THREE INNOVATIONS: PROMISES AND PERILS

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ABSTRACT
In 2003, I began a longitudinal study into the purpose of education. The process of my investigation included getting involved in new innovations as they were introduced to our school board. As I looked deeper into the purpose of schooling I discovered some startling things about how and why systems of education, through the apparatus of schooling, influence who and what, professionally, people become. I also discovered patterns related to the act of becoming that exist in school reforms. This study analyzes three reforms introduced between 2003 and 2017: Professional Learning Community, Differentiation of Instruction, and Social-Emotional Learning.

KEYWORDS: Professional Learning Community; Differentiation of Instruction; Social-Emotional Learning

INTRODUCTION
In 2003, I began an investigation into the purpose of education. The investigation was motivated by questions about my role as a teacher within the overall school system. At the start of this investigation, my school board was introducing Instructional Intelligence as pedagogical practice. Watching the implementation of this innovation as a passive recipient it was difficult to tell how it differed from regular classroom practice. To gain a better understanding of the influence of the educational system on teaching practice I actively involved myself in the process. By inserting myself into the implementation process of subsequent innovations I could observe from a teacher’s perspective, gather staff reactions through discussion, and reveal the structural influences that subsumed these initiatives into systemic purpose. During my investigation three initiatives were introduced: Professional Learning Community (PLC), Differentiated Instruction (DI) and well-being which included mental health and social-emotional learning (SEL). Each of these initiatives offered a promise of systemic change. This investigation uncovers reasons why each
innovation was inevitably subsumed by the apparatus of schooling to cohere to systemic norms. It also reveals the importance of the direction of change indicated in each innovation. This directional influence recognizes a need for all participants to develop a philosophical mindset that helps build a theoretical foundation for sustainable school change. In this way, it is hoped that projects of this sort may ultimately shift the purpose of education.

The school board introducing these innovations was a large board with 29 secondary schools and 132 elementary schools in the province of Ontario, Canada. It was an amalgamation of three rural and one urban board. The three innovations were introduced at the elementary and secondary levels, but this investigation is from my perspective as a secondary school teacher. At the start of the investigation I was working at a school located in a small city in one of the rural communities. Most of the 1,130 students were bussed from rural locations. During the implementation of the PLC and DI innovations, I worked in an Alternative classroom within the school. When SEL was introduced my work location was in a mall downtown. Also, the administration of the classroom changed from having a Principal on site at the school to having a Principal and Vice Principal in a central location to the various alternative classrooms within the board. My students were transported by taxi from my former school to the mall location. As a consequence, I maintained contact with the staff at the same school throughout implementation of all three innovations. This provided a continuity of response to the three innovations. My perspective as an alternative teacher offered an outsider’s position as I was able to evaluate the process as a participant in the implementation but not as a practitioner immersed within the regular school system.

**Theoretical Framework**

Begley (2004) identifies three purpose values of education. The first purpose is to provide a liberal education, which is intended to provide students with a broad experience of various fields of study. This makes choices of future occupations more informed. The second purpose is skill building. The value in this is that students have the knowledge and discipline to become effective in the occupation of their choice with a minimum of transitional difficulty. The third purpose identified by Begley (2004) is the reproduction of familiar social paradigms. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) identify social reproduction as the overall purpose of education. The first two purposes act to support this last purpose because they give value to career selection and preparation for contribution to a chosen industry through physical and/or intellectual labour.

Althusser (1971/2014) demonstrates that, through various apparatuses, governments reproduce the means of production. In his discussion Althusser (1971/2014) identifies systems of education as the primary means of labour production in capitalist states. Governments develop systems of education to maintain social systems that support dominant cultural paradigms of financial success. Education is a key supporting structure in a society dependant on the production of goods and resources for profit. Systems of education, Althusser (1971/2014) informs us, not only teach the skills needed to reproduce labour, but also the rules of good behaviour in the context of capitalist ideology. Children learn, then, not only the skills of labour, but also the attitudes of consumerism
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needed within a culture of acquisition. Foucault (1977) describes how governments work to extract a particular docile being who accepts the dominant social agenda as something they choose for themselves. Through systems of education, governments influence a particular definition of personal success which coheres to cultural norms. In this way, not only the body and mind are prepared for labour, but, as Foucault (1977) suggests, the soul.

