

Jared Cooney Horvath explains the amazing science of learning

TRANSCRIPT

Dr Jared Cooney Horvath, Neuroscientist, Educator and Author

Andy McLean 00:10

Hello and welcome to Moments In Mind. My name is Andy McLean, and this is the first episode in Season Three of this podcast from Pearson Clinical Assessment. Thanks so much for joining us.

This is the podcast where we meet with educators, clinicians and other professionals to find out about the moments that have changed not only their lives, but also changed the lives of the people who they support. And I'm delighted to say our first episode is a real cracker.

We've got Dr Jared Cooney Horvath, who has come to us all the way from the United States of America to have a chat. He's here to talk about neuroscience and education. So as well as talking about some of the highlights of his career and some of the moments that have shaped his work in classrooms and with schools down the years, we're also going to go on a little tour inside the human mind. And Jared will be our tour guide. Well, hello Jared! Welcome to the show.

Jared Cooney Horvath 01:11

Thank you so much for having me on.

Andy McLean 01:13

Jared, our first question is always the same. On this podcast, we take our guests back to their earliest childhood memory. So cast your mind back. What stands out for you?

Jared Cooney Horvath 01:25

My earliest childhood memory. This is gonna sound totally weird. I was at a birthday party at our house. I don't know whose it was. For some reason I decided I had to take a nap. So I must have been still young enough to be taking naps. And I remember waking up and seeing my bookshelf, and for some reason, that is the first memory I have locked in, is waking up in that room and seeing a bookshelf.

Andy McLean 01:50

Wow. So that's at home.

Jared Cooney Horvath

That was at home. I remember there was an inflatable pool out back, and there were kids. Something was going on. Maybe it was my brother's birthday or something. Yeah, right. Don't know why that one stuck, but that's about as far back as I can go.

Andy McLean

Okay, all right

Jared Cooney Horvath

Are you going to interpret that now!

Andy McLean

Yes, I'm going to analyse in great detail. The rest of the podcast is going to be me analysing you! No, actually, what we'll do next, we'll turn the page in the Jared story, and we're going to take you to school now, so we're moving forward a little bit.

Jared Cooney Horvath

Okay

Andy McLean

Was there a teacher, perhaps, who stands out for you for any particular reason?

Jared Cooney Horvath 02:30

Oh, man, I could probably... I genuinely could pick one at each level! If you had to pick one, I'd say Mr. Anderson, which sounds like The Matrix, but Mr. Anderson in fifth grade. When I switched schools halfway through fifth grade, and so I only had him for about six months, but he's the first one that pops into mind as being the kind of level, the one that says, 'hey, there's more to school than just learning in school'. So he's probably the one, yeah.

Andy McLean 02:59

Right, okay, and that would have been a kind of pivotal moment for you, right?

Jared Cooney Horvath

Yeah

Andy McLean

So you changed schools and then he was this kind of figure of safety for you?

Jared Cooney Horvath 03:09

I think a figure of expansion. So the school I grew up going to, for some reason, I just never really clicked there. My brother did. I just never fit in. I was the usual suspect. I was the bad kid. So if anything bad happened in school, they would look to me, and probably they were right! It was probably me doing something. And for some reason, when I went to that new school, I finally fit in, and he was the kind of teacher that made me realise there's more than just kids. There's more than just learning this. It was just expansive, in that, 'now, you're allowed to ask questions. You're allowed to push back without being the usual suspect and grow in that way'. So I think he opened up my mind to being like 'all right, what can I push back against intellectually, without breaking a window or making someone angry?'

Andy McLean 03:55

So finding another channel for that kind of urge to push back and question? Yep, and of course, you went on to become a teacher yourself, right? And then you later secured - and I'm going to have to check my notes for this, so forgive me - a Master's degree in mind brain and education from Harvard, correct?

Jared Cooney Horvath 04:13

That's correct.

Andy McLean 04:14

As well as a doctorate in cognitive neuroscience from the University of Melbourne, Jared. That's pretty formidable!

Jared Cooney Horvath 04:23

When you read it out, it sounds crazy. In reality, it's just same as anything. You just chip away, you have ideas, and you keep chipping away, and you look back, and next thing you know, you're like, 'Oh, I guess I finished a doctorate. That was cool.' But there was no big master plan, and it's not as cool as it sounds.

