The Root of School Innovation

As a member of the Learning Forward Foundation board, I am part of a team exploring a think tank for innovation.

"We are inviting leadership teams to engage in the Learning Forward Foundation's year-long Innovation Think Tank Challenge. Innovation within our educational systems is important for ensuring that we meet the needs of each child and that our educators are prepared to implement their own learning. An innovation mindset is critical to building the capacity for change within a system that leads to transformative practices in teaching and learning. "

As I approach this work, I have thought about what it is that drives educators to innovation and transformation.

George Couros* writes that the innovator's mindset starts with empathy for the students and a desire to create something better. He offers these questions to consider:

Would I want to be a student in my own classroom?

What is best for this student?

What is this student's passion?

What are some ways we can create a true learning community?

How did this work for our students?

Couros describes having a desire to create learning experiences for our students that are better than the ones we had ourselves.

For me, exploring “What could be better?” when planning for or debriefing after a learning activity creates the opportunity for improvement and innovation. The more I learn about teaching and learning, the more possibilities for making a learning experience better arise:

How can we increase student voice and choice?

What would tap students’ emotions?

How can learners interact with the world outside the school?

What can students learn/experience beyond the required standard?

How can the largest number of students spend the greatest amount of time in the most important learning activities?

How can my learning impact my students’ learning?

In an article, ***How to Make the Most of On-The-Job Learning***, Leah Shafer identifies approaching tasks with a completion, performance, or developmental stance.

In a completion stance, the aim to get a task done well, but with little time or mental investment. When filling out a timesheet; although there may be an easier way to do it, it just has to get done right. The only learning that happens in

*this mindset is **accidental learning**.*

*In the performance stance, the aim is to get a task done very well, with a sizable time investment, but without reflecting on how to use that process in the future. Think of a substitute teacher leading a class that routinely uses a Smartboard; he wants to use the board for the few days he is in that class, but he isn't concerned with mastering every aspect of the technology. The result is **incidental learning**– a consequence of the push to perform well in the present moment, but not aimed toward future tasks.*

*In the development stance, the aim is both to get a task done very well and to learn from that process how to complete future tasks. A supervisor leading a weekly meeting wants each meeting both to be productive and enjoyable and to set the precedent for such meetings in the future. This is **intentional learning**, with the supervisor actively noting, analyzing, and reflecting on the flow of each meeting.*

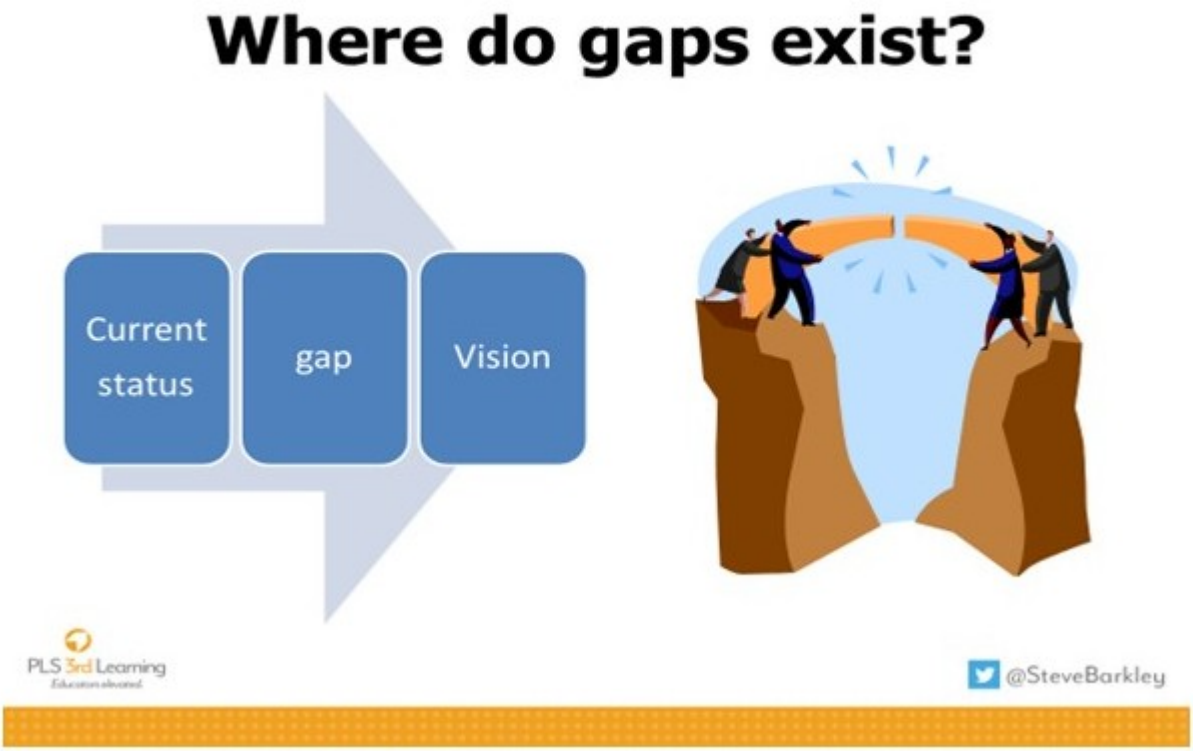
The developmental stance creates deeper learning.

At times our learning leads us to ways to improve our design for student learning. In other cases, we see the need to change/innovate for a better way.

Looking to the Latin roots of the word, "in-nova-tion" literally means "in a new way." Innovation can be defined as the successful conversion of new concepts and knowledge into new products, services, or processes that deliver new customer value in the marketplace.

(What is Innovation?)

One of the many roles of the school leader is to keep a vision of a desired future vision in front of staff. The gap that exist between current reality and vision can motivate the work that creates innovations and better learning for students.



Consider how George Couros' questions and mine listed above might be used in coaching conversations with individual teachers and professional learning communities to create a developmental stance and spark innovation.

*[Innovator's Mindset]