

Innovations in Thinking and Learning

Michael Fullan – New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (NPDL)

MICHAEL: If we take our big initiative, which is new pedagogies for deep learning -- we call it also deep learning -- so literally, the NP part, new pedagogies, means really new learning relationships between and among students, teachers and family. So it's transformation of teaching and learning, basically. And then the deep learning is about deeper learning outcomes for students. And the formal way of saying that, or at least the succinct way of saying it, is that deep learning is about understanding and using the six Cs in order to be able to flourish as a learner in a complex world.

The six Cs are: Character education, Citizenship, Collaboration, Communication, Creativity and Critical thinking. The latter four of those Cs are often called the "Twenty-first century learning skills;" they're the so-called cognitive skills, and they're in the curriculum. We have added character education and citizenship, and it's a very powerful combination when you take the six. So six Cs, going deep with all students with teachers and systems, is what this work is about.

We have to think of this work as innovation, which means we didn't have it all planned out in advance. We created by doing it. And the schools and the systems that came into this, which are now a thousand schools from 10 different countries -- Ontario is a very strong base for that. These are schools and districts who said, we want to go in this direction. We're not clear, we know you're not clear. But if we team up and we create a living laboratory of development, that's the best way to get there. We actually started with the concept of leadership from the middle, which is something that we've arrived at that says, top-down change doesn't work. If you leave it up to individual schools, it's too desultory. So where's the glue? The glue is in the middle. Where's the middle? The middle are districts. So that's where we started, in the districts where the unit that we connected with. Then when we started to work together, one of the big surprises was what I'm going to call the "bottom-up forces." And the bottom-up forces are, because the pedagogies actually do empower students, among others, they actually ran with it much more than we thought. And so the push for change is now coming upward from students and teachers into the school and into the system. Even though we started in the middle, we're now appreciating that you go to those forces and unleash them, liberate them is really what is happening. In our work -- I want to underscore this -- it's about system change. It's not about individual schools, it's not even about individual districts. Whole systems means a province of Ontario, the State of California, New Zealand as a country -- it means a hundred percent of the schools are implicated. It means that the change has to have that sustainability through the system uptake, even though we're now really mining what we're discovering at the bottom. So it is a surprise.

When we think about what's happening, they're implementing the six Cs. The teachers introduced it. There's a lot of this empowers teachers as well as students. And one of the things, the way I would describe it is -- we'll start with what the outcome is, and then why it's happening -- is that what is happening is that students are being liberated. They care more about school. They care more about life. They care more about making a difference. And once we talked about that, because it's in character education and citizenship, for example, the citizenship is, where is the world? What's the diversity? What's my contribution? How can I help humanity? How can I be better off? So they are starting, they're becoming citizens of tomorrow today. I'm talking about eight-year-olds, ten-year-olds, younger, younger. And they become a force for change, because they're not committed to the status quo, students aren't. They don't have any vested interest in keeping things the way they are. They're frustrated with the boredom of traditional schooling. So they're ready. They're ready to change. They may not know how to do it, they may not have had an opportunity. But NPD, or DL, gives them, because the teachers in the schools and the districts are doing it deliberately -- they're opening this up. And they're as surprised as anybody the way it takes off. They're really taking off, students. And by "change agents," what we mean are, they're starting to influence the pedagogy of teachers, how to group, how to give us more opportunity. We can help you assess the outcomes -- all kinds of real participation. So one category is a student as a change agent for pedagogy pushing teachers, I should say, and the other students, each other, into these really new ways of learning.

Another is, impact of the learning environment. They're talking about grouping, about how to link to the environment sustainability, all kinds of things the learning environment gets loosened up. And I also have a third theme, which is called, "Students as agents of societal change." It sounds really highfalutin, but it's practical. These are -- the students are saying -- and this is the phrase we use now -- helping humanity is natural for -- I'm going to call these the "millennials," born between, let's say, 1982 and the year 2000, just to take that frame. These kids are different. They're not going to be wanting to work with organizations that are stodgy. But they do want to make a collective and an individual impact. And it starts with this project very early age, where they're doing things to really help their local community, they're doing things to break free in the learning sense, the global sense. So we're documenting it because we didn't go in there with saying we want to cause this to happen, but we appreciate it, and we're leveraging it.