

EP 3: DR. BRETT JACOBSEN

FINAL TRANSCRIPT

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

Russ (co-host)

00:00:00:04 - 00:00:09:21

Welcome to the podcast, Brett. So happy to have you with us from Mount Vernon. Can you just tell us a little about a little bit about your amazing school, the mission and vision you have over there in Atlanta?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:00:10:02 - 00:00:29:13

Yeah, thanks for having me. And grateful to be on with you guys. You know, this is a school that has a day school here in Atlanta. But we also have we've launched Mount Vernon Online. So we have what we call a global campus. And then we have this consulting arm of the school called Mount Vernon Ventures.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:00:29:13 - 00:01:17:05

And so our mission simply that sort of is the umbrella for all that we do is that we are a school of inquiry, innovation and impact. And so when you have the word innovation inside your mission statement, that is high accountability. And it really requires one to demonstrate progress and to discover new ideas, to connect dots that are seemingly unconnectable, to iterate and iterate and iterate again and up and level up and beta as your if that's a word, your culture, your system to give them you're giving them the autonomy and agency to continue to move forward.

Russ (co-host)

00:01:18:09 - 00:01:47:13

And we've seen some a little pushback or a little a few question marks about a mass wave of schools with innovation in the mission statement or the title. Is there any advice that you could give emerging school leaders that really want to not? I say jump on the bandwagon because it's a noble cause, but any advice as an experienced school leader, you can give to principals who are really wanting to push the kind of outer remits of innovation?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:01:47:22 - 00:02:25:23

Yeah, I think that you know, part of what's in the ecosystem is around innovation, fatigue. And I've always said that in order to have fatigue, you actually have to be innovating. And so I think that there is quite a bit of window dressing related to innovation these days. But I also think that part of what is overwhelming to people is that it seems that it seems to appear to be too revolutionary, too much reform, too quickly, and just really too much to take on, especially as we're emerging from COVID.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:02:26:00 - 00:02:55:18

I think I would like to really challenge and encourage leaders around the world to say that innovation actually is accessible to everyone. And I think that there are different entry points to innovation. And so at the very basic level of the entry point for innovation is around tweaking something, modifying something, whether any particular program within your school.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:02:55:18 - 00:03:18:18

And it's just a slight tweak, a slight modification that's about thinking differently, that's about creating a new idea. And I would say that's innovation. It's innovation to your community and your culture in what you're doing because you know, if you atomic plan it, this like James Clare talks about in his book, you know, small deposits have a cumulative effect.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:03:18:22 - 00:03:42:02

Now, the next level of innovation is really about replacing one system and methodology with another. So we moved from traditional sort of assessing students with numeric averages to be one of a concept-based system. Now we give out grades because we're in the state of Georgia and we give that Hope scholarship. And in all of those different dynamics.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:03:42:02 - 00:04:09:04

So we still convert those competencies to alpha [grades]. But we have shifted from one system to another. And then the highest level of innovation is if your industry didn't exist. And so in other words, you're not going to camp out all day long in as if your industry didn't exist. But if you're not actually dealing with that dynamic, there's a lot to be missed.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:04:09:04 - 00:04:39:03

And so for us, an example is our innovation diploma students serving as consultants with major corporations. And so they're partners or consulting partners have been Portia and AT&T and Chick-Fil-A Innovation Hatch, Delta, the Center for Civil and Human Rights here in Atlanta. Many, many others, including non-profits and civic environments. And so that's a different way of looking at school than how we traditionally have looked at it.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:04:39:04 - 00:04:58:28

So we're answering that question What if our industry didn't exist? What does this look like? So I think that there are different levels of that. And with each level, there's a greater amount of cost and resources and then greater in terms of just being able to make the case for change around the type of work that's that that's going on.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:04:58:29 - 00:05:30:10

So really it's answering the question, what is your innovation intention? And so if the I word is if there's fatigue around that, whether that's genuine or not, then, you know, I don't know, creating new ideas because I don't think the current system which education has it changed too much over the last several hundred years that what does that doing for us in in a deluge of web three O metaverse.

Christian (co-host)

00:05:30:12 - 00:05:58:02

And Russ, I think he just signaled all kinds of, you know, topics and ideas that you think about a lot. So save some space in this conversation. You know, something that has always struck me about in addition to your leadership of Mt. Vernon, but how your community has navigated and you know, these are real families, real human beings, real educators, real close community partners.

Christian (co-host)

00:05:58:02 - 00:06:21:18

And so there's never a straight line when you evolve or you grow or you take risks. But there have been two things that I've really respected, and I'd love to hear your thoughts on what allows that to be the case or what you learn from it. But sort of principal one was that you had deep a deep mission and a deep purpose as a learning community before you started moving in this direction.

Christian (co-host)

00:06:21:18 - 00:06:40:18

So in some respects, it was a faith-based college prep independent school that, you know, really young people were being mentored to do good in the world or it was always sort of there. You weren't that wasn't an idea. Somebody brainstormed a Post-it Note in a workshop and let's innovate around doing good. It was kind of always there, right?

Christian (co-host)

00:06:40:18 - 00:07:01:09

So I'm interested in that idea about a school that maybe hasn't identified the thing that is going to drive everything and to what degree a school can innovate without that anchor or that route versus the school that hasn't that maybe has to re-articulated or think about it how it can be agile or evolve. So that's part one I'm really curious about.

