



Building trust to support intellectual risk-taking in the classroom: The power of inquiry

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Asking Questions

- Between two & five
 - 10,000/yr
- By Preschool
 - 300 a day
- Age 4
 - Explanations not just facts
- “Why?”
 - Getting the wrong answer

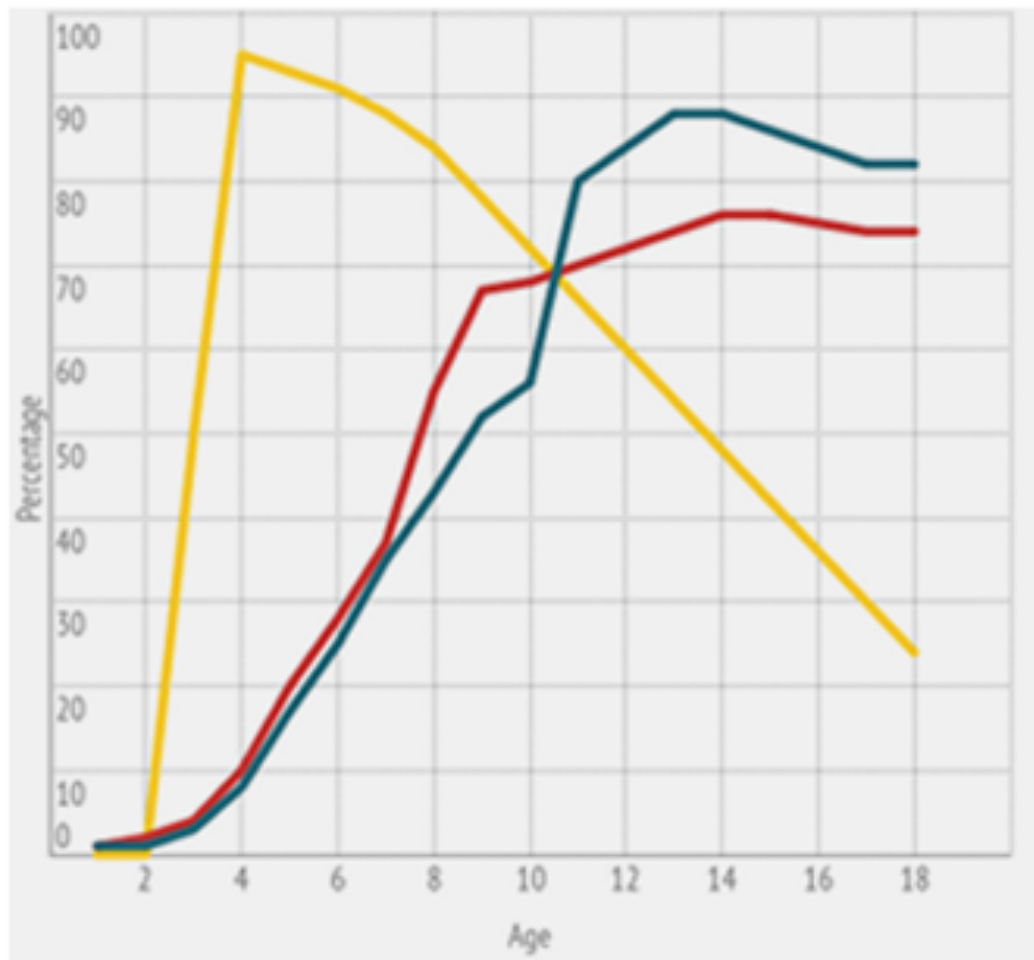


How do we
get from
this...



