

What Makes Up Equitable, Learner-Centered Ecosystems

Interview Excerpts

On the Role of Adults

In *Remix Podcast Episode 4*, Karen talks with [Alin Bennet](#), [Education Reimagined's](#) Vice President of Practice and Field Advancement, and [Olivia Christensen](#), a member of Education Reimagined's board and a student at Morningside College. Their conversation expands on a *Learning Out Loud with Education Reimagined* session featuring Alin and Olivia, that explored their experiences as leaders and learners in reimagined systems and settings.



Olivia: I definitely like the way home base is described as being the place where like the learner is completely understood as a whole. And I think that's one of the biggest things for me that changed when I made that transition into Iowa Big was that I actually was considered a whole person by every single one of the faculty members or the mentors. They really truly saw me as a person rather than a statistic or a grade or any of the learning curves that I had to get around as I made that transition.



Karen: You've used the words “teachers” and “mentors”. Were the teachers public school teachers who were working in Iowa Big?

Olivia: “Teachers” isn't really the best word I would say. I think “mentors” and “advisors” are more of the term that we used when we were in Iowa Big, because teachers, especially in this kind of environment for me, it actually kind of has like a negative connotation. It does feel very much like when I think of a teacher, I think of somebody who's above me and somebody who makes it a point that they are the ones instructing me rather than having a mentor or advisor where they are kind of working alongside you and a lot of the things that you were doing. And so I would say a lot of the people, the staff that worked at Iowa Big, were more mentors.

I consider them a lot of the time family members. Like we had very good relationships to the point where they made it a point that they weren't there to be above us. They were there to work with us and they were learning alongside us as well.

So yeah, teachers isn't the best term.

Karen: Thank you for clarifying that. What did you call them? I mean, just now they're staff, they're advisors, they're mentors, they're friends, they're colleagues. Did they have an official term? In schools, people have very official terms - teachers are teachers? What did you call them?

Olivia: So, we basically just called them by their names. We didn't really have a specific like name for them. They weren't like a faculty member. And that's why I kind of use those words because they're very general and I want to kind of get them as a whole, but I called them by their names. Like I remember them every time I'd see them in person, I would call them by their names. They knew me by my name.



Karen: Alin, talk a little bit about this. Help us sort of translate the specific Iowa Big story into this more general idea of how we really bring this language, these distinctions, to life in ways that allow for this mixing and matching across locations and across different kinds of adults. And then take us into a little bit of how you got into this work in Providence.



Alin: I'd love to transition just by continuing that thread of why it was so difficult for you, Olivia, to find terminology for such a nuanced and complex role. Like try to put the role descriptions of "mom" on paper. Like it would be 50 pages long, or your abuela or whatever. It's like, that's what advisor was for, for me in Providence. The role of advisor was so nuanced when I was an advisor and then, later, a principal at the Met School in Providence. The advisor was that friend. It was also that mentor that was like a personal-life mentor and life coach. They were a curriculum designer because they had to design a curriculum for every single child based on their interests, their passions, and what they were navigating in the community. So that role of advisor, which is I have seen as the most common term for that adult who is the go-to adult in a child's life, other than their primary caretakers, that is helping that child navigate a complex ecosystem of learning.