

VIEWPOINT

# WELL, NOW WHAT?

A CONVERSATION WITH  
JONATHAN MATTA, NATIONAL  
EDUCATION LEADER,  
KI FURNITURE

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We sat down with Jonathan Matta, National Education Leader with KI Furniture, to take a bird's-eye view of lessons learned from the pandemic. We address topics like learning vs. education, why the term “learning loss” is a bit of a misnomer, re-imagining learning culture, the importance of flexible learning spaces, and how to give students agency in their own educational process. We also talked about how reflections of the shift in learning culture over the last decade can be found in everything from *Star Wars* to *The Office*. Today's episode is sponsored by KI Furniture.

**S4L: Jonathan, thanks a lot for being with us today.**

**Jonathan Matta:** Hey, thanks, Matt. I appreciate the opportunity to spend some time with you.

**Yeah, of course. We're happy to have you. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?**

Sure. You want me to start from the very beginning of birth, or...? Joking, obviously. Yeah, so, my name is Jonathan, and I serve KI in the role of a National Education Leader. I tend to help the organization in a number of different ways, be it from marketing, to kind of poking at curious thoughts around what the future of learning inside school systems looks like. My background is in design—specifically, design thinking and human-centered design. And that also affords me the opportunity to help us a little bit when we think about new product creation, and how do we empathize or perform ethnography on cultures to understand latent needs? And then, how does that inform product design? So that's kind of me in a nutshell and what I do at KI.

**I think the big question on everyone's mind right now is basically just, “Well, now what?” It's been quite a year. How is KI looking at what's unfolded and what happens now, and just kind of, what happens next?**

Yeah, I think, generally speaking, we love kind of big, juicy questions. And I would call that a pretty

“So you start to kind of ask yourself this question of, are we doing what we need to be doing to foster organic, authentic learning? And again, organic learning is a series of self-expressed experiments and experiences. Or are we pushing upon our youth a system of education that is trying to engineer outcomes?” – Jonathan Matta



big, juicy question you just asked. And we're not afraid of it. When we think about what we—you know, KI's been around since 1941. And a lot of times, I try and put this in a framing of kind of: Why, how, and what, right? What KI does, at the end of the day—and we know this well—we manufacture furniture. We manufacture anything that goes into a K–12 through a higher-education environment. How we do that, I'm not gonna bore you with. We're really proud of how we design products, why we design products, and then how we manufacture here in the United States.

I will say the most important thing is why. Why do we do what we do? What is our purpose? And what we really believe is that we have a responsibility to contribute to the reimagination of learning systems. And so, when you ask the question of like, “Well, now what?”, you know, our big thing over this past year has really been to try and gain a deep understanding of, what have been the bright spots? We believe that it's so easy to focus on all the negatives associated with a pandemic, and things associated with, you know, shutdowns and school closures. What we've tried to focus on are listening, right? Knowing where we've been. Knowing what school has looked like. Knowing that there's been this tremendous reimagination of K–12, dating back to around 2010, where we really saw transformative shifts in pedagogy, and instructional models, and then how space—physical space—and the design of new buildings and environments supports that, and real learning. And then, through the pandemic, saying, well, wait a minute, it's not all bad. Maybe there's some wonderful things. Maybe if we're just actually listening to users. Maybe if we just interview users. Maybe if we talk to third graders, maybe if we talk to fifth graders, maybe if we talk to middle schoolers, maybe if we talk to high schoolers, we might learn some things. We might learn some things for those users, for their experiences, and the

environment that they go into on a daily basis. That would actually turn out to be a wonderful thing, right? A new reimagination.

And when I mentioned our purpose is to contribute, KI's never gonna prescribe to trends. We're aware of trends. But what we're really interested in is an honest interpretation and an honest contribution to, kind of, the future that lies ahead. And that means we empathize with our end-user partners, again, be it a K–12 school or a university. We love partnering with architecture and design firms, and just contributing to the reimagination of a learning culture. So when I say like, that's, you know, “Well, now what?”, we intend to continue to do that, if that makes sense. We intend to come out of this thing still listening, and still forming patterns, and then poking at those patterns and trying to invite conversations around those patterns.

