



Nat: Welcome to another episode of reach teach talk here in London, one of the London episodes, and I am absolutely thrilled today to have as a guest, Ms Andrea Zafirakou. She's a 12 year art teacher. Is it 12 years?

Andria: It's actually now, 13.

Nat: 13 years now. My goodness. She's a London native, grew up in London, in Camden, and she is of Greek Cypriot origin, but she grew up in London, and her parents came over from Cyprus and from Greece. I say this because Andrea is the Global Teacher of the Year, the 2018 Global Teacher of the Year, and that alone made me think, "I got to see if I can get Andrea on this show." But it's also, even more importantly, it's what I learned about Andrea when I started researching her. Who is this winner of the 2018 global teacher award?

Nat: I came upon a quote, and I'd like to read this quote because it relates to everything that Reach, Teach, Talk is about, and everything about what we're going to talk about today, Andrea and I. "Teaching is all about building relationships. Instead of worrying about teaching the curriculum or making sure that you've got a strict classroom environment, build your relationships first. Get your kids on board, connect with them, find out what it is that they're interested in, build the relationship, build that trust, and then everything else can happen."

Nat: So, with that triumphant call to action for all teachers out there, listening, watching, I want to turn this over to Andrea, and I want to, first of all, just say again, thank you so much for being on the show.

Andria: Oh, gosh, my pleasure. Absolutely my pleasure.

Nat: This is obviously my pleasure. I'm just so grateful that you took the time today, and I know that it's not a school day for you, even though it's a Friday. Why aren't you in school today?

Andria: Well, since winning the award, my life has changed slightly, so I've had to be quite careful in how I'm allocating my time. So, I work part-time in my school, where I'm teaching two days a week, and the other three days I am gallivanting, changing the world, running my charity, meeting lovely people like yourself, and trying to raise the profile of the arts, and also teaching as well.

Nat: So, Andrea is an art teacher. She is absolutely, and I want to ask you about where did your love for the arts come about? Were you an artist growing up as a kid? Were you particularly artistic?

Andria: Oh, my God, absolutely. I think it's a DNA thing. It's the first thing that you see, the first thing that you do. So, I think my mum and my dad would say that I was always creating, making, gluing, sticking, drawing, building, crafting, just always doing something practical. Yeah. That's where it's probably come from. Me saying that, my early memories of my grandmother was her always doing crochet, and crocheting blankets and blankets. So, I think it is a DNA thing. I think it is something that I've inherited. I'm proud to say that, as well.

Nat: Is this your grandmother on the Greek side, or the Cypriot?

Andria: It is, well my Greek is Cypriot grandmother. Yes, yes.

Nat: Your Greek Cypriot grandmother. And was this a traditional kind of weaving and crochet?

Andria: Yeah, so she was actually a weaver. That was her profession before she migrated to the UK, and so she would grow her own silkworms, spin silk, weave silk, and make garments. And she was actually quite famous in her province, and one of her stories that you never quite know until you really dig and you go, "Oh my God, Gran!" Was she was told by the British Army that she'd had to weave and give them all of her silk, so that they could use it for the British parachutes.

Andria: And at nighttime, she used to, by candlelight, weave, so that she can actually make something she can sell for the family. So, it was really interesting, her story, and how the handicrafts and how textile's a big part of their life, of their livelihood, the culture, and also now mine. So, it's gorgeous. I love that story.

Nat: I also love that story, and I love, also, the organicness of what your grandmother did. You said that she raised the silkworms, so it was actually the material that went into the product was all coming from her.

Andria: That's right. That's right.

Nat: And there's something just beautiful in that, I think.

Andria: Absolutely. So, it's the seed, it's the growth, isn't it, of the whole item, and it's the respect thing of the material, and of the substance until it's made into whatever outcome it needs to be. So it's quite.

Nat: There is, to me, a very clear analogy to what you just said there, the seed and the growing, and you respect the growth, the outcome that comes out. And could we not make that similar approach to teaching and working with kids?

Andria: It's pure teaching, isn't it? It is. It absolutely is. And I think that's the beauty about being in the classroom and knowing a child for about seven years, and seeing

from the moment they came into the school, and just watching them develop, becoming more confident, seeing what their interests are, what their strengths are, what frustrates them, what gives them joy, until the point whereby they've done their exams and they come and collect their exam results, and they just celebrate with you. And you're just so proud. And I think those are the magic moments that we have in teaching.

Nat: You said seven years tracking a child, so does that mean, as an art teacher, you're able to see similar students as they get older? Like you're not fixed to one grade level?

