School Should Mirror the World as We Believe It Could Be

This book is borne of a spirit of hope that we can build healthier, more relevant, more caring schools that, in turn and in time, will help to build a healthier world.

According to Wolfram Alpha, there are fifty-nine million K–12 students in the United States.¹ That’s fifty-nine million families’ dreams, fifty-nine million young people whose lives are still loaded with potential, fifty-nine million young people whose stories have yet to be written, fifty-nine million students who deserve to be encouraged to believe, “You can,” before having someone tell them, “You can’t.” For that matter, the over three million teachers² all over this country also deserve someone to tell them “You can,” before having someone tell them, “You can’t.”

And yet, so much of what happens in school happens because we believe that we must prepare children for the world as it used to exist. Never mind that we have no idea what the world will look like for kids in kindergarten right now—and we might not even know what it will look like for the kids in ninth grade—we continue to replicate the factory-age structures and compliance-based codes of conduct that have governed school for decades because it “feels like school” to parents and politicians and school administrators all over the world.
Worse, in the twenty-first century the massive technological changes that have vastly changed our society have had little effect on our schools; in too many places, the technology is merely being used as the next, best filmstrip, or worse, a better way to quiz and test our students, rather than as a way to open up our classroom windows and doors so that students can learn what they need to, create what they want, and expand the reach of their ideas to almost limitless bounds.

In 1518, Martin Luther nailed ninety-five theses to the door of the church. He envisioned a world where the church did not act as a go-between—and in his mind, a barrier—between God and man. We need to understand now that school does not need to be a go-between—and, too often, it is a barrier—between students and learning. We can remake school so that students can feel more directly empowered to learn deeply alongside teachers who share a vision of the sense of joy that learning can unlock.

For our ninety-five theses, we ask you to suspend your disbelief that schools can be better than they are now. In fact, we ask you to suspend your disbelief that the world can be a better place. Each thesis in the text could lead to more questions, deeper discussion, more research, and, we hope, positive action. It is our hope that, individually, each thesis could help students and parents and educators to examine specific practices in their schools as they exist, and taken collectively, they can help communities create a new vision of school, built on the best of what has come before us, steeped in the traditions of progressive educators of the past hundred years, but with an eye toward a future we cannot fully imagine.

**From Theory to Practice**

- To prime your thinking as you move through the text, pause and take a moment to describe what you think school should be doing, what its role is in a modern world, and what success looks like. Let this thinking be a signpost as you explore this book.
• Start a conversation. As important as it is to think deeply about your own vision of what school can and should be, this book is designed as a conversation starter as well. As a thesis strikes you as relevant to your own place of learning and teaching, consider how you might use it to begin a larger conversation. Could you get time in a faculty meeting or a Parent-Teacher Association meeting, use it to inspire discussion as you have coffee with a colleague, or track key quotations and share them with a Listserv? Be on the lookout and be mindful. The more stories we share, the deeper our thinking will become.

Science Leadership Academy (SLA) was started by a group of educators with the idea that it would be the kind of school we would want our own children (real or theoretical) to attend. Our belief in an inquiry-driven, project-based, technology-rich approach to learning was not just for “other people’s children,” but for our own as well.