### **I was wondering, could you tell me a little bit about *Star Wars* and systems of education over the last decade?**

Yeah. So I think, again, we mentioned—thank you for that segue. This is a new thing that I've been talking about and thinking about, and it kind of hit me about a week ago. So, it's pretty new, if you will. In 2010, 2011, 2012...2010 was when I really began my expedition into design strategy and design thinking, and how you could use a methodology of design to help school-teaching teams transform and change the way they're going about doing things through the lens of empathy of the user. Now, what's interesting is in 2010, 2011, 2012, you know, while I was starting to learn design strategy in 2010, there were other people in the United States that were doing it themselves, too. You know, there's a great book around that time called “The Third Teacher.” And there were people pushing at a time when there wasn't like anything pressing that would say, “Hey, we have

to reimagine this thing,” right—this old kind of factory model of rote or transmission-based instruction.

And yet, we had people a good 10–11 years ago that were really pushing the reimagination of actual learning. We saw a lot of career and technical education; we saw entrepreneurship in the form of lean start-up methodology. We saw mobile platforms, right? With the rise of a handheld device and computer in your hand, we saw a school shifting instruction to mobile-making: coding, application-based things. At the time, we saw a mentor to me, Seth Godin, form a thing called altMBA, which was—and still is today—a 30-day experiential learning journey, where you just are put into these cohorts of peers that are all subject matter experts in their own thing. And over the span of a month, you create 17 actual, shipped projects. It looks like real work, right? Real, high-performing teams.

And when I think about that, it’s akin to *Star Wars: A New Hope*, right? This idea that there is a new hope for what this thing can become. And this thing is obviously school-based learning, school systems—be it public, private, whatever it might be. I joke and say, okay, so the pandemic hits, right, and COVID protocols. And COVID protocols are kind of like the Empire striking back. This idea...all of a sudden, we have controlled dissemination, right? The behaviorist model of sitting in rows, six feet apart, a lot of lecture-based stuff, looking at the front of the classroom. So the Empire kind of struck back at us.

And now I think it’s really the return... and I’m calling it the Return of the Jedis, not the *Return of the Jedi*. And it’s really this, kind of, call to action. This idea that it’s not—and we can talk about this in a minute, but there’s a really good buzzword going around right now called “learning

loss.” And I’ll shelve that for a minute. But it’s not just one person. It’s not just KI. It’s not just me. It’s not just other people on our team. It’s not you. It’s all of us, right? It’s the listeners of this podcast. It’s designers at architecture and design firms. It’s designers inside school systems. It’s teachers. It’s principals. It’s assistant superintendents. It’s superintendents. I think there’s this opportunity for the return of what we were doing pre-COVID. Learn from what happened, right? Are we really listening to users right now? There’s some great things that came out of this, and then pushing the envelope—no differently than we did in 2010, 2011, 2012—to really reimagine a path forward that provides more students with more opportunity.

**I know we’re speaking broadly and that there’s a lot of different kinds of applications to this. But could you maybe give one small, little, concrete-type example of the way that we’re looking at some kind of benefit from the pandemic, and applying it moving forward?**

Yeah. So, I mentioned users, right? So, if we take the average age of a high schooler right now, let’s just say a high schooler’s a 17-year-old kid that just went through this past year. Well, if I rewind the clock, they were an elementary-aged kid, right, in 2010, 2011, 2012. Well, we know at that time, that the “new hope” was reimagining and shifting towards maker and project-based, right? If we assume a high schooler today was exposed to maker and more inquiry-based, project-based forms of instruction, and less transmission or rote forms of instruction—well, when we interviewed them about a hybrid schedule, we overwhelmingly heard, “I love it!” We overwhelmingly heard, it is wonderful that I don’t have to be there every day. It is

wonderful that I can actually pursue other hobbies, other passions, there’s more space for me. Right? I don’t just have to just be a robot and show up at 7:30 a.m., and I get to leave at 2:40.

I mean, the bell system itself: You know, I half-jokingly say sometimes that like, you look at like the design of middle school, you know, pre-COVID, right? Like, you have to change into a uniform to exercise. You are released on time for things; you are scheduled for times on things. It was like prison, right? And so, when you think about—okay, so we listened to high schoolers who are saying, hey, I love this, I love the flexibility. Well, what does that look like? It looks like college. Right? So now, we start to say to ourselves, well, why? Why do they love it? Well, if you go backwards, you say, well, wait a minute, look—it’s working. The whole purpose of active forms of instruction, and active forms of pedagogy going all the way back to Socrates and the Socratic Method, this creates deep levels of inquiry as to create agency. A human that is capable.