Andy McLean 04:38

Okay, all right, but what was it that drew you to neuroscience?

Jared Cooney Horvath 04:41

This is going to be crazy... There's two aspects. So when I was a teacher that was 'the decade of the brain'. So I thought 'cool, if I knew more about the brain, that would make me a better teacher'. If you know any of my work, you've since learned that I've kind of pushed back against that simplistic idea, but neither here nor there, my PhD ended up being inspired by a book called The Brain That Changes Itself, by Norman Doidge. I don't know if you ever read it. One of those... when PopSci was PopSci... Like pop science books now feel like 300 pages to say one thing - it's like 'that should have been a pamphlet!' But back then, if you read PopSci, every page was a new idea. So that's how I try and write my books now, but that one had a whole chapter on a guy using TMS, which was transcranial magnetic stimulation, magnetic pulses and fields that would directly influence and change the brain. So I had this wacky idea that I could use that to build a 'thinking cap' that would actually boost learning in my classroom. It all collapsed! It all fell apart! There's a reason it didn't work. I am known as 'the brain stimulation pariah' now, because I basically showed why it will never work! But that was... I genuinely thought, 'if I figure out the brain and I figure out how to manipulate it externally, we could just boost learning in the classroom like nobody's business'. Didn't work, but it was a good idea.

Andy McLean 06:03

But you've kind of continued that mission throughout your career. You just found new tactics that perhaps don't involve magnets, right!

Jared Cooney Horvath 06:08

Yeah isn't it funny? You realise I was trying to manipulate the system, and you realise: talking to you right now is manipulating the system! So learning is a manipulation of the system - but there's a right way to do it, and it's not through pills, it's not through magnets, it's not through electricity, it's through connection.

Andy McLean 06:27

Yeah, yeah. We're going to unpack that a little bit more in a moment. In actual fact, on that point, actually, we're discovering more about the human brain all the time. In fact, what a wonderful time for you to enter this, this field of work, right? Because the level of knowledge and discovery has just exponentially increased in recent years. What is it about how the brain learns that teachers need to understand to help every child progress?

Jared Cooney Horvath 06:53

Oddly enough, you could get away without knowing a single thing about the brain! So the brain is so far removed from the practice of teaching that I actually have written a lot of articles saying you don't need to know anything. I could teach you an entire class about learning without ever once mentioning the brain. And be fine. So it's like, this is gonna sound weird, but if we want to talk about, say, working out. I can tell you about exercise. I can tell you what kind of exercises are good for the heart. I can tell you this, then I can tell you what chemicals are actually going on in the muscles that make those exercises good. The chemicals become basically irrelevant. What you really wanted to know were the exercises, and that's where the brain sits. When people talk about learning, they want to know learning, which is really a psychological phenomenon. It is underpinned by the brain. The brain is doing chemicals, the brain is doing all this stuff, but the psychological phenomenon itself sits above all of that. So whenever I talk about the brain, it's cool. And people are like, 'Oh, that's a cool brain area'. But you'll never see a brain. So the brain is basically off limits, but we can deal with psychology. We can deal on the behavioural level, and that's where I think most people genuinely want to be. It took me a while to kind of make that transition, to realise I talk mostly about the behavioural stuff more than the mechanical stuff. They feed into one another, but one is more important than the other for practice.

Andy McLean 08:19

Okay, so then what is it that teachers need to know behaviourally speaking?

Jared Cooney Horvath 08:25

If I had to boil down one thing, it's that everyone has the same process. For as much as we like to talk about how 'learners today are different than learners before, this kid learns differently than this kid'. No, we don't. Learning is a process. Understand the process. It is the same for everyone. And since homo sapiens first stood up 50,000 years ago, we have one learning process. If you learn differently, you're not a human anymore! It's just the same as breathing, digestion, circulation, it's all biology. It doesn't change all that much. So once you start to recognise that we have one process that's when you can start to say, 'what's the difference between a preference and a necessity?' A lot of the things that we say 'kids learn differently today' - well yes they have different preferences, but it doesn't change learning. And when we play into those preferences, sometimes that's actually going to circumvent the learning process. So think about like kids today love short form videos. So a lot of schools are saying, 'cool, how do we make class short, fun, snappy? Here's micro learning! Blah, blah, blah'. That's good for preference. And if you ask people, 'do you feel you're learning?', they'll say, 'heck yeah!'. But track the learning. They are not. Because no one has ever learned from a short form anything. Learning takes time and friction. So that's where we start to see, if you know the process, you can start to differentiate between process and preference and recognise when 'oh, I'm playing your preferences. But that might not be what you need to learn'.

