



Nat: I'm here in London with Adrian Bethune, here in a London episode of Reach, Teach, Talk, and I am very excited to have you here on this program, Adrian.

Adrian: I'm really excited to be here.

Nat: Thank you. I met Adrian about a month ago at a conference up in Cambridge, and Adrian, I immediately ordered your book on Amazon, Wellbeing in the Primary Classroom. It is an incredible treasure trove of exercises, advice, strategies for primary school, which in the US would be elementary school teachers. This material works, and I would even recommend it for teachers at the secondary school level just as a reminder about how the brain works, the connections of emotions and cognition to learning. Also just to be inspired by this incredibly inspiring teacher.

Adrian: Thank you.

Nat: So Adrian, why don't you talk about why are you here? What brought you to this studio right now? What's your career history? What brought you into teaching? Feel free to also celebrate what you're doing outside of the classroom as well because all of that is very exciting.

Adrian: Yeah. So it's been a long journey, probably started in terms of my journey into teaching back in 2008. I worked not too far from where this studio is. I worked on Berner Street which is in the West End of London. I worked in music publishing, and I had a well-paid job. It was fairly interesting. I had girlfriends. I had a good social life. Then things unexpectedly started to unravel for me. I got on the property ladder at the time of the world financial crisis and suddenly I just felt this huge burden and weight on my shoulder, like I had this mortgage and everything that's happening around me. Will I lose my job?

Adrian: I started to feel anxious. I'd always been quite a happy-go-lucky kind of guy, and had periods of anxiety and stuff but nothing major. Whereas this was like an anxiety that wasn't shifting. That took its toll on my relationship and I ended up breaking up with my girlfriend. I had a big fallout with my best friend who lived just round the corner from the flat I was living in. So I found myself living in this one bedroom flat alone in London, and I just felt acutely lonely, like seriously that was the overriding emotion.

Adrian: So, yes, there was anxiety there but I just felt incredibly lonely which I think is exacerbated when you live and work in a capital city, a really busy city. There's all of these people but you feel disconnected from them all essentially. That period acute anxiety but worse, it led to a bout of depression, I think mainly because I couldn't sleep at night. The anxiety was keeping me up and I burned myself out.

Nat: That compounds itself, doesn't it? If you're not sleeping, you're feeling worse during the day when you're awake, right?

Adrian: And your perspective goes completely. Things that normally brought me joy like playing football, seeing my friends, I was still going to these things. I was turning up at work. But it was like I was just observing. I just didn't feel connected at all.

Adrian: Anyway so that was a profoundly difficult period for me. During that I had this ... It's not even an epiphany, just a realization that I was someone who had worked incredibly hard at school during my exams and at university. And I kind of thought to myself during this difficult time, I have all of this knowledge, all of these qualifications and I literally have no idea how to help myself feel better or get better. I was literally in a rut and I didn't know what to do.

Nat: There was no course you took at university that was about how to lift up.

Adrian: Exactly. So back in 2008, 2009, talking about mental health, happiness, wellbeing, it really wasn't that common at all. And I didn't have any shame about how I was feeling but equally I didn't know who to talk to about it. I didn't know what to talk about. Anyway, I had a good group of friends and family around me that were very supportive and they massively helped me. In a chance conversation with a friend, he said to me, "I've seen a counselor. Maybe you should see one." And even him opening up to me about that was like, Whoa, I didn't know that you could go see a counselor and speak.

Adrian: So this started a journey of self-discovery, reflection. I started to read about the cause of anxiety, depression. I discovered that there was a science of wellbeing and happiness, and there was research about what makes us happy and what makes us unhappy. Basically I kind of taught myself all of this stuff that in a way I wish I'd learned at school because I felt on reflection it could have really helped me.

Adrian: One of the things that I read in my research was that the happiest people often give a lot. They often volunteer, or they're giving their time or their money, whatever, to other people. So I signed up to a mentoring scheme. I volunteered for year, a charity in London called Chance UK. I mentored a nine year old boy in Hackney which is quite a poor borough of London. He was at risk of being kicked out of school because he was aggressive and violent. I got to know a lovely little boy whose anger, I guess, was a symptom of his home life. He was a single parent family. His mother had mental health issues. His brother was involved in a local gang. And his school wasn't really helping him. So I did that for a year.