The mechanism of influence used by systems of education is schooling (see Foucauld, 1977). Schools are the social apparatus that extract the Foucauldian soul. They do this with various structures of expectation with which students must comply to achieve success. The three structures that emerge in this investigation are: curriculum expectations, achievement level expectations determined through assessment, and expectations on schedules for completion. Figure 1 shows the relationship between these structures and the systemic purposes identified by Begley (2004).

In Figure 1, the purposes of education, as outlined by Begley (2004), contain and control the structures of schooling. Assessment strategies are a central structure because they act as motivation to do well on curriculum assignments within expectations for credit completion. The broken lines between structural columns represent the reciprocal relationship between the three structures. DI involves an assessment of how students process the curriculum. The direction of influence starts with diagnostic assessment to determine what students need to fulfill curriculum expectations, through formative assessment of how they are meeting expectations in the scheduled time, finishing with the summative valuation of their level of success. All this moves toward skill building, liberal education, and culminates in social reproduction.

Schooling is the apparatus through which systems of education achieve their goals. My hypothesis, in this investigation, was that changing the practices implemented in schools to educate children is not likely to alter systems of education. This difficulty is because systems of education exert external influence on the apparatus through legislative policy, financial control and the systemic purpose identified by Begley (2004) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977).

Systems of education construct the apparatus of schooling. The apparatus of schooling includes building design, staff preparation, the selection of subjects and materials for instruction, assessment practices, the schedule of learning, and the direction for education as outlined in legislative policy. The apparatus of schooling uses the learning process to prepare children for a successful life in the dominant culture that designed the systems of education. Preparing children to become the individuals needed to maintain and continue a social paradigm ensures the continuation of similar systems of education with the same apparatus of schooling. As the apparatus of schooling uses the process of learning, and the process of learning is a biological process for ontological development (Jarvis, 2009), systems of education which recreate themselves in the way described produce, what I call, an ontological tautology. They develop conditions of being, ontological conditions, which recreate the social systems that promote the conditions of being that regenerate similar social systems. In biological organisms, such redundancy ensures the continuation of the species. In organizations it helps ensure the continuation of systemic norms as defined within systemic purpose.
Figure 1: Influencing Structures of Schooling that Support Social Reproduction

Note: The term Professional Learning Community (PLC) is used here to indicate both original PLCs and Living Systems PLCs (Mitchell & Sackney, 2011). This is done for practical purposes of space, but it is important to remember that the two things are very different methods.
This ontological tautology necessitates the consideration that the preparation of staff for the apparatus of schooling begins the first day they enter school as children. Their model of learning is influenced by the systemic structure of their education. This is one reason that educational change is difficult; anyone exposed to the system is deeply inured to systemic thinking. Systemic thinking occurs when people working within a system, such as a system of education, take on the beliefs and attitudes of the organization as though they were their own. Innovations to the apparatus of schooling, thus, become superficial and are subsumed by the overall purpose of education. The effect of this systemic influence is given in the redundancies above. However, the philosophical approaches of innovations linger under the surface of systemic practice even when they are not apparent in daily practice. The underlying reasons for their introduction to the learning environment require consideration, especially as they pertain to an ontologically developmental paradigm for educational purpose.

**Method**

This investigation began with an existential dilemma about why I was teaching. In seeking answers to that question I began to look into the purpose of education. As that question emerged, the concept of “Instructional Intelligence” (developed by Barrie Bennett) was introduced into the system of education in Ontario (see Bennett & Rolheiser, 2001). The introduction of this innovation seemed a good place to enter into action research to investigate this practice first-hand - along with additional reading. The chosen innovations needed to be systemically driven, that is, they needed to be sanctioned by policy because such innovations were meant to bring systemic change. The process of investigation was to become a part of the innovation process by being an active member of the change team. There were three innovations in the time of the study that fit into these parameters: Professional Learning Community (PLC), Differentiation of Instruction (DI) and Social-emotional Learning (SEL) under the heading of Well-being.

For each innovation I give a description of: the experiential process for my involvement in the change initiative (Experiential Process); the theoretical, philosophical and policy context of each innovation (Developmental Context); and the mechanism of schooling into which each was subsumed (Systemic Structure). Each innovation offered the potential of a critique of educational purpose with a move toward concentrating on the development of being as opposed to career development. A concentration on the development of being creates a more ontologically developmental paradigm for education. The promise for systemic change through the three innovations motivated teachers, such as me, to implement them.

