort of game for the high achievers or slower students. The more she got into viewing the program, the more she understood what it was actually doing. Soon she slid other materials aside and was using the courseware as the core resource for teaching math.

She delighted in telling this story because she saw significant gains for students and could tell the story *statistically* of their gains.

This is the truth of the transition to digital – help teachers to look and know what they are viewing and what the software can and should do to help them teach students.

It’s the story of student gains because of something as mild-mannered as a willingness to try, to look, to play with software, and to just see.

¹ Stephanie Weldy, "VUSD teachers discontent with working conditions," *Visalia Times Delta Newspaper*, February 6, 2015, <http://www.visaliatimesdelta.com/story/news/education/2015/02/06/vusd-visalia-teachers-discontent-working-conditions-black-shirts/23004093/>

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