Adrian: At the same time my really good friend from university asked me to be a governor at a school that she worked in. Those two things, being a governor, volunteering, mentoring, just made me reflect and think actually my job is

enjoyable but it's not meaningful. I felt that my life was lacking a sense of direction and purpose.

Nat: So your job at this time was still in the music business?

Adrian: Yes, still music industry. Yes.

Nat: And being a governor is, for the folks in the US, it's being on the school board. It's being a board member of a school. Was this a primary school?

Adrian: A primary school, yes. I was chair of the finance committee. So I was using my music industry financial knowledge to help the school. But, yeah, I was just getting so much out of working with this young boy, volunteering at the school and I felt actually this is where I want to spend more time. I want to teach children. I also want to help the children like the boy I was mentoring with their emotional difficulties, help them fit in, help them be happy, help them be a success. Because I felt his school wasn't doing that for him.

Adrian: So I retrained to be a teacher in 2010 with this bold ambition to do all of that stuff I just mentioned. Kind of really focus on the stuff that matter in the classroom. I was very quickly disillusioned because the focus ... In the UK education had changed massively from when I was a school, and even at primary, elementary school it was all about results. It was about results in English, results in maths. It was about progress. It was about academic attainment, and because of that there wasn't time to focus on emotional issues of children. There wasn't time to focus on happiness and wellbeing because the curriculum was packed with content we had to just get through.

Nat: Adrian, this sounds very familiar to what was going on across the pond at the same time which was the Race to the Top. Arne Duncan, Education Secretary under President Obama, at the exact same time gets this idea of Race to the Top. So if your student test scores are doing well, your school will be ranked higher and you will be at the top. State by state started competing against each other for this recognition as being on at the top, but based on quantitative metrics. As a teacher, teachers were also in the US being assessed on their efficacy based on their students' test scores, which seems a bit unfair because as a teacher you know, actually you don't know who the students are that are going to come into your classroom every year. And every year they're different. There's no hero teacher out there who can work magic with any group of kids and bring them all up to the top. You work with what you get and you meet the kids where they are.

Nat: So anyhow, it's just interesting to know. This story sounds so familiar to many teachers I've talked with in the US around the same time, this idea of, "Is it really my job to achieve through test scores and through quantitative metrics? I thought it was something different?" So anyhow, let's get back to your story.

Adrian: Yeah. That was what I was reflecting on at the time. This vision I had of how I was going to teach and what I was going to teach, and how I was going to help these kids was not marrying up with the reality. I felt disillusioned. And not only that. Because of the relentless pace and pressure of a typical teaching day I started to feel the anxiety coming back. I started to find it hard to sleep at night. I found it hard to eat my lunch at lunchtime because I had that sickening feeling in

my stomach. I actually started to dread going into school most days. I was teaching in a London primary school. It was a challenging school. Yeah, and the reality of going from mentoring one child, one to one, to having 30 children was a massive learning curve for me.

Adrian: The difference was in terms of the feeling of anxiety was that ... So by this stage, two years later, I was in a new relationship. What I had learned as part of the previous difficult time I spotted the signs really early. I could recognize I wasn't sleeping well, I couldn't eat. Whereas before I might have just ignored it and put it to the back. I spoke to my girlfriend about it and I was open with her about how I was feeling. So just talking, which was something that I hadn't done a couple of years before, and also I just made some subtle changes. I made sure that I was going to bed earlier, trying to stay away from stimulants, like cocoa and tea and coffee, before bed so I got a good night's sleep. I was exercising more and that really helped.

Adrian: The other thing that happened and this was kind of, I guess, fortuitous, kind of lucky. Another teacher that was on my teacher training course, I studied at London South Bank University. I was studying at the university one day a week and the other four days I was in the classroom. One of my teacher training buddies, when she could hear that I was feeling disillusioned and kind of actually angry at the state of UK education, she lent me a book. She said, "I think you should read this book." It was called Teaching Happiness and Wellbeing in Schools by a teacher called Ian Morris who was a secondary, high school teacher. Basically his book shared a lot of the science of wellbeing, positive psychology, and it gave some ideas of how to embed it in your school.

Adrian: Although it was aimed at a higher age group I started to tweak some of the ideas and bring some of the ideas into my classroom setting. And just that gave me a sense of agency and empowerment, and a sense of purpose that actually this is what I'm got into teaching to do, and now I'm actually doing it. Although I'm doing it on a small scale, it can grow from here.

