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Book Review

Deep Learning: Engage the World Change the World

Michael Fullan, Joanne Quinn, & Joanne McEachen

Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press (2017)

208 pages; \$33.95 USD (paperback)

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<https://us.corwin.com/en-us/nam/deep-learning/book255374>

Reviewed by William V. Loose, Azusa Pacific University

“We can say with confidence that the current education system doesn’t work and one way or the other will transform or disappear over the next two decades” (Fullan, Quinn, & McEachen, 2017, p. xvi).

Michael Fullan and his colleagues start the book with the above sentiment about reforming the education system through *deep learning*, which the authors view as a solution for school reform. The deep learning system is built by developing a shared purpose and a collaborative expertise that will enable students, teachers, and families to transform learning. In reading and reviewing this book, there is a great deal for school leaders to contemplate and accomplish to develop this deep learning school system as offered by the authors.

This book uses deep learning as a term and focal point for a framework by which today’s schools can develop six global competencies (6Cs) for their school and students: character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. The authors believe that the 6Cs also encompass empathy, social-emotional learning, entrepreneurialism, and related skills. The authors acknowledge that the 6Cs may be similar to other 21st Century learning lists, but to date, the simple process of identification or “list” of these items have had very little impact on actually reforming and improving the current educational system as it currently exists.

The process to develop the Deep Learning Framework to achieve the 6Cs is accomplished through four layers:

1. The first layer of the framework is acquiring the 6Cs.
2. The second layer of the framework supports the learning design process with the integration of pedagogical practices, learning partnerships, learning environments, and leveraging digital technologies.
3. The third layer of the framework describes the conditions that mobilize deep learning across schools and systems. The author's necessary five conditions that need to be present at each of these three levels include: vision, leadership, collaborative cultures, deepening learning, and new measures/assessment.
4. The fourth and final layer is the "outer circle" which is a collaborative inquiry process that grounds the work and fosters the interaction effect of all levels.

The Deep Learning framework is presented as a systemic change in a school organization's culture but not necessarily the programs. Thus, deep learning affects the whole system with the four layers interacting holistically. Fullan and his colleagues suggest that the significance of this framework is that it is not being driven by policy or top-down government mandates. Rather, it gets its strength for the reformation from the middle (district's and municipalities) and from the bottom (students and teachers). The authors encourage school leaders to "go deep, or go home," meaning that school administrators should be pervasive (system minded) or stand aside and let this movement go forward.

The authors provide examples how Deep Learning is occurring throughout the world in Australia, Canada, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Uruguay, and the United States. The authors also believe that as deep learning begins evolving through the four layers, the contagion factor sets in, and that deep learning becomes a momentum maker for on-going and transformational systemic change.

The book organizes the deep learning framework into three sections.

- Section I: *Engage the World Change the World* sets the stage for "why deep learning" is necessary; "what makes it deep?"; and "why it matters."
- Section II: *The Living Laboratory*, demonstrates how deep learning is emerging across the globe thorough the NPDL (New Pedagogies for Deep Learning partnership – www.npdl.global), which is providing the definition and implementation to the concepts of deep learning.

- Section III: *A Precarious Future*, highlights the emergent discoveries in deep learning; identifies coherence making outcomes; and describes how transformation to deep learning might be possible.

In Section I: *Engage the World Change the World*, the authors make the case that the current public educational system simply is not working and state that there is no reason for the majority of students to take the current conventional schooling seriously. Fullan and these colleagues offer an equity hypothesis believing that deep learning is good for all students, but is especially effective for those most disconnected from schooling (in subgroups such as students living in poverty). Ultimately, the goal is to make deep learning a “momentum maker” that can and will break through the many forces that have reinforced and maintain the current status quo and rein in the traditional educational system which has been so resistant to reform.

At the heart of the matter is the process of reimaging learning. The process consists of recognizing what is important to be learned, how learning is fostered, where learning happens, and how success is measured. This section utilizes Roosegarde’s suggestions for cultivating learning environments for children, stressing that it is not about re-inventing the bike, but finding new ways to ride the bike.

Leading the way for this transformation are the “Coherence” concepts Fullan and Quinn have previously written about and presented in his 2016 book, *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems* (2016). Coherence, as defined by Fullan and Quinn, is the “shared depth of understanding of about the nature of the work” (p. 29). The Coherence framework has three essential features: it focuses as system change; it zeroes in on pedagogy and the process of learning; and it always considers the casual pathways that result in measurable impact for all students. Further, the Coherence framework is not linear, and Coherence is comprised of four components of focusing direction, cultivating collaborative cultures, deepening learning, and securing accountability.

The authors then suggest that the Deep Learning framework overlays the Coherence framework combining together as the literal road map of how to achieve deep learning and reform educational systems.

Section II, *The Living Laboratory*, illustrates how deep learning is seen in action through living partnerships, describes how deep learning is being designed and developed in collaboration, outlines the conditions through which deep learning is mobilizing systemic change, and suggests new measures to be used in deep learning.

