Lynda Barry helps us imagine the future of education
(transcript)

Lynda Barry: My name is Lynda Barry, and I am a Discovery Fellow, and a self-proclaimed artist in residence here at the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery. Instead of producing this fine piece, what if we make it like the drawing boards here at WID, where it's just someone getting their idea out? So it won't be restricted to just people that can draw or can't draw.

Then I thought, what if we try to talk to every age [of] person? And the question is, "What will the university be like in a hundred years?"

And so, I've been going to elementary schools, and also I've conducted a couple workshops on campus that are comprised of faculty, staff and people from the community. And what's interesting is the kids, even though they also kind of see a little bit of doom in the future, there's exuberance to the stuff that they invent. Like, one invented a "volcano school" that erupts, and that's how the kids get out. Another one was that the schools made of candy, everything's made of candy -- the teachers, the students, everything's made of candy, except for that as soon as school starts it all goes back to normal.

Then I said, "Okay, we're all gonna get in a time machine, and we're gonna go for a hundred years, and then we're gonna come out of the time machine, and tell me what school will look like in a hundred years."

This kid raises his hand, and I go, "Yeah?" And he goes, "It's gonna look really old." And then somebody else, "The teachers will all be dead." I said, "No, no! Not this school in a hundred years!" (laughs). And that's something I've learned from being here, is that how you pose the question really affects the answer that you get.

Adults, in general, have a much more sad view of the schools. They often see us being under some kind of dome that protects us from the environment. There is a weird agreement that there'll be a computer chip that will be implanted right here (indicates spot on neck.) The insights that I've had is that across the board, people feel that the computers and digital stuff, that that's our future, and that little things like desks and handwriting and drawing -- all the stuff I care the most about -- won't really be around anymore. The only thing that made me feel a little bit hopeful was when the kids would gesture for how computers will work, they gestured like this (wave arms above head and in front of face). They gestured in space, so they were actually using their hands. The adults imagined buttons, and then so then if you're imagining a button it's sort of like, why not just freeze your whole body (laughs).

So that's been kind of a little bit hard for me, as somebody who really thinks that thinking and intuition and all kinds of stuff comes from these original digital devices

(waves hands in front of face). But I don't know. The opportunity to talk so many people about something that deep, I just don't know how else I would have had it.