[SQUEAKING] [RUSTLING] [CLICKING]

JUSTIN REICH: So the course Envisioning the Graduate of the Future is about helping schools develop what we call a graduate profile. It stems from the idea that to do really good work, you need to begin with the end in mind. So if you're going to prepare people for their roles in a democracy, for the future of work, to be reflective ethical individuals-- if that's the work that schools need to do, they've got to be able to say to themselves, what should a graduate be able to do? What kind of person should they be? What should they accomplish while they're in a school setting?

And so a graduate profile is a document that characterizes for a community the hopes and aspirations that they have for their graduates. As schools develop these graduate profiles, they can then use it both as a rubric and as a blueprint. So you can look at what you're already doing and saying, are the kinds of things that we're doing going to prepare people to be the kind of folks that we hope they are and develop the skills that we hope they have? If not, what can we do to change?

And as we think about new programming or new things we're trying to accomplish in our school, we can say to ourselves, OK, we have this graduate profile. We have this type of person, this set of accomplishments that we're aiming for. How well is our work happening right now in order to be able to prepare people to do that?

SARAH HANSEN: So it sounds like there's really no one size fits all for these profiles, that they're developed by local school communities.

JUSTIN REICH: That would be particularly true in the United States. In the United States, we have an extremely decentralized education system. So we have 50 different states. We have about 13,000 school districts. We have 130,000 schools. In our country, we have a really strong tradition of local control.

And so it makes sense, in our system, that local communities, with their elected school boards and things like that, would do this exercise together. In a big city like New York City or LA, it might make sense for each different school to go through this exercise together. And other parts of the world have more centralized education systems, in which it would make less sense for individual schools to generate their own graduate profile because part of what they're trying to do is be part of a larger federal system.

But yeah, the way that we mostly frame it for people in the United States in the course is the idea that, when teachers do the work of schools, it's just incredibly time consuming and taxing to make these complex institutions run every day. Today, some administrator had to call me because I forgot to pack my daughter lunch. And their teacher has to figure out, what is this kid going to eat? And that was one tiny thing that happened in one school. And there were a zillion things like that.

What a graduate profile process does is it says, OK, you've probably been just running your school and just making it work for a while. Let's stop and take a break for a second and say to ourselves, is what we're doing leading to the outcomes that we hope for? When we look at our students when they walk across the stage in May or in June, are they people that would make our community proud? Have we taught them the things that we think they'll need to be successful? Because the world changes, it's important to revisit those things periodically and ask new questions about-- as technology changes, as culture changes, as the disciplines change, are we doing the work to have people be really well-prepared?

SARAH HANSEN: Right. And along those lines, how did you structure this particular course to spark local change?

JUSTIN REICH: In all of our online course design, our goal is that when people take our courses, they leave and make a difference where they're at. So we don't really care if they complete the course. We don't care if they do our assignment. I mean, we build a bunch of things to help them. But the measure for us is not did you get a certificate, did you pass the class. The measure is did you go back to your local community and feel empowered to make change.

So that permeates-- that question permeates everything that we do in the design of our courses. So for instance, one of the things we know is that it's a lot easier to engage in change processes when you have other people with you who are helping you. So leading an initiative by yourself is more hard than leading it with a couple of other colleagues.

So from the very beginning of the course, we encourage people to sign up in small groups from their school and form what we call learning circles. So we say, as you're taking the course, find a couple of people that you can meet with regularly throughout the course. A second thing that we do is that almost all of the activities and assignments in the course ask you to go out and start doing things in the world.

So the first activity that we ask you to do individually in Graduate of the Future is to start talking to different stakeholders in the school about what they think the best work in the school is or what they think the most important things are for students to learn. So it's not the case that we say, come take a six week online course. And then at some point in the future, go and do interesting things. We say, as soon as you show up in this course, start doing interesting things.

As you go out in the world and make these experiments in your local context, create little artifacts, summaries of conversations or data that you're recording from experiments you're trying. And bring that back into the course forum and share that with other people, in part because that's an accountability mechanism for you, but in part we can stimulate some really interesting conversations if we have people all over the world saying, hey, I went to talk to the stakeholders in my community. And here's the kinds of things that they said were important.

