

Podcast Episode 2

## Making Learning & Development a Team Sport

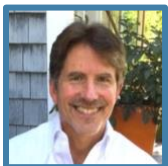
Interview Excerpts

### *On the Role All Adults Play in School Culture*

In *Remix Podcast* Episode 2, Karen talks with [Ron Berger](#), Senior Advisor, Teaching & Learning for [EL Education](#), and [Margarida Celestino](#), a freshman at Colgate University and alumnus of Casco Bay High School (an EL school). Their conversations pushes more deeply on themes from the Science of Learning and Development (SoLD) Alliance Strategy session in which all three were panelists – [Design Principles for Schools: Putting SoLD into Action](#) – school culture, social emotional learning and the role of community partners and engagement in the community.



*Karen:* Ron, I want to start with a sentence that you used which I thought was very powerful: “The student culture of the school is never ahead of the adult culture.” And you’re using language very specifically about adults and adult culture. And very often when we have these conversations, we talk about teachers. Who are these other adults that you’re talking?



*Ron:* I really appreciate your push on that because I think it's essential that we not limit this to teachers. From a student experience, every adult in the building matters. The bus driver matters; the person who greets them at the door matters; the secretaries in the office matter; the assistants, the counselors, the nurses, the custodians, everyone in the building.

**If those people are also not modeling the courage, compassion, kindness, and respect that we all want to model in a school, it has a profound effect on students.**

We should always include full staffs when we work together to become better people as models.

**Karen:** Margarida, in the SoLD interview, you talked a lot about the importance of your teachers and teacher relationships, but can you talk a little bit about these other adults that Ron was just mentioning?



**Margarida:** I do agree with Ron. Besides just teachers being present, other staff members do change the experience that a student has overall. Like I personally had a very good relationship with our school nurse and it was nice to see that someone besides my teachers cared about me outside of the classroom.

**She didn't care about my grades. She didn't care about how much I spoke in class. She was just solely there to make sure that if I had any concerns about myself, if I had any worries or any questions, I was able to go to her as an adult.**

And that is because she was very inclusive of every student, and she was nice to everyone and didn't exclude students who didn't speak up. She would come out to us. And that's something that I always say:

**It's important that sometimes adults start the conversation or adults just do make the first move because students need that.**



*Karen:*

Did you experience this adult culture, this intentional adult culture, as different from, in your earlier schools?

*Margarida*

Yes, it definitely felt different because teachers and staff, they acknowledged that their students are important. They acknowledged that their students mattered, and they genuinely cared. I never really experienced that until I got into high school.

*Karen:*

Ron, I'm curious how you make this happen. We talk about professional development for teachers setting aside time for teachers. But we don't talk about doing this with the whole staff. You've talked about EL as a professional development organization, focused on all of these adults. How do you find time? How do you get all of those people working together and seeing themselves as critical parts of a climate?

*Ron:*

That's a great question. EL Education has a big push on making sure we build what we call a spirit of crew – a spirit of teamwork, of looking out for each other among all staff members of a school. And that's really hard to accomplish, as you say, Karen, time-wise. The high school that Margarida attended was a regular public high school. It's not a charter school. It's within the regular school district, but we had to negotiate with the district to make sure that we could get staff members together and have those conversations about the kind of human beings we want to be with our students and how we'll make sure that every student's identity is honored in the school; how we make sure every student feels that he or she or they belong in the school.

**That means that we have to have some hard conversations with staff. We have to discuss race. We have to discuss gender identity. We have to discuss sexual orientation and income issues.**

Because if staff can't talk about those things with each other, how can they help students talk about those things? And so it really is a focus on staff crew in order to create those conditions for good student crew.