

THE POWER TO TRANSFORM: LEADERSHIP THAT BRINGS LEARNING AND SCHOOLING TO LIFE

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Why Reform?

- "Finishing a course has come to mean achievement"
- "Listening to a lecture has come to mean understanding"
- "Getting a high score on a standardized test has come to mean proficiency"
- "Credentialing has come to mean competence"
- *Do you sense that the Saskatchewan Government and the Ministry of Education are moving toward, or away, from a standardized model of gauging student achievement?*

Introduction

Stephanie's book examines school reform and encourages the reader to consider how past attempts at change have not had a profound effect on the learning of children.

The concepts of teaching, schooling, achievement, learning and understanding are explored.

By contrasting concepts

such as meaning vs. memory or transmission vs. inquiry, Stephanie supports the ideas presented by the renewed Saskatchewan Curriculum and the inquiry approach to learning.

This book is applicable to education today and provides "food for thought" for

individuals in leadership roles who are working to implement reform and growth in today's schools.

In this Executive Book Summary I share highlights from each chapter and connect them to my own experience. I have included quotes that I found to be most thought provoking.

Chapter 1: Firestorm or Gift? The Power of Story

Too much emphasis is placed today on students learning facts, details and information. Stephanie suggests that the focus should be on what a student is able to think, create and envision.

She uses the analogy of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. A butterfly is not just a caterpillar with wings but it is a creature that has gone through a transformation. A process has evolved to

allow for the change and the development of children should be viewed the same way.

What stuck with me most from this chapter is Stephanie's call to change the language and stories surrounding education.

"When our language is prescriptive, our schools cannot be generative. When our language is controlling, our schools cannot be creative" (pg. 17).

This information is valuable for leaders today because they can begin to change the language and conversation around student learning.

Changing the conversation to include creativity, innovation, inquiry, wisdom and passion (to name a few) will begin to set a stage where lifelong learning and authentic understanding can be achieved for today's learners.



Chapter 2: What Living Systems Teach Us



How does externally mandating what happens in the classroom affect student learning?

Schools and classrooms are presented in this chapter as ecosystems with the goal of achieving and maintaining balance.

Ecosystems and education are understood to be more complex and complicated than originally understood.

Protecting these human systems, and allowing them to evolve organically is a challenge I plan to take on as I move forward in a leadership role.

Stephanie emphasizes that when external forces have too much control over what occurs in the classroom there is potential for stifling and inhibiting the naturally occurring desires of students to learn.

Mandating the purpose and meaning behind learning limits the ability for schools to **"learn, organize and change through the creative and generative principles of life"** (pg. 36).

The 12 Attributes of Human Systems:

1. Energy
2. Vitality
3. Purpose
4. Meaning
5. Trust
6. Collaboration
7. Intricacy
8. Diversity
9. Creativity
10. Order
11. Adaptability
12. Resilience (pg. 32).

"We are born learning beings. We naturally imagine, wonder, invent, and explore our way into unknown territories and perplexing and paradoxical questions" (pg. 38).

Chapter 3: Nurturing Integral Habits of Mind

This chapter explores two stories of learning and schooling. The contradiction between how schools are organized (external) and how students learn (internal) is discussed further.

It is easy to recognize when *shallow learning* is occurring. Students are detached, sitting down, and disengaged. *Deep learning* looks like conversation, activity and engagement.

The two stories are detailed in the chapter using tables and narrative under the headings: *Reductive Learning (shallow)* and *Integral Learning (deep)*.

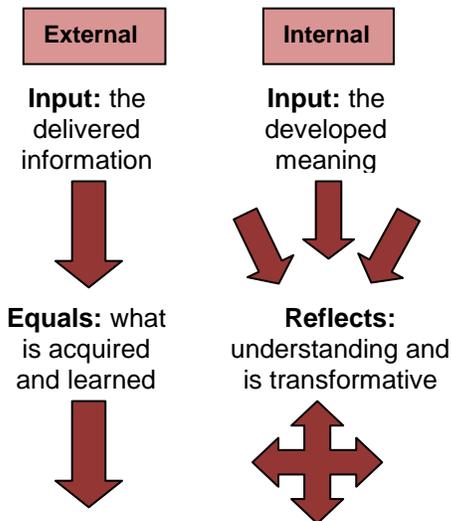
The following outlines my own personal highlights that I will carry with me from this chapter:

Integral Learning:

- developing meaning
- creativity
- personal purpose
- multidimensional intelligence
- problem solving
- holistic of mind, body, emotion, and spirit
- prior knowledge is relevant
- depth and quality of understanding over quantity
- constructed
- relational
- purposeful
- collaborative
- transformative
- assessment variety

As a leader I hope to remember these outlined characteristics and refer to them when working with colleagues and students.

