#158 -- Girls Who Game Equity In Stem With Dr. Kendall Latham

19:36

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

girls, mentors, kendall, program, game, stem, opportunity, education, clubs, classroom, educators, community, connecting, unpacking, minecraft, authentic, develop, pathway, interested, dell

SPEAKERS

Rena Clark, Paul Beckermann, Dr. Kendall Latham, Transition Music, Transition Music with Rena's Children, Winston Benjamin

Dr. Kendall Latham 00:00

Only 11% of our minority females are in a STEM related field, we need to change that narrative. Girls Who Game is an extracurricular program that really empowers girls to develop and strengthen their STEM skills as well as their global competencies.

Rena Clark 00:19

The topic for today's podcast is Girls Who Game: Equity in STEM, conversation with Dr. Kendall Latham. Unpacking Education is brought to you by avid.org. AVID believes every learner can develop student agency. To learn more about AVID visit their website at avid.org. Welcome to Unpacking Education, the podcast where we explore current issues and best practices in education. I'm Rena Clark.

Paul Beckermann 00:53

I'm Paul Beckermann.

Winston Benjamin 00:54

And I'm Winston Benjamin, we are educators.

Paul Beckermann 00:58

And we're here to share insights and actionable strategies.

Transition Music with Rena's Children 01:02

Education is our passport to the future.

Rena Clark 01:08

Our quote for today is from Alisha Ramos, Senior Front-End Designer at Vox Media, she says, "It's not enough to be aware of the possibilities. You have to believe that your goals are attainable. First, can you see yourself, picture yourself as an engineer?" Paul, what do you think about that quote?

Paul Beckermann 01:30

The part that resonates with me is that you have to be able to picture yourself in the role before that possibility seems real to you, before you think that you can even strive for that. If you can't see yourself doing it, it's not a possibility. It's like it doesn't exist. Maybe it's a possibility for somebody else, but not for me, because I can't see myself there. So, it really reminds me that we need to make sure our students can see themselves in a wide variety of roles and careers so that those possibilities do become real for them.

Rena Clark 02:01

And I'm excited today because we have a guest that's going to talk to us a bit about this. So, with us today is Kendall Latham. She is a Senior K–12 Educational Strategist at Dell Technologies. And she's been involved with Girls Who Game since 2019. So Kendall, could you go ahead and just tell our listeners a little bit more about yourself?

Dr. Kendall Latham 02:27

Yeah, sure. Well, first off, thanks for having me. First and foremost, I'm an educator at heart. So, I got my start in 2002 as a middle school classroom. I've had various district positions. I have a PhD in Urban Education with a focus in Literacy. So prior to joining Dell, the majority of my work was really working with underserved populations, and really providing opportunities for them and broaden their awareness and really helping them think through a potential pathway to career and future readiness. I'm also the mom of three. And one of those is a daughter, who is eight years old. So very, very passionate about Girls Who Game not only for you know, when we think about globally empowering communities, but also on a personal level, because I do have a young daughter that I'm hoping will eventually go down the STEM pathway as well.

Rena Clark 03:18

Yes, I have a nine-year-old daughter, my own self, very close and personal to my own heart. And when I hear her talking about how she sees herself as a scientist, or just makes my heart happy.

Dr. Kendall Latham 03:30

Oh my goodness. Yes.

Rena Clark 03:32

Yes. So, could you just tell us a little bit more about what is Girls Who Game and what is its purpose?

