

Podcast: Transforming the “One-Teacher, One-Classroom” Paradigm



“We don’t have a teacher shortage. We have a shortage of sustainable, team-designed teaching jobs.” – Roger Osorio

Positive results emerge when educators genuinely share students and responsibility, collaborate around instruction, distribute expertise, and possess meaningful decision-making authority. Teaming can create the daily observation, feedback, and reflection opportunities that make peer coaching part of the work rather than an added activity. Teaching is a team sport.

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Podcast Transcript:

[00:00:00.340] – Steve [Intro]

Welcome to the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. As instructional coaches and school leaders, you are tasked with guiding continuous teacher growth to create student success. This podcast looks to support you with strategies from experienced guests, as well as my own insights that I've gathered over the years. I'm thrilled to have you with us. Thanks for tuning in.

[00:00:29.790] – Steve

Transforming the “One Teacher, One Classroom Paradigm.” Here's a statement on LinkedIn that caused me to reach out and invite Roger Osorio to join our podcast: “When educators burn out, we offer wellness seminars or we hand them an AI copilot to write lesson plans faster. We treat a structural architectural failure as an individual endurance problem.” Now, listeners who frequent this podcast or my blog know my mantra: teaching is a team sport and a public act. So Roger's description of transforming the one-teacher, one-classroom paradigm jumped out at me. And a pre-podcast check-in with Roger has me really looking forward to our conversation here today. Roger Osorio is a former middle and high school math teacher, a Penn Graduate School of Education faculty member, and a professor of entrepreneurship at Sarah Lawrence College.

[00:01:46.330] – Steve

He's hosting a new podcast, The Ensemble School, where he's exploring how we move from isolated solo teachers to orchestrated educator teams, teams that produce transformational learning experiences. Welcome, Roger. So glad you're here.

[00:02:04.130] – Roger

Thanks so much, Steve. I'm really glad that we connected around this topic.

[00:02:08.370] – Steve

So Roger, you shared with me early on that you were led to teaching from experiences you had tutoring students. What was it that you discovered from those experiences?

[00:02:18.070] – Roger

Yeah, so I'll take you back to the original context. I was working in corporate right out of university. I went to Penn State, graduated with finance and international business degrees, and I was part of a leadership development program at a company. So it's one of those fast-track programs where they rotate you around the company for about 3 to 4 years. And things were going really well. In fact, I had landed a really great job right out of the program where my client was Anheuser-Busch. So I was having a blast to say the least, going to all of their parties and getting all access passes. The dream job for a single 25, 26-year-old guy. Like, this is the perfect job. But I had this little part-time job on the side where I was tutoring math at a local learning center so that I could pay off my student loans a little bit faster. And along the way, I fell in love with what I was doing in those 6 to 8 hours a week versus the 40 to 50 hours that I was putting into the day job. And as fun as the day job was, there was something so fulfilling about what I was doing in the evening.

[00:03:21.570] – Roger

And as I got more into the work, what I discovered was that the problem that students were having wasn't with math itself. It wasn't the topic. In fact, I often tell students, especially my math students, that math is really easy. It's actually, they make it sound hard. It's one of those subjects that I feel like people want it to seem special and hard. So those who are really good at it, you know, like, oh, they feel special. But I tell my students, I go, I promise you, it is not that impressive. And once we get into it, you'll see why. And what I found the real problem was, it wasn't the topic, it was confidence or a lack thereof.

[00:03:54.990] – Steve

Yeah.

[00:03:55.630] – Roger

Students that I was working with in these learning centers, their confidence had been beat down. I mean, it was beat to a pulp and there was not much left. And so what I did was when I got in there, I sensed that and I got to work on that. And I discovered that when you help a student rebuild their confidence in math, then your job, your only job as a tutor, and later I learned this as a teacher, is to get out of their way. Because now you've got somebody who knows how to learn, because we all are hardwired to know how to learn, and now they have the confidence to move forward even when things don't go well or things aren't going perfect. And that inspired me to do more with this. Tutoring wasn't enough. I wasn't getting my fill anymore after some time with tutoring, and I needed more. And that's where I thought to myself, what if I reinvented myself from this guy who's doing sales and marketing at a big corporation to a math teacher? And so I got onto that journey in 2008. I quit my corporate job, and I started to pave that path.

[00:04:54.460] – Roger

And I had no idea what it was going to look like. I had no idea how long it was going to take. But I got to work. I started a tutoring business so I could tutor more hours than just the learning center. So I had the learning center hours, I had my own business hours, and then I went back to school. I got a master's in psychology focused on executive coaching, and that was because I felt that that was the only topic or the only degree that helps you learn how to grow people. When I looked at all the master's in education, pedagogy, administration, classroom management, a lot of really interesting topics, don't get me wrong, but I go, but which one of these shows you how you grow a human? How do you develop a human? And I found that to exist and live in

executive coaching. So I did that. And 4 years after I quit my corporate job, almost, almost to the day, was when I landed my first opportunity in a classroom, like a formal classroom.

