



## A Visionary Look at New Schools for a New Century

*Patricia Kokinos*

To quote renowned futurist and rabble-rouser R. Buckminster Fuller, "What usually happens in the educational process is that the faculties are dulled, overloaded, stuffed, and paralyzed so that by the time most people are mature, they have lost their innate capabilities."

He saw before the rest of us that our education system was *not* doing the most important thing: nurturing the intellectual and creative potential of each child and igniting natural learning capabilities. Instead, we were filling children with disconnected information, narrowing and controlling ideas through systematization, and funneling each child through the 20th century on a conveyor belt of the great industrial machine.

We now know that human brains are designed to synthesize multiple factors and functions and build webs of meaning. Schools can no longer get by with forcing children's brains into narrow, linear, carefully circumscribed channels of thought. Just as the printing press caused an explosion of information in the European Renaissance, the World Wide Web is fueling a technological renaissance, igniting the next stage of human development. Now is the moment to stop quibbling about test scores and teacher evaluation and step back far enough to see the expansive design of a much larger picture.

The entire construct of public education must change—and rapidly—if we intend to be part of this startling advance. It must be smarter, faster, lighter, more adaptable, more collaborative, more open-ended, more technologically integrated, and more connected to the global community.

Curricula that are ponderous, fact-filled, and formulaic must give way to innovative means of connecting ideas for real-time problem solving. And we should expect thinking and problem solving from every student, not just elite populations. We must encourage entrepreneurship among educators and students and cease dependence on conformity.

"Coaching" academic subjects must replace lecturing about them. Teaching should be a professional and collaborative act, transparent to colleagues, parents, and students. In addition, governing hierarchies must give way to collaborative processes involving parents, teachers, school leaders, and students. Funding must flow to teachers, students, and schools and away from the tyranny of textbook companies, testing companies, school supply companies, and others who force-feed students homogenized products as a way of controlling costs and enhancing profit margins.

Following the model of the human brain and the Internet, schools must morph into interlinked webs with numerous nodes and connections, providing a human-friendly network of support for each child—a community where students work together in small groups and teachers team up to work to their strengths and share ideas and responsibility. That means open classrooms instead of closed doors. That means casual spaces for groups or pairs where students and teachers can be comfortable, instead of the confining atmosphere of rigid timing and bells and hard-backed desks in tight rows.

We must vastly reinvent schooling by creating a new paradigm that includes

- **Moving our schools' concepts and designs from "factory" to "family"**—away from mechanical models and toward human-friendly models of working and interacting.
- **Flattening the bureaucratic hierarchy** by moving more highly educated people into direct contact with kids every day.
- **Creating small, personalized, supportive learning environments** for every child, at every age.
- **Allowing flexibility of space and time for collaborative teams** of teachers to work with teams of students.
- **Providing time and training** for teachers to reinvent their roles as professional leaders and coaches for academic learning.
- **Making use of new approaches to learning that build on higher-order thinking skills, creativity, collaboration, and entrepreneurship** for students and teachers.

Such a sea-change in thinking is asking a great deal of the American public and of our politicians and policymakers. Refusing to change, however, is an even greater risk when the world is rushing past us at warp speed.

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