And all of a sudden, we’re hearing it, right? It’s come true. They’re in front of us. It’s happening, which is so exciting, obviously. And so, the concrete example that we’re thinking about is like, what might happen to high-school campus design? And how quickly might high-school campus design begin to look like university campus design, where you have lots of come-and-go, come-and-go? That would be a really concrete example.

**Can you talk a little bit about learning versus education?**

Sure. So, we’ve written about this recently on our blog. And some of it came through, obviously, the pandemic and what we saw. You know, I’m a father of three. We think about my profession has

largely been made in helping school systems reimagine learning, right? So, education system, reimagine learning. So, for the past 15–16 years of my life, education systems and the art of learning is a central thing at our dinner table some nights, right? You know, when the pandemic hits, this thing got, I mean, everybody, right? I mean, sometimes, when I start workshops, I do like a show of hands. And I say, how many of you have children in school? And the hands go up. And I say, leave them up. And I say, how many of you were in school? Everybody puts their hand up, right? And one of the coolest things about education and learning is that everybody has some personal empathy for it, because we've all experienced it, right?

And so, when I think about what we've learned this past year, what I just talked about, and then some of our new product creations that are not out in the world yet (but we're working on from a development perspective), when we think about looking at just very specific learning cultures—you know, one learning culture is like very little children, right? Like, a nine-month-old to... let's call it a four-year-old. And all that learning occurs largely in their household. It's almost all experiential-based. It is all a series of experiments. It's not planned experiments, but they're just accidental experiments that the kid is engaging in through experience. And learning is occurring. This contrast to education, which is this idea that we are going to control the dissemination of new skills, new behaviors, new concepts, and we're going to try and teach that to you. So it's this idea that, like, education is this "system of" where learning is this natural organic act. Does that make sense?

So what we are excited about, and if I go back to that story of like, listening to

high schoolers that said, we loved hybrid, or we love hybrid. We think it's a byproduct of the fact that not only when they were little kids—we were all little kids. We learn. We don't need to be taught how to learn. We know how to learn, right? My 4-year-old does an awesome job learning on her own. I don't need to do anything. My 10-year-old, he's still pretty good at it. But you can see by the time they hit third grade, we start to kind of beat it out of them and push the system of education upon them. My 13-year-old, I mean, you know... I'm a very creative person; that's kind of arrogant of me to say it like that. But I'm a goofy person; I'm a playful person. So I'd like to think that her natural ability to still learn is a byproduct of her home environment. But I mean, it's almost heartbreaking to see the autonomous nature of education system that is instilled upon our children. And this idea that like a) you're going to go to school, you're going to get good grades; b) that's going to get

you into college; and then c) you're going to get a job. I mean, I just saw thing yesterday, it said 47% of recent college graduates are in jobs that didn't even require their degree.

So you start to kind of ask yourself this question, right, of like, are we doing what we need to be doing to foster organic, authentic learning? And again, organic learning is a series of self-expressed experiments and experiences. Or are we pushing upon our youth a system of education that is trying to engineer outcomes? Now, when we think about the pandemic, we now come out of the pandemic, and there's this huge focus on "learning loss." Well, let's just pretend for a minute that we adopt my thought on this—that we really need to be focused on learning, which is a natural, organic act of experience and experiments. Well, I guarantee you, when school closures were happening, kids were learning. They were engaging in experiences and





My son was in second grade, and the school district said he doesn't appear to be strong in math. And I said, "Well, have you ever asked him about salary cap?" And the question was, "What?" And I said, "Well, you should ask him about football. Ask him about the salary cap for the Seattle Seahawks." Right. Like, it is as simple as, like, making it something experiential.

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experiments. We might not have liked what they were doing, but...and that's a lack of control thing, right? That's where like, oh, we want to control what they're learning, and that just validates my point, right?

And so, it's really—I keep telling people, it has nothing to do with learning loss. It has everything to do with education loss, and then if we were doing it the right way. And what I mean by that is, if we were fostering deep, organic, active forms of learning inside our school systems—and again, lots of good examples of it have happened. I'm not picking on it. That was when the new hope was happening, right? We were reimagining it at pace. K–12 was doing an incredible job at reimagining it at pace. But you have an education gap, right? Sorry—it's education loss and learning gap, right? So, I juxtapose it. You've lost the education, the transmission-based education that you sought to deliver. And if you were doing it really well, if you were in some sort of career and technical education program of entrepreneurship, we're creating our own businesses, right, we're solving problems that humans don't know they have. And you're doing really good learning, now you got a learning gap.

