

Episode 1 Transcript:

Back-to-School: A 2020 Restart.

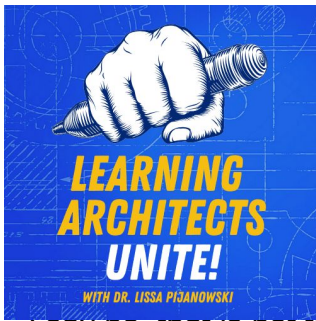
In this episode I will provide an introduction to this new podcast series and discuss key considerations for reopening this Fall.

I have had the great fortune of working with teachers and leaders who are inspirations and making a BIG impact in the lives of children every day. This podcast was born from my Professional Learning Network encouraging me to share ideas and resources with an even broader audience. I am excited about this new adventure and look forward to creating a community of Learning Architects that will UNITE together to create compelling learning environments for the students we serve.

As an educator for almost 30 years, I have seen my fair share of fads, trends, and “latest, greatest” ideas. I still contest that there is no silver bullet. Improvements in education are made by prioritizing the priorities, mobilizing and motivating teams, and by providing clear expectations for the work ahead.

I have served as a teacher, instructional coach, curriculum director, and Director of School Improvement at the GADOE in addition to being an Associate Superintendent for Teaching and Learning in a large GA district. Since leaving public service I have returned to my teaching roots and now coach adults across the U.S. and Canada. I am just as hopeful and passionate about my work as an educator as when I started teaching in 1991.

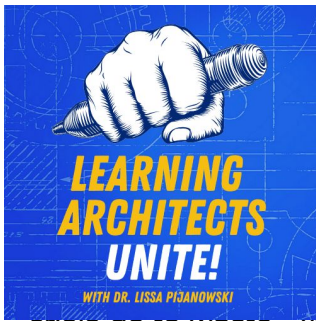
I have come to realize that as teachers and leaders we design everything from classroom environments to daily lessons to lunch schedules. All of these play a role in the student experience. Therefore, I consider us architects of learning. Additionally, I believe that we must strive for deeper learning. We have too many standards and too much testing. It causes us to fall into surface learning where we are trying to “cover” content and not teach for understanding. It is a frustration of many teachers and



leaders today. How do we redesign teaching and learning to make memorable learning happen for all of our students? When I pose this question I often get shoulder shrugs and a feeling that what you want to make are not possible within the system that we work. I say no, that is not true. The only people who can change the system each and every one of you. Every teacher and leader should feel empowered to make the shifts that you know need to happen to fully realize a learner-centered approach. As an architect of learning, you are the designers. You create the blueprint for learning and build from there.

I feel so strongly about this approach that I wrote a book titled Architects of Deeper Learning: Intentional Design for High-Impact Instruction. The book outlines 8 design principles and provides the why and how for creating your own blueprints for deeper learning. While this podcast will sometimes focus on content from the book, I am also an advocate for teaching the whole child and believe that school/classroom climate and social and emotional learning are critical. We cannot have great instruction without building a culture of care for students, staff, and our communities.

The podcast will share evidence-based practices and how-tos as well as things to ponder. I think posing the “what ifs” is helpful. It causes us to reflect and possibly alter our current path forward or try new, innovative solutions that may not have been considered. I will also be interviewing some of the amazing educators that I meet when I am in the field. It is always motivating to learn from others who are doing amazing work on behalf of children. And finally, I will be taking questions from you. I want to know what you want to explore, what questions you have, and how I can support you and your work. Most likely your question is one others have or have not even considered yet. This will help make the podcast timely and focused on what you need as listeners.



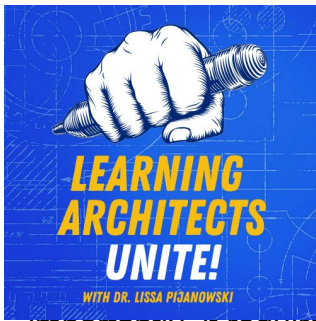
And WOW, what a time to start a podcast! We are in the midst of a global pandemic for COVID-19 where schools closed in March 2020 and teachers turned on a dime to teach remotely. We from this experience and I continue to say we should not let this crisis go to waste. While Spring 2020 was not ideal for teaching and learning, we still learned a great deal about ourselves, our teaching, and how our students learn best. We learned about our own resilience and unwavering commitment to our students and their families. We learned new tools, found new resources, and collaborated with our teams to create learning experiences during a turbulent time.