[00:05:48.140] – Steve

So Roger, in a piece that you wrote that I had the chance to read, you stated that teachers leave the profession – and I want to put this string of words out and phrases out here that you use – that teachers leave the profession after dealing with profound isolation, unsustainable emotional load, and structural burnout. So would you define those a little further for us? And I guess both what did you experience as a teacher and what did you see in your colleagues that leads you to those words?

[00:06:26.840] – Roger

Yeah. So one of the reasons I wanted to be in the classroom, in addition to doing more, like I said, with students, was because I had been reading a lot of articles as I got into the education world that would often suggest that teachers were the problem. They don't care, they don't even know what they're teaching very well. You've got the wrong teacher in the wrong room. Long story short, a lot of blame being placed on teachers, and it was almost like the easy answer. And I felt like this is a little too easy and a little too convenient. And a lot of these articles are pointing to these problems, YouTube videos on the same topic. I mean, there were a lot of things that I thought, man, this is really strange. How can we blame teachers so easily? Well, I thought one of the best ways to find out is to get in there. And when I got in there, I started working with teachers. In my first teaching experience, I had teachers on the team that were probably like 4 to 5 years out of university, and then I had some that were 20+ years.

[00:07:24.120] – Roger

So I had a nice range, a nice variety there to learn from. And one of the things that I learned from working with them was

that there was a – well, one, the article was not 100% wrong. You know what? Yeah, I could see how teachers could seem like the ones to blame, but the story didn't go deep enough. And what I discovered was that these teachers had been beat down. They had been burned out, beat down. Actually, I should probably add that to the list because in reality, one of the things I felt after I got in there was like, wow, we get beat down. We get beat up a bit here. And I'm sure it's not the same in every school, but depending on the school and the circumstances and what's happening in that moment, there could be a situation where you feel like you're getting bullied quite a bit. And, and by the way, not feel, you are being bullied. And so I realized, wow, these teachers in some cases are just, they're done. They have no energy left. But they also in some cases just didn't have a way out.

[00:08:24.270] – Roger

They had committed so much time to this career. And it was really hard for some of them to leave. Those are the ones that I found were there for 20 years. They're like, I've got nothing else I could be doing. And there's really nothing else I'm trained for, I'm educated for, or anything like that. And I can't take a break from this. Whereas the younger teachers in some cases felt like, well, maybe I could do something else. And so I felt like that's what helped them leave because they too felt the same thing. Because a teacher on day 1 versus a teacher on day 3,000 of their career has the same exact job. Nothing really changes.

[00:08:55.120] – Steve

Yeah.

[00:08:55.300] – Roger

The only thing is that you've been in it 3,000 days versus 1, or 300 days or 3,000 days versus 1 day. But the experience is more or less the same. But I felt that the younger teachers felt that they had more options. And you know what? As the years went on, yeah, I mean, with the internet, with a lot of

things that they could do online, training on their own time virtually. I mean, yeah, more opportunities were presenting themselves. So I think that was a little easier to get out when things got really bad. And yeah, the burnout was there, of course. All the duties, I mean, I'm preaching to the choir here, but all the duties you have to do, it's not just teaching. I mean, you get hired to teach math, but I'm monitoring snack time, I'm monitoring lunchtime, hall duty, whatever it is, or dismissal time or homerooms and all these extra things that we have to do. And then there's not really much time to prepare for class unless I decide to do that on my own after dinner at home or early in the morning at 5 AM, then maybe I can get some of those things done.

[00:09:50.510] – Roger

But you feel like, am I really a professional here? I mean, I'm not being treated like one. I'm not even given the time. Whereas if I was an L&D professional at a company, I would have plenty of time to prepare and I would only be doing it for a short period of time and then I'd get some rest in between. And it's a very different experience. So yeah, I saw this and I thought, wow, you're really burnt out. And then of course the isolation. I mean, you're in a room by yourself all day for the most part, except for a few moments where you get to eat lunch maybe with your colleagues, assuming you don't have duty right before or right after that, and you're just inhaling your lunch so that you can get back to paying attention to all the students, in which case I can't talk to my colleagues in that moment. Or if we run into each other in the teacher's lounge while we're trying to prep for a class in those few precious minutes we get to prep.

[00:10:34.230] – Steve

So I came into the profession in a team experience, and I had all my teaching in a team experience. And it wasn't then until I began to consult and do professional learning for other teachers that I was finding that different environment. And

then, to my surprise, when I would talk to people about teaming, because I've just always historically been sold on it, I wouldn't want to choose to be in a classroom by myself. A lot of people saw it as infringing on – it's kind of like my classroom, my kingdom kind of thing.

[00:11:17.530] – Roger
Yeah.

[00:11:17.790] – Steve
And it struck people. So you're using a phrase that I want you to work through for folks. You're using the phrase, "distributed educator teams." So can you paint a picture of how you see that?