Adrian: Yeah, so then I read more books and I thought actually all these books are for adults on positive psychology and wellbeing. Why can't I tailor some of that to my six, seven year old kids that I'm teaching? So I brought in a mindfulness meditation practice in the morning because I was in a mindfulness course myself. Over a period of a few years I just started to embed more. I went to more courses. I learned when I spoke to other teachers.

Adrian: And then fast forward to 2018, well actually it would have been 2017. I kept Googling wellbeing in the primary classroom. I was looking for books aimed at primary and elementary school. I just couldn't find any that were written by teachers. I could find them written by psychologists.

Nat: Why did that matter?

Adrian: Because teachers, or people that have spent a lot of time in the classroom, know the reality of a typical classroom and the myriad of issues that might come up, and the innumerable amount of variables. Whereas I think sometimes when you might be a mental health expert or a psychologist, and you think, "Okay. Do this is the classroom." The teacher might think, "Well, actually that's not going to work

how you've presented it." And that was the massively appealing thing about Ian's book. He is still a practicing teacher.

Adrian: So, yeah, I couldn't find a book aimed at primary school teachers, and I thought, "Sod it. I'll write my own." I started to write just the first few chapters. I wrote the preface which was just my journey from mental ill health to becoming a teacher. And I mentioned that I was starting to write a book to my best friend who was someone who had really helped me in my difficult time. I said to him, "I'm writing this book. I've seen that Bloomsbury, the publisher, have a book proposal form on their website." So if you have an idea for a book you can fill it in. He said, and again this is lucky. He said, "I know someone that works at Bloomsbury. I used to work with him at MTV and now they work at Bloomsbury."

Nat: Connection.

Adrian: Yeah. But I would still have probably procrastinated and not done anything about it. But literally the next day he emailed her, copied me in, and said, "My best friend is writing a book on teaching wellbeing. Are you interested?" She wasn't in editorial. She was in marketing, but she said, "Look I know the editors. Can you give me one paragraph summary of your book?" Which I did and she came back and said, "Look, they like it. Fill in the document, the proposal, and take it from there."

Adrian: Yeah. They like the book. I took year to write it pretty much from beginning to end. Yeah, the idea is to give teachers the research because I think that's important, the evidence base. Why is this important? And then ideas, practical ideas, like how to bring the research to life in a normal everyday classroom with challenging, normal, everyday kids.

Nat: And you're still teaching now?

Adrian: Yeah.

Nat: You're applying what's in your book to your daily teaching as well.

Adrian: Yeah. So I teach part-time now. I was three days a week last year. Now I'm two days a week. I have enough. Since the book's come out I'm being invited to give more talks and do training in schools. There's enough work for me to leave teaching completely and do just what we call in England freelance work, the private work. But actually one, I still enjoy teaching. Two, part of my mission is still to directly teach these skills to kids. And three, I feel that when I do do my talks and go into other schools, I'm talking from a place of experience and authenticity. Like this is what I do. And when someone says, "But what about," and they give me a scenario, I've got experience to say, "Well, this is how I adapted it for this setting."

Adrian: Because what happens a lot of UK schools is that the people that do training don't teach and teachers are sitting there thinking, "Yeah, that's probably not going to work in my setting," because of X, Y, Z.

Nat: It's going from theory to practice. Right? The longer you are outside of the classroom the more detached ... Your research might be incredibly important, and it might be relevant but consulting, working with schools, talking to teachers,

if you're not in the classroom you're not able to, as you said, respond to those nuances or those questions, "But what about? What if?" It's one kid that's like this. So all of that. And it's also just a credit to the fact that you're in the classroom still while you're absolutely, you're a really wonderful public speaker and a fantastic consultant. I think you do work very well with teachers and hope that continues.

Nat: Two strands of conversation emerge from what you were just sharing, Adrian. One is when you mentioned connection earlier. It's this idea that you knew somebody ... Well, your best friend knew somebody ... believed in what you were working on, could see that you working, this is a very authentic project from you Adrian, and connected you to this person at Bloomsbury publishing, which ended up publishing your book. This idea of connection, right? When you think about connection, and when you think about connection with kids. You think about your own classroom or you're thinking about what ... What does every kid need in terms of connection in order to flourish, in order to feel thrive working? As a teacher how do you encourage that?

