

## EP 2: KIRAN BIR SETHI

### FINAL TRANSCRIPT

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The time stamps begin at 00:00:00:00 when the guest appears (after our intro reel).

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;00;00;17 - 00;00;24;28

Ooh. That's a good way to start. You know, it's interesting you're asking me this because I've actually gone back into the class after a long time. You know, I used to teach full time and then subsequently kind of, you know, stepped back a little bit. But in the last month or so, I've kind of ventured back in with the youngest children.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;00;25;13 - 00;00;54;12

I've wanted to start my story how I started it 21 years ago. So, I've kind of been meeting my these young ones and completely gobsmacked by how things have changed, you know, saying, okay, the fact that 21 years ago I remember thinking that awareness was my greatest ingredient in the learnings. I mean, my children were coming from this fake sort of safe and cloistered ways.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;00;54;12 - 00;01;09;22

And I would come and think, Oh, my God, you have to know what the world is about. And let's just let's introduce the world to you. And now I don't have to do that. They're coming. And I'm talking about five, six and seven year olds right now with an awareness of the world.

Christian (co-host)

00;01;10;08 - 00;01;17;28

And so now can you can you just mention what you mean by awareness of the world? Because in those 20 years, what does that mean?

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;01;18;11 - 00;01;50;18

I remember like in my very first batch, my children came from, you know, little babies. But, you know, even to understand what in the world was and you know, what, what, what it's even just global conversations and what is happening or even things like in the city, you know, if they hadn't even traveled from one part of the city to the other part of the city, simply talking about travel, you know, travel internally, travel with the mind, travel physically.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;01;51;07 - 00;02;14;28

And so a lot of my first ten years of my first batch is really about introducing them to this wonderful thing about, you know, the world and we would travel to see little places and we would go and visit people today. Today, I mean, the last month or so, I've been meeting these children, saying, "Oh, my god, they are so aware."

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;02;15;25 - 00;02;38;14

And then one it and it did do things to me. I sort of step back and said, “What do I have to do now?” It's not about everything outside. It is the inside. It is the ability to slow down. And suddenly, from looking at what the purpose of what children should engage with, was the slowing down.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;02;38;29 - 00;03;13;19

And it is my God, that's really the need just to listen a bit more, just to engage with attention and with interest. And I realized and this possibly is true more of the urban schools that the last year specifically because we went online and the whole world went online, I figured out that children can learn about things online, but to learn about yourself, you need each other. And that understanding of slowing down and listening sort of recalibrated what we needed to do.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;03;13;26 - 00;03;40;19

So, does not about do you know these? Do you know that? Oh my God, we were doing gravity. And then you. Okay, can we slow down? And so it's interesting, Christian, in the last two months, we've kind of tried to kind of re-imagine what a day should look like, what the experience should look like. And a lot of it is decluttering, not just the many things, but slowing down and kind of listening.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;03;40;19 - 00;04;03;06\

So, I think that was a wonderful thing. So, every day, in fact, just today I met my youngest and I was curious about what they thought was the most difficult job in the world. So, I'm going to ask, what do you think is the most difficult job? And so one said the army, one said garbage cleanup. And then one a teacher. And I said, okay, well, I do think teaching is a difficult job.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;04;03;06 - 00;04;34;21

So, you know, so they started talking to me about that. So I think for me, I've always thought that the teacher's biggest superpower is the act of listening. And I'm putting that on and venturing in and being super curious about, “What do I need to learn now about my child, about this learner?” So, I think my curiosity every single day is awakened by “Oh, after 20 odd years how little I know!”

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;04;34;21 - 00;05;00;08

I have to go back into that so it's super exciting because I think this is one space you never will have the answer. You'll never, ever know. And if that curiosity stays present, I think it will just surprise you with stuff. So I think for me, I'm super grateful to have the opportunity to be surprised every day.

Christian (co-host)

00;05;02;11 - 00;05;26;15

I'm just so captivated, one by an incredibly experienced educator getting to a point and finding joy in not knowing, the impossibility of knowing, but actually seeing that as an invitation, a gift. How do young people slow down to be curious, how does an adult create space, not clutter?

Christian (co-host)

00;05;27;09 - 00;05;47;05

What should a day in the life be for a group of, not just children in general, but unique, specific groups? And how do you design with that intent? So a lot of things you're making me ponder about, but I know Russ has got questions as well, but thank you. What a great start.

Russ (co-host)

00;05;47;05 - 00;06;11;11

As you moved back into the classroom, what was the **skill** -- and you said it changed a lot from your 21 years -- what skill do you feel is essential for an educator moving into, you know, into teaching or an aspiring teacher or, you know, someone who's interested in getting into the profession?

Russ (co-host)

00;06;11;11 - 00;06;16;12

What would you say is that is an essential skill where we're at in education right now?

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;06;17;05 - 00;06;44;10

Yeah, I think everything has changed, right? I mean, we've always known that. Yes. In some ways the content was never king and I think we always knew it, but we were not able to challenge it the way we should. And there was always this kind of fear that came into it, into the planning, into the way that one would address the tension between content and character, you know, and it was always I mean, what should we do?

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;06;44;11 - 00;07;04;07

Should we, you know, it was always this I would hear, but where is the time? Where is the time? You know, I have to teach quadratic equation or do I have to be educated? I can do both. So, I think that's the I thinking over the years, it's just become increasingly clear that, you know, like I was just mentioning, there's a Khan Academy for everything.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;07;04;07 - 00;07;26;19

But, you know what? What will you do when you're when you're in front? And are you now being worthy of being in front of a child? You know, I have learned this over the years that what you might not listen to, they will always mimic you and now you are worthy of being mimicked. Are you presenting yourself in the manner that you are being everything that you're saying?