Because if I put my altruistic hat on, I would look at it and say, okay, there's some kid who's socioeconomically disadvantaged, but they're in a career and technical entrepreneurial program.

Now that kiddo is being exposed to an elevated learning opportunity. And that is the promise of education system—it should be, right? If you're doing it right, you had a learning gap. But we're just calling it learning loss, which I think is totally misplaced. I think you got an education loss.

And again, I think what we're trying to do is just continually, you know—my partner, my primary partner inside of KI is our Vice President of Education, Brian. And Brian always says it's our job to poke at things. And I think what we're trying to do here is really poke at it. And again, going all the way back to the beginning, we don't have all the answers. We're really curious. And this is one thing that we're really curious about, and we're excited for conversations like this, because we get to poke at it with you guys. Right? And we get to poke at it with your listeners. And hopefully somebody else goes home and pokes at it. And through a series of poking, you become aware of it, and then people start to design ways around it, or solutions for it. And that's what we're excited about.

**As a furniture manufacturing company, as KI, are you worried about the *Return of the Jedi* at all? Are you worried about the decentralization or hybridization of education that might lead to students spending less and less time in school and a physical building—a little bit less need for education, design furniture?**

No, no. I mean, I'm not...I think I make it sound so simple. Like, I'm not afraid of it. I'm not. I mean, I think we've known for a hundred years that we are social creatures. We require socialization. Now, I'm naturally an introverted human. That's hard for a lot of people to believe. And the metaphor I use oftentimes is, it's my cup. Like, imagine you just have a 16 oz. cup. If I go into a social engagement, it's like I'm walking in with my cup half full. And as I engage with people and talk to people, I just get really full really fast, right? An extrovert is somebody who's just...their cup never gets filled up, right? It's always just empty, and there always needs to be more, and more, and more.

I guess my point is, it doesn't matter whether you're an introvert or extrovert; we're social. And so, we don't worry about it. I think if you look at, you know, a chalkboard tablet was 8.5 x 11. And a piece of paper is an 8.5 x 11. And an iPad is an 8.5 x 11. Right? I think we might be coming out of this feeling like we've learned how to use a digital tool for the first time more effectively. But we're not very worried about this mass digitalization—I mean, if that's a word. Digitizing of all content and all experiences. We think like AR and VR is going to become

a bigger thing. And so, like augmented forms of reality, allowing for an experience to be brought to a user. But even in those design environments, oftentimes, you see almost like this old, you know, kind of Coliseum design, right? Where one person's engaging in the AR experience or the VR experience, but you have a Coliseum of people in person watching them. Right? Almost like theater. So no, we're not, we're not terribly worried about it.

I mean, I think...I do think we're gonna see like a HyFlex response, HyFlex learning, which is hybrid flexible. But if you talk to educators about hybrid flexible, which is this idea that like a student on a Tuesday just decides they don't want to go. And I'm kind of downplaying that a little bit. It's not that simple. I mean, you might have an actual need on a Tuesday to not have students come into the class. Could you use digital tools to make it a synchronous thing anyway? So gone out the window is this whole idea of synchronous days versus asynchronous days. HyFlex environment would just be designed to make it all synchronous, whether you're there or not, in person. We're gonna see that at university. We're gonna see that in higher ed. And part of that is just, obviously, kind of the continual value proposition that the world is questioning with higher ed. And so, they're going to respond that way, in my opinion, so that they can make sure that students are in and enrolled. But I think we've been talking to a lot of superintendents, assistant superintendents, and then a lot of teachers about HyFlex in K-12. And that is not a popular idea in K-12.

**Yeah, I guess I could see that. How K-12 would be a little less willing to kind of dive into something new than higher ed.**

Well, and they've been...we look at it, we think K-12 has been far more willing to dive into new concepts than higher ed has. But I think that it's fascinating at times when tension pops up, right? Because we think, reputationally, K-12 over the past decade has been, really, the leader in reimagining. And then this thing like a HyFlex environment comes along, our hybrid flexible environment, which again just means hybrid on-demand, whenever needed. And we would think, oh wow, they're probably...they're progressive, they're gonna do—and no. They're like, no, we want our kids in. And I think that kind of reasserts the belief that we know that learning is this immersive, experiential experiment. And if we've shifted our model, our instructional model, to be a lot more of that as opposed to here, I'm going to just stand at a chalkboard and teach you math. Right? I think you've got the people that have disrupted that in



K-12 still saying, oh, we got to get them back for all these wonderful things that we're doing.

