

Education Explored - Episode 2 - Luke Brewer

Transcript

00:00:13 Speaker 1

Welcome to Education Explored, the Department of Education at the University of Oxford podcast.

00:00:18 Speaker 1

My name's Heather Sherkunov, and I'll be your host for this episode.

00:00:22 Speaker 1

As part of this series, we're deep diving into all things Department of Education, including speaking to some of our alumni.

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And today I'm delighted to be joined by Luke Brewer, who completed his MSc in Learning and Teaching at the department, graduating in 2020.

00:00:36 Speaker 1

Thanks for joining me, Luke.

00:00:37 Speaker 2

Thank you.

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Thanks for having me.

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So first of all, what attracted you to the course back then?

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I've always had an interest in pedagogy.

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I find the way in which students learn and indeed teachers teach fascinating.

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I suppose it's really the geeky side of me that really wants to drill down into the strategies that we use, what actually works, what we do because it feels nice versus what we do because the research shows it's effective.

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And I think when you're working with young people,

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You don't have time to waste.

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You need to get it right.

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And so for me, the opportunity to sort of deepen my understanding of pedagogical awareness was the main thing that drew me to the course.

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And, you know, teaching in Oxford, I've always...

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aspired to be part of the university and this was a match made in heaven as it were.

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So that worked really well.

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And you were already in school at that point, you were working as a teacher.

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Yeah, that's right.

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I was a teacher of English, head of key stage three English at a nearby school and it's a school where it's an outstanding school.

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It's really very focused on being quite research led and so it had a nice match up with the learning and teaching which was advertised as a kind of CPLD opportunity and

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it spoke to me.

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And it was two years that you did the course for, is that right?

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Yeah, that's right.

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So, because it's sort of I have my PGCE and then so you go straight into kind of part 2 and then and then part 3, yes.

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And what was it like?

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As with any opportunity where you're managing a full-time job with an additional qualification, I would say it was quite intense.

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I think it was really exciting because there's no question about it, the prestige of being part of Oxford definitely spoke to me.

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And a lot of the, certainly in part 2, the first year, a lot of the sort of mini projects that you're doing, working up to the main sort of hand in, are about mini research projects that you can kind of do

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as you're teaching.

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So lots and lots of kind of active research and I enjoyed trying something out and observing carefully the impact upon students.

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So there would be specific focused observations.

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We would be trialling kind of different strategies and kind of working out what the impact was.

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And for me, that felt very aligned with the kind of teacher I wanted to be.

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Again, I want to know what I'm doing makes an impact and is effective.

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And so it was really nice.

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The weekend seminars certainly pushed you in terms of workload balance, but they were only sort of a few across the year.

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And so it was quite manageable.

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And do you think it helps that you sort of live locally or with people on the course from all over the place?

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Yeah, that's a great question.

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So in terms of how the sessions are delivered,

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because they're delivered sort of, it was quite a lot of online interaction, commenting on each other's research projects and things, and that kind of forum style was quite nice.

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But the actual seminars that began on a Friday from like four till six and then all of Saturday, that kind of, if you were travelling in, some people found that sort of travelling a little bit more difficult.

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But I think because it was sort of four, maybe five weekends across the year in the first year, it was manageable.

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It just needed a little bit of negotiation and understanding from schools.

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That leads me sort of nicely onto the community aspect.

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I suppose I'm trying to get a bit of gossip around what's the downtime like?

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Yes, so I met some really lovely course friends who I'm still in touch with and that was really nice.

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And you know, these kind of fellow teachers, they're various kind of middle and senior leaders in various schools.

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And that's really nice because for me moving to Oxford, having done my teacher training qualification kind of

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up north in Manchester, it was really nice as a kind of way of meeting the kind of community.

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Any big nights out you can tell us about?

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I mean, like there were definitely some sort of post-Friday if people had the stamina to kind of absolutely go out and enjoy ourselves.

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Yeah, absolutely.

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And that was really nice.

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I think after the poster conference, that felt like a real achievement.

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And there were definitely some cocktails and some nearby establishments, which was really nice.

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What about any influential supervisors or teachers that you had while you were here?

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Yeah, I was very lucky.

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I ended up having the same supervisor for part two and part three, and I was also joined with a second supervisor in part three just because of the nature of my area of research

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which is really nice.

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So Gary Snapper was my supervisor.

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He was great and he really challenged me to think about his kind of main research areas in poetry and he really challenged me to think about the way that we...

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both introduce and kind of explore poetry.

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I think in the schools where I work, it's quite didactic sometimes.

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And it is very much that famous adage being the kind of sage on the stage rather than the guide on the side.

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Whereas I think Gary really challenged me to think about, but how does that feel for students?

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Like to just have poetry sort of taught at them.

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And that kind of got me to think about how we kind of explore that kind of lived experience for students.

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The sort of Dylan Williams, you know, what does it actually

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feel like and what is the experience for a student in that classroom?

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So that was really, really great.

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And then my own research interest, in particular looking at marking and feedback, was very much influenced by Ian Thompson and Velda Elliott's and et al's work, which really got me thinking about this thing that we spend so much time doing, marking and writing comments.

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And does it mean anything?

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Do the students read it?

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Do they understand it?

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Do they do anything with it?

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Because that Wednesday night that you've just spent two or three hours marking books because you've taken them home feeling miserable, you bring the books in on Thursday, the kids look at it and immediately move on to the next thing.

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And you're like, was that a useful, was that a productive way to spend part of my life?

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Could I have gone to see a friend, you know, to cheer up midweek?