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;07;27;08 - 00;07;52;07

Right. I often found the disconnect between saying and talking about values and acceptance, but your being very differently. So, I think is the teachers, the skills and being the authenticity in who you are. And to remind yourself that of being worthy to be in front of children because I think COVID has basically busted everything else.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;07;52;07 - 00;08;12;26

I mean you can get everything else externally, but, I keep telling teachers that you are a walking, talking curriculum. It's you. Everything else is secondary. You know, the way that you will smile, the way you will lead in, the way in which you will respond to justice in the classroom. What does that about being fair?

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;08;13;09 - 00;08;31;08

You know, they are learning what you are not teaching them. You know, they're learning from everything else they seeing. And then they kind of figured this is the way the world functions, is what fairness looks like or justice looks like or beauty looks like or kindness, looks like. And I think that's going to be the biggest curriculum ,that is possibly the greatest curriculum.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;08;31;08 - 00;08;51;07

And I think with teachers now, if one can really understand that space that you are gifted in with the child, what an enormous opportunity. And if you can just be what you are saying, hey, half the job is done.

Christian (co-host)

00;08;52;22 - 00;09;20;00

Kiran, do you think that also means we're changing the expectation of how a teacher interacts with her peers or his peers, how educators come to a place called school, their classroom, the faculty lounge, that walk the campus. Does that mean in order to do that, they have to also do that with one another, for one another?

Christian (co-host)

00;09;20;10 - 00;09;31;23

And if so, tell me about what you see possible or needed when it comes to educators being part of a community in addition to the privilege of working with young people.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;09;32;00 - 00;09;56;03

I love that question. You know, I often found that all schools and possibly every school that I've gone to has a staff room. And if I asked you to reimagine that, that the whole school is a staffroom, what a different way to walk into a space. Right? And

architecturally, the school should engage the ability for you to respond to each other in multiple ways and question you.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;09;56;03 - 00;10;19;15

Of course, in Riverside we have a little staff room. We have no principal's cabin, we have no office in a manner that keeps a child away from us. So, for many teachers, it can be intimidating. I remember there was a teacher who joined me who'd come from a very traditional army school and she came to me and said, "Where do I have my cup of tea? This is too much. You're asking me to do dinner with the children all the time. I need my space."

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;10;19;26 - 00;10;36;16

And I started realizing whilst yes, I think she needs her cup of tea and she can go to maybe a quieter corner, but I do want a door to close with my child. You know, I cannot say, "Please be brave. Be wonderful." And then the first chance I get to run into the staff room and close the door.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;10;37;12 - 00;10;57;11

Right? So, I think in many ways we challenged that right from the beginning when I designed the school and I realized what an opportunity to sit under a tree. The moment they see you're accessible and you're visible, I kid you not, the safety of all people in the communities is strengthened.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;10;57;11 - 00;11;19;02

I mean, I'm just going to talk about the global concern around bullying. Right. We've talked about again and again, why are we still talking about and still creating spaces that are not safe? Right. So architecturally, a space can provide that transparency and safety for your children because the moment they say they're going to learn better, it's such a no-brainer.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;11;19;02 - 00;11;46;11

Right? And yet we're expecting children to learn with spaces that are not safe. So, one of those learnings I had was when architecturally with design transparency became a big thing as you see this glass. So, I can literally sit in any space and see across in many ways and gives a subtle understanding that I'm safe. So, for children, for the team, so I feel that's a massive responsibility for a school.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;11;46;22 - 00;12;06;29

You know, we keep thinking academic results is one, but academic results is an outcome of how safe I feel emotionally, not just physically, but emotionally in the space, even for

the adults. I feel that for my team, for them to feel safety and I push that a little bit more, especially in places about you have to have an inclusive space.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;12;07;22 - 00;12;34;23

For me at Riverside, I aim to have a little mini-India, so it fits all communities, all beliefs, religious affiliations, all demographics, they all are present here. So, you have a mini India. So I keep telling my children that, you know, you're not seeing what is, you're seeing what can be. So, when you see a space that you can talk about what can be, then you can mimic it wherever you go.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;12;35;09 - 00;13;04;20

I wish for you great success, but that could be limited if it doesn't make spaces that are more just and beautiful and equitable, right? So, I keep thinking of responsibilities beyond just, okay, we're like a school, etc. but can we create a space of what can be? So, when they see all my teachers from different faiths and different communities and different demographics, doctor's children from various, I mean, we have 25% who learn completely free till the other end of the spectrum.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;13;04;20 - 00;13;27;11

We have special needs. We have all of that. I would love that my children pick that up as one of the key ingredients of their educational experience of Riverside. So, it works for all, Christian. It just works for all. I can't think of a better reason to have that space designed for inclusion.

**Russ (co-host)**

00;13;27;11 - 00;13;48;27

Kiran, you mentioned India. So, let's take a take a look at the local context. And can you tell us and the viewers and the listeners a little about Riverside, a little about the school, the aims and ambitions of the school, and where in the context of education is it regionally or nationally, how Riverside fits into the jigsaw [puzzle].

