

Katherine ([00:11](#)):

Over the past four episodes you've heard our host, Karen Pittman conduct rich and engaging interviews with youth and adult leaders from the K-12 education system, who are and acting with an eye toward learning and development ecosystems. While each brought a unique perspective and framing, there were also consistent themes that emerged. The role all adults play, the critical elements of an ecosystem, and the importance of engagement of, with and in the community.

In this final episode were turning the tables and I will be engaging Karen in conversation as we remix in real time. In our conversation Karen shares some of her cross episode reflections with you and continues to push us all to think more deeply on the power of all adults and of community. We hope like us, you'll be inspired to remix and connect the great ideas of our podcast guests with your own experiences. So Karen since we recorded these episodes I've had the chance to hear you in a variety of different conversations leverage the voice of the podcast guests. What stands out to you as some of the most memorable messages or quotes from the season?

Karen ([01:21](#)):

Well, Katherine, I don't think it's surprising to learn that I think some of the most memorable quotes came from the young people themselves. And in particular, I think it came from the young people as they were being asked to reflect on who beyond their teachers and sometimes beyond their schools were the people in places where they were really finding the kind of learning opportunities they were looking for.

Gizzelle ([01:44](#)):

Also, having the Urban Assembly School also give the opportunity to have an internship and go into different hospitals or urgent cares that also helps greater our experience levels that way when we do graduate with certification, we also have that under our belts.

Carlo ([01:59](#)):

I would say definitely where I'm definitely constantly learning is definitely on the soccer pitch with my teammates and my coach.

Gizzelle ([02:10](#)):

I was a part of a program this summer and I had the opportunity to speak with New York senators over the summer. And when I spoke with them, I was protesting against the zero tolerance policies.

Margarida ([02:22](#)):

So through the library, I was able to join clubs that were outside of school. And I made connections with people that were not necessarily my guidance counselor or my teacher within the classroom. I made connections with people that helped me with my essays that were meant for school, but they were not my teachers. They were not my tutors. They were just at the library and I actually made a really good connection with one of the teen library staff members who helped me be part of like the teen council that the library had. And through that, I was able to improve on my leadership skills outside of school, which is something that I know a lot of students do not get opportunities to.

Katherine ([03:01](#)):

So I want to dig in on one area that the young people shared with us in particular, both Olivia and Carlo, not just talked about the wide range of adults that they worked with, but specifically shared with us how they define teacher or educator.

Carlo ([03:17](#)):

I think someone, a role model that will help you and educate you just not only on subjects that we learn at school, but I think subjects overall in life too. And that are key figures in, I think your life that guide you. Yeah. That's my main overview.

Olivia ([03:43](#)):

When I think of a teacher, I think of somebody who's above me and like 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 are doing. And so I would say a lot of the people, the staff that worked at Iowa BIG were more mentors even I consider them a lot of the time family members like we had very good relationships.

Katherine ([04:10](#)):

What stands out to me in these quotes are the connection to new teacher centers desire to humanize teaching and the need for personal connection. What resonated for you in the definitions that they shared with us of teachers and educators?

Karen ([04:23](#)):

I think the thing that came through most specifically in their comments, but I think in all of the comments from young people and then reinforced by the education leaders that we had on the call was the fact that young people are looking for relationships in which there's an equal power balance. And that what they reflected on, even when they had teachers that they loved, that the role that teachers are put in of conveying content and assessing mastery creates a power imbalance that narrows their ability to get to know the whole young person.

Margarida ([04:57](#)):

It is very different with the ones I'm experiencing in America. It was very with the one that I experienced in middle school versus my high school Casco Bay High School.

Carlo ([05:06](#)):

I think that it's really key for the teacher to really know all these things outside of school and inside their classroom about their student to really get that kid who's unmotivated, tired, meaning of class to really enjoy math and to feel like it's not a drag.

Olivia ([05:28](#)):

One of the biggest things for me that 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 like 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.