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And so my research is funny because I

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I came to one of the most prestigious universities in the world and looked at how to save time and do less work more effectively.

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So yeah, so those kind of conversations really sparked my interest.

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Yeah.

00:07:12 Speaker 1

Bit of a cliched question, but what were the highlights and the lowlights would you say of the course?

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So the deadline for part two is pretty brutal.

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I remember the Easter, so this phrase, this mythical phrase, holiday.

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So the Easter holiday.

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That was, that was, that was quickly eaten by a, I think a 10,000 word.

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research dissertation in part two, which was brutal.

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And that was like, chain myself to the desk in the Bodleian and then don't leave until it's done.

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That was tough.

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I remember that one being quite tough.

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But in terms of highlights, I'm never afraid of getting into a pedagogical debate if one beckons.

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And I definitely remember meeting people, actually from the private sector as well, because I'm kind of surrounded by state school settings.

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And I found it really interesting to

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gain an awareness of what it's like on the other side, and trying to sort of think about how can we kind of collaborate so that...

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it's less divisive and more collaborative.

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And that was a really interesting, a really interesting experience.

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And I guess, the highlight of certainly graduating.

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So I graduated on February the 29th, 2020.

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So both a leap year graduation, but also prior to the world locking down.

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And so that was quite a unique and memorable experience.

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And I'll never, ever forget graduating from Oxford and all of the ceremony in Latin and the

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Yes, Chancellor.

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That was amazing.

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Like, I will keep those memories forever.

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What did you do that night?

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Did you go out and celebrate?

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Yeah, we managed to, so we had my, had family and we had a lovely family catch up.

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This is the last time that I saw my grandparents for many, many months who were living in Spain.

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So they'd flown across, flew back and the next day the airport was locked down.

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So that was fortunate.

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But we had a really good night and it was just so lovely to just know that we'd achieved this thing while still essentially full-time working.

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Yeah, it's such a prestigious, but just a really, a really amazing feeling.

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What a massive achievement.

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And also to have it right, like you say, on the eve of kind of...

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the whole world locking down.

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I mean, how lucky to be able to have your grandparents and everybody there.

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Completely surreal.

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And I, it was just so fantastic.

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I just remember that feeling of such this incredible achievement that I never really dreamed of, to be honest.

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But yeah, I think as an interesting bit of context, perhaps I'm the first in my family to go to university.

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And so

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Yeah, to reach this, to reach this kind of, pinnacle as many would consider it.

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That was really awesome.

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And now you've gone on to be the Deputy Head of Sixth Form, Head of EPQ and Teacher of English at the Swan School.

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Yes.

00:10:00 Speaker 1

What's that like?

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Yeah, intense.

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So context of my school, the Swan School, is it's a new school.

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It's now in its sixth year of operations.

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So one of the interesting things about working for a school, which is new, is it's like working for a startup business.

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And you really don't know what you don't know until it's time to, you need to know it.

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And so I kind of got brought across

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because they said, we've got, there's this qualification, extended project qualification.

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It's really, it can be really powerful for students, but we haven't got a clue how to do that.

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Would you, would you mind setting it up from scratch?

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And I was like, yeah, not done that before, but that sounds, that sounds fun.

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And

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But that's been really, really great.

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And quickly they sort of saw that I lent quite strongly into sort of sixth form and establishing that very small but kind of growing sixth form.

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And so I joined the sixth form quite quickly as became the kind of deputy head of sixth.

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And I love it because it's essentially everything that I care about, pathways, you know, university opportunities, apprenticeships, helping students find what it is they care most about and helping give them the access to that.

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And I guess that's very much influenced by my own background of if it wasn't for a teacher who cared and showed me one, university exists, two, you can do it.

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You can be part of that.

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I think, you know, I would not be sat here recording this podcast with you.

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Who was that teacher?

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So her name was Lauren, and she was part of my sixth form college, Cirencester College, and she was an amazing, amazing woman.

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And there was another lady there called Janet, who I think she'd graduated from, I can't remember if it was Oxford or Cambridge, with a double first.

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Well you need to get that right.

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I know, right?

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100%, I need to do my research.

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She made me redraft my personal statement like eight or nine times.

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Like she was absolutely going to make sure that I had a shot and I originally studied law and so I would never have kind of got to that stage in the first place.

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And then obviously made a career change to education.

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It just shows the influence of a teacher who, one, has the time to give to you.

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Two, makes you feel more confident and believe in yourself.

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And three, puts the time in, does the hard work to work with you and help you achieve what it is you're aiming for.

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You know, Janet in particular, Lauren was sort of

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a tutor really helped me, but Janet was instrumental in terms of my ability to go to university and then progress from there to kind of come to Oxford.

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What a fantastic story.

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And then now, like you said, you then moved on and completely changed your career path for that reason.

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Yeah, that's the thing.

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So students ask me, you know, if you've done a law degree, why are you a teacher?

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You know, apart from my love of literature and the subject that I teach,

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It's about the fact that I had someone who kind of championed me and took that time and invested interest in me and that helped me become a success.

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I know firsthand the power of an effective teacher.

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And so I think by the time that I got to graduating, apart from loving the subject but not necessarily loving the professionals within the subject of law,

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I would, I would say, and then I did a little kind of part-time brand manager job for Teach First, and then it was from it was the Teach First programme that I then joined and stayed.

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Teachers I found far more inspiring than lawyers, I'll be honest.

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they're people who make you think and challenge your every day, but also there's a moral purpose to what we do.

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And there's also that kind of question of legacy.

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And I always feel slightly, I don't know, arrogant or slightly, you know, it feels like a very grand term, legacy.