Well, look, we see that some of these themes cut across lots of different schools in lots of different places. And then you also have some things that were really unique to your local context. If you're a school that's on the coast of Massachusetts, particularly if you have a strong fishing community or something like that, the sea just matters to you in a way that it's not going to matter to a town in North Dakota that's going through a fracking boom that's thinking about the oil and gas industries and things like that. I mean, the places that we're located-- places that have extensive immigration from different kinds of communities, or don't, or are in rural northern New England where communities are hollowing out because young people are moving away-- all of these things make a difference for how schools think about themselves and the work that they need to do.

SARAH HANSEN: Right, right. Tell us about the role of case studies then, these very specific examples from different locations from around the United States. What role do these case studies play in sharing these specific examples?

JUSTIN REICH: Great. So we think one of the main virtues of online learning, for school leaders, and other helping professions, and teachers, and things, is that we can take you to places where things are happening that would be hard for you to see in your local context. So there are definitely lots of schools across the country that are engaged in some kind of graduate profile process, envisioning graduates.

But if there's not one that's near you that you can go visit, in our course we want to be able to take you there. Teachers, like lots of other professionals, they want to see people who are like them doing work in contexts that looks like theirs, that feels relatable in order to be able to say, OK, this feels real. This feels like not just some suggestions that these academics at MIT are making. But this feels like work that schools can do.

So we have these voices in practice case studies, where we try to take people in our courses to schools that are doing interesting things and not necessarily doing the best or exemplary work, but just places that are really deeply engaged in the work and envisioning graduates of the future. We happened to find three schools that really different stages.

So we went to Washington Leadership Academy in Washington DC, where they were just starting to have these conversations as a relatively new school about what do we want our graduates to look like, how would a graduate profile help us. We went to Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, which was a suburban community, very much in the middle of this process-- community group meeting happening in the midst of creating a graduate profile.

And then we went to the Community Charter school of Cambridge that had already finished their graduate profile process and was starting to use it to evaluate their current program and curriculum and think about future program and curriculum. So we can take the learners in our course to these three moments of time and say, well, here's what it might look like when you're at the beginning. And here's how you get started. Here are some of the things that come up in the middle, and the exciting parts, and the friction, and the challenges. And then if you're successful, here's how this can be a tool that can help you with future kinds of work. And seeing people who have their jobs, look like them, doing this is really important for-- I mean, our learners often say that the documentary videos that we create are the most powerful part of the learning experience for them.

SARAH HANSEN: So this course moves away from grades as the primary assessment tool. Can you talk about that?

JUSTIN REICH: Sure. So it would not be possible-- there's not really a set of declarative knowledge that we want people to know. I mean, we could have asked someone a multiple choice of what is a graduate profile or a few other things like that. But mostly, we want them to engage in a process that's customized for them to their local community.

So we don't have enough staff to be able to grade everyone's performance on those kinds of tasks. So the way that we do assessment in the courses is we give people challenges. Some of them are individual, reflective activities. But most of them are go out in your school, collect some data, try some experiments, do a new thing, and then come back and tell us what happened. And then we award people a certificate in the course if, through an honor system, they enough weekly checklists and enough parts of those weekly checklists to do about 60% of the work in the course. And then they can get a certificate.

An additional level of accountability that we have is that when people do these assignments, they create some kind of artifact around them. So if I went and talked to a few stakeholders, I would take notes on what I thought were the most important ideas that came out. And then we have people post that in the forums. And then we ask people to give each other peer feedback on what they're doing and what they're learning-- how do they take notes, what kinds of questions did they ask. When they do a first draft of the graduate profile, what seems to be being communicated effectively? What's unclear? When they do a second draft, how are they improving it?

I mean, teaching professionals around the world, they don't need us to hold them accountable. They're going and doing the work of making schools better every day. They need our help, and support, and guidance, and those kinds of things. And we're not we're not trying to certify people as having achieved a certain level of envisioning the graduate of the future proficiency in the way that other courses should.