Andria: No. So, I'm a secondary school teacher in the UK, so we can teach them from year seven all the way to when they're 11 year olds, all the way up to when they're 18 years old. So, when they get into that university placement or they go to college, and yeah, it's just bliss.

Nat: Absolutely bliss. That is absolutely bliss to watch their creative minds expand and to watch their skills develop. But also, more importantly, I imagine, to just watch them grow from young adults to near adults. Right?

Andria: Yes!

Nat: And to feel proud. Do you feel proud as they're going off on their journeys?

Andria: That's right. And you reflect back and you just think, "Oh, can you remember when he used to be a pain? Can you remember when? Can you remember that? Oh God. And look at him?" It is like being part of journeys of so many incredible young people and then you just think, "I wonder what they're going to be doing, and I wonder where their next stage of their life takes them." And moving that forward. And it's just gorgeous to be part of that.

Nat: Okay. This leads to my next subject matter here, which is about the Global Teacher Prize, because I want to explain that the Global Teacher Prize, it's not just the title makes it sound like a big deal. This is a very big deal. Andrea winning it out of a cast of tens and tens and tens of thousands, probably 100000+ nominations. I'm not sure what the numbers are, and I see the modesty here.

Nat: It's not just getting the recognition, but it's also having \$1 million as award money to use however you want to add to this. The goal of the teacher prize is from the Varkey Foundation and the Varkey Foundation states, "We believe in a quality education for every child. We work to build the capacity and the status of teachers to ensure that the quality of teaching is enhanced and outcomes will improve."

Nat: The capacity. We work to build the capacity and the status of teachers. I love that because the Varkey Foundation is talking about, we seek to build the content and the skills, the teacher capacity, of course, but also the status. And already in this conversation, Andrea, it's the status of teaching is something that, in listening to you speak over the past few minutes, about what you love about teaching,

already just kind of gives a texture to how we should elevate the status of teaching.

Nat: Because teachers, clearly this is coming from the heart, and teaching is a hope-based profession, and teaching is about watching the kids, over a seven year period, go from little what's its as 12 year olds to being much more kind of who their adult selves will be by the time they're 17. And as teachers, were able to do that. And I'd love to just dig a little deeper on this a little bit, Andrea. What is it, in your mind, that makes teaching a profession that you are keen on helping to elevate and strengthen the status of, and what do you think it is about teaching that the folks at the Varney Foundation and the nominating committee and all of that saw in you?

Andria: I think we just need to make one thing absolutely clear and that is that teaching is the ultimate profession. Everything comes from being in a classroom or being in front of a teacher, being taught. Presidents are created because of someone who inspired them. A teacher, doctors are great, somebody who inspired them, a teacher. It all comes from the other person who you've met teaching. And that's what the Varkey Foundation are very, very proud of, the fact that teaching, and I think I can quote Sonny Varkey on this, he will say that teaching is a mother of all professions. And by having someone to acknowledge that, the Varkey Foundation, it really means a lot to me because it means that someone gets it. They get, beyond all the bureaucracy, it is all about that person who is in the classroom inspiring, nurturing, growing, equipping the young people of the future.

Andria: Hence why it's here's the most important, should be the most respected profession in the world. And that's why I'm so passionate and believe in teachers and want to thank them for the work they've done, because okay, I've won the Global Teacher Prize and I've had opportunities in these last few months where my students who I've taught years ago have come back and said to me, "Miss, we're so proud of you. Because of what you said, I'm now doing this. And Miss, can you remember when you told me off and you got my parents? And oh, Miss, but look where I am now." And they appreciate you, and I've had so many students coming up to me and say, "Miss, we're so proud. Thank you. It was so great it's you."

Andria: The thing that I don't feel we do enough is say thank you to our teachers. We don't do that. And because of that, I don't think they really appreciate how significant they are, and what they're worth is, because they are gold dust, they are priceless. There's not one person in this world who you will go up to, and you say, "Oh, who was your favorite teacher?" And automatically they say, "Oh, it was mister, mister so-and-so. And he said this to me, and that changed my life."

Andria: And that's what we do. We plant the seed of inspiration, we change lives. Yet we don't acknowledge that. And I just think that being able to have this award and represent teachers, and say thank you for what you're doing and you are appreciated by hundreds and hundreds of young people, and people who you've inspired. Do not forget that. You are inspirational, you're changing lives. And thank you for doing that.