**I'm sorry, I was looking at one of the blog posts and it was talking about multipurpose—that the word I was trying to think of—it was talking about multipurpose spaces. And it was talking about how kind of the age of, like, the math room being for math, the history room being for history, the cafeteria being for eating, that framework is kind of going out the window. A lot more classrooms are becoming multipurpose spaces. Can you tell us a little bit about the “F-word” in K-12 schools?**

Yeah. So, when the pandemic did hit, we saw schools that had already created flexible—so the “F-word” stands for “flexible”—flexible spaces. They almost had like the kryptonite, right? So again, if we go back to images we all have seen in our heads of old, static furniture where they put the tennis balls on the bottom, that's a response. That's a response to trying to make something a little bit more flexible, right?

The schools that shifted—and again, I can't stress this enough, this shift should always come with a shift in instruction, right? So all of a sudden, we're going to shift to an active form of instruction, meaning, I'm not lecturing, I'm not standing up at the front of the classroom. It's either fully open, like a maker idea where it's just like, whatever problem you're curious about and you want to solve, the space is here to support that. Right? If it's more project-based, it's a series of...it's a part of the instructional plan, with hands-on-project forms of learning associated with it. Those spaces, then, were shifted with flexible

furniture. And I mean, it sounds so stupid at times, but like, putting a wheel on something is powerful. Right? And so, the “F-word” that we joke about is this. The “F-word” is flexibility.

And we saw at the very beginning, schools that were programmed for flexibility already, they just had an advantage. It’s the ones that had a lot of fixed furniture that were having a really hard time. And then when we think about what that teaches us, it’s just this idea that, you know, it’s like Legos, right? It’s like, if I give you, like, a thousand 2 x 2 Legos, or I give you, you know, a thousand mixed, you’re gonna be able to do a lot of different things, right? A lot of different things with it. So, it really is as simple as that. There’s gonna be, we feel, like very nuanced, niche—like an operating room. But an operating room still needs to be flexible. We think that like, through a series of workshops that we did over the past, probably, five years, the No. 1 driver we heard for learning space design was flexibility. And that’s, again, we just referenced it as the “F-word.” But it means something different to a lot of different cultures, learning cultures.

And again, we go back to this idea that

we need to make sure we’re understanding what they’re trying to achieve. You know, if we’re going to just teach math, and it’s going to be in a very rote and transmission-based model, putting kids in mobile furniture doesn’t make a ton of sense. If we’re gonna teach math as a byproduct... I’ll never forget, so my son was in second grade, and the school district said he doesn’t appear to be strong in math. And I said, “Well, have you ever asked him about salary cap?” And the question was, “What?” And I said, “Well, you should ask him about football. Ask him about the salary cap for the Seattle Seahawks.” Right. Like, it is as simple as, like, making it something experiential.

### **I was wondering: Could you talk a little bit about Pavlov’s classical conditioning?**

Yeah. And I should have tied it into the learning loss thing...I shouldn’t call it the “learning loss” thing. You know, when we think about learning loss—and again, learning loss is something that we see in government CARES Acts right now, right, that there’s money available to schools to recover learning loss. Are you by any chance a fan of *The Office*?

### **Yes, definitely.**

So, are you familiar with the episode where Jim seeks to condition Dwight to expect or anticipate an Altoids mint?

### **Every time he turns his computer...is it on or off? Reboots his computer, right? Every time Dwight hears that, like, computer ding, he holds out his hand for a mint?**

Yep. And then finally, he gets to a point where Jim just reboots the computer, and Dwight’s hand just goes out. And Jim goes, “What are you doing?” And Dwight goes, “I don’t know, but my mouth just suddenly tastes bad.” That is Pavlov’s classical conditioning. Right? And I think, again, one of our jobs is to kind of poke at things. And for us, when we think about learning loss, and we think about to the extent that now we’re funding how to recover from it, to me, it’s a demonstration of classical conditioning. We have been classically conditioned to—and, again, I think there’s a lot of pockets where it is accurate, where like real, disruptive, natural, experience and experiential learning is happening inside schools. But I also think there’s still a long way to go, right?