Andy McLean 09:50

That makes sense, because we didn't evolve with 30-second videos, right? Did we? You know people have been learning for thousands of years. And as you say that the process of learning remains the same.

Jared Cooney Horvath 10:04

I think one of my favourite ideas or kind of findings in this field was: if you look at the impacts of different things on learning, a strong student/teacher relationship is among the top. If you can pick one thing to do, get to know your students. I always tell my kids, 'if you have a choice between getting the exact information you need at the exact moment, you need it in the exact way you want it - intelligent tutoring - or liking the person you're learning from, always pick liking the person you're learning from. You will learn more from that person. And when you boil down what the relationship is, empathy is the big driver. But luckily, empathy isn't an emotion. Like most emotions you can't touch if you if we said happiness is key, then what is 'happiness'? Empathy isn't an emotion, it's a biological synchrony. We can actually track empathy. And so it turns out, one of the best drivers of learning are when two people's biology syncs up, and we can actually measure when that is happening. And that's just proof that we have biological mechanisms built into us that say learning is driven with other human beings. It's not driven by pure information dump. It's not driven by watching the clip of something happening. We evolved to learn from each other, and I think that's one of the coolest things you could find.

Andy McLean 11:42

And am I right in saying there are chemicals released in the brain when two people are sitting down together in person, like we are right now, that I guess the way we've evolved is all about sort of generating trust and all of those sorts of things - and is it oxytocin?

Jared Cooney Horvath 11:56

Yep, right, absolutely.

Andy McLean

Tell me a bit about that.

Jared Cooney Horvath

So oxytocin, with another suite of chemicals, they are a kind of marker of bonding. If we see oxytocin in your blood, it means you're starting to bond with another human being. So where do you see it? You see it primarily during breastfeeding, when you're making love and when you're positively interacting. Pull it back, if you're interacting with someone online, via text, we never see oxytocin. You can if you're on a phone and you can hear the other person's voice, or like a one-on-one call. But Zoom calls with 50 different people, we rarely ever see it. So that's our marker of bonding. And what happens is, when we see oxytocin, it means two people are starting to feel safe around one another. Once you feel safe, your biology will start to synchronise. We do not know the mechanism by which it happens, but our hearts will start to beat at the same time. We will start to breathe at the same time. We will blink simultaneously. Our brains will start to mirror one another. In that moment, you are empathising and you are no longer learning from another person. You are thinking like another person, and now learning becomes easier because I'm 'in your head' when you're trying to take me down a path I'm on the exact same wavelength you are. So I can follow all your connections because I'm making them myself. So that's where you start to see, 'ah, we have a way to learn, and we've been doing it for thousands of years'. We don't need to really rethink some of the basics going forward. We've got a lot of it already locked down.

Andy McLean 13:18

Now, I'm interested in what you said there, because we were talking then about one-on-one, right?

Jared Cooney Horvath

Yeah.

Andy McLean

I'm putting myself in the shoes of a teacher for a moment who's got a classroom with 30 children, and they've got all these different individuals with different strengths and different learning needs and individual needs, right? Have you got any advice in terms of what we know about the process of learning to allow and support teachers to make those individual connections?

