

## **Innovations in Thinking and Learning**

### **Em Del Sordo – Making a Profound Difference**

EM: So this is what we call a living museum. And part of this is, How do we take our learning and we go on excursions and we extend that learning? And we go on trips to go further with our learning, and pick things from that culture to say, "This is represented of our learning and our vision." So right now, we're starting off with every brick here equals 1,000 lives that were killed because no one stood up for their rights. And so what we're thinking of doing is we're just starting it right now to say, "Look at all of history in that we're not learning." And so how can we go about and correct that? How can we go about and change that? And more importantly, how do you see yourself in this movement? And where is it that you want to focus your life on? Because these here really represent all the different pathways to creating a better world, to create a better life for yourself. And the best way to do it is for goal number four, which is the purpose why I'm here: quality education. To give these kids and these teachers the best educational institution that's publically-funded so that we can create the profound difference that's needed in the world all through learning. Skills and knowledge and authentic tasks connected to a great vision, which is the big idea that is better and bigger than who we are.

It means the kids are engaged, they're busy, they're making connections, they're talking, they're sharing experiences -- life experiences. And at the end of the day they see the school as a social organism, not a prison. They see it as a place where they come and they talk about their experiences. Life experiences connected to curriculum, connected to their friends, connected to what their next step is. And they're really looking for a caring adult to say to them, "You know what? How might this look like, if you did this?" Not necessarily to give them a lecture. Give them really a coaching question. To have, like, the students really think about it.

A funny story that happened once was a teacher came to see me because he was very, very frustrated and fatigued. He says, "I need your help. I don't know what to do with this one kid." And I said, "Sit down. Let's talk. What is it?" He goes, "I can't get this kid to stop talking in class. I don't know what to do. Can you help me?" And I said, "Uh, have you met me? Tell the student this is their future." At the end of the day, being talkative in class doesn't mean you're off task. It means that's the way I need to communicate my thinking and my learning. And that's the way I know my teachers approached it, where I had to learn -- and I suspect this is where other kids have to learn -- when to tone that down and when it's acceptable. Right? And those are the boundaries that kids want to learn. And what we have to do is teach them the boundaries in a very caring, loving way that speaks to our decency and what we're trying to do here in the world. So that the

kids see us as role models, and then they replicate the way we handle difficult situations. Because that's how we're going to change the world.

Everything starts with the curriculum. That my teachers start there to say, "Okay, so what am I actually measuring? And what body of content am I going to do this with?" So I see the teachers thinking first. And it's so pronounced for me because that's what we've been working on. Like, to say, really, What are you measuring? And then what I see, I see all these different tools that we've actually tried to learn about being implemented, being worked on, being tried. Some of them work really well, and some of them work not as well as we anticipated. But we constantly build on it. What I love about that kind of process of what we're seeing about it is what I really call -- there's an art and science to teaching. The art is the teacher. And every teacher has a different artistic way of getting it. It's their autonomy, it's their personality, it's their thinking, it's their stories. It's how they see themselves as an educator is the artistic way. But that's not useful if it's not connected to the science of teaching. And the science of teaching really is all those wonderful tools that you will see my teachers working on. The knowledge-building tools, our integrative thinking tools, our NPDLE tools, our tools from our Student Success department, our tools from our board -- our Transforming, Learning, Everywhere initiative from our board. All of these tools are really deeply embedded in research, which means we've got to get our heads, as professionals, around that. What does that look like? What does that sound like? And what do we do when the kids can't show us that in the class? And so what we want to really have the teachers to understand is, What tools do you know, and you know very well -- which are, like, you know, the doctor's tools. You know? Your scalpel. You understand? Which tools are you going to use for what purpose which is connected to the curriculum? And then that art part is, Who are you in this process? How are you going to put you together with these kids so that they can be themselves with these tools so that this way we're really hitting an expectation? Because at the end of the day, professionally the teacher will always be able to measure a student by saying, "This is what it is. This is the expectation. Here's the skill. Here's the body of knowledge. And this is what I can tell you about this student and how they achieved it, and where their gaps are, and what their next step might be." And that's the exciting part about it.