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But legacy is about the impact that you have in your time and how others hopefully are impacted by that.

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Yeah.

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I could have been a city lawyer earning plenty of money and living very comfortably and probably not sleeping.

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But instead, I can help others find out what it is they most care about and help them achieve their dreams.

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And for me, that is what legacy is all about.

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Do you think it's less stressful being a teacher than a lawyer?

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Oh, wow.

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court case versus the classroom, courtroom versus the classroom.

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Interesting.

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I've had some merging experience of the two in the sense I used to lead the mock trials law team of young people who were kind of trying out different, you know, cases in the local magistrates court in this competition, which was fantastic.

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I think it's very different, right?

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I think what a lawyer is doing, they're chasing the bottom line.

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They're making money for their clients and their firms.

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What are teachers doing?

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We are trying to, in its most profound, change the life chances of young people who might otherwise face a pretty tough deal in life and hopefully celebrating their successes along the way.

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And I think working with people, working with young people, that success feels a lot sweeter, I think, than money would bring.

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How did the course support you in your role now then?

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Or set you up for success in it.

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Yeah, great question.

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So the focus of my part two was around motivation.

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So looking at how can we can build the intrinsic motivation of particularly low attaining boys who really struggle, particularly in an English classroom, I think.

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And building on that, my second, my part three was on working with training teachers and thinking about feedback and how feedback plays into motivation.

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but also developing strategies that help have a greater impact in the classroom.

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For me, it was the confidence that I could lead sessions with training teachers,

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deliver with sort of a sense of authority from research-backed kind of evidence, these are some really effective strategies.

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And then my school kind of found out about my topic when I presented to SLT and then I was delivering sessions within the department and then local training providers and with all of the, at the time, NQTs, now ECTs and training placement students, student teachers at the school.

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So I just found myself working with a wide range of training teachers

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And that's kind of continued really, and that led me to become a mentor and an assessor of teaching, training, and a lot of that has given me confidence within that field.

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And I think also just in my current role as a deputy head of sixth form, like as I said at the sort of start, I'm not

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interested in things that perhaps feel nice but don't actually have an impact.

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We have a limited amount of time with students and so we have to get it right.

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So I think it's given me the confidence to say, okay, but what does the research show?

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What are other schools doing?

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What is best practice here?

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Rather than, oh, that feels like a nice way to spend a Friday, you know?

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And so I think it's that confidence that's comes from knowing

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what I'm doing actually has backing and is robust.

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And in a new school where everything's new, you've kind of got to have a pretty confident strategy moving forward and then adjust as a sort of iterative kind of cycle of research might suggest.

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But you've got to know what you're doing to start with, really.

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And it sounds like you said, being a new school, you're sort of thrown into it, just you take charge of this whole

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piece of work or this project or this area and that takes a bit of confidence, right?

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Yeah, absolutely.

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And especially for my sort of the extended project qualification that I lead.

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I made the pitch to the school that, unlike some schools, I want every single student studying these skills.

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I think every single, on a social justice kind of point of view, every single student can benefit from learning research skills and project management skills prior to going to university or starting an apprenticeship or career.

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And that's backed by the research.

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We know from the research that students who have this additional qualification

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are some 10 to 15% more likely to, one, progress from year one to year two in university, and two, achieve a 2-1 or a first at the end of their degree.

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If the evidence shows that this is, and it's most powerful for those coming from the kind of most deprived quintile of the multiple deprivation index, we know that it is the most powerful because that is what the research has shown.

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So my argument was,

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if we're going to be talking about raising the life chances of these students and supporting their pathways, this is something we've got to do.

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And that's not an easy thing to pitch to a school which has so many priorities, including things like securing an exams officer, because exams are happening for the first time ever this year.

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So I think, again, being research-backed, being evidence-based, it builds confidence and it allows you to make those important

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pitches and those important arguments.

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So every single student at your school does do that qualification, in the sixth form.

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But at other schools, how do they choose who does that and who doesn't?

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Yeah, often to use a kind of older term, it's a sort of gifted and talented programme.

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It's for those who display exceptional aptitude or they opt into it.

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For our school, I want all students to benefit from sessions around

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how do you do academic research?

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How do you reference academic research?

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How do you avoid plagiarism?

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And also, how do you manage a complex project?

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How do you write a longer piece of work?

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And so even if the students don't perhaps submit for the final qualification, every single one of them has gone to that taught skills program.

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And this is something I've spoken about at nationally PQ conferences.

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And I just think that it is the right, I don't think I know it is the right thing to do because again, the research shows it makes the biggest difference for those who are least perhaps likely to have encountered any form of academic research prior to A-levels.

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So again, it's about a policy of hopefully a platform of empowerment for those students.

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Yeah, fascinating.

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What does teaching look like on a good day?

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Teaching on a good day.

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It's just a spectacular feeling.

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It's the students that perhaps find learning the most challenging, just like kind of looking up.

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There's kind of a kind of a gleam in their eye.

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There's just something that's kind of activated in them.

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And you know that is the impact that your, you know, your kind of classroom practice is having on them.

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It's raising their confidence.

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It's helping them realise they can be successful too.

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I teach a small group of kind of some of the lowest students in the school for English who have previously found the subject so difficult.

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Their reading ages are low and doing Shakespeare with them is an incredibly ambitious undertaking.

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But it's when they want to answer questions, they are struggling, but they are trying so hard.

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And those moments where you realise,

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I think if I wasn't here right now, this student would be having a very different experience.

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And I think those days where you just reach those hard to reach students, that's the best feeling.

