

September 12, 2013



When I was a child, I remember hearing a prediction that someday we would talk to people on the phone and see them at the same time. I thought how ridiculous that was. It was impossible. It would never happen. My, how times have changed!

Remember, how the United States was the industrial leader of the world? We took the factory system and introduced the assembly line with its uniform parts and standardization. And then we took a seemingly unlimited supply of raw materials and combined it all with good old American know-how and work ethic. The business of America was business. And, we were the best in the world at it.

Being the innovators that we were, we took that same model and applied it where? You got it. Our schools took that model and it worked. We had the best education system in the world. And over the years, we have gotten better and better at it. We've got it down to a science. So what seems to be the problem? Why aren't we ranked the best in the world anymore? We're not even in the top 10 by most accounts.

Remember Woolworths, Montgomery Ward, American Motors Corp., Standard Oil, Pan Am, or RCA? These were huge companies that, in many ways, defined America. What happened to them and many others like them? I believe that they failed because they failed to adapt. Times changed and they just didn't change with them. They worked harder and harder, and focused more and more on the things that got them to the top, such as standardization. They even hired efficiency experts to improve productivity. In the end, they failed. They forgot the changing need of society, that is, the customer.

Are we doing the same with our schools and our students? Are we putting too much focus on standardizing our teaching when we should be focusing on *customizing learning*? How do we avoid the fate of many of our nation's failed businesses?

We can and we must succeed, but we have to get away from the factory mentality and start getting creative. We call ourselves an institution of learning, but we haven't changed much in the last 100 years. So, instead of being an *institution of learning*, we need to become an *institution that learns*.

We have to be willing to make changes and find ways to personalize learning for students in a way that will prepare them for a future that we don't really know much about. We have to focus on timeless skills such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication skills. We have to take these types of skills and integrate them into real, authentic learning tasks that engage students and stretch their abilities.

Alas, I'm running out of space and you're probably getting bored. If you have just a few minutes longer take a look at this video. It's a pretty good eye opener.

[What is 21st Century Education:](#)