Nat: Now Andrea, here's the thing though, right? Because as a teacher, it's quite rare, maybe it's not rare for you, I'm curious, but it was definitely rare for me, is that moment when a student would come up to me in the middle of the school year, and say, "Hey, Mr. Damon, that book you just gave me totally changed my life. Like you just made the biggest difference in my life. Like I'm taking a U-Turn, and now everything's going to be just rainbows and unicorns for the rest of my life." I don't hear that.

Andria: No, you won't. You won't. You won't.

Nat: So, what do we do with that and how can we keep that faith that, even though we're not hearing it, it's there?

Andria: I think it takes people, having this opportunity, I can now say, "Look, this is for real. You are significant." But what it also takes is that parent. So, if a parent sees their child doing something great that they're like, "Oh my God, that's amazing," and they know that's come from the score, then please get a post it notes out. Write something to the teacher and say, "Thank you. That was really great." Just something small. Do not be shy to give a compliment. Do not be shy because it's free. There's no money in that, but kindness and kind words, when you're giving them to a teacher, it just fuels you. It gives you that kind of that va va voom, that zing, that whatever it takes, just kind of take you through and inspire you for the next few months, years, whatever.

Nat: I love the timing of this conversation because yesterday was Thanksgiving in the US.

Andria: Yeah, Happy Thanksgiving!

Nat: Thank you very much! Hey, every day should be Thanksgiving, am I right?

Andria: Of course, of course!

Nat: And it's also the latest date that Thanksgiving can take place. It's the final Thursday of the month of November, and this year it happens to be November 28th, so we are now madly rushing into the holiday season. Right? And this is a period of time that's particularly stressful on teachers because, in a sense, they've been in school for three months now. The rhythm, the routine they're familiar with. It's been about 100 days. But they're looking ahead at about another 100 days more actually in the classroom.

Nat: And so, we're beginning to get into this period of winter, which is a little darker, a little more heavy, a little more sagging in the school year. It just happens to all of us naturally. So, what advice would you give to teachers in terms of teachers who might be feeling a little bit tired or deflated or like, "Oh boy." How can you keep that Va Va Voom?

Andria: Ugh, okay. I would say to my colleagues, your Christmas, your holidays, your weekends have got to be your own.

Nat: It's harder to do.

Andria: Of course it is, But you've got to be strict and you've got to be fierce with yourself, and know that, actually, do not feel guilty. You deserve that. Why? Because you need to heal. You need to recover, you need to recuperate, you need to sharpen that sword, you need to be exactly who you want to be in front of the young people. And I say to myself, "Do you know what? If I was a young person, would I like me as a teacher? Would I like to be taught by somebody who can be ratty, who can be moody? Would I like that?" Of course not. Would you like it for your kids? No. So, look after yourselves. Take what you need, and do not feel guilty. You're highly professional people. You've been trained, you know what the right thing is to do, so just do that.

Nat: Do not feel guilty. The word guilt is, at least in my world, is not often used.

Andria: It eats you up. You go to school when you are dying because you don't want to set cover work. You're guilty because you don't want to give another teacher the responsibility of carrying that clause. Or you don't want the kids. How is that good for you? That will make you even more sick. Just look after yourself, too. You're worthy, too. And it's taken me a long time to appreciate that. And yes, I have not got work life balance sorted.

Andria: I'm going to be honest with you, I haven't. But what fuels me is my family, is my friends, is the connection time, it's being a human being, it's doing what I love. That gives me a lot of energy, and something which my husband said to me a while back, which made me think, "God, what's going on?" It was the summer holidays and we have that nice, long period of time. After two weeks in my holiday, I started to feel normal again, like a human being.

Andria: And he goes to me, "You know, you're quite unbearable during the school term." And I was like, "Oh my God, if I'm doing that to my husband." And I just thought, "No, that's wrong. That's absolutely wrong." So, I needed to make sure that how I manage my time has got to be so spot on, but also includes my time, me time.

Nat: I would also hear the same thing from parents when I would be meeting with parents, and they would talk about their kids. They would remind me that, you know, "Nat, Mr. Damon, in school, you're seeing my kid really on their best behavior because they're at school. We always get the hair's down, the other effect of it." And in a sense, I was thinking in my head, and I'm being cheeky, but just what your husband said about you during the school year, you come home and you're maybe-

Andria: I'm teacher. I'm in teacher mode.

Nat: Yes, exactly!

Andria: Yeah. Yeah.

Nat: But that's all because, when you're in the classroom, you're balanced, you're even keeled, you're absolutely open to the individual creativity, and bringing it out

and your students. And that's what I want to talk about next, because this is also kind of a meta goal or a sub goal of this episode, is to really inspire people who are thinking about coming into teaching or who are mid career and maybe thinking about coming into teaching, and teachers who are, again, feeling that kind of sag, questioning, "Do I really want to stay in this profession?"