Adrian: Yeah. Well, I notice in your book, first chapter, first section, is about connection. In my book the first section is called Creating Tribal Classrooms, which is all about relationships and connection. I think primarily what children ultimately need is to be noticed, as in the adult has noticed that they exist. They need to be valued as in individual, that they have strengths and qualities and attributes to bring to the classroom environment. And they need a sense of belonging, that they are part of something. So, yes, they're an individual but actually they're part of something bigger than just themselves. That they are part of a team, part of a tribe, part of a family. Those three things I think really help children feel safe. They need to feel safe, that's just like a fundamental. The safety part is important because in order to learn you need children to explore and you need children to be able to take risks. It's through that exploration and that risk taking that, yeah, actually they'll probably make mistakes as well. And that's really valuable learning for them too.

Adrian: And if they just stay in their little comfort zones, not willing to explore and take risks, then their learning is immediately hampered. That risk taking takes many forms. It can be related to academic learning. It can also be in terms of connection. They might have had family experiences where making connections is a big risk for them. They might have been let down. So creating that environment in the classroom where actually it's okay for them to maybe reach out and connect to other students, and to reach out and connect to other adults in the school is a safe thing to do. That they're going to be, yeah, valued, respected. All of that is massively important.

Adrian: And research around attachment theory. So one of the key proponents of that, a psychologist, I guess, called John Bowlby, essentially in order to be happy, in order to learn, in order to lead a flourishing life, children need a secure attachment with an adult, typically the mother, primary caregiver. One way psychologists measure attachment, and attachment is often psychologists' technical term for love, is by taking a one-year-old, separating them from their primary caregiver and putting them in a room with a stranger. Sounds horrible when you describe it, but essentially what they're trying to measure is their attachment.

Adrian: Typically children fall into one of four categories. Securely attached children will show distress when their caregiver goes, kind of uncertainty with this unfamiliar adult. Then when their familiar adult comes back, then they're happy and they carry on as normal. Everything is fine. That's healthy attachment, secure attachment.

Adrian: Then there's avoidance attachment. That is where the primary caregiver leaves, the child doesn't seem that bothered. The primary caregiver comes back and the child doesn't seem that bothered. So they kind of avoid them.

Adrian: Then there is disorganized attached which is primary caregiver goes, and the child shows disregulated responses. So they might spin round in circles. They might start tapping on the wall. Often it's because they have parents or caregivers that show frightened or frightening behaviors. The child doesn't know how to regulate themselves.

Adrian: The fourth one is ... It's gone out of my mind now. It'll come back to me. But essentially they are distraught when the caregiver goes and they're still distraught when they come back.

Nat: They can't come back to ground level. They can't be regulated even when the parent comes back.

Adrian: Yes. I can't remember the exact term but that's the behavior. So essentially adults will have certain attachment styles. The attachment styles you develop as a child typically follow you through into adulthood. So it'll effect your adult relationships. So all classrooms will have a mixture of kids will all different attachment styles: securely attaches, anxiously attached, avoidantly attached, disorganized attached. The teachers and the adults in the school will have different attachment styles.

Adrian: The reason this is really important is because you need to meet your children where they are. If I'm an avoidant, ambivalent attached adult, meaning I steer close of those close, connective relationships, and I've got an anxious child, anxiously attached, they're going to be quite needy and want my reassurance. If I'm not aware of my attachment style I might find them really annoying and just want to push them away. That's the worst thing you can do to that child. Whereas if I'm aware that I'm avoidantly attached, I can moderate my behavior to respect what I need but also give that child what they need as well, so reassurance and some attention.

Adrian: Yeah, so I think attachment styles is important. That teachers are aware of the research behind it but also practically how you adapt things in a classroom, how you moderate your behavior and you're aware of your own attachment style because that's going to impact how you relate to others.

Nat: Can we talk about your own attachment style for a second? Not yours necessarily, Adrian, but the attachment style of the teacher. Because in listening to you talk about attachment and the four different varieties, I was thinking about the teachers that have levels of attachment to their students that also have a variety of extremes. So you could have on the one hand the teacher who really doesn't care if their students, what they think of them, or just as long as the students do the work and they turn it in on time, and blah, blah, blah. Then you

could also have a teacher on the other side, which is I really care that my students like me, and I really care that I'm connected and that they feel connected to me on a deeper level than most.

