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# STOP PUTTING BANDAGES ON A CORPSE

5 REASONS WHY THE  
EDUCATION SYSTEM NEEDS  
TO CHANGE

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## THE PROBLEM IS

In South Australia, 1 in 2 teenagers who start year 8 are not completing year 12, creating a massive skills deficit and ongoing employability issue for the economy. A blueprint for change – transforming the delivery of education for the 21st century – to allow young people to succeed and the economy to grow is needed.

## A BROKEN SYSTEM

The education system is broken. It is a 19th century system designed for an industrial era that has not changed with the times and is woefully out of date to graduate students for a meaningful future in the 21st century. While piecemeal initiatives are rolled out to address particular areas of need, this is the equivalent of putting bandages on a corpse – with the result of mummifying an institution that has long passed its sell by date. This eBook explores why and how the education system needs to change, offering a practical blueprint for what a future education system could look like, transforming the delivery of education.



## REASON 1:

### *Why we are stuck in an Industrial Model*

In 2010, Ken Robinson produced his infamous RSA Animate video that highlighted that 21st century schooling was failing because we had designed the education system in and for the 19th century and it had not moved on from industrial era thinking despite the economic, technological, social and political changes that have occurred since the system was designed. Nearly a decade later there has still been no change.

In March 2018 the second of the Gonski reports was published, outlining the findings of a public review of the Australian school education system, and while it made recommendations for change, aligned to Ken Robinson's seminal work, nobody is working to taking the agenda forwards. Why is this?

Fundamentally it is because it is too hard. We have too much invested in the operation of the current system, from the schools, teacher training colleges, exam boards, government departments of education and so on. Each has their span of control but to change any single element requires all elements to change and gaining agreement and sharing the co-creation process amongst such a diverse group of vested interests simply falls into the too hard category for any one area to drive change.





## HERE'S WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW:



*The principle goal of education in the schools should be creating men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done. Jean Piaget*



1. School curricula are organised around subjects and teachers are considered, first and foremost, to be 'subject experts', from the days when disciplines were considered in silos rather than in interdisciplinary contexts.
2. Teacher training is organised around the development of subject experts and 'pedagogic content knowledge' – that is how to teach 'a particular subject' – supporting the notion of content being of paramount importance and the relevance of content having some long-term value.
3. Shifting to a 21st century model requires teachers to be first and foremost learning experts, as content and subject expertise is now ubiquitously widely available, and the lifespan of content is now approximately 4 years' duration.

Transforming the delivery of education requires a system that is centered around the student not the subject, and the role of the teacher is in supporting the development of the whole student as a learner rather than the part of the student that is studying their subject. The Inventorium has revolutionised the way in which an LMS thinks by organising itself around the student rather than the school, courses, or subjects. There are no set term times; no linear learning patterns of fixed curriculum; and teachers are allocated to students rather than students being allocated to subjects. This fundamentally shifts the way in which all stakeholders in education interact and behave, with the student being the centre point of organisation rather than the teacher or the school.



## REASON 2:

### WHY WE NEED TO MOVE AWAY FROM STANDARDISED TESTING

In the industrial era, there were jobs where people needed to behave in a standardised way, there was the need for set processes and procedures, and consistency in service delivery and outcome was dependent on humans behaving as machines. Now with the advent of automation and the advances in technology, this is rarely the case. Indeed, we are now increasingly experiencing the need for individuals to be treated on a case by case basis, with every nuance, extenuating factor and special circumstance being taken into account before any decision can be made as to any service provision. In schools we are seeing increasing numbers of students diagnosed with ADHD, autism, dyslexia and other learning categorisations as the impact of modern life affects young people's health, growth, welfare and ability to learn.

Despite this, in Australia, the ultimate school test is a ranking system that places each individual in competition with everyone else, so they can be categorised on their abilities based on a set of assessment processes that are now so far removed from anything we might actually need them to be able to do in the workplace, they can be considered a hindrance to employability.



