

Idea Diversity and Learning

Male: **[00:00]** So, at the laboratory school—it, it's been around for 88 years. And the sense of, you know, laboratory, makes one think that it's quite experimental. It, it actually has a very clear philosophy from the very beginning. And one is, it's got an inquiry approach that comes to us from John Dewey ...

Female: Mm-hm.

Male: ... who wrote way before the Internet. And he seemed to know that children weren't empty vessels that needed to be filled with facts. And now, we know that better than any—you know, anyone else in the sense that they have the same access to information. And, and that game that I used to play where I would hold information and reveal it and then, you know, hold something back and then give it—you know, sen—give it to a child and then be incredibly inconvenienced when a child had access to that information before I was ready to deliver it.

[00:47] That, that world no longer exists and perhaps never should have existed. So this—we get from Dewey this inquiry sense that we begin with experiences, children's questions, their half-baked ideas which some might call misconceptions. But we see that as idea diversity. Wonderful opportunity to really be looking at many different explanations, and then engage in this process of learning. This process of being in design mode, trying to figure out how to solve our questions. And, and we are very much influenced by research, evidence-based research.

[01:26] And so the work of Marlene Scardamalia, who is one of the professors at OISE, has—she's developed knowledge building, an approach to learning, a Knowledge Forum, a database to support that. And some of her principles are that all ideas are improvable. We want children to really believe that. Also this sense that learning and knowledge building are very different. When we're building knowledge, we have a collective responsibility to develop a community's understanding. And so I'm not just learning for my own sake: it's sort of what, I think Michael Fullan and Ken Leithwood were saying, that this idea of lateral or, or a vertical or a horizontal, I think they said, relationship.

[02:04] So what we're learning in one group needs to be made visible to the next group. Not on the project reveal day, the last day of the unit, where all the rich connections are made, but too bad, we're moving on to another unit the next day. But on an ongoing basis. So—and, and I want to also talk about, you know, mention—when I look back at my practice, people like Howard Gardner(?) talk about, you know, a disciplined mind ...

Female: Mm-hm.

Male: ... and so much of the way I taught.

[02:30] If we think about science, for example, was—as if it was history. You know, the work of other people, much smarter than us in this cla—than we in this classroom, and, you know, you just observe as I conduct this experiment and take good notes. And so Howard Gardner talks about how we must create environments where the children are learning as the discipline is practiced in the real—real world.

[02:53] And so, history is practiced very differently than science is practiced, as is math. Each are unique. So, looking at that, it's been very interesting. We've explored a lot of technology to see how to make children's learning visible. Not only to the teacher; we're actually less interested in that, but more visible to themselves. So sort of the—having the process of learning be as important as the content that they're learning.

[03:20] And also that they are able to analyze their contributions. So a lot of social network analysis and different built-in tools to be able to have children see how the community is functioning as they're acquiring. Our goal is for children to have real depth of understanding rather than coverage.

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