Christian (co-host)

00:07:01:09 - 00:07:20:13

To what degree has the deep purpose allowed you to innovate? And then the other part is there was a really exciting, you know, period in the recent past where you were designing a new high school campus and the innovation diploma for the upper school was coming online and some really incredible things that have led to the consulting and Mt. Vernon Ventures.

Christian (co-host)

00:07:20:26 - 00:07:54:23

But there was also a really subtle thing that you and your team were doing, and that was you were helping your five-year-olds and six-year-olds and seven-year-olds and their teachers, pre-K, kindergarten, first grade, etc. and their families start to utilize and embrace and play with the language of innovation, but at a scale that was appropriate for five-year-olds, or that a mom whose first child was going off to school would talk about in carpool line or that teachers didn't feel like they had to stop doing what they knew, but instead could capture the things they believed in.

Christian (co-host)

00:07:54:23 - 00:08:18:06

So I've always thought that there was something really striking and you only innovated at the upper levels and it was all college prep and future workforce. Certainly, something would have been lost. And yet you were just as passionate and intentional about how do our youngest kids, their families, their teachers. So those are two I have always thought about.

Christian (co-host)

00:08:18:06 - 00:08:19:24

Tell me what's what that means for you.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:08:19:29 - 00:08:45:11

Yeah, I think there are a number of different directions to go, so I'll try to start here. You know, I think that's really what's unique about in that I think our community has a lot to be proud of. I consistently say you are building something exceptional and I think that continues to be the case because when you take a look at our school, I love the micro-schools that are popping up all over the place.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:08:45:11 - 00:09:18:10

There's a lot of value to that. I think the type of work that you're doing across the globe has tremendous value and for students, for families and for educators as well. I think what's interesting about our work is that we're a full-service school. In other words, we're preschool through 12. We have a full academic program. We have arts and athletics like we do.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:09:18:10 - 00:09:48:04

And there's this historical faith-based component to the school. Mixing all of those up, people would say, How can you possibly really innovate and innovate at scale to that dynamic? I will say that over a decade we've grown by 60% in the city of Atlanta. So around 740 students at the time. We now have more than 1200 students here at our Atlanta-based campus.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:09:48:04 - 00:10:15:29

That's part of what sparked this idea of having more of a global campus we'd have online. But if I go back to those sort of original days, early on, we actually applied to Blue Ocean Strategy to the world. And this is a very competitive Atlanta-based market. And so in every city, there's Nike, Adidas and Reebok, and in Atlanta, there's Nike, Adidas and Reebok.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:10:15:29 - 00:10:45:10

And so those are great brands and those are amazing. And so we were just starting a high school that I think there are a couple of graduating classes before me before I came. And so our high school is younger, so we really were at this nexus of saying, do we want to replicate what is perceived success in high school or do we want to actually try to do what's best for this generation of students?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:10:45:17 - 00:11:10:07

Not for me as a Gen Xer or anybody else, but for this generation. And so we really leaned into why not? Let's take this shot at where we're younger. And so this dispersion strategy, if you're familiar with it, is that there are red ocean traps, and that's that schools are companies sometimes fight over the same issues.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:11:10:07 - 00:11:35:16

And there is that fight creates blood in the water. An interesting illustration that the Blue Ocean Strategy, a Harvard press book, you know, research put together and so you can think about what are those issues that schools compete in and actually the same thing. So even if we competed well, we would lose because they're established. We're not. We need to make sure that we competed on those levels.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:11:35:16 - 00:11:54:14

One, what's best for kids. But on those levels that felt familiar to people and to families and students at the same time, we wanted to create our own niche, one, to create our own blue ocean. So we didn't want to be known as a traditional school and we didn't want to be known as a progressive school in the city of Atlanta or both of those camps.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:11:54:18 - 00:12:19:09

And those are amazing schools. And they're knocking the ball out of the park in their missions. So we didn't want to be known as either, but we wanted to be known as an innovative school. So when I typically ask people what are 2 to 3 descriptors that you would describe Mt. Vernon literally the first probably the first one over 90% of the time, the word innovation is going to be used.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:12:19:25 - 00:12:48:09

And so actually what's interesting from your previous question, we actually fronted the work with this idea of being an innovative school and then we began to demonstrate it. So we put that out front and then we built the store behind the window and we have full demonstration of that today. But I'd have to say one particular poignant thing that I wish I would have learned early in my career is really around the power of common language.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:12:49:17 - 00:13:14:27

And so we would revise our mission statement and then we just most of our students today can quote the mission statement because we repeat it over and over and over and over. And therefore, we debate it, we dialog it, we edit, we edit the definitions. We put forth a new way of looking at a new angle.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:13:15:01 - 00:13:40:25

But there's common language around inquiry, innovation and impact. These are three words that keep being repeated and therefore we hold ourselves accountable to it or we have our norms, which we're revising for our new strategic plan. But our norms around here start with questions. Well, that has to reflect a school of inquiry, if that's how we're going to operate or if it's around "fail up."