Through my active involvement in the implementation process, I was able to observe staff reactions to the innovations through discussion and to reveal the systemic structures of the apparatus of schooling into which each innovation was subsumed. Three structures emerged as dominant forms of systemic influence: assessment strategies, curriculum expectations and schedules for completion. Each of these structures works to support the others in influencing the continued educational purpose of social reproduction (Begley, 2004; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). From this, I conclude that what each innovation needed to reach its potential was a broader understanding of the purpose of education by all stakeholders.
**Professional Learning Community**

**Experiential Process:** In 2005, the Ontario Ministry of Education provided funding for school boards to develop PLCs in their schools. The PLC was a method for teachers to reflect on the direction of teaching and learning in their schools and classrooms. It provided time for teachers to gather and review student progress and teaching techniques. Ideally, it could also be used to question the reasons for teaching a particular subject a particular way, or to look at the overall structures of schooling and whether they helped or hindered learning processes. Each school was expected to submit a proposal prepared by a development team. Successful proposals were given funding for one Student Success Teacher (SST) and time to run PLC meetings. Before this announced funding, I investigated the concept behind the PLC. I wanted to determine the origin of the learning community concept and track any changes from its inception. At the core of the learning community was a component of critical exploration into systemic practice, which I felt promised meaningful change in schools. I joined the PLC Committee.

I discovered the primary motivation for school involvement was access to Ministry funds. The allotted teaching time (one period of class time) for the SST needed funding, but the time for PLC conferences could be arranged without extra funds. The SST had the responsibility of acting as a liaison between staff and administration, gathering data on students labelled “at risk” and organizing programs for students to rescue credits. Time for these programs was always scheduled during the students’ lunch period. Soon after the PLC committee process started, the government announced the intention of having an SST in every school. The proposal, then, served some other purpose. The main thrust seemed to be establishing the structure of the PLC in every school.

In the first year of implementation the SST collected data. The SST presented this data at staff meetings to show how their programs worked to help students succeed. The SST at the school where I worked always presented positive results even if small. Unfortunately, students were disinclined to take time at lunch to improve their success rates. The program put more emphasis on failure and took away social time. In the second year, the lunch period program was scaled back. By the third year it was cancelled and the SST was an extension of the guidance department.

PLC meetings were held within departments. They often involved designing department-wide common testing to gather accurate data about student success in the department. This focus ensured greater adherence to curriculum expectations in every classroom. As well as classroom data, PLCs considered the results of government testing in literacy and mathematics, which was performed every three years starting in grade three. The grade-ten literacy test was a requirement for graduation. Class time prior to the test was often spent preparing students for the test, especially as the results were published and reflected on schools and the board.

Eventually a system called “learning cycles” emerged in which analysis of classroom data was organized at specific periods of time. Government policy encouraged the completion of required credits in the scheduled time for each grade level. Any student failing to do so was labelled at risk. The board developed a series of interventions for any student labelled
at risk, one of which was involvement with the SST, initially, meant to prevent students from becoming at risk.

**Developmental Context:** The PLC as implemented into the apparatus of schooling was derived from the work of Senge (1990), who developed a model for thinking about the way an organization accomplished, or failed to accomplish, its goals. Senge (1990) referred to this as systems thinking. A system is a cyclical process through which an organization may help or hinder itself. Systems’ thinking requires an awareness of complex influences acting upon and within the system. Outside influences are as much a part of a system as is organizational purpose, the influence of actions, and the attitudes of employees. In Senge’s (1990) work, the learning community involved open dialogue about the effects of these influences unfettered by expectations or a felt need to appease a boss. The promise of the PLC as applied to schooling was that it would open up dialogue about the purpose of education and the process of learning. It would allow us to take a deep look at the structures of schooling and their effects on developing minds.

At the same time that PLCs were percolating through education, there was also a call for greater accountability. There was a growing concern about whether schools were providing children the knowledge they needed for an unpredictable future. This evolved into concepts within 21st century learning. Systems of education needed to prove they were meeting these needs. As a result there was a push for “data driven” education, which later became “data informed”. The shift from data-driven to data-informed was due to concerns about teaching to standardized tests. The term data-driven suggested a focus on quantitative increase, and a concentration on data appeared to override the quality of learning in schools. Learning that was data-informed suggested a more developmental, more organic, approach to the use of data. The PLC offered a way to use data as part of a reflective process and so make classroom practice accountable and data-informed.

