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What Is Next Generation Instruction?

I did what I knew. And when I knew better . . . I did better.

—Maya Angelou¹

Think for a moment about the word *teaching*. The images that emerge are probably reflective of your own academic experiences. Most likely, you imagine straight rows of desks with the teacher in front, sharpened number 2 pencils, copied worksheets, and textbooks. Some of you may remember a few projects, experiments, and field trips that inspired new understanding, but few will remember school as fundamentally those things. What if instruction, assessment, and community building had blended seamlessly into one another? What if assessments *taught* you something new—about yourself and about the content—and every instructional choice your teacher made led to a new understanding of what you knew and could do? What if each led to a stronger learning community, providing a platform for even more rigorous learning?

Now think about your own classroom. What if you could

- enhance the quality of the learning experience?
- assist students in learning how to learn?
- create learning that was lasting and transferable?

I view Next Generation instruction as being synonymous with facilitation, coaching, or acting as the “guide on the side” (as opposed to the “sage on the stage”). Ted Sizer, in writing what would become the foundational text of the Coalition of Essential Schools, referred to a shift away from the paradigm of “the teacher as the primary deliverer of educational services” to one in which the student acted as the worker and the teacher was the coach (Sizer, 1984/2004, p. 226). Long-time educational reformer Deborah Meier agreed that

improved learning is best achieved by improving teaching and learning relationships, by enlisting the energies of both teachers and learners. . . . Human learning, to be efficient, effective, and long-lasting, requires the engagement of learners on their own behalf, and rests on the relationships that develop between schools and their communities, between teachers and their students, and between the individual learner and what is to be learned. (Meier, “Alternative Assumptions,” 2000)

Students are continually asked to memorize and regurgitate—to parrot facts in order to achieve on standardized assessments—but are rarely asked to think. Now, I’ve yet to meet a teacher who entered the profession out of a deep and powerful desire to help students memorize

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meaningless factoids. Universally, we aspire to more for our students—we want them to become participatory citizens who are curious about the world around them. If we don’t help them to become just that, they’re going to find themselves prepared for a world that no longer exists. The best way to teach them to question, to

evaluate, to problem-solve, and to communicate is to put them in situations where these skills are nonnegotiable while also teaching them how to do these things well (Wagner, 2008). The entire 21st century skills movement is based upon the reality that schools must move toward a “new pedagogy” based in active problem solving and engagement with material. “The world is changing,” wrote Ken Kay (2010), director of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills. “Manual labor and routine tasks have given way to interactive, nonroutine tasks—even in many traditionally blue-collar occupations” (p. xvi). In the conclusion to their 2008 *Phi Delta Kappan* review of assessment across multiple countries, Linda Darling-Hammond and Laura McCloskey (2008) described what students “need to know to succeed in today’s knowledge-based economy: the abilities to find, analyze, and use information to

solve real problems; to write and speak clearly and persuasively; to defend ideas; and to design and manage projects” (p. 271).

As states across the country begin to implement the Common Core State Standards, we are recognizing that the standards themselves call for a different way of teaching. Since the curriculum is designed to encourage not only recall of information but also the application of this information, educators must find ways for students to dig more deeply into the material being taught (CCSSO, 2011). The pedagogical approaches most able to lend themselves to this application (problem-, project-, place-, and inquiry-based instruction, for example) require teachers to take on this new role as guide and resource. Posnick-Goodwin (2010) wrote about the impact of new standards in terms of skills, and her words can just as easily describe a new approach to content:

The new standards have much more of a focus on application and making sure kids use the skills and strategies they learn. The new standards are more practical with less emphasis on learning skills and more on actually using those skills, thinking and doing. There should be more discourse in the classroom, more opportunities for kids to talk to each other. (Posnick-Goodwin, 2010)

We are more likely to achieve this discourse and application when we give our students not only the chance to gain new content knowledge but also the confidence to engage with one another without depending on the teacher to act as the instructional linchpin. The emerging theme is clear—we need to rethink our methods if the next generation of students is going to be successful.

Over and over across time, philosophy, and context, we hear the same thing: “The learner does the learning” (Danielson, 2010). This is just as it should be. But teacher-preparation programs often create educators who teach the way teachers (in recent memory) have always taught—through lectures, worksheets, and textbooks. While some programs may offer theoretical training in constructivist methods (i.e., problem- or project-based learning, service learning, etc.), the methods modeled by professors are more likely to reflect traditional pedagogy. While these methods still have a place, they no longer represent the full spectrum of pedagogy. Peter Senge (2000) wrote:

If a child’s primary orientation in school becomes pleasing a teacher, this attitude will draw attention away from developing the capacities for more rigorous self-assessment. Meanwhile, a cornerstone of lifelong learning is the capacity for objective self-assessment—the ability to judge for yourself how well you are

doing. In effect, teacher and student collude in shifting the developmental burden from self-assessment to pleasing others. The result can be adults who spend their careers currying favor rather than doing something they truly regard as meaningful. Few educators would espouse this, but the system of specialization and control produces it. (p. 44)

Even well-intentioned educators, trained in the use of different methods, may be find themselves tied up in the textbooks, curriculum guides, standards, and other demands placed upon them.