[00:11:32.870] – Roger
Yeah. So think of maybe one of the ways that Arizona State University's new Education Workforce Initiative explains it is imagine unbundling the teacher role and then creating roles that take different pieces of that. Now, it doesn't always look like that because a lot depends on the particular school, who's on their staff and how they are. And this is one of the things that I'm learning as I attend more events where I get to hear from teachers and leaders that are going through this and have gone through the transformation. It looks different from school to school. But that said, imagine distributed as, I mean, here was my original inspiration into this: In 2015, I pitched a similar idea to the school I was working in at the time, and it was shot down pretty quickly. And in all fairness, you know, it seemed like a pretty crazy idea. Even I recognized it was a bit of a crazy idea at the time. I'm glad that today it's a little less crazy, but the way I saw it was we were up against Netflix when it comes to the attention of students. My students, I would always ask them about their lives outside of school and all that.

[00:12:38.260] – Roger
And one of the things I learned was, at least at that time,

I'm sure there's different things now, but they would binge watch Netflix after school. I mean, spend hours watching it. And I'm thinking, wow, I've got to compete against Netflix. And it's really hard. I mean, they've got incredible production teams, producing amazing series, and I have to beat that with my math homework. I don't think I'm gonna do so well if I'm by myself. And so I had become really close friends with the theater instructor at the school at the time, and I thought – as I got to know his world a little bit better, I wondered, what if we assembled ourselves into a team that was distributed by strength and split up and divided by strength, just like a production team. The writer doesn't do the acting. The actor doesn't do the directing. Well, sometimes, but you have all these different roles that come together in order to create and produce this outstanding show or this outstanding performance. And I thought, what if we came together like that? And part of that meant unbundling the teacher role.

[00:13:42.460] – Roger

What are all the things that we have to do? Well, the teacher has to build the lesson plan. So that means you're preparing slides or the days that the things you're going to go over in the lesson and all of that. You have to deliver the lesson. You also have to create and design homework assignments and assessments. You have to grade and give feedback on those assessments. You have to do after-school interventions. You have to work with the students who are struggling. You have to communicate with the parents. I mean, if you think about it, there are a lot of roles here. There's a communication specialist. There's an assessment specialist. There is a data analyst role in here. There is a scriptwriter of sorts, you know, the person who writes the lessons. There's a facilitator, the person who takes that lesson and brings it to life on stage, the actor, if you will. The roles are distributed, and that's what is meant by team-based. If we looked at education and teaching as a team sport or as a team activity, then there are different positions that we can play,

and we can then play to our strengths as well.

[00:14:38.300] – Steve

So I'm going to give you 2 very silly examples.

[00:14:42.790] – Roger

Go for it.

[00:14:43.820] – Steve

I team taught first grade. And this is a lot of years back, okay? But so we would have the kids practice their sound with a picture. And so we would put an activity on the board for the kids to do while we were meeting with small groups. And if I tried to draw a picture of something that the kids had to do the first letter, all the kids said was, "what is it?" [laughter] And so fortunate to work with a colleague who could step up there and sketch up all the things. And never was there a phrase from the kids asking what the picture was. They knew immediately. And then I used to flip to the other piece of something needed to get done, but somebody had to go out with the kids for recess. So once it got to winter, Diane would stay in the room to do anything to not have to go out for recess.

[00:15:46.790] – Steve

I'd be out there running around with the kids having a great time. And I used to say to folks, "who do you want to be out to recess with?" Diane, who's holding the whistle looking for one kid to misbehave so she can blow the whistle and say, "we're going in," or Steve, who's having so much fun he's probably going to keep us out 5 minutes longer? So those both flashed through my head as you were laying out the sophisticated examples.

[00:16:12.490] – Roger

That's it right there.

[00:16:14.670] – Roger

I mean, look, when we think of team sports, right, and when

someone is not performing well, when someone can't get that shot to go in, someone else can pick up the slack. Or when someone is better at something, they assume that role, and the other person can now focus in on what they do best rather than everyone trying to do everything at once, which is what we ask teachers to do. Another metaphor or comparison I use for schools right now is, it's – teachers are like solopreneurs. I mean, a school is like a coworking space. I mean, it might as well be a WeWork, but with only offices, no open spaces. And we each have our own little office and we run our own little business with our, you know, 25 to 30 customers. And that's it. And from time to time, we run into each other in the bathrooms and at the canteen, and we'll have some lunch together, and then we'll go back to our offices and we'll run our own business.

[00:17:06.710] – Steve

I'll give you a historic book that you're too young to know about that you can look for. It was called, "The Shopping Mall High School."

[00:17:16.920] – Roger

Ooh, The Shopping Mall High School. Okay.

[00:17:18.770] – Steve

And it just fit your description – that in effect, the teachers at a high school were like the store owners at a shopping mall. So they have a common parking lot. But when they get inside the store, they're actually in competition for the customers.

[00:17:40.860] – Roger

Okay, I just got it right here.