Many authors illustrate how PLC, as implemented in the school system, also became a way of exerting internal control by local authorities. One of the tenets of Senge’s (1990) system was the need for a communal vision. Ideally this vision emerged from the dialogue within PLCs, becoming the core to the culture of the board and all of its schools. In the system of education, however, any developed vision had to align with an overall vision determined by government policy which was included in the critical systems thinking indicated in PLCs. Fullan (2001) pointed out that the collaborative organization described in institutionalized PLCs adds an element of peer pressure on those who preferred to work on their own. As part of a method to help manage change, Fullan advocated for the benefits of positive peer pressure. Similarly, according to Pankake and Moller (2003), the government should help initiate dialogues around PLCs, but require them to be within “an organized structured mechanism to identify ... desired values and teach them” (p. 9). In general, therefore, teachers who are not willing to live up to the expectations set by the agreement within the new regime would be pressured to transfer out or be put on a transitional plan (at least, noted by Pascal & Blankstein, 2008, p 18). Finally, principals in such a situation had to be willing to engage in difficult conversations with teachers who were uncomfortable working with others (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 112). In such an environment, therefore, the PLC was not the open forum for discourse envisioned by Senge (1990) but a method by which teachers observed each other’s practice to ensure that it aligned with Ministry goals.
Ministry goals for student success were the accumulation of credits in the required period of time with an acceptable achievement rate. The managed change was assuring conformity to organizational expectations.

**The First Systemic Structure of Subsumption (Assessment Strategies):** The promise of the PLC was a critical analysis of the practice and purpose of education. Senge's (1990) learning community looked at all the aspects of an organization from physical structures, to human attitudes, and to the very thing they were trying to do: to determine how to improve the vision of corporate purpose. As such, the PLC was a form of assessment. In schools they became think tanks for assessment analysis. Systems of assessment are key components in schooling because they are used to inform students and teachers how they are doing according to government standards, and what they should do to improve based on course expectations. But assessment can be used by administrators to check up on how well a teacher can teach according to expected benchmarks for credit completion and grade point average. I recall one new teacher expressing concerns to me about how one of my students was affecting the class average.

The three-year assessments of math and literacy were devised as a way for the government to determine how well schools were doing in teaching core areas of the curriculum according to standards determined by the government, and often influenced by international standards such as those of PISA, a test designed to measure the effectiveness of systems of education of member states of the OECD. In the accountability environment they became the measure of a “good” school.

The government implemented PLCs by providing funding. They also structured the nature of discourse which excluded government policy. In schools, PLCs had teachers assess their performance more in the context of policy than in the context of learning. This assessment, consequently, shaped education and informed pedagogical practice. From this, the motivation for improvement was based on the need to achieve a higher grade point average for all students throughout the school rather than the development of each student’s capacity learn. The critical aspect of PLCs was subsumed within the foundational structures of school assessment. As such, PLCs were unlikely to result in any systemic change as teachers were assessed on their ability to fulfill systemic goals. Any critical aspect looped in on itself. As a consequence it only served to strengthen the apparatus of schooling that maintains systemic norms. And so, the promise of systemic change was not fulfilled.

**Differentiation of Instruction**

**Experiential Process:** In 2008 I joined the Task Force formed to explore, explain, and implement DI into the board. On the task force were one or two representatives from each school and a large number of board administrators including eight people from program services who were either Teachers on Special Assignment or Learning Coordinators. The Ministry planned to mandate the framework for DI into elementary schools in the following school year with a broader plan to rewrite curriculum policy documents to include information and suggested practice around DI. Much of what interested me about DI was the way it promoted an understanding of learning from the perspective of the learner.
There were a large number of interrelated components to DI that members of the Task Force worked to become knowledgeable about to present these ideas to their schools and at conferences across the board. Some of these components included: learning readiness, brain-based learning, offering students a sense of agency by giving them choices for how they proved understanding, experiential learning, and diagnostic assessment of learning preferences. Learning preferences were related to: learning style, multiple intelligences, and whether students preferred analytical, practical or creative processes.

We were each given a small collection of books on DI to bring into our schools. The work of the Task Force also resulted in an information package on the components listed above as well as a small box of quick reference cards to help teachers implement DI in their pedagogical practice. The reaction of staff to the introduction of this material ranged from mild interest through general indifference to an almost defensive frustration.

The Ministry introduced the concept of Instructional Intelligence (Bennett & Rolheiser, 2001) into the system from 2002-2004. The board attributed Instructional Intelligence to Barrie Bennett who travelled around Canada and abroad doing demonstration classes in how to use Instructional Intelligence. Many teachers saw DI as simply another intrusion of government policy on their classroom practice. It was seen, by some, as an invasion of their professional judgement. As I learned more about the direction for implementation of DI I could not disagree and excused myself from the Task Force.