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;13;49;14 - 00;14;12;17

When Riverside legacy started 21 years ago, in fact, in my home and I chose to take my son out of school. I'm actually a designer by profession for those who are listening, not an interior designer, but a visual communicator. I graduated from the inside as a visual communicator, ran a wonderful design firm with just me and another designer.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;14;12;23 - 00;14;43;04

So, we call it Garden City and Associates. It was me and another woman and oh, it was beautiful gardens and restaurants and teams, etc. Then I became a mother and my whole life changed. And I think my introduction of what design can be really was when I

thought of education. So, 21 years ago we started. And I think in terms of significance, it is on the banks of the Southern Cathedral and that is a river where Mahatma Gandhi started with the Salt March.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;14;43;11 - 00;15;18;08

So, in many ways, I am such a fan and to me that umbrella under which I have to own up to my responsibility of being the change is kind of terrible because my school is diagonally opposite his ashram when he started his freedom movement. So symbolically it's a massive sort of moment for me, but otherwise I think Riverside, I think, started as I have to tell you honestly, when I started, it was not to change education.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;15;18;12 - 00;15;38;13

I didn't have grand plans. It was it was a very small story of a mother. So, I didn't have the burden of saying, "Oh, my God, I'm changing education!", you know? So, it was a piece I could take and I wanted to do just so that piece. I think as we grew, we started learning more and we started understanding more stuff, we started doing more.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;15;38;28 - 00;16;09;16

So, I think Riverside was able to do two things. One is provide an opportunity to influence the language of education in our own city. First, because 21 years ago, I don't think there were many schools challenging the so-called traditional norm. Right? I think now I would like to say that because of Riverside, there are many more schools that are offering this idea of agency for children as norm. It's not a USP or a special thing.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;16;09;16 - 00;16;28;18

So, I think we did that. But over the 20 years, I think we also, I hope, share the fact that we're not the best school in the world, but the best school for the world. So, in that we did approach, which was making sure the Riverside School became an object, engage with the community.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;16;28;29 - 00;16;48;19

So in 2007, we started an initiative to make cities child friendly. So, this was not only for Riverside. You see, typically schools say, I do a damn good job for the kids who pay me or were in my school. Right, right? How do you expand the notion that you are a lighthouse for a community and that your responsibility is beyond?

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;16;49;02 - 00;17;23;26

So, in this act of blurring the boundaries, we ventured into the community. We got a chance to work with the municipality, the police, the citizens, the industry, and work on making cities child friendly, right? So, we closed down the busy street for traffic, make it

a piece of childhood many things to do ApRoch which is that initiative started to it is celebrating 15 years I mean that's significant, Then in 2009 we started Design for Change again to bring this idea of agency in a simple framework.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;17;24;07 - 00;17;39;14

You know, a lot of people said, “Kiran, we love what you're doing. How do we do it?” It's difficult to scale content. It's super easy to scale context, right? And the framework. Simple. So we created the framework of “Feel. Imagine. Do.”

**Christian (co-host)**

00;17;39;23 - 00;17;44;13

Can you just pause in that for a second, Kiran, to talk more about that idea of why scale in context is needed and easy.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;17;46;11 - 00;18;04;11

And is it? Yeah, I keep thinking of it. All the initiatives, you know, when you start off with the with the curriculum, and then you have to train on the curriculum and then you have books to read and then you have trainings to do. So, it becomes heavy and in that heaviness the scale becomes limited.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;18;04;27 - 00;18;31;09

The moment we made a framework and said, “Wherever you are in the world, a child has a heart, a mind, an ability to act and do right. And it can only be true if you select what bothers you in your place.” So, coming to your question about project-based learning, because I would challenge that a bit because most often then an adult would come in and say, “Let's do projects, let us change this.”

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;18;31;09 - 00;18;54;08

You know, it was never the child's truth. Suddenly the framework handed it over to the child and said, “With this simple act of trust in listening, you are the protagonist in the story, right?” And it completely morphed from this and then offered the “I CAN”, right? So, in 2009 we started in India thinking, “Oh, it'll be terrific, I'll run it in India.”

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;18;54;23 - 00;19;15;05

I had no clue that it would go global. And I'm so grateful to be dead wrong. Right? And it when global and suddenly I saw the need and the gap, people from around the world were saying, “Oh, we love this. It's so simple. Can we do it?” But we just put it open source online and now we're in 63 countries.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;19;15;21 - 00;19;43;29

So Riverside is going deep and we take this and take it to wide. So, we realize that excellence is an act of depth and curiosity and consistent, you know, sort of understanding. But it's very important for us to take it and take it wide. So, we went through with and then our most recent venture is the Riverside Learning Center to offer other schools to become "I CAN" schools.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;19;43;29 - 00;20;07;16

So that's been the trajectory of 21 years. But it started as a mother saying, "Oh my God, I can't help my son." Going into this, did you know when we started that we would be able to influence a conversation, will be able to offer an idea, we'd be able to take something to the world and have more children, experience what my son couldn't when he was six more?

**Russ (co-host)**

00;20;12;00 - 00;20;51;11

Riverside's obviously making some great, great waves in terms of what you said, the TEDx talk and the 63 countries, which is incredible. You've obviously managed to shake the system and a lot of questions we get, whether it's THINK Global School or the THINK Learning Studio, just people who Christian and I come into contact with. We'll talk a lot about the system and a lot of come and I was actually just speaking to someone today who who commented that the system actually, I don't know if I'd personally I was deep as this, but the system repels innovation. In terms of the system, how resistant to change? Are we overstating it? Or is the system very deep rooted?

