

Mary Miele: Hello, everyone. Welcome to the November edition of the Evolved Education Podcast. I'm Mary Miele, and I'm so excited about today's topic. We're going to jump right into it. These are lessons that we have learned about supporting students throughout their schooling journey, from nursery school all the way through college, and I'm so excited to interview today's guest who comes to us as head of tutoring services here at Evolved Education Company. Amy Nathan is here today to talk with us about some of these lessons that we have learned. We hope to share them with you so that you get to learn them too. And we hope also that it stirs up a dialogue within your communities and families for the benefit of our students.

So without further ado, I am here today to introduce our guest, who is Amy Nathan. Amy brings a wealth of experience in teaching and curriculum development, especially for students with learning challenges and language-based learning disabilities. We're going to dive right in. Amy, thank you so much for being here today. Can you just start by telling us a little bit about your background and your role here at Evolved Education Company?

Amy Nathan: Sure. Thank you for having me. I am so excited to be here at Evolved. I've been teaching for the past 12, 13 years and mostly, as you mentioned, worked in special education settings with students with language-based learning disabilities and attention deficits. During my time in schools, I've worn many hats. I've taught reading, writing, history. I was a writing specialist, a learning specialist, an instructional coach for teachers. I've conducted reading and writing assessments. And I love doing it all. I have also been a private tutor myself and have worked with students in reading, writing, and executive function.

Mary Miele: Amazing. Yes. You bring such a wonderful host of experience to us. I really want to talk first about the unique approach to tutoring and the focus that we bring on academic development and achievement while also considering the development of the whole child, which includes their social, emotional, and physical as well as academic functioning within all of those environments that they function. So school, home, extracurricular, we're really interested in talking about it all. I want to know a little bit more about our philosophy and what we've learned about it and what kind of shapes our tutoring methods.

Amy Nathan: Sure. So I think something we've noticed post pandemic is that students are really requiring more skills and there was a real lag of skills during that time. So we've been bringing in specialists onto our tutor team and we are really making sure that we're listening to the parents, collaborating with schools, doing our own assessments to really examine the whole child and see what skills we can bring in to support the students and get them to where they need to be or what skills we can enhance to get students to achieve their goals. I think our philosophy really is this whole child's approach, like you said, and making sure that they learn well and live well.

Mary Miele: Absolutely. And I guess, parents, if you're listening and you're kind of wondering about this because maybe you're already a client here or you are thinking about tutoring and support for your child, I want to urge you to think about your child right now. Who is

your child academically? How is your child functioning socially? How is your child handling all of the host of emotions that life brings us? How is your child accessing physical development? We've been noticing some students are really needing some additional activities within their social and physical development after school. Our work has actually been sometimes to have conversations with parents about how to bring some of that into their afterschool programming, along with the tutoring. What an amazing lesson we've been learning about the available resources that students have in these areas.

So I guess I just want to go into this notion of balancing these individual needs with the academic goals. So big part of that, of course, is the relationship between the tutor and the student. And we know that that is a really important relationship to form. I guess, parents, think about this for a second, if you are going into a situation in which you are thinking about learning something and it's a little bit vulnerable for you, your skills are lagging in that area, you want to make sure that when you walk into that lesson, the person who's with you has some rapport with you, establishes a really trusting relationship with you, champions you, sees your strengths and says, "Hey, I noticed you're really good at this part of this. Why don't we just keep doing this? This is great."

I know I was just learning a language and my teacher was saying, "Your writing is really great in the language. We need to work on your speaking, so maybe you could just formulate a couple of sentences and just now practice with me by looking at those sentences on the paper." And she was right because I really did struggle with the speaking part of it, but I was really grateful that she noticed that I was pretty good at the writing. So I see that a lot in our reports, and our tutors are really, I think especially encouraged by you, Amy, to look into those strengths. Sometimes those strengths are in those social, emotional, and physical areas that we're looking at.

Amy Nathan: Right. Yeah.