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That sounds incredibly rewarding.

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The marking hasn't quite come in yet.

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Understandable.

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And then dare I ask, what does teaching look like on a bad day?

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This is a tough profession.

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I talk about, there's a very high level of emotionality in teaching.

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It's so easy to take things so personally.

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And I think what's important to remember is you're only seeing a snapshot of a student's day.

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You have no idea what the background context is for those students.

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And so.

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It can sometimes feel very personal.

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And I think sometimes students, especially are kind of paradoxically, if they trust you, if they trust you, they know you're going to be there.

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They can really take things out on you.

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And it can kind of hurt, if you like, some of the language or behaviours or that sense of kicking back against you, hopefully not physically, but just that sort of sense of you are the representation of the things that most frustrate them.

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And I think it's very easy to take those things personally.

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I think also as a kind of mirror leader, some of the safeguarding issues that then come up and you're there to support the student, provide that consistency, provide that reassurance.

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But what goes on behind the scenes when you perhaps leave that moment, the emotions can really hit.

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And so I think

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With teaching, there's a very high degree of emotionality because you're adapting and interacting with some 150, 200 people a day.

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So when you come home, sometimes the last thing you want to do is talk.

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I just want to hide or read or escape in some way.

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And so I think it's very easy for a non-teacher not to kind of realise the emotional toll that the job takes.

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I don't think it's any worse than, for example, a social worker.

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I think, you know, the problems that some of our kind of nurses and social workers and those people who come into contact with some of the most difficult circumstances working with people, I think it's kind of akin to that just sense of like,

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I'm doing everything I can, but the world seems to be kicking back against them and it feels cruel and there's nothing I can do.

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I need to plan that lesson.

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I need to make sure that I'm ready the next day and I need to kind of steel myself, if you like, to be that consistent, calm, supporting presence, even though I'm kind of fighting back the tears a bit at the moment with the student.

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And is that how you deal with it?

00:24:18 Speaker 1

Keep going with the structure of your day, your lesson plan.

00:24:22 Speaker 1

How do you deal with those moments of emotion?

00:24:25 Speaker 2

Yeah, it's a great...

00:24:26 Speaker 1

I'd just burst into tears.

00:24:27 Speaker 1

I'd be useless.

00:24:27 Speaker 2

I'd spent my first year of teaching after a Wednesday afternoon just...

00:24:33 Speaker 2

kind of running and having a bit of a sob with my mentors.

00:24:36 Speaker 2

I think there's an adrenaline, right?

00:24:38 Speaker 2

like with any job that I think there's some, I don't know how robust this study was, but there was some kind of study that looked at the amount of incoming information that you have to process as a teacher.

00:24:50 Speaker 2

And the only job that came up higher than a teacher is an air traffic controller.

00:24:57 Speaker 1

Oh, wow.

00:24:57 Speaker 2

You know, you are dealing with so many sensory inputs from so many different

00:25:03 Speaker 2

young people in your classroom, when you're moving about in a corridor, you just have to deal with so much incoming information and the adrenaline is so high.

00:25:12 Speaker 2

And unlike, for example, in an office job where you do need to be at your desk for 9, but probably people won't notice if it's 9.03.

00:25:20 Speaker 2

If there's 30 young students waiting for you and you're not there on time, they do notice and things go wrong.

00:25:27 Speaker 2

So I think that there's that timekeeping and then also

00:25:31 Speaker 2

there's that sort of adrenaline of you being the one who has to bring the authority.

00:25:35 Speaker 2

And if you don't demonstrate that authority, then piranhas in the water.

00:25:39 Speaker 2

You know, they will pick up on that immediately.

00:25:44 Speaker 2

So I think it's about that sense of, I kind of laugh about it, but being the adult in the room, you have to be the responsible, consistent,

00:25:54 Speaker 2

de-escalating adult in the room, whereas internally maybe you just want to scream.

00:26:00 Speaker 2

But that's just what you're going to do.

00:26:02 Speaker 2

You put on that act, you adopt that teacher persona, and you get through it.

00:26:07 Speaker 2

And then, you know.

00:26:07 Speaker 1

But it's worth it.

00:26:08 Speaker 2

Absolutely.

00:26:09 Speaker 2

And at the end of the day, if you still feel pretty tumultuous, just go and see your colleagues, because you can almost guarantee that someone's had a similar and challenging experience that day.

00:26:19 Speaker 2

And the collegiality of it is very powerful.

00:26:23 Speaker 1

Did the course help support you with the reality of teaching, or is there support from your peers, or was it more about the kind of research side of it?

00:26:33 Speaker 2

Yeah, I'd definitely say it was more about the research side of it, but I think sometimes those conversations with supervisors where you're...

00:26:41 Speaker 2

ostensibly looking at the research, but then ultimately just having a gripe about whatever is going wrong at the time.

00:26:47 Speaker 2

I think that can be really powerful.

00:26:49 Speaker 2

And again, it's that sort of network of colleagues, so your course mates, again, supervisors and teachers.

00:26:55 Speaker 2

Inevitably, our attention spans are only so long.

00:26:58 Speaker 2

So we take in this information about, you know, quantitative and qualitative data analysis at 9 a.m.

00:27:02 Speaker 2

on a Saturday.

00:27:03 Speaker 2

And then, and eventually you get to the break.

00:27:06 Speaker 2

And what you get is not a conversation about, you know, chi-squared, it's a conversation about

00:27:12 Speaker 2

my goodness, this week, what is going on?

00:27:14 Speaker 2

How are we supposed to support students with diminishing resources, especially for those with SEND needs?