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:13:40:25 - 00:14:12:27

Well, "fail up" has to be something that reflects the school of inquiry, innovation, and impact. But this is how we function on a daily basis. This is what matters here. This is how we run our organization. So having a common language or our mindsets, which we're also revising because we're in a new strategic position. But this idea of being an ethical decision maker, a collaborator, a communicator, a solution seeker, well this is common language.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:14:13:15 - 00:14:51:06

And I think it's one to celebrate. And I think it's one to recognize when people are upset with the school, for whatever reason, they will use either mission statement words or they will use norm words, or they will use mindset language as a way of describing some of their concerns or where we might be misapplying the work. And that's really good because what that says is that embodying the language, and that's how they shape a narrative around express saying their concern.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:14:51:18 - 00:15:25:23

And I think that so the power of common language if you can get just some common language and be persistent and resilient around that language, I'm telling you, it will we can I can give you a 50-bullet point slide show, whatever. But if I could just say one thing, it would be to identify some common language collaboratively, land the plane on that, and then just be persistent with using it and redefining an editing it over time.

Christian (co-host)

00:15:27:02 - 00:15:40:22

Is there a is there just a quick snapshot, like a real moment in time where you just saw a kid or parents or alumni use that language like it on the sidewalk, in the lunchroom, in a board meeting? Well, I mean, were there.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:15:41:10 - 00:16:22:11

For sure. I mean, I've gotten emails over the past where a student will be in athletics in an athletic game and struck out. And it will send an email to say as they got up to bat the second time, they were thinking about that concept of "fail up" and how to how to do that, or we've seen that example in classrooms or I got a message today about this had this healthy me unit in our lower school and how the student didn't he was a pretty picky eater.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:16:23:01 - 00:16:53:11

And through this healthy meal exercise in the school and the students walking down to a Trader Joe's that's in a shopping center near the school and exploring that has now created charts around the rainbow, colors of eating, around eating all sorts of different dynamics. And this was connected to a common language. And this is this also connects to part of your question about having it systemic from preschool through 12th.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:16:53:11 - 00:17:19:15

So if inquiry-based learning because we're a school of inquiry is important, then we have to deploy design thinking as a visible as part of inquiry-based learning even at the youngest of ages. And a quick response to that is I was about to read to a group of kindergartners and before I read to them, I always do a visible thinking routine and always ask them, Hey, what are you learning today?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:17:19:28 - 00:17:47:27

And I kid you not, in her own kindergarten language, she said to me, We are in a design thinking challenge, collaborating with fourth graders about helping preschoolers on the Frontier, which is our playground. So I was like, Oh, we've got to get ready for you guys. We're going to be ready for you. Because if you're saying this in kindergarten, you're going to go through our system.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:17:48:07 - 00:18:14:00

Woah, you are going to be this influential, compassionate, and I'm a father of two girls, so I would say this female, you know, an amazing leader in our system. And I was like, we got it. We got to make sure that it doesn't interrupt itself, disrupt itself. Like you got to continue on in our system and that will hold us accountable to that dynamic.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:18:14:00 - 00:18:38:00

So everything we try to do is, is systemic in nature. Now we plot actually, we plot design thinking, lower school, and then it brushfires to the entire system. Or we may start instructional rounds from a teaching professional learning standpoint that took place in every school, and then it's made its way throughout the entire school. So, you know, we plot things at different places, but it's systemic.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:18:38:10 - 00:18:44:07

The goal is to be systemic, you know, sort of in nature.

Russ (co-host)

00:18:44:21 - 00:19:08:06

Bret, we've heard a lot about students and we were talking a little bit about it offering student voice and choice and again in the educational ether that's then those terms are being used a lot. It seems like Mt. Vernon is doing some incredible things around student voice and choice. Can you give the listeners and viewers some actual real examples that are going on in Mt. Vernon?

Russ (co-host)

00:19:08:06 - 00:19:14:03

Because I feel sometimes we talk about these two concepts, but actually, we're shy of some real examples.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:19:14:03 - 00:19:44:03

Sure. And I think part of that conversation is how we talked about innovation, intention, I think student choice, autonomy, the agency can be looked at in various ways. So I want to make sure that people understand that this is truly assessable. Now, I will say that sort of what you're saying is when you say student-centered, you know, degree really student-centered, like I don't know if most people are not prepared for that.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:19:45:09 - 00:20:16:25

Most school communities are not really prepared for the orthodoxy of student-centeredness. That's why you have micro-schools in particular. That but I would even argue even for micro-schools, I could argue that they're not truly students. Now, if you want to get to sort of a Reggio, maybe a Montessori sort of, you know, in of that perspective, you know, I think we can we can take a look at that.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:20:16:25 - 00:20:46:25

But the thing is, is that so I think that there are different entry points. Let me give you a basic one that is not going to probably fit the definition of why you ask the question, but I think it's important to show the range. So on one hand, in our upper school, you know, we

have a set of graduation requirements and we have these learning competencies throughout the system.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:20:46:25 - 00:21:17:03

But we have these Lego bricks, we have this mod schedule. So when you take a course like biology, it doesn't have to be taught sort of in sequence. It can be built throughout the year if necessary. But we might offer several types of biology courses in one mind and so. So it's like I'm telling my children, you can have green beans or carrots.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:21:17:03 - 00:21:41:21

This is part of the choice. But you but you're still going to eat this vegetable. But this is your choice so there's still some autonomy and agency around that. Now, I'm asking you to complete this requirement. The learning outcomes are the same for both for all of those types of courses of choice.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:21:41:27 - 00:22:18:23

But I'm still giving you some level of choice. So that's a very foundational bottom-line way to do it. In most cases, it's just saying, here's the course. We teach it the same way we turn the same pages. But there's nothing in that now. There could be projects that could help with choice in voice, but otherwise, it's a very standard sort of approach where we saying, here's a little bit more of a menu open to you that that that skills to an AI project course that we have.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:22:18:23 - 00:22:53:08