**Why Mummy?
How Mummy?
What if Mummy?**

**Let me try!
I do it
myself!**



Question Asking

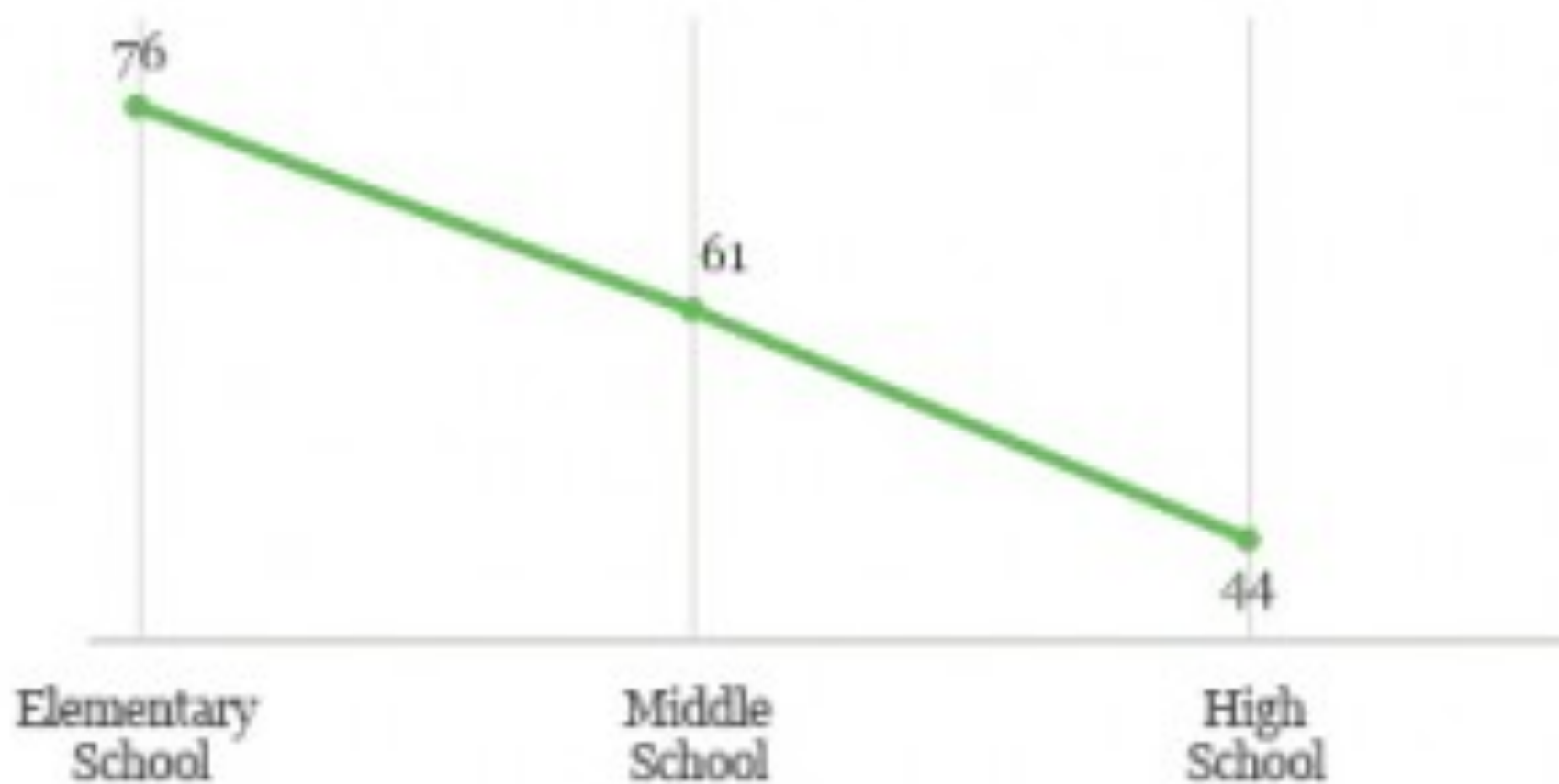
Reading

Writing

The School Cliff: Students' Engagement Drops Over Time

The Gallup Student Poll

■ % Engaged



GALLUP

To this?

Just tell us what's on the test.

I'm bored.



It doesn't really matter if I learn anything as long as I get the piece of paper and a job out of it.