Katherine ([05:50](#)):

YouthTruth did some research at different points throughout the pandemic and one of the things that they found was that early on in the pandemic adolescents were finding more of that connection and relationship with teachers in particular, teachers were asking them about other aspects of their life. And by this fall, most of that had begun to decline and students were no longer experiencing that connection. So it's very interesting that in the systems where we talk with the leaders and the students, that's a more consistent theme. And it makes me wonder how does a learning and development ecosystem approach or ecosystems thinking help us get to this point of that power balance, connection, humanizing in these relationships?

Karen ([06:33](#)):

You know I think the research that you just quoted is so important and we should just stop and pause on those findings and on that progression of, as the pandemic went on, teachers really then felt compelled to get down to the content. We haven't discussed enough why there feels like there's such a tension between getting to know the whole young person and getting that young person to the place that you are accountable for getting them in terms of content mastery or knowledge mastery. Why that's set up as a tension that somehow taking the time to actually get to know the young person, to find out where their interests are, to find out where their connections are, to find out what their needs and their assets are, is somehow seen as getting in the way of accountability for what you're being required to do.

And so that idea of humanizing teaching by empowering educators that Atyani talked about really is in order to humanize teaching, we have to empower educators to take the time to get to know their students and to take the time to let their students get to know them as full beings. And so I think it's disheartening, but not surprising that our teachers really jumped in because they are human beings who want to know their young people. They jumped in fully into this let's find them and find out how well they're doing but as the months went on that pressure to get caught up, that idea of learning loss got in the way of learning about how the young people were doing.

Katherine ([08:09](#)):

Yeah your comments, Karen, bring up for me another theme that I think we heard in the episode in particular both David and Ron spoke to this notion of social, emotional learning, and academics being in competition. I often hear you talk about learning is social emotional, rather than social emotional learning, or people will talk about social, emotional and academic development. But let's hear from David and Ron about how they spoke to that topic.

David ([08:36](#)):

It is a crazy thing that we think of this as a trade off, that we focus on the social, emotional health of students or their identity and their sense of belonging and their character, or we focus on their academics because the science makes it so clear that those things are interdependent. And that every parent already knows that if your child does not feel that she belongs, does not feel respected and valued in school she's not going to do well. That those things that confidence and a sense of belonging and a sense of being valued are a foundation for doing well academically.

Ron ([09:10](#)):

I want to say this again, the work-based learning, the internship, the work that Giselle is doing in terms of restorative practice, these are part and parcel of her social and emotional development. It's not just about an assessment, right? It's about how are you living these things out? So I think the better we are

to moving to those outcomes the better our city will be. And the better our city will be Hopefully the better folks will be in terms of looking to our city for inspiration.

Katherine ([09:34](#)):

So the big question you just started to get to it a little bit, if there are models like EI Education and Urban Assembly that are really blurring the SEL and academics that are empowering teachers, not just teachers. We heard it from the students in those systems, all adults in the building to make those connections. And they're engaging communities in ways that are working why haven't we scaled models like that as a country, as a system?

Karen ([10:05](#)):

Just a little question. I think that really is the huge question and it's the question that we're going to have to tackle. And there are lots and lots of answers to it, but I think you touched on it. And I think actually our students touched on it again. I believe that it was Olivia who said at the end that she had such powerful experiences at Iowa BIG, where she spent a half day and where she felt that she had the people who knew her by name and she knew by name that she called advisors and coaches and mentors. But when pushed she said, "I wouldn't call them teachers because they came at it with this fuller perspective."

And one of her reflections at the end of the interview was it felt like Iowa BIG, even though I was going there for part of the school day and I was getting credit for it, it felt like they was resistance from the schools, that they thought this was in competition with what they were doing, as opposed to a critical part of what they were doing or something that actually could make me more engaged when I'm back in the school for that part when I'm really digging into hard subjects. And she didn't understand that.

And I think that's the problem, we don't understand that. We have not been fully convinced about what the science tells us, which is that learning is social and emotional. That if we don't feel a deep sense of social belonging and emotional safety, we're not going to engage. And if we're not going to engage, we aren't going to learn. Somehow, even though we know that and all of us as humans have experienced that the way we've set up our schools and the way we've specifically defined teaching and way we've elevated a specific kind of content knowledge over the other kinds of knowledge and competence building that when you get out in the real world, we know young people need to have, we've done that until we dismantle that accountability system, it's going to be very difficult for us to do that. So why we need that ecosystem approach is that accountability system puts the burden on teachers.

