

QUEST 2016

Heidi Siwak Knowledge building for integrative thinking

HEIDI: Knowledge building is really about how do we work as a community to build ideas. And it's about the idea that we're only ever working with our current best idea, and it's about idea improvement. And we learn how to leverage each other in the classroom to make all of our learning explicit and apparent to everyone, so the knowledge is contained within the community. And then we work to improve our understanding of ideas. And there's 12 principles around that, so we learn the principles, it just becomes a foundation piece in how we approach our learning. And then design thinking, integrative thinking draws upon design thinking. Design thinking, really, is all the empathy.

So empathy, a lot of people think of empathy as being -- it's nice to have. You need to understand other people's situation, almost like a sympathy type thing. And empathy in design thinking is actually a tool. And it's a tool to get to innovation. So when you can deeply understand somebody else's needs, you can then create. And that's -- and so, design thinking is an empathy process to get to innovation, blends really well. Again, it has tools for you to use to go through the empathy process. If you think about the first iPod, right, that's an empathy piece. It exists because somebody deeply understood people's needs for communication. So we look at design thinking that way. So everything, it's all about, I guess, in the end, problem solving.

Well, I think as a teacher, right, you have a certain way of acting and behaving in the classroom, and then to bring these tools in, you have to change how you do things. And because I didn't know what I was doing, and neither did the kids, we had to figure it out together. So that's one of the big changes that both of us are learning at the same time; how this new model of learning could possibly work.

So letting go of, I guess, a mental model of how school is supposed to be is part of this process. That was kind of hard to do, allowing the kids to participate and shape what the integrative thinking piece is -- that was part of the process.

Figuring out where the curriculum fits in -- so at the beginning, my first year of it was about testing the tools and figuring out what I could do with them. Now it's, okay, I have these tools, how do they match with the curriculum? So we're still really hitting the content pieces that need to be hit. I think I have a good system in place for that now. It's just, that's one of the struggles, I think, as we make the shift to inquiry and all those kinds of things, where is a place of curriculum within all of this?