And that's very purpose and passion-driven. So it's something that that you're passionate about, that you're drawing meaning from and that you want it to be consequential to others, consequential to the world, and so you are going to go through a design thinking sort of mode and process. And at the end of it, you're going to come out with something that you're going to make a pitch, you're going to make it, you're going to demonstrate a prototype that would have an impact or something of consequence to some to someone else.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:22:54:00 - 00:23:27:10

Or you could be a part of our Innovation Diploma program where they are forming their own cohorts around working as consultants for corporations based on the challenges that those corporations are putting in front of them. Or we have an international travel program where people have different options to where to go and what to study and what to do, sort of within those dynamics.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:23:27:10 - 00:23:59:14

So I think the range of options is particularly important and I think it's accessible to every school because I think you can deploy more choice in voice with students. I think the reflective practice is an important part of understanding where students are coming from as a way to continue to improve and develop future programs.

Russ (co-host)

00:24:00:23 - 00:24:09:04

Is that voice and choice part of that common language as well? Do you guys use that as a usual kind of talk in and around stuff, spaces?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:24:09:04 - 00:24:43:25

Yeah, there's no question. I mean, I think that we're constantly seeking, you know, so part of one of our mindsets is a round collaboration and communication. So how can I ask you the question? You know, help me see what you see. How can what role do we play on a particular team? How can we what voices are missing from the conversation?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:24:44:17 - 00:25:25:18

How can we identify what they are? Who they are, and how they can be represented in a particular conversation? And so this really so we have in our law school an Upstander program, how to be an Upstander. Part of being an upstander is about belonging is about pulling people in is about really focusing on listening to others in others p perspectives and in through that, students will begin to identify what maybe they're wanting to learn.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:25:25:18 - 00:26:00:23

Even our preschoolers. We had a major bridge collapse well before COVID in the city of Atlanta. And this bridge collapse inside our city turned into we have a very project approach with preschoolers. And it led into this whole bridge study in most cases, by the way, that's a great example of tweaking a system for preschoolers. We never took preschoolers on learning expeditions.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:26:01:22 - 00:26:32:02

It's complicated. You're dealing with car seats and it's a different dynamic. But we began to figure that out and we traveled to different expressways down local roads where bridges were as a part of that experience. So combining a couple of questions there and examples, but it's it was the voice of students that led to a project.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:26:32:12 - 00:27:12:08

And as we know, how can we equip our adults around a responsive curriculum dynamic? We had a family that had sold their A business and they were looking to invest in another business and they were looking at various industries. Well beyond kind of the medical

industry that they had been in. So I get this call about wanting to get involved in kind of the gaming industry and without going into great detail, I pulled a group of gamers in our school.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:27:12:20 - 00:27:31:28

They wanted to bring the owners of this company in front of our students to decide whether they wanted to invest in the company or not. In most cases, in most schools, especially preschool through 12, if anyone would have gotten that call, they've said, that sounds like that's so great, but we're on page 22, we're on questions for like, we just can't do that.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:27:32:10 - 00:28:01:19

It would just completely mess up our scope and sequence. And we pulled these students out of their class, out of their whatever classes they were in, put them in front of this these executives at this company and based on the questions that they ask and the comments that they made, the investors decided not to invest into that company because of what was revealed through the questions that our students asked in the comments that they made.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:28:01:19 - 00:28:21:00

Now, our students would have never had that opportunity if we weren't responsive as adults to say, Hey, we're not losing you a thing. Matter of fact, we're gaining so much by being responsive in the moment and agile and adaptive for whatever our students potentially need.

Christian (co-host)

00:28:22:09 - 00:28:44:09

Russ, you brought up that you can use the phrase staff in the staff room meeting the kinds of conversations that go on throughout campus. You have an incredible group of colleagues at all levels. Some are, you know, they begin their education, career teaching career on at Mount Vernon. Others come from across the country. Some, you know, have really been part of this transformation over time.

Christian (co-host)

00:28:44:20 - 00:29:10:09

Others, you know, maybe more recently, I'm wondering what you've noticed about the kind of candidates or interested applicants that have arrived in the last couple of years. What are they what have they become intrigued by within their own? And what attributes are they bringing that are really striking you as like there's some I mean, because you're doing incredible things.

Christian (co-host)

00:29:10:21 - 00:29:25:10

People are paying attention. They're coming to professional development. Local companies are teaming up with you. But it's an interesting formula when you think about those kinds of candidates that you consider bringing into your team. They're going to carry the ball forward. So what's going on?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:29:25:12 - 00:29:50:06

Yeah, and I'd also say I'd also add to your statement that others have left us to carry on the work to, you know, to do it in, in their own way, that of what they've gained from, from the school. So and so I think it covers that spectrum also. I think it's important to say upfront, we are far from perfect.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:29:51:00 - 00:30:47:09

We are messy, we are humans. There are no clean lines and we make mistakes and we are just as disrupted by a global pandemic as anybody else was. So I think it's important to say that upfront. I would say to me the most common thread and theme in my time of being here of people coming to us, one of the most common dynamics is that if they're already in education, out of school, they will say, we feel like we're the lone, sole person in our place trying to convince our colleagues to do this.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:30:47:22 - 00:31:17:22