And so I think that it’s...we’ve been classically conditioned to assume that learning is just default happening inside schools. And it’s not, right? It’s not at scale yet. And that’s our opportunity. I go all the way back to the beginning. And we think about the *Return of the Jedi*. We’re all Jedi now, right? And we all need to play our part at saying, okay, now we have funding to help recover, right, as a byproduct of what just happened. How might we use that funding to drive actual learning? That’s a powerful question that I would love for every team across the United States to be asking.

The whole purpose of active forms of instruction, and active forms of pedagogy going all the way back to Socrates and the Socratic Method, this creates deep levels of inquiry as to create agency. A human that is capable. And all of a sudden, we’re hearing it, right? It’s come true. They’re in front of us. It’s happening, which is so exciting, obviously. – Jonathan Matta

**That makes complete sense. And that is just that major shift of realizing that just because students are physically present in the building, it doesn't mean they're learning. I think anybody who's ever kind of sat through, like, a sophomore year geometry class, and kind of sat there for 45 minutes, and then stood up and realized they didn't retain anything...I understand that, yeah.**

Well, I think about that, too, right? Like, when was the last time—this is the better way to ask this question: On what day as a human being does your GPA no longer matter?

### **The day after you graduate college?**

That, or the day after you get your first job. And so again, it goes, it goes back to—a lot of times, I look like I'm a punk, right? And I look like I'm a jerk, and I'm trying to like really blow the system up. There's some of me that is that, but there's also a big part of me that saying, like, we have this opportunity. And we have this opportunity to say, we can make it better. And again, if we make it better, the beauty of making education systems better—and my vision of “better” is, how might we foster organic learning in the form of experiences and experiments? You're elevating the opportunity for any kid. And that's how you make the world a better place.

Again, the beauty of K–12 is, it's public system. Right? And I'm not gonna say it's the only guaranteed thing; I don't want to sound naïve. But you can come from a really rough place and still go to a K–12 public school. Now imagine if all of them are doing what we've talked about. You're changing the life of a kiddo. And that, to me, is what it should be, and that's what it needs to be. And that's where, again, from a KI-purpose perspective, again, we know what we do. We make furniture. We make a lot of it. We make it here in the United States. And how we do that is unique in the form of, we modify about 19% of what we do, because we listened so well. But the purpose is to contribute to the reimagination.

### **In reference to organic learning taking place in schools, can you talk a little bit about who's shaping our children—mentor figures? Role models?—and kind of the shift between the old way of that and the new model that we're seeing?**

Yeah, absolutely. It's a great question. I'm listening to...do you know who Steven Rinella is? Steven Rinella owns a company called MeatEater. He's a conservationist, right? I mean, he's a very elite hunter. But from my experience, all elite hunters are generally conservationists. They love the land, and they love protection of land and wildlife. And he, now, he's on TV. He's got

We don't have to have permission to reimagine things. We just have to have that...we just have to have the courage to do it. Go forth and be courageous. – Jonathan Matta

his own show. But he writes books, and he was initially published as a writer. And when he was asked the question, like, you know, “You're growing up in Michigan, and you're trapping and hunting. How do you turn into a writer?” He goes, “Ah, my tenth-grade English teacher saw something in me that I didn't even see in myself, and my family never saw it.” Right? And I think every, quote, “overnight success”—because there's no such thing—but every person has some story about how some teacher believed in them and saw something in them. And I think that's such an interesting thing, right? Like, as a parent, having a teacher see something in my kid that I didn't even see...it's kind of a humbling moment, right?

And so, when we think like, who is molding us, right? We're molded by a lot of different people. When you think about how much time our kids and youth spend in the K–12 system...Those are your molders, right? Your teachers. And through the pandemic, the concern was—and this this kind of goes back to your question about like, you know, are we fearful that we won't return to full in-person? This really is, in my opinion, almost one of those like, we have no choice but to. You guys, you're molders. I mean, oftentimes, again, teachers are these wonderful believers in our children, and they see things in our kids that we don't see.

If you think about, you know, back when I was a little boy, it was you know, grandparents, right? Your parents, obviously. Mentors, coaches. Think about sporting-team coaches. Now imagine, again, through a year where sports were not allowed to be played in some states. So you're absent of coaches. When we think about high-performing CEOs, they're not managers. They're not leaders. They're coaches—they're the best coaches. And we think about high-performing military teams, you have the best coaches. And so, I think when we think about who's molding our children, we need more of that, right? And we need to get back to that.