It was not perfect. It was crisis teaching. Now, we have the opportunity for a restart. While it is still uncertain how schools will reopen this fall with cases on the rise, we have to be prepared for anything!

Brick-to-Click

Some of us will be Brick-to-Click, meaning we will start f2f and may have to close schools if cases are on the rise within our community. In this scenario we will have to take extreme precaution to ensure the safety of staff and students. In a post written by Jennifer Gonzalez titled *Reopening School: What It Might Look Like* she offers a review of our f2f options in more detail. Alternating days, half days, cohorts, one-room schoolhouse, one course at a time and more. All of these options were designed using out-of-the-box thinking. We are not sure how long this pandemic will last and it is causing us to rethink, or redesign ways to still make teaching and learning effective. Cherokee County Schools, where I work part-time as an ASA, has just released their back-to-school guidelines and they are both comprehensive and place student and staff safety above all else. The GA district has also created a thoughtful instructional plan for both f2f and digital learning. As a standard practice, I will always provide links to articles and resources mentioned in the podcast for your reference.

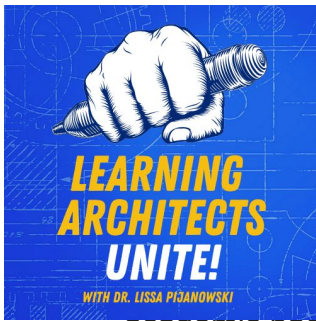
Click to Brick



Some districts may have to start Click (remote) and move to Brick, meaning our community or State may not be ready for a f2f start and we will need to open school remotely. This requires a transition using platforms, resources, and online tools, but more importantly, it requires that we look at our instructional design. In a post I wrote during Spring 2020 I discussed reminders for remote learning. I have adapted these for reopening as well. These are also supported by student feedback on 4 areas during pandemic teaching - technology tools, teacher clarity, social-emotional connection, and student engagement. A survey, conducted by Peter DeWitt shared compelling notions we need to consider. The article is linked on my website and was published by EdWeek on May 26th. As an advocate for student voice I found this to be so informative. In summary students wanted more “live” teaching and fewer powerpoints to read. They want teachers to utilize a variety of apps and tools when assigning content and assignments. Students want clarity - better directions, easier access to teachers, ways to get assistance, and clear communication from the school. The students surveyed also described a desire to go back to school. They missed their friends and the social aspects of learning. They wanted more check-ins to make sure they were on track. And in terms of engagement, they wanted less busy work, more interaction, and new learning opportunities. None of this was surprising to me. While this feedback came during pandemic teaching, I believe these hold true for f2f as well. Student voice is critical. They are partners in the process and should be treated as such.

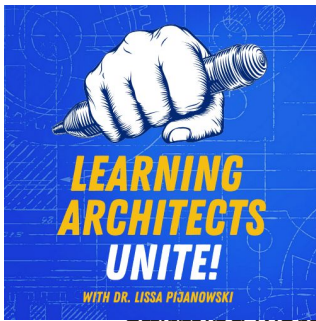
So here are my thoughts about Fall 2020.

- **Connect Through Relationship:** Our first 20 days needs to be about rebuilding community, cultivating relationships, and checking on the health and well-being of our students and families. We have not seen our students since March. We have to recognize that many students have experienced trauma while away from us and focusing on the social and emotional aspect of our work will be critical.
- **Consider Equity, Always:** We must also consider the fact that not all students “connected” with us this Spring, means we have lost time. Some did not have



devices, internet, or stable home environments to support learning. We need to consider equity when planning for learning this fall whether f2f or remote. We need to take time to determine what students may have learning gaps and create a plan for how to adjust the academic pacing to