Not only are children integral learners, so are adults. I believe in Saskatchewan, we have begun the journey to having deep learning reflected in our curriculum, professional development, continued education, and professional practice and I hope to see this pattern continue.





Chapter 4: A New Learning Landscape Aspen Grove by Design

The first three chapters of the book discuss what authentic learning is and what it should look like. Moving forward, one might ask, how do schools achieve an environment that allows this learning to occur?

Stephanie stresses that the design of schools must change. Success cannot be achieved by completing assignments, having excellent attendance, paying attention and passing tests.

To begin fostering intrinsic learning one must facilitate students so they are able to ask

meaningful and relevant questions. **"Student learning is guided by learning inquiries-significant questions-contained in curricular frameworks, developed by faculty and staff" (pg. 71).**

So we know what the basis should be what principles need to be in place to make this inquiry learning happen?

The following summarizes the basic principles for the learning landscape:

- schools are created understanding how the human mind works

- children are connected to the learning
- sufficient time and space is provided
- materials and experiences match student needs
- assessment reflects learning
- community is inclusive and learning is shared
- learning expands to all ages
- structures need to be flexible
- learning connects to the whole world
- ignite, nurture, joy and love

I found this chapter relevant to my role today. I am in a school that is working hard to adopt an inquiry model of learning throughout the entire building. We have a long way to go but I know it is in the student's best interest to keep working hard to make this happen.

Looking at the summarized points about the learning landscape, do you see these as possible realities or impossible dreams?



Chapter 5: Integrity Naming and Owning Our Integral Learning Identity

How we see ourselves as learners shapes our identity and alters the way we approach education. **"Who we believe we are as a learner creates a context and story that frees or constrains who we believe we can become" (pg. 82).**

Stephanie discusses how schools still put most of their focus on language arts and mathematics. Arts ed., phys ed., science and social studies are taught but they are not perceived as important. She emphasizes that

not reaching all of the intelligences hinders learners and does not allow them to develop deep meaning and to become lifelong learners.

As an educator and leader I appreciate the examples she gives of what might be said to children and how we can re-word these statements to help foster healthy identities in our students.

Can you think of a time when your own learning identity was shaped by what someone said to you?

What one might hear:
 You are born either smart or not smart.
 Really smart people are good at all subjects.
 We all learn at the same pace and in the same way.
 Tests scores assess how smart you are.
 Schooling and learning mean the same thing.
 Competition and success are dependant.
 Learning is solitary.
 School is no place for emotion or passion.
 You are too young to know what it best for your own future.

What one SHOULD hear:
 Your brain can grow when it is challenged.
 Intelligence is not just a set capacity that you are born with.
 Even though schools are focused on language arts and mathematics does not mean the other ways of knowing aren't just as valuable.
 Learning should occur in a community of support.
 Ask questions, solve problems and feel.
 You need to learn at your own pace and in your own way, and you are capable of envisioning your own success.

Chapter 6: Vibrancy Generating and Using Abundant Learning Information

Sample Question for Leaders:

What do we need to know?

How shall we ensure the learning information we value is generated, captured, and shared?

How can we ensure that provocative and potentially disruptive information essential to our identity is invited into, noticed and generated by the system? (pg. 104-105).

I have sat in many staffrooms, staff meetings and professional development sessions where educators have questioned the purpose of standardized assessments. The reality is they do exist in Saskatchewan and they may, or may not, be a part of our reality for awhile.

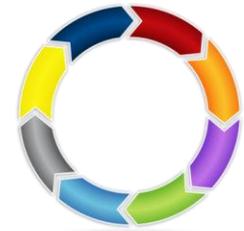
What this chapter showed me is that even though standardized assessments are occurring it is essential

that we continue to collect data and evidence that gives us a bigger picture.

"To engage the creative capacities of our system and each learner, information essential to deepening and sustaining learning must be generated, gathered, shared, and used in decision making" (pg. 102).

As a leader I see the value in continuing with the model already in

place in my school division. We meet in Collaborative Inquiry Teams (CIT) to plan for instruction. One of the main goals of a CIT is to make decisions based on data. Once a plan is made we to work together to implement best practices and to access research to support us in our learning.



Chapter 7: Interdependence Inviting and Sustaining Collaborative Learning Relationships



"In learning as in the rest of life, relationships are everything" (pg. 110).

Most school systems are organized into elementary, middle, and high school years. In my school division I see professional development delivered through a collaborative model. The CITs meet often and are supported with time and money.

Unfortunately, the collaboration stops at each grade alike grouping. Rarely are opportunities provided to allow collaboration across a variety of grade levels.

Stephanie gives the example of a school division committed to giving teachers

opportunities to observe and co-teach in classes at very different grade levels than they are accustomed to. What developed were strong relationships that fostered understanding and support.