Kids today are lazy

Entitlement

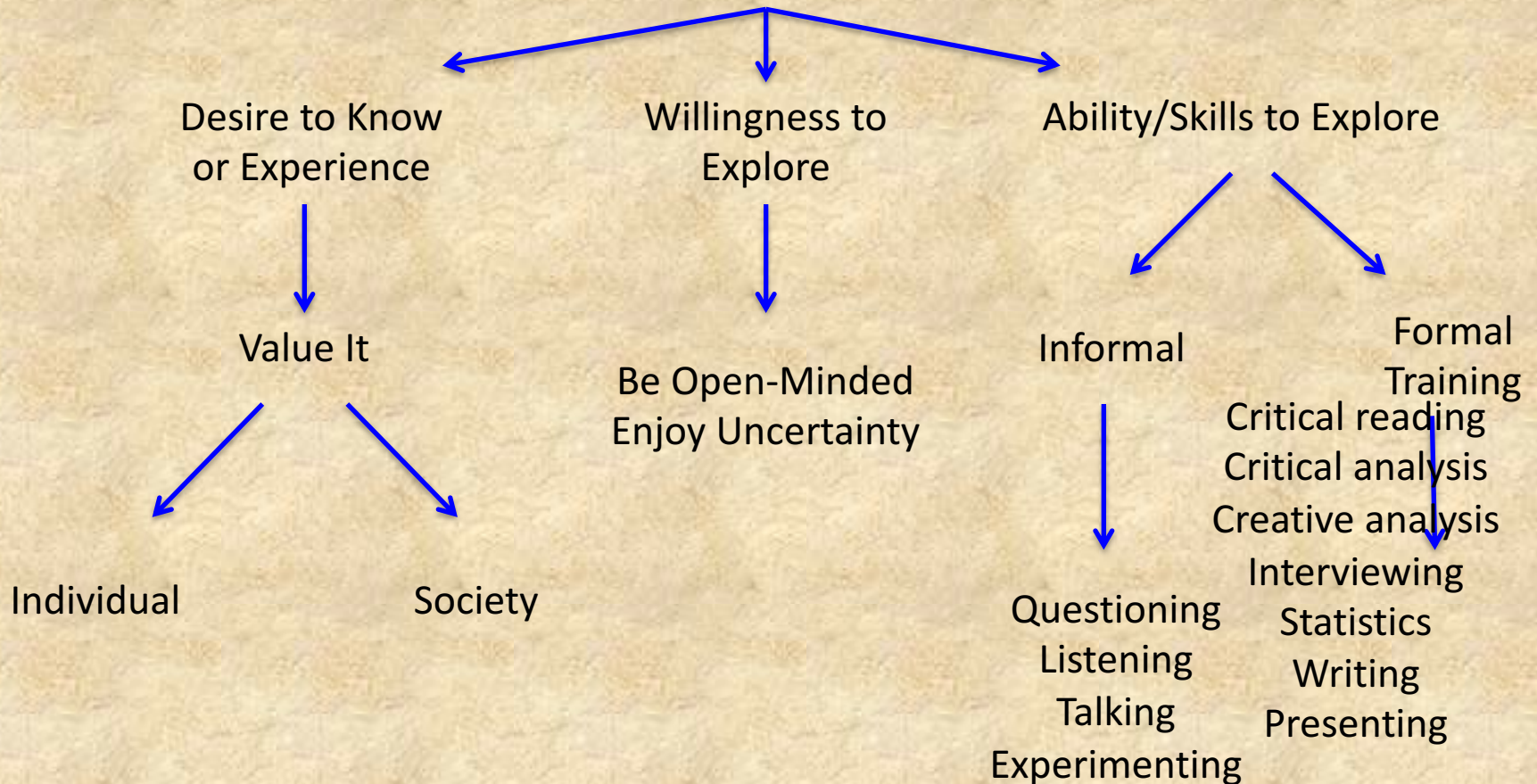
More concerned with their
social life than learning

Or could part of it be that universities
make erroneous assumptions about
their incoming students...

What we need to know about university students...

- Many are studying in areas they aren't intrinsically interested in so they can "get a job"
- Came to university because they are "supposed to"
- Even when we are engaging students in "active learning" we are often still giving them the questions
- We assume our students are coming to us with desire to know/experience & willingness to explore
 - Many, if not most, aren't
- Students don't instinctively trust professors
 - They've been given good reasons not to

Curiosity-fuelled Learning



**How do you create a trusting
learning environment between
students and professors
in high risk learning situations?**

**The power of inquiry:
Ask questions!**

So we asked questions...

- 4 semi-structured focus groups
 - students and professors who were engaged in curiosity & inquiry-based learning
 - higher education
 - local, national, & international.
 - award winners
- Systematic grounded theory analysis
 - open, focused and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014)

How did they define trust?

- Profs
 - being willing to make ourselves vulnerable to one another in the process of learning, with favorable expectations but no certainty of positive results
- Students
 - ability to be comfortable enough to share openly and honestly.
 - feeling comfortable in a safe kind of way
 - connection that you feel is you know, reliable and very you know dependable
 - trust the whole process of it all too

What do they need to learn?