00:27:20 Speaker 2

Like what is going on?

00:27:21 Speaker 2

And it's just the sense of bringing teachers together in a purposeful and research focus, but ultimately it's just an opportunity to kind of talk to each other and work out how we're supposed to be doing what we're doing within these kind of circumstances.

00:27:36 Speaker 2

So I think it's just an opportunity for a bit of a vent and a bit of a download,

00:27:41 Speaker 2

But then obviously head back in the game when it comes to the next session.

00:27:45 Speaker 1

Yeah, so your MSc part three was entitled Too Early for a Marked Improvement -

00:27:50 Speaker 1

can we develop training teachers to reduce their workload through whole class marking and feedback strategies?

00:27:56 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:27:57 Speaker 1

Can we?

00:27:57 Speaker 2

Yes, absolutely.

00:27:59 Speaker 2

In fact, it's crucial.

00:28:00 Speaker 2

I think my perspective that I noticed was, oh, this whole class marking, these feedback strategies, it's quite advanced pedagogy.

00:28:10 Speaker 2

And for training teachers,

00:28:11 Speaker 2

They just need to turn up and learn how to do the job.

00:28:14 Speaker 2

But then, I don't know about others, but when I was a training teacher, I was working 60 to 80 hours a week and that for very, very little remuneration, which I think is just not acceptable.

00:28:25 Speaker 2

And I think, actually, if someone had said, do you know what, you don't need to take those books home.

00:28:30 Speaker 2

You don't need to spend till 9/10pm marking.

00:28:33 Speaker 2

My research was around, I was looking at all this brilliant research going on from Oxford from their original publication, Velda Elliott and et al's publication around marking and feedback effectiveness, which kind of found that...

00:28:46 Speaker 2

Essentially, if you put a number, a mark on a piece of work and a target, the student's just going to ignore the target.

00:28:51 Speaker 2

They're just going to look at the number and then just move on.

00:28:54 Speaker 2

And you're thinking, well, hang on, that's 30 sentences, minimum 30 sentences that I've written into the student's work.

00:29:01 Speaker 2

And then they're not going to read it.

00:29:03 Speaker 2

What a total waste of my time.

00:29:05 Speaker 2

I could have been out seeing that friend who I know is also going through a tough time and we could have just gone and had a meal out or just had some time to connect.

00:29:14 Speaker 2

I was kind of outraged, I guess, with this.

00:29:17 Speaker 2

And for me, I was like, I don't just want experienced teachers to know this stuff.

00:29:25 Speaker 2

I want training teachers to build this into their practice early to develop those habits that are going to result in retention.

00:29:31 Speaker 2

If teachers are working less than 50 hours a week, that is probably going to lead to them wanting to stay in the profession more.

00:29:39 Speaker 2

And I don't just think that this work was interesting.

00:29:42 Speaker 2

I think it was urgent.

00:29:43 Speaker 2

And

00:29:44 Speaker 2

I work with, a range of some 50 training teachers, and the feedback from my results show that some teachers were reducing their marking workload by up to half, some even more, by adopting a bit more of a kind of toolkit of strategies.

00:29:59 Speaker 2

It's all about intentionality, right?

00:30:00 Speaker 2

What is my intention with this feedback?

00:30:03 Speaker 2

Do I want my students to read it, understand it, and apply it?

00:30:07 Speaker 2

Well, if you do, then you need to teach it again because there's a reason they didn't get it in the first place.

00:30:11 Speaker 2

Classic example is reading a student's work and you want them to use a greater range of punctuation.

00:30:17 Speaker 2

So you write, it would be lovely, great to see a greater range of punctuation, semicolons and colons, et cetera.

00:30:22 Speaker 2

And then you think, well, why didn't they do that in the first place?

00:30:25 Speaker 2

Probably because they don't know how.

00:30:27 Speaker 2

And if you just write, can you try and do this thing that you don't know how to do yet?

00:30:31 Speaker 2

It's totally ineffective and worse, it's demotivating and damaging.

00:30:35 Speaker 2

So my research was all about showing there's another way and actually there's a better way, a more effective way and a way that you can have your Wednesday and Tuesday nights back and actually you'll be more effective in the classroom and you can spend the time preparing for what actually matters, which is those in-class interactions.

00:30:54 Speaker 2

And you can have the energy

00:30:56 Speaker 2

and the purpose and the intentionality to focus on in class rather than all this time wasted outside.

00:31:02 Speaker 1

In that scenario, so the punctuation scenario, it might be specific to that student.

00:31:07 Speaker 1

So how do you...

00:31:08 Speaker 1

have strategies, does it mean you work with that student on that thing?

00:31:12 Speaker 1

What does some of those strategies look like?

00:31:13 Speaker 2

Sure, we're getting really into the detail now.

00:31:16 Speaker 2

I'm very happy to.

00:31:17 Speaker 2

But essentially, for example, you'd have a grid, a sheet of paper, it doesn't even need to be a grid.

00:31:22 Speaker 2

And as you're reviewing student work, you flick through, you have a little read.

00:31:27 Speaker 2

You don't put anything on the page for a whole class marking strategy, but I'd note down, let's say Adam seems to not know the difference between a full stop and a comma, or let's say Alice is struggling with remembering to capitalise these character names.

00:31:43 Speaker 2

Yeah, it can be anything like that.

00:31:44 Speaker 2

And first of all, I need to check that they actually understand that.

00:31:48 Speaker 2

And if I'm noticing a third of the class isn't using an apostrophe correctly to indicate possession, then I need to reteach that.

