Comparing/Contrasting works by Daniel H Pink and Tony Wagner

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Daniel H Pink and Tony Wagner both acknowledge that the world is changing at a rapid pace and that automation and outsourcing jobs to Asia and other countries are big threats to the employment future of today's students. There is a consensus of stages of development in societal employee needs from the Agrarian Age to the Industrial Age to Knowledge Age to a Conceptual Age. It is the move from Knowledge Age (knowing information is key) to this Conceptual Age where there is a need for more creativity and greater emphasis on communication skills. Both books provide keys to skills that will increase the learner's potential for future success in the world of work.

Wagner is an educator by trade while Pink has worked as a writer and business analyst. Pink’s book is what he calls “high concept and high touch” (Pink, 3) and I find that the book was engaging and easy to read. We start the first chapter with Pink’s personal experience of undergoing a functional MRI. He is telling us a story to connect us to the information he wants to share. Throughout the book, his stories keep us tuned in to the information much as we can get drawn into a good movie/show. We want to keep reading, to embrace what he has to say, and to see how the story ends. Wagner’s book, in contrast, is not highly personal even though he is sharing his personal interviews and experiences as an observer. The closest we get to storytelling in Wagner’s book is chapter 4 (page 126) but even then the personal experience is told in the third person while making the reader a participant in the experience through provided thoughts and speech. I wasn’t excited about learning more and really just wanted the experience to end. Pink made me want to become part of the story while Wagner tried to “teach” me what I would have experienced.

This difference, shown in their methods of presentation, extends to the basic material that the authors want you to walk away with. Wagner is very technical, focusing on the seven survival skills which are summarized on page 67. Pink’s six senses are clearly listed in the table of contents before even before beginning the book and then introduced at the end of the introduction. How do these skills and senses look side-by-side?

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| **The Global Achievement Gap** (Wagner, 67) | **A Whole New Mind** (Pink, 4) |
| Critical Thinking and Problem Solving | Design |
| Collaboration Across Networks and Leading by Influence | Story |
| Agility and Adaptability | Symphony |
| Initiative and Entrepreneurialism | Empathy |
| Effective Oral and Written Communication | Play |
| Accessing and Analyzing Information | Meaning |
| Curiosity and Imagination |  |

When I look at these lists, I see a more impersonal, business-focused approach from Wagner and a personal, all-encompassing lifestyle approach from Pink. While each of the skills can be demonstrated through a sense and each sense will be able to demonstrate a skill or two (or maybe more), Pink takes a more whole-person approach and his book deals with the “human abilities that are essential for professional success and personal fulfillment” (Pink, back cover) while Wagner focuses on the institutions of school and work rather than on individual accomplishment. In a way, Wagner is the victim of his own education where schools do not teach individuals but train a generation for the work sector. Wagner uses examples of good schools/teachers/classes and bad schools/teachers/classes to help you see what needs to change in the school systems, but are the readers experiencing a personal metamorphosis? Pink takes his personal approach to the extreme as each individual sense chapter provides “a Portfolio – a collection of tools, exercises, and further reading … that can help you surface and sharpen that sense.” (Pink, 4) I do not feel powerful enough to really make a difference by myself based on Wagner’s writing, but Pink empowers me to become what I want my students to embrace.

Yes, schools need to change. Both Wagner and Pink agree on that, but they take different paths to their solutions which are more similar than different. The end result for me is that Wagner’s book will be relegated to a shelf and I will be referring to Pink’s portfolios to sharpen my six senses to increase my personal fulfillment which should have a positive impact on my professional success.

References

Wagner, T. (2008). The global achievement gap. Why even our best schools don't teach the new survival skills our children need-and what we can do about it. NY: Basic Books.

Pink, D. (2005). A whole new mind. Moving from the information age to the conceptual age. NY: Riverhead Books.