Nat: What advice would you give for teachers in terms of how they should look at their own feelings of attachment? I've always said it's attachment versus engagement. I talk about it's healthy to have a sense of engagement with your students but you don't necessarily want to be attached to them because that seems like you're giving of yourself in order to be liked versus respected. Blah, blah, blah. Are there any thoughts you have about that? How attachment can be an unhealthy thing in the classroom as well?

Adrian: Yes. I guess a lot of these ideas and the research around wellbeing in particular, I think it all comes back to emotional balance. Like there is always I feel whatever you're talking about some middle ground to try and find between unattached, overly attached, and then somewhere in the middle that's probably a healthy balance. So, yeah, I guess in terms of unhealthy attachment at either end of the extreme you've got teachers that don't want to make any connection with their students. They just see their job as conveying content for them to learn, and that's it. That's their job. They don't care about their children's home lives or their friendship issues. They're a teacher. I'm the expert. Here's the knowledge. Learn it. Practice. Do your homework. See you later.

Adrian: And then at the other extreme maybe are teachers that want and really feel the need to be liked and accepted and, yeah, actually might cross some boundaries in order to get that validation from their students.

Nat: If I can interrupt you for a second because I'm thinking about this movie that if you haven't seen it yet I highly recommend it, but it's highly disturbing, called The Kindergarten Teacher. It came out about a year ago. Maggie Gyllenhaal plays this kindergarten teacher with a family life that has got emotional holes the size of the Grand Canyon. She's a kindergarten teacher. She has this five-year-old in her classroom, reception teacher, who she attaches to to try and fill this hole in her. Anyway it's a really fascinating study of exactly what you're talking about, the over-attached teacher looking for something more than what is absolutely acceptable in the student-teacher relationship.

Adrian: Yeah. It's made me think. The conference we were at, the relationships foundation conference, when one of the speakers was talking about behavior and responding to behavior and it kind of link to this. This relates to parents as well as teachers, that at either ends of the spectrum you've got permissive parenting, teaching where you don't really care. Do what you want, like kids can behave how they want. That's really unhealthy for children, that complete lack of boundaries.

Nat: That's what you were saying earlier about balance.

Adrian: Yes.

Nat: Kids need a sense of balance in order to feel safe, right?

Adrian: Yeah. And at the other end of the extreme you've got authoritarian. So it's do as I say. Don't question what I'm saying. These are the rules, just follow them. That's



unhealthy too because either you get children that really push back and rebel or you get children that just completely follow. They're not learning their own self regulation.

Adrian: So in the middle this expert was saying you need authoritative parenting-teaching, which is essentially I'm in charge but I will respond to your needs. That kind of healthy balance. And I think that's what teachers should be aiming for, which is ultimately I'm in charge because I am the expert in terms of the subject content, largely. I'm also in charge because I'm here to keep you safe. That is part of my job. But equally if you need something from me I will listen and I will help you as best I can. And that's that balance, middle ground. And that's probably is something you can read in a book but I think it's also experiential. You just need to be in the classroom and learn.

Adrian: I'm a parent now. I've got two young boys. I'm learning that in the deep end right now. That's hard.

Nat: It is hard, isn't it? My goodness. Let me ask you a question about ... You said earlier, you mentioned just in passing that there are studies that show the emotional level of health that you have when you're about 16 impacts your emotional self as an adult. Can you just quickly explain that study or explain that research?

Adrian: Yes. So Professor Richard Layard based at the London School of Economics had a longitudinal study over 40 years of data, thousands of participants. They wanted to look at adults that were reporting high levels of life satisfaction. So they were saying, "I'm happy and satisfied with my life." Trace them back through the data to their childhood and work out what's the strongest predictor in childhood of adult happiness, adult life satisfaction.

Adrian: The strongest predictor was the child's emotional wellbeing at the age of 16. The weakest predictor of adult happiness was the child's intellectual development. So the grades they were getting, how well they were doing at school, was not a strong predictor at all of who would grow up to be a happy adult.

Nat: So when we're looking at productivity measures in societies, in countries, we should be looking more at, it seems like, how emotionally healthy are our 16 year olds. Because inevitably in the future they will be more productive members of our society and of our growth. As opposed to let's focus on the GTSE scores. Let's focus on A levels. We need that though, and you would agree, we need the measurements. We need the data, right? But you can't let that supplant ...