And yet what's compelling is, is that we're surrounded by a similar mindset and a similar disposition in ways that I felt so alone where I was. And I think that has been the most common dynamic. So it is really compelled people who are with a similar disposition and mindset to want to do this type of work.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:31:18:18 - 00:31:44:26

I will say, though, that sometimes that work is deepened for sure. And then in other cases, it's like, oh, I thought I wanted to do this, but because this is the hardest work one will ever do, I believe that while it may be the hardest work one will ever do, it is the most meaningful work that one will do.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:31:45:00 - 00:32:11:01

We talk especially in this new strategic plan, about impact writing, and we believe that impact already is the autonomy, the agency to explore and act on what is meaningful to self, inconsequential to others. And so how do we set the conditions not only for our students but also for the adults who are coming here? How do we give?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:32:11:01 - 00:32:27:06

You know, it's kind of like Dan Pink's book and Tribe really talks about autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Like if you can like engage in autonomy, mastery, purpose for

anyone, then it's like, you know, it's going to be hard and it's going to be messy and it's not always going to be great, but it's going to be so meaningful and purposeful.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:32:27:06 - 00:33:03:11

So I'm really hoping for a purpose and meaning revival among educators, because if you look at the work related to gosh, now I'm forgetting his name...Marcus Buckingham. Now Marcus Buckingham's most recent work, he will talk about resilience or lack of resilience if you ranked all industries. At the bottom of that resilience list are educators and healthcare workers now think about COVID.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:33:04:04 - 00:33:37:05

Both of those industries were on the front lines of the work, so no wonder they're at the bottom of the list. However, they are the that is are the two most meaningful, purposeful industries in the world. And so how do we have a revival among this group? Because they're so great and even as McKinsey put out in a 10 to 15 point list in like number four was like schools based on COVID schools are the fulcrum of society.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:33:37:05 - 00:34:05:04

They continue to be the fulcrum of society. So I agree with that. And so by agreeing with it, how do we have this revival and provide meaning and purpose sort of around that? So I think that the adults coming to us are trying to lean in a similar way. And then how can we deepen their social capital, whether they stay here at Mt. Ver non or not?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:34:05:11 - 00:34:15:25

And so I think we're emerging from that just like everybody else's and really trying to find our footing, I think, in a more purposeful way.

Christian (co-host)

00:34:15:25 - 00:34:31:13

I think the language of a revival of meaning, of purpose, is, you know, they're going to be a number of things from what you've shared. Brant they're going to hang with us and we're going to kind of think about that idea of what does it mean? That meaning and purpose were always there in the DNA. It was in the culture.

Christian (co-host)

00:34:32:16 - 00:34:45:16

But so what does it mean to bring that? And to what degree can that have a greater impact and greater magnitude of impact? That spirit, even the way you ask the question like there's a sense of smile and a sense of adventure. And when you say and.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:34:46:05 - 00:35:06:27

What's interesting too is that for the summer we have a part of our professional learning program. This summer we call it Summer Plus Learning. We want it to extend beyond summer. So it's called Summer Plus, but through the summer plus, learning, just knowing how exhausted our staff was, we wanted ahead of a very basic, you know, plan for the summers.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:35:07:00 - 00:35:36:02

But we wanted to make sure there was that there was voice, by the way, voice and choice into the paths that they took. But we did ask them a common question about why did you get into teaching. Like, let's go back to like real basic, you know, why, why did you become an educator and in journal that and reflect that and produce something around that by the end of the summer?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:35:36:15 - 00:36:05:14

And just going back to a very basic story, we're focused a lot on what is your story here at the school this year. And so in every story is so unique and the colors and shapes with that story in the hearts and the pains and the successes and the achievements come along with that story. And so what is your story?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:36:05:14 - 00:36:27:16

Why did you get involved in education, like setting the world out and just really kind of focusing on that question in as a way to kind of kickstart that. But I also have to say, you know, some of my most recent research, and I've turned 50 this year, so I'm like, why did it take me so long?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:36:27:16 - 00:37:10:23

But the more I'm learning about just, you know, well, well-being and behavioral health literacy, not only for myself, but for others, is this idea that that action perceives behavior disposition. For example, James Clear in his book talks about someone who wants to try to build a habit of losing weight. And he describes a story of this person who gets up early, gets in the car, goes to the gym and does like one push-up, gets back in the car, drives home, and most of us go, well, that is just insane.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:37:10:23 - 00:37:46:00

Like, that's, that's, that's crazy. But his action preceded anything. Just getting out of bed, getting in the car and going to the gym, and doing one put like that action preceded anything else. And so I just think that in this moment of emerging from COVID is that let's do something, let's put have some action. And, I believe that purpose is going to come from some action that we move forward.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:37:46:14 - 00:38:09:10

And that could be at scale for any organization. We're so subject to trying to ship a perfectly packaged product. I get that. But we need to take some risks. And actually the risks, they're low. They're not high stakes, actually. And I think we need to do more of that in our industry.

Russ (co-host)

00:38:10:26 - 00:38:41:18

And with previous guests. Brett, we've talked about the disorientation of the students, and all staff coming into a project-based, challenge-based environment. You've obviously talked about, you know, that theme this year for Mount Vern on about, you know, why. Why as an educator, did you get into the profession? What were those first steps like if there was an educator whom you've hired, you've recruited, you're kind of banking on to do well at Mount Vernon?

