

# **Disrupting Class**

How Disruptive Innovation will Change the World

By, Christensen, C.M., Horn, M.B., Johnson, C.W.

Review By Ronnie White

As a teacher with little business experience I found it difficult at times to wade through many of the business terms and schemes presented in the book *Disrupting Class*, by Christensen, Horn, and Johnson, but at the conclusion of each chapter the educational reference really drove home the ideas. Throughout the book I couldn't help but think back to my life as a child growing up in the same monolithic system it describes. It reminded me of both the struggles and disadvantages I had, and of the path that led me to being a teacher in the first place.

One of the ideas that immediately caught my attention was in chapter six on pp.151-156. After describing the relationship between neurotransmitters, synapse, and the human brain, the book outlines the importance of having “fully adult extra talk” (pg.153) with very young children. If children are not exposed to more adult conversation, what I refer to as real talk, they are automatically disadvantaged going into the educational setting. According to the author “...the children of lower-income, poorly educated, inner-city parents are trapped in a multigenerational cycle of educational underachievement and poverty” (pg.153). I grew up in poverty and this idea really hit home for me as I thought back to my educational experiences. I never felt comfortable in school and never felt that I could be as successful as other students that gave the same level of effort as I did. However, I knew that getting a good education was the key to escaping the hard life I had growing up, so after high school I put everything I had into being successful. Even today when I bring up my education with students my quote is always the same, “I wasn't the smartest kid in the world, I just worked hard”. I try to install the same mentality to many of my struggling students as a form of motivation: if you work hard and give it all you have then you can be successful. But that often isn't enough for many of our youngsters as many teachers have seen.

The question many teachers have is why isn't that enough to motivate students? Chapter seven brings up a remarkable idea that really helps to drive home the idea behind motivation. The chapter discusses the "job" that students are trying to get accomplished. Most students, as was the case when I was a student, are trying to learn, feel successful, and have fun with friends. I think that all teachers know this intuitively but we lose track of how to accomplish it for so many students with such a variety of needs. One of the key concepts that helped me realize why it is so difficult is the idea that teachers of certain subjects are typically the strongest learners of the monolithic system. As the book states, "Teachers, of course, are no different and excel in a discrete number of styles. Like all of us, they therefore tend to teach in ways that are compatible with their strengths." (pg. 36) So when I expect my students to have the same motivations and successes that I have without a student centric educational system to work with, I am really expecting something that is nearly impossible.

As I continued to think about my high school career and the lack of success I had, I thought about the differences between college and high school. In college I was able to choose many of the classes I took and from the teachers I wanted to have. For me that was a huge part of my success. I built a schedule that interested me in a way that high school never could and my level of success was substantially higher. While not totally student centric, or built to my needs individually, I was able to choose classes that fit my learning style significantly better than if someone had put it together for me.

As I continued to think back to what motivated me to become a teacher, I remember one teacher that helped me to make that determination. Mr. M was my high school Global Studies teacher. He motivated me not because he was inspiring and influential, but because he was the exact opposite. I knew I could do a better job as a teacher than he could ever do and I wanted to

help kids like me be successful. Unfortunately I think that I, like many teachers, am in a difficult position. I expect myself to reach all of my students and I work very hard to do just that. Yet in spite of my best efforts I find myself falling short in many situations. I have always known that something needed to change but the vision was too far out there for me to see.

Ultimately when reading a book as a teacher, I want to know what the problems are with implementation of new ideas, why they have not been implemented and if they can ever be implemented. I like the ideas presented in the book but like many ideas I feel implementation is a long way away. The quote that most signifies my feelings in education is, “When the task of rearchitecting is given to teams of teachers who work within their departments, the projects are characterized by endless debates, grudging compromises, and little change.” (pg. 218) How true that is in my school. But the ideas presented in this book seem to hold a lot of water. A student centric educational system is a phenomenal idea that truly does need to be looked into. The book outlines an idea for a solution, “As hundreds of thousands of teachers and parents develop methods for knitting success and education together in the years ahead and as many thousands of them make their solutions available to others in the facilitated networks...we believe that this integrated solution of success and education will be found to have scaled magnificently against the challenge of students motivation.”(pg.178) I tend to agree with the idea that technology must play a huge role if education will be successful in creating a tailor-made educational system.

Christensen, C.M., Horn, M.B., Johnson, C.W., (2011). *Disrupting class: How disruptive innovation will change the way the world learns*. New York. McGraw Hill