**Russ (co-host)**

00;20;51;11 - 00;21;14;11

And does it take someone like yourself who's going to put your heart and soul into this project to really change it? It can't be a kind of fly-by-night project. It has to be deep, it has to be meaningful. So, I guess in a roundabout way, I'm asking how resistant do you think this system is, this kind of Victorian, this exam-based system?

**Russ (co-host)**

00;21;14;15 - 00;21;22;20Is it

Is it possible to change or are we dealing with just little sparks of light like Riverside? Or do you hope that a greater change?

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;21;22;20 - 00;21;45;01

Kind of you know, in all fairness, I have had the opportunity to now see schools across the world. It's not an Indian idea. It is a global phenomenon that schools are designed to resist change. And the reason I see this is deep humility is because everybody and his uncle is coming to school and saying, "I have the idea to change the world."

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;21;45;12 - 00;22;03;15

So, I found that very often there's a certain fatigue that comes in a school. This is how much can I keep being nimble? You know, there's a certain stability that I need. You can come and say, "Oh, this is the program that is going, and then I'm out after two years, another one will come with, 'This is my idea'."

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;22;03;15 - 00;22;36;29

So over time, I have found that the schools are basically pushing back and saying, "I also have a responsibility. I need to get out, shouldn't do whatever for the lack of anything, be academically sound, whatever that means. I mean, that's a whole different conversation by itself. So that's being over time, this fatigue, this idea of saying that there is this constant shift and change that happens, whether that policy level, whether it is at a governmental level, whether it is at an innovation level.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;22;36;29 - 00;22;58;19

But the ones that have stuck, I have to say, I just give you a small example of [???]. What an outstanding innovation right to get and it had nothing to do with the academics; it had nothing to do with the pedagogical input. But the midday meal offering subsidized meals or free meals was the single most transformative innovation that was about equity.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;22;58;23 - 00;23;22;23

And they got everybody back into school. Think about that. That was just outstanding. Right? So I think in many ways, schools are also figuring out what does it mean to respond to societal needs. Unfortunately, whether you like it or not, your admissions into colleges are shaped by what society sees an engineer or a doctor or a manager are going to be valued.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;23;23;17 - 00;23;50;00

But I have to say, in 20 years I've become more optimistic. And we now remember there was a time when there was massive resistance. You know, I can I mean, even after Riverside, when I started, there must have been like 25 children who joined. And I'm telling you that at least 20 of the parents were thinking: listen, we go to her for one or two years in school. And I didn't care; I just needed children.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;23;50;00 - 00;24;20;20

And they all finally graduated from Riverside. Right? But we also have to show confidence to the parents. That said, this matters. The narratives have to change. The idea of teacher value has to change. Systemic changes have to happen. But in 20 years it's slowly pushing it. We've got so many great innovations happening across the world that are around teacher pedagogy, around technology, in education, around nutrition, and wellbeing.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;24;21;03 - 00;24;56;04

So I think but I think what we you do a better job is highlighting these practices and codifying them. Yeah. So I think one of the things that I've done in the last five years and said that if I can identify what works codified and then amplified, that's my responsibility. If I can codify with not codifying practice. We've got fantastic schools, but it's like those recipes that get lost is like the maharajah recipe today I can still cook is because somebody took the effort of putting it into a recipe.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;24;56;19 - 00;25;23;02

We're not doing that enough. And I would urge these wonderful schools across the world not just to document practices in India as independent pieces or disagree reading project or disagree not project. You have to codify how to build culture. And over the last six years we've actually codified how do you take values, take design thinking, processes, that, and then time-tabling.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;25;23;02 - 00;25;31;03

Because if it's not in the timetable, it is not going to happen. All the intentions in the world doesn't change it.

Christian (co-host)

00;25;31;24 - 00;25;56;26

You've talked about architecture, which in its own right can be a fascinating conversation about just how spaces can invite certain behaviors or awareness or just a sense of curiosity. But when you talk about time, in some respects it's the one design challenge that most schools never take on. It's almost as if we see time is fixed. There's a morning, lunch, and afternoon classes.

Christian (co-host)

00;25;56;26 - 00;26;25;22

They're in blocks of time. There's a beginning of the school year, an end of the school year. And there's a sense that within nine months we learn here and we get to there and we're done, we move on. And but in the other hand, we see learning is not fixed, that it's almost, I want to say random, but it's almost built into a lot of schools that time stays permanent and the learning outcome is we hope every kid gets there but it's not a guarantee was what I'm hearing in some respects in your philosophy, your spirit, your stories.

Christian (co-host)

00;26;25;22 - 00;26;47;17

And as Russ and I both are aware of, just on so many different levels, Designed For Change as a global program and Riverside as a single school, the kind of impact you made. But it seems like within it, you must constantly think about how can time be an ally and how can we assume learning can be accomplished in an infinite array of ways.

Christian (co-host)

00;26;47;24 - 00;26;57;19

So, would you talk a little bit about the relationship between time, space, flow, awareness, patience, whatever you want to do or hours of the day and learning per kid or per community?