Russ (co-host)

00:38:41:28 - 00:38:58:10

Once they come through the door on day one, is there a process that you as a leader put them through to and to actually not just get them in line with Mount Vernon's mission and Vision, but actually in terms of teaching and pedagogy, that kind of element.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:38:58:24 - 00:39:30:01

Yeah. I mean, you know, one thing that one in one of our design principles at school is just saying is that relationships are foundational to learning. And so, you know, the relationship piece is critical to that. I would say we've continued to revise our onboarding program. As a matter of fact, we're creating a culture code like a culture book that has come out of some of the work that we're doing and from the feedback that we've received.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:39:30:01 - 00:39:57:11

So outside of that mission vision, sort of common language, you know, sort of dynamic, part of what we're encouraging people is, is I always say this to new faculty when they come, I say several things. I say, one, suck the life out of the colleagues who've been here because they're amazing. And they have they've gotten their own graduate degree by being here at Mount Vernon because we invest so much into professional development.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:39:58:07 - 00:40:28:27

And the amount that you learn even in one year is, well, more worth it than any graduate degree that you could get. So I would say such a lot that of people that are here, I always say appreciate the decisions that were made before you because at some point, good because at some point people are going to say, you made a crazy decision and you want them to be able to appreciate why you made that decision at the time, to appreciate those decisions that were made before you.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:40:29:06 - 00:40:50:08

And then thirdly, this is why are you here? We need you. I've written this research paper. I've read this research paper for 14 years and I need someone with a fresh view in reading this research paper for me. I need you to smooth the edges. I need you to give me an angle to look at. I need a fresh voice.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:40:50:08 - 00:41:21:28

I need new ideas. We need you. So. So it's saying welcome to Mount Vernon and you're going to gain so much. And then and then how do you provide a fresh sort of approach to the work so that innovation and actually doesn't it plateau here? Here is here at the school. And I just think the professional learning we had a conference style sort of approach at the beginning of the year where you had some voice and choice into the work.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:41:21:28 - 00:41:45:10

We also had kind of that old, you know, unconference sort of concept. We kind of brought that back a little bit for faculty and staff during that time. And then we're doing a lot of intense work with our new staff members, what we call a new crew, and down to like just Maslow's hierarchy of needs, right?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:41:45:10 - 00:42:06:12

I mean, it's like, you know, I'm just trying to eat and breathe and drink water, you know, what are the basic dynamics? And because sometimes we're guilty of like just piling on everything at one time because it's all important. But how do you kind of space that out? You know, a little bit more, I think is particularly important.

Russ (co-host)

00:42:07:04 - 00:42:22:27

What's the biggest struggle that if you just very quickly just if you said what if you said one thing from a teacher going from traditional into more inquiry-based and student, let's use what we've been using through the podcast, the voice, and shows. What would you say the one struggle is for educators?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:42:24:18 - 00:42:58:24

Well, I mean, one is just they weren't trained this way. We weren't trained this way. No. So, you know, you know, to think about a power standard, a focal point, and a learning competency, and then we want you to convert this to an alpha, you know, grade. It's like, ooh, yeah. So I think it's and then applying, you know, inquiry-based, you know, you know, design thing and PBL are our visible thing or in things that, you know, is just so.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:42:59:20 - 00:43:28:04

So some may look at us saying many have quite a bit of staff of support and we have a whole learning and development team that are really what we call in the field. Coaches in that range are from a person per campus, a CB person per campus, integration, technology per person per campus, and the inclusion of mercy equity action person per campus and academic support administrator or coach per campus.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:43:28:09 - 00:43:46:28

Like how do we coach this based on what your needs are? And I just think that you know, it is unlearning that is unlearning and relearning that. That is all of our struggle, including myself.

Christian (co-host)

00:43:46:28 - 00:44:13:26

Brett, you really shared a really cool thing that you're going to be doing literally the end of this week. You and some teammates would be flying to Vietnam and Russ and I were talking with you about that earlier. So as a general context, you said that there's a group in Vietnam that's partnering with Mount Vernon Ventures and is going to be doing some really incredible work and in some respects trying to learn as much and adopt as much of the work you all have been doing.

Christian (co-host)

00:44:14:11 - 00:44:33:23

But they also have their own culture, right? I don't just mean like the images culture, I mean they have their own way of doing things. So yeah, I'm really curious about that opportunity as you consult now with, you know, a Delta and a Porsche which is incredible. But other schools have said to you, we really want to go the distance and do a version of what you've done.

Christian (co-host)

00:44:34:18 - 00:44:58:22

I'm really curious what that requires. And I ask that because, you know, we grew out of a school, think global school, and we launched the studio like our ventures launched to respond to an inquiry, respond to requests, respond to opp opportunities to make an impact. So we feel some real simpatico alignment with you all. And as we have others have reached out to us and in essence, have said we'd like to do a version.

