



Making sense of pedagogy in a world of uncertainty

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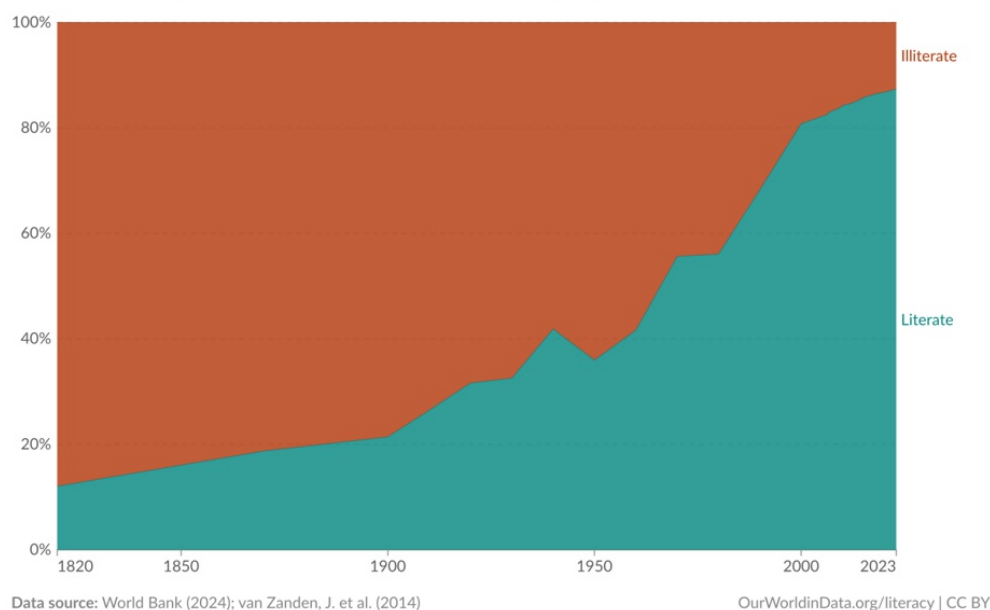
During an age of accelerating technology, social upheaval, and environmental vulnerability, the art and science of pedagogy can't be summed up simply as a method of teaching but rather as a multi-dimensional, fluid, and uniquely human pursuit.

As explored in my article, *Making Sense of Pedagogy* (Blessinger, 2020), pedagogy is both a philosophy and a praxis—a way of seeing the world, relating to others, and shaping futures through deep learning.

To rethink pedagogy today is to engage with the very essence of what it means to teach and learn in a hyperconnected and unpredictable world. This rethinking is not optional; it is urgent. In the span of the last 200 years, we have seen the global literacy rate go from about 10% to nearly 90%. This demonstrates the importance of literacy, and teaching and learning, in contemporary life.

Literate and illiterate world population

The share of adults aged 15 and older who can read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life.



The Heart of Pedagogy

At its root, pedagogy is not simply “how” we teach; it is “why” and “for what purpose” we teach. In this regard, pedagogy must begin with foundational questions about values, identity, and intention. What kind of society are we preparing learners for? What kind of human beings do we hope to cultivate? These are the fundamental questions that underlie the entire educational enterprise.

These questions, as I argued in *Making Sense of Pedagogy*, reveal pedagogy as a living system of human relationships, cultural beliefs, and ethical commitments. This understanding helps us move away from purely mechanistic instruction toward more holistic, learner/learning-centered experiences.

For example, John Hattie’s Visible Learning research identifies instructional practices like teacher clarity (effect size = 0.84), feedback (0.70), and student-teacher relationships (0.72) as among the most impactful. These are not just strategies but pedagogical relations of clarity, trust, and respect towards one another.

Pedagogy for an Uncertain Future

Pedagogy is not static; it is a revision, renewal, and reflection process on an ongoing basis. In our own time, such a view is more relevant than ever. Effective pedagogy requires educators to move more fluidly between theoretical insight and classroom reality.

