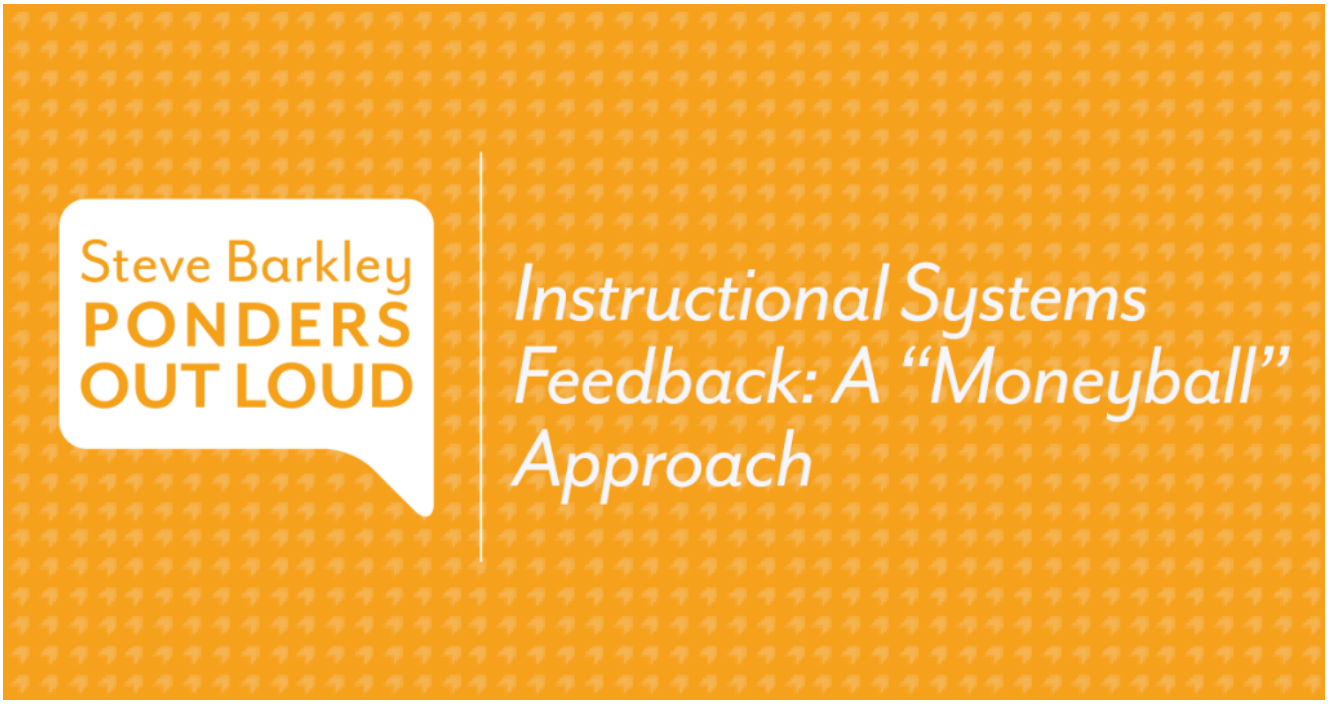
Podcast: Instructional Systems Feedback – A "Moneyball" Approach



Patrick Mongrain, an experienced teacher and teacher coach, shares a message comparing the use of data to drive smarter decisions in the movie Moneyball to providing teachers with data to analyze their instructional classroom moves. He describes the role of 8 high level strategies such as building community and relationships, providing opportunities to respond, and positive and corrective feedback. Too often clearly defined instructional skills that are key to instructional strategies are not identified or coached.

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Podcast Transcript:

[00:00:00.000] – 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.

[00:00:30.000] – Steve
Instructional Systems Feedback: A Moneyball Approach. Patrick Mongrain is joining our podcast today to share an instructional framework that applies a Moneyball approach to leveraging data and analytics on key performance indicators for teachers. As an educator for 20 years, Patrick has taught middle school history and leadership for 10 years, and he has spent 10 years as a district-level instructional coach, restorative justice specialist, and MTSS coach. Currently, Patrick works in a district's professional learning department, dividing his time evenly between coaching and classrooms, supporting school leaders in building systems, and working on district systems. Patrick believes teachers are incredible and that we must support them as the experts they are. He has developed a data collection app called EdChanger Pro and is publishing a book titled Theory Can Only Take You So Far. Welcome, Patrick.

[00:01:42.040] – Patrick
Thanks, Steve. Thanks for the intro.

