Creating Innovators: Book Study

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Creating Innovators is a great book by Tony Wagner where he discussed the process of creating innovators in our society. This book covers many different aspects and levels of education and how to manage the minds of young creative thinkers. I will discuss his theories about the parent’s role in creating innovative thinkers. Wagner also addressed the traditional versus progressive educational practices that could discourage the pathways of potential inventors and ground breakers in society. The book, Creating Innovators, did a great job using anecdotal stories from parents of successful innovators and showed the development in a somewhat non-traditional way. Wagner discussed the 7 characteristics of an innovator. Wagner also talked about the things that are necessary in the education of a successful innovator’s education.

At the beginning of the book Wagner discussed the state of America and its place in the world for developing new technologies. Wagner’s perspective on how our nation has produced wealth in the past has centered around the idea that our manufacturing and industrial production is what has set apart from other countries in the past. Wagner illustrated these sentiments with this statement, “We have to become the country that leads the way in developing the new technologies for a sustainable planet and affordable health care. We have to become the country that creates the new and better products” (Wagner 2012 , p. 2) Wagner seems to believe the country’s stagnant economy has been generated by a lack of creativity in production. He analyzes our education system as the primary culprit in the destruction of our desire to be more creativity. It appears that he blames the socialization of society to be workers and not creators. This book felt like Wagner was critical of the rudimentary process that funnels people through the education system.

Mr. Wagner implied that his type of innovation we need stems from creativity and not from research. I found that Wagner’s premise addressed the old regime of new inventions was antiquated. Creating by the old fashioned of research and a structured testing environment. He argued that we need to rethink our approach to building an innovator. He wants teachers and advisors to embolden our kids with non-conventional techniques. Wagner(2012) quoted Rick Miller president of Olin engineering college who remarked, “Innovation may then be defined as the process of having original ideas and insights that have value, and then implementing them so that they are accepted and used by significant numbers of people”(p. 14). I believe Wagner’s use if that quote was to highlight the process of defining innovation versus procedural evolution. The expansion of a product idea would need to be cultivated beyond just is mere necessity of existence. Wagner makes innovation seem groundbreaking and transformative.

The way Wagner used the stories of advisors and parents of innovators to illustrate his points was captivating. Wagner (2012) told the story of Kirk Phelps who dropped out of high School and and helped design the first iPhone (p 31). Wagner chronicled how his parent approached the unconventional style of raising him. His parents could have been strict and forced him to finish his high school and college. However, Lea and Cord Phelps allowed kirk to follow his whims to success or failure Wagner characterized theirs styles unrestrictive and beneficial to Kirk’s creative developments. I found that in this portions of the book like many other parts of the book the author explored the lives of his subjects and showed their developmental processes were out of the ordinary. In Wagner (2008) I thought there was an interesting quote by Lea, Phelps, Kirk’s mom, she proclaimed, “ A child has to get bored before he can figure out how to get himself out of boredom, and a lot of that happens outdoors ( pg 36)”

The Jamien Sills story was intriguing to me because of his mom’s video. She was just so sure he was going to be success and was willing to do anything to ensure his success. Jamien’s mom (Wagner2008) stated, “To watch him go through this process and to not be able to see the results he is looking for at this time, but I do all I can to help him” (p. 96). This was passionate about her son’s success and allowed him to the opportunity to develop his craft. It mirrored the plights of many of the other story contributors to this book and made impactful statements of what levels a student must go to to accomplish a groundbreaking status. Wagner connected Jamien’s educational path between advising and growth. I found it interesting that Jamien could find few teachers who had poured enough into his to make a great impact.

Lisa Nelsen in her blog disagreed with Wagner’s (2008) assertion that schools offer genuine opportunities for collaboration. She stated (Nelisen 2012), “When it comes to collaboration however, I’m not sure if Tony has spent a significant amount of time in public schools lately. It’s all about...

* Collaborative groups.
* Work in teams.
* Sit in 4-desk pods.
* Never have a moment to be alone.
* Never have time to think critically and deeply.
* Groupthink, groupthink.
* Get grouped with other people who happen to be share your birth year and geographic location, rather than group yourself, if you choose from others in the world, not just your classroom (Nelisen para. 3)”

I tend to agree as a teacher within the framework of our school we several opportunities to collaborate. Students encounter them every day. What stagnates our schools is a lack of fundamental desire to explore our general curiosities beyond our tertiary responsibilities?