Jared Cooney Horvath 13:45

Yes: align your pedagogy to the content, not to the learners. For a while, there we had this whole movement of, I forget what the official word was, but where you everyone has different preferences, so teach eight different ways... 'Differentiation!' - that was the term. And we've since realised that no if you align your pedagogy to your learners, a) that taxes the heck out of you and b) no one has enough time to actually sync in with you to make anything work. But when you align your pedagogy to the content, everyone learns better, regardless of their preference. And it's obvious when you see it. In some ways, like, if I want to teach you how to dance, we will all learn better if we get up and dance. The visual learner won't learn more by just being like, 'I just want to watch', or the auditory learner [says] 'just describe it to me'. Nope! if we all get up and dance, we'll learn better. There are pedagogies that align to the content, and when you pick that pedagogy, you give everyone the best chance to start to resonate with you. And then the question is, can we resonate 30 kids at once? Go to a movie theatre - I mean, go back 20 years, before movie theatres were full of kids on their phones. You could have 1,000 people in an audience, and if you're telling a good narrative, you can lock and load all them simultaneously. One of my favourite research studies was when they were looking at - and this was kind of the birth of a lot of this - 200 people in a movie theatre watching a movie, and they were tracking their blink rate. So how often do they blink? And there were two periods of a couple minutes each where every single person in that theater was blinking at the exact same time. And they thought, 'oh, it must be an action scene, and maybe they were getting a flash of light'. They went and tracked it back. It was just dialogue scenes. And that was a sign that we started recognising ways saying all these people somehow linked up at the exact same moment with this show. So if they can do it with a movie, by all means, as a teacher, if I'm adapting my pedagogy to the content and everyone is with me, I can get them all at the same time too. Wow! Which is really cool!

Andy McLean 15:45

Yeah, the power of stories hey? It makes me think of Shakespeare in the way I learned it at school, right? We used to sit at a class in a classroom, and we'd learn by rote, and we'd learn the lines of Shakespeare. Right? Now I see companies like Bell Shakespeare. They get kids up on their feet, acting the plays, interacting with one another and stuff, and it's sticking right. They're learning so much more. It's really, really, really resonating with them in a completely different way.

Jared Cooney Horvath 16:09

Isn't that great? Align the pedagogy with the content. If the content is a play, do the play. It's not magic. Get up and do it, and then you're gonna have to live it a little bit more. Even the kids who don't want it, who are not kinaesthetic or don't like getting up, 'sorry, you're going to learn more if you get up and just say the line, as opposed to just think it or whatever it is'. So it's a perfect example.

Andy McLean 16:31

Well, thank you, Jared. Let's take a very quick break. When we come back, I'd like to discuss teaching breakthroughs, a little bit about parenting and perhaps your own parenting styles, and also the future of education. So we've got lots to come back with. In the meantime, stay tuned. We'll be right back.

[Promotional message break]

Andy McLean 17:19

Welcome back to the podcast. So Jared, I'm sure in your work with teachers and students, you've experienced lots of different breakthrough moments that are pretty memorable. Can you perhaps give us an example?

Jared Cooney Horvath 17:31

Yeah, probably the biggest one, the one that kind of spurred a lot of my thinking: I was working with a school in Ballarat, Australia. It was a Catholic school. They were wickedly underperforming, so much so that they were going to be shut down. And so the principal said, 'well, cool, I got a year before I'm gone. What can we focus on?' And he decided to shift his focus back to learning. Rather than saying, 'what's a hot pedagogy, what's a cool technique or tool or tech piece?', he just said, 'what is learning?' And so together, we worked on a program for science of learning with his staff, looked at what is memory, what's attention, what's metacognition? When they shifted their focus to learning, all the scores went up, and all of a sudden, by the end of the second year, they didn't close the school down. After one year, they were in the top 10% of all categories of growth across the nation. And that was, I think, the big moment where we're like, 'wait, when we focus on learning - what it is and how to drive it - we don't really have to debate pedagogies. We don't really have to figure out what's a new tool. We align everything to learning, and everything gets better'. And I think that's a big thing with kids, especially, too. I always try and tell my kids, if you focus on the performance, how am I going to do on a test? There's no guarantee you're going to learn anything. But if you focus on the learning, I promise you, you're going to pass every test, because you know what people are asking. And I think that whole school shifted into learning, and that's when I said, 'you know what? I'm just going to focus on - not techniques, not study strategies - learning. How does it work? If we focus on that, then everyone is going to do a little bit better.

Andy McLean 19:00

And that's something that you can carry through your whole life, right? If you know how to learn. Well, that's not just going to serve you at school and university, but it will keep serving you in all of the various careers you might have after that.

Jared Cooney Horvath 19:13

Just think of the teachers. Most of the teachers were never taught about learning. We have a good intuition of what's going on, but once you finally put words to it, you go, 'oh, that's why that works'. So teachers who've been doing this for decades, even they, when they embrace learning, are like, 'thank you, that gives me more agency over my career, over myself'.

