Innovations in Thinking and Learning
Michael Fullan – Expectations of New Pedagogies for Deep Learning

MICHAEL: I think the expectations, first of all, they've been exceeded, that is, teachers say that to us, or principals. And principals and district admins say that about teachers. We never would have predicted that this groundswell would have happened. So I think in that sense, it was, and here's expectations, let's meet them. Then when we get to the actual expectations, what's happening is, there's a productive tension, I'm going to say. I'm thinking of one teacher in a secondary school where the student wanted to do a simulation, a 3D simulation, as part of the assignment. And the teacher said, "Well, I don't have that kind of skillset, so I want you to do something as more focused." But anyway, the long and the short of it was, the student was allowed to do it with a couple of other students. They produced something that was really great. And the teacher said it was that moment I recognized that I'm no longer the font of knowledge, that students are creating knowledge. I'm not the source of knowledge. I have to enable it, I have to appreciate it.

So I think what we're finding is that teacher expectations are expanding, they're being heightened because of this experience. So it's not a kind of a resistance tension, it's a bit of a surprise. It's certainly an awkward transformation for teachers, who are used to being the centre of attention. And they talk about that, and we want to talk about the change process that way. So I think those expectations are there.

The big set of expectations, they're really the six C's. And if you look at any of the curriculum, if you look at Achieving Excellence, Ontario's work, British Columbia, Netherlands and Finland, where we work, those new expectations, which have to do with thinking and succeed type things, our work is compatible with the best of the new work that's showing up in curriculum. So these are expectations, then, that are finding their way into provincial, state and national policy, haven't been realized yet except in ad hoc schools, but now are seen as system goals. So we are witnessing, and causing, I think, together collectively, the transformation of expectations so that these expectations are deeper, more ambitious and more pushing the limits and beyond the limits of learning. So this is a time for me, and I've been working on this kind of work for 35 years, this is a time where I see for the first time a great transformation of education, bigger than we've seen in the last 35 years, by far. And it has to do with integrating three things; the power of digital, the power of pedagogical transformation like we've described it, and what I would call the power of change leadership, because it has to be led. It has to be enabled. If you take those three forces and have them synergized, that's what we're seeing.
The more imperative -- and that's a phrase I've used for more than a decade -- is the commitment to raising the bar and closing the gap for all learners. So that moral imperative is what we want people to have. And it's certainly in our Achieving Excellence priority for Ontario, Achieving Excellence, equity, well-being. So the moral imperative is there, but I'm going to say two things, two limitations. One is it actually hasn't been realized very much. Ontario's done a better job of reducing the gap, not closing it. But it hasn't been realized. So we have to find -- we have to be recommitted to doing that. First Nations, special education, students in poverty, immigrants, et cetera. So that remains unfinished business.

But the other part of the moral imperative now is redefining it, so it's not just literacy and numeracy. It is that, but it's not just that. It actually is this producing the citizen of the future, today. That's where the moral imperative really takes off. And we also think, and we're testing this now and producing it, we also think that deep learning, the way we do it, has more to offer the disadvantaged student, the student who's not normally connected to the regular academic curriculum, is the one that can flourish. So we say essential for some, necessary for all. So we think that this strategy we're talking about is the newest lever to accomplish the moral imperative, which is have everybody moving up, but the gap being reduced.