Christian (co-host)

00:44:59:06 - 00:45:15:05

It was a really incredible honor. It's exciting and also comes with a whole of interesting dynamics. And so I'm just curious if you get ready to go to Vietnam, it has its own story, but also what does it represent as you help other schools go the distance on this?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:45:15:14 - 00:45:50:00

Yeah, so I think similar to you is that, you know, Ventures, that was not the original name actually we ran in the name during the pandemic. We're like, Hey, it's a global pandemic. Let's just rebrand. And that's the greatest time to rebrand something. So, so it was birthed really out in early 2012. During that time period, we were just getting so many requests to visit the school and we were selling our time in a way that we love having visitors.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:45:50:12 - 00:46:07:10

But man, when you walk towards something, you walk away from something. So every time we walk towards someone who wanted to the school, we walked away from our own kids, in our own families here at Mount Vernon. So we're like, okay, we need to like, let's rethink this. Like, there's a lot of buzz around this and in walking people, so how can we do this?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:46:08:18 - 00:46:42:15

And we hosted our first design thinking summit and around that same time and we're like, we don't know if anybody is going to come in. 130 people did. And Kim Sachs from New Wave came down and it was just an amazing experience. But we learned a lot from those pieces. You know, my thing about Ventures is this: this is our value proposition, I think similar to you all, which cannot be said of most consulting firms out there, is that we are current practitioners in the field.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:46:42:15 - 00:47:10:05

We are doing the work we are in. So we believe that transformation needs a guide. And why not have a guide who is currently in the field, the work and so that our consultants, our teachers, and our staff members here at the school are currently in the field at Mt. Vernon. And in like I'm giving you some real examples today we have a thousand more examples of being in the field doing the work.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:47:10:15 - 00:47:37:28

And so I think people recognize whether it's domestically here in the United States or even at a school system like Vietnam, we're not trying to replicate Mt. Vernon necessarily. We're really leaning into whatever your community is. You know your community better than anybody. No consultant, even in the field, can tell you more about your own community than you can, and you know it.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:47:38:06 - 00:48:11:21

However, we believe that we, through active inquiry, can really understand what is happening and where we can be of support. So that ranges from executive coaching, and strategic planning to Vietnam, where they actually are creating, Mt. Vernon, at this

particular place. But we're not asking anybody to do that because that wouldn't that doesn't fit every mission. Envision for every community.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:48:11:26 - 00:48:44:03

But we're empathetic enough to understand where one needs support and help. And we can help that with curriculum and instructional design, whatever the case may be. And so what we've discovered through this, by the way, is that because these are current practitioners in the field, you know, we were just talking about staff and in continuing to fulfill them and give them added value when they serve as a consultant man, that they're getting to share their work outside of the school.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:48:44:21 - 00:49:06:12

Yeah, it gives them greater meaning and purpose in their work. So there are so many tentacles of having a consulting piece. You know, for us it's also about new philanthropy. So it's an exchange of goods and services. It re-invest back into the day school. So obviously that is a component, not the driving component, but it is one in full transparency.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:49:06:18 - 00:49:30:28

At the same time, it just adds so much value back to our own organization and our teachers in particular who are in the field doing, doing the work. So whatever the situation is out there that people need help on, we just say, Hey, transformation needs a guide and we're current practitioners in the field doing the work, so we actually get it.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:49:30:28 - 00:49:34:21

We understand your struggle more than anybody.

Christian (co-host)

00:49:35:10 - 00:49:56:08

Well, you're doing one extra thing. Not. Not what? Actually, you're doing one significant thing that adds to that. And that is not only are you heading to Vietnam to be in service to their goals within their context, and again, giving your team a chance to just revive that sense of their pride, their passion. Right. And that kind of impact to make.

Christian (co-host)

00:49:56:17 - 00:50:21:15

But you're also developing a partnership. So you were a consultant for this school. Sure. You're also, though, teaming up with them because some of their students are going to come and spend the summers with you. So what I'm intrigued about is the difference between consulting and consulting partnership. But also, you will be at different school as a result of these kids coming in their families and so it's not just you're giving great ideas and good guidance.

Christian (co-host)

00:50:21:21 - 00:50:25:16

You're also saying we're willing to be different as a result. Talk about.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:50:25:16 - 00:50:49:21

That. Yeah. That's interesting so thanks for bringing that up. What's interesting about that dynamic is not only that will they be coming in the summer, but they will be also taking courses online. So the online not only serves, we're trying to reach the flexible family out there. And so not only does it serve the flexible family, but it also serves in a capacity of different types of needs.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:50:49:21 - 00:51:14:25

And one of those is those students in Vietnam who will not only get a degree to graduate from that diploma, from that school but will also gain a diploma from the Mount Vernon School here in Atlanta, in the United States. So you're right. We're serving the school from a consultant basis, from a training standpoint.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:51:14:25 - 00:51:38:16

And their curriculum design, leadership transformation systems, and processes. And then at the same time, those students are taking online courses. They're coming here for training during the summer, and ultimately they will graduate. Some of them will graduate from The Mount Vernon School.

Russ (co-host)

00:51:39:26 - 00:52:06:06

So, Brett, just before we start wrapping up, we've got about six or 7 minutes left. I just wanted to jump back to the pandemic and one thing that's fascinated me is, are we going to as the pandemic comes to a close, education's probably been through the biggest upheaval maybe since the Second World War. It's a huge upheaval where things change that we never thought we would change.

Russ (co-host)

00:52:06:27 - 00:52:39:20

This doesn't have to be from Mount Vernon. It can be from anywhere that you've seen nationally or in the Atlanta region. Is there something that you think we should absolutely not abandon as we come out of the pandemic, something that we've changed over the course of the last two years, whereas that has worked. And even if there's a rush to get back to normal, we should absolutely keep that one or two components that we've evolved as the pandemic kind of wore on over the last two years.