A key part of the living laboratory involves the importance of creativity in the deep learning process. Indeed, Fullan and his colleagues suggest that deep learning is not about one particular model of teaching, but a wide range of learning practices that result with students being more excited and deeply engaged in their learning. These students are utilizing more collaboration and creativity and the traditional structure of schools is extended to other times and places through developing critical thinking. The ultimate result is an “unbridled optimism of students, teachers, and leaders who describe a renewed energy, passion, and liberation” which Fullan and colleagues posit “is due in part to the greater voice and choice....” (p. 46).

To begin this transformation and reformation process, three suggestions are offered:

- Promote powerful conversations
- Cultivate a culture of deep learning
- Think big – start small

To design the new deep learning system, there are many new design aspects, steps, and processes for the school system and stakeholders to establish. Indeed, these authors state that these new designs are a distinctive feature of what embodies deep learning. New pedagogies for deep learning include: (a) new learning partnerships between and among students and teachers with the learning process becoming the focal point for mutual discovery, creating, and use of knowledge; (b) expanding the learning environment by moving beyond and outside the traditional classroom; and (c) leveraging digital resources. The authors suggest that all these new pedagogies stand in direct contrast to the traditional teaching models that focused primarily on content mastery.

Designing a system for deep learning requires that the traditional school roles for teachers, school leaders, families, and communities be completely redesigned. For example, new roles for teachers consist of Activator (establishing learning goals, success criteria, and deep learning tasks), Culture Builder (establishing norms of trust and risk taking to foster innovation and creativity), and Collaborator (connecting meaningfully with students, family, and community). The authors lay out new roles for school leaders, families, and community members that similarly emphasize active participation and shared power within the school community.

To make all of these transitions to the deep learning process and framework, Fullan and his co-authors describe the “fuel” as being cultivating collaboration and capacity. It is pointed out that with all the talk of 21st century

skills and collaboration, that many assume collaboration is already in place and well-functioning. The authors contend that reality is quite another story, and that teachers and staff will need help and support to make the kind of changes this book is calling for which is a systemic movement and reform that is not dependent on one “super teacher” or one school leader. To cultivate the collaboration four strategies are offered: establishing norms and relationships; building common language and skills; identifying and sharing innovative practices; and providing sustained opportunities for teachers to build their practice. The need for building a school/staff’s capacity is a necessary part of this process and four key areas are identified to accomplish capacity building: change leadership, collaboration, pedagogy, and assessment. By following these prescribed steps, the results are to “amplify and accelerate the learning.”

The conclusion of the book is titled *Sirens or Salvation: Deep Learning Hell or Heaven*. Here the authors detail the challenges in moving forward with Deep Learning using the metaphor of heaven and hell. In this case, hell is described as:

- Not experiencing deep learning yourself
- Unwilling to reimagine the “grammar” of schooling
- Not respecting students in the present as opposed to the future
- Not giving students choice
- Not living by “less is more”
- Not willing to admit you don’t know the answers
- Not creating opportunities for revision/improvement
- Not helping students to feel they belong
- Unwilling to set the world a little askew
- Not realizing that deeper learning is a countercultural enterprise

In contrast, heaven in deep learning is:

- Going from simple to complex ideas
- Learning is simultaneously personal and collective
- Learning changes relationships and pedagogy
- Learning sticks
- Learning involves a critical mass of others
- Learning is built on innovation
- Learning attacks inequity
- Learning engages the world to change the world
- Learning creates citizens of tomorrow
- Learning where young people make older people better

Getting to Deep Learning heaven, Fullan and his team warn, will be much more challenging than previously believed because of the new relationships and discovery required by the process.

There are a number of elements of this book that are bound to be of particular interest to educators in Catholic schools. In fact, the book includes The Ottawa Catholic school system among the examples of schools and systems moving toward deep learning. The Ottawa Catholic schools are described as an urban school system serving more than 40,000 students in 84 schools. Although it is noted that not every school in Ottawa is fully immersed in deep learning, the district is a prime example of what is possible in using the deep learning system.

Observations in the Ottawa Catholic schools provide examples of students working with their own devices; using space purposefully for collaborating and moving; providing green walls for producing videos; students taking responsibility for their learning which is their new norm. Additionally, teaching and learning are approached in new ways with teachers meeting in teams by grade or cross levels and where teachers are learning alongside the students as they explore new digital devices not familiar to the teachers.

Principals and district leaders in the Ottawa Catholic Schools are also visible learners as they attend student-led workshops and learn how to leverage digital resources. They participate in learning walks with teachers and students visiting classrooms with an observational purpose. Monthly meetings of all principals and district leaders provide opportunities to focus on sharing and developing solutions to any problems of practice.

The Ottawa Catholic Schools are praised for making this kind of deep learning the norm for all schools and classrooms by choosing to embrace the deep learning agenda and using the coherence framework to craft a whole system strategy for change. Indeed, this system provides a rich example for Catholic schools to emulate and follow.

Reference

- Fullan, M. & Quinn, J. (2016). *Coherence: The right drivers in action for schools, districts, and systems*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.