

## **Innovations in Thinking and Learning**

### **Mag Gardner – Getting Started – Implementation is a Social Process**

MAG: The biggest question for people was, "I see the end product, but I'm not sure how to get there." And they weren't sure where they would begin. And so we were very dedicated to providing opportunities for people to share their stories. And those stories included the successes as well as others. There was moments where they had great self-doubt and that we just collectively understood that self-doubt was going to be part of what we were doing. And so they shared, and we provided them with a reflective tool for that, shared these insights with each other regularly. The reflection often, for them, came towards after doing one of those cycles, doing it the second time. And they began to pull out the insights based on using some of these tools, the reflective tool that we provided, but also by using the tools that the NPDL provides around not only the six Cs but the conditions for learning within a school and as well for the teacher assessment program. This has been only our first year. And with 16 schools participating in the NPDL, we have teachers and a principal as part of that team. And we've created a network of NPDL folks, if you will. And we are gathering together formally as a large group to, as part of that whole collaborative inquiry thinking, to gather, share the work that we've got, assess that work conscientiously and safely with each other and provide support and critical friendship around what might be our next step, how could we improve this, enhance this, where might we take this next? And that networking piece is critical, that face-to-face networking is critical, for teachers who are just beginning to learn this work. In between those times, at the school level, the principal is really acting as an instructional leader. And we've had tremendous support from our instructional coaches and consultants who are visible and in the schools, supporting and engaging teachers with this work. And I'm in there too. I'm visible and in there and taking a real interest in what's going on. It's the highlight of my week whenever I can get into schools to see what's going on. So it's really critical, I think, in this work that everyone situates themselves as open to learning and sharing, knowing that we're all going to fumble at some point, and that's just part of the learning. So that's really how things have been working. There's some activity online that happens in between. But we've found so far that that's been a limited engagement and that, often, it's the face-to-face time. It's the facilitated questions that help to trigger the thinking and reflection. It's that we've created some sacred space, if you will, and time away from the busyness of schools to focus on this, which, for this first year, has really helped people to grow with their thinking. We were very, very deliberate about creating norms around how we would work not only within our school teams but collectively. And we would revisit those norms every time we got together to make sure that people continue to be comfortable. And we would actually assess how we were doing and to check in to make sure that we were truly living to those norms. I was very frank with people that the first semester of our work

was about play. It had to be about play because, in order for people to feel safe and to take chances ... And they were taking chances, right? This was a departure from their known practice. We explored that we need to return to a childlike wonder and that they would not be judged by anyone. And that began with me. And I expected it from the principals, coaches, consultants and so on. So it was about play. Quite frankly, at the very beginning, I think we actually had a lot of fun. We laughed a lot together, and we built rapport and deliberately brought people together to get to know each other a little bit too across the schools. And folks could work in schools that are within their neighbourhood for many, many years and never really get to know them beyond their own school walls. It's important to establish those communities. That is part of the work. You don't apologize for it. People call it soft skills. It's absolutely critical if you expect the deep thinking to occur later. You've got to establish those conditions and continue to return to them.