00:31:55 Speaker 2

Because obviously,

00:31:56 Speaker 2

third of the class haven't secured a basic skill, which I thought they had when I taught it to them first.

00:32:02 Speaker 2

So by reteaching that skill, prioritizing what are the main things that need to be retaught here.

00:32:07 Speaker 2

And then while students are kind of working on self-correction or they're working on a task, which is getting them to reapply that skill, relearn it and reapply it, I can then go to my other students, I can go to my Fatimas and sit with them and have that bit of one-to-one time, or I can go to my Alex's who are absolutely flying and they've got this, they've secured this skill, and I can go and challenge them

00:32:26 Speaker 2

with an extension task.

00:32:28 Speaker 2

So I think it's about adapting teaching to best fit actual needs of the students in front of us, not just kind of what we imagine might be the case.

00:32:36 Speaker 2

Building in time on a curriculum to reteach these things.

00:32:41 Speaker 2

My school is excellent at this.

00:32:42 Speaker 2

It has a week where each cycle where everyone is kind of assessed each term and then we build in two to three weeks of reteaching so that we can secure those skills.

00:32:52 Speaker 2

Because if you just move on before a student secured skills,

00:32:55 Speaker 2

they're not going to secure them.

00:32:57 Speaker 2

And so taking that time, being very deliberate in how we target our kind of reteaching makes a big difference.

00:33:05 Speaker 1

You mentioned about retention.

00:33:07 Speaker 1

Do you think that's one of the biggest risk factors for the whole sector?

00:33:10 Speaker 2

Absolutely.

00:33:11 Speaker 2

The research is, you know, the statistics are horrifying.

00:33:14 Speaker 2

I think there's still a

00:33:16 Speaker 2

terrible, terrible issue with workload.

00:33:18 Speaker 2

And I think it gets worse with pressures like external agencies like Ofsted, but I don't think Ofsted is the root cause of the problem.

00:33:25 Speaker 2

I think it's how senior leaders sometimes misinterpret things.

00:33:28 Speaker 2

They themselves don't do things that are research-led.

00:33:31 Speaker 2

I won't name the school, but I remember working within a school where the deputy headteacher was making us use this particular marking strategy.

00:33:40 Speaker 2

It's called triple impact marking, and it's a horrendous, horrendous workload burden.

00:33:44 Speaker 2

And actually, it wasn't really doing much, but it was

00:33:46 Speaker 2

is adding 12, 20 hours to our marking every half term.

00:33:51 Speaker 2

Where's that time coming from?

00:33:52 Speaker 2

Because there's nowhere in my contract it says there's the direct time, 1, 2, 6, 5 hours, and then after that it's just like, and just the rest I assume.

00:34:01 Speaker 2

That's not sustainable.

00:34:02 Speaker 2

It's not sustainable that our teachers are working sometimes up to a third, sometimes up to half above their actual directed time.

00:34:10 Speaker 2

It's ridiculous.

00:34:11 Speaker 2

I made a comparison between lawyers and teachers earlier.

00:34:14 Speaker 2

Lawyers typically work, I think it's like 1,800 hours up to

00:34:16 Speaker 2

teachers aren't far off, lawyers get paid a lot more.

00:34:19 Speaker 2

It's not okay, and anything that we can do to help teachers drive down their workload by using really intentional strategies.

00:34:31 Speaker 2

that is what is going to improve retention.

00:34:33 Speaker 2

Because ultimately, as you progress through life, you might want to have children, you might want to have, dare I say, hobbies.

00:34:39 Speaker 2

And so you're being a teacher is a privilege, but it is a job.

00:34:43 Speaker 2

And I push against quite hard the idea that it's a lifestyle.

00:34:47 Speaker 2

It's not a lifestyle, it's a job.

00:34:49 Speaker 2

And as an office worker, I don't think I'd be expected to take an additional two, three hours of work home every night.

00:34:54 Speaker 2

I don't think that's acceptable.

00:34:55 Speaker 2

We have to help teachers have fulfilling and successful lives outside of the profession as well.

00:35:01 Speaker 2

hours within it, that is what will, in my humble opinion, change retention.

00:35:06 Speaker 1

Do you think that's why some people say it's a lifestyle?

00:35:09 Speaker 1

Because for the love of the pupils and for the love of, like you say earlier on, you were talking about progressing people and the impact that teachers had on you.

00:35:18 Speaker 1

So do you think that's why?

00:35:19 Speaker 1

Because people think it's a bit like they see the bigger picture of why it's the good thing to do, but then they don't think about the reality of actually how many hours and the toll that takes.

00:35:29 Speaker 2

Yeah, I think honestly it's a sense as a culture

00:35:31 Speaker 2

of martyrdom.

00:35:32 Speaker 2

I think it's that teachers are a master to the cause in some cases.

00:35:37 Speaker 2

I like to think that I am a powerful advocate for my students.

00:35:41 Speaker 2

I teach well-structured and

00:35:44 Speaker 2

and impactful lessons.

00:35:45 Speaker 2

But I also go to my board games club on a Wednesday.

00:35:49 Speaker 2

I step away when I go home and I have a quite strong kind of sense of I leave my work at work.

00:35:56 Speaker 2

It is absolutely my lifetime's kind of career fulfilment, if you like, being really good at what I do or aiming to be really good at what I do at least.

00:36:06 Speaker 2

I absolutely 100% commit myself fully when I'm in that building.

00:36:11 Speaker 2

But when I leave the building, I want to be able to live a life that is also fulfilling and walk my dog and see my partner and things.