BOX 1.1 A NOTE ABOUT TECHNOLOGY

For many, Next Generation instruction is synonymous with technology integration. While technology is certainly an important tool in the 21st century, it is not the only tool a Next Generation instructor has in the toolbox. While reference will be made throughout the text to situational usages of technology, the more important element is the number of times you *won't* see technology used by our instructors. According to technology integration specialist Dan Callahan, "Sometimes the lesson is great as it is and you shouldn't use technology. It's like anything else—look at your goals and your options and figure out what is a good fit." If you're not currently using any technology at all—if you don't even know how to use the tools available to you—then of course you need to take a hard look at what you might want to do differently and why you're not using what you have. Are you unaware of what's available? Do you lack training? Are you afraid of breaking something or looking foolish? Start by using your technology for your own professional learning—explore Twitter or YouTube to learn about something that you're interested in. Play with your interactive whiteboard. Ask colleagues you trust to show you what technology they're using—ask a student you trust the same question. Instead of starting out thinking "How can I use this for instruction?" start out asking yourself "How can this help me learn something I want to know?" Begin as a learner rather than as an instructor, and you'll have better results. Dan says,

The challenge is trying to build resilience in teachers. There's a lot of talk about kids being "digital natives," but I'm not a fan of that term. I don't think kids know any more than we think they do. They know the stuff they know, and they know it very well, but there's a lot they don't know. They know what they know because they had a reason to learn it. They'll figure it out because it has a value for them. The biggest (technological) difference between adults and kids is that kids are willing to try again when things don't go right. When teachers try something—a website, say—and it doesn't work, and then they'll blame it on "Technology" writ

large. It's not technology; it's the site. Find a better site. It's really a matter of training teachers to do what the kids do. Lots of teachers use the tool "ask three before me." Wouldn't it make sense to do the same thing with the technology—especially if it would improve instruction?

In short, technology is a tool to do a job better. It's not the job itself.

There is a moment, sometimes, when a teacher recognizes that she's working a lot harder than her students. This blinding flash of the obvious can lead either to an abandonment of the profession or to a change in philosophy (or another last-minute Google search for lesson plans and activities!). The wise educators—the ones who choose to remain in the classroom—recognize that this way of teaching is exhausting, unsustainable, and not terribly effective for students. They then seek a way to shift the heavy lifting onto the shoulders of those who should rightly be carrying the load—the students. It is in the process of making this shift that they discover a new level of rigor, engagement, passion, and relevance. A new pedagogical world awaits those who are willing to make the change.

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WHAT ARE THE PURPOSES OF NEXT GENERATION INSTRUCTION?

The purposes of Next Generation instruction, to restate the definition from the introduction, are simply these:

- To intentionally structure quality learning experiences
- To assist students in finding new ways of taking responsibility for their learning
- To aid students in creating changes (in both habit and content knowledge) that are lasting and transferable

In order to understand Next Generation instruction, with its roots in facilitation and experiential learning, we need to understand the nature of experience. We all have experiences every day. We get up when the alarm goes off, or we hit the snooze button (and are either on time or late for work). We fill the gas tank or we don't (and either reach our destination

or find ourselves stranded on the side of the road). Sometimes we think about the choices we make and their connected results, and then these events become learning experiences. Sometimes we don't take the time for that reflection, and then . . . we don't learn. The difference between the two (an experience versus a *learning* experience) was described by Kolb (1984) via the "elements of a learning experience." (A full exploration of the varied models for experiential learning would require another book completely—and that book has already been written by a number of other authors.) Kolb described an experiential cycle that includes the following:

- Concrete experience
- Observation of and reflection on that experience
- Application of abstract concepts to those reflections and observations
- Testing of new ideas based on that application

For example, I may realize that I never wake up on my own before 7:30 and that the drive to the airport will take 90 minutes. I will use that knowledge to make plans for catching a 9:00 AM flight. I will set my alarm to ensure sufficient time to wake up, dress, and catch the flight with sufficient time to park and make my way through the security gauntlet. This process—"getting to my flight on time"—is a *concrete experience* in itself. Once I'm safely seated on the plane, I may take time to *observe and reflect* on the success or failure of my plans. Was I scrambling to get to the gate on time? Was I overly rushed? Appropriately organized with all the documentation needed to fly in the 21st century? I will *apply abstract concepts* such as different routes to the airport, different airlines or airport choices, or a streamlined plan for getting dressed in the morning to see if there might be a better way to approach the process in the future. I will then adjust my future preflight plans to factor in new knowledge gained from this specific experience and *will test that new idea* the next time I travel.

Antioch's Critical Skills Program applies a similar model to classroom instruction, documenting a two-tiered experience in which students do the following:

1. **Engage** in a task (or "challenge").
2. **Exhibit** their learning.
3. **Reflect** on the process and knowledge used and gained.
4. **Transfer** that new knowledge and skill to different situations.

And in which teachers take the following actions:

1. **Design** learning experiences, focusing on both content and process skills.