Nathalie Duval-Couetil, and Michael Dyrenfurt (2012) researched the studies the how to develop creativity within a curriculum. Duval-Couetil and Dyrenfurt (2012) said, “Somewhat surprisingly, program descriptions made few references to specific technical competencies students would obtain or specific jobs and careers for which they would be prepared. Only by examining specific course descriptions did one get a sense of the technological skills, knowledge, and activities on which they focused” (p. 153). To contrast these findings with Wagner’s assertion convoluted his point about going a non-conventional route. When looking at students like Jamien and Kirk to grow their ideas in nonconventional it seemed as though Wagner were suggesting that those gentlemen could not gain the creative insight necessary to innovate within the framework of their institutional learning. Wagner suggested that the most restrictive part of their growth was their participation in traditional school setting. However, Duval-Couetil and Dyrenfurt seem to counteract his assertion when their researched remarked, “for example, it did not address innovation education increasingly embedded into major degree programs, such as engineering, science and technology (Pg. 153). They implied that creativity can be incorporated into the curriculum and course creations. These authors studied how programs can be created to support students in attaining sustainable that skill that produce innovation.

Wagner (2008) discussed his Seven survival skills as:

1. Critical thinking and problem-solving
2. Collaboration across networks and leading by influence
3. Agility and adaptability
4. Initiative and entrepreneurship (p. 12).

However these skills were not considered by Wagner as enough to creating innovators. So he created a new list that entailed doing, thinking, play, passion, and purpose I believe these are good qualities for innovators to have in their education. I do not necessarily agree with Wagner’s premise that innovation in the traditional research-based environment. I did not see Wagner’s anecdotal stories about different innovators as evidence that non-conventional methods educational growth were best suited for student’s creative process. I believe that the support of the families of these innovators to was vital in theirs success. Grant Glitchman (2012), “Many educators feel the same way: the passion to make a difference in the lives of young people over-compensates for the long hours and heavy load. We still suffer at times during the workday; so does an athlete or an artist pursuing his or her own brand of passion (Gitchman para. 4 2012).”

The creation of opportunity for success is the fundamental root transformational change. I believe that many student lack the ability to have strong creative because they are too busy holding on for dear life. Having been an educator for many years I have seen teachers attempt to foster creativity in the classroom. Many student are creative but lack the basic skill and drive to apply these creative skills. I takes a certain personality to forgo security for a whim of a vision. Those who lack a support system when they make decision of this magnitude often fail.

Lastly, I am often disgusted by the notion that we should teach our children not to be extrinsically motivated. In a world where we need currency for sustenance and our own personal desires it seems un-American to suggest that we be motivated any other way. I say that with trepidation because I believe that intrinsic motivation is not at a warring faction with extrinsic motivation. We can debate merits of long-term versus short-term incentives at another time. I believe that we should teach our children aspects of both types so that children can be well-wounded. I believe my intrinsic motivation pushes me to through my day to day. However my extrinsic motivation gets me through life. On page 20 Wagner discussed traditional motivators versus intrinsic motivators. I believed an executive offered stock options and one of the employees replied, “I am not coin-operated (14).” I found this to be a ridiculous supposition. I feel whatever motivates your consciousness is up to, but the benefits of rewards are appealing to most people. I believe those who are not motivated by extrinsic rewards are neither more or less creative, but rather just not wise enough to see the benefits beyond a job well done.

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Neilsen, Lisa. The Innovative Educator 2012. <http://theinnovativeeducator.blogspot.com/2012/04/tony-wagners-creating-innovators-doesnt.html>

Glitchman, Henry (2012) I humbly disagree with Tony Wagner on work and play. <http://learningpond.wordpress.com/2012/06/01/humbly-disagree-with-tony-wagner-on-work-and-play/>

Nathalie Duval-Couetil, and Michael Dyrenfurt (2012). Teaching Students to be Innovators: Examining Competencies and Approaches Across Disciplines. International Journal of Innovation Science; Sep 2012, Vol. 4 Issue 3, p143.