[00:01:44.300] – Steve
Glad to have you with us. So when I had a chance to speak with you ahead of time, I wanted to uncover what you mean when you use the term instructional system. So I think that's a good

place for us to jump in for our listeners.

[00:02:01.080] – Patrick
Yeah. Systems is one of the new buzzwords in education, right? And sometimes we all know how that can go good, or sometimes we can turn those words into bad words. But I think that I would define system as really just interconnected parts working together for optimization and efficiency. And so systems can be big and small. And I guess that's how I would respond to that. But again, big question. If you want more, I can add.

[00:02:27.580] – Steve
Well, let's move it into the classroom. So what are you thinking about an instructional system across the classroom?

[00:02:36.660] – Patrick
Yeah, great. One of the points I make in a lot of the conversation I have is that I just believe one of the injustices in education is that teachers aren't really taught a really clear and coherent classroom system of practices. From my experience, and not to tell too long of a story, but early in my career, when I struggled as a teacher, I was told, find all these new activities or change your mindset. And I worked and I did those things, and I just felt like there was chaos in my head. And then what I learned was that what made teachers great, all of the teachers I looked up to, was their practice with students. And so I started diving into what those practices looked like. And so I, over time, over a long time, have created my own version of an instructional system or framework. And there's multiple similar systems or frameworks out there. Mine is maybe a little bit based on my experiences and my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. I've created this system of eight practices in a classroom. It starts with community and relationships, intentionally planning routines, and teaching expectations.

[00:03:50.280] – Patrick

Those three practices are a foundation. Then inform supervision. While I'm supervising my students, I can really do three things in my last three practices is provide positive feedback, provide corrective feedback, or provide an opportunity to respond or ask students a question. Then based on my background as an MTSS coach or working on interventions, my eighth practice is what I would call that first wave of tier two in the classroom, targeted support strategies for students. Those eight practices, community building practices, planning routines, teaching expectations, informed supervision, positive and corrective feedback opportunities to respond in teaching moves for targeted support, create this really cohesive system in a classroom.

[00:04:40.880] – Steve
I read that you described the value of the system as providing hope to teachers. Take me a little further with what you mean there.

[00:04:51.000] – Patrick
Yeah. To dive into that, thanks – good question – good point. I'll start by saying that when I was a teacher in the classroom, rarely did I just go to school and hope my students were going to be good or hope they were going to learn, as a lot of people can connect with. When I had those days, when I was in a hurry or whatever, I was generally disappointed. When I felt hope was when I had a plan and I had a system. I use the quote over and over, "systems equals hope." How I explain that is really just, again, I don't just hope things are going to go well. When there's a logical next step, I know when something goes wrong, what the next thing to do is. That's what I really feel a sense of hope. So for example, if you have a classroom that is really strong in routines but has no positive feedback, that classroom might be orderly but might feel cold. If I have a classroom, say, flip that, I have a classroom with a ton of positive feedback but no routines, that could be fun, but also it could be chaos.

[00:05:58.890] – Patrick
So I know as teacher, if my class feels contentious, slow down and build community. If my class feels chaotic, install or reteach routines. If my class feels cold, increase positive feedback. If my class feels dull, increase opportunities to respond or rigorous questions. So again, those eight practices just provide this really clear and coherent, what do I do or what's a logical next step when things go wrong? And that's what gives people hope.

[00:06:28.780] – Steve
So I'm going to try another sports analogy since you started us there with Moneyball. I'm almost hearing that hope is in knowing you can call an audible.

[00:06:42.540] – Patrick
Yeah. Phone a friend or whatever that is. Yeah, That's a really great point. Yeah, I love that. I love that as a football guy.

[00:06:48.960] – Steve
I walked in with a plan that said this play was going to work. And standing in the front of the room, I can see that the play isn't working. And because of my system's knowledge, I can do a quick assessment of where I'm at and what's happening and look at an audible for the next move.

[00:07:12.980] – Patrick
Just like a quarterback, you've got whatever this play called, and you see this blitzing linebacker coming, and he's whatever, 6'3, 250 pounds, 4'3, 340, right? You might want to change what you're going to do. And when you know the system, you can just make a different call there at the line of Scrimage. Yeah, I love that. Great analogy.

[00:07:32.540] – Steve
Cool. So for listeners who haven't seen the Moneyball film, make the connection for us between what happens in that movie

and your application of the systems?