[00:17:42.540] – Steve

If you think about it as a high school, a student who takes an extra year of a language now doesn't have room in the schedule for the art class that they might take. And so it was actually

structured in a way that had teachers not just working solo, but actually going to the next step of being competitive.

[00:18:03.140] – Roger

You know, you're absolutely right. And I felt that as well in my classroom teaching experience. And I only spent 4 years in the classroom, 2 in an inner city public school, 2 in an all-girl private school. So I did get to see different environments. So in those 4 years, I saw different things. And by the way, we could have a whole podcast on the similarities as well. But we'll save that for another episode.

[00:18:26.910] – Steve

I've been there.

[00:18:27.550] – Roger

Yeah.

[00:18:28.060] – Roger

So, but this competition piece, absolutely. There was this attitude where people felt that, hey, do you consider your class more important than mine? Is math more important than English? And one of the things I used to tell my students, and I started doing this at the all-girls school, I used to tell the girls that, look, I don't care if you like math or not. My feelings aren't hurt if you don't like math or if that's not your thing. If your thing is English, if your thing is art, if your thing is dance or performing arts or whatever it is, great. I want you to have that thing that you really enjoy. I'm not trying to compete that. In fact, if you allow me to, I will help you do the absolute best you can up to a point so that you don't have to dilute your efforts in the other thing. I'd rather you spend more time on the other subjects, not mine.

[00:19:21.530] – Steve

Powerful.

[00:19:22.420] – Roger

But you're gonna have to listen to me. You got to trust me because I will make sure that you get – now you're not going to be an A student, so let's set that right away. That's not your goal. And it shouldn't be your goal. But we're gonna go for that B, maybe even a strong B. And look, if you get into that A range, amazing, we'll celebrate that too. But we're celebrating at the B level already. And that's what we're working towards. And I want you to be outstanding over there. I want you to be an A over there, because I'm not trying to compete. I don't want to take you away from the thing that you enjoy most and you do best, because please, you should do that. I'm here in teaching because I reinvented myself because I fell in love with this and I'm pursuing what I love. Who am I to tell you not to pursue what you love as well? So yeah, that competition thing is there and it's tough because it's embedded into the environment. To your point, I pulled up the book here.

[00:20:09.050] – Roger

The subtitle is, "Winners and Losers in the Educational Marketplace." Wow. What a title. And by the way, I did just make it. It was 1985, so I was already 4. I was 4 years old.

[00:20:26.970] – Roger

I Just made it. [laughter]

[00:20:31.460] – Steve

[laughter] So you've got a degree in psychology and you studied executive coaching. How do you think your understanding that developed in those areas, how does that align with the structure of a distributed educator team?

[00:20:50.890] – Roger

So, when I pursued the master's in psychology focused on executive coaching, like I said, what inspired me was that I felt that what they described in this program was a recipe for growing people, for helping them go from where they were to where they wanted to be. And when I got into – when I

continued tutoring while pursuing my master's and then eventually teaching, I started applying coaching methodologies to really help these students grow and develop in really big ways. And I learned that, like I said, it's not just the curriculum. Which in a way, suggests there are other roles necessary in a school besides just the subject matter experts. There are roles for coaches, there are roles – and when you look at a student as a coach, you look at a lot of other things. You're looking at a lot of things. You're considering their home situation, you're considering what causes them anxiety, because as a coach, my job is to help you move from where you are to where you want to be. And if there is something blocking the way, from going from where we are to where we want to be, then I got to help you remove that blocker.

[00:21:55.500] – Roger

That's the job of a coach. And so sometimes that blocker is confidence. Sometimes it's an issue at home, sometimes it's an issue in another class. Sometimes it's an issue in that you did not understand something years ago in math that is now holding you back from getting this topic.

[00:22:10.770] – Steve

Yeah.

[00:22:11.090] – Roger

There are so many things. But if you're one person, it's going to be really hard. To help the student with all of those things, because any student could have many of those things going on at any given time. As a team, I mean, we are just better empowered and better equipped to be able to help the entire student. Yesterday I was on a call with Arizona State University's new education workforce folks, and they had a panel of teachers who talked about these other things that come up, these other issues that come up for students at home and all of that. And if it wasn't for a team-based approach, they wouldn't have time to catch that or address it. Even if

they caught it, they wouldn't be able to address it. But now they do, because someone else can take that on while someone else focuses on the work or the class or teaching up front or whatever it might be.

[00:22:59.870] – Steve

Well, I followed Arizona State's program from time to time. You've studied it a little closer than I have. What are some of the results that they're reporting are happening in the schools that they're working with?

