



Introduction

Let us put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children.

—Chief Sitting Bull

For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be a teacher. My mom and grandmother were both teachers. It seemed to be my destiny. I began teaching in 1991. And believe it or not, I am now more passionate about education than ever before. I must admit, though, that when I started teaching it was more fun. We had more latitude to create lessons that students loved learning—and we loved teaching. I now hear teachers refer to the 1990s as the “good old days.” This, in and of itself, is saddening. What happened over the last couple of decades to erode the art of teaching and the morale of teachers? For the answer, let’s take a brief look at recent education reform.

By the early 2000s, the US education system was perceived by many as failing. As a result, in 2002, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was signed into law. In my humble opinion, this was when teaching began to be marginalized, with an education policy that valued accountability over creativity. While there were good aspects of NCLB, such as focusing on the growth and achievement of all students, the impact on teaching is still being felt today. An emphasis on standardized testing and meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) ruled the day. This led to a greater focus on measurement than on instruction. Teachers began feeling that they were losing their autonomy in the classroom, which started to eat away at the “why” of becoming a teacher in the first place. This has become an

unhealthy trend. Teachers are now leaving the profession at a rate of 17% per year (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, Carver-Thomas, 2016) often citing reasons like a lack of support, inadequate resources, little to no input into decisions, and too much emphasis on testing and evaluation. To this day, our profession is under the microscope. Teachers and education leaders constantly share with me a desperate sense that they lack the authority to do what is in the best interest of their students.

Fortunately, we are now entering a new era under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015). Power is now being returned to the states and local districts. While there is still an emphasis on high academic standards, college and career readiness, and school improvement, the law encourages local innovation and investment. Society needs to embrace this new opportunity and empower educators to make the changes they believe are needed to best serve their students.

Architects of Deeper Learning is about bringing back the joy of teaching. It's about fostering more profound, more meaningful learning. And maybe most important, it's about honoring the abilities of professional educators to design and create learning opportunities that invigorate our classrooms, our schools, and our districts.

This is our time to shine!

In addition, students are begging for work that is grounded in the real world and prepares them for a rapidly changing future. Too many of us have heard the question: "Why do we need to learn this?" Add to this, students' level of stress and anxiety has increased due to increased pressure for high grades, more arduous college entrance requirements, and a hyper-competitive workplace. When it comes to student engagement, education experts Russell J. Quaglia and Michael J. Corso (2016) found that "45% of students said school was boring" (p. 33), "38% of students said their classes help them understand what is happening in their everyday life" (p. 37), and "58% said they feel comfortable asking questions in their classes" (p. 37). Less than half of students believe school addresses their daily lives. This is disheartening, to say the least.

We are at an impasse: Both teachers and students are struggling with our current education system. We must create learning experiences that

nurture joyful teaching and learning and that support a sense of urgency in better preparing students for their future. Students today need to be prepared to enter a workforce that we have yet to imagine. Just reflect on how our world has changed in recent years with the rapid growth of technology. Jobs of the future will likely require very different skill sets. As educators, we need to rethink and redesign how we prepare students for these new requirements. A recent article in *Forbes* (Strauss, 2016) reported the results of asking over 63,000 managers what skills recent college graduates lack. Broken down into hard and soft skills, here are the most cited deficiencies:

Hard Skill Gaps

- 44% report lack of writing proficiency.
- 39% report lack of public speaking skills.
- 36% report need for data analysis.

Soft Skill Gaps

- 60% report lack of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- 46% report a need for better communication skills.
- 44% report lack of leadership qualities.
- 36% report lower-than-needed interpersonal and teamwork skills.

In addition, of the more than 14,000 graduates who were also surveyed, 87% reported feeling “well prepared” for their new jobs. Maybe not surprisingly, only 50% of managers agreed (Strauss, 2016). Clearly, there is a significant disconnect in the workplace. Far too few students are entering the workforce prepared to meet today’s requirements.

Teachers and education leaders have enormous influence on learning outcomes and an ability to create compelling learning environments. When teachers are given permission to think outside the box and create experiences, rather than discrete lesson plans, the results have been astounding, including higher levels of student achievement and engagement and increased faculty satisfaction. This book, quite simply, is about creating these experiences and achieving these results.

But before we dive into the contents, let me describe the broader purpose, structure, and use of this book.

What Is the Purpose of This Book?