[00:07:48.020] – Patrick
Yes, that will require, I think, a little bit of a story. But so the first point I always make is systems equals hope. And the second quote that I use often in my work is, “repeating is not the same as creating.” And what I mean by that is that at the simplest level, if I’m a teacher and somebody just hands me a lesson plan and says, “Go teach this to your kids,” it’s just not the same as something I created myself. So repeating something somebody gives me. And one of my big points is, again, really just everywhere I go, I see teachers doing incredible things. I just think that teachers are just amazing people, some of the greatest people on the planet. And we have to coach them in a way that acknowledges that and acknowledges them as the experts of their students and really just the wonderful people that they are. And so the money ball approach that I take to that is based on the movie Moneyball. I love playing the clip for teachers, a lot of laughs every time. But the story of the movie Moneyball is about a guy named Billy Beane, who is the general manager of the Oakland A’s And the Oakland A’s are a team in a smaller market, so they don’t have the hundreds of millions of dollars the Yankees and the Dodgers do to buy players.

[00:09:10.280] – Patrick
And so they have to compete with those teams with significantly less money. So they really have to work smarter and more efficiently. Which, by the way, a little analogy to education there – the help of more money is probably not coming in the world of education, right? So Billy Beane, I’ll fast forward to a part in the movie, Billy Beane has to find a to do more with less money. Generally, that comes in finding younger players and helping them overperform. They had just had a few really good years because they had some younger players who weren’t as well paid that played really well. And those players go to more lucrative contracts in bigger

markets. Billy, throughout the movie, then I'll fast forward to… There's a scene in the movie where Billy is sitting – Billy is played by Brad Pitt. He's sitting and he's talking to his more traditional scouts about how they're going to replace these amazing young players they just lost. And the scouts are saying things like, maybe more of a traditional mindset, things like, "Well, this guy's got to really square jaw." And, "This guy has a really nice-looking swing." And where it ends with is the funny part is that one scout says, "Oh, we can't pick up that guy for our roster because he's got an ugly girlfriend."

[00:10:31.660] – Patrick
And it's just none of those things have anything to do with how well a guy can hit a baseball. And so Billy dives into this. Billy rubs his face in his hands and is frustrated. And he goes into this speech about how we need to pick the best baseball players, and we need to look at data and analytics to decide who the best players are. Let's stop thinking about who's got the biggest muscles, and let's start calculating who gets on base the most, and who hits the most line drives, and all of those little things that really make up a good baseball player. So it's that process of data analytics is that I refer to. But again, that quote, Scout says, "We can't pick up that guy because he's got an ugly… His girlfriend's only a six out of 10 at best" or whatever. I just think the analogy to education, sometimes we judge teachers on who's got the Pinterest classroom and who is well connected or whatever that may be, when really we need to be collecting data and analytics and really see who is the best instructor, and then also coaching teachers to let them know that's what matters, is their instruction.

[00:11:40.120] – Steve
I have to tell you, you used a line that I think lots of our listeners as instructional coaches and administrators might be looking at, and the concept of younger players who

overperform. I think there's a lot of schools today in fulfilling teacher vacancies, that they've selected younger people who are going to need to overperform from where they are. Thinking about how we coach and support those younger players in that growth.

[00:12:19.940] – Patrick
Yeah, I mean, that is a really good point that younger teachers do cost less money, generally, have a lot of energy, are asked to do a lot of different things. Well, that's probably true of all teachers, right? And again, I think that goes back to that injustice. There's not a lot of… The teacher education programs I'm familiar with, and I know when I went through the university, I wasn't told, here's the eight things you need to get really good at, or here's the six things you need to get really good at. I was really told, here's the mindset you need to bring.

[00:12:53.780] – Steve
Absolutely agreed.

[00:12:54.980] – Patrick
Yeah. Go build community. What does that even mean?

[00:12:58.400] – Steve
Actually, it wasn't until I When I began taking courses from Performance Learning Systems, 3rd Learning, which is the group I'm with now that's interviewing you, it was my first course with them where they broke it down to the isolated skills and coach those communication skills. I talked to people about that, that at that point, I had a master's degree, and yet no one had identified, here's a specific set of skills that I needed to practice, rehearse, internalize, be coached upon, and that that was going to greatly increase my success. As that did, it greatly increased the confidence. I mean, it really reinforced everything you're saying, it was reinforced for me in my own history with that.