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;26;57;26 - 00;27;22;09

I just actually capture that entire thing. It was of time. And this constant that, you know, it takes time if, you know, we have to we can't do everything because it takes time and I'm going to and I'm going to just share that time like you said, can be your biggest ally if and only if you invite the voice of whoever.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;27;22;16 - 00;27;46;20

I mean, like in this case, a child is used right in this conversation. So, you don't design for but you design with all of us doing the design principles. Right? The problem is there's a middle if I'm taking time to talk with you and co-create, something would do. It takes time, but it's actually the reverse. You're gaining time because then that journey of who you're walking with, you're not pulling and pushing them on that journey.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;27;46;28 - 00;28;06;01

You're walking together. So, you cover more time. It's the simple act of time. Trying to get a child to tie a shoelace. The first week is going to be an hour and they will struggle and with our shoelace, everything but you know then that after that first week they're going to be tying somebody else's shoelace. That's what we have to have confidence with.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;28;06;15 - 00;28;32;03

So invariably when I hear where the time or how do I have an and why would I engage? So, we then get comfortable with compliance and then we confuse obedience with respect is so much of it that comes back to the fact that when children are obedient and they're listening to us, and this time, because obedience is an act of power, it is you keep quiet and I will tell you, I do.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;28;32;06 - 00;29;06;15

It's a passive act that respect. Oh, it takes you to listen and have a bit of shift. But then the ownership that comes, you actually gain time, you know, you make up. So that's what I have realized. And the school that we're working with and it's shifting the way they understand the timetable and the time as and as an ally, they've started seeing the shift and happens with that little 20 minutes in the 20 minutes that if you just open up that space for relevance for relationships and reflection, suddenly.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;29;06;26 - 00;29;19;20

So and this has been I think education's greatest challenge harnessing and leveraging time.

Christian (co-host)

00;29;20;03 - 00;29;38;25

Russ, I'm curious. I love to hear you weigh in on this with Kiran. When THINK Global School first started, it obviously like Riverside was this incredible invitation to a different way for school. For Riverside it might have been the community, it might have been design thinking, it might have been a young person has voice.

Christian (co-host)

00;29;38;25 - 00;30;05;05

For THINK Global School, it might have been see the world experience, dove into communities far and wide, and again mini-India at Riverside but also many worlds that THINK Global School is in. So I'm wondering in terms of time as you went deeper in and shifted from an IB curriculum, which is very time-focused, it's very much linear, there's an expected mission of you'll be here at this point and then let go and move entirely into project-based learning just as an easy way to name sort of the collective.

Christian (co-host)

00;30;05;13 - 00;30;32;07

But also you had to rethink time and rethink pace and energy and getting lost as much as finding clarity. So, I'm wondering what the experience was like for you and THINK Global colleagues. And then Kiran, I'm curious what you hear with Russ' ideas and what that means for others who may be thinking about we're here and we have a sort of a predictable week or we know that a kid in first grade has to accomplish this before they move to second or whatever it is. And so we don't have time or we don't know how to add something.

Christian (co-host)

00;30;32;07 - 00;30;38;20

So, Russ, what was it like for you all? And Kiran, what does it bring up when you hear him?

Russ (co-host)

00;30;40;05 - 00;31;00;06

Well, initially it was shock. You know, when it was announced that we were going to shift from IB to Changemaker, there was a deep shock within the staff, you know? How is this going to happen? How is this going to look? Because what you have to remember is through university, we're only prepared for school to look one way.

Russ (co-host)

00;31;00;23 - 00;31;36;26

You are a silo teacher, you are a content deliverer. You are at the mercy of time. And then all of a sudden as Kiran said, you're moving into things like context being considered. It said you are taking students. All of a sudden you are negotiating time. As Kiran said, you know, this idea that you are preparing students, which is very time consuming when we actually teach project-based or place-based learning, but we gain it back in later terms when the students have mastered the flow of work, the portfolios, design, thinking, project-based learning, however, we going to define that.

Russ (co-host)

00;31;37;10 - 00;32;02;12

So, I think it was shock initially. I think there was a rite of passage that we all went through when we had to abandon our old curriculums, which, you know, a lot of work. And this is where I think a lot of teachers will feel the pain when they shift into different curriculum models. You have to kind of abandon or, you know, regard in traditional teaching and traditional assessment you've bill and that's hard and I think we have to humanize that.

Russ (co-host)

00;32;02;14 - 00;32;30;28

You know I think we have to be very careful when we push for change because it is hard. You're pushing against the system that no one's prepared for through training and university. You're pushing it. You're basically telling people everything they've done is and it needs to be changed. And then you've got to have, I think, great compassion and great care, and then you've got to give them a route filled with, you know, professional development opportunities, great leadership as obviously caring sharing through Riverside.

Russ (co-host)

00;32;30;28 - 00;32;44;03

You need that. You need good guides, good mentors. So, I think it's a very complicated package. But ultimately, as you've seen, as we're seeing now with this Eiverside, hopefully TGS is an example. It is possible.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;32;45;24 - 00;33;11;17

Yes. I think we have to build a culture of being agile and I think very often schools should be safe. You know, it worked last year. Why should we change it? It worked two years ago. Why should we change it? Right. And to start with, why every year is a task because it's so much easier to say that's how it's done, not this is why it's done.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;33;12;02 - 00;33;45;04

So to revisit and to reestablish the reasons for something to exist today, not what it started ten years ago, because traditions have to serve the people today. Right? Well, that rituals are good and stories are good. They must serve the user today. But to create a culture

where that where you're agile and change is good takes time again and it takes reiterating and it takes like says it needs a lot of patience.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;33;45;17 - 00;34;09;02

You need to address the multiple concerns and it's all so easy to go and do I told you to do this morning it's so easy. And you have to reengage your friends from that and invite them in. I kid you that to get an idea and take an idea and make it a process. It is the hardest thing in the world.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;34;09;19 - 00;34;31;28

I'm telling you, this is an idea dyed in the wool. Everybody has an idea to convert into a process so that it finally gets to the timetable. That's the challenge most leaders don't want to do because it is really hard. It means to invite it. So if, if at all, you want to move away from the imposition and I'm posing this to you and I don't get what you're saying.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;34;32;04 - 00;34;52;07

You just do it. There's so many red flags in that. But if you want to get them to believe in it, then you need to slow down. You need to reiterate, you need to do it again. Again, you need to take little bits and pieces. You need to then refine, you need to iterate. It's not easy for leadership to do that.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;34;52;07 - 00;35;15;15

And therefore schools then get dusty and they settle and it doesn't work. Right. But to build a culture of agile thinking iteration is a massive leadership challenge. So I would say, but if you do that, it is incredible what your teams can achieve.