And I think one of the things that's happened, which we were discovering with the introduction of SEL, that acronym of social, emotional learning is that it got translated early on into social, emotional teaching. This is one more thing we have to teach the kids. We have to teach them algebra, we have to teach them geography, and now we have to teach them empathy, and we have to teach them teamwork. And if we put all of it in that frame of, we have to teach them, then we put the burden on the classroom teacher to try to build more and more of this in, while marginalizing the other adults who are in a better position to be able to acknowledge the strengths that young people already have in these areas and give them these more natural, real life experiences to use those skills and see what it means when they really are going into the world as competent young people.

Katherine ([12:50](#)):

That reminds me so much Karen of Atyani sharing with us that in the craft and art of teaching the content has been prioritized much more over all the other aspects. And so you've both got within the traditional system this prioritizing, and then as you so clearly articulated it a limited view of the role that others can play. So that takes me to the last theme that I wanted to remix and dig in on a little bit with you here. Overall, this podcast is going to be focused on creating equitable learning and development ecosystems. And that's a phrase and a concept that we've been playing with a lot and thinking about how do we make it clear and how do we understand how systems fit in ecosystems and what are all the aspects and places and spaces where young people are learning and developing.

For this season, we very intentionally selected guests from the K12 space that were focused on engaging with and in the community. And the power as you've already emphasized of hearing from the young people about how they experienced it was amazing. We also heard from the adults working in these systems, that they had to do some work to define community. You often talk about models where community is that outer ring and it's vague and it's amorphous, but in these places they've intentionally said this is what we mean when we say community and this is how it contributes to everything that we're trying to do. So what's stood out to you either in terms of what the young people shared of how they experienced connection with community, or in terms of how the adult leaders that we talked with were thinking about community for the work that they're trying to achieve.

Karen ([14:29](#)):

You know, what I loved most about doing these series of interviews with education leaders along with young people from the schools that have benefited from their expertise was just the intentionality with which they took on an aspect of community. Because as you said, we often just say, we need community and community sort of means we get an auditorium filled with people and we tell them what we're going to be doing in school and they nod along and say, "How can we help?" And then they help in vague ways. But for each of these education leaders they had a really specific and actually quite different definition of how they were going to intentionally make sure that every young person in their schools had an intentional community experience for EL Education that community started with building teams. I am going to feel that I am a community because I have a group of peers that are going through this entire thing with me.

So I'm never alone. If we're succeeding, we're succeeding as a team. That's a steep sense of community that really sort of gets you to that belonging and safety when you go through these critical developmental years as a team. Also, include intentional building up that entire adult community as a team so that young people were experiencing school as a community, not having one set of experiences in one classroom and a different set of experiences is in the cafeteria. They really had the confidence that everybody in that building really was on the same page and with them on the same page about what community was.

Gizzelle ([16:02](#)):

It's just we all come together and they create that culture together as one.

David ([16:06](#)):

People have a responsibility for developing these skills, attitudes, and culture that it means to be a part of the school.

Ron ([16:12](#)):

And 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. 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 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.

Atyani ([16:43](#)):

For me to feel empowered to create the kind of, I love the word Carlos used atmosphere where children feel seen and valued and stood and supported and can bring their selfhood into the academic space to achieve some of the energy that Carlos is describing that happens on the soccer field, in the math classroom. Teachers have to have those kinds of experiences as well.

Karen ([17:11](#)):

And then which as I listened more to what they were are doing with that team, with those teams of adults and those teams, their crew, as they use that term, they then went out to learn about their communities.

Margarida ([17:25](#)):

Junior Year too we had an expedition called public policy where we had high school students actually questioning policies that were made. Policies and systems that we're living under. I feel like it's a good opportunity to just come out of my own bubble and be like, oh, I'm actually in the real life world. Like there are things that are happening outside of this small little high school.

Olivia ([17:48](#)):

So for me, I know I pitched a couple projects that I was really interested in that eventually I didn't necessarily get partners. And so that was also a really cool experience as well, even though those projects weren't very necessarily successful I learned a lot from them. I learned how to pitch a project. I learned what aspects were necessary for a project to be successful and so I learned a lot from that.