00:36:20 Speaker 2

I want to be able to do those things and I wouldn't be able to if I just accepted that my work could just leak into my kind of life.

00:36:32 Speaker 1

Slight subject change, AI in education.

00:36:35 Speaker 1

Fun, are we terrified?

00:36:38 Speaker 2

As a subject leader for the extended project qualification, which is a 5,000-word research-based report or creating an artifact, AI is a nightmare when it comes to plagiarism concerns.

00:36:51 Speaker 2

So, for example, while I see the benefits of using something like ChatGPT or Gemini to do some research in an area you feel quite uncomfortable with or, you know, uncertain with,

00:37:01 Speaker 2

It's a bit like a Wikipedia page, right?

00:37:03 Speaker 2

It's a good starting point.

00:37:04 Speaker 2

And actually, if you're a diligent researcher, and you, we've all used Wikipedia to gain a quick bit of knowledge, but you know, everything underneath is footnoted, everything underneath is referenced, and you can then go to those deeper references to gain a deeper understanding.

00:37:19 Speaker 2

I guess the biggest concern with AI is that students are just taking shortcuts that ultimately can be a helpful starting point.

00:37:26 Speaker 2

But if that is the product, if that is the

00:37:30 Speaker 2

the research product of what they've done, then they probably haven't understood what they've submitted.

00:37:35 Speaker 2

And in a project like the extended project qualification, or also just for English essays, it means that we have to get students to handwrite things all the time, or we have to get students to submit electronically and in printed forms so we can run AI detection software and things.

00:37:51 Speaker 2

It's just another rung of complexity to what we're already trying to do.

00:37:56 Speaker 2

And I think AI is an incredible asset for

00:38:00 Speaker 2

for rapid knowledge assimilation.

00:38:04 Speaker 2

And I think assimilation is what it should be used for.

00:38:06 Speaker 2

If you're coming from a starting point of zero, it is going to give you a lot of information quickly.

00:38:13 Speaker 2

But it's okay to assimilate information, but you humans who are researching have to then process it, think about it, understand it,

00:38:24 Speaker 2

And I worry as a society already, we're pretty low on critical thinking skills.

00:38:30 Speaker 2

And I fear, not to sound like a Luddite, but I fear that AI is going to further drive that lack of criticality.

00:38:41 Speaker 2

You know, that's what the masters is all about, right?

00:38:43 Speaker 2

It's thinking really critically, evaluatively and analytically about what we're doing.

00:38:48 Speaker 2

I feel if I had AI when I was doing the masters,

00:38:53 Speaker 2

I might have just taken shortcuts, which I think I would have really, it would have really deprived me of that, of that proper understanding of sitting in the library and really teasing through the notes and the articles and things that we're reading.

00:39:10 Speaker 2

I think if I hadn't put that brain power in, perhaps I wouldn't have left with the confidence to be able to challenge the things that I don't agree with.

00:39:17 Speaker 2

So yeah, it can be a powerful tool as a starting point.

00:39:21 Speaker 2

But my concern is when it replaces human thought.

00:39:24 Speaker 1

I'm wondering if there's any way you foresee that it might support teachers?

00:39:28 Speaker 2

Yeah, so there's some interesting developing software around lesson planning, for example, and how AI can generate a pretty feasible, serviceable lesson plan.

00:39:40 Speaker 2

But, you know, the thing that makes the biggest difference is we as teachers are able to adapt

00:39:48 Speaker 2

what we're delivering to meet the individual needs of students in our classroom, because we know them very well.

00:39:56 Speaker 2

A massive language model isn't going to be able to compute the kind of emotional experiences of a student.

00:40:04 Speaker 2

So let's say, for example, I go back to my absolutely beloved small group year 8 class.

00:40:10 Speaker 2

I can sense the mood.

00:40:11 Speaker 2

it's the afternoon.

00:40:13 Speaker 2

They are absolutely on the edge of what they can take in terms of concentration of reading a text.

00:40:19 Speaker 2

And I pick up on that and I notice and I make adaptations and changes and I try and build in some more oracy activities or I build in things that I know will motivate them.

00:40:32 Speaker 2

If I just ran with my AI generated lesson plan from Of Mice and Men about chapter 2 or whatever it might be,

00:40:40 Speaker 2

I risk missing that human element.

00:40:42 Speaker 2

And I guess I feel like, and I sound so jaded now, but I feel like in a society which is so online, so social media driven, so comparative, and so decentred around people, my fear with AI is that if we just unquestioningly sort of follow it, we'll lose that human connection.

00:41:06 Speaker 2

And I think the very best teachers

00:41:08 Speaker 2

are emotionally really sharp and notice these things and make these changes and help those students who might be in a really, a really emotionally dysregulated state, they help them reconnect.

00:41:23 Speaker 2

My fear with AI is it's not about human reconnection.

00:41:27 Speaker 2

It's about efficiency over perhaps something more genuine.

00:41:31 Speaker 1

And is it fun being in the classroom?

00:41:33 Speaker 2

Absolutely.

00:41:35 Speaker 2

I think, I talked about you have to kind of be the adult in the room.

00:41:39 Speaker 2

When it comes to like behaviour, managing expectations, you absolutely do.

00:41:44 Speaker 2

But when it comes to teaching, especially English, you know, it's such a wonderfully fun subject that you can really become totally immersed in and you end up doing different voices for different characters.

00:41:58 Speaker 2

I'm teaching vocabulary and I'm doing like actions to go with the vocabulary and I look quite crazed, I think.

