

Introduction

In the revelation of any truth, there are three stages. In the first it is ridiculed. In the second it is resisted and in the third it is considered self-evident.

—Arthur Schopenhauer

The book you hold in your hands is about the future of education. Specifically, it is about the future of K–12 education in the United States. We started this book with the premise that this part of the education system is broken and needs fundamental change. In recent years there has been a growing sense of failure, frustration, and acceptance that what exists no longer serves our children, our society, our country, and our place in the world. This was our departure point. The structures, ideals, and systems of education in the United States were all created in prior centuries and have not kept up with advances made by the rest of society.

There has been much debate about what to do, where to go, what matters, what is missing, and what is wrong. There have been many wonderful books and articles written about what is needed for education to provide value in this new century. There are many great thinkers who have led the conversation to help us all see what isn't working and suggest what might be done to improve education. Our purpose here is not to compete in any way with these thought leaders or the work they have done, but rather to join the conversation more from the perspective of the ordinary citizen, parent, and

businessperson to provide a vision that is as broadly accessible as possible.

We are now entering the second decade of the twenty-first century and the second decade of a new millennium. We are transitioning through one of the most dynamic periods of change in human history—a time we call the Shift Age. With our growing ability to connect, communicate, and collaborate globally, the speed and scope of change seem to increase daily. But as society races ahead, our approaches to educating its youngest members—and the resources we dedicate to this purpose—seem to continually lag behind. In this book, we share with you our view that nothing less than transformation will succeed in changing this situation. We cannot repair, reengineer, or retune: we must reinvent.

We begin the journey toward transformation with an overview of how we evolved to our current state and a brief look at the many signs that the legacy education system we have inherited is now failing our needs. There is no denying that problems of education today are huge and we discuss a number of dynamics that we must address head-on if we expect to achieve fundamental change. But the goal of the book is not to get bogged down in pointing out current failings and challenges. We move beyond these to offer our vision of why transformation is necessary, what it looks like, and key areas we should focus on to lead it.

We are also fortunate to be able to offer in these pages the visions of a range of stakeholders—from architects to school administrators to businesspeople—who were kind enough to share their thoughts on the future of education. Some of these visionary comments are interspersed between chapters as brief “Change Visions.” Ones we have collected from individuals currently working as administrators and teachers within our school systems are grouped together in Chapter 6.

There are two major undercurrents that run throughout the ideas offered in the book. The first is that transformation is inevitable. With or without us, the vast array of changes that new technologies have created in the past decade will push us

toward a sort of *phase transition*, to borrow a term from physics. In a phase transition, there is a moment when matter suddenly shifts from one form to another in a way that seems almost magical. Think, for example, of water suddenly becoming steam when the right temperature is reached. We see an analogous shift coming in the world of learning and education. The question is whether we will be ready for the shift—whether we can help to lead and guide this coming change or whether we are simply overtaken by it.

The second undercurrent is that we already have much of the knowledge and capability we need to lead the transformation. Just as steam is fundamentally still water, *transformation* does not materialize out of thin air: by definition it is based on existing forms. Already there are numerous bright spots and pockets of change across the educational landscape, but we have yet to assert our collective will to make a true shift toward transformative change. Indeed, while there is widespread discontent with the state of our current educational system, there has yet to be widespread engagement across the general public in asking and answering the questions critical to making things better. It is time to engage. It is time to make an active, collective choice for change.

We offer this book to you with the hope of inspiring that choice and the action that will follow, for first and foremost this book is intended as a call to action, as a catalyst for creating the new vision of education for this century. It is time for that vision. It is time for transformation. It is time for Shift Ed. Please join us.