Andy McLean 19:30

Yeah, right. So then they're more conscious of the things that they were perhaps doing intuitively, and they're able to then lean into those strengths.

Jared Cooney Horvath 19:36

And how important is that! That's where agency comes from. It's when you know what works, cool, when you know why it works, now you can start to adapt it and really make that thing your own. So I always say, teachers know what works, and we've had decades of people saying, here's good strategies, here's bad. My job is now to tell you why. Or help us figure out why it's working. So now you can personalise it every day, because you 'get' the mechanisms underneath it.

Andy McLean 20:02

Aha. So this, presumably was part of the inspiration for The Learning Blueprint which you've created. Tell me a bit about that.

Jared Cooney Horvath 20:10

Yeah. So The Learning Blueprint is basically an entire Master's program about the science of learning, but broken up and presented for teachers in the way I wish somebody would have taught me. So when people hear like, they go to university and they go to those boring classes and then they take the class with me, they're like, 'why are you so easy to hang out with?' 'Because,' I just say, 'if I would teach you the way people taught me this stuff, you would never want to hear it. But as a teacher, I can filter it through my own experiences. And I can say here's what matters to us as teachers'. So I teach it the way I wish someone would have taught me, and it just becomes so useful and so meaningful. So yeah, The Learning Blueprint just basically outlines learning. What are the key principles? What is the process, surface, deep, how does transfer work? What are our core mechanisms? What's memory, what's attention, what is creativity? And then this kind of non-cognitive side, where you start to say, how do emotions feed into learning? What does stress play into it? How do relationships and empathy? So you go through the whole process of learning with the understanding that when you come out of it, you're going to understand your students completely differently. You're going to see your practice in a new way. It just kind of changes the control mechanisms of everything.

Andy McLean 21:23

Control mechanisms yes. And yet, when I hear you talking in those ways, it speaks to me about the reasons that teachers go into the profession in the first place, right, about creativity and passion, and also, I guess, partly professional recognition too?

Jared Cooney Horvath 21:40

Yeah, and I got no problem with that. Think about how most professions have a body of knowledge that allows you to elevate your work, like in science, right? We all publish we cite each other's works. Whoever gets more citations, that must be important work, love it or hate it. That's our system. We don't really have that in teaching. How do you elevate your work in your own school, let alone beyond your own school? We have no way to track what we do. So I think another interesting aspect of The Learning Blueprint is it gives us a way to start to document our work in a system that we can start to recognise each other's great ideas. 'I'm going to use that in my own classroom,' and now other teachers tap in and say, 'wow!' And so maybe that thing you've been doing for decades that no-one has ever known that you've done - now you have a way of sharing that so everyone can benefit from it. And now your work is impacting kids you've never even met, and that's a profession, that's when it gets good.

Andy McLean 22:34

That's awesome. We've talked a lot about teaching and education. What about from a parental perspective. You're a dad, you've got a small daughter at home, I believe.

Jared Cooney Horvath

I do.

Andy McLean

How have you, perhaps, employed some of the science of learning into your parenting style?

Jared Cooney Horvath 22:52

I am the king of 'we don't talk shop at home'. So my wife's a psychologist, and I do this. And so everyone's like, 'Oh, you guys must know exactly what's going on!' No. When I'm not with my daughter, I can look back and say, 'oh, yeah, I saw that. Oh, I should have done that differently'. But when I'm with her, I'm just dad, and none of this crosses my mind. It's one of the crazy things like, I don't view myself as her teacher. I just view myself as dad. And so I'll make the same parenting mistakes everyone makes. I'll have some wins, I'll have some losses, but it's usually only afterwards that I look back and go, 'I knew better, why didn't I...?' Because I was just so deep into it.

Andy McLean 23:30

So speaking as a father, that makes me feel so much better about my own parenting style and my own approach to parenting, because it's often retrospective, isn't it, when you realise the mistakes!