**Developmental Context:** The common perception of learning and intelligence changed when in 1993 Howard Gardner introduced the theory of multiple intelligences. Gardner (1993) suggested that each individual has different intellectual inclinations, and originally posited eight intelligences. Goleman (1995) introduced emotional intelligence suggesting that emotional intelligence was more important to learning and social success than our understanding of intelligence from IQ tests. Sternberg (1997) introduced the styles of analytical, practical and creative learning and the idea that students who were given tasks which aligned with their learning styles were more successful. Sternberg also posited that children with a creative learning style were at a disadvantage in schools because the teaching was more often from an analytical or practical approach. The shift in thinking about learning in each of these cases was that learning was a complex and personal process. Also, if we wanted an equitable system of education we needed to consider the individuals being taught not the subjects we were trying to teach.

The promise of DI to understand and respect the learning differences of each student suggested a broader respect for difference in general. This inherent respect for student diversity lingering beneath the surface of DI also promised that not only teachers, but other students would be aware of the learning differences of their peers. This opened a door to a kind of learning equity where each person in the classroom understood that everyone had different learning needs and could assist in them being met.

From the systemic perspective DI came out of the search for more efficient methods of curriculum delivery. Respecting the learning differences of each student functioned to offer access points to the curriculum for individual students without altering curriculum expectations. There was a strong influence on DI from ideas about teacher effectiveness
with the suggestion that an effective teacher was able to use DI to be even more effective in improving student achievement (Hume, 2008; Marzano, 2003). By 2013 this idea of effective teaching evolved into designations of “best practice” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). DI was designated best practice and written into policy.

**The Second Systemic Structure of Subsumption (Curriculum Expectations):** In the Ontario Curriculum Expectations are provided by the Ministry of Education. Outlined in the expectations are general and specific expectations for what students must learn and teachers must teach, in each course. A broad range of courses provides a liberal education. But each course represents a potential career destination. Recalling, the foundational premises outlined above, that systems of education prepare children for successful coherence with dominant cultural norms, the curriculum presents cultural expectations as a set of possible identities. For example, I am: a farmer, a doctor, an engineer, a scientist, a computer programmer, a teacher, an entrepreneur. These identities define potential contributions to society. DI, as implemented in schools, was intended to offer each student a more personal access to these curriculum expectations. The promise of DI, as implemented, was that students would have a greater chance for success in meeting systemic expectations for curriculum learning.

Through this application of DI the learning process is channeled into the process of social reproduction by maneuvering learning to align with social expectations - i.e., the acquisition of curriculum knowledge. Curriculum knowledge translates into career choices and so improves the possibility that students will identify themselves with a particular career. Here, again, is the ontological tautology. The promise of equity and understanding that could be found at the core of a differentiated learning environment is subsumed within the systemic requirement to meet career-focused curriculum goals.

**Social-Emotional Learning**

**Experiential Process:** In the school year of 2012-2013 I chaired the School Improvement Planning (SIP) Committee at my school. The circumstances of my involvement in the committee are of interest to the idea of SEL and school purpose as are the activities resulting from my involvement. Our school is not a typical school. We work with students who are usually labelled at risk. They are struggling with, will not, or cannot fulfill systemic expectations. Often their struggle to follow expectations is due to social emotional factors rather than academic ability. As a consequence we often focus on meeting their social-emotional needs and providing coping strategies than we do on credit accumulation and grade point average.

At a staff meeting our Superintendent, as he had to all of his schools, posed these questions: Why do we do what we do? Why do you teach in an alternative setting? Why does your school exist? He left these questions for us to answer. I waited. Two days later I posted a response to the questions stating how important this discussion was and that it gave us the opportunity to define who we were and what was important to us. My response led to an email discussion with colleagues and I spent the next few months summarizing and connecting the disparate viewpoints. The result of this was that I was asked to chair the SIP Committee.
The process of SIP entailed fitting our unique perspectives on education in with the Board improvement plan which had to align with Ministry directives for education. It was my first experience with this web of systemic connections. It was through this process that I realized where the system was malleable and where it was welded and fixed. The three areas of subsumption that arise in this paper are areas that are, in my view, fixed.