An introductory computer science course should certify you are reasonably proficient at x number of things. For us, assessment-- I mean, the most important thing that our assessments do is they encourage, inspire, empower, give permission to people to go out in the world and start trying to make their schools better through some process that we're helping guiding people through. And for me teaching these courses, I think some of the most fun, rewarding feedback we get is something along the lines of before I took this course, I didn't know it was my job to do this. I didn't know that I could help lead a community conversation around a graduate profile.

But there was nobody else doing it. And when I started doing it, people started going-- or the principal started going along. Or my colleagues started going along. Or the superintendent started going along, or other things like that. My colleague here in the Sloan School, Peter Senge, who's worked in lots of industries, not just education, says there's no one in an institution who really feels empowered to make change by their title.

Lots of people feel like we're stuck in the world that we're in. But there are all kinds of people around the world in wherever they work who go, nope, I'm going to make this thing better. And that's a real part of the spirit behind our classes, is that sense that it doesn't have to be your job. You don't have to be the superintendent to declare that we have to have conversations about what our graduates should be able to do. You just start having those conversations. And if you do it well, and if you do it with enthusiasm, and with care, and with an invitation to others, they'll start getting involved.

SARAH HANSEN: Yeah, it's interesting, how you ask students to articulate-- I used to think this and now I think this. And that brings to mind design thinking. Could you talk about the role of design thinking in the course?

JUSTIN REICH: Sure. So I would say all of our courses that we build have a a kind of bias to action behind them, which I think is one of the key tenets of design thinking. So design thinking is a methodology for understanding and addressing problems that believes that good ideas come from iteration more than any other source, that the way that you get to a good idea is that you start with bad ideas, or you start with lots of ideas, and you cycle through them as much as you can.

So this course, I think, embodies this notion of we want to get away from the idea of the graduate profile as-- well, before you can do any of this, you're going to have to get everyone together in the room. And you're going to have to have a two year commitment to a process. And our approach to it is more, what is the smallest thing that you can do to start getting people to think about, ask questions about, explore where graduates should end up?

Anyone in a system can ask their colleagues, their students, their parents, their stakeholders those kinds of questions. Anyone can start taking the answers to those questions and synthesizing them, and putting them on your classroom door, or bringing them to a department meeting. Anyone, having done that step, can go to the next step of finding leadership, and trying to get more resources, and more time, and more support behind these initiatives.

That, I think, is the most design-inspired component of it, which is that we're going to have people figure out how to do this well not by studying it for a long time in the abstract and setting up a long process, but by saying, here's some ideas. Get started. Have some missteps. Have some things at work. And be continuously adjusting as you're going along.

SARAH HANSEN: I love that idea. What is the smallest thing I can do to spark a change?

JUSTIN REICH: I don't remember if it's in this course or another course. Generally speaking, we refer to that as the Someday Monday Problem. If you really want to do powerful work in schools, you have to imagine really different kinds of schools. The institutions that we have now are not doing the best possible job they could preparing young people for their futures as citizens, as reflective, ethical individuals, as people prepared for a changing world of work.

But also, all the kids are showing up tomorrow. And some of them are showing up without their lunch, like mine. And you can't fix all of those things. You can't send the kids home for two years and be like, let us retool for a little bit. When you come back, it'll be great. And also, as you're working towards these bigger changes and someday you have to have these things that you can try and implement on Monday.

What's the next thing that I can do that gets me one step closer to this larger goal? And actually, depending upon the time of year it is, people are more or less receptive to more fine-grained or more wider-grain things. If we taught versions of Envisioning the Graduate over the summer, we would do it in a way that there's less about the day to day interventions that you would do, because there aren't day to day interventions to do in July in schools in Massachusetts, and more about, all right, what is some kind of longer term planning that I might be able to do.

And this, we happen to be filming this right before Christmas break. There is no Someday work that gets done right before Christmas break. If you're going to make suggestions to people in this time of year, it has to be like, here's one more thing that you can try before you head out for the holiday. But do but do that one thing. There's always one step that we can try and take to get us one step closer to this broader vision we have.