Too often, however, educational systems reduce pedagogy to technical delivery. This reductionism can strip teaching of its soul. True pedagogy transcends technique, albeit important. It is rooted in humility, empathy, and the ability to make meaning amid complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity.

The future our students will inherit is one of flux and fragility. The disruptions of COVID-19, the threat of climate change, and the rise of artificial intelligence are systemic signals that our world is being reconfigured in deeply fundamental ways across the entire global landscape.

Thus, the pedagogical challenge is not to prepare learners for a stable, predictable world, but for adaptability and resilience—key qualities needed for a world characterized by instability and unpredictability. This calls for a shift from knowledge transmission to *transformative learning*—a shift from not only what to think, but also how to think.

This can be achieved through inquiry-based learning, interdisciplinary projects, and social-emotional development, for example. It means transforming rigid disciplinary silos into more integrative, interdisciplinary frameworks. Learners must be empowered not just as workers and consumers, but also as citizens and ethical agents.

Learning is social and is always situated within particular contexts. Pedagogical practice, therefore, must be deeply attuned to the social, cultural, and environmental contexts in which it occurs. This means teaching for resilience, ecological and digital literacy, and systems thinking—not as electives, but as core competencies.

Humanizing the Learning Experience

At its heart, pedagogy is a deeply human act. It is not performed on students; it is co-created with them. As such, pedagogical relationships are built not only on intellectual rigor, albeit very important, but also on compassion and care.

The work of Nel Noddings (2005) reminds us that care is not a soft ideal; it is a rigorous educational practice. Learning is at risk without trust in the relationship. Students close off when they feel invisible or unheard. This is an issue in increasingly diverse classrooms, especially. Inclusive pedagogy and cultural responsiveness are not buzzwords—they are practices of community and belonging.

When educators honor students' lived experiences and identities, they affirm their humanity and open pathways for authentic learning. As noted in Hattie's research, factors like "collective teacher efficacy" (effect size = 1.57) and "self-reported grades" (1.33) show how deeply personal and relational teaching truly is.

Collective teacher efficacy, with an effect size of 1.57, ranks as the single most influential factor affecting student achievement. But what does this term mean in practice? It is the shared belief among educators in their collective ability to positively affect student learning.

It transcends individual teacher skill and taps into the cultural fabric of the institution itself. When teachers work collaboratively, believe in their capacity to overcome challenges, and collectively strive for excellence, the impact on students can be transformative.

This belief is not grounded in naive optimism, but in empirical reality: schools that cultivate strong professional learning communities, that invest in collegial trust and cooperation, that cultivate high expectations among teachers and students, and that empower teachers with agency and voice are the schools where students are more likely to thrive. Collective efficacy is not just a psychological state; it is a pedagogical force multiplier.

Also of interest is the effect of self-reported grades with an effect size of 1.33. Along with cognitive task analysis (1.29), this metric is a measure of a student's ability to predict or estimate their work accurately. In other words, it's a measure of metacognition—students' awareness of their own learning and their ability to effectively manage it to produce major results. It is also a measure of high expectations that students have for themselves.

Students' achievement is strongly motivated if they are taught how to manage their academic progress and assume ultimate responsibility for their own knowledge and skill development. It is about creating more self-sufficient learners rather than overly codependent ones.

This awareness should provide a paradigm shift in the design of our assessment programs. Rather than relying solely on summative evaluations and standardized tests, we must integrate much more formative assessment—feedback, goal-setting, and student-led reflection—into our teaching practices. This helps drive real-time instructional adjustments and differentiation based on student learning needs.

Teaching students *how to learn* becomes just as important as *what they learn*. When learners see themselves as competent, capable, and in control of their educational journey, their motivation and outcomes improve.

Collective teacher efficacy and self-reported grades illuminate a profound truth: the most powerful levers for improving education are not technological, structural, or procedural—they are relational, reflective, and cultural.

They remind us that when we leverage the collective efficacy of teachers, and we support students in believing in themselves, we create a climate of deep learning. In short, the power of self-efficacy can change lives.