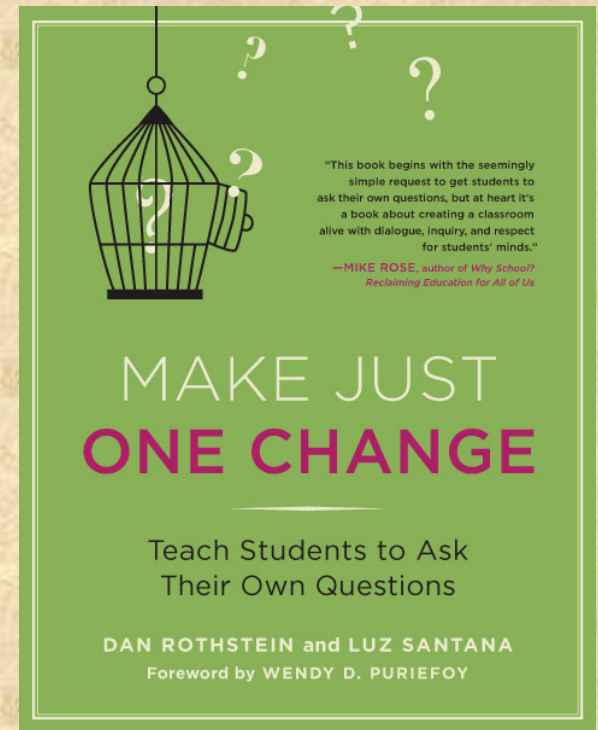
- the difference between being and becoming curious
- how to deal with “wicked questions”
- how to be your own “devil’s advocate”
- how to deal with uncertainty
- the importance of failure in learning and inquiry
- integrating and finding divergence between ideas
- the art of giving and receiving feedback
- seeing the bigger picture and considering the implications of what is learned
- effective questioning skills (QFT)

Question Formulation Technique

– Rothstein & Santana, 2011

- Produce your questions
- Improve your questions
- Prioritize your questions
- Discuss the next steps
- Reflect

www.rightquestion.org



The
Right Question Institute
A Catalyst for Microdemocracy

Power & Inequality: “Sharing power”

- “even though as an educator, may not put a lot of weight on the power that you are given in the classroom, students perceive that power.”
- “keep that in fore-front of any decisions, even when you were asking for their trust, and doing processes that help them to trust, there is still always going to be some elements where, you have power whether you want it or not, as the facilitator or educator in the classroom.”

**Explicitly entrust them with the ownership of
and pride in their own learning.**

Safe spaces to take risks

- Emphasis on learning not judging
 - Evaluate ideas not people
 - Encourage & model respectful controversy
- “Las Vegas Rule”
- Don’t just take my word for it: former students
 - “this is about a place where you can take risk, and be safe.”
And the students would also say, “trust him, he is weird, but trust him. There is something behind each of the things he does with you.”

Being Human

- “trust in the classroom to me looks relational”.
- “Taking the time to get to know the whole people that your students or learners are, and creating an environment where they can also learn about the whole person that I am.”
- “vulnerability to me certainly plays a role”
- “Caring about the other people that are present in the class with you, as humans.”

Dealing with Challenges

- Be open about your challenges & failures
- Explicate the challenges students will face
- Actively work TOGETHER to overcome these challenges

**How does the learning environment
need to be modified
for students at varying levels of
perceived power to develop trust?**

Ask questions!

Ask, don't assume

- Explore and understand cultural differences
 - Define culture more broadly
 - “Myself as an inquirer”
 - ensure all students voices can be heard
 - Balance comfort with challenge
- Focus on growth not assessment
- Use respect as a verb instead of a noun



Thank you!



- smackinnon@upei.ca
- Curiosity & Inquiry Lab
 - <http://projects.upei.ca/curiosityandinquiry/>
 - <https://youtu.be/D3P06W1qNV0>
- MacKinnon, S.L. (2017). “The Curiosity Project”: Re-igniting the Desire to Inquire Through Intrinsically-Motivated Learning and Mentorship. *Journal of Transformative Learning*, 4(1), 4-21.
- Boyle, S.L. & MacKinnon, S.L. (2016). Speed Bumps or Road Blocks? Students’ Perceptions of Barriers to Learning & Developing Academic Resilience. *Proceedings of the Association of Atlantic Universities’ 2016 Teaching Showcase*, 20, 58-57.



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