In addition to my involvement with SIP I investigated the nature of SEL. I discovered that social emotional factors were considered to be essential for learning engagement (Elias & Moceri, 2012). This was corroborated by my readings on brain physiology which showed that all our sensory inputs are mediated through the limbic system which is the centre for emotional engagement (MacLean, 1990). And so, meaning and motivation are derived from emotional associations with experience (Calvin, 1996). SEL was also important for the development of resiliency (Siebert, 2005), which was becoming recognized as something that education needed to develop in students. All were wrapped in the concept of well-being.

Once we had a SIP unique to our situation and aligned with Board and Ministry goals we began implementation. We recognized that SEL, within the purview of well-being, encompassed considerations for mental health. As a consequence the first action of the SIP Committee was organizing a professional development (PD) day around mental health. In this, we also considered staff mental health as important. We invited speakers from the university and planned presentations by staff to explore aspects of, and strategies for mental health and SEL that resonated with all stakeholders. The build-up of staff involvement in the whole process and the recognition of people on staff who were experts in areas from my perspective made this a very good day.

That school year ended. The Superintendent and the principal accepted incentives for retirement. In the next year, teachers were not asked to participate in the SIP. It was a year of assessment at the end of which two of our class sites were closed.

**Developmental Context:** Goleman’s (1995) work may have been a catalyst for the inclusion of SEL in the apparatus of schooling but it was the influence of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) that placed well-being and all it entails into the purview of schooling. The OECD is a conservative organization of 34 member nations that professes to “promote policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world” (OECD, 2018a). With so many member states the OECD has access to resources for research to help improve and promote those policies. Part of this policy promotion is the comparison of educational systems which prepare people for employment. This comparison is done through the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which annually rates the education systems of OECD member states in the areas of “science, mathematics, reading, collaborative problem solving and financial literacy” (OECD, 2018b). The publication of the statistics from PISA also puts a comparative pressure on member states to adhere to organizational goals.

In 2001 the OECD published a report on *The Well-being of Nations* subtitled: *The role of human and social capital* (OECD, 2001). Well-being became an increasing focus of schooling after this report. The 2014 ISLLC Standards for Leadership (Council of Chief State School
Officers, 2014) indicate that school leaders must promote “the success and well-being of every student by ensuring the development of an equitable and culturally responsive school” (p. 20). Previous incarnations of the standards spoke only of *success for all students* in general not success and *well-being of every individual student*. The OECD (2001) recognizes the component of mental health in well-being, but their primary motivation is toward economic success and the lifestyle that it offers as human and social capital.

Other aspects of human well-being emerge in educational writing after the OECD (2001) report. Three discourses specific to SEL are: resilience, self-regulation and motivation. Resilience is explained as an ability to adapt to difficult experiences and learn from them (Siebert, 2005), meaning that an individual is not simply toughing out a bad situation, but learning how to manage and use the situation to their social and emotional advantage. Self-regulation is described as a method of self-awareness through which a person understands motivations for feeling and acting in certain ways in different situations. This self-awareness is said to give the person the power to act in accordance with the situation without becoming overwhelmed (Shanker, 2016) and unable to act in an appropriate manner. To do this a person is expected to know what motivates emotional responses in themselves and in others. Brain-based learning teaches that everything we do and learn is motivated by emotional responses. Engagement in learning, or any activity, it is an emotional thing (Elias & Moceri, 2012). Lavoie (2007) differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Intrinsic motivation is deemed best. Lavoie (2007) argues that schools use extrinsic motivation in the form of warnings (If you don’t get an education you won’t make very much money) or punishments (Complete your assignments or be assigned to the lunch hour program). Green (2008) also points to the importance of discovering intrinsic motivations for student behaviour before asking them to assist in devising a plan for change. Unfortunately, each of these discourses uses the process of understanding individual student need as a method to manipulate students into compliance with expectations and pleasing the people in power: parents, teachers, and administrators.

**The Third Systemic Structure of Subsumption (Schedule for Completion):** As a consequence of SEL’s connection with school engagement the apparatus of schooling has taken an interest in SEL. School engagement is important to the quality of learning, but also important to the efficiency of curriculum learning within the schedule for credit completion. Funding is provided for students of a particular age range and teachers are expected to deliver the curriculum in a specific time. The increments of time are often divided into grade levels, Kindergarten to Grade Eight and Grade Nine to Grade Twelve for example, which correspond to the ages of students. As noted above, students failing to acquire passing grades, for whatever reason, in the allotted time are labelled “at risk”.

