



Most Likely to Succeed: Preparing Our Kids for the Innovation Era

Tony Wagner , Ted Dintersmith

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From two leading experts in education and entrepreneurship, an urgent call for the radical re-imagining of American education so that we better equip students for the realities of the twenty-first century economy.

Today more than ever, we prize academic achievement, pressuring our children to get into the “right” colleges, have the highest GPAs, and pursue advanced degrees. But while students may graduate with credentials, by and large they lack the competencies needed to be thoughtful, engaged citizens and to get good jobs in our rapidly evolving economy. Our school system was engineered a century ago to produce a work force for a world that no longer exists. Alarming, our methods of schooling crush the creativity and initiative young people need to thrive in the twenty-first century.

In *Most Likely to Succeed*, bestselling author and education expert Tony Wagner and venture capitalist Ted Dintersmith call for a complete overhaul of the function and focus of American schools, sharing insights and stories from the front lines, including profiles of successful students, teachers, parents, and business leaders.

Most Likely to Succeed presents a new vision of American education, one that puts wonder, creativity, and initiative at the very heart of the learning process and prepares students for today’s economy. This book offers parents and educators a crucial guide to getting the best for their children and a roadmap for policymakers and opinion leaders.

Most Likely to Succeed: Preparing Our Kids for the Innovation Era Details

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Tony Wagner , Ted Dintersmith

From Reader Review Most Likely to Succeed: Preparing Our Kids for the Innovation Era for online ebook

Cindy Jacobsen says

This is my 4th book for the 2017 Reading Challenge-a book with career advice. Every teacher, at any stage of their career should read this and rethink the classroom. Every district should watch the documentary that goes with this and start to reinvent "school". The American school is still following the plan created in the late 1800's to get a population ready for factory work. The world has changed yet "school" still plods along. A quote from the book that sums up all of the ideas and information: "If you want to get inspired about our country's future, look to our inventors, our innovators, our social entrepreneurs, our start-ups. And if you want to get discouraged, look at how we educate our kids. How we treat our teachers. And how we stumble from one failed policy to the next."

Sandy says

The book is really alarming and seems to be all too true. Our education system is about 75% worthless according to the premise and I certainly can't dispute it. What a waste of all the hard work being done much like gerbils running on a treadmill rather than students actually learning.

I do have trouble seeing how things can really change for the better due to the entrenched positions of educators and lobbying by advocates of testing, SATs, college admissions and long held beliefs even when they seem to be wrong. It is as discouraging as politics where it is also hard to see how real constructive change can occur.

But I love the concept of kids learning modern skills of critical thinking, communication, asking questions and collaborative problem solving. Just hope we can somehow get there!

Good job Ted!

Shanna says

There were many aspects of this book that really hit home with me. The chapter detailing the math skills students will need in real life contrasted with what they are expected to learn in school was especially interesting. However, the book spent too much time puffing itself up about the greatness of American innovation and how education needed to change for the sake of job security and national pride. The authors spoke about intrinsic motivation but in the same breath spoke of alternative mandatory courses students should take in high school. At one point I said aloud, "If I read the word "grit" one more time, I am prepared to close this book and be done with it." Overall, a decent read for someone just getting started in exploring education alternatives but there are better books out there in my opinion.

Veronica says

This interview with Sean Carroll is a quintessential example of something this book discusses in detail—namely, the failure to prioritize pedagogy in academic circles, especially when it comes to granting academic tenure at prestigious universities: A Personal Narrative. Another perspective on the whole debacle—a furious testament to the absurdity of modern academia.

The erratic ('peer-driven'), research-focused process of granting tenure at selective US universities is unquestionably injuring the education in this country. I am glad that the wonderful Sean Carroll found his way to Caltech.

In May, 2005, I was informed that I had been denied tenure. This came as a complete shock, in part because I had been given no warning that any trouble was brewing. I will never know precisely what was said at the relevant faculty meetings, and the explanations I received from different colleagues were notable mostly for the lack of any consistent narrative. But one thing that came through clearly was that my interest in doing things other than research had counted substantially against me. I was told that I came across as “more interested in writing textbooks,” and that perhaps I would be happier at a university that placed a “*greater emphasis on pedagogy*.”

I have a lot to say about education—in particular, education in America. Too much to formulate, as of now. But the current system of tenure granting at selective colleges is a tremendous affront to the true purpose of collegiate studies, which—at one point—was to teach students.

Now, I know not what...