[00:13:49.780] – Patrick
Yeah. I think, Steve, thank you for sharing. That's a really great point. I feel like I have a similar history. Then I always, because I generally am really and have a lot of energy. But then sometimes I just come back and that makes me sad that the injustice that you and I, who are no longer in the classroom, learned those things after we left the classroom. The people actually doing this amazing, incredible, and hard work with kids don't get that. It just is backwards to me, right? And I think that's done with the best intentions, I guess I'd say, too. People in charge of policy and systems. Everybody loves kids, and everybody's trying to find this quick fix or the next thing that's going to help kids. But in that search for relief, we've really just lost track of how we're going to slowly build systems, is the way I would put it. But again, to me, that's sad that, again, to me, the 27-year-old Patrick really needed to know what I know now, right?

[00:14:55.240] – Steve
Yeah. Talk a little bit about the title of your book, "Theory Can Only Take You So Far."

[00:15:00.340] – Patrick
Yeah. So that's a really great segue, what we were just talking about. I feel like in my history as an educator, which, by the way, not that these things aren't important, they are, I was always told, find all these new activities. If you just teach a Socratic seminar, your class is going to be wonderful. By the way, I tried that. I put my kids in a circle. I said, talk about this investigative question. You can imagine what seventh graders would do. [laughter] First couple of Socratic seminars were a little bit uncomfortable, a little bit painful. But then I learned there's all of these practices. If you teach them depth of knowledge stems or cost as levels of questions, just that one skill changes a seminar when they start asking higher-level questions or how to

paraphrase each other. You practice paraphrasing each other. Just being able for that kid who's uncomfortable, if that student, like I was as a student, can start what they're going to say by paraphrasing what the last student said, it makes a lot easier for them to share. Those practices, really, how I as a teacher reinforce those things with my positive feedback or correct students when they do something wrong.

[00:16:10.380] – Patrick
I learned that those activities and strategies don't go very far without really good instructional practice. And same thing, I can have the greatest asset focus, equity, whatever mindset. But if I step in a classroom, I have to know, how do you do that? And so that's… Those things are important. It's important to come into a classroom with good activities. It's important to come with an asset-focused mindset or whatever you might call it. And it's also really important to have a really good instructional practice. You have to know the how. Theory can only take you so far. The how is that I actually think what really matters in a classroom. Again, that idea of systems equals hope plus repeating is not the same as creating. I think that's in the data and analytics piece, I think that's how we get to the how. I'll even add to that. I think students in our schools were always, as far as learning styles, very diverse, but I think that's very much more apparent in our society now. We really have to develop the instructional agility to meet the needs of all of those students.

[00:17:23.360] – Steve
Coaching has to be a critical element of it as I'm listening to you.

[00:17:27.320] – Patrick
I think so, yeah. Some way we need to find a way to do that efficiently. Yes.

[00:17:32.560] – Steve

Because the teacher needs the feedback as they're looking to develop the skill.

[00:17:39.160] – Patrick
Yeah. The hard thing is, again, I would say as many great things about administrators as I do teachers. It's a lot to ask an administrator to be in charge of running the systems, all of the family engagement stuff that has to happen, supporting teachers as humans, and then supporting them as instructors. I mean, that's a lot of the reason why being an administrator is so hard is we ask them to do too much, I think. Yeah. So I do agree, coaching somehow has to be a part of it. Yes.

[00:18:10.820] – Steve
So talk a little bit about the app that you've developed.

[00:18:16.100] – Patrick
Yeah. And so that is really, again, a lot of learning painfully for me as a coach. Being an instructional coach is hard. It's really there's so many layers of, one, you have to prove yourself and build relationships. People aren't going to listen to somebody that they don't know cares about them. And also, to be an instructional coach, you have to be really good at what you do. And so I struggled as a coach young. And where I had my best experiences as I became an instructional coach was, I think one of the first was – the Gottman study, a lot of people are familiar, PPIS as a 4 to 1, positive to negative interaction ratio. Somebody gave me the idea of just tallying that – P, P, P, N, P, N, and sitting next to my teachers and saying, "Okay, today you were one to one. How'd that feel? How did your students respond?" And having those questions about instructional data. It's so much different if I can ask them those questions and they can share, and then I I can just provide them resources that we can go through with each other. I saw so much growth, and then I was like, well, why can't I do that about everything?

