

## Student Panel

### Starting a Knowledge Building Network

>> The first thing I thought of was, you know, change is really messy. So I'd love to tell you a nice straight linear trajectory. There isn't. So I'm going to give you a little bit of the messiness behind how we got this, so many of teachers in our board and various schools to try in some form or another the idea of knowledge-building.

So starting a knowledge-building network. The first thing that I did when I first started this back in 2009 is I played with it, of course. And I found out what kind of worked and what didn't. And once I got really comfortable, all I did was bring some teachers into my classroom. And also to take a look at the work that the kids were actually posting. And, you know, you get a lot of, "Hm. That's interesting, Glenn." "Okay. Yeah." And then I would just, you know, in the back of my mind to bring them in again and say, "Oh, guys! Take a look at this." You know? And eventually as you kept bringing more people in to take a look over your shoulder at what the kids were doing, that's when you start getting more buy-in.

And so eventually I realized that you have to identify what we call those instructional adventurers. You know, the ones that really want to change a little something in their classroom. Not only the teachers but also the administrators. So I was really lucky in my own school where the -- my administrator, Francis Noventa, came into my class and saw what the kids were doing, and he really got it. He really understood what was going on. And then he had the idea of somehow taking this out of my classroom and also out of my department and seeing if we could spread it out a little bit further.

So the ultimate idea here, of course, with knowledge-building or any other educational innovation is, you know, why bother? Am I right? So, you know, the idea is to identify the needs that knowledge-building or fill in the blank would actually give to the students. What problem does it actually solve. So, you know, we know some things. And that's the wonderful thing about knowledge-building. We know that it increases reading levels. We know that it increases writing levels. And we also know that it increases knowledge levels of the kids. So that was the hook, I think, in many parts of the knowledge-building process in our board, is why bother? And of course we all know that when we go out into the real world, you know, everything is built on an idea improvement. And it's one of those, you know, fogs that was lifted over my -- off my eyes and I realized when you look at everything in this room, it's built upon improving of an idea that existed before. I mean, it's so natural, part of the world that it's strange that we don't do it very much in our classrooms. And that's the thing that I always try to impart upon the teachers and administrators of why knowledge-building, I think, is a really powerful pedagogical idea for our 21st century classroom.

We also wanted to build a culture of trust and support. And I guess that's a little bit of a platitude, but it's true. I started this by myself, but when Francis came on board, the administrator, I had a buddy to talk to. I was nice. I could bounce ideas off him because he kind of knew what the process was. And then when I got a few other teachers trying it in my own science department -- I'm the head of -- that's what I call my own science department, but the science department -- then they got it as well. And the one comment I got from one teacher one time was that he did his in evolutionary science. And he said, "You know, Glenn, at the end of all this there's no way

that I could have covered the content that the kids pulled out working as a community compared to what I could have given them." And I thought that was pretty powerful. And so again you never ever have to worry about the knowledge that is going to be generated. It's the part of the communicating within the community that is. But that's another story for another time.

And finally the very last one, of course, sometimes it's all about the money. And in order to bring teachers together beyond the science department and also in other schools, the -- Francis, the administrator, found money at the board level, who also found like-minded people and thought, "Okay, this is kind of a nice idea." And they released a series of teachers and we found those instructional adventurers. And well, I don't want to say the rest is history, but it's still building up. But we certainly have some knowledge builders in our board that is continuing the process.

As Michael Follen said, I think in his talk, and I made the quick quote that the part of the leadership in making something work is that you find it in the middle. And I really do think that that's where we found ours. You know, from a teacher-administrator perspective. It didn't come from down on high. It came from the middle. The teachers and the like-minded administrator. And things just went from there in a very, very positive fashion.

The way I tried to get this started, and I'm by no means any expert on this to a large degree, but I just sat down and had a good think of, you know, how can you make this work? So we set up these teacher workshops and then we had, say, 20 people that would come out. And then I'd say, "Go back to your classroom and try it." You know, after this workshop, you know, see what you can do with it in your own classroom. So the old idea, that ready-fire-aim approach seems really valid in this. You've got to try something. You have to go through that implementation dip as I did way back in the day. But once you actually see it in action, then you have to bring the teachers back together again. So at some point after about two or three months, we had a little more release time for a half a day, and we basically had just a nice discussion. It was just a beautiful little community. Everyone got up and showed their database or the knowledge that the kids generated, made some comments, and basically I asked them to do three things. What worked well? What would you do differently? And where were your shallowest -- well, where were your shallowest gains, if you will, and what would you do differently? So those are the three guiding questions that I gave the teachers. And we had a great conversation. And once we had the conversation rolling, they could then go back to their classrooms and retry again. In this case you're ready, aim, and then fire for the second time through.

The impact I think is around the students. They're taking charge in areas that are usually controlled by the teacher, whether it's the question-asking, the goal-setting, and the planning. And that's probably the most beautiful part in all of this. Because, you know, ultimately, you know, might this be more motivating to learn in this type of environment? And it certainly is. I mean, who wouldn't want to work with their own questions? You saw this in Michael's video there. Their own ideas? Everyone wants to do that. So we just need to set up the conditions for that to happen. And just to take it that one step further and work together as a community, as opposed to a series of individuals doing individual projects. That's where the real learning comes into play.