**Russ (co-host)**

00;35;18;00 - 00;35;37;07

That segues perfectly into my next question which was about leadership. Where do you draw inspiration, Kiran, for your leadership style and how you conduct yourself as a leader? Where do you draw inspiration from? Any particular reading, any particular people that you look to inspire? Yeah, inspiration and leadership.

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;35;38;20 - 00;36;04;24

You know, I think for me, I have multiple places where I get a constant surge of inspiration. But a couple of things that have stayed constant is Mahatma Gandhi. I think for me the idea of stamina, massive, I think leadership, which we think is only about talent or passion, it is about stamina, it is stamina to stay the long story, right?

**Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)**

00;36;04;24 - 00;36;21;25

So, for me to get that from him and I keep going back when I sometimes get tired and I think to myself that, oh my God, I'm so fatigued. What's happening? I have got to use cutouts [of Ghandi] in the school at different places. So, I just stand in front of and say, "My God, I have to do one day up in the energy."

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;36;22;12 - 00;36;54;14

We have to do it. So, you know, I mean, if I keep thinking to myself, what am I crying about? What am I worried about? This man did it at a time when there was no concept of freedom, the audacity of his ideas, and his belief and his ability to stay true. I mean, what am I talking about? So, I think sometimes when I get fatigued, I get stamina and that the moral authority that's something I really got from the way of his leadership was a moral authority.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;36;54;21 - 00;37;22;10

Position authority is useless. I can have this big title. It says Principal at Riverside. It would mean nothing if I didn't have more. And so I think for me, again, this was a big, big inspiration. And I think for me, I was very, very lucky. And I have to say that to have grown up around very wonderful examples of leadership within which was my parents.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;37;22;10 - 00;37;47;22

I'm married to a world champion in billiards, a nine-time world champion. So, my husband, again, excellence. The idea of what excellence means, because that is again, poorly understood. You know, we think about outcomes and we think about things getting done. Excellence is a pursuit and you have to have persistence and stamina to achieve excellence. You have to have that curiosity and relentless interest. So I think from him I got excellence.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;37;48;06 - 00;38;12;04

I think for me the idea of joy, that's a big one. You know, I don't think leaders often bring joy into the work. We bring seriousness and we bring a lot of effort. But joy, I think, for me, is a massive ingredient to stay useful to your team. Otherwise, you're never useful to your team. If you're not joyful, you are abusing what you are doing.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;38;12;05 - 00;38;38;26

So I think for me, joy comes from my own children and from my the work I do. So I think design thinking was massive for me. The idea of empathy, starting with the process in the way I would look at not problem solving but opportunity, discovery or solution discovery. So, for me, I love the idea that I would look at something and not think of it as a problem, but as an opportunity.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;38;39;06 - 00;39;07;03

And for me, that was a massive leadership mindset to create, so stress went down, the ability to co-create was easy, empathy was the starting point. So those were just my own education, training me to be able to build a mindset that would be opportune. I mean, solution-focused. Yeah. And anything can give you inspiration. Every single day you see some of these and my God, that was awesome.

Christian (co-host)

00;39;11;07 - 00;39;29;19

Kiran, first of all, having been on campus and seeing the cutouts of Gandhi, you know, on campus and it is a real thing and it's not just a thing on the wall. It's a living, breathing part of what the school represents and what it is curious about.

Christian (co-host)

00;39;29;19 - 00;39;58;02

And you, you are joy. I mean, I've never doubted that the joy is just always present with you. It's not something you rise to the occasion, you just are. But I also know that must take energy. There must be days where you know it, but you don't feel it because you know, life is complicated and you have created a school and a community and methodologies and programs that people believe so much in that they're willing to fly across the world just to be present, just to visit.

Christian (co-host)

00;39;58;13 - 00;40;25;08

They are willing to rethink their own schools like you have created one of these communities and journeys, I think, for many people. So I want to kind of reverse that a little bit. If you were given an opportunity privately, just you yourself, the opportunity to leave Riverside for a year, no responsibility to be on a keynote stage, no res responsibility or further DFC and support all the chapters around the world.

Christian (co-host)

00;40;25;19 - 00;40;53;20

But just Kiran as a person got to spend a year in another organization, another community of any kind. It could be education based. It does not have to be. It could be one that no one's ever heard about. It could be something provocative and grand that everyone thinks about. Where would you spend a year so that you, Kiran, could simply be curious, could grow, could be confused and lost, but develop?

Christian (co-host)

00;40;54;00 - 00;41;07;06

I'm just wondering, where would you go if you had a gift of a year and could just temporarily pause all of the joy and responsibility that comes with serving multiple organizations and a diverse community?