Robbyn says

I hated this book at first, too much throwing out of the baby with the bath water. That's one of my least favorite things with this type of nonfiction; authors feel like in order to create a space for their argument they have to say that everything else is THE WORST! As a person who thrived in a traditional educational setting, I disagree with the notion that it's all horrible. As I got further into the book I liked it much better. I believe in innovation and changing with the times and making sure there are good opportunities for all types of learners (I know plenty of people suffocate in the same environment when I succeeded). So lots of good ideas here. I don't agree with everything, but I found it thought-provoking.

Michael says

Man, I don't even know where to start with this one.

I went to graduate school almost 17 years ago, initially, where I earned my M.Ed in Secondary Education. This was a vocational degree: I studied the craft of teaching, and practiced in a classroom for a year before becoming a full time teacher, a job which I have held ever since. Four years into my career, I entered into a doctoral program and began to study--among other things--the philosophy of education. I had some excellent professors, and I learned a great deal about schooling in America. I can't honestly say I am an expert on schools and education, but I think I am reasonably well informed about issues related to education.

This book is the newest, and most cutting edge, thinking about education, and it makes me feel like a complete dinosaur. The authors--quite convincingly--lay out the case that how we are educating young people today is completely wrong. Instead of fostering a generation of creative problem solvers who can communicate effectively, collaborate productively, and communicate both clearly and compellingly (as well as think critically), we are running our kids through a credentialing wringer then wondering why they are turning out so dumb.

Basically, these authors are arguing that knowing things is not as important as demonstrating that you can *do* something with what you know. Knowledge, they argue, is ubiquitous now. I can just look things up if I don't know them. What I *do* with knowledge; how I synthesize it and apply it and creatively reconstruct it into new forms...that's what we need to be teaching. Kids will be intrinsically motivated to learn if their learning is connected to things they are passionate about, and that have real world applications.

If this sounds like common sense to you, I ask you to reflect on your own schooling experiences. Did you have a 'Genius Hour' like Google does, where it lets its employees spend 20% of their time pursuing their interests? Did you create a digital portfolio highlighting that things you created, then use that portfolio as a way to impress an employer, or to seek entrance into a college? No?

Did you take a standardize test, like MCAS or PARRC? Did you take an AP classes? The SATs? Did you major in something? According to the authors of this book, you wasted your time.

I am not going to recreate their arguments here. Suffice it to say that I am startled by how different this all is from what I was trained to do, and how I was taught myself. If the goal is to no longer develop 'knowledge workers' because knowledge is so readily available, why are we spending 13 years of elementary and secondary schooling teaching kids facts, figures, formulas, and foreign languages? Should we teach them basic skills and content, then turn them lose to solve real-world problems? To work collaboratively with others to create actual things of value?

This book has given me a tremendous amount to think about. I have more questions than answers. I also, literally, cannot imagine how any of this would apply to the difficult public school where I work. None the less, much to ponder.

Halyna Shlapai says

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Ted

The world cares not about what you know, but about what you can do with what you know

Do you have the skill and do you have the will?

Where am I encouraging the play, the passion, and the purpose

Melanie says

Wagner and Dintersmith present a compelling, well-researched argument for the need to revolutionize education in the United States.

Having worked in independent settings that have the resources and agency to experiment with these authors' initiatives, I am well-acquainted with the ideas entertained in both the "Most Likely to Succeed" film and this text. While I theoretically support almost all of what is put forth in this text, I have witnessed uneven and sometimes ineffective execution of the 21st century approaches. It's unfortunate because with the right kind of alchemy, I think implementing what is put forth in this text can be transformational and highly effective. I still believe that taking the leap and building an innovative program is worth it, but in determining the efficacy of such an approach, there needs to be support and professional development for those teachers in helping them determine how to assess work/products so that they don't completely toss out rigor in the process. Just as Wagner and Dintersmith point out that technology alone does not equal innovation (and rightfully claim that much educational technology integration is still organized around the completion of low-level tasks using technology as a vehicle), I would argue that simply employing these new approaches (such as project-based learning) without careful research and planning may not necessarily translate into BETTER learning unless you find ways to help the teachers in said programs strive to ensure that assessment is not fluffy and allowing the students to bypass REAL learning. Wagner and Dintersmith begin to talk about how to assess this learning in ways that still uphold quality and rigor, but this is where I would have liked to see more development and a sharpened focus.

