

## Season Two Introduction

Welcome to the Second Season of the Exploring the Core Podcast. My name's Greg Mullen and I'll be hosting this series of episodes, digging deeper into the ideas I introduced in the first season, ideas like standards-based grading, social and emotional learning, and a developmental mindset for an inclusive learning environment. When those episodes came out a year ago, I was highlighting how those three ideas overlap to create a self-directed learning environment in a school setting - and had actually just published a book about that with Corwin Publishing - the book's actually called, *Creating a Self-Directed Learning Environment: Standards-Based and Social-Emotional Learning*; and in that first season of this podcast, I was able to connect with and share insights from a number of education experts who have long been promoting these ideas in schools all over the United States.

And so I'm excited for this second season where I'll be speaking to another group of innovative school leaders, university professors, parents, and educators at public, private, and democratic school settings. It's a big season, and for those who have listened to the first season's episodes, I want to point out a change in the format, because I'll be focusing more on the insights from my conversations with all of the guests in this season; and each episode will be highlighting layers of underlying concepts and principles, which do connect in support of self-directed learning in a school setting; and that's what I want to talk about in this introduction because - and this came up in a conversation I had with a brilliant up-and-coming physical therapist, that the *\*what\** is not the same as the *\*why\** or the *\*how\**, and if we don't have a firm grasp on the what, on the goal or the vision of a conversation, then it's easy to get lost in all of the why, the reasons and rationale for the problems we see in so many different things, that it becomes difficult to talk about the how, to know what path we want to take to move forward; and that's what this introduction is for. I want to try to explain *\*\*what\*\** I'm exploring in this second season because if you're listening to this, there's a good chance you have some thoughts as to *\*why\** these topics are important, and in order to get to the *\*how\**, I want to take a moment to explain just what it is I'm exploring.

Essentially, what I'm exploring, is the *\*core\** of who we are, and how we learn, and yes I know that sounds heavy but each episode is going to be digging deeper into specific layers of a model I designed which pulls concepts and principles long researched by all kinds of really smart people that are all working in the same direction, if not by the same path, and what I want is to get us to this larger point that who we are, and how we learn, needs to be the focus of how we approach change in our education system. And because I know this is big conversation, I want to give you a way to visualize how all of these topics might fit together; and the best way I can think of to do this is to ask you to visualize a rainbow, something you might draw and color at first with basic colors - red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet; and from there, imagine those colors blending into red-orange, yellow-green, blue-violet... and now visualize a clear or stormy sky behind that rainbow, maybe it's raining, or has just stopped raining, or maybe is still raining off in the distance, and consider the time of day when there's just that right angle of

sunlight refracting off the moisture in the air that you're able to clearly see the colors in the sky. Now visualize yourself being where that rainbow is, standing in the sun and the mist, and think about how the weather patterns elsewhere are responsible for the weather conditions that you're experiencing as you stand amidst the colors of that rainbow, and maybe we think about the elevation you're at, or the ecological diversity of the trees, the grass, the wildlife - because all of these elements play into where that rainbow came from - but they are not the rainbow itself. In fact, if I were to ask you to hold even a piece of that rainbow in your hand, you couldn't, because a rainbow isn't real, it only exists through the combination of all these elements, and it's only through a picture that we draw or take with a camera that we can look at and discuss the elements responsible for what we perceive is that rainbow.

And that's what I mean when I say I'm exploring the core of who we are and how we learn. We can imagine a fictional person - we can imagine ourselves - but it's in the layers of elements that make up not just our physical self, but the elements responsible for our expressions, that cause our reactions and responses to our own decisions and the decisions of others - it all plays a role in who we are and how we learn. By exploring this core, I get underneath the larger overlapping domains of standards-based grading, social-emotional learning, and a developmental mindset for an inclusive learning environment.

And that's why, to help explore these ideas, I'm excited to share conversations with so many innovative leaders in education. I'll be sharing their experiences and insights, to give real-life meaning and purpose to the value of what I'll be referring to as a Self-Directed Schooling environment, because there are public school districts who have realized the traditional model isn't working for all students. And like one alternative school leader described to me, a district is like a very large ship that can be very hard to turn, and some districts are finding ways to work more like a fleet of smaller ships that can more easily shift course to personalize education for their community of families. Now this approach does require bottom-up implementation, so students, parents, and teachers will need to be willing and able to get involved, but this needs to also have top-down support to create this shift in authority and responsible for learning, from strict top-down hierarchical structures to a more - a more - egalitarian structure, and I address this idea in an episode but remember, each idea, by itself, won't be the thing that fixes education, that by exploring the interdependence of ideas in these different episodes, taking the time to create a shared language of understanding for how these elements influence each other, we can actually celebrate what we might already be doing to personalize education in some ways, while still find inspiration to adopt and adapt new ways that help personalize learning even more for the families and communities our schools are already serving. And it all comes back to this idea that a standards-based and social-emotional approach to learning can result in a Self-Directed Learning environment, and that it can be really effective beyond just academic measures, but that it isn't going to be a standardized or franchised model that will work for all students; it's about finding that balance of effectiveness over efficiency, of growth over proficiency, in academic, social, and emotional competencies, which are separate from the physical

and mental health and safety - of adults as well as children. And so I believe that this season, by exploring who we are, and how we learn, will support the larger movements in education like standards-based grading, social-emotional learning, and a developmental mindset for an inclusive learning environment.

With that, I want to thank you for listening, and I hope you enjoy this second season of The Exploring the Core Podcast. Talk to you next time.