The inclusion of SEL in the purview of schooling offers students the potential for a caring and concerned environment. Many educational professionals exercise this kind of compassion anyway, but systemic structures apply motivational pressures that turn compassion into compunction; instead of a feeling of support students may experience nervous anxiety and guilt at not having performed up to organizational standards (Ball, 2003). This anxiety can be associated with schedules for completion as SEL is subsumed within the temporal structures of schooling. Schedules for completion are in place so that
students might finish their formal education just as they enter adulthood when they are expected to successfully contribute to the maintenance of established social norms.

**Analysis**

By inserting myself into the process of integrating these theories into educational practice I was able to show the perils of their subsumption into the apparatus of schooling and the educational purpose of social reproduction. For each of these innovations the theoretical work was done outside the structures of education. Each innovation was introduced into pedagogical practice with the stated reason of learning improvement. Unfortunately, no distinction was recognized between learner and student. Learning is a biological necessity as beings engage in discovering themselves in the world. A student is part of the apparatus of schooling, described by Althusser, which prepares them for the world of work. This apparatus limits the process of learner even within a broad liberal education because it demands that Foucaultian soul inured to systemic ideals.

Each innovation claimed learning: learning community, differentiated learning styles, social-emotional learning, without recognizing that learning in schools is controlled, directed to a certain goal, and confined within the three influential structures: curriculum expectations, assessment expectations, and schedules for completion. As each innovation was subsumed into one of these structures and influenced by the others the learning was compromised by the need to fulfill systemic expectations.

**Systemic Thinking:** The other teachers on the PLC Committee recognized the value of allotted time for meetings specifically dedicated to discussing strategies for improving student achievement. Often less formal plans to hold such meetings were curtailed by other concerns. The PLC promised time during the day for reflection and more detailed assessment of student progress. It provided a more efficient way to improve student achievement and for teachers to share teaching strategies and course materials. In this way, as implemented, the PLC gave teachers a way to better accomplish what was expected of them. As a consequence, the system implemented was easily accepted as it did not threaten the status quo.

The learning community was meant to use systems thinking to critically analyze whole systems. Applied to systems of education this would mean questioning the very purpose of education as the engine for the reproduction of dominant cultural norms. As implemented, the PLC was given jurisdiction within the apparatus of schooling but not the entire system of education. The PLC, thus, was a tool for internal surveillance used to “enforce collective compliance with the prescribed programs and pacing guides which demean professionalism” (Hargreaves, 2008, p. 176). This was done through statistical models of assessment that examined pedagogical practice from the perspective of academic success. It was a form of behavioural modification that staff performed on themselves. The PLC thought about the education system from a systemic perspective asking: How do we get students to learn what we need them to learn to successfully enter society, rather than from learners perspective asking: How do we inspire learners in the process of ontological development?
Much of the discussion between people on the DI Task Force was centred on the potential for improving student achievement. A few members saw the broader potential of creating an improved level of understanding for teachers of students. They understood the formalization of a process for developing this understanding as a process through which all teachers would, eventually, work to know how their students learned as individuals. It was hoped that this would change the traditional model of teaching all students with one method. Most teachers I spoke with at the school agreed with the premise of DI. Most saw it as a clear definition of what they already did in their classrooms. Some also recognized its formalization as a way for the Ministry of Education to influence pedagogical practice.

DI promised a pedagogical practice from the learner’s perspective asking teachers to consider differences in learning for each learner. There was a suggestion of respect for the process of learning that included a respect for diversity. However, when embedded into the system DI became associated with curriculum content. This attachment to curriculum learning shifted the purpose for DI from understanding the learner to manipulating the way of the learner to acquire the knowledge the system expected. A broad curriculum offers the opportunity for the liberal education valued in a society with multiple needs. It allows students to explore different areas of knowledge and to discover something they might like to be for the rest of their lives. It also limits the range of knowledge to certain identified forms, with science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM subjects) for example, taking precedence (Sternberg, 1997). Teaching professionals are expected to recognize if a student is musically or visually inclined, for example, then manipulate that interest, through DI, to have them meet curriculum expectations in other subjects. The motivation is skewed. Philosophically DI suggests that we shift the system to fit with the learner but in application we shifted the learner to fit with the system, only now we have more information about who we are trying to change.

In my conversations with teachers about SEL, all recognized how it affected the ability of students to learn. Some went so far as to speak to the importance of SEL on their ability to teach. These teachers tended to see social-emotional development as a responsibility of the entire school community: parents, teachers, support staff, and other students. A few teachers understood the importance of SEL but did not view it as part of their role in the process of curriculum delivery. Many of them departmentalized these two aspects of schooling and saw SEL as the responsibility of Guidance and the Social Worker in the school. At least one teacher I spoke with saw SEL as a form of classroom management to have students get back on track.