Ron ([18:12](#)):

We need to loosen up and decide. If we want every kid to succeed we need to rethink some of that bureaucracy and allow schools to connect to a broader wealth of community resources and support.

Karen ([18:25](#)):

Their projects were really learning projects and when they went out to in interview immigrants to find out what the immigrant experience was, or went out into their community to find out how toxic waste was having an impact in some neighborhoods, they picked a project. But they went out as a team to really explore their communities. So building community within the building gave them the confidence to go out as a team and explore the broader community. When you went to our discussion that we had with Olivia, from Education Reimagined and Olivia's experience in Iowa BIG, the community actually came to her. She spent her afternoons in Iowa BIG, which had people there who were sort of their advisors and coaches, but community partners came in to work on projects with them. So she was actually confused when we kept asking her about community because well, the community came to me I didn't really go out into the community.

Then when we go to Urban Assembly and that conversation about community, they are very intentional that the partners they looked for in community were industry leaders, because they wanted young people to not just have experiences in the community, but they wanted them to have experiences that were relevant for college and career success. So as you heard the young person talk about how she was in one of the schools that focused on the health sciences, they are partnering with industry leaders to make sure that young people are getting those kind of connections, not just in a one off internship for six weeks, but throughout their high school career. And that they're coming back and able to reflect and grow with those experiences. So each one of them had a very different way of helping young people go out into community as well as a very different and intentional way of building community in the building with all the adults and with the young people.

Katherine ([20:12](#)):

Two words that you said in there that I want to highlight, one was intentional and I think that's so much of what we heard is they had that intentional definition of community. It wasn't the same for each one, the experience wasn't the same, but they had clearly articulated in our learning and development ecosystem these are the community, places, spaces, people that we are going to or bringing in. And then the other word that just really stood out to me was confidence. I think we heard each of the four young people talk about how their experience with these unique learning settings boosted their confidence, helped them grow as human beings, as curious learners and as contributors to society in a way that then they transferred far beyond that learning setting.

So it was really exciting to hear both how folks are starting to think about learning and development ecosystems and what it's already looking like in action on the ground in lots of exciting places. So I want to quickly transition to wrapping us up, we have already been thinking about season two. We're anticipating a few months before that one comes out, but I would love for you to share anything that you're willing to with the listeners about some of the ideas that we're thinking about for what next season might hold.

Karen ([21:27](#)):

I think the ideas are still in formation, but it's clear as we came into this that digging into this idea of what makes for equitable learning and development ecosystems is a big topic that we couldn't... Even five podcasts wasn't going to be enough. So I think in the next season, what we're hoping to do is to compliment this deep dive into listening to young people and adults who have experienced what it means to be in a very intentional school that has taken on these ideas, to really figuring out how we scale these ideas outside of school.

Now, whether that's by digging into what do we mean by community partnerships or looking at things like the success of STEM learning that has really grown with schools, but mostly really grown by tapping into all the places, libraries, museums after school programs, summer programs, college campuses, you know sort of places where learning happens that are not linked to school in a specific way. We're going to really figure out how to dig in and understand what it means where we've got folks who have been thinking about this broader ecosystem beyond the school system and how they're really tackling learning and how they're scaling these experiences.

Katherine ([22:43](#)):

Well, Karen, thank you so much for giving that preview of those ideas I know between now and then we're going to have lots of on the record interviews as you go out and have conversations with leaders across the thriving youth fields that we'll be sharing with folks. And I am sure that many of our listeners

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will have ideas for us about what the next season can hold. And I know I for one am excited to continue to tune in and to hear more as we help people think about how learning and development ecosystems can truly change the odds for young people.

Karen ([23:11](#)):

Absolutely. I'm looking forward to it.

Katherine ([23:15](#)):

Please visit [changingtheoddsremix.com](http://changingtheoddsremix.com) and our YouTube channel, where over the next several weeks we'll be sharing remixes of the ideas and voices from this season's guests. And stay tuned for season two, which will be released later this spring, where we'll continue to explore how learning and development ecosystems help us change the odds for children and youth.