Nat: Because, Andrea you've clearly got that va va voom, it's obviously been recognized and basically what is it for you that you would advise for teachers to reach into? When you talk about self care and you talk about not feeling guilty, and you talk about being of present mind and be stable and be as secure in your own feet in their classroom as possible, where does that all come from, and where would you advise teachers to really look inward, to really look at during this mid time of the year?

Andria: That's a really hard question. I think, for me, it's about my support mechanisms around me.

Nat: Maybe nurture the support mechanisms around you, not being a silo.

Andria: Yep, absolutely.

Nat: Let's pick up on that.

Andria: Because I think that I am who I am because of people like my colleagues at work. So making sure that I've got colleagues who I can go to, to kind of vent and vice versa. Or, "I've got a problem, how would you do that?" So, that's really important, making sure that part of my world is great. Also, my home life, my family life, it's that balancing. It's that absolute balancing part of it. I think you need to be a kind of a person who is very confident to saying, "I've got a year free class, now we're teaching this. How would you do it?"

Nat: But that's being vulnerable. That's saying to your colleague, "I'm not the expert. What would you do?"

Andria: How many times have teachers ever said to a class after they've taught that, "Guys, how was that? Was that okay? Did it work or what could I have done better last time?" And why not? Why are we not doing this? Why as professionals are we not being vulnerable? Because at the end of the day, I think there is an assumption that teachers must know it all.

Andria: Well, actually, our young people are changing. What's influencing them is changing. They're being inspired by the techie world and social media. They're learning, their language is different. What they're being inspired by is completely different. So, why can we not ask for their opinion as well?

Andria: And as raw as it can be, it has always been the greatest feedback. "Miss, we spent too long on that. We spent too long on that. We could have just done that, Miss, the first time. Miss, you didn't explain that well, but when you showed it to us, you've got it." Brilliant, brilliant. And I think, again, it's about the building the

relationships. It's asking their advice, getting them on board. We can be part of that learning journey for them, with them.

Andria: And I never, ever expect to be the person who knows everything in my class. And I've, on many occasions, have said to a young child and a young person, "Oh, my God, you draw better than me."

Nat: I can imagine that student response.

Andria: And you should see their face. It's just like yours, that, "Oh, my God." And it's like, "You draw so much better than me." [inaudible] And that's an honest thing. That's an absolutely honest thing. And why not share that? Why not be open with that?

Nat: Because you're the art teacher and you're meant to be the perfect art teacher.

Andria: It's the journey. We're on this together. We're journey, I'm mentoring, I'm coaching. I'm there to help you fall. I'm there to push you. I'm there to challenge you and to support you. But it's your life. You're owning this.

Nat: So let me ask you this question then. Because turning it from the student, the effect of a great teacher on a student, to the effect of being a great teacher on oneself. How would you say you've grown in your past, now this is your 13th year, so in your past 12 and a half years of teaching, if you think for a second about just one area where you feel like you, Andrea, have grown thanks to your receptivity to feedback from your students?

Andria: I think it's about my lesson content. So, it would be the artists that we probably should be teaching about, to actually what the students want to learn, and making the connection there. So, for example, I can teach them about Renaissance, Rembrandt. They'll probably get bought out of their heads. But if I teach them graffiti art and link it to Michael Craig Martin's very illustrative work, who draws objects which they use, so mobile phones and headphones, that's the connection. And that's when you get to appreciate art and what influences that artist. And then, you're going round that whole circle in a reverse way, but you're still building up the skills, their critical knowledge, their appreciation of the arts, artists, contemporary art as well as traditional art.

Nat: But is that not just giving the kids what they want, in a sense? Do you honestly believe that graffiti is its own art form?

Andria: Of course I do. It's a genius art form. It's spectacular. It is something which completely inspires me and I'm in incomplete awe, and that's the hook. That's the hook into your life. And when they see that you appreciate that form of art, they want to know all about it, too. "Miss, oh I saw that!" And, "Miss, Miss. I saw that. I was in Camden and I saw." I was like, "Yeah, and who was the tagger?"

Andria: I think it's part of that learning journey and that inspiration, and you being the role model, you being the door to your arts world, or your subject world, and you

entice them to come in and be part of because you know it's such a great world for them.

Nat: Okay. So the word curiosity is just flashing in neon in my head or my brain has been tagged to the word curiosity in varying different colors and very cool font. And curiosity. Does that play a role in being an art teacher? Because I'm kind of thinking it does.