Jared Cooney Horvath 23:40

Yeah, and it's you think you're killing it in the moment. [Afterwards] you're like, 'ooh, I could have done that better!' And my wife is the best at it. So as a psychologist, one of her focuses is attachment theory, and so she's got all this knowledge and schema there and all this stuff going on, and she will call me at the end of every day, like, I'm travelling now. So she'll call me to tell me about the day, and she'll be like, 'whoa, screwed that one up'. But it's because when you're in it, it's hard. So that's where I think a lot of this training, I think as teachers, when we know our role, 'I'm a teacher, I've got an outcome I'm gunning for'. It's a little easier than 'I'm a parent'. There is no end to this. There's no outcome I'm gunning for other than survive. And so you have to wear a different hat in different spots.

Andy McLean 24:22

What would be your advice then, for parents in terms of their partnership with teachers in primary and obviously through to high school as well? Like, how can parents help teachers achieve the best results for their children?

Jared Cooney Horvath 24:37

There's two things - they're going to sound contradictory - but they are totally not. The first is, you got to trust them to do their job. They are doing a different job than you. I was working with a school a couple years ago down in Melbourne, and I was talking to the principal, and a parent comes busting in. In the middle of the meeting, the parent starts berating them, 'I pay you this amount of money a year! And you've got to do this for my kid!' I'm just sitting there, like, 'dude, should I leave? This is weird.' But the principal says 'keep going'. So this guy just blows up all the things the principal needs to do. And to his credit, when he's done, the principal goes, 'are you finished?' Which is, like the number one thing you don't want to hear when someone says, 'are you finished?' Oh, here we go! And the principal goes, 'good, you don't pay me that amount of money to tell me what to do. You pay me that amount of money because I'm the best at what I do. This isn't a McDonald's where you get it your way. This is a five-star restaurant where you're paying for the greatest quality everything. If you don't like what I'm doing, you can do it better. Take your money, take your kid, get out of here'. I've never heard a principal say, 'Take money, take your kid and leave'. But I was like, that's it. You've got to trust teachers. Teaching isn't just this thing we were all born with. It is a skill, and like any skill, if you train at it, if you practice it, you get better at it. So when we say, 'there are expert teachers and they're doing things we don't know as parents, let them teach your kids'. The other side, I would say there are some aspects of guidance where teachers will not have a voice, where only parents will have a voice, and that's where it might sound contradictory, but something like ed tech. We know too much ed tech is harming learning in schools. Teachers can't really say that. Otherwise they lose their job. There's too much top down pressure. But if you as a parent come in and say, 'I would like to opt my kid out of tech, I would like my kid to avoid all non-essential tech,' what you'll see is the teacher is going to be your best friend. The teacher will be like, 'I've been trying to do that for a decade. Thank you for opening that door'. Only parents can push back in some ways, so: Let them teach - but if you notice something grossly out of line, chances are they notice it too. They just can't say anything. But if you come in and say something, you actually have the leverage to move the school if they can't.

Andy McLean 26:50

Yeah, it's interesting. It's an advocacy role, isn't it? And a great example of that would be, I mean, this podcast is global, but in Australia, we've got a ban in schools on mobile phones. And that ban is only as effective as the implementation of it, right? So I know of a number of schools where the rule is officially there, right? But it's not being implemented in the school. So parents can play a role - in a supportive and constructive way - of letting the school know that perhaps this hasn't been implemented effectively. And then hopefully, that will support the school and make them feel more empowered to implement it.

Jared Cooney Horvath 27:29

And I think smartphones is the greatest example of it. I don't know a single teacher that liked smartphones at school. They all hated it. (I'm sure there were one or two that was like, 'This is magic', but the vast majority, it was nothing but a distraction.) But teachers don't have a voice at the systemic level to push back. If the principal says it's cool and I say, 'I don't want it in my classroom', I could lose my job, so I just go with it. But if parents push back... Then Jonathan Haidt writes a book - parents read the book, go into their school and say, 'Get the phones out of school'. Every teacher was like, 'Thank you. Thank you for doing that'. So that's where, yes, the advocacy role, the parents. There are certain levers only parents can move. And it sounds contradictory, but you also have to trust the teachers to do what they're doing. So when it's the big ticket items, jump in. Otherwise, let them cook.

Andy McLean 28:14

Yeah, absolutely. For anyone who hasn't come across that book by Jonathan Haidt. You're talking about The Anxious Generation. We will put a link to that in the show notes of the podcast for anyone who hasn't yet discovered it. It's essential reading. Wouldn't you say?

