

QUEST 2016

Marlene Scardamalia Knowledge-building: Improving Ideas

MARLENE: I'm going to give you just some sense of the ways in which knowledge-building is synonymous with knowledge-creation, but we didn't refer to it as knowledge-creation because people think of that as creating knowledge in knowledge-creating organizations. The challenge of schools is really different. If you go into a knowledge-creating organization you're hired because you're a knowledge-creator, you expect to generate new knowledge in society. Schools haven't been built for that purpose, they've been built to say other people have had profound advances in knowledge and your job is to learn what they invented, not that your job is to actually create new knowledge, so [AUDIO OUT] really, really differently, and it's part of what holds them in place in the form they are. So this notion of wanting to produce every moment of every interaction in schools, ideas that are communicable, that serve the good of a community, that empower people to work, Peter Drucker said it nicely, he said, "Innovation must be part and parcel of the ordinary if we're going to make this change." Building theories. Actually the hard part is realizing your theory actually doesn't work, or, you made this great advance but, if you read the literature, somebody else in 90 percent of the time has already made that advance. So you've got to live with this thing in a kind of, it's a combination of modesty and ability to live in a really tough space that says it's really, really hard to develop and create new knowledge, and we need citizens who are able to do that. So that, having good ideas, you know people kind of hate this about knowledge-building but we keep saying ideas are a dime a dozen, and the problem is having the ideas is not the hard part, learning to improve them and make them make a difference in society that's the tough part, and so, how do you sustain people in that enterprise?

And finally this notion that we think technology needs to be built by educators in new ways to actually help with the sustained production of ideas, that's a really new technology challenge and I don't think we can turn to corporate people building technology to solve those problems for us so it has to be part and parcel of how we as educators advance. The challenge is producing knowledge of value to a community. It starts with a natural tendency to play with ideas so we have a wonderful resource to start with, but it extends to this really hard piece of continually improving your ideas, that we need to give students collective responsibility for taking on the very highest order challenges, that is, as Bruce conveyed, monitoring their work, setting next steps instead of somebody else always taking them step by step along this path. If students are to take responsibility they, ideas need to be at the center. Now I just want to give you the sense of how schools are built that is antagonistic to this, to give you some sense of the challenge. Mostly we have curriculum experts, subject matter experts, assessment in new standards, they build a curriculum, that curriculum then is given to the teacher, the teacher translates that into tasks and activities that the students are to do, the students, those yellow dots at the bottom, if those ideas go into their head and they pass a test we say our system is working. Education is getting a lot smarter in saying oh those bunch of little tasks, that homework, isn't really what we need, we need bigger projects, bigger activities, thus to get students involved, but mostly still, somebody is setting that

task, or at least saying, oh, for this hour or two, you'll do this project, or for these three weeks we will do this project. It's contained in this larger system of affordances. I'd argue that collaborative projects still work within this context of tasks and activities at the center of our lives.