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;41;07;06 - 00;41;09;10

I've got three places I'd love to go.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;41;10;17 - 00;41;47;21

All right. One, an archeological dig. Oh, possibly Egypt or, you know, Machu Picchu or something. But I'm so curious about where we came from and what the stories were. So I would love to just dig quietly with a hat and not worry about dying and just, you know, slowly take away the sand and discover something. So that would be super interesting for me and just have the patience and slowing down because my life has just been so full and outwardly I would love this to be this.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;41;47;22 - 00;42;28;08

Then just for sheer inspiration: Cirque du Soleil. Well, I would go to them and figure out how they do what they do. It is madness. I would love to swim because I've never had that level of fitness, that level of, you know, body in, you know, the challenge. My body. I've never done what's how to do that it gets used to get don't do that trapeze action do those massive throws.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;42;28;08 - 00;42;44;23

The third, if I had my chance I would be in Tuscany drinking wine. And not think about anything. Get some cheese and get some wine.

Christian (co-host)

00;42;52;14 - 00;43;07;24

I would I would love a version where you had a three year sabbatical. You spend one year in archeological dig and then a year at Cirque du Soleil and then a year just drinking wine or any order.

Christian (co-host)

00;43;07;24 - 00;43;29;00

I don't know if you know and know this, but there's a wonderful little community in Mexico called San Pancho. It's sometimes referred to as San Francisco. San Pancho is near Puerto Vallarta. There is actually a circus called Circo de los Ninos, and it is a children's circus.

Christian (co-host)

00;43;29;09 - 00;43;51;27

I need you at some point in time to find an excuse to get here. One of the founders of Cirque du Soleil was visiting the community, and there was a local like basically a library that's created these great little community programs and young people and residents and visitors coming together and doing incredible things. But they would of en offer these little programs like little an hour of drawing on the sidewalk, a little thing like that.

Christian (co-host)

00;43;52;06 - 00;44;12;21

And this gentleman who was visiting the community was really, you know, just on vacation, but often said, well, I will teach a little thing, a little, you know, a little circus thing. And it grew and grew and grew to the point. Now it's this remarkable program where young kids from the age of four all the way through 18 or 19 learn the circus arts from the Cirque du Soleil methodology.

Christian (co-host)

00;44;12;21 - 00;44;38;16

And quite literally, some of the performers come. It is mind-boggling, but it also is the most precious, beautiful expression of when families just come see their child at seven or 12 or 15, take the next step in that leap of faith or that creative risk. If you ever get a chance to go to San Poncho and see Circos de los Ninos, it will just feel like a lovely cousin of Riverside.

Christian (co-host)

00;44;38;16 - 00;44;42;01

And but also maybe it's an entry. And who knows?

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;44;43;00 - 00;44;47;09

Actors, magicians, maul, you know, those people just are just going to.

Christian (co-host)

00;44;49;26 - 00;45;16;26

I'm wondering, Russ, what's on your mind? You and I talk a lot about how to create the conditions for educators to step into what may be in their heart or what they know is possible.

Christian (co-host)

00;45;16;26 - 00;45;39;19

But either the system or just their training or maybe just the timetable, does it yet allow? And so they're curious about how can we you know, help young people do really interesting things out in the real world or how can we solve challenges that the future needs? Or how can we just be more creative and joyful? Kiran, to your point, and so that we do wonder a lot about just how do you help educators continue their journey

Christian (co-host)

00;45;39;19 - 00;46;01;07

Not so much stop doing what they know, but almost honoring what they know is true. But then being able to respond differently and being agile and really trusting a young person's curiosity. Russell, we talk a lot about that. What are you curious about that you know, exists within Riverside or you wonder what Kiran, you know, might offer, but what?

Russ (co-host)

00;46;03;06 - 00;46;46;15

Yeah, I think for me, Kiran, the big elephant in the room at the moment within education is this huge teacher shortage the we're potentially facing. It seems to be a global phenomenon even though news is coming out UK, US, Australia. But it seems to be more global than that. The idea that the profession in this wh whatever we want to define it as in this new gig economy, this more agile economy, you know, the old order of, you know, graduates in from teacher college going into education and staying so you 60-65 retiring that model just simply doesn't exist anymore as it doesn't exist really anywhere anymore.

Russ (co-host)

00;46;46;15 - 00;47;08;18

If teacher numbers collapse as we think they potentially might do, and if you were advising maybe the government in India or maybe a global forum, what are some of the things you think we can do together to attract people back to the profession? I mean, the wine line, I thought was great because, you know, it's about balance, isn't it?

Russ (co-host)

00;47;08;18 - 00;47;30;02

You know, the idea that you we need to decompress, sometimes we need to switch off. We need to go and have a glass of wine, laugh with our friends. And I think for me, when I speak to teachers, there's an expectation of, you know, you almost hand your life over to teaching and they don't see potentially any balance there, which kind of might be scaring them off.

Russ (co-host)

00;47;30;02 - 00;47;45;16

I don't have any data on that. It's just some conversation with had. Where do you see as the potential to get people back into the profession? So, as you said, bring joy back to teaching because this is a huge problem we face.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;47;45;16 - 00;48;22;19

I think we are possibly thinking it wrong by saying we have to get people back. You know, I think we have to understand that we no longer teach individually, but we're looking at a teaching community or teaching teams. In fact, I was and I think in some way this whole idea, the shared economy and the shared ideas can be used as an inspiration to figure out how do we leverage the citizens of a nation to become responsible for the children who will become citizens?