Andria: Are you kidding? It is all about curiosity. It's all about making mistakes and taking a journey with a media. What would happen if you mix paint with that other media? What would happen if you do that? Explore, experiment, take risks. And I think the beauty about the arts is that there's absolutely no way that you can say that's wrong. There's ways you can improve, there's ways you can challenge, but there's no mistakes. And I think that's why children really enjoy the arts, because they feel that they they're not failing, that they can always improve, that they're challenging themselves, and their curious minds is what's making them even better in this particular subject.

Nat: Let's discuss that for a second. The curious minds, the curiosity that excellent art students possess is what makes them excellent. They have curiosity. So, digging a little deeper, what is curiosity to being a good artist or a good art student?

Andria: Just having an open mind.

Nat: Asking questions.

Andria: Asking questions, taking something, being creative, taking something from one dimension and then changing it to another. Exploring how a media, a paint brush can be used, not just with the bristles, but on the other end. How can I paint using an extended arm instead of having it controlled? It's about experimentation and seeing where it can take you. And I think, for me, it's not worrying about mistakes, not worrying about it looking good, not worrying about taking risks. It's all about the risk taking.

Nat: You mentioned the word experiment or experimentation. You talked about the studying the bristles of the brush and then maybe trying it from the back of the brush instead. You've talked about thinking outside of the box and looking at different ways to approach a problem. I'm thinking about science, and I'm thinking about math.

Andria: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

Nat: So, I'm thinking about critical thinking.

Andria: Yeah.

Nat: And what this conversation is helping me, is to blend, actually, the importance of arts curriculum and arts teaching and art skills into the STEAM subjects. Am I correct in thinking this?

Andria: You're right. See, I think the word creativity, it's almost categorized in the art subjects, whereas it shouldn't be, because to get an answer with a math equation, you can be very creative, in terms of the directions you're taking to get there. And the students will tell you that as well. In terms of the science, experiments, you need to be creative in order to try an experiment and think about different solutions or way of finding that. I think it's all down to do with problem solving, trying to solve the problem that you have put down as a question, and how to get to that end goal. But creativity should exist in every single subject and all curricula.

Nat: Is that something that you have worked with teachers on at all, or have you addressed that with teachers before in some of your workshops? I'm curious, because it does look like a very keen approach to curriculum development. Let's add creativity in here. How much creativity is being? So, is that something that you talk about at all?

Andria: Yeah, and fundamentally, all the time. But not only that, I think the worry, for me, is that there is still a lack of comfort in how to be a creative teacher and know how to teach creativity, and what does it look like, and how do I do it? What does it mean? Whereas if you speak to employers, that's the type of person they want. They want the creative individual, they want the problem solver, they want the colleague or the employee who will think outside the box, who can connect with people, who can bring in new audiences, new customers. And you get that if you have got creative people working for you.

Nat: So, wow, this is great, because not only are you making connections between the skills that you look to generate in your art class for art's sake and art development, but also to how those skills transfer into maths and science and other core classes in the curriculum. But now you're also extending it to their real adult life and the workplace. And we look for people who are collaborative and who are creative thinkers and who can speak a conversation. They may take different twists and turns, but are flexible with that and curious.

Nat: So, it gets me to really think about the importance of having the time in the classroom to be able to connect with your students in order to bring these skills out. And Time, my book, Time to Teach, Time to Reach, the theme of time is in the title. And what's your view of the commodity of time? I see a smile here. In schools, how is time being used and abused?

Andria: It's like, calling Andrea, a reality check. Where is it? How are we going to do it? I've got to teach. My curriculum is this long. I've got to teach everything with specification. There's no time. They're not doing that. Duh, duh, duh." How am I going to get that?" That's the key problem. That is the key.

Nat: There's push back.

Andria: Yeah. And I don't know what the answer is. I mean, some schools have been really creative by changing their hourly, the days, so that they can try and fit more and more in. Is that going to work? I don't know. We've got curriculums in

countries which are very broad, very open. There's a lot of trust in other countries. You're the teacher, we trust you, you know your stuff. Get on with it.

Nat: That's like Finland.

Andria: Yep. In our country, in the UK here, I don't think there is that trust. I think it's very much dictated that you must be teaching this, otherwise the children won't pass their exams. That is the ultimate question, but I think it comes down to the leadership of the school. What do they want for their young people? What do they want for their staff? What kind of product do you want to have when the child leaves your school? Who do you want? Someone who can regurgitate, someone who has passed exams but cannot sit down and hold a conversation with another human being, and has no opinions? Or do you want somebody who's well-rounded, someone who is confident, who can be reflective, who can be sociable, critical yet can adapt, has curiosity, can problem solve, and who you think, "Yeah, I want to employ you. You will take my company to another level."