Connections were made for teachers, students, and administrators that lasted beyond the co-teaching times. These connections helped foster an identity where educators felt part of something bigger.

School reform must be viewed with a broad lens. In order to improve, restructure, and move forward,

leaders need to look at an entire system and considering what needs reform at all levels. This will hopefully create an environment for renewal and sustainability.

My school division has separate priorities for the elementary schools and high schools. As a division, we need to develop meaningful relationships which will help us foster a healthy identity so that we can all feel like we belong to something bigger which will help us to be committed to the work that needs to be done.

Chapter 8: Stimulating Creative and Self-Organizing Learning Processes

"Learning is a boundlessly creative, curiosity- and inquiry-driven, and exploratory process of meaning construction and discovery" (pg. 118).

This chapter highlights the benefits of play, exploration, experience, and discovery. I love how Stephanie describes learning through play as an adventure where students can take risks, try new things and experiment in different situations.

Play also helps shape our identities and helps us to form relationships. Learning and playing alongside others expands our experiences and exposes us to other points of view.

In society, play is accepted and encouraged in younger children but as children grow older the opportunities for play become less and less.

Imagine if teenagers were allowed to play in physics or mathematics. Visualize professional development sessions where educators role

played and tried to connect and relate to students.

Tapping into one's imagination encourages the use of problem solving skills and critical and creative ways of thinking are developed. Encouraging students to ask questions and seek out answers through inquiry can be encouraged during play.

Stephanie encourages her readers to imagine what it would be like if we chose to ask our students **"How did you learn today?"** instead of "What did you learn today?"



Chapter 9: Sustainability Weaving and Mapping Networked Learning Patterns



"What relationship networks in your life encourage you to be creative and innovative?"

In Chapter 2 the connection was made between schools and ecosystems. The point was made that being part of a learning environment means that an individual is a part of a connected web of life.

The analogy is made between the intricate patterns of a web and the connections we make when we seek understanding and meaning.

"Within disciplinary domains, patterns represent the

organizing conceptual configurations of principles, constructs, concepts, and modes of inquiry" (pg. 134).

Humans naturally "chunk" their knowledge and mind map their understanding. Teaching children how to recognize patterns, to categorize and to connect their thinking will help them to sustain their learning.

Stephanie closes out the chapter by looking at relationships and patterns because of the

networks we create with other people.

Some of our relationship networks are formal and they are necessary to keep a system sustainable. We don't interact with them a lot but we benefit from having them in place.

It is the informal relationship networks that benefit us the most because they are more likely to encourage creativity, innovation and inquiry.

Chapter 10: Stability Creating Flexible, Temporary, and Adaptive Learning Structures

The book has focused on why schools need to be reformed and what authentic learning looks like. The point is made that schools need to change, but once these changes begin how do we ensure that this reform stays in place and adapts as necessary?

Schools need to be able to evolve to meet the needs of the learners. It is important to be cautious and not completely ignore

things that are already established. It is important to remember:

- Do not abandon the standards
- Do not abandon the formal curriculum
- Do not abandon effective instruction
- Do not abandon evaluation and assessment practices

It is helpful to keep these points in mind while reforming schools into generative learning environments.

The most memorable quote from this chapter outlines the *Five Design Principles for Teaching for Understanding*.

Teaching must be:

1. A relational, personal, communal and transformative process of co creation between teachers and learners.

2. Focused on ensuring that each student acquires knowledge, develops an understanding of concepts and knowledge structures.

3. Personalized and grounded in fostering each learner's construction of meaning.

4. Centered on the personal and communal exploration of great questions.

5. Developing each child's confidence and internal authority for lifelong learning.

(pg. 161)

Chapter 11: A Generative Community for Integral Learning



In this chapter Stephanie revisits Aspen Grove, which was discussed in Chapter two. She summarizes a lot of point made earlier and applies them to the look and feel of the new school.

What I appreciated most about this chapter is her discussion on the use of technology. She recognizes that technology must be transformative and it must used in a way that it enhances learning and moves students forward. She does an excellent job of outlining the main points to be

considered when using technology.

- Information sources are expanded with the use of technology
- Collaboration opportunities are extended outside of the school walls and allow students to be connected
- Dialogue with experts can close to home or around the world can occur in classrooms
- Students can maintain a digital learning portfolio

(pg. 172-173)

Looking at this chapter through the lens of a leader allows me to consider how I can encourage people to use technology while keeping these points in mind. Supporting colleagues and helping them to move on from only using technology as a tool, but encouraging them to use it in a transformative way, will be a benefit to the profession and to the students we teach.

"Deep learning requires unimpeded and continuous access to multiple forms and sources of information"

(pg. 172).

Chapter 12: The Right Moment Answering the Call

In just a few pages, Stephanie presents a clear argument for reform and a call to action to make the reform happen.