Jared Cooney Horvath 28:29

I heard somebody say that's the most important book written in the past 200 years. It's had a bigger impact on the world than any book written in 200 years.

Andy McLean 28:39

We've talked a little bit about some of the challenges in education. Let's paint an optimistic picture. Perhaps we'll look ahead as we as we close the podcast, can you perhaps tell me what a flourishing school might look and feel like in, say, 10-15 years from now?

Jared Cooney Horvath 28:55

Absolutely, a lot of the tech is gone. There's still tech in there, but it's in a computer lab like a woodwork shop. There's a spot where you go to do woodwork. It's not in every class. There's a spot where you go to do the computer but it's not in every class. You've got kids interacting again at recess, at the playground, at lunch, in between class, all of that stuff is not only social. It's also key for learning. Your brain is doing a lot of work in those down periods, where, if you are immediately on a phone or a computer, you don't get those down periods. So all of that is both social and learning, and you've got classrooms where teachers and kids are talking again, where they're interacting. The teacher is no longer just policing behaviours. We're back to that almost 1990s early 2000s discussion. We've got some surface learning. We're going to move that into a project. That project is going to expand into: how do these three classes feed into one big project? And you just got this growth each year from facts to concepts to application. And we just go back to that kind of model of start small, grow, transfer - start small, grow, transfer, year on year. Is it going to be perfect? No. Is every kid gonna love it? No. Name one generation where every kid loved going to school! But it's going to be a lot more interactive, a lot more social again. And I think a lot of those kind of personalised learning approaches are gonna go away. We're gonna go back to collective learning, which is what school always was there for. You think about it like, what is the function of a K-12 education, if not, to unify an understanding of the world? Give me a thousand kids with a thousand different points of view. We got 12 years to get them to understand something collectively, so that we can all live in the same world together. We can all use the same basic language together. And I think that individual learning movements, where everyone's going to get their own stream and get their own thing, sounded good on paper, but now we're reaping the rewards of that, which is nobody has a unified voice. We can't understand each other. So I think we're going to go back to that collective where we get 20 kids and we're going to all talk about one thing.

Andy McLean 31:02

Now that's really interesting, because we started this conversation talking about you in the classroom as a kid questioning things, right? And now we're coming back to this point where we need to have the freedom to question things and to question one another in order to have healthy debate.

Jared Cooney Horvath 31:19

Yeah, yeah. I think about [it like this]: in order to think outside of a box, there'd better be a box to think within. In order to question something, there'd better be something unified for me to push back against. Otherwise, what is there? And in the world of individual learning, there's nothing. I have my own echo chamber. So anytime I push back, the program, the system will change and feed me only that which I want to hear. But when 100 kids are all getting the exact same thing, and we all agree, 'here's what it is'. Now I have something to push back against. I can be the one kid to go, 'what if it's not that?' Oh! And now learning gets deep, and that's where things get fun, I think. And I don't want to turn this political, but I think you've noticed this. In the past two decades, debates used to be at the concept level. You have a set of facts we all agree on, we're going to debate on what those facts mean, how they fit together. What's the bigger story? In the past couple decades, the debate has shifted just to the facts. We're not even going to agree on the basic facts, in which case cool. All you got to do is say 'no!' / 'yes!'. That's not a debate, that's just disagreement. I think that's where, until we get a unified system, that's what allows us to step into that next level. And I think the individual kind of focus has really made it difficult for us to get to that next level.

Andy McLean 32:35

Yeah, there's a lot to ponder there. Jared, I can't thank you enough today for answering all of my questions - many and varied as they were - it's been an absolute joy having a chat with you today.

Jared Cooney Horvath 32:45

Thank you for having me on. It's been awesome.

Andy McLean 32:50

Thanks for tuning in to this episode of Moments In Mind - a podcast by Pearson Clinical Assessment. To find out more about The Learning Blueprint for Teachers, which was created by Dr Jared Cooney Horvath, check out the Pearson Clinical website. And Jared's new book, The Digital Delusion, is available now in bookstores or online. And we have more episodes of Moments In Mind coming your way very soon. So make sure you subscribe on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, YouTube or wherever you get your podcasts - and while you're there, feel free to leave us a rating and a review. Until next time, thanks for joining us, and goodbye for now.