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## MEET THE MENTOR—Michael B. Horn

**Saturday October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

**Speaker: Michael B. Horn**, Co-Founder and Distinguished Fellow, Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation, USA

**Facilitated by: Nathan Martin**, Interim CEO, Matterfund, UK

### Summary Paragraph

*What is the single greatest motivator to get teachers involved as role models in the transformation of teaching? Michael Horn has been leading a dialogue with the education community for more than a decade, studying the application of disruptive innovation theories in the creation of a student-centered system of education.*

Keywords: Teaching Strategies

### Key Points

Michael Horn began by stating that his approach is fundamentally focused on solving problems for the benefit of students. He advocated that teachers ask themselves what success looks like, and design their practice around that.

He shared that when teachers implemented his approach of using blended learning, they found it easier in terms of lesson planning, but harder in the sense that there is more possibility to reach every individual child, so in essence the only limit is the teacher's energy level and time.

Nathan Martin asked about the 'opportunity gap,' which would seem to be beyond the teacher's remit. Is there anything schools can do to close it?





Mr. Horn responded, “to solve the opportunity gap, who you know is at least as important as what you know, since social capital is not equally distributed. How can we connect people to mentors, role models and supportive figures using new social media?”

He pointed to two types of social capital: the first is ‘strong ties,’ such as family, that give love and nurturing, and cultivate a child as a person. Since they are part of a child’s circle, no new contacts come from them, so they are not the ones that create opportunity for a child. Conversely, ‘weak ties’ are people a child meets tangentially, who open opportunities in surprising and unanticipated ways.

Moving on to what constitutes a truly disruptive innovation, Mr. Horn said that the key part of the disruptive innovation is that it can be done at scale. “There are 250 million kids worldwide who have no access to school,” he said, “so offering online solutions that they can access is an opportunity that could leapfrog the western education systems.”

He continued, “disruptive innovation starts in areas where there is no other choice, and is generally primitive to begin with, then evolves until it attracts people from other models.”

However, a barrier to scaling disruptive innovations is that it must be measured in order to secure funding. Mr. Horn pointed to Imagine, a non-profit trying to bring measurement into online learning systems, which is key, as “in education, because it’s so hard to invest in some areas, they are being held to a higher bar than technologies in traditional economic sectors.”

Despite his appetite for disruption and technology, Mr. Horn said he was ‘not enthusiastic’ about Artificial Intelligence, because “Big Data is good at showing correlation, but bad at showing causation.” He said it was far more likely that what technology will do is change the role of the teacher: “we may need far more of them, because we need to reskill, and for that we need experts constantly. Technology can create good immersive learning experiences, and even some kinds of assessment, but it can’t do mentorship and rich evaluation. Even more teachers are needed, specialized into roles such as content provision, evaluation, and mentorship.”

To answer the question, “is fear slowing the process of positive change,” Mr. Horn gave the example of Western Governors, an online adult learning service that provides accredited degrees, but does not fit into the United States framework of being a college or university. Among other differences, Western Governors awards course credit based on mastery, not credit hours. Congress said that there was not enough faculty interaction, and that they should shut down.





However, on the 'ground level,' he said "my sense is that people in the West are desperate for 'how come we can't get this faster and more of it?' Progress is slow, particularly because they must create more room for innovators. Rules currently govern inputs, not student outcomes. This is a policy shift that is a long time coming."

One teacher from New York City offered the perspective that focus on outputs and outcomes in the city caused a reaction against innovation, because teachers were afraid to take risks. Mr. Horn attributed that fear to assessments, saying, "standardized tests fail to look at the individual growth of each child. They should be measuring growth, not proficiency. Evaluation should be a real-time feedback for learning—which drives what a student is doing next—and of progress, because it gives an accountable picture of how students are doing."

He advocated "a healthy mix of assessing knowledge and doing interesting things with it," via a competency-based system. "Students should not move on unless they have achieved mastery and done the work. Technology can make it efficient to learn knowledge, which frees up teacher time to work on richer projects."

Building on this point and the New York example, Mr. Horn said that "change cannot come from policy. Change comes from the bottom up, and then policy changes to accommodate it. A lot of the more interesting initiatives are coming from schools that are integrating backwards to fit their teachers, as opposed to the opposite."

He concluded by saying, "whatever my vision is of the future, I'm wrong. So we all need to innovate together."

**Main Takeaway: Change cannot come from policy alone. Rather, it comes from teachers defining what success looks like, and designing their approach around that.**