Dr. Kendall Latham 03:38

Yeah, so Girls Who Game is an extracurricular program that really empowers girls to develop and strengthen their STEM skills as well as their global competencies. So critical thinking and collaboration, creativity, innovation, but then to be able to do it in a safe and supportive community. And the program, really, the foundational piece of the program is on three pillars, so one authentic application. So what does that mean? Well, our girls are given a challenge to work through based off the UN's sustainable goals. So it's an authentic application, right? So they're really thinking about how can we solve a problem that's either linked to our community or globally and they're doing that within Minecraft EDU. So you know, Minecraft is cool, kids love Minecraft. But then when we connect it to actually developing their global competencies, developing their computational thinking, it just adds an extra layer to it. second pillar is a girl-centered ecosystem. So, so often, if we take a look at girls in computer science classes or in STEM classes in high school, they're often filled with males, right? And so we really want at a young age want to get girls to build their self-confidence to feel like that they can learn from and with each other and so we do that within a growth-centric ecosystem. And then the third pillar is mentorship. So as you guys kind of talked about earlier, that it really is this idea is, if they can see it, they can be it. So part of our program is that the girls have an opportunity to have a mentor, they have opportunity to learn about potential career pathways, they have the opportunity to develop their leadership skills with a mentor.

Rena Clark 05:24

And I know you're talking about how you're trying to build opportunities for girls to be part of those classrooms, which we said historically tend to be male heavy. But why is it so important in STEM? Especially that there's equity? And how does this program help to improve that in the STEM fields?

Dr. Kendall Latham 05:45

Oh, my goodness. Well, let's talk a little bit about workforce, right. So when we look at the stats, females represent 50% of the workforce. But then if we look at STEM specific fields, we're only 28%, within STEM fields, and then if we look at minority females, only 11%, right? That is shocking to think that only 11% of our minority females are in a STEM related field. Well, we need to change that narrative. And the research is really clear that we can't wait until high school, high school is too late, we really have to start at an early age. And so that sweet spot is really grades four through eight. And so with girls who game we target grades four through eight, because if we can get them interested and excited in STEM. During that time period, the likelihood that they're going to stay that pathway is pretty high. And so it's just really important that, you know, we get them early. But then we also connect to their interests. So it's not just we expose them to STEM fields, but we're connecting to stuff that they're passionate about. And so that's really where the UN's sustainable goals come in, and really connecting to their community,

connecting to their school experiences as well, too. So, you know, we really, that sweet spot is so important to us that we say, hey, we want to get them early, we want to keep them in.

Rena Clark 07:05

And it seems like if it's something authentic then and connected to them, then they can actually see themselves in that, like we talked about.

Dr. Kendall Latham 07:12

100%. Like they're not just building in Minecraft because it's cool, but they're actually building to solve a problem in their community.

Paul Beckermann 07:20

That's so cool. And you talked several times now, you mentioned models, role models, mentors, can you give us kind of a snapshot of how that mentorship actually looks like in your program?

Dr. Kendall Latham 07:31

Yeah. And we've learned a lot. You know, some of the feedback that we got was we needed to have multiple opportunities, not only for the mentors, but also for the mentees to come in and be part of it. And you know, everybody has a different time commitment. So a couple examples we have, you can be a one-on-one mentor, that means one female to one either Dell, Microsoft, or Intel mentor. We also have a mentor club, where it's not as heavy a lift for the clubs, because sometimes it would, clubs are just getting started with Girls Who Game, they feel like it's a lot. And they don't want to add anything else on their plate. So they'll say, "hey, we just want one mentor to support all 12 girls within the program." We also use Flipgrid, where mentors can come in and in under five minutes, they can record their career pathway and share their experiences. And that video gallery is open to all of our clubs. And we just continue to add to it every cohort and so now we have a repository have over 500 videos for the girls to go in and take a look at different career pathways.

Paul Beckermann 08:43

I love that idea about building that library of role models kind of so people can grasp it on demand. So let's say somebody loves what they're hearing here and they want to get involved, how can somebody get involved in Girls Who Game?

Dr. Kendall Latham 08:55

Well first off to spread the word right so we're small but mighty, I mean, we our program got started in 2019 in Canada and we moved down in the fall of 2019 to the US and so you know the biggest thing is we just say spread the word. But also if you go to dell.com you can find our Girls Who Game program there as well to learn more about it too if you want to send it to be a mentor if, you know, want to say if you've got girls if you've got a daughter or you're an educator

and you say hey I want to start a Girls Who Game club at my school go there, reach out to us, our email is there as well too. But you can also email us at girlswhogame@dell.com as well.