SARAH HANSEN: So when you think about facilitating this course again, how are you thinking about iterating?

JUSTIN REICH: A big thing that we're thinking about is-- in the first runs of our courses, we really focused on the idea of making an experiment, making a change, starting some kind of process as the central learning goal of the course. And we still have that.

But the thing that we're trying to add to it is, are we giving people enough tools and resources to share what they're learning, to not just engage people for Envisioning Graduates of the Future, to not just engage people in the process of doing a graduate profile exercise, but to be able to share with a couple of other colleagues here's how we're thinking about this whole thing. Here's all the stuff that I learned in this course.

And you're not going to have time, or you're not that into online learning, you're not going to do the whole thing. But let me share with you what I've learned about this so that, if I'm a principal of the elementary school in my town, I can show the five other principals in the elementary school what I've learned. And then all six of us can do this process together in our schools.

So in subsequent versions, we're continuing to think about, are we doing enough to empower our learners to feel good about taking what they've learned in this course, sharing it with others? How do we make it more accessible, easier to share? We've been experimenting with things like creating workshop agendas for all of our courses. If you wanted to facilitate this course in a face to face setting, here's seven one our professional learning community meeting agendas. Here's two half-day agendas. Here's one full day agenda for being able to do that. Those are the kinds of resources we're trying to generate more of as we iterate and do more and more of these courses.

SARAH HANSEN: Right. Those seem like such useful support. It's not telling teachers how to do the work that they're already doing, but it's providing support around that. It's really, really neat.

JUSTIN REICH: Yeah, we're pretty sure that when we share those agendas-- we have learning circles facilitators. It's fine for us if people glance through them and go, oh, that's interesting. I'm not to do that, but I'm going to do this other thing. But it's not clear to us how many people take what we give them as training supports and use them in the way that we give them to them. But we see all kinds of ways that people take them and adapt them into their own local circumstances and make them make sense for them.

SARAH HANSEN: Is there anything else that you'd like to add about teaching this course?

JUSTIN REICH: Well, it's just such a tremendous honor and privilege to be able to have the time of the teachers in the United States. I mean, it's just a great joy to be able to support them, to learn with them, to have them come up with new ideas. I mean, in the first run of this course, a big idea that I hadn't really thought of before but came home to me listening to teachers was, as they finish this graduate profile process, a number of them said, look, we basically made a document that describes who we want to be as adults.

It wasn't just a graduate profile. It was a community member profile. It was an aspiration for who we are as people. And we can use that. That can help us think about how we hold ourselves accountable to our behavior and to our engagement with students, and the community, and those kinds of things.

And so that's what-- these courses are not built so that there's a bunch of experts at MIT who know all the things and go out and tell other people how to do stuff and how to run their schools. If we're doing this work in the best possible way, we're inviting this dialogue with a community of educators and saying, look, we're fortunate enough to be able to just sit around all day and think about how children learn, how teachers learn, and to not have to worry about whether or not somebody forgot their lunch.

And so that's what we can bring. But the teachers that we work with know more about their schools, and their community, and making schools work than anybody else does. And so we have to build learning experiences that honor and incorporate that wisdom and experience.

SARAH HANSEN: Right. And finally, what invitation would you offer to our audience out there who might like to engage with this class?

JUSTIN REICH: So we try to make the courses so that they're as accessible as possible. So we usually run them in a facilitated way once a year. And then the rest of the year, you can go and visit the archived material, and take it, and use it however you want. There's a whole bunch of this unMOOCed material that people can take and do whatever they want with.

We try to have regularly throughout the year all of our courses running. People can go to the Teaching Systems Lab website, tsl.mit.edu, and sign up for our newsletter, and hear about new kinds of things that are going on. And we love having teachers engage with our work, give us feedback, help us learn how we can do a better.

SARAH HANSEN: Great. Thank you very much.

JUSTIN REICH: It was fun, Sarah. Thanks for having me.