Nat: Wow. The focus on leadership. You just gave me a ray of hope right there, Andrea, because I haven't really thought about this to this degree, that as teachers, in a sense, we can choose the school environment that we want to work in. Now, that's not really taking into account the fact that teaching, it's a competitive field to be in, and especially as an art teacher, there are only so many vacancies at so many schools in a given year. However, if I'm hearing you right, you choose a school that best fits you, and school leadership, as you say, the school leaders really shape the culture of the school.

Andria: Absolutely.

Nat: Is that right?

Andria: That's absolutely right. And I think, especially for our new colleagues, our younger teachers there, if you want a message, take this away with you if anything. If you're not comfortable, if you're not happy in your school, but you know that you are a teacher and it's in your gut, and it's in your soul, then you need to find another school, because there could be a school that's two minutes down the road that has a complete different culture that you may fit in better there than you are now. So, instead of suffering in silence and reflecting and thinking, "Am I? Am I? Is this the right job?" Yes, you probably are in the right job, but you're probably in the wrong school.

Nat: Yes, perfectly said, perfectly said. Don't give up. If you're feeling a secondary layer of burnout in this middle part of the year, just really ask yourself, could it possibly be the school that I'm working in, and is there a better fit for me? Because you can't remove the personal from the professional when you're a teacher. I mean, this whole conversation is about this, Andrea. I mean, who you are has generated thousands of young artists because they feel safe in your classroom because they know you. You are a specific individual to these students. As you said earlier, the students are watching you as the adult.

Andria: You're the role model. You're the absolute role model. Sometimes, you're the best role model they have, considering where they come from and their home environments, and some of our children do suffer a lot, and they've got some horrid, horrid circumstances, and you are the best person in their life. And because of that, it's a huge responsibility, but own it, take it and be honored by it.

Nat: And it doesn't mean, though, put it on your shoulders to be the hero teacher.

Andria: Yeah, absolutely not. I've got so much admiration for all teachers, but especially the UK teachers, because we have got to be responsible for everything. Mental health, social care, being a nurse, being a mum, being the kitchen, to providing food, and plus, don't forget, you've got to teach. And you've got to meet that target. You've got to make sure that your child makes progress and that's the grade they should be getting. And if you haven't, then you're bad. That's a huge amount of pressure that we're putting on our teachers to be everything. And I think, yeah, we acknowledge that, students acknowledge you, thank you, but look after yourselves as well.

Nat: Self care. Look after yourself as well. And focus on your own.

Andria: Do you know, now, I used to go home and some days I would be crying to my husband thinking, "I don't know what to do. He said this to a teacher, he said that, he threw this chair. He ran out of school. Duh, duh, duh, duh. He might've got arrested, whatever. What else can I do?" And then the husband says, "You can't. You can't. Now, it's down to the child. Now it's down to the externals. You've done everything you possibly can. And have you?" And I've been like, "Yes." He goes, "Well, that's it, no more."

Nat: Yup. That's a wake up call. That's fantastic cautionary advice for any teacher, which I think would be every teacher, who has students that they're, two in the morning they're thinking about this student. Exactly the kind of student you're talking about, and they want to help. But it's also really important to back off and to not commit your whole self to something where there are others. Right?

Andria: No, I'm with that. And I do have the husband who is great at doing that, but it's just making sure that, again, we're talking to people, that we are constantly talking about what's going on. And so we've got advice coming, and then we can reflect on whether or not we're taking that. But I think it's important to share. Always share.

Nat: It's share, and this gets back to the other S word, silos, that you were talking about earlier.

Andria: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Nat: So, it's almost like, at the beginning of the school year, or if you're a teacher coming into a new school, right, really make it a priority to connect with colleagues from the ground level. Like first day of faculty orientation, we call it in the US, just before the students arrive, when it's just the faculty there and leadership and just really, really extend yourself. Really connect, because you're

going to want to have these connections during the school year, so that you're not trapped in that silo, so that you can lean on each other when you have students that you're thinking about at two in the morning, but you know you can't be fully responsible for. Right?

Andria: No. It's so important. It's really important.

Nat: Tell me about your school, because you've been at the same school, right?

Andria: Yeah. Strangely enough, in the UK, this is not normal. It's not normal to stay in the same school for so many years.

Nat: That's amazing.