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;48;23;03 - 00;48;42;02

So I have this wild idea to organize teaching. I would say that, you know, I've seen this across that everybody wants to give some time, not all the time. Back to you know what they want to feel good that, you know, we've given back but they don't want to come back.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;48;42;02 - 00;49;21;01

So it's not the bringing back. It's how do I harness that desire to want to give something good for education? And can I offer you that time? And then can I in Uber? I want to wake up. I need a math teacher. Can I have you come give you 2 hours, maybe a week? And the thing is, suddenly, while you might have a smaller set of core teachers who are the anchor in a space, but you're having the community come together to make it their responsibility to grow citizens of a nation.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;49;21;01 - 00;49;44;10

Right? And finally, the world. So one, possibly to re-imagine that, bringing back and saying stay here and be here, because right now nobody wants to do that. You're right. They all want to do. We have the ability to travel and work from home. So if we recognize its okay if that's the trend, how are they using it? Well, how are we not saying, no, don't do that, give up your time.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;49;44;10 - 00;50;07;13

So if communities can build this nationhood, you know, this idea of citizenship, it could be just outstanding. So I came up with a concept note. I sent it up. I have heard from nobody as of yet.

Russ (co-host)

00;50;09;09 - 00;50;10;12

I love it. I love it.

Christian (co-host)

00;50;11;05 - 00;50;32;15

Well, maybe we have a shot. This podcast will reach one more person, a dozen people, and maybe that'll be the little thing. All right. All right, Kiran, Russ and I are going to be hosting something in March. We're going to be gathering heads of international not as international schools, but school heads from around the world to come together for a retreat in Japan in March.

Christian (co-host)

00;50;32;15 - 00;50;49;00

And there's a lot in there I won't bore you with, but at the heart of it and this is where the is going to come back to you, is my final question to you. At the heart of it, we're inviting those who lead international schools and each one has a different context, different history, different group of people.

Christian (co-host)

00;50;49;13 - 00;51;25;05

But we believe they share two things in common. They are doing what they can to innovate, respond, set up their organizations and communities to be successful with

whatever the future is going to require. At the same time, they're human beings and they're being cautioned from all directions. It is a lonely position to be the head of any organization, but certainly, a head of school is a particular version of your 'one of one'. So, they're going to come together and we're going to be creating an experience for them where they can refuel, they can catch their breath, they can just have time with one another.

Christian (co-host)

00;51;25;05 - 00;51;58;18

But also there's this opportunity to come out of it and to be part of a community and a network of leaders, but also to go back to their campuses, to go back to their team, to go back to their board, back to their communities. And so with that in mind, I'm wondering, with all that you've experienced in 21 years of Riverside, all the experience in over a decade, at Design For Change, all that you are setting up with this learning institute, what advice or what challenge would you offer a head to bring back to their community?

Christian (co-host)

00;51;58;18 - 00;52;36;06

If there was one thing they can do, one move, one invitation, one investment, one moment of pause that they could do that would help their community feel joy, help their community notice what's possible, help their community not try to be all things, but try to figure out what they are and to, I suppose, as a head to feel the energy for what lies ahead as opposed to maybe overwhelmed or set in their ways.

Christian (co-host)

00;52;36;22 - 00;52;47;01

What would be that one bit of advice to this group of heads coming to a retreat, knowing they're going to go back home? What would you want them to think about or to know?

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;52;47;01 - 00;53;29;25

I think you can start with a very simple thing: step out. I would say close your offices, close your staff rooms, be available. I think the kind of stuff you notice, the conversations you will have, you suddenly, I think see stuff you've never seen because you've been behind the doors. So I would say put your desk out in in the school, like to sit under a tree and you would be surprised by the people who will come to you and those who will not. Be surprised at the conversations you will hear and those you will not be surprised by the body language you will see.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;53;29;25 - 00;53;47;02

And suddenly all of that will get you a vision of your school which you never suffered from. So I would say if you just want to do that and nothing is because everything else takes too much time. It's I keep thinking again, this is by the moral authority that you've have to be the change, right?

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;53;48;03 - 00;54;10;24

So just if you can for a week and you will be surprised, people come and say, “What are you doing? What's wrong? Are you awake?” So I would get surprised again. I think we've forgotten that. So I think you will hear laughter. You will hear complaints, you will see children, you will see teachers who are wondering where they can talk.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;54;11;03 - 00;54;24;25

You will see parents. It'll be just an amazing thing, I think experience. So once you do that, suddenly I think it give you a blueprint of what can be done next. So I think that could be a good challenge.

Christian (co-host)

00;54;24;25 - 00;54;44;12

And I'm reminded of something you shared at the very beginning when you said you've gone back into the classroom and you're working with the littlest, the youngest in your school. But you said that in some respects it's to help. It's not just giving them more and more content because they have all that, but it's actually creating the space to just observe, to notice, and to feel in the moment.

Christian (co-host)

00;54;44;12 - 00;55;01;14

And I love that you come to the end of this talk with us and you remind us that that's not just three or four six year old. It's not just true for our people. It's also something we need to do for ourselves and for one another. And I'm really grateful for that. That reminder.

Russ (co-host)

00;55;01;14 - 00;55;09;17

Thank you so thank you for joining us, Kiran. We love having you on the show and we're so grateful. Thank you.

Kiran Bir Sethi (guest)

00;55;09;17 - 00;55;15;16

Much, love. So fun, guys. Thank you. Like I said, Christian, you have to come back [to Riverside]. I think it's time. Yeah.

Christian (co-host)

00;55;15;16 - 00;55;21;09

And I need to come back and Russ needs to go.