The purpose of *Architects of Deeper Learning* is to promote a learner-centered design model focused on moving beyond surface learning through intentional planning of learning experiences that transform instruction in districts, schools, and classrooms. Every educator can be an instructional leader. Everyone has the ability to rethink the way we currently “do school.” I chose the architectural theme as it represents both the art and science of teaching. Just as an architect must design a structure to meet various building codes, so must a teacher design instruction to meet learning goals. But how we design the structure is up to us.

We have to recognize that the art and science of teaching is complex. How do we make the complex simple? This is the “why” of this book. I stated earlier that teaching has never been more difficult than it is today, particularly because we are preparing our students for an ever-changing world. In the face of all these challenges, I still see educators searching for the silver bullet to improve education—the easy way to raise achievement. The truth is, there is no silver bullet. We must invest in people and practices. *Architects of Deeper Learning* was written to equip all teachers with the tools and resources needed to design learning experiences that will engage students today and prepare them for tomorrow.

How Is the Book Structured?

Intended as a step-by-step guide for incorporating purposeful design in your classroom, school, or district, *Architects of Deeper Learning* is made up of six focused chapters and a series of appendixes with resources and templates to assist with implementation of the instructional design process.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the Blueprint for Deeper Learning, which is a four-part framework for designing learning experiences

that are rigorous, relevant, and engaging for students. This chapter also introduces the Rigor/Relevance Framework®.

Chapter 2 is all about learning goals. Understanding at a deep level how to prioritize standards and performance expectations serves as our **foundation** for learning. We will focus on conceptual understanding, rather than discrete knowledge and skills. The investment we make in building a strong foundation leads to a course of study that is more focused and gets results.

Chapter 3 examines complex problem-solving and how we **frame** the problem that students need to grapple with during the learning process. We can challenge students to solve real-world problems through a collection of tasks that culminate in a final product or performance. These engaging learning experiences can span an entire unit of study and provide opportunities for students to use both hard and soft skills while engaging in meaningful experiences that lead to deeper learning.

Chapter 4 focuses on the **construction** of knowledge. This chapter is about how we teach. The design of the overall learning experience should be intentional and driven by practices and strategies that have the greatest impact on student learning. This chapter explores how we construct meaning for our students and create a plan that drives daily lessons.

In Chapter 5, we look at **inspection**—the measuring of what students have learned. The formative measures we develop to provide evidence of student learning inform our design and redesign of lessons, as well as the differentiation needed to ensure student success. The involvement of students in the assessment process empowers them to become goal-oriented learners who are able to monitor their own progress and make adjustments when needed.

Chapter 6 is a deep dive into how we start a learning **renovation**. And yes, the word choice is intentional. Some synonyms for renovation are modernization, makeover, refurbishing, reconstruction, improvement, repair, remodel, and update. This chapter helps us to analyze our current structures and identify modifications we need to make in order to better meet the needs of our students. It includes a detailed description of the process for focusing adult actions that will affect student learning. To this

end, I provide an action plan for collaboration among colleagues in promoting deep implementation of the best practices from this book.

Chapters 2 through 6 include a number of practical features to help with understanding and implementation, including design questions, field notes, real-world examples, opportunities for practice, chapter reviews, and next steps. Throughout this book and in the appendixes, there are tools, strategies, and resources to fill your teaching toolbox. To extend your learning and exploration even further, visit and bookmark www.leadered.com/AODL, a growing repository of additional resources.

Who Is the Target Audience for This Book?

This book is intended for professional educators who recognize the need to design learning experiences that are meaningful and authentic for students. *Architects of Deeper Learning* is relevant for individual teachers or teams of teachers, but it can also be used to define a district-wide instructional framework. Focusing on what to teach, how to teach, and how well students have learned is critical to the success of any educational organization.

How Can This Book Be Used in Schools and Districts?

Architects of Deeper Learning can be used as a resource for improving instructional design in any school or district, at any grade level, and in any content area. The book empowers teams to make dramatic improvements in teaching and learning. The blueprint presented in this book can be adopted by a school or district and used as a paradigm for designing learning experiences that will better prepare students for college, career, and life. But maybe more important, transforming instruction with this model will result in greater joy in both teaching and learning.

I am thrilled that you have chosen to become an architect of deeper learning. As a passionate teacher advocate, I firmly believe that there is no greater profession than that of educator. We shape lives; we shape our

world. Therefore, I challenge all of us in the field to reimagine the practices of teaching and learning—to rethink what types of learning experiences students need in order to succeed in an uncertain future. It’s a tall order, I know. But I am convinced that, together, we can build amazing experiences for students each and every day. Let’s get to work.