Rena Clark 09:41

Okay, I know what I'll be checking out later. So beyond Girls Who Game, what could a teacher or school leader consider know if they want to get started? Maybe take a baby step so that they can bring more equity to STEM program.

Dr. Kendall Latham 09:57

Yeah, so I think we've grown to game, one of the things that we always offer is we have a big celebration at the end of our cohort. And so anybody who's interested in saying, "hey, I want to learn a little bit more," we say, "hey, come to our celebration event." It's a virtual event, it's put on by the girls. So they run the entire event. We have guest speakers as well, too. And so that's just an opportunity for them to come in and just learn a little bit about the program. We also often offer kind of shadowing opportunities. So if I'm a school leader, and I think this might be something good for my school, but I'm not ready to take the next step, then you can come in and shadow and so you can see a program running. We also have professional learning to really support our clubs. And so we say, "hey, come into professional learning session, and just see what these teachers are learning, see what the girls are learning and see how they're using the design thinking process to really conduct their build within Minecraft." And I would also say too, one of the things that I love so much about this program, is it's not a one size fits all, it really is customized based off of different needs. So if we've got somebody that's interested, I usually sit down and I say, "Hey, tell me more. Why are you interested in girls who gave? Why do you think this might be a good fit?" And then once they kind of open up, then we kind of say, "Okay, well let's, can we do this? Can we brainstorm? Can we figure out how to navigate," because the biggest thing, again, is we ultimately want to scale this program to support all communities, not just the few communities that we're reaching right now.

Rena Clark 11:28

You did say you started in 2019, rather small, but how's the program going? And what has the response been like so far?

Dr. Kendall Latham 11:36

Oh, my goodness. Well, you know, we had a little kind of, you know, pandemic in March 2020. You know, and so, so many clubs and sports had to shut down. But Girls Who Game, we never stopped. Now, we had to, you know, switch some things up, we learned a lot. But really, we have expanded so much, we now have over 300 clubs, we have supported 3000 girls in four countries and three languages. So when we think about a program it, you know, fall 2019 was our first cohort in the US, then we had the pandemic. I mean, we're just looking at so much opportunity that actually, you know, Girls Who Game was able to thrive during the pandemic, which I don't know that many programs were able to say that, right. But it was because of the

opportunity to really come together in a girl-centered ecosystem in a virtual space, to really build community and learn from and with each other.

Paul Beckermann 12:36

That's really neat to hear the reach that your program is having. And I'm wondering how that reach extent extends beyond getting girls interested in STEM fields. Like what other benefits does that program bring to the participants?

Dr. Kendall Latham 12:51

Oh, my goodness, so many. And I think it's also sometimes we forget about the adults as well, too. So first off, you know, what we hear from educators is, you know, they're like, oh, you know, I first started, I thought this was a really cool program that I would do after school. But I found some connections to my curriculum in my everyday classroom. And we're like, yes, that's what we want to hear, you know, you're developing global competencies in your classroom, you're helping students navigate computational thinking in your everyday classroom. So it's not just a, if I've got time, kind of fun after school activity, you're seeing the connection to the classroom. Also, I would say, for the mentors, so for Dell mentors, Microsoft mentors, Intel mentors, the feedback we always hear from them is "Oh, my goodness, these girls are amazing. I got so much of this opportunity to connect with them. I learned so much about our future generation, they taught me so much, because so often adults, they're scared of Minecraft. And so actually, the girls ended up being the teacher and they teach us how to use Minecraft, because I'm the first to raise my hand and say, I'm not that great, right? But I'm willing to open up and take a risk and have them teach me how to use the different tools."

Paul Beckermann 14:08

So awesome. So what else would you like our listeners to know about the Girls Who Game program, wide open question, whatever you want to share?