[00:19:37.620] – Patrick
It was so successful. So I went through it. I found data points for all of the eight practices I have mentioned earlier. And then still sitting there tallying on a paper was hard. One day I had the aha, if I could just be tapping these things on my phone, there's a lot of good that could come. And so worked with a friend who's a coder, developed this app where really simply, there's what we call games because it's fun to be sitting in class and be tapping buttons, right? Games for each of those practices. So for example, for positive feedback, There's really just a P and an N button in front of you on your phone, and you just tap P and N every positive and negative interaction. Then what the app does is it calculates those, sends the teacher their exact ratio, one to one, two to one, one to two, whatever it may be. It gives them that data, and then it gives them some what I would call high-quality resources that I've created. For opportunities to respond, you just tap V, G, or W for verbal, gestural or written. Opportunities to respond. The teacher asks the student.

[00:20:49.560] – Patrick
The studies say that you should offer three to five per minute. You had four opportunities to respond per minute. Here's three resources. Planning routines, it creates a grid of the classroom. You just tap on the student and then D for disengaged or E for engaged. Student 1D, student one, D, student two, E, student three, E. At the end, it gives you the exact percentage of students who are engaged in that routine. The RTI triangle tells us 80 to 90% need to be engaged. My favorite one, sorry, I'm probably talking a lot. My favorite one, I think, is the… I think I'm going to do this somewhere last time. The Informed Supervision, it gives you a grid of a square, and you just tap boxes to really quickly build a map of the classroom. So you tap boxes where the desks or groups are. And then you hit go, and the grid disappears, but the map stays there. And then you can just on your phone, trace the

teacher’s path throughout the classroom. And then when you hit done, it screenshots that map with their pattern and emails it to them with resources. So again, the idea is repeating is not the same as creating.

[00:22:04.400] – Patrick
I’m not telling as a coach, I’m not telling a teacher how to teach or saying, this is what you need to do. I’m simply giving them the data and saying, how did that feel? How did your students respond? And here’s some resources with some ideas of how you could refine your practice. And so then, again, acknowledging them as experts, they can go through and decide, what do I need to do that’s best for my students? Because they’re the ones that know, not me as a coach. To summarize, the way I put it is that traditional PD and traditional coaching are wonderful. There’s a lot of great things. But sometimes you can get… If a teacher comes to my course at district office, whatever I say might not even apply to their students. And even if it does and I just tell them what to do, that strips away their personality and creativity. When we sit down together and examine the data and they make those decisions, I’m acknowledging them as an expert. They’re an agent in their own learning, and that’s where really profound change happens.

[00:23:03.580] – Steve
So you’re providing them with the data that you collected in a way that makes it easy for them to analyze and then encouraging them to draw a conclusion from it.

[00:23:16.780] – Patrick
Yeah. Sometimes that takes some questioning and discussion. Then same thing. Sometimes it takes some time for us to look through some resources and have them decide what they’re going to do. But yeah, it’s a pretty It’s a seamless process to me at this point.

[00:23:32.860] – Steve

How do you feel about the word simple?

[00:23:37.740] – Patrick
I use it a lot. You can't expect to do anything that's not simple.

[00:23:45.300] – Steve
People frequently call me simple. They tell me that's one of my specialties. A part that I'm liking here for me is you're working to make the complex simple. Not simple to do, but I think that's what connects back to hope. If I can understand what's happening, then I have the hope that I can change something. But if I can't understand what's happening, my whole classroom world is too complex for me. I'm really not in the position to have hope and make a decision that I can move in a way that makes it better.

[00:24:24.320] – Patrick
Yeah, I love that. The logical next step is not clear when things are too complex It's very complex, right? I have a thing with that idea. And I must have said, my friend who coded the app for me, I must have said the words simple and elegant to him a thousand times. Any time he was like, "How's this, though?" "Can we make it more simple and elegant?" Which is, again, I'll add to that's hard in education because schools are not simple. Kids are not simple, right? It's so diverse.

[00:24:53.240] – Steve
It's a very complicated, complex job.

[00:24:56.380] – Patrick
It is. To make it simple is not easy, which is why we're in the disjointed, I would call it, a little bit of a mess or crisis that we're in now. It's not easy.

[00:25:08.160] – Steve
You aren't making teaching easy. You're making it easier for the teacher to do the analysis and become the decision maker.

You're providing the teacher with information, similar to the Moneyball movie. It's information that became the empowerment.