One thing I wished the authors had emphasized more is the idea of merging passion AND challenge. I felt at times that there was such focus on passion that challenge/rigor was overlooked or downplayed. Too often, one is lost at the expense of the other, and I think they need to be merged effectively to make sure that the learning is deep and meaningful because the marriage of passion AND appropriate challenge is the sweet spot for students. As ELA teacher and consultant Penny Kittle outlined in her text *Book Love*, while she does give her students the freedom to decide which books they will read next, as she develops rapport with each of her students and grows more attuned to each one's strengths and challenges, she works to scaffold their reading worlds. First, you need to get a student motivated and excited about reading....but if you get a student who just wants to keep reading thirty books by the same author, at some point, you may need to step in and encourage the student to take on a new, more challenging endeavor.

I believe that the Most Likely To Succeed authors are working on a new film where they will feature schools who have prioritized innovative learning, and if this is the case, I think it will be beneficial for educators trying to grapple with the "how" of implementing this kind of approach to see examples of the work in action.

enyanyo says

The role of education is no longer to teach content, but to help our children learn—in a world that rewards the innovative and punishes the formulaic.

Our opportunity—and our obligation to our youth—is to reimagine our schools, and give all kids an education that will help them thrive in a world that values them for what they can do, not the facts that they know.

Ted Dintersmith and Tony Wagner argue that the current (American) education system is failing to prepare

young people for a the future. They propose a competency-based, "merit badge" system that focuses on creative problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration and communication.

Most Likely to Succeed: Preparing Our Kids for the Innovation Era is not very different from the few education books I have read recently like Ted Dintersmith's What Schools Could Be and Ken Robinson's Out of Our Minds. I did like that this one provided some practical examples about what an effective classroom/course should look like.

Kelly says

Wagner had me at hello with his book Creating Innovators. When I attended his keynote presentation at a conference, I counted myself fortunate indeed. This book continues with the same ideas, but he also touches upon new topics.

While reading this book, I shouted many AMENS and fist pumped and smiled and moaned and said things to myself such as "that's exactly what I've been saying for years!" For example, I railed against Accelerated Reader years ago when it was first introduced; I spoke with my children's elementary school teachers about the ills of this program. I didn't get far, but I voiced my concerns for sure, and I refused to use it my high school classroom. Thank you, Mr. Wagner, for validating my opinion.

Recently my school district embraced Expeditionary Learning as the next great thing for our students. The concept of EL is good, but why do we need this if we are teaching as we should? I'm tired of companies creating programs for schools that we don't need but which we blindly purchase because we are in the bandaid mode of fixing what is wrong with education.

Let's do something radical. Let's really make our schools better. Let's really use authentic audiences. Let's really teach our students to have grit and perseverance and let's really make our courses rigorous. Let's teach students for real that failure is a good thing. I don't want to hear the excuse that we have to teach to the test. That's an excuse; it really is. We can teach students to THINK and to SOLVE and to CREATE and to ANALYZE and to COLLABORATE and to make CONNECTIONS. It's going to be exhausting for teachers, and we will have to clearly explain to parents, students, the school board, and our communities what we are doing and that it will look messy at first and we will fail at first because failure leads to success.

It's time for us to stop following the curriculum that was created by 10 college professors over 100 years ago. This book provides enough practical examples and ideas for us to use, and the authors' ideas are all backed by evidence and facts. The authors dissect each content/subject area and provide specific lessons for how to improve student assignments so that student learning is more meaningful. Let's do more than give lip service to the words rigor, grit, creativity, and critical thinking.

We all lament when we return an assignment to a student and all s/he does is look at the grade and not the many comments we made. And worse, the assignment gets thrown away because the student will not be using it again. Let's change our school culture so students look forward to how they can improve upon their learning and take onus for their individual learning.

Read this book and be amazed at how colleges receive high rankings. I guarantee you won't look at higher ed rankings the same way ever again, and you will think more deeply about college degrees and their purpose. Read this book and you will learn how academic credentials create a hierarchy not unlike a caste system in our country. (I listen to teachers at my school compare what colleges they attended and how someone is a better teacher than another simply because of the name of their alma mater.)

Read this book to learn what the true purpose of education is and how our worship of competition, instead of collaboration, is undermining our children's future. I've had too many students tell me they have to cheat in order to score better so they can get into a better college, etc. They view cheating as a means to an end and don't view it as necessarily being dishonest.

Read this book to see the true purpose of assessment and how we can make it meaningful and helpful. And read this book to learn how we can collaborate to create true change. The authors provide examples from schools that are preparing our students for the future.

This book is a compelling read. It's also scary because change is scary. But you can't read this book without feeling empowered and excited (and to be honest - overwhelmed and nervous, too).