Adrian: No. I think what's happened is that, again, it comes back to balance. We've gone so far the other way of just bowing down to the god of data that we've forgotten about wellbeing, emotional health. And there is a balance to be struck. I want my children to be happy, well-rounded individual. I also want them to do well academically because I know grades are important for securing good work and getting a good job. And by good I don't mean necessarily well-paid or high status. I mean a job that gives you pleasure and purpose.

Adrian: Typically you need good grades for that but also the grades are a proxy for knowledge. Like I want my children to be knowledgeable of themselves and the world. Which teacher wouldn't want that? Yeah, I think we've just gone too far

though of worshipping data. In that act, when children become numbers you essentially dehumanize them and I think that's why we have certain problems in the UK education system because we've forgotten that there are individual human being in the classroom, and the teachers as well teaching them. We've forgotten about them and their lives. I think that's what we need to remember more.

Nat: Ironically that humanist is a primary, if not the primary incentive toward learning, that promotes engagement. If you are allowed to be as a teacher an authentic adult, the only adult in the room, an authentic presence, somebody who is able to be his own individual there in the classroom that he is running, or she. Student tap into that. You know this, right? Even at a young age students can sense insincerity. They can sense somebody who's trying to be somebody they're not. A very easy mistake that younger teachers, or teachers who are newer to the profession, make is to try to be perfect, to try to be the font of all knowledge. I can't make a mistake or else my students will judge me as weak. When really it's the opposite. That kind of approach actually promotes distance versus a teacher who's like, "I don't know the answer to that. Maybe we can discover this together as a class. Extra credit for anybody tonight who come home and figures out the answer and brings it to us tomorrow." Blah, blah, blah, right?

Adrian: Yeah. And also I think it's important as teachers to show that we are continually learning and it's impossible to know everything. So when a student asks me something I don't know I say, "I don't know," and either find out and let me know because I'm fascinated to find that out. Or I'll have a look as well and let's reconvene tomorrow.

Nat: And you've never had a student walk out of your classroom when you said you don't know the answer?

Adrian: No.

Nat: Protesting. Mr. Bethune doesn't know the answer so I'm leaving.

Adrian: But do you know what's even more funny is when you're doing let's say a maths equation and you're solving on the board, and a child in your class will say, "Mr. Bethune, you've forgotten to carry the ten." You've completely messed up this example and it's important to own those mistakes and just say, "Look, I'm 38 years old. I've been learning maths my whole life and I still make mistakes and that's okay." Now that mistake has now meant I will double and triple check every time I do this on the board. So there's value in those mistakes, and that's important to communicate to kids as well.

Nat: Because the students, they're kids. They are watching all the time. Ted and Nancy Sizer are big educational ... Ted has since passed away but Nancy is writing and researching around Harvard in Cambridge US. They wrote a book together called The Students are Watching. They're always watching and they're not always going to watch for like, "Oh, I'm so excited to learn about remainders." Or about handwriting, or cursive. But they are watching you. They might not want to be a teacher themselves but they are watching for how you as the adult respond to this, this, and this. They don't have the words to articulate it certainly but they are looking for actions that they can emulate and they respect.

Adrian: There's a quote I use in my book. It comes from a child developmental psychologist called Professor Alison Gopnik who is American. Written a brilliant book called *The Gardener and the Carpenter*. The quote I use in my book is that, "Children learn far more from their caregivers unconscious behaviors than any of their conscious manipulation." I love that. That just makes me think of teaching. Like I'm here teaching you stuff and this is what I'm consciously trying to get you to do or to learn, but actually my body language, my tone, when you see me in the corridor and the photocopier's not working and how I respond in that moment, that's what the children are most soaking up.

Nat: I always talk about the time when a teacher would interrupt my classroom just as I'm about to teach Odysseus stringing his bow and about to slaughter the suitors and just building up, building up, and then immediately just as he's about to shoot the arrow, the math teacher comes in and says, "Hey do you have a dry erase marker because mine just ran out?" Nobody in the classroom cares about Odysseus or Telemachus or anything at that point. All they care about is how is Mr. Damon going to respond to our math teacher. Is he going to be graceful? Is he going to be rude? Is he going to be annoyed? Does he have a dry erase marker? You know how it is? That's how it is.