Dr. Kendall Latham 14:17

Yeah, so a couple things. Again, we want to scale this program, right? Like this is a free program that we offer in partnership with Microsoft and Intel. And so what comes with it is if they need devices, we give them devices. We have professional learning to really support the educators. The girls get swag, we have mentors and so really, we see it as a win-win. And so we're again, we just want people to spread the word. You know, if you're on social, follow the hashtag "Girls Who Game" and you can just start kind of seeing what we're doing with our different clubs. Secondly, I would also say I mentioned this before, but customization that, you know, at the heart of everything we do, is making sure our girls get the best experience possible. And so we know that not every single club looks the same, right? So, you know, other iterations of our Girls Who Game clubs we've done. For example, in Kentucky, we're actually connecting University of Kentucky with a district club. And so we're really building that community. We're also connecting them with the local parks and recreation community as well, too. So the girls are able to see it's much more of a community, you know, we always tell them

like, think globally, but act locally. And so now they're actually really seeing how they're there, how they're able to solve a problem in their community that's actually going to impact community members.

Rena Clark 15:43

Well, thank you so much. I think we have a lot of great information. And it sounds like if you want to get started, you can go to, you said dell.com, which takes us to our next segment, which is our toolkit.

Transition Music with Rena's Children 15:58

What's in the toolkit? Check it out. Check it out. Check it out.

Rena Clark 16:09

So I guess I put that one in the toolkit already, you can go to dell.com. and you can find out more about Girls Who Game. Paul, do you have something else to add to our toolkit?

Paul Beckermann 16:18

I picked on what Kendall said, hashtag "Girls Who Game" so if you want to follow on social, you can follow with that hashtag. I think that's a great idea.

Rena Clark 16:29

Anything else you'd like to add in our toolkit, Kendall?

Dr. Kendall Latham 16:34

Email girlswhogame@dell.com Okay, perfect.

Paul Beckermann 16:40

Well, we have one more segment Kendall, and that's called that one thing. So we're gonna jump into that,

Transition Music 16:45

It's time for that one thing. That one thing.

Paul Beckermann 16:58

So in this segment, we get a chance to share one thing that is kind of resonating with us from our conversation. So Rena, we're gonna let you go ahead and start.

Rena Clark 17:07

I just think of where we started with the quote, but to really have really anyone children see themselves in something, it has to be authentic, and meaningful to them. So I appreciate how this program creates opportunity to make those connections that are really truly authentic, and have meaning to your participants. And then it can grow from there.

Paul Beckermann 17:33

And what I'm thinking from the conversations, I'm just so impressed with how the program allows these girls to excel within this community of girl gamers and how it's helping them grow and letting other people see the wonderful skills and attributes that they have. I just see I can picture them blossoming in this and also it stood out to me as the Think globally, act locally. I love that idea of bringing the action back home, close to home, so it's really meaningful to the kids. Kendall, do you want to share like one last thought with our listeners? What's your one thing that's on your mind?

Dr. Kendall Latham 18:07

I'm just, that girl-centric ecosystem really trying to continue to build a safe and supportive community for our girls so that they can continue to shine.

Rena Clark 18:18

So important. Well, Kendall, I just want to thank you for taking the time to be here, y'all. We're on different time zone. But we made this work. We both have three kids in the background. We made it work. So I appreciate your time.

Paul Beckermann 18:33

We've got the whole country covered, don't we? Yeah, Central and East.

Dr. Kendall Latham 18:41

I guess I'm gonna let my kids get some ice cream out late at night because they were quiet.

Rena Clark 18:47

But that aside, thanks for sharing your story and so much information. I know I look forward to checking out some of those resources and so do our listeners. So thanks again.

Dr. Kendall Latham 18:58

Thanks for having me.

Paul Beckermann 18:59

Thanks, Kendall.

Rena Clark 19:03

Thanks for listening to Unpacking Education.

Winston Benjamin 19:06

We invite you to visit us at AVIDopenaccess.org where you can discover resources to support student agency, equity, and academic tenacity to create a classroom for future ready learners.

Paul Beckermann 19:21

We'll be back here next Wednesday for a fresh episode of Unpacking Education.

Rena Clark 19:25

And remember, go forth and be awesome.

Winston Benjamin 19:29

Thank you for all you do.

Paul Beckermann 19:30

You make a difference.