[00:23:17.200] – Roger

Yeah, I don't have the numbers right in front of me, but a few of the areas where improvement has been seen by the team that they're measuring – one is they are seeing more retention. So teachers are staying in the profession. So when they look at the schools that have already implemented this and they've had it for a few years, they have seen that turnover has gone down, retention has gone up. They've been able to keep more teachers, which is a really, really big one. Now, they haven't always seen that necessarily job satisfaction is necessarily up. But it's not crazy down either. It's not down, let's say. It's about the same. So there's still room to improve. But things like retention, they're hanging in there a little bit longer. Burnout is also being cited as something that has gone down, and teachers report not feeling so burnt out, not feeling so isolated. Obviously, that one is more by design. You're working on a team now, so you can't feel that way. But that's an important one, even if it is by design taken care of. And so, right away, you're seeing that the person in the role is better equipped to handle the role, to hang in there longer.

[00:24:24.370] – Roger

I mean, if you think of somebody just getting beat down every single day, at some point you just run out of steam and you got to go. You're like, I can't do this anymore. Especially if you have a way out, you're going to leave. And in some cases,

even if you don't, you just realize, I can't keep doing this. But if you're not isolated, that means you have other people you can talk to, someone you could share some of what you're going with, and they see it too, and they're there with you, and they can pick up some of the slack when you're going through a tough time. So those are the main areas where they are finding teachers are becoming more – maybe the best word to sum all that up is resilience.

[00:24:58.620] – Steve

Yeah, good word. Good word. Yeah, I was going to say from my team teaching experiences, somebody else seeing you struggling with that student and having the empathy.

[00:25:13.830] – Roger

Yeah.

[00:25:14.030] – Steve

And somebody else seeing you be successful with a student and join that celebration. I struggled with a non-reader for months early in my career. And the day he broke the code, the next day, a group of teachers came in my room with a cake and a champagne bottle.

[00:25:40.190] – Roger

Wow.

[00:25:40.850] – Steve

And that'll drive you through unbelievable amounts of days of struggling.

[00:25:49.100] – Roger

Yes.

[00:25:49.490] – Steve

That's one of the things I always said. It's why I've been a big promoter of peer coaching. When you're peer coaching and a teacher tells you about what they're laying out in this lesson and what they want to happen, and you're sitting in the room

and it happens there in front of you, and you give a thumbs up, you can just see the teacher light up with this surge of energy. And I used to talk about that. If you waited 2 hours later to try and describe it in the staff lounge, it's kind of lost its luster. And then most of us, if you're going home to somebody who's not a teacher, they're not going to get it even if you can get them to listen to it. But that resilience, that word that you used, I think that's really a big one.

[00:26:37.290] – Roger

I love what you shared. It's almost like – it's like when you are, I don't know, you're shooting hoops into your trash basket and you do the weirdest one off the wall, 2 walls in, and you're looking around, no one saw? You're like, no one's here to see this? Am I the only one who saw this? Like, is anyone going to believe what just happened?

[00:26:56.870] – Steve

Nothing like that kid get this tremendous insight from your teaching. And that's exactly what you're doing. You're looking around, somebody's got to see this!

[00:27:04.970] – Roger

Is there a camera in the room? Please, I would take a camera right now. I would love a camera right now.

[00:27:11.050] – Steve

So educator teams that you've defined are certainly going to require administrators to do changes. I'm wondering what kind of supports and training do you think teachers need to work effectively as a team? Because I don't think it's in teacher ed.

[00:27:32.350] – Roger

No. Yeah, and I'm not even too familiar with teachers because I didn't go down that path.

[00:27:36.510] – Steve

Yeah.

[00:27:36.900] – Roger

But that said, when we think about teams – and by the way, it's not that different even in corporate.

[00:27:43.900] – Steve

Yeah.

[00:27:44.120] – Roger

I mean, some folks and some teams organize really well, and they have the cultural foundations, they have the steps, they know how to behave, they know how to work together. In sports we see this, but one of the things that I think need to be taught is, and it really has to go – it has to start, in my opinion, in the undergraduate level when you're pursuing your teaching degree, is the mechanics of how a team works in education. Because there are workflows, I'm sure, you know, if we go to these schools that have implemented this, and the thing that I'm noticing so far is that, again, there's a lot of school, different schools do it different ways. So that means the workflows are a bit different. But I bet you over time, there will start to emerge like a template of sorts, something like a starting point for how teams in education work together. And when you start figuring out how educator team works, I think that needs to be taught. It needs to be one of those things that you leave knowing that, well, yeah, obviously this person then hands this off and then this group does this.

[00:28:43.190] – Roger

And then, you just kind of have an idea of the operations, if you will, of an educator team. And so you've got to learn a little bit more about – or teachers need to learn a little bit more about working in teams. Now, that said, that's an ongoing thing. You know, again, going back to my experiences in corporate, we're always being trained on topics like this, on how to work better together. You know, that means that we have team offsites, those types of things. We have a lot of things that we do in order to make sure that we're coming together –

[00:29:10.590] – Steve
Build that team.

[00:29:11.010] – Roger
More effectively.

[00:29:11.970] – Steve
Yeah.