Nat: Last topic we'll briefly talk about now but it's still important because you mentioned this word several times in this conversation. It's the word tribe. As an American the word tribe is actually right now anyway viewed kind of negatively by society because which tribe are you in? Which identity group, affinity group do you belong to? Are you Democrat or Republican? Are you liberal or conservative? Blah, blah, blah. It's been used as a term that talks about division and talks about building a wall.

Nat: You tend to be using tribe in a very positive way in terms of applying it to the classroom. I'd just love to hear you talk a bit about how the classroom as a tribe has worked for you and also how it has been able to achieve a sense of belonging and a sense of safety, for your students and for you in this classroom you designed. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Adrian: Yeah. So this idea of tribal classrooms which is the first chapter in my book, comes from Professor Louis Cozolino, another American.

Nat: California. He comes from Pepperdine I think.

Adrian: Yes. He's Italian heritage because he talks about it in his book originally. Essentially what he says is that human beings are a tribal species and that for hundreds of thousands of years we've lived in tribes. It's only very recently, in the last 5000 years, we've moved to the industrial based societies we live in now. He essentially says that 5000 years is not enough time in terms of biological evolution to move from the animal that we are, which is a tribal species. His research and his book is about how you can tap into what he calls the primitive social instincts of children which is about needing to belong to a group, to a tribe. Because that literally turns on their brains for learning. It makes them feel safe, secure, happy. It has benefits on their immune system. It reduces the amount of cortisol, the stress hormone. When people feel connected, we feel good and we do good.

Adrian: So when I first started to bring this research and this idea into my classroom it was when I was teaching a year two class. They were six years old and their reception teacher had gone off on stress leave. Their year one teacher had gone off on stress leave, and then I was inheriting this class in year two. I was starting to panic because they were not a cohesive bunch of children. They were not kind to each other. They were all trying to get one another into trouble. I remember thinking over the summer holidays I'm going to get this class in a month's time, how can I create this sense of team? We need to work together if we're going to have a good year essentially.

Adrian: So, yeah, I did a lot of work around creating a sense of tribe. I wanted these children to feel like actually you are part of a team in this classroom. At the moment we're not getting along but actually we can work, every single day we can work on what we can do to look out for one another, to cooperate, to learn how to share, to take turns. So that year was my focus, like maths and English were kind of secondary to how can I get these children to work better together, to feel like they belong and connect.

Adrian: Because there's research out there that shows that a sense of belonging is fundamental to learning. So if I want to teach them English and math and science and everything else, these children need to feel like they belong. So I did some work around creating a team flag which was essentially we looked at a video of team GB at the Olympics. We thought about what makes them successful, attributes, qualities. So things like perseverance, friendship, kindness, effort, teamwork, determination. And then I gave each child a plain piece of paper and I said choose the value that means something to you. So you wanted to make it personal to them. Write it in bold on your piece of paper, fill your paper with color. And we pieced these 30 separate pieces of paper together and it created this large team flag.

Nat: So this flag was a mosaic of every one of your 30 students not only choosing the term that they thought of when they watched team Great Britain, GB, video what brings them together. But also it was the way that they designed their part of the flag. Their section was individualized.

Adrian: Yeah. So the value that they chose and also how they designed it was completely up to them. So then you have this beautiful tapestry of individual values that together make our team flag. So we became team Picasso then, because our name was Class Picasso. It was really about communicating to the children, "You might have just created this one small piece of the flag. You might have just chosen the value of love. But actually you're part of something bigger than just yourself. You're part of Team Picasso, and the success of our team relies on all of us working together. We can't do this alone individually. We're going to have a good year. We're going to learn stuff. If we're going to have fun whilst we're learning we need to work together."

Adrian: And it was also that communicating that this values as part of our team flag they are a work in progress. Like this idea of perfectionism. We are not the finished product, but we are working towards showing love. We are working towards being determined. We're not the finished product. By the end of that year with that class, and it was a very difficult year, it wasn't easy. It's not easy creating a sense of team and tribe amongst children that don't like each other. It's really hard.

Adrian: By the end of that year I was completely besotted with that class. They were, they are still one ... I know you shouldn't have favorites but you can't help it.

Nat: Most memorable.

Adrian: Yeah, most memorable. Yeah. Then I moved to year four after teaching them and I got them back two years later. We made another team flag and the values were slightly different and we worked again. We continued to work on being a team and a tribe. Because in London schools lots of children move around so probably six or seven kids had left and I had six new ones. And then at the end of year four I moved out of London and in the UK children leave primary school in year six, so age of 10 or 11. I promised them that I would return for their leaving assembly. They have this big assembly where they graduate.