- **Clarify and Communicate:** We must be crystal clear about our expectations for time, tasks, and engagement. Whatever we do this fall will be redesigned and clarity for teachers and learners alike will be imperative. While we are teaching digital natives, many are not used to learning digitally. So, whether we are Brick-to-Click or Click-to-Brick the rules of engagement need to be communicated early and often. Give permission to think outside the box and know that giving students choice and multiple opportunities to learn and show mastery will be key.
- **Prioritize the Priorities:** We cannot, and should not, try to teach all of the standards outlined on pacing guides / curriculum maps. Even without COVID-19 selecting Focus Standards within each course is critical. From there, our first 20 days needs to include time for remediation and reteaching. This is a time where we must prioritize essential learning and consider ways to teach and learn these standards in a variety of formats.
- **Value Tasks Over Tests:** Whether f2f or digital, offer students the opportunity to engage in solving real-world problems with tasks that challenge their thinking and promote creativity. Have students show what they know through a product or performance. Testing online, while easy to administer, is not the best evidence of student learning when working remotely. I would argue that is the same for f2f learning as well. Always consider the product or performance that will provide the best evidence of student understanding and deep learning.
- **Know That Less Is More:** Teaching and learning a few things more deeply will prove to be better in the long run than trying to cover the curriculum. Consider the breadth and depth of assignments/tasks, reading, asynchronous learning. Make learning fun and don't overload the inbox.



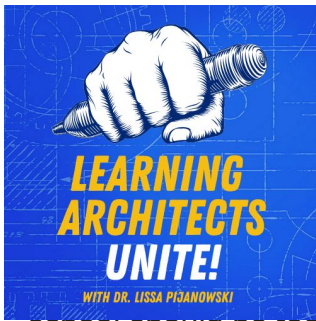
- **Provide Feedback, Not Grades:** Providing students with frequent and timely feedback is more important than grades. They need reassurance they are on the right track and when you miss you walking around the room checking their progress, your affirming words, and the time you take to reteach when they need some help. Students are returning unsure of themselves and will need extra guidance and reassurance that we are getting them back on track.
- **Collaborate To Innovate:** I am always impressed by the ingenuity of educators! This crisis has brought out the best in all of us! Continue to rely on your PLC (Professional Learning Community) and your PLN (Professional Learning Network) to learn new tools, share ideas and solutions, and to create community while dealing with this crisis.
- **Care For Yourself And Others:** Taking care of yourself by setting office hours, taking time for your own family, and practicing self-care is imperative. We have made it through a crazy Spring semester and now need to sustain this effort through the beginning of a new school year. That requires taking care of YOU so you can care for others.

Click by Choice

Finally, a Click by Choice option where a completely virtual offering is needed due to a medical need (physical or mental) or even by personal preference. Some districts are providing virtual options with existing teaching staff, others have hired a private provider or have a state agency that offers virtual learning options.

These three choices are critical to consider. As of today States across our Nation are breaking records for new COVID-19 cases and the opening of school in Fall 2020 is still so uncertain. What I do know is nothing about this is "normal".

Few districts were equipped to shift their entire learning enterprise to remote learning in the Spring. And even those districts were set up for days of digital learning, not weeks



on end while dealing with a global pandemic. None of this is "normal". We must recognize that we have families losing jobs, experiencing stress and anxiety, dealing with ill relatives or because this is not "business as usual" we must not think that school should be too. Let's be gracious to one another, to our students and the families we serve. This experience is causing us to rethink much of what we do in "normal" school and I welcome the challenge. It is my hope that we do reimagine, or redesign, the way we do school. We are overdue for a learning renovation!

However, right now, let's be practical about our approaches and know that focusing on our community's health and well-being is first and foremost. We can make up the time, fill the skill gaps, and teach our hearts out in time. For now, take care of each other, stay well, and know that you are appreciated! Continue to rest and rejuvenate for a new normal. Be patient with district and school leaders making decisions on school opening and know that there are many variables and data points to consider and that right now this is a moving target. Folks are leading with best intentions.

The next episode of Learning Architects UNITE! will be on our first 20 days of Fall 2020. I hope you will join me and thanks for listening.