## HERE'S WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW:



*"Standardized testing is at cross purposes with many of the most important purposes of public education. It doesn't measure big-picture learning, critical thinking, perseverance, problem solving, creativity or curiosity, yet those are the qualities great teaching brings out in a student. Randi Weingarten*



1. Nobody ever needs to come up with an answer under exam conditions in a workplace. Indeed, the notion of needing to remember something and repeat it in handwriting over a 3 hour period in isolation, silence and without reference to any sources would be considered a waste of a time in a workplace.
2. Schools and universities punish students for behaviours which are rewarded in the workplace – that is exploring what was done before, building on someone else's ideas, asking others for advice and ideas, and repeating something with a set of improvements. All of these would be considered a form of plagiarism in education settings but would be considered good practice in the workplace.
3. Standardised testing requires a content based curriculum rather than a learning process based curriculum and therefore limits the scope of what a student can study to that which can be tested.

Transforming the delivery of education requires assessments to be negotiated on an individual or class basis according to the needs of the individual or the group, and the interdisciplinary areas that they are studying. This requires teachers to be able to understand assessment design and assessment rubrics in a manner that allows them to adapt assessment processes to fit different purposes while still achieving standards of outcomes.



## REASON 3:

### WHY WE NEED TO LINK EFFORT AND OUTCOMES

A school system that is run to set timetables requires students to learn certain chunks of learning in certain timeframes. It doesn't allow for some to need longer on some areas than others, and it doesn't allow for some to find something easy and skip ahead. Everyone has to progress at an even pace, set by the teacher, school or the curriculum authority.

For the individual student, the correlation between effort and outcome is limited. Some can do nothing but fail as once they start to fall behind and don't understand something, there isn't the time and space for them to catch up before they start not understanding the next thing. For those who find something easy, they are slowed down in their progress and become bored and frustrated.

The single measure of success or outcome stem from the various testing regimes that occur at various points in the student lifecycle, including NAPLAN and ATAR. This disconnect between effort and outcomes is demotivating to students and causing widespread disengagement with PISA statistics reporting 1 in 3 students in Australian classrooms being disengaged from the learning process..



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## HERE'S WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW:

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*In the first place, God made idiots. That was for practice. Then he made school boards. Mark Twain*

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1. Students are disengaging from class because they cannot progress at a pace that suits them, and are either held back or left behind by the pace set by the teacher, school or curriculum authority.
2. Students cannot correlate the outcomes they are achieving with the effort they are putting in to their studies.
3. A content based curriculum requires a set rate of student progress according to the volume of content to be covered over a finite period of time, factors that have nothing to do with the student themselves.

Transforming the delivery of education requires students to have personalised learning plans that allow them to progress at a rate that is suitable for them, ensuring a year's worth of learning for a year's worth of effort. Such a system would facilitate mixed ability classrooms where students can work alongside each other at different paces and levels while still completing common outcomes and shared experiences. This requires teachers to be able to facilitate projects work and buddying mentoring, as well as allowing more advanced students to lead teams while others are simply team members, differentiating the learning experience during a common task.



## REASON 4:

### WHY WE NEED TO ENGAGE TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM



We hear a lot of criticism of the Millennial generation for having an ‘entitlement’ mindset, where they feel they deserve something for nothing. But do they? I don’t think so. My experience of them is that they are perfectly happy to work really hard at something – but they have to see that that something has a value.

Access to the internet, social media and YouTube means that people can pretty much find out anything they want to when they want to, so what purpose could they possibly see from leaving their technology in the school locker and engaging in some ‘old fashioned’ process for a purpose they don’t value?

Rather than getting students to use technology positively in their learning processes, developing their communication skills, and enhancing the learning experience, schools are doing the opposite and are limiting its use in the classroom, subjecting the students to slower, less engaging learning processes for which they don’t see the relevance.

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## HERE'S WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW:

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*Education must be the only sector that hasn't already been completely revolutionized by technology. Wendy Kopp*

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1. Young people are experiencing more stress and anxiety and are self-reporting mental health issues at a rate of approx. 75%. Much of this stems from shifting communication skills to mobile phone usage, but rather than addressing this and developing these skills, schools are removing the phones from the classrooms, creating 'false' environments which can exacerbate the problem.
2. Nowhere in the school curriculum is there a skillset development focussed on communication skills utilising technology and the mobile phone. Young people are expected to develop and master their skills in this area themselves.
3. Mobile technology and the internet increases the stimulus processing and multitasking capabilities of young people beyond those that a single analogue task can match, and hence removing technology can result in disengagement.