Andria: But yeah. But I started as an NQT, so, a newly qualified teacher there, and I just did not leave. I just loved it. The challenges were huge. The energy in the school was on level a million, behavior problems, lots of things that needed fixing, and completely enjoyed every minute of the challenge.

Nat: You said before that your school is a very diverse population, right?

Andria: Yes, yes.

Nat: And you've implied, but you've never said it straight out, but you've applied that diversity as a strength, actually.

Andria: Oh, it's gorgeous.

Nat: Can you explain that?

Andria: Oh, absolutely. I mean, diversity is how you would get to appreciate others and how we get to learn more about another culture and other people. I love learning from my students. I love learning about their cultures, about them, seeing their curiosity, learning from other people as well, and just being open to what's around. Food, the way that someone dresses, how they look after themselves, how they communicate, how they perform religious observance. It's so inspiring. It's completely inspiring. And this is what makes us stronger as a community.

Nat: The diversity is what makes you?

Andria: Absolutely.

Nat: The exposure to the [crosstalk] the world through different lenses?

Andria: Absolutely. Absolutely. It's very important because I came, don't forget, I was came from a migrant family, and when you do come from a migrant family, there is almost like this subconscious feeling of you can't lose your Greekness. You can't lose your Greekness! So, we must talk Greek, we have Greek food, follow the culture. You'll go to Greek school."

Andria: So, there is this kind of huge investment, more so when you're not in your home country, on your culture. And the problem with that is that, when you are then going into a brand new culture, you may not adjust. So, it's very important to be appreciated and appreciate those new, the different, so that they feel that, yes, you are one, that we can connect with you, and we value who you are. I value that you're not Greek. I value that. And I want to know more about that, and it's inspiring, and tell me about it. Oh, and do you know that we do something similar in my culture? We follow the same thing. So, it's the connections, as well, and how there is a unity as well.

Nat: It's funny about the talking to people from different backgrounds.

Andria: You're not Greek, are you?

Nat: I'm not. But what I do have is a family lineage that is in the looming industry and the weaving industry in New England.

Andria: Yes! Oh, wow!

Nat: So, to be totally honest, my family traces back to the first mills in Lowell, Massachusetts. So, back in the 1700s, 1800s. So, anyhow, when you were talking about your grandmother and just her weaving using the silk from the silkworms that she was growing, just made me in the back of my head, think, "I have a connection with Andrea here." And from 6000 miles away, and 250 years.

Nat: So, I guess that's it though. I guess that is the key. It's curiosity. It's asking questions, it's a receptivity, it's planning your classes so that there is engagement that comes out of relevancy, hooking the students. It's knowing your students. I'm reflecting on this whole conversation and different themes that have come out of it. It's the idea that anybody can be an artist, and the privilege of being an art teacher, seeking out what makes students tick, to be able to track kids seven years, and to watch them grow from 11 years to 17 years old.

Nat: All of this just advocates so clearly to why teaching is, as you say, the greatest profession. If there's one thing, I mean, this is the last topic to bring up, or last question, really, if there's one thing that you would advise the Department of Education to take a closer look at, and this is not even a critique on the Department of Education in the UK. It's really not. It's more just like, "Hey, I've got something to say here, and I've been recognized for my skills in this profession, can we shine a greater light on X component of teaching?" And it doesn't have to even be pragmatic or make practical sense, Andrea. Just what do you think is an area of teaching that you really think should be better, stronger valued?

Andria: I have a list as long as my arm, but I'm not going to go through that list, but I think what I will say, is two different things. First of all, is the value of the arts, the creative subjects, in our young people's lives, and how we're not focusing enough of those and they're the first subjects to be cut, the first subjects that we will get rid of, or will add as an after school activity, an enrichment activity, and not value them as a super golden core subjects within the school curriculum.

Andria: I think that's one of the things which I would love most curriculums in most countries to really, really think about, simply because of the skills which our students learn through them. The transferable skills that they will go on and on and on and on and use. And that will help them on their four or five different careers they will have in their lives. The adaptability, the problem solving, the choice, making, the connecting with other people. So, that's the one thing. So, making sure that within the curriculums there is a huge president of the creative subjects in the arts.

Andria: And my second message is quite simple, and that's the focus on kindness. Kindness! Kindness for teachers to teachers. So, just remember that to be in a kind environment, to appreciate the fact that as a teacher I have trained, I'm a highly skilled professional, I can make decisions, trust me to do what I think is right in my classroom environment. Kindness.