2. **Coach** students as they engage in the experience and exhibit their learning.
3. Provide **feedback** (in concert with student reflection) about areas for future growth and skills attained.

No matter which model of experiential learning seems most aligned with your own background, the commonalities are clear. Student learning experiences can be carefully crafted to produce desired learning outcomes, but this learning will take place only if opportunities are provided for students to assess the content and quality of their learning and to plan to transfer that learning into future experiences.

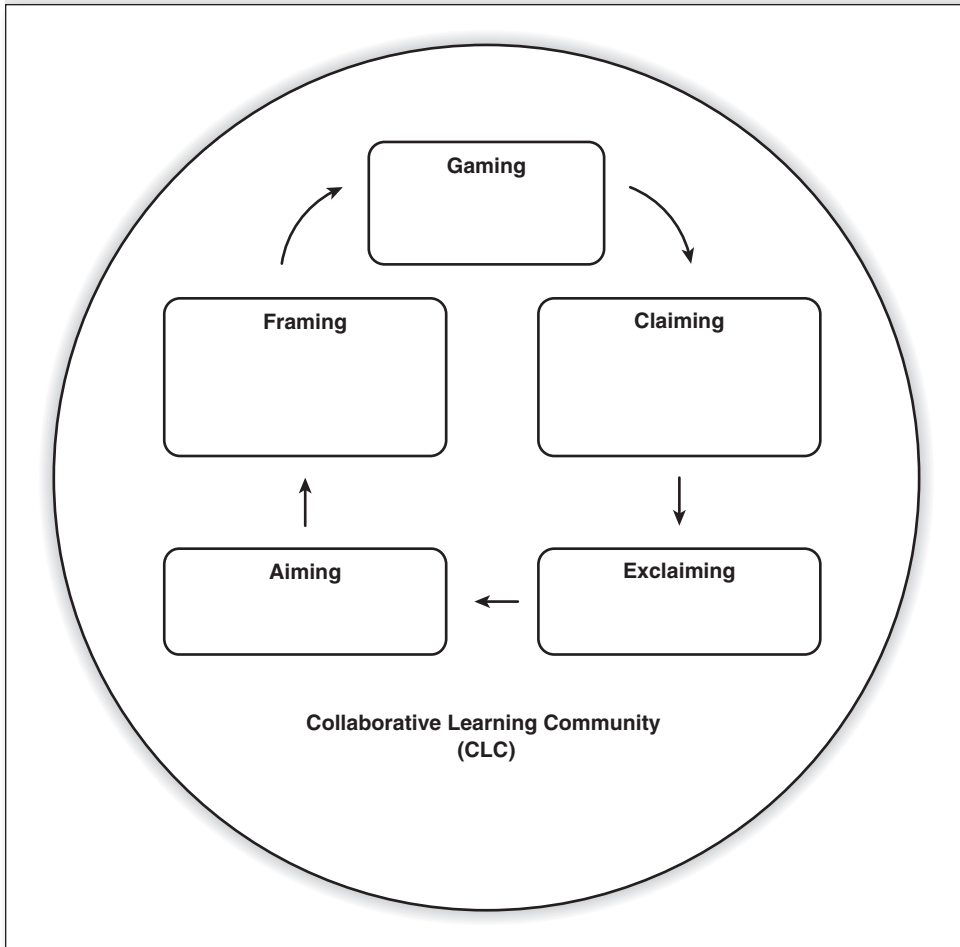
Many classrooms currently provide problems for students to solve, projects to create, interesting questions in which to engage, and opportunities for exhibitions of one sort or another. The Common Core State Standards and related inquiry-driven instructional methods (e.g., International Baccalaureate, problem-, project-, or placed-based learning; service learning) will require more of this in the future. As we move toward these more student-centered methods, we must be mindful of and attentive to the reflection and transfer elements of experience. These key elements are the most important, because reflection and transfer are the moments in which learning occur—the moments in which students understand and integrate their learning into their real lives. Skilled facilitators are prepared not only to ask the right question at the right time but also to explicitly structure assignments and learning tasks to build in opportunities for reflection and transfer. They skillfully guide students through their experiences, calling to mind the old saw about being “the guide on the side” instead of “the sage on the stage.”

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The elements of this process have been combined into the framework for Next Generation instruction (see Figure 1.1), which will serve as the spine of this book. It has been adapted with permission from the work of outdoor and adventure educators at the American Youth Foundation.

The foundation of the framework is the collaborative learning community (CLC). The CLC is more than a cooperative environment, more than basic kindness and courtesy (though those are certainly important elements). It is an intentionally created classroom culture in which all the students (and adults) are able to make important contributions based on their unique skills and talents (McGrath, 2007). It’s the result of careful planning throughout the life of the class, both as a separate task and as the result of your instruction and assessment. In the next

Figure 1.1 Framework for Next Generation Instruction: Overview



chapter, I'll describe the attributes of the CLC as well as the steps necessary to build it in more depth.

NOTE

1. *Jet*;1/30/95, Vol. 87 Issue 12, p. 51.