[00:29:12.130] – Roger
So that's another thing that has to happen regularly. There's gotta be team offsites. So we've gotta treat an educator team no differently than we would treat a marketing team, a sales team, an engineering team. All of those things. I think the other thing is, and this goes back to just more what I've learned personally from applying coaching methodologies to education, is teachers can also stand to learn how to be coaches. It's an amazing opportunity for teachers if they learn not how to become an expert coach, because that's not the job. We're not asking you to become a full-time one-on-one coach, executive coach. But at IBM, for instance, when I was there, I was part of a program where we trained managers on coaching. And it was just a fundamental level. It was Level 1 ICF, which is the International Coaching Federation. It was their Level 1 curriculum. And we called it coaching for managers because it was applied to being a manager, which means you're not their coach, you're not their full-time coach, they should still get a coach. But you are going to draw on these methodologies to be a more effective manager.

[00:30:19.340] – Roger
Well, guess what? If you're working on a team, there's one of the things, there's coaching up and there's coaching down. There's your manager coaching, but there's also coaching your manager.

[00:30:26.740] – Steve
Yeah.

[00:30:27.290] – Roger

And I think that if teachers are equipped with this incredibly powerful skill, not only will it help them be more effective in teams, but it will also, because I've experienced this personally and I've tested this myself, it will make them more effective in the classroom. I think it's actually one of the things that are missing in becoming an educator and going in the undergraduate level is learning how to some of the fundamental coaching skills.

[00:30:48.540] – Steve

Yeah. And, I mean, coaching's my thing. It's where the largest part of my energy goes. But I've always laid out – education majors at a university ought to be coaching each other as part of their coursework. You're going to do a presentation in the class and I got a chance to be your coach – I've even talked about professors being coached live in front of their classes. Imagine you're getting up to teach a class and before it starts, your coach is there and they have a little pre-conference with you where you talk about the kind of feedback that you want. And then you go ahead and you teach the class and then you sit down and get coaching from that person. And you get, as a professor, get to model coachability and how you use a coach. Those would all be really powerful.

[00:31:43.620] – Roger

I mean, it's a performance. Teaching is no different than a performance, than a sport, if you ask me. Your audience, even though you may not be performing in front of 40,000 people in an arena or in a stadium, you've got 30 of the most important –

[00:31:59.240] – Steve

You got a tougher audience.

[00:32:01.080] – Roger

Tougher audience. They're tougher. And you know what, if you ask me –

[00:32:05.000] – Steve

They didn't pay for a ticket to be there. [laughter]

[00:32:06.940] – Roger

[laughter] Yeah, exactly. Well, that's a whole other topic that, you know, I mean, they didn't sign up. They didn't buy the ticket to be there. You're absolutely right. They were told, you got to show up to this place. But this is also, as we know, just our kids are so important. For me, they're the most valuable. They're more valuable than the audience at a basketball game.

[00:32:27.140] – Steve

For sure.

[00:32:28.440] – Roger

And if we prep our athletes, if we give them the pep talk, if we say, hey guys, everybody, this is the focus today. Today we are going to deliver on these 3 outcomes, or this is what the end looks like. And we do all of this for them so that when they get out there, they're at their absolute best. How are we not doing this for teachers? How are we not getting teachers pumped up at the beginning of the day? And I know I've read of cases in some schools where they have leaders like this, leaders that get them ready as if they were getting ready for the big match, because you know what? They are. Every day is the big match. I mean, on any given day, you could absolutely make or break a kid's – just something about them, something in them. Why not make it inspiring?

[00:33:09.540] – Steve

When you're teaching on a team, there's a day that a colleague walks in and you kind of look at the person and say, kids should not have to deal with you today. I could just tell.

[00:33:21.040] – Roger

Yeah.

[00:33:22.310] – Steve

How can we swing things around here? I look at it, I got things for a while. Go catch a coffee and pull it all back together. Sometimes there's nothing to do with what happened there at school. It's what happened at home before before you showed up at work. I mean, all of those issues have been big team to me. I do have a question on my mind as to what you're picturing. And I know that you're committed to moving in this direction and exploring it deeper, so I may be too early with my question.

[00:33:58.760] – Roger

Mm-hmm.

[00:33:59.790] – Steve

But I'm wondering about, is there a step-by-step slow process where a school can go through becoming more team-like and team-oriented, or do we need to close down in June and open back up in September in a different setting? Now, I've been influenced because when I walked in, it was a brand new school. Everybody was hired to teach on a team. I went for my last interview. There was a woman seated in the interview who was being interviewed same time I was being interviewed. And going through my mind was they've narrowed it down to the 2 of us. That wasn't the case.

[00:34:43.040] – Roger

Nope.

[00:34:43.550] – Steve

They were trying to figure out whether 2 of us could work on the same team.

[00:34:47.020] – Roger

There we go.

[00:34:49.730] – Steve

Yeah. So, it was being orchestrated compared to people saying, okay, now you got to go work with these 4 people. You know, we haven't done our homework on how we put that team together. So

yeah, you have a thought as to what a process looks like?

