

Innovations in Thinking and Learning

Michael Fullan – Tension

MICHAEL: The word "tension" is -- I mean, it's essential to innovative learning. And I guess I would say you can -- attention can be negative or positive. So it's not by definition one or the other. You certainly can see tension and aggravate it, and make it dysfunctional, and conflict, that just leads to deterioration. But on the other hand, when you think about learning, the tension of learning something new, we just don't look at something and learn it and say, "Oh, yeah, that was a breeze." You have to grapple with it to learn with it. And this also goes back to some of Roger Martin's work, where the opposable things, the two pros where you have two positions and this is what they, and knowledge building for that matter, are teaching students. They're teaching students to see -- to not just naively accept this version of the truth because it looks truthful, but to actually delve into it, and then to especially learn when, let's say, two groups have opposite views about some given thing, for the students to say not only do I have to understand these opposite views, but is there a way of reconciling them?

So this learning is tension, tension is learning. And we're talking about positive tension, tension that really gives you big, new insights in terms of knowledge, big, new insights in terms of action. We are very heavy on the action side, doing and improving. And let's use the word "entrepreneurialism," not in its narrow sense, business entrepreneurialism, but social justice requires entrepreneurialism to actually address it, problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, character ed -- all of them. So this is a, I think, a way in which we are getting, seeing this tension for learning not only in a microcosm for a student, but playing itself out in the collectivity, and on big issues that have to do with the future of the world.