I haven't watched the documentary of this book yet, but I plan to soon.

Okay, so I had a love fest with this book. I went back and reread the book (yep, i really did), paying close attention to what i could use right now with my own school. I wish every employee in my district would read this book; I wish every parent and every student would read this book. I wish we had the courage and stamina to truly revolutionize our school. I'm not giving up hope. I know that a few people truly can change the world. So.... who's with me? Who's ready to create some innovators?

Ruth says

If you're someone who cares deeply about education and kids, prepare to feel utterly depressed and helpless by reading this book. Yes, the last chapter holds more promise, and the authors DO hold up several models of schools that work--but, overall, I find the book to be pretty black and white (e.g., ALL educational models are failing and there's only ONE fix, etc.)

Well, maybe it's not as dire as I paint it. The authors do have plenty to say, and I'm afraid some of it is true. As I say, it's depressing if you care about education and kids. For those of us who work in the educational field, it's almost too much. But the innovative ideas near the end do help to--mostly--redeem what is otherwise a literary black hole.

Jonna Higgins-Freese says

This was interesting, although I disagree with one of the central premises: "But while students may graduate with credentials, by and large they lack the competencies needed to be thoughtful, engaged citizens and to get good jobs in our rapidly evolving economy." This sounds to me like the myth debunked in *Why Good People Can't Get Jobs* [see full review elsewhere]:

"To recap, then, the hardest-to-fill jobs appear to be those that often require the least skills, employers are frequently unwilling to offer the wages necessary to attract the skill set they seek, knowledge is evanescent and experience frequently as hard to attain as King Arthur's magic sword, and would-be employees are wary of uprooting themselves and their families for increasingly short-term job security" (39).

Re: the myth of US school underperformance: "OECD show[s] US students about in the middle of industrial economies. It is true that we used to be higher up, but our relative fall is largely representative of other countries catching up, especially those in Asia, where, until recent decades, economies and levels of public spending were modest. Meanwhile, there is no evidence of any absolute decline in US scores or even of a sharp decline relative to other countries" (47).

But -- aside from that faulty premise, the point that it might be better for American education to be different, promote deeper learning and more critical thinking, etc. is an interesting one.

Math courses could ask students to engage with real problems that require real mathematical thinking -- developing and defending estimates of world population in 2100 for example. In history, students could use primary documents to answer questions such as "Why did the Gulf of Tonkin resolution achieve such strong support, and should that have informed decisions in 2002" (126). (Stanford's Reading Like a Historian). Or students might start the year with a big question, like "What does it mean to be an American"? (138)

In terms of foreign language learning, technology offers "polylinguality"/instant translation, and Guido Sarducci's Five Minute University teaches what students remember five years after college graduation ("Como esta usted?" Muy bien"). The best way to learn language, if one wants to, is to use the Rassias Center for World Languages and Cultures method of speaking to learn.

They cite Academically Adrift: "[Arum and Roksa] observed no statistically significant gains in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills for at least 45 percent of the students in their first two years of college, and for 36 percent of students across all four years of college. Overall gains across all students were a scant 7 percent in the first two years and only slightly higher for those completing their graduation requirements. 'In terms of general analytical competencies assessed, large numbers of U.S. college students can be accurately described as academically adrift. They might graduate, but they are failing to develop the higher-order cognitive skills that it is widely assumed college students should master' (157). (Along with many other horrifying figures -- nor do they mention the substantial critiques of Arum & Roksa's work). They suggest alternate means of measuring college performance (165).

www.likelytosucceed.org
thesparklist.org

The recommend the usual suspects: innovation, project-based learning, more qualified teachers, different goals -- yet without ever addressing the political contexts within which education operates, the agendas of those who fund (and defund it) and the possibility that schools are, indeed, working extraordinarily well to do precisely what they are intended to do in the United States: preserve the illusion that those who don't have don't deserve.

Robin says

Not a review - just notes.

Smoothly and compellingly written, though I do not agree with everything asserted by Wagner and Dintersmith. I absolutely love the dedication to America's teachers.

"We will see, however, that most lecture-based courses contribute nothing to real learning. Consequential and retained learning comes, to a very large extent, from applying knowledge to new situations or problems, research on questions and issues that students consider important, peer interaction, activities, and projects. Experiences, rather than short-term memorization, help students develop the skills and motivation that transforms lives." [p. 7-8]

What is the purpose of education?

