

Innovations in Thinking and Learning

Marlene Scardamalia – The Tipping Point

MARLENE: People are very aware that education needs to change. So I think, you know, they talk about the "tipping point," and these forces that predict change. So one is dissatisfaction. One is great in quality within our educational system, I mean, I think most people don't realize that one of the strongest recent findings is that education acts much like the economy, from this point of view that when you -- the rich get richer. So if you come into school with knowledge, more knowledge, you leave school with more knowledge. And education does not tend to change that. So we have grading in quality within education.

And I think there's great concern. Students are not motivated, we're losing lots of students in school, there's a sense that they're not very engaged. And so there's an understanding that education itself has severe problems that need to be addressed. This notion of needing to move from a system that keeps the relative strength of students as they come into school the same when they leave school, that needs to change. We really need to democratize knowledge and engage students more productively.

I'd also believe that we're showing that, indeed, very, very young students can be very much champions in the creation of new knowledge, and active participants in society. So I think that these are what they call various parts of the tipping point; dissatisfaction with education, a need of social issues that point to the real need for change.

Technology is another factor in this tipping point, that is, we have new media, we have new means. Now, mind you, what education -- what all groups tend to do is reinvent the old with the new, so we tend to not make the substantial changes. But I think that for us, in the development of technology, that actually is building technology that conveys the process of expertise, of innovation, of engagement -- the way it happens in the real world. Bringing that into school, we've learned that young students, as young as kindergarten -- junior kindergarten, I mean really young students -- can engage this process. And so technology makes it more ever-present, more possible and more connected to the world. So I think those are all factors that are making a big difference.