Transforming the delivery of education requires teachers (and students) to embrace the use of technology as part of the learning process, and appreciate that the skilled use of such technology is a learning process in itself which needs to be recognised, developed and rewarded in terms of education outcomes. The IT industry is already rejecting traditional education outcomes and instead recognising microcredentials that it is establishing within the industry rather than school or university provisions. What does this signal to us about the future of this area?



## REASON 5:

### WHY WE NEED TO PERSONALISE LEARNING PLANS



Peter Hutton, formerly Principal of Templestowe College, asked the question ‘what would happen if we allowed the students to decide what it was they wanted to learn?’. His work at Templestow College which he takes forward through the Future Schools Alliance worked on this model of literally ‘letting the lunatics take over the asylum’ and to great effect. Because if you give the students the choice of what they want to learn, they will choose to study things they are interested in, and because they are interested in them, they focus and enjoy the learning, and guess what? They succeed!

While there are some core skills that nobody would argue are not core, such as basic literacy, numeracy and oral skills, other areas such as an appreciation for history can be developed through developing the student’s natural sense of curiosity, as they seek to find out what happened before in the area in which they are interested. This is very different from them having to study various periods of history pre-determined by a school board.

Student centered inquiry based learning approaches allow the students to focus on areas of curriculum that have meaning and importance to them, are of interest to them, and motivate them to study.

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## HERE'S WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW:

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*I think the principle purpose of education is to allow each of us, when we become adults, to shape our own future. Michael Gove*

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1. Students are more motivated to learn subject areas and engage with their studies when they can see relevance and meaning to the areas they are studying.
2. By adopting inquiry based learning approaches, students develop broad skills in learning processes that are transferable across disciplines and subject areas and build on their natural sense of curiosity.
3. Inquiry based learning allows for the development and application of core skills and curriculum areas through their application and integration into the inquiry process rather than being taught as stand alone skills without relevant application.

Transforming the delivery of education requires teachers to facilitate the student's learning process development as they set off on inquiry journeys into the unknown. This can be scary, uncharted territory for teachers as they do not know what the students will find out, and they may be working in areas in which they feel they lack expertise. However, every teacher should be able to facilitate a process and draw on subject expertise as and when needed. This is a very different way of organising school resources to the traditional subject led teaching approach.



## SO WHY NO CHANGE?

When a system is so clearly broken, it is unbelievable that so little is being done to bring about change. Why is this? Perhaps too many vested interests in the current system that would all need to change simultaneously – such as the State curriculum and assessment boards, the schools, the teachers, the Universities that train the teachers and perpetuate the ATAR system, the teacher registration boards, the head teachers – the list is endless and includes the parents and students themselves.

So is the task so impossible that the system literally needs to collapse for alternatives to arise? Possibly! There are more and more schools and educational offerings that are considered 'alternative' at a local level becoming more mainstream, such as Templestowe, Montessori, Big Picture Learning, and others. These all work to a different model and outcome. As more students fail at the current system, the likelihood is that demand for more of these alternative will rise. In the meantime, the Government continues to sustain the current system.





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## TIME FOR A NEW EDUCATION SYSTEM:

### THE NEED FOR A STUDENT CENTERED FOCUS

The investment in the production of the Gonski reports into the future of education had bipartisan support and resulted in a set of recommendations that would take us a long way to realising changes in the system, but again they are being largely ignored.

Part of the difficulty seems to be that people cannot comprehend how such systemic change can occur when everything about a system is centered around content, assessment and systemic processes rather than around the student. Simply taking the student as the focal point for decisions and actions brings about the change from the bottom up. It is possible and it can be done, and it doesn't require every other structure in the broader system to disappear – they simply have to adapt and respond to the bottom up change. This needs to be a student centered revolution.

