

MOVING INTO THE ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL INSTRUCTION

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In 2012, Bruce Alberts, Editor-in-Chief of *Science*, wrote an editorial titled 'Failure of skin-deep learning'. Alberts pointed out that the most meaningful learning takes place when students are challenged to address an issue in depth, which can only be done for a relatively small number of topics in any school year. However, the standard practices of curriculum design, textbook production and classroom teaching tend to promote a superficial coverage of a field, leaving little room for in-depth learning. Curricula, textbooks and lessons are predominantly skin-deep and jam-packed, making it very difficult for teachers and students to go beyond memorization of right answers required in tests and exams. This is the developmental challenge depicted as the horizontal axis in Figure 1.

Historically, schools were created to foster children's development protected from the vagaries of child labor and other hardships. This has generated the heavy tradition of encapsulation of school instruction. Calls for breaking the encapsulation are commonly presented in terms of establishing continuity between an individual student's learning experiences in school and out-of-school (Bronkhorst & Akkerman, 2016). Shifting the focus to collective engagement of entire schools in partnerships and critical encounters with other societal activity systems, such as communities and social movements, is still rare. This is the developmental challenge depicted as the vertical axis in Figure 1.

Moving out of skin-deep learning and encapsulation are two key dimensions along which schools need to construct their zone of proximal development. This dual challenge may be depicted with the help of the following figure.

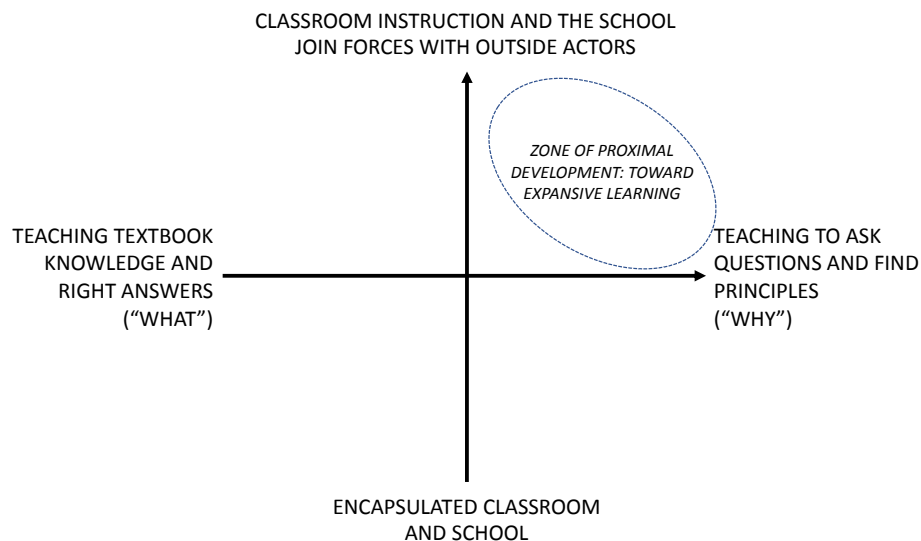


Figure 1. Zone of proximal development of school instruction

In the keynote presentation, I will examine promising initiatives and examples of movement into the zone of proximal development along the two axes depicted in Figure 1. I will also discuss the possibilities of integration of advances along the two axes – arguably the most difficult and the most exciting challenge ahead of us.

References

Alberts, B. (2012). Failure of skin-deep learning. *Science*, 338(6112), 1263-1263.

Bronkhorst, L. H., & Akkerman, S. F. (2016). At the boundary of school: Continuity and discontinuity in learning across contexts. *Educational Research Review*, 19, 18–35.