

## Educational Economy in Times of Crisis: The Critical role of *Core Capabilities*

Over the last year a great deal of attention has been focused on the difficulties that schools and teachers have been facing. Truly remarkable stories have emerged of professional struggle, devotion, and ingenuity in meeting extraordinary challenges. But relatively unnoticed has been the fact that the massive migration of schooling, away from conventional classrooms to alternative venues, presents the greatest opportunity for educational renewal that has appeared in more than a century.

While teachers scramble to figure out how they will transfer what they were doing from classrooms to virtual environments, the fact remains that the classroom has only been a medium of convenience and never an ideal venue for instruction. In truth, there is only one critical feature of any educational program that needs to be taken on the journey from the conventional classroom to the realm of new possibilities: It is our perception of *what we want students to learn!*

The testing and publishing industries are strategically poised to move education into online venues, but there is no reason why they should be allowed to drive the bus, let alone determine its direction. For decades our colleagues at the Association for the Cooperative Advancement of Science and Education (ACASE) have studied conventional testing and grading. It is evident that the primary impact of the testing industry has been the application of their measures to compare and manipulate students, teachers and schools. It has not been to support teachers in helping students to attain valued learning goals.

It is just this - our learning goals, what we want students to learn - that is the essential foundation of every educational effort. It also something that is constantly lost sight of in the course of fulfilling everyday duties. Our learning goals are the one critical element that must be carried forward on the road to innovation. This alone, success in attaining learning goals, is what justifies every feature of educational endeavors.

Not all learning goals are of equal value, however. There are some concepts, skills and dispositions that are of special value. These are the capabilities that facilitate concurrent learning, subsequent learning, and the transfer of learning to productive application in the world outside of educational environments. We call these *core capabilities*.

The field of education can start afresh by turning attention away from all that does not contribute to the attainment of learning goals associated with core capabilities. This will dramatically reduce the workload of any educational program. It will free individuals and institutions from layers of activity that are not essential. This can lead to unparalleled efficiency in the attainment of the learning goals of greatest value.

At this moment of critical need for renewal, educators and educational institutions must recognize the necessity of putting aside all that they normally do that does not contribute to the attainment of the most essential learning goals. Then the possibilities open up to do the following:

- Set learning goals for those core capabilities that are essential to productively meet current and future world conditions. These are the prize. This will be the new *curriculum*.
- Collaborate with colleagues to develop ways to assess how well each core capability is being attained and, together, monitor each student's level of attainment on each capability. Without this information there is no true basis for planning and evaluating instruction. This is true *educational assessment*. Conventional tests and grading schemes do not provide this information. They are destructive and waste the time and attention of our most precious human resource — our teachers and students. Evaluation and grading based on conventional tests is a fundamental reason why efforts at systemic education have failed historically and why they will continue to fail.
- Imbue teachers with the authority to exercise their inspiration, imagination and intuition in addressing identified learning needs. Encourage them to try out whatever means they conceive of to help students attain these core capabilities. This will be the new *instruction*. Online venues, face to face classrooms, phone conversations, books and movies are simply different modes of presentation and communication. True *instruction* engages students in a way that leads to success in attaining learning goals.
- Educational communities must join together, meet regularly to review how well core capabilities are being attained and how to assure the contribution of assessment and instruction to that attainment. On this basis they can decide where and how to direct resources, what to keep, what to discard, what to transform. This will be the new *evaluation*, one that must be humane as well as efficient. Educators must find ways to share their findings with colleagues in their institution and with the world at large to multiply the effect.

Institutions that concentrate their efforts in these ways will arrive more quickly at meeting the demands of the times. They will soon leave behind those that are burdened with unproductive vestiges of past educational practice.

Attention to *core capabilities* is one of 12 principles of sound educational practice that our association actualizes to support education and training programs. We invite you to share your thoughts and experiences. Let us all take advantage of the unique opportunity inherent in the present crisis.

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