



Addressing Student Disengagement

“It is increasingly difficult to reach those children who remain excluded from education”

Kevin Watkins,
Director of the Education for all Global Monitoring Report

Promethean Education Strategy Group
Student Achievement





Case Study: POV on Addressing Student Disengagement | v3 | Written by Jim Wynn

“It is increasingly difficult to reach those children who remain excluded from education. Research estimates that between 25% (Willms, 2003) and 66% (Cothran and Ennis, 2000) of students are disengaged in classrooms making engagement a salient issue for millennial learners.”

**Kevin Watkins,
Director of the Education, Global Monitoring Report**

“Ninety-five percent of students love school in Kindergarten, but by Grade 9, the feeling has steadily declined to 37 percent...a hell of a lot of disengaged students.”

**Michael Fullan,
Stratosphere: Integrating Technology, Pedagogy, and Change Knowledge**

Student disengagement continues to be amongst the top issues for the education community, regardless of whether it's at the school, district or country level. The acceleration in the number of young people not in education, employment or training, commonly referred to as NEETS, is worrying governments around the world. In the Arab world there may be as many as 20 million young people in this category in the coming years. Large parts of large cities around the world have unemployment figures of over 80% in the younger age groups and in one top-performing PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) country, students are dropping out of class at an alarming rate.

“The global youth unemployment rate for 2012 remains stuck at crisis peak levels and is not expected to come down until at least 2016.”

Global Employment Trends for Youth 2012 Report

The curriculum doesn't seem to inspire students as much as it did; it's failed to keep pace with the demands of the 21st century and the expectations of students. When students see siblings and friends unable to get work despite achieving at school, engagement in the education process slows, and too often stops. The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation) reports that in the UK 20% of 16-year-old students drop out, and in Egypt only 50% of children complete 6 full years of education.

It isn't just about the curriculum or life after school, it goes deeper than that. Ken Robinson spoke, in his famous RSA (Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) talk, about the difference between student lifestyle out of the classroom and the regime inside the classroom and how this gap leads to disruptive behavior. So why has the gap become so big? One answer is the rapid adoption of communication technologies, which is virtually universal and is particularly pervasive amongst young people. Technology allows them to be dynamic, last minute and adaptive. It feeds their needs as individuals, giving a personalized experience and at the same time enabling collaboration, in real time and asynchronously with different social groups. Individuals can have different personas with different groups. Compare this to school, where they sit in rows and at 11:00 a.m. learn geometry.

The issues we face today are not new, but surely we have had long enough to tackle them. Education systems are inert; this inbuilt inertia to change was a virtue in the past and represented wisdom, stability and comfort. It also led to respect for educators, which is still relevant and important today. Education did change over time, serving agricultural and industrial societies, but this change has been slow and gradual. The information society has accelerated the need for the education system to change.



In many systems, educators, or the majority of them, are unable and sometimes unwilling to change. Therefore, the gap between them and their learners, which has always existed, has now reached breaking point. It's as if they speak a different language. In one survey a student remarked, "My teacher is really strange, she still remembers telephone numbers".

It's not just about the gap between students and teachers, but also the need for the curriculum to adapt to reflect the skills needed today and 20 years from today.

Conrad Wolfram is receiving a lot of attention for his attack on the mathematics curriculum in schools. Those professionals who use math in their work use technology to solve their problems, yet some schools system still ban calculators and some ban access to any form of technology, which is then used as soon as the learner goes home. Wolfram wants to separate understanding and solving problems from the mechanical part of number crunching. He is simply reflecting a proper analysis of the needs of that curriculum area today. It simply isn't 1890 anymore, so you don't have to teach logarithms.

It's not just about the curriculum content, but how it is taught and the expectations of learners. Changing the curriculum and introducing appropriate teaching methods to include real-world scenarios is simply not enough.

Learners are increasingly demanding an education that suits their needs as individuals. The curriculum today must give feedback to the learner frequently enough so that the learner can make his own personalized progress and discover his own learning journey.

Feedback at the personal level is not required by governments; they wish to know how the whole system performs and use summative tests to find this out. This drives an agenda towards the summative test, and the individual is left behind. There is a need to test the system. The nadir of the personal zenith demanded by the individual is not surprisingly a root cause of disengagement. Some of us, and I am one, believe that all summative testing could be scrapped if formative assessment methods with data capture were in place. Not only would this save time and be more meaningful, but it would positively impact results.

Key to delivering a modern education system fit for purpose is professional development for both educators and administrators of schools. No subject or topic is in itself boring. Not one. Making the subject authentic or real to the learner requires certain skills and experience of the educator. This in turn will demand the use of technology to better bring that topic to life. A chalk drawing on a chalk board is never going to compete with a video produced by National Geographic.



“Promethean believes that education is the fuel that drives economic growth and social progress. Effective teaching is the key to successful, collaborative and personalised learning-which in turn creates better prepared students, more prosperous nations, more secure societies, and more engaged global citizens.”

No prototype made in balsa wood can compete with a 3D printer object. Educators need many more skills than ever before to bring learning to life, and as someone once said, bring life to learning. As both students and governments demand more from educators, we must give them the tools to do the job. Teachers need a network of support and resources through access to on-line communities. Without management support, educators will not be able to develop new skills and keep pace with the needs of a modern education system.

I believe that as learners get older, the balance between physical education and virtual education changes. The younger learner needs an educator that helps develop social skills as well as knowledge. The older learner needs support in developing his niche and understanding how to become economically and socially active in the world. Unless we can deliver both, we will see a continuation of student disengagement. I continue to believe in schools.

Further Reading and Research

Out-of-School Children: New Data Reveal Persistent Challenges

<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/out-of-school-children-data-release.aspx>

Global Employment Trends for Youth 2012

<http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/youth/2012/lang--en/index.htm>

Ken Robinson – RSA Animate

<http://vimeo.com/29485820>

A College Degree Sorts Job Applicants, but Employers Wish It Meant More

<http://chronicle.com/article/The-Employment-Mismatch/137625/#id=overview>

OECD: fifth of British teenagers 'drop out of school at 16'

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/9072482/OECD-fifth-of-British-teenagers-drop-out-of-school-at-16.html>

Draft science curriculum is not fit for the 21st century

<http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/blog/draft-science-curriculum-is-not-fit-for-the-21st-century>

Stratosphere: Integrating Technology, Pedagogy, and Change Knowledge

http://www.amazon.com/Stratosphere-Integrating-Technology-Pedagogy-Knowledge/dp/0132483149/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1346351852&sr=8-1&keywords=ullan%2C+stratosphere

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