[00:25:29.200] – Patrick
Yeah, that's a good way to put it. Educators altogether have way too much on their plate, play way too many roles. So making refining their practice simple really is my goal. The other goal is, too, is, again, here's the balance is that, again, talking about how incredible educators are, some people, if you just say, Okay, I'm going to tally P and N, sometimes they're 4 to 1 and they're good. But they're like, well, I want to improve. And so I've got I've really all say I've created that balance, I think, in my resources. When they get that email, there's a webinar of me, an eight-minute webinar of me teaching a class on that practice, which is mostly just first steps with maybe a few deeper ideas. They get it like a one-pager that's like a level one document, I would call it, where it's just five different types of positive feedback and then 10 sentence stems to use, just like that first refinement step. Then the third thing is I've created for each of those practices, I call them Resource Frameworks, where they've got 10 or 12 pretty deep resources that really is an idea for everybody.

[00:26:41.200] – Patrick
Then they also have a document that I call, again, those targeted support strategies. For each of them, there's about 30 targeted support strategies for students with different needs. They're broken up as students with anxiety disorders, students with strong behavior problems, just hard to reach students, and then some general strategies. And so under positive feedback, there's five strategies under each of those categories that you can look for. So it starts really simple, but if you want to get more complicated, and again, those things are pretty organized, where if I'm four to one, I know I jumped to the resource framework, look at the different ideas. It might take 10 or 15 minutes at the most to find

something really helpful. So it’s the balance of simple and complicated.

[00:27:33.260] – Steve
I’ll suggest a word. I’d replace complicated with complex.

[00:27:38.900] – Patrick
Complex, yeah.

[00:27:39.760] – Steve
Okay. And the more complex… If you think about it in sports, the higher level at which I perform, the more complex my game is, the more coaching I need. I need more and more input. A top tennis player is going to have a couple of coaches giving them feedback on all different things. So as the teacher develops his or her skill level, the work they take on becomes more and more complex. And so the need for it, that’s why in my thinking, the further you advance in your teaching career, the more coaching you should receive, which is the opposite of the way most systems work. We go give coaching to the beginning people who are struggling in their learning. But our highest-level performing teachers, they’re the ones working at the most complex level. And so creating opportunities for them to be able to look at that complex work with specific pieces of information becomes the job of the coach. And that’s what I’m hearing you’re working to lay out and make that simpler for the teacher to get the data they need.

[00:28:53.380] – Patrick
Yeah, that is a really good point. And I guess in education, the way I think probably I learned that – I think like leaving the classroom, there was three or four things I was really good at. But again, there’s eight practices. And so I probably was encountered by some teachers who were better at things than I was. And then I’m trying to support them, and that’s hard. As a coach, that’s painful. And so trying to build those refinement moves for any practice has been something that’s been a part of that work, yes.

[00:29:27.940] – Steve
Cool. Well, Patrick, it's a It's been a great conversation. I was looking forward to it, and you delivered the Moneyball.

[00:29:36.480] – Patrick
Yeah, thanks.

[00:29:37.400] – Steve
What's the best way that listeners can follow up, find out more about the work that you're doing, find out more about your app?

[00:29:46.000] – Patrick
Yeah. I mean, the app, it's called Ed Changer Pro. It's on the App Store. So downloading that would be awesome. I just got into LinkedIn, so I've been doing some marketing on LinkedIn for the last week, but I'm posting a bunch of strategies and resources. And if you go YouTube at Ed Changer, all of my webinars are on there and they're free. So that would be a really good spot. In fact, one thing I'll add is that one of my pretty strong and very idealistic beliefs is that sometimes good professional development and coaching is only available to a select few who can have the investment to do it time or money. Small districts sometimes don't have coaches. And so all of my resources really are free online. I have a YouTube channel full of webinars. I have a resource hub on Google Drive that has all those resources I explained, but even included in those resources, on the resource framework, there's a paper monitoring tool for all of the practices. So you can really do everything the app can. It's just pencil and paper. Now, I'll tell you it's worth the money to buy the app because to be able to tap on your phone and send the email is definitely increases your efficiency.

[00:31:01.160] – Patrick
But for anybody who doesn't have that available to them, everything's online and free. Again, all teachers deserve great coaching and support. So yeah, YouTube at Ed Changer, my

name at LinkedIn. And I’d always field an email, especially at this point, pmongrain65@comcast.net.

[00:31:21.300] – Steve
We’ll put all that in the lead-in to the podcast, make it easy for folks to connect with you. Thanks so much, Patrick.

[00:31:27.920] – Patrick
Yeah, thank you, Steve. Appreciate your time.

[00:31:32.020] – Steve
Thanks for listening, folks. I’d love to hear what you’re pondering. You can find me on Twitter or LinkedIn at Steve Barkley, or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.