



Nat Damon: Welcome back for another episode of Reach. Teach. Talk. This is episode five of The London Series, and I'm thrilled because... Well, not only am I really thrilled about the guest that we have on today, but I'm actually also thrilled because as any viewer who's seen any of the previous four London episodes will immediately recognize, our poster is no longer propped on cushions. We have space to speak and to hold conversation openly. There's a higher ceiling. There's two cameras, so there's actually going to be kind of some fun jostling between two different lenses. It's just an easier... You won't see me sweating as I always had in the first 10 minutes of every other London episode because we were in this amazing yet very intimate bay.

Nat Damon: I am here today with Ben Berger, rhymes with bay, who is the Founder of The Kindness School Foundation and the Co-Founder of The Kindness Movement based here in London. Ben and I met... Actually, we met because we were both in the audience listening to the 2019 Global Teacher award winner Peter Tabichi from Kenya, who was just incredible and inspiring. Ben actually stood up and asked Peter a question, I was too nervous, and his question was about kindness and the role of kindness in schools and what Peter Tabichi has seen about just the implementation of kindness, the idea of kindness as a school ethos.

Nat Damon: My 25 years working in schools in the U.S., certainly this theme of kindness, the concept of cultivating and nourishing kindness and nurturing kindness in schools has been just a very, very important, obviously, element of the learning experience. What was not so obvious for me when I was working in schools in the U.S. was why. Like, why isn't that it's important for us to teach kindness? Now, obviously, we want to teach our kids to be kind because they grow up being kind and they end up being kind adults and it makes the world a better place. We got that, but when it comes to the recent neuroscience behind learning and the research that these educational neuroscientists have come up with and proven about the important of kindness in schools, well, that's what got me thinking.

Nat Damon: This gentlemen, Ben, who asked this really thoughtful question about the ethos of kindness in schools, there's actually real depth to this kind of concept. The idea that kindness is not just important for social and emotional development, but as science is now confirming, kindness is extremely important for social and emotional learning, for long-term retention. The easiest way for me to kind of frame this is that you have a kind focus in your school, you are working actively at alleviating anxiety. You're working actively at the idea of inclusion, not exclusion. You're working actively with the notion that learning is cognitive and emotional, which you've heard me say in episodes past and in my book, Time to

Teach: Time to Reach. Learning cannot be achieved without the heart. Also, lastly, the idea that learning is also social.

Nat Damon: This conversation with Ben is going to be an example of kindness in our social connection here. Listen and watch and watch us put this to the test. I don't see us getting into any heated debate, but who knows? Maybe he's got something up his sleeve that I don't know. Ben, Berger, welcome to Reach. Teach. Talk. I'm really thrilled to have you here.

Ben Berger: Thanks for having me, Nat. It's great to be here.

Nat Damon: It's wonderful to have you here, and I notice you have an accent. I just want to give you an opportunity to kind of share... Actually, it's not London regional because I also have an accent, obviously. What does it say about you and where you grew up? Have you always been a missionary for kindness ever since your earliest memory?

Ben Berger: Well, that's actually a really interesting question about me being kind of an advocate for kindness. I guess throughout the past one and half years where I started this project, I've gone through different phases where I've asked myself, "Am I a kind person? Am I particularly kind?" To be honest, I've never been asked that question before, but I think that I don't see myself as an exceptionally kind person. I just see it as... I see kindness as one of those values that we need to emphasize more in society and are really vital, especially in a kind of time where the political environment feeling much more heated. In times where we're talking about global challenges such as climate change, I think kindness is a really crucial factor in bringing the world together and in tackling global challenges.

Ben Berger: So much to me being a kindness ambassador, I don't think I'm a particularly kind person, I just think it's really important. My London accent, yeah, that's a tricky one, or my English accent, which is not really from London. I grew up in Switzerland, but my Mom's English. I was actually born in London, but growing up in Switzerland, the only source of my English was my Mom. I think through that I kind of developed an English accent but not really from a specific location, and so it kind of gives me away in the occasional pub conversation with local Londoners. They're like, "Where are you from?" "Yeah, I'm kind of from England."