Andria: And also kindness to think about the lives of our young people and what they're going through, knowing them, the relationship building aspect of it. How do we know what that young person has experienced on the journey to school, or on their evening, and are we prejudging, and what are we doing to support that young person in our school environments? Our environments, safe places. Are our environments places where they want to thrive, or they want to be inspired, where they want to learn, they want to nurture, they want to play, they want to fail. They want to stand up again, where they want to explore, where they want to be inquisitive. Are these environments that we are nurturing in our schools?

Nat: Wow. That's a call to action. Call to action, of what's most important. It costs nothing. It costs nothing, and it is yet so essential. And it's interesting, as you were talking, Andrea, your wisdom comes from... So, being specific to art teaching, when I was a principal, which is when I was a deputy head back in California, if I had questions about a student, and this is totally honest, I would go straight to the art teacher first.

Nat: And the reason why it's twofold, one is an art teacher can see things about kids in a way where the creativity meets the criticism. Just how kids handle creativity. Some kids get very frustrated when they have a blank canvas, literally and figuratively, and they don't know quite how to do it, and to do it right and all that stuff. So, you observe how kids put pressure on themselves, you observe how kids focus or not, and you observe how they create.

Nat: But the second thing, which I actually think is even more significant, is, being an art teacher, when kids, you know that feeling in the art classroom when the kids are all in the flow, and they're all working?

Andria: Oh, it's beautiful.

Nat: But they're also having side to side conversations as they're doing something completely not relevant to what they're talking to their peers about. And I imagine, as an art teacher, you overhear, you're eavesdropping conversations that are very candid and very honest, as kids are in that flow.

Andria: And you're invited to take part in that conversation.

Nat: Tell me about that.

Andria: It's happening in your environment.

Nat: Right. Right.

Andria: What a privilege, right? And then that is that whole kind of, "Miss, we're accepting you as being in our world. I'm telling you my problems. I respect your value because I'm having this conversation in your... And I think that is what I like to call or think about as being The Art Room, The Art Environment. And when I say the art, I mean the arts. So, drama, music, media, all of the creative subjects. There's something quite unique about what happens in these rooms. They're very different to the science labs, to the maths labs, to the English rooms. They're very, very different.

Andria: And you do see incredible relationships happening between young people, peer to peers, the respect as well. So, when you have a child in our subjects and in my lesson, the one thing that I love is the fact that you can be a child who has got special educational needs. You're labeled, but you won't know that and you can't see that when you're doing a piece of artwork, and the whole inclusive aspect of the arts, the fact that you don't actually have to learn a language, you don't have to speak English, you don't have to be able to communicate to me as your teacher for you to understand what I'd like you to do in the next stage. And I think that is why they are so incredibly powerful.

Nat: And we will leave on that. It's incredibly powerful session and just an incredibly powerful conversation.

Andria: Thank you. Oh, it's been so lovely.

Nat: Elevating. Thank you so much.

Andria: It's been so great. Let's talk forever!

Nat: We could go on and on. Hey, you're not in school today! But Hey, just Andrea Zafirakou, 2018 Global Teacher of the Year award recipient. What are you doing with the \$1 million? That's key.

Andria: Oh! I'm glad you asked me that.

Nat: I am, too.

Andria: So, I'm changing the world? I'm on a mission to change the world, so I'm changing the world and I'm putting my money where my mouth is. I have started a charity, which is called Artists in Residence, and the idea of this charity is by bringing inspiration, creativity into schools, by connecting schools with artists. So, artists are coming in, working in schools, creating magic, having that magical

moment of a child working with an artist and saying, "Oh my God, can that be a profession?" And we're creating incredible work and moments like that, which are changing lives. And I'm happy to be on that journey.

Nat: Is there a website?

Andria: We are at www.artistsinresidence.org.uk. And if you are wonderfully rich and wealthy, there is a donate button there. So, please go ahead and support us if we can. But thank you so much for all the schools who are part of our teams, and we're really, for me, I'm so fulfilled to be able to help support schools, getting them to be more creative.

Nat: Well, thank you so much, and thank you so much for just sharing that support with us today. Andrea Zafirakou on Reach, Teach, Talk.

Andria: Thank you.

Nat: I'm so grateful you came on board and I look forward to tracing you in years ahead because you're an incredible voice.

Andria: Thank you so much.

Nat: And the world needs this, and the classrooms needed it, your students have needed it and will continue to yet. I'm so grateful and I hope that this can be a platform, one of many, to help you spread this word of the importance of the arts in learning.

Andria: Thank you. Thank you.

Nat: So thank you very much.

Andria: Thank you.