

Innovative Networks

Success In The Knowledge Age

The rules for success in the knowledge age have been defined as; learn a lot, understand what you learn, learn to like ill-structured problems, take risks with ideas, improve your ideas, and make friends with people who think.

Those points were created for a special purpose. And this was at a sort of celebration in Hong Kong, attended by hundreds of school students. So this is for them. It's not for the teachers and the administrators. And it struck me as interesting that everybody's talking about education for the knowledge age, and what people need and what competencies and so on, and the twenty-first century skills, and all of that. Nobody talks to the students. They're the ones that have to live in it. What do they need? So these have a sort of common sense character, they don't sound very research. In fact, there's research lying behind almost every one of them. They didn't just come as an inspiration. The importance of learning a lot; this tends to get lost now, in these days of on-demand, instant, just look it up on the web. People thinking, well, maybe you don't need to store much knowledge. Well, the best predictor of what you'll learn is what you already know. And you turn that into an equation, and that says, the more you know, the more you learn.

Understand what you learn. That's a pretty popular idea, all right, but there's a lot of research to back it up. And now as things go out of date very fast, you know, and that's another characteristic of the knowledge age, is oh, most of what you learn is going to go out of -- be wrong by the time you graduate -- what doesn't go out of date very fast is the understanding. Even if some of the facts you've been taught are wrong, if you understand where they came from and what they mean, it's not that hard to fit onto new facts. But if you've just learned them by rote, and that's the way the world is, then you're in trouble when the facts go out of date.

I think the only one that doesn't derive from research so much as from my sense of the whole culture and history is, make friends with people who think. That's been my own personal experience, that the most valuable thing I ever joined -- and this was in secondary school -- was called the Kenosha Pseudo-Intellectual Society, which was entirely young people, there were no adults in it unless you count university sophomores as adults. But we'd read a book each week and talk about it. That was basically all there was to it. And that was the most formative experience for me.

But then as I look back in history and look at what people report of what made a difference in their own lives, and so on. It's having contact with somebody who thought, sometimes it's contact with an older person who thought, you know, more mature. But often it's just making friends -- having a coterie of people.

So this was just something to pass on to the students. And then I found, oh, well, teachers seem to think there's something in it, too. Let's -- we kind of stuck with that simplistic set of rules. Furthermore, there's design thinking, and then there's critical analytic thinking, and

they're both important. And you want to have friends who do both, or at least some friends who do one and some friends who do the other.

Is there anything you would add to that list now, Carl?

Of course, all ideas are improvable, as we tend to preach. So it might be better to tinker with these, rather than just try to make a longer list.