Russ (co-host)

00:52:39:20 - 00:52:40:25

Anything that jumps out at you?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:52:42:05 - 00:53:19:28

I don't know if this is where you're going, but or not that you're leading the question, but it may be too conceptual so we can break it down if you want to. But I think it's been affirming that learning is not tied to time, place or space. Right. Okay. And in taking that conceptually and actualizing it inside all of our schools and again, it can be in the tweaking or more modifying or even more transformational.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:53:20:07 - 00:53:46:19

But I think that has been reaffirmed and I think that was said before the pandemic in this whole if I had fatigue around anything, it was about making the case for change, not necessarily within our community, but just in the ecosystem of education. I think the global pandemic has proven it's part of the case that was being made before it.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:53:47:19 - 00:54:19:24

And then and but my concern is, is that we're going to default back to a prepare endemic position just because of the trauma of the last few years where we're getting back to like, you know, like we can, you know, come up for air that has some margin and there's, you know, to do traditional education man that and that would be a luxury like that is I feel like that is the easiest system to sort of deploy.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:54:20:12 - 00:54:49:01

It's not the most meaningful one, but it's certainly probably the easiest to deploy. And so, you know, just requires action before behavior, before disposition about this. So conceptually, that's kind of what I would say. I wouldn't necessarily point to technology. I think technology is a huge dynamic for sure. We could go on for days about that. But yeah, but, but, but at the moment it's not transformational.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:54:50:04 - 00:55:23:02

There's not an urgency. There's not it's not transformational enough at the moment for people to take that hybrid virtual dynamic to revolutionize their schools. Because, again, when you're a full-service school and that's a predominant nature, especially the independent schools, what I'm talking about, it's that that that's challenging for them to do that.

Russ (co-host)

00:55:23:28 - 00:55:25:01

Yeah, for sure.

Christian (co-host)

00:55:25:15 - 00:55:55:18

My last question to you, Brad, is something we talked about together a couple of weeks back. Russ and I, and a couple of others are going to be hosting a retreat for heads of international schools sometime next spring. And part of the intention is to create space just for heads to revive and to use your language like it will be a set of just reconstituting their why and also to have a community of others who over the last couple of years have been through some remarkable challenges as heads of institutions.

Christian (co-host)

00:55:56:01 - 00:56:22:00

But there's also this part two, which is you're going to go back to your community and to the degree within your context and your mission, you're going to continue to innovate. And so if you were at the retreat and you had a chance to say to your peers and to say, as you go back each year, there's one thing I would recommend you do not as a solution, not as a strategy, not as an initiative, but a chance for you to see differently, choose differently, to feel differently.

Christian (co-host)

00:56:22:06 - 00:56:36:27

If you just did this, actually, it would allow you to ask, what would it be? That one bit of advice as a coach, as a mentor, but also in the subtlety of just how they are on campus Monday through Friday or how they just live?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:56:37:05 - 00:57:19:24

Yeah, I think this could be a bias that I have at the moment because this is what a lot what I've been thinking about and reading most recently read Ari Wallach's book, The Long Path. And so I would ask the heads of schools at this particular retreat to think of themselves as an ancestor and to think about transgenerational empathy and really think about the long past.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:57:20:29 - 00:57:53:07

And I'm not a legacy person. I never have been until I read this book because legacy is not tied to someone's name, but a legacy is tied to someone's character. And so what for? Because if we spoke to our ancestors about what did they hope for us, there could be some good, bad, and messiness in all sorts of things within that.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:57:54:00 - 00:58:41:05

But if we were asked that question generations to now, what would we hope for those to come after us? So how do we just start moving? But it's one step out there. And so think of yourself as an ancestor because someone is going to 100 years from now, all new crazy leaders, all new think global crazy people. And it and so this is our shot to impact a generation in and so what is what does that look like and what do what world do we want to design and create?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:58:41:25 - 00:59:04:08

And so that's what I would ask them to do. Now that may seem so in the clouds and so philosophical for others, but I think that if you really spend some time doing that, I think that not only are you going to create some new ideas, I think it's also going to be something you see that you can't unsee anymore.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:59:05:09 - 00:59:24:13

It's going to provide some accountability. I think you'll begin to demonstrate some progress. You begin to organize. You know, I think one of the biggest issues that go back to a previous question you asked, I think one of the biggest issues for most schools and national organizations, I will say this, is that schools lack operating systems.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

00:59:25:15 - 00:59:48:11

There is no operating system about truly identifying what a 5 to 10-year target looks like, 2 to 3-year pictures that are snapshots of what you're trying to do, and real discipline around one of your priorities. So I think one can begin to do that by thinking about transgenerational empathy.

Russ (co-host)

00:59:50:08 - 00:59:58:15

Incredible. Yeah. Thank you so much, Brett. You've been awesome. Where can our viewers find you and follow you and follow the journey of Mount Vernon?

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

01:00:06:07 - 01:00:39:29

Yeah. So, so we're on our social media platforms in terms of the school Twitter, Instagram for those of another generation, Facebook, and then but you'll find me on LinkedIn in particular. I have a podcast myself called Counter-Service. It's about teaching organizations how to learn well. We're going to be starting the new season later this fall. And so so you can tune into that.

Dr. Brett Jacobsen (guest)

01:00:40:05 - 01:00:55:19

But otherwise, we're at MountVernonSchool.org or MVVentures.org. So all sorts of different ways to kind of experience what's happening here at the school.

Russ (co-host)

01:00:55:19 - 01:00:56:14

Thank you so much.