Mary Miele: It's fun because we can have that lens and pull out those strengths as we're kind of meshing ourselves into the academic skill development that we need to be working on. Right?

Amy Nathan: Yeah.

Mary Miele: Yeah.

Amy Nathan: Yeah, definitely.

Mary Miele: Yeah.

Amy Nathan: I think we come from a strength-based place. Obviously we do not see tutoring as a sign of any sort of weakness. Right? We want to get in there to support and build up the student's strengths and strengthen the areas that are challenges. So I think, like you said, we like to balance the individual needs, the academic goals, and ensure that the student is learning the process and understanding how they learn and why they learn

and what kind of learner they are. I like to think of us as the bridge really between home and school too, so that we can communicate and collaborate if necessary with the school and help understand what the child looks like in a classroom setting. And that might be different than what they look like one-to-one in a tutoring setting. And that might be different than what they look like at home when you're asking them to brush their teeth. Right? So I think we've all been there as parents. Children look different in different settings, and we're really there to bridge the gap and figure out how the child is going to learn best.

Mary Miele: Definitely. I really think that is what it is all about. It's such a dynamic process. I feel like you bring such a host of experience from the classroom experience into the one-to-one. You mentioned before that a child might perform differently in those different types of settings. And I wonder, as you are working with families, does this experience sort of influence your approach to the tutoring and test preparation process?

Amy Nathan: Yeah, for sure. That's a great question. So I think what a lot of our tutor team and our specialists do really well is they arm our students with strategies so that they can be independent. They can take what they learned in the one-to-one session and apply it into different setting. I was just having a conversation with one of our test prep tutors and I was saying, "Oh, this kid has a really busy sports schedule." And he's like, "Awesome, let's use the test prep motivation and drive into his sports." It's like real crossover there. I think that our tutors want the students to understand the process and what they're doing so that they can go independently apply it, because application really is the highest form of knowledge in that way.

Mary Miele: Sure, sure. Exactly. I also think of it as a ladder. I like to teach these images to parents too, in saying we have these expectations that are I think pretty commonplace. We want our children to self-advocate. We hear that a lot, right? The teachers will say, "We want the child to come to us and tell us they need help. We want the child to come to us and tell us what they know and don't know. We want the child to tell us what they need in order to learn." And I always see those processes as the child standing on that top rung of the ladder.

Amy Nathan: Right.

Mary Miele: They're really able to balance the ladder. They can really navigate almost like they're holding the tops and they're jimmying it left to right. It takes a lot of skill to do that, right?

Amy Nathan: Right.

Mary Miele: But we need to sometimes go down the ladder with them and start at the bottom, and a tutor is really that person to say, "Okay, here are the strategies you need in order to write this paragraph. Let's just routinize those strategies. Let's use that quick outline over and over and over again." And now you can use it independently and you can ask for it when you need it. You could ask your teacher for different versions of it as you get into higher levels of writing. And that's you climbing that ladder as the student and

being able to now confidently go and say, "I need this." So I think that's something I'm noticing also, which is really, really cool and special.

Amy Nathan: Yeah, for sure. I think that the self-advocacy piece is a huge part of what we want to do with our executive function support. We want to position children to live well, learn well, and be their own self-advocates, understand what strategy tool they need to be successful and to help their brains and to make them into independent learners.

Mary Miele: Definitely. Definitely. And I really think this kind of brings us into some of these additional questions. A large part of our work that I know is so important is communication, right?

Amy Nathan: Yes.

Mary Miele: And I think that something our tutors are supported to do and our parents are supported to do is to go through that communication process. Can you talk a little bit about what parents might consider or what kinds of communication they might need to know about when they're putting a tutor in place and they have the school piece going? How do you navigate some of this communication that is really helpful?

Amy Nathan: Sure. So I think when parents call or email, I really want them to think about their child. What kinds of adults connects best with your child? Is your child somebody who likes to work with somebody in person or are they great on Zoom? Do they have a super busy afterschool schedule and Zoom might be the only option that works? How long are they able to sustain a session? We have options for all different timeframes. What kind of goals do you have? What kind of timeline are you working with? And how do you want the school to be involved? How can we connect with your child's teacher to make this a team effort?

