

Thinking About Our Pedagogy (Part Two of a Two-Part Article)

By Janet Stork

There is a very compelling book, Closing the Achievement Gap, by Tony Wagner, the co-director of the Change Leadership Group at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. In looking at the new global economy, which features the sea change of huge losses in existing jobs as well as the creation of yet-unfamiliar roles, Wagner conducted a wide range of interviews and synthesized current research from the fields of education (including higher education) and business. He discovered that there is overwhelming consensus about the core competencies for the 21st century that our students will need for their future in work, intellectual/creative pursuits, and citizenship.

The need to develop these competencies guides all our decisions at TBS, and fit with the Teaching for Understanding Framework. Of course, these higher order skills depend upon ensuring that students acquire the necessary core competencies and skills, but mastering these foundational skills (learning how to read, write, perform computational math, and so on) are not the end goal; they are the *means* to cultivate the core competencies that are especially important for our generations of children and are different from what was proposed for 'success' in the 19th and 20th century.

This is why it's counterproductive to say, "Well, the traditional education I had was good enough for me, so it's probably good enough for my child." We need to take a fresh look at what our students really need for their future, acknowledging that in fact it would be good for adults as well, since many of us, given the changing global economy, now have to 're-invent' ourselves. Please review this list, because I think that most of us would agree that these have become necessary competencies in our work and our everyday lives.

- 1. Critical Thinking and Problem Solving.** This refers to asking good questions, critically reflecting on one's work, and orienting toward focusing on the important problems to solve deciding how to solve them.
- 2. Collaboration and Leadership:** Change through both collaboration and leadership skills, teamwork, etc.
- 3. Agility and Adaptability:** Flexibility in thinking, readiness to change, using a variety of skills/tools to solve new, unexpected problems.
- 4. Initiative and Entrepreneurialism:** Becoming a self-directed individual with a drive for results; facing challenging problems that need creative solutions. Those who take initiative and lead teams to solutions will be sought after.
- 5. Effective Oral and Written Communication:** This is key in everything we do. We need to be able to use clear and concise communicate across cultures and genres, including internet, etc.

6. Accessing and Analyzing Information: We must be able to process, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information effectively in order to make informed decisions.

7. Curiosity and Imagination: Success increasingly is not just about being smart and “doing school well;” we must be able to foster an inquisitive mind, come up with creative solutions, and design products and services that are noticeably different. This will take not only intelligence and disciplined thinking, but curiosity, practical intelligence, and imagination as well.

I understand that the shift from Montessori as the central focus of our pedagogy to one that places evidence-based research about teaching, learning and understanding at the center, can seem like a huge, daunting change. But the world has gotten more complex; we know so much more now than we did a hundred years ago about the underlying learning processes in the brain and how they differ for different kinds of learners. I want to make sure we integrate that evidence-based research in the decisions we make about teaching and learning, in order for our students to develop the core skills, competencies, and values necessary to thrive in the 21st century. Our charge is to educate children for the here and now, while preparing them for *their* future (“engage a changing world”). The purpose of being a student is to deepen learning and understanding, and the best way I know to do that is to have a dynamic pedagogy that explicitly states that teaching, learning, and understanding are at the center of every decision we make. We want our pedagogy to reflect the core competencies for the 21st century, staying fresh and open while still incorporating past practices that still hold validity for today and tomorrow.