These are not just strategies to be added to an instructional toolkit—they are expressions of a pedagogical philosophy that taps into the core of human agency, dignity, and interconnectedness.

Pedagogy as Ethical Imagination

In *Making Sense of Pedagogy*, I argued that pedagogy is also a form of ethical imagination. That is, it asks us to envision what is possible when we center human agency, intellectual rigor, and global interconnectedness into our work.

This vision resists the commodification of education. It sees students not as mere data points, although assessment data is very important, but as whole persons. It treats teaching not as mere delivery, but as dialogue and development. And it insists that education must serve not only markets, but communities as well.

Such an ethical stance requires educational leaders to reimagine the systems that govern learning. Bureaucracy must allow for creativity and agency. Standardization must be sensitive to student needs and institutional autonomy. And compliance must make room for innovation and experimentation.

The idea of pedagogy as ethical imagination can also be represented through verse. In the following lines of verse, I tried to capture the essence of this idea.

The Classroom Globe

In classroom 304,
a weathered globe sits quietly,

its edges frayed, its colors muted,

dulled by eager little hands;

faded by the recurring tides of time.

Its worn surface—

a journey of restless minds,

each rotation—

a lesson of Earth's long history,

each spin—

a chronicle of humanity's progress.

Students spin it over and over,

they watch in excitement
as continents collide,

and empires rise and fall

like shifting sands,
as wars tilt the axis

of an ever-changing world.

Their fingers trace the veins of rivers,

the spines of mountains,
the scars of borders;

redrawn with human blood,
reshaped with human sacrifice.
The grid of latitudes and longitudes
carve the world into measured realms,
yet they're unable to contain
the boundless expanse
of human ambition.
The globe is no mere artifact;
it's no simple model of the planet,
instead, it's a portal through time,
linking past to present,
reflecting the history of humanity,
mapping our hopes
for a better future.

* By Patrick Blessinger

Historical.Note

The globe represents humanity's quest to understand the planet it lives on. The ancient Greeks theorized about Earth's roundness. Renaissance cartographers mapped new frontiers as they learned more about the planet. Each new iteration of the globe expands our knowledge about the world. It has propelled explorers to new lands and helped establish empires. Globes and maps are found in classrooms and libraries around the world. Civilizations rise and fall, and borders of countries shift like sand. The globe represents the fluidity and tensions in human nature and human history.

Author's Reflection

I wanted to illustrate the tension between change and stability in this poem. I wanted to show that while maps and globes represent two and three-dimensional models of planet Earth, they also represent much more than that. The poem isn't simply about a planetary model on a classroom shelf; it is about the burdens of human history, the enduring wounds of conflict, and the aspirations of past generations. Each spin of the globe represents a touch with the past. The globe is a bridge between humanity's past and our future possibilities.

Toward Future Pedagogies

As the world shifts, pedagogy must evolve. We need new paradigms to meet new challenges. Three in particular stand out:

Ecopedagogy frames education as a tool for ecological regeneration. Students learn to see themselves as part of the web of life, cultivating a deep ethic of care for the Earth and for others. In an age of AI, extended reality, and digitization, we must ensure that technology amplifies—not replaces—human wisdom. Digital tools must be used critically and ethically, guided by pedagogical principles that prioritize inclusion, agency, and well-being.

Finally, we need to reaffirm education as a common good. Pedagogy should also help cultivate core democratic principles: dialogue, freedom of thought, and collective action. In this way, the classroom is not just a site of teaching and learning, but a space to advance the common good.

Conclusion

To make sense of pedagogy today is to rediscover its highest purpose: to awaken minds, ignite hearts, and expand the horizons of intellectual possibility.

Pedagogy is not merely about efficiency or outcomes—it is about transformation. It is an invitation to engage with the world with courage, curiosity, and care. As such, it is a reminder that teaching is one of the most impactful professions, for it is tasked with the crucial responsibility of producing the next generation of citizens, consumers, workers, and leaders.

Let us teach, then, not only for assessment, not only for knowledge and skills, not only for rigor, but also for meaning, for human and social development. Not only for survival, but for a better and brighter world.

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