Mary Miele: Yeah. Yeah. I think those are good questions. It's a great ... I think what you're also saying there is to really think about your child in a way that's curious. And what we are doing too is helping you as a parent to think about what's going to be the best modality for this support. How can we make it most impactful given what your child has to do? Feedback is a really big deal as well. So just knowing how we're going to get that feedback. As we spoke about before, we want to teach the strategies that actually get used independently. So how are we knowing if that's actually happening? I know that's a big part of some of the things that we're discussing with families too.

Amy Nathan: Yeah.

Mary Miele: So as you're listening to this, parents, you might be thinking about that too. How are you facilitating some of that important communication between people who are working with your child and the school setting or the sports setting or the theater setting? What is some of that communication looking like? Are you feeling it could be transparent and clear?

Amy Nathan: I think something our tutors do really well too is this feedback loop I like to call it. Our tutors provide families with weekly recaps of the sessions that are quite detailed and giving work that parents can do at home and that can be easily applied even at the dinner table. So I think that our tutors are really open and accessible and want to work together with families to make this really a successful experience. And they want to work with schools and therapists, specialists, anybody to make this really successful. And I always think about your phrase, Mary, that we are the bench, right? We are on a family's bench. That's super important to know you have people behind you that are going to support you and that are going to advocate for you.

Mary Miele: Yes, I think so. I mean, it's been such a pleasure to have Evolved also from a professional sense for myself because I have certain curiosities in my professional life. I did tutor for many years. I had certain things I was tutoring. I had certain things I didn't necessarily tutor. So to have other people who I could rely on to take over certain areas of a child support and also work as a team and also share the same values and approach was always really helpful.

Amy Nathan: Yeah.

Mary Miele: Yeah. So just to have that bench from a tutoring perspective was always a benefit. And I see our tutors doing that too, where they're coming back to you and having conversations about their students and they're saying, "Hey, I wonder what you think about this." Yeah, it's a very supportive experience. Yeah.

Amy Nathan: For sure. For sure.

Mary Miele: Yeah. So in closing, parents, I would just like to let you know that we are on a journey here to support you and your journey to ensure that your student is learning well. We are about to launch a beta form of an app that will serve as access to our community in a more dynamic and community-based way. So we hope that you will be able to come and check it out with us and participate and give us feedback so that we can best support you as questions come up. It'll be a great place to drop your questions. We will be responsive with answers.

Members of our team have expressed interest in forming opportunities for parents to join group sessions in the evenings to talk about anything from parenting to special education advocacy, to middle school and high school admissions processes. So it'll be also a place where you might want to come in and join some of those conversations to learn a little bit more and get some more ideas. Because I think also that's something that you can never really have enough of as a parent. Just adding to the bench concept, right? You need to really establish that bench. Just know you're not alone in your pursuit of ensuring that your child is learning well, right? So I'm excited to have that opportunity. Amy, any last minute advice or anything else that you want to say before we close up this episode?

Amy Nathan: I think with your mention of the app, I think we want to be here as a resource. So come here to ask the questions that you have along the way. If you get feedback, something

about your child's reading, and you're like, "Are they in the right reading group? Or do I have the right independent books for them at home?" ask us. How we can help you is so important to us, and we want to be there as a resource. We have a wide bench and we want to be there to support you.

Mary Miele: Absolutely. We sure do. Amy, it is such a pleasure to talk with you, as always. I appreciate your time today. And if anyone would like to speak with Amy, you can reach her at amy@evolveded.com. She does exploratory calls with families to discuss different tutoring options and test preparation options. So that is always available to everyone. And yes, please come and check out the app when you can. We are here for you throughout your journey, nursery through college. Have a great rest of your November. We'll see you all or hear from you all in December.

Amy Nathan: Thank you.

Mary Miele: Thank you.