Adrian: So two years later I came back into London just to attend their leave assembly because I was part of their tribe and I had made that promise. That class stay in my mind when I think about tribal classrooms because we went on a huge journey. It was hard work but there was a real sense of belonging as part of that journey. Yeah, they're a class I think fondly of now.

Nat: Adrian, this is wonderful. I'm going to ask you a curve ball question, all right?, which relates very much to everything we've been talking about and ties us back to the beginning of our conversation as a way to conclude this conversation, which is, how has establishing a tribe-based or tribal classroom ... I've always looked at the teacher-student dynamic as reciprocal. It's not just the teacher who is imparting information, explaining the rules and regulations, maintaining oversight of the classroom, blah, blah, blah. A teacher also can, if open to it, be the recipient of a lot of information that helps that teacher to grow. In a sense every student holds a mirror up to what we do every day. The students are watching.

Nat: I'm just curious for you, and you might want to think for a second about this, because the way we began this conversation was really looking at your story. You had a real hero's journey in a sense of what brought you into the classroom. This epiphany that I want to leave the music industry which could make me a lot of money and could be this very, very status-y kind of job. But with that accept the loneliness that comes with the job. It's really about chasing money in a sense. The maybe dullness of just looking at spreadsheets and budgeting and all that stuff. And I want to be in the classroom. I want to do something generative. I want to do something that's giving.

Nat: That was your moment, I think, of moving into the classroom. But what do the kids give back to you in a tribal classroom is my question. How do you find it as, in a sense, an environment that helped you get from that period of loneliness, darkness toward your flourishing life that you're leading today?

Adrian: Yeah, it's a really good question. I guess when you are creating a tribal classroom as the teacher you are a part of that tribe. And so they, as part of my tribe, gave me a really strong sense of meaning and purpose. So I was there to in a sense be the tribal leader. But equally when you work on that connection, that sense of belonging, it's what some people call micro moments. You get so many positive micro moments from your tribe, such as kids coming up to you at playtime. You're out on playground duty and just coming up to have a

conversation and just tell you about their day because they have that sense of connection. It's about a child at the end of your lesson coming up to you saying, "Mr. Bethune, I really enjoyed that lesson. Thank you."

Adrian: It's all of those little micro moments that I think come from creating a sense of tribe, and that I get a sense of belonging to Team Picasso and whatever other team I've created as much as they get a sense of belonging. Every day when tribal classrooms are at the forefront of your mind, your purpose, your mission is extremely and abundantly clear. Like why I'm here. Like, yes, I'm here to teach a bit of Shakespeare and equivalent fractions and all of that. But actually I am here to connect with you, for you to connect with me, and we're going to go on this learning journey together.

Adrian: So, yeah, it's definitely reciprocal. Whereas in the music industry, yeah, I was part of a team as in I was on a team. But we all worked at separate desks. We all had lunch separately. But in the classroom, when you've worked hard at creating a tribal classroom, it is a really visceral feeling. It's like this is my class, this is my tribe, this is where I'm meant to be. Yeah, that sense of purpose is just really clear. It's something that I completely lacked in music. I guess I didn't realize it at the time because the job was pleasurable. So I enjoyed it. I got to have nice lunches, and I got to have nice meetings at music publishers and things like that. But actually pleasure can only take you so far and I think that deeper sense of meaning and purpose, which ultimately I think comes from connection, is what tribal classrooms give you. So you have the strong sense of purpose, and also because you're a tribe and you're having fun learning you get the pleasure as well. So you get that nice balance of pleasure and purpose.

Nat: Adrian, an unexpected pleasure from this conversation is my hope that there are people listening to this episode who are mid career thinking about changing careers, maybe thinking about going into the classroom themselves. And a story like Adrian's, really this idea of you can make this change. If your heart and if your spirit is motivating you toward moving into a school environment, Adrian's a great example. Listen to this again, and you'll see how Adrian is a great example of somebody who had a career going and made this change, and absolutely flourished. That could be any of you listening too.

Nat: I want to thank you very, very much Adrian.

Adrian: Thank you, Nat.

Nat: This has been a wonderful conversation.

Adrian: I've really enjoyed it. Bye-bye.

Nat: Cheers. Enjoy your tea!