". . . adults need to be able to ask great questions, critically analyze information, form independent opinions, collaborate, and communicate effectively." [p.20]

We were talking about this stuff more than 10 years ago when I still worked in public education. Testing all the time punishes teachers and tortures kids, cuts back on the amount of time that could be spent actually learning something.

I was a champion standardized test taker. I was a genius at filling in those little bubbles, topping out at 12.9 in early elementary school. Doesn't mean I understood anything going on around me.

"not what you know but what you can do with what you know." [p.27]

I agree that communities should have flexibility in developing local goals and culture and teachers should absolutely be able to use their creativity and judgement in deciding how to teach and how much time to spend on each skill and topic. They need be able to be responsive to the needs, talents, and interests of the students in their classes. But there should be some general agreement across communities as to what we're teaching and why. There needs to be overlap so we can be a cohesive nation with a common base and vocabulary from which to proceed into the future. As we can see from current politics and news viewing, when we start from different 'realities' with different 'facts' it is almost impossible to have a sane conversation and work together.

"We believe that the starting point for taking on the fundamental question of "What is the purpose of education?" is that education needs to help our youth discover their passions and purpose in life, develop the critical skills needed to be successful in pursuing their goals, be inspired on a daily basis to do their very best, and be active and informed citizens. Without this foundation, schools will continue to fall short." [p.44]

"It's a rare five-year old that doesn't demonstrate real joy for things in his or her life. Our preschool kids . . . are full of passion, curiosity, and exploration. But it's a rare high school senior who demonstrates any joy for something related to his or her education." [p.46]

"News sources today are driven not by civic responsibility to report the news accurately, but the need to build an audience . . . Every citizen selects and controls the news he or she receives, and we all gravitate toward comfortable predictable sources that reflect our own beliefs." [p.67]

Things to look for:

How slide rules won a war" by Alex Green

The Finland Phenomenon

George Land's NASA Creativity Test

Wolfram's TED talk: "Teaching Kids Real Math with Computers"

We're losing our minds: Rethinking American Higher Education - Hersh

College Work Readiness Assessment

ConceptTests

NH competency based approach to high school diploma

NY Performance Standards Consortium merit badge approach

www.likelytosucceed.org

sparklist.org

"While advanced math may be needed for admission to college, it is not the math required for students to succeed in college." [p.93]

Math resources for complex operations that you can download to your phone:

Wolfram Alpha

MATLAB

Calca

computer-basedmath.org

"Learning how to compute integrals by hand is of no use without learning how or when to apply them." [p.96]

"If college admissions officers are going to encourage kids to take the same AP math class, why not statistics? Almost every career (whether in business, nonprofits, academics, law, or medicine) benefits from proficiency in statistics. Being an informed, responsible citizen requires a sound knowledge of statistics, as politicians, reporters, and bloggers all rely on "data" to justify positions." [p.98]

"Today, when kids have ready access to an enormous range of written material, we should encourage them to be great readers by devouring everything they can that's aligned with their passion - whether it's nature, sports, or Harry Potter." [p.117]

"... our issue with education isn't the quantity of time students devote to their development; it's how they are impelled to spend boatloads of time on school-related activities that lead to no real learning." [p.154]

Many graduate college with no basic skills such as being able to write well enough to satisfy their employers. [p.157]

"What does it mean to be an educated adult in the twenty-first century? What are the core competencies that matter most for work, learning, and citizenship today? And how are these skills different from what students needed a century ago?" [p.223]

What matters is what you can do with what you know. Grit, perseverance, self discipline, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, problem solving.

Jill Cherry says

This book is a MUST READ for literally every single person in this country ages 14 and up.

We need to shift gears regarding our educational system. I have often wondered why so many children do so well in elementary school and then when entering middle school struggle so much and seem to lose interest. This book will help answer these questions and so many more.

Its time we step up to the plate and actually teach our children how to succeed in society and not just how to cram to take tests. We need meaningful curriculum teaching skills that will create a population of critical thinkers and innovators.

Sharon says

I thought this was well-written and organized. The authors give compelling arguments for completely revamping the way we see education and our goals for our kids. I was already convinced of much of what they propose (get rid of standardized tests, focus on depth of learning and motivation) but I felt like they gave some reasons for these changes that I hadn't thought about before and that were very convincing. Their views on college and the options currently available to those who don't go to college were depressing and eye-opening. They also give some solid ideas of how we could change our system and how to go about making it happen, although I am still left feeling fairly discouraged about our educational system and the likelihood that we are going to make the changes that I think are necessary.