Two things need to be considered with SELs introduction into the apparatus of schooling: that connection between SEL and school engagement, and the context through which we understand the concept of well-being. The recognition that social-emotional factors motivated the desire to learn and to act on that learning is a pivotal change. Wrapping SEL in the holism of well-being is also extremely important, but context is everything.

The importance of making meaningful connections with students is something that most teachers know intuitively. When building these relationships becomes formalized practice the attitude switches from intuitional to institutional and is subsumed in the structures of schooling. SEL, consequently, becomes a tool for student engagement in the process of meeting deadlines in the schedule for course completion. This does not preclude the fact
that students feel a greater sense of connection and may feel safer or even loved but it does suggest why this innovation did not evolve into meaningful change.

The context for understanding well-being in systems of education echoes back to the purpose of social reproduction. We know that well-being became immersed in the purview of schooling through work done by the OECD. The OECD is an organization that promotes economic success. It views individuals and their interactions with others as human and social capital not as a process of learning and psychological development. The purpose of education in this context is to bolster economic success not individual being. The individual failing to fit in with this economic model is often subjected to stigma and shame because they do not measure up. Schooling influences a form of social being that coheres to an economic model. Such considerations of economic well-being are essential in the dominant culture of acquisition in which we currently exist. Unfortunately, this culture places its greatest value on the capital gain of economic co-operation and development not ontological development and social diversity. Consequently the purpose of education remains stuck in that dominant loop.

**Directions for Change:** The three structures of schooling uncovered here: assessment strategies, curriculum expectations, and schedules for completion influence and support each other in a closed system designed to ensure social reproduction (Figure 1). Each of these structures acted to subsume one of the innovations and make it work to support systemic practice. But each innovation also suggests a direction for systemic change.

The learning community introduces the process of deep critical assessment of whole systems. There is already a new iteration of the learning community referred to as a Living Systems Learning Community (LSLC) (Mitchell & Sackney, 2011), which encourages the questioning of structural apparatuses of schooling that may adversely affect the learning process. Embedded into the process within the LSLC are considerations of social emotional factors that may affect attitudes toward learning and instruction. It can be seen from this that one innovation may influence the others and push the whole system to change. The outcome of this broader critical outlook is that educators begin to consider how the apparatus of schooling affects social emotional development.

The core philosophy of DI encourages teachers and students to consider aspects of metacognition. They must think about how learning happens, the different ways through which people learn, and overall reasons for learning. Such thinking leads to an understanding of the process of learning as the method through which people find and make meaning. From this perspective the subject of learning is learning itself and the objective of learning is the formation of being. The curriculum, thus, loses importance and becomes a vehicle for personal growth. A complex curriculum offers greater opportunity for personal growth because it offers a greater variety of access for differentiated learners. A natural result of this evolution is a move toward more self-directed learning and an integrated curriculum both of which are currently being explored in my board.

Attention to well-being with a focus on SEL may shift our perceptions of time. DI recognizes that each individual learner maintains a unique perspective on any given situation, and may act differently based on this perspective. This differential experience
develops different social emotional responses, which shift and adapt over time. This social emotional development is different for each person though we have many models for ideals of growth: Erikson, Maslow, Piaget, for example. We are all born with the potential for similar growth but circumstance introduces differences in social-emotional learning that have subtle, yet significant effects on how we envision and experience the world. Schedules for learning in this context need to be fluid to enable students to discover paths of their own.

The structures of schooling do not allow this form of fluidic development. They construct dams of designated discourse to be discussed in PLCs. They dig canals to direct the formation of knowledge along standard curriculum paths. They plumb incremental taps on rates of completion that swirl into those canals and dams. Still, the introduction of these innovations suggests a recognized desire for systemic change. They signal the realization that learning ought not to be confined to a tautological system for social reproduction but must be given room to fulfill its purpose for ontological development if education is to bring social change. What is required is a deeper understanding of any adverse effects of the apparatus of schooling on the development of being. Each of these innovations has some aspect of that understanding embedded as a philosophical premise but that understanding was lost to systemic structures that cohered to the economic paradigm. We can see the desire for a sustainable shift to an ontologically developmental paradigm of purpose in education but we have yet to see the will to ask the deep questions to make that paradigm shift.

References


**Biographical note:**

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