[00:35:02.100] – Roger

Yes. I mean, well, one, you're absolutely right. I'm just getting into this work, right? I'm doing my research. I'm talking to as many people as I can about this. But that said, you know, one of the things that I bring to this party is I have been working with startups and entrepreneurs for over a decade. And one of the biggest topics that I focus on is the prototype, the pilot, the minimum viable product is how do we test your assumptions? How do we test your ideas in very small, you know, non-disruptive ways?

[00:35:35.640] – Steve

Absolutely.

[00:35:36.130] – Roger

So that we can begin building momentum in a direction. And by the way, iterate as we go because we're not going to get it right on the first try. So I would be the one who would come into a party like this, you know, for the team-based staffing, and I would say absolutely not – do not shut down the school in June and then reopen in the – because that's the equivalent of saying, hey, look, I'm just going to launch my product in the way that I envisioned it. I haven't talked to a single customer.

[00:36:00.130] – Steve

That's right.

[00:36:00.370] – Roger

I haven't run it by anybody. And then I'm going to hope that it all works out perfectly and I sell out, but I won't. And so what I'm going to be looking for is what are the ways that schools can experiment? Now, from what I've read and from what I've heard from some of these teacher panels and school leader panels is that they usually start small. They start with one group, maybe one grade, and I've seen it configured in a lot

of different ways, which is really interesting. That's actually probably one of the things that I found most surprising was that it could look so different in different schools. For instance, one way of doing it is having all the teachers from each subject come together and be a team, which means then I'm on a team with the science teacher, I'm on a team with the English teacher, I'm on a team with the social studies, and the list goes on. And then we form and become a team. So the question then would be, okay, is there a grade that is better positioned for such an experiment where it would be a little less disruptive?

[00:36:59.320] – Roger

I always tell people in a situation like this, where would the experiment be a little bit more contained so that it can't have negative or positive spillover effects? Because we don't know what's gonna come out of this, so it's better that we not risk it. So is there a part of the school that's already a little bit more contained? Is there a grade that operates in a little bit more isolation than the rest? Is what I would ask a school leader as they are considering something like this. I would also ask, you know, is there a grade or is there a department, maybe, if you're looking at high schools and you've got a math department, is there a team that tends to be already a little bit more, I don't know, like innovative, experimental? You constantly find them testing new things because that behavior, that comfort level is going to suit them really well in order to test this out. Because you don't want to have to also overcome confidence issues and fears and all of that in that initial experiment, because in the initial experiment, you're just trying to see, does this work for us?

[00:37:54.770] – Roger

It's a different question. Then later we can worry about, okay, how do we help people prepare for this? And then that's where training and all of that comes. So I would always advocate start small. Find that place in the school where

things are a little more isolated. Find the moment. Maybe it's isolation not by space, but by time. Maybe there's a moment in the year that this could be tested. And I don't know, it depends on the school and how it's run. When I proposed it to our school, perhaps I thought a little too big back then. It was 11 years ago.

[00:38:21.870] – Steve
Yeah.

[00:38:22.410] – Roger

And I wasn't as good at designing MVPs as I am now. But I proposed that we did this for the entire grade or – for the entire 6th grade. The problem was that all of us taught 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. And so there were rarely times where we could all, or at least 3 of us, be together in a room because chances are we were teaching one of the other grades. And so it was a bit tougher to do that. So that was probably not the best place to experiment. But then working with another teacher, we thought, could we test another part of the model? You know, in our case, in the case that I was trying to prove, it was that learning should be a production or teaching should be a production, just like a Broadway show.

[00:39:05.160] – Steve
Yeah.

[00:39:05.460] – Roger

And so I go, can we test that part of it? Can we just come together on our own, on the side, after school, just meet and put together a lesson that looks and feels so different? And, and by the way, hey, theater teacher, since you're not on the same schedule as my colleagues, can you come in and teach with me? Because you might be available when I'm teaching or when somebody else is, you know, because your schedule is so different than ours. And you know what? That was a more doable thing and it was a little easier. So yeah, I would always say test small, find that way of slicing up the isolation, a

contained, a self-contained scenario, if you will, wherever possible or as contained as possible.

[00:39:45.240] – Steve

Roger, as we close out here, any final thoughts you want to leave the listeners pondering?

[00:39:55.150] – Roger

Yeah. Gosh, I would say one is that, not only is this doable, but this is necessary. We are in a place where this can be done. This is incredibly doable. 150 schools across 17 states and 50 school systems or districts, have already implemented this for a varying number of years, some for as long as 6 years, others for 2 years. And it's working for them. Teachers are happier. And when teachers are happy, they perform better. Anybody, I shouldn't say teachers. When anyone is happy, they perform best. And that's what we need out of teachers. We need teachers to be at their best more than other fields, if you ask me, because they are dealing with the most precious customer that we will ever come across, which is our students. And they need us to be at our best. I struggled with this, and I was only in teaching in the classroom for 4 years, and I left because I was just like, man, this is challenging my mental health. I never called in – I mean, I called in sick in life, you know, maybe once or twice a year, maybe if that, but I did it so often. In my final year of teaching, I couldn't believe I got to that point.