00:42:04 Speaker 2

And I just love it when students are really, they might even be laughing, honestly, at the kind of ridiculous fake American accents that I'm trying to do when, you know, with mice and men or whatever it might be, or high posh English with Pride and Prejudice, you know, whatever it might be.

00:42:22 Speaker 2

And I just love it, those moments of real human connection.

00:42:26 Speaker 2

And it's a performance.

00:42:28 Speaker 2

And my job is to engage my audience as any kind of actor or actress might need to.

00:42:35 Speaker 2

And so there is a very performative aspect to it.

00:42:39 Speaker 2

And sometimes there are just really silly moments.

00:42:43 Speaker 2

Just last week, one of my students developed hiccups.

00:42:46 Speaker 2

A few moments later, another student developed hiccups.

00:42:49 Speaker 2

And then the first student put the hand and it was like,

00:42:51 Speaker 2

totally off-piste from that chapter of Pride and Prejudice that we're doing, was just like, so who's got the better hiccups?

00:42:57 Speaker 2

I was just like, that's fun.

00:43:00 Speaker 2

That was a thought I had in my head, but I dismissed it because I was being ridiculous and I told myself in my head to refocus on the lesson.

00:43:09 Speaker 2

You've now distracted me again.

00:43:11 Speaker 2

But like, you know, there's silly moments of just laughter or kind of emotional vulnerability, you know, some really hard-hitting moments in novels or

00:43:21 Speaker 2

or poems when sad things happen and you feel it together.

00:43:24 Speaker 2

And that sort of, I guess it's both the fun, but also that shared humanity.

00:43:29 Speaker 2

That is something AI is never going to be able to do.

00:43:31 Speaker 2

Create those shared moments of humanity.

00:43:33 Speaker 2

And that is some of the best parts of teaching.

00:43:37 Speaker 1

Sounds like your pupils keep you on your toes.

00:43:39 Speaker 2

Oh yeah, absolutely.

00:43:40 Speaker 2

I mean, if I'm, I am never bored, right?

00:43:43 Speaker 2

You go into teaching, you're never bored.

00:43:46 Speaker 2

You can guarantee that.

00:43:47 Speaker 2

No two days or even lessons are going to be the same and you are going to be pretty tired by the end of the day, but hopefully pretty satisfied too.

00:43:56 Speaker 1

What would your advice be to prospective students who are looking to do the MLT?

00:44:01 Speaker 2

For me, the most important thing is think about how you're going to manage your time.

00:44:07 Speaker 2

When I was investigating the course, I made the request to my school just to drop one day of a fortnight.

00:44:12 Speaker 2

And I felt for me, that allowed me to compartmentalise my time well enough to have a kind of hard hitting Friday in the library.

00:44:19 Speaker 2

But it allowed me to kind of do all the things I need to do.

00:44:23 Speaker 2

I would say, you know, just think carefully about how you're going to find the time to write a research led dissertation.

00:44:30 Speaker 2

I think there were eight different tasks in part two when I did it.

00:44:36 Speaker 2

And you've got to find the time for that.

00:44:37 Speaker 2

And you can't just be, oh, well, I just do it in half time.

00:44:39 Speaker 2

I just do it in the Christmas holidays.

00:44:41 Speaker 2

Because that's just not quite how it works.

00:44:44 Speaker 2

So I think carefully about the time.

00:44:46 Speaker 2

It's a brilliant experience.

00:44:49 Speaker 2

you need to be self-motivated.

00:44:51 Speaker 2

You need to be plugged into the pedagogy and you need to want to deepen that understanding through your own independent work.

00:44:58 Speaker 2

Working with brilliant supervisors, yes, but ultimately you are the one who does the work.

00:45:02 Speaker 2

So find out if you can find the time and then...

00:45:06 Speaker 2

definitely put in an application.

00:45:08 Speaker 2

I actually found the application process quite rigorous.

00:45:11 Speaker 2

I really had to do a bit of pre-reading prior to my interview.

00:45:14 Speaker 2

And according to Ian, actually, I managed to find an article that he hadn't heard of, which I was very proud of.

00:45:19 Speaker 2

But yeah, do a little bit of pre-reading about what it is you might want to research.

00:45:22 Speaker 2

Have an idea.

00:45:23 Speaker 2

You don't need to have a fully formed idea.

00:45:25 Speaker 2

But I knew for me, it was about kind of motivation and how do we motivate these kids who are just really not with us.

00:45:34 Speaker 2

Is there a way to kind of do that?

00:45:36 Speaker 2

And that was what I ended up doing my interview based on.

00:45:40 Speaker 2

I think if you can find the time, then find the courage.

00:45:44 Speaker 2

Walking into Oxford is a pretty intimidating kind of prospect, especially if you haven't been part of this sphere before.

00:45:52 Speaker 2

But it really is empowering and brilliant and it really drove my further interest in the career and the profession.

00:46:01 Speaker 2

So go for it.

00:46:03 Speaker 2

Just find the time first and don't break yourself in the process.

00:46:07 Speaker 1

Maybe stay away from AI?

00:46:09 Speaker 2

Stay away from AI.

00:46:10 Speaker 2

Do not write your application with AI.

00:46:13 Speaker 2

Ian will know.

00:46:15 Speaker 1

Thank you so much for being here today.

00:46:17 Speaker 1

It's been so interesting.

00:46:19 Speaker 1

Join us next time for the next episode in our brand new series.

00:46:22 Speaker 1

And if you'd like to know more about our department, or our courses or the MLT, go to education.ox.ac.uk.

00:46:29 Speaker 1

Thanks, Luke.

00:46:30 Speaker 2

Thank you.

00:46:33 Speaker 1

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