



## The Winds of Change – Lessons Learned from the Saddle of a Bike

I'm a biker. No, I don't have one of those big expensive motorcycles with the deep rumble. I ride one of those bikes with the thin tires that I peddle down the road. It is great therapy after a long day at school. But, if you have ever ridden in the wind, you know that it is a challenge. What seems like a light breeze when you are standing, can feel like a hurricane when you are riding against it.

What do you think about the changing wind currents in education? Everything that I am seeing today tells me that there are winds of change that are impacting the way education is happening in our schools. There have been small adjustments over the past 100+ years, but no major changes. Will these new winds bring real change? Will we see lasting change that fundamentally alters the way our students learn in the future?

I have learned a few lessons from riding the bike in the wind that I think apply to education.

1. Be ready for the gusts. If the wind is coming from the side and is steady, it is not a problem. As long as it remains constant, you can lean against it and keep going, but if it gusts, you could be in big trouble. A 10 mile an hour gust that hits you from the right can place you in the middle of the road full of cars, or if it hits you from the opposite side, you can be in the ditch in the blink of the eye. Either of those scenarios can be disastrous. To avoid getting thrown to the side, I have to stay focused on what lies ahead in the direction I am traveling. If my focus is on my bike, or the road, or the ditch, the wind will push me off course, but if I stay focused ahead, I can change my center of balance much quicker and stay on track. With the rapid pace of change taking place in education today, we have to be aware of unexpected challenges that will come at us and throw us off course. This may come in the form of a salesman trying to sell you the latest technology or online curriculum. It may come in the form of a major equipment failure causing Internet outages. If you stay focused on the educational outcome that you want for your students, these tools can be helpful and you can adjust to unexpected gusts.

2. Pay attention to the direction of the wind. The temptation is to just ride with the wind at your back. I have done that. I just cruise down the road without a care in the world, my speedometer says I'm going 20+ miles per hour and I'm hardly breaking a sweat. Twenty miles later, I turn to go home and I am hit with the realization that I now have to battle back home. Now, I have learned to always start off against the wind. I fight the wind for the first half of the ride, and then I turn and let the wind take me home.

How does that metaphor help us during this educational shift? I was educated in a traditional system. It is natural for me to teach just like I was taught. To follow that model is a temptation. It worked for me and all of the thousands of teachers out there. But, if I am going to reach all students, I firmly believe we need to learn a new personalized model. That is going to require me to

ride against the system for a while. If I persevere, I will eventually be able to ride with the wind, or perhaps that teachers that follow me will be able to do that.

3. Occasionally I need to tune up the bike. I don't ride as much as some of my friends, but still manage to log about 1,000 miles during the Spring and Summer months. After a while, I need to take my bike down to the great folks at Rolling H bike shop and they do their magic with the gears and adjust this and that. If I don't do that, I am working harder than I need to as I peddle down the road.

Teachers need a tune-up from time to time. We need to learn about new methods. We need to be inspired. We need fresh ideas. If we don't do that, we are going to be expending more and more energy with diminishing returns for our students. I know that there is never enough funding for all of the professional development that we would like, but we have to make this a priority. Take time to read about our profession. Take time to talk with other teachers to improve our profession. Find ways to get a tune-up as often as you can. It will bring you energy and help you go further.

4. Finally, riding is easier with others. Most of the time, I ride alone. That is because I fail to plan and know the times that I will head out. But when I really want to go on a serious ride, I get together with a few different people. By riding in a group, we can take turns breaking the wind and drafting. But beyond that, we push each other to go further and faster than we would ever be able to go alone. Just by talking with a friend during the ride, I forget the pain and the tired muscles and I am able to push on.

Traditionally, teaching has been a lone-ranger-adventure. We can enter our room, close the door and become emperor of the kingdom. That is unfortunate. Together, we are stronger, better teachers. We need to take turns facing the winds of resistance. We need to face the student data together and seek high levels of learning for all students. We need to encourage one another.

Facing winds of change in education can be an adventure. Enjoy the ride!

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