[00:41:13.450] – Roger

I didn't know what else to do. There were days where I really just couldn't get up to go. And even in those days, because one of the things about being a teacher is you can't really be sick, so you have to plan the whole thing the day out so you can hand it off to somebody. And so I made sure that it was always something that I could hand off and it wouldn't be too disruptive for my students. But my gosh, it really kicked me in the butt and I was you know, fortunate that I came into teaching from another field, so I had a way out. And, and I

used that way out, and I had an opportunity to go to IBM at the time, and it was a really great opportunity. And I said, you know what, I'm leaving because, my gosh, you know, I love teaching, but I do not enjoy the job of teaching. I love teaching, but I don't enjoy the job of teaching. I was blessed by God, and 2 years later I had an opportunity to teach again, but on different terms.

[00:42:05.770] – Roger

I was working at IBM, but I was a part-time – I got to teach my entrepreneurship course at Sarah Lawrence College. So I eventually became an entrepreneurship professor there. And then that same year, later that year, University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education recruited me to come teach for one of their executive master's programs. And so I got to do that again, 2 teaching jobs that were balanced better because it was part-time and all of that. So luckily I didn't leave teaching for that long. But I will say I do miss teaching math. If anytime a kid says I need help with math or I hear that happening, I'm like, "Oh, I'll come in!" I'll share this last story because this one just shows like, I think any teacher listening is going to say, yep, I know what you're talking about. If you really love teaching your trade, your craft, that is. So I obviously love teaching math. I was at a speaking engagement in Toronto and it was being held at a university and it was like a 3-day event. So I had plenty of time to see the campus.

[00:43:05.660] – Roger

And so somebody asked me, hey, Roger, you know, you're on a break break for a little bit. Do you want to go see the campus? And I go, yeah, absolutely. Let's go see it. And they're walking me around, giving me the tour and all of that. And I go, wow, this is super cool. And then we passed this one room inside of a building, and there's a sign that says math tutoring or something like that. And I look inside and I go, "Oh, so what's going on here?" They're like, "Well, I guess

it's one of those tutoring programs just to help students with math." So I walked in and the person continued walking thinking we were still on the tour, but I just kind went my own way, and they eventually came and caught back up with me. And I saw a table of people just kind of sitting there, and it looked like they were waiting. And I was wondering, what are they waiting for? Maybe there's no one to serve them at the moment, and they're waiting their turn. And so then I asked like, "Hey, what's going on?" And they're like, "Oh, well, I'm just waiting for my turn."

[00:43:50.880] – Roger

I've got some questions on my math homework." And I go, "Cool, I can help you." And I just sat down and I started helping. I'm here for a completely different activity somewhere else on campus. But when you're called to be a math teacher or a teacher of any kind, I mean, it's just, it's what you do no matter where you are, no matter who it is that needs it, whether you're getting paid or not. I love doing it. So I know that the people who choose this career come at it from a very different perspective. I think it's more of a calling. It's not a profession that just makes sense because, oh yeah, it's prestigious, or, oh yes, I want to work for McKinsey, or I want to work for Google, or whatever it might be. It's not about that. You don't do it for the glamor. There is no glitz. There's no glamor. There's nothing like that.

[00:44:33.360] – Steve

So I know you've got a commitment to explore and go deep in this. You're starting a podcast around the topic. What's the best way for listeners to be able to follow your work moving forward from here?

[00:44:48.430] – Roger

Yeah, I would say it'd be great. I would love your support on the podcast. It's called The Ensemble School Podcast, and you can find it on Apple or Spotify. So wherever you listen, either one of those. And of course, I would appreciate the

follow and the subscribe on those podcasts just because that matters. and that counts. And then finally, LinkedIn is probably the second best place. Connect with me there if you're a teacher or a school leader and you want to connect around these topics or just be in touch and follow some of the work. I will be publishing a lot of different things that I'm learning along the way, what I'm discovering and finding, because I want to bring this to more people. Right now it's a very small team in Arizona State University working on this, and I want to help augment whatever they're doing and get it into more people's

[00:45:32.730] – Steve

Terrific. Well, know that I'll be a cheerleader all along the way. I've been giving the mantra of teaching as a team sport for a whole lot of years. So thanks a lot.

[00:45:43.330] – Roger

You'll be on my podcast in a couple of weeks. I'm going to reach out for that because I want to hear your stories.

[00:45:49.130] – Steve

I'll look forward to that, Roger. Take care.

[00:45:51.280] – Roger

Awesome. Thank you, Steve.

[00:45:54.300] – Steve [Outro]

Thanks for listening, folks. I'd love to hear what you're pondering. You can find me on Twitter or LinkedIn @SteveBarkley, or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.