The converse thing is, obviously, through the pandemic, you know, realizing that my kids were still learning, they were engaging in experiments and experiences, a lot of them in the form of web-based things on YouTube. And the next thing you



know, I've got, you know, LazarBeam and Flamingo and all these random TikTok and YouTube stars, right, that are now molding and putting an impression upon my children. Now, I'm not saying that's good or bad. I am saying that—are we paying attention to that? And then are we saying like, again, going back to the success stories that we know today, the people that are shifting and changing and doing wonderful things for our society, they all have that, “Oh, my tenth-grade teacher,” “my seventh-grade teacher,” right? So we're big advocates for, obviously, the molders of our youth in the K–12 system.

**This just popped into my mind. Last night, I was just clicking around online. And there was a social media post that I thought was really funny. But the more we've been having this conversation, the more it kind of seems directly relevant. It's a picture of a car. And there's a stick of butter squashed to one of the tires. And it says, “My four-year-old asked what happens when you drive over a stick of butter. I said, ‘It'll flatten.’ He asked how I knew. And that's how we got here. So what I'm saying is, when we have a hypothesis in this house, we test it. I'm also saying my wife is away.” So that just reminded me of kind of that organic, experience-, experiment-based learning, where sometimes we learn a lot more by having a question and finding the answer ourselves.**

Yeah, I mean, I love that. I have not seen that ad or commercial. I love that. And I think it's, you know...I've got guitars in front of me on the wall. And my four-year-old says, “What does that do?” “Take it. I'm not gonna tell you what it does; go figure it out.”

So, I bought clothes from a company years ago. I have a hobby of mine, big hobby, woodworking and carpentry. And I was getting better at PPE—before COVID, PPE for like wood dust and stuff like that. And I wanted to know if something was flammable. Right? Like, is your material for this flammable? And then the person responded, the company responded with me, “Oh, here you go.” They lit something on fire. I mean, I bought it, right? Like, it lit on fire, it's clearly flammable. The fact that like, you just were so willing to just light it on fire.

**Only one way to find out! I think as we start to wrap up, was there anything else that you want to address? Were there any kind of lingering points that we didn't circle back around to?**

No, I think on that last one, you know, I had a philosophical debate with a friend years ago. The friend's name is Mike. He

started a thing called Hack Studio. It's since gone up, it's gone under. It's gone out of business. But Hack Studio was this idea that we just meet the kid where their passion is. Through just organic experiments and experience, you can do whatever you want, as long as we don't have a safety concern associated with it. And Mike always used to say when he was worried about the longevity of his creation, “I don't know why it's not working. I don't know why it's not working.” And, you know, eventually he got to this idea that maybe the world isn't...it's just not ready yet.

And when I think about that, I think to myself, like, wait a minute, we're just not ready to own our learning? I still do worry about that. I still do worry that we, you know, we're not ready to own our learning. And I think that is the hope, right, that through this potential environmental shift that was the pandemic and was COVID, that maybe—just maybe—we'll walk out of this thing with a social shift in the expectation of what learning is. And it becomes a thing where not only every individual says, hey, I need to own my...I need to own it. It's mine. It's mine to make, right? Nobody else is gonna do it for me. And I got to do it for myself, and I can't blame it on anybody else if I don't do it. Right? And I think, at the same time, what if systems—what if university systems, what if K–12 systems—started designing for it, so it became the default? As opposed to standardized testing? I mean, I'd be juiced, right?

**Yeah. This seems like as good a time as any to maybe kind of try to reinvent and try out some different frameworks and some different ideas.**

Yeah, absolutely. I think, again, if we go back to 2010, 2011, 2012, and kind of that framing of *A New Hope*, you know...there were people doing it then. We don't have to have permission to reimagine things. We just have to have that...we just have to have the courage to do it. Go forth and be courageous.

**I like that. I'm really not sure we can finish off any better than that. But again, we wanted to thank you so much for being here. And thank you so much for your time, and insight, and expertise. These are a lot of great ideas to kind of think on moving forward, just to kind of think about how we can apply these in little, specific, concrete ways at the K–12 and higher-ed levels both. Again, were there any last words you want to toss in before we sign off?**

I think, you know, from a KI perspective, obviously we thank you guys for the opportunity to contribute to the conversation, so thank you very much. ■