She mentions that the ancient Greeks had a term *kairos* meaning the right moment. She feels that these changes must happen now and that we must move forward.

Children who are naturally curious and inquisitive are missing opportunities to foster their learning identities

and to develop their inquiry abilities.

Ending this chapter has left me asking the question: What is my learning identity? Before I can move my students forward I feel it is essential that I look at my own learning patterns and understand them more deeply so that I can improve many of my own teaching practices.

I feel fortunate to work for a school division that values many of the things discussed

throughout this book. I know our province and our division value the learner as a whole individual and they want to fuel the mind, body and spirit.

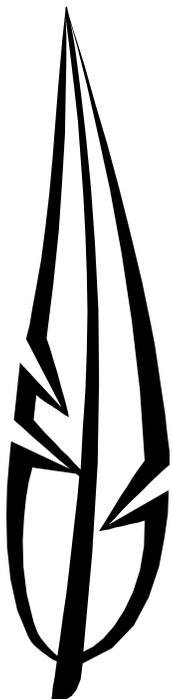
Unfortunately, what I also see is what was mentioned in chapter ten. Too often we abandon the things that are working because we think reform means changing everything. I have witnessed the "pendulum shift" where old ways are done away with only to be introduced again after some passing of time.

I feel that this only frustrates people and they end up focusing on the inefficiencies rather the reasons why there is a need for reform.



Have you ever experienced a "pendulum shift" in your career?

Chapter 13: Elder-Leadership Changing the Current Story



Stephanie eloquently devoted this chapter to the role of a leader in making a generative learning environment.

She challenges the reader to consider the term elder rather than leader. She respectfully includes the indigenous perspective of how elders are a natural and common occurrence and that they are held with regard and they are valued.

Too often in people in leadership roles are not respected and they are often challenged. Many times they are seen as

ones responsible for the problems and they are rarely given the credit when things go right.

"Elders hold the context (story), consciousness (meaning), and soul (wisdom) of a culture" (pg. 193).

As a leader (elder) we must value story, tell stories and listen to stories. If we want to see reform begin we must change the story. "It is the new story that will enable the creation of a generative and life-affirming system of learning and schooling.

"It is this new system that in integrating intelligence and love in action can educate integral and wise minds into being" (pg. 195).



Chapter 14: Creating the Radical New Story of Learning and Schooling



The final chapter reiterates many of the ideas brought forward about learning, learners, schools and leaders.

The concept of story and how we become what we tell ourselves encourages to rethink the stories we tell.

It is essential for our story to unfold that we work collaboratively, view learning as a life system and that we commit to a new promise with our children.

Below is a brief summary of the main insights she shared in this final chapter.

School reform must involve:

Generative Identity

- meaning is constructed by the individual and the self must be transformed

Generative Information

- knowledge is co constructed and shared

Generative Relationships

- learning is in a community and we are part of something meaningful

Generative Processes:

- learning is continuous and sustainable

Generative Patterns:

- meaning is grounded in the principles and patterns of life

Generative Structures

- learning models are created by the people working in the environment (pg 207).

Critical Evaluation

This book does an excellent job of examining schools and it encouraged me to think critically about the students I teach and the way I learn myself. What I appreciated about her book is she is very student/learner centered. She focuses on what learning is and then relates that to the role of a leader.

I am used to reform coming from the "top-down". I agree with Stephanie that we need to look at students first and examine how we can create environments that allow for generative and

deep learning experiences. The approach should be "bottom-up" and we should be approaching change based on student needs.

One criticism I have of the book is that a lot of the information in the chapters is repetitive. I felt that too much time was spent revisiting the ideal learning environment and explaining what meaningful, authentic learning is.

Since I was transferred to a community school I feel strongly that there are

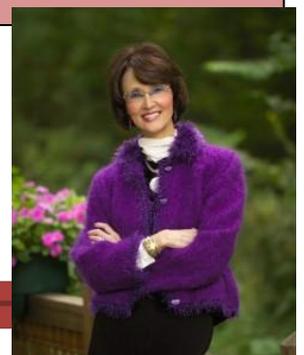
many factors affecting children not mentioned in this book. The learning environment is only one piece of a very large puzzle and I think we need to make a call out to the public to get help with our children.

Schools cannot do the job of education alone anymore. I would have appreciated recognition from Stephanie that this is just one piece, and although it is necessary, these changes alone will not make a big difference if other sectors don't step forward.

Meet The Author

Stephanie Pace Marshall is an educator and leader in the areas of Science, Mathematics and Technology Education in the United States. She well known for her views on creating learning environments that are created to bring out the inner "genius" of each child.

To read more visit:
<http://www.stephaniepacemarshall.com/biography.html>



Marshall, S.P. (2006). *The power to transform: Leadership that brings learning and schooling to life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass