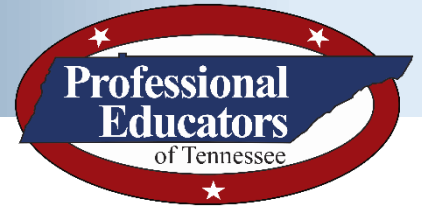


EDITORIAL

October 16, 2020 Online at www.proedtn.org



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WE NEED INNOVATORS, NOT DISRUPTORS, IN EDUCATION

Educators have to constantly fight against false premises that our public schools are failing, that educators are the problem, and that outsiders (usually non-educators) should take control of running our schools.

Harvard professor and businessman Clayton Christensen wrote [*The Innovator's Dilemma*](#) in 1997. In the book, Christensen put forth a notion of “disruptive innovation” as a concept for business theory. Christensen’s theory is based on buying decisions made by businesses, not consumers according to Ben Thompson, a critic of this particular business theory.

Disruption is built on two varieties: *low-end disruption* and *new-market disruption*. The essential difference between the two is that low-end disruption focuses on overserved customers, whereas new-market disruption focuses on underserved customers. When it comes to government programs, such as public education, for example, every child is made to conform to the existing business model. When in fact, they may fall within both types of disruption. As we have seen, new technologies to assist educators have been neglected, and our state needs greater access to broadband for communities and schools. Granted, we are making a rushed effort to make adjustments, but during hurried efforts, mistakes are frequently made.

Tony Robbins clarified, “His theory worked to explain how small companies with minimal resources were able to enter a market and displace the established system.” Robbins added, “like most buzzwords, the term quickly took on a life of its own. Suddenly everyone in the workforce was ‘disruptive’ and/or ‘innovative.’” Education is the same way. We welcomed people who were out-of-the-box thinkers or had a business background. However, education is not always a precise science. In business, the bottom line is selling a good or service. In education, that good is someone’s child.

Mark Zuckerberg is famous for telling his Facebook development team, “Move fast and break things.” Phil Lewis in Forbes magazine asked the key questions about the concept of moving fast and breaking things. “What is it acceptable to break? Why? And under what circumstances?” The answers to those questions are critical. In education, moving fast may not always be the best interest of children. You may fix one thing and break three.

For example, in high school, we got a new principal. He believed that by cutting time between classes we could add to the instructional schedule. We went from 5 minutes to 4 minutes. That meant we could add an extra minute to every class. What did that do? It also angered students and teachers. It forced students in our

SUMMARY

Even though educators are key in solving some problems that schools face, they can never be fully responsible for the serious societal problems that exist. Schools need people who are willing to innovate with fewer disruptions.

very large high school to forgo a bathroom break, get to class, and then get permission to be excused to go to the bathroom. Rather than add time to class it took away time from class time. The goal may have been well-intentioned, but the end results were predictable. We changed back very quickly. So much for disruption.

Too many people simply bought into the jargon fostered by disruption innovation. They are so enthralled by breaking the rules of the game that they forget what game they are even playing, thus changing the objective of their particular business. Robbins points out that Christensen himself was so troubled with the misuse of his theory that he published a 2015 update in the Harvard Business Review on what the term “business disruption” really should encompass.

Every single attribute of business simply cannot be documented and measured. Lewis points out that “innovation is ultimately a human enterprise, to do with our ability to inspire each other, think creatively and collaborate.” We do not need disruption in education, as much as we need innovation. Education is a pathway to the future. It provides a foundation for life.

In public education we are succeeding, despite the challenges we face. Schools alone can never be fully responsible for the outcomes that our students achieve. Educators are the key to solutions that schools face, but they need more assistance to confront the serious societal problems. We must ask ourselves frequently: What kind of state or community do I want to live in, work in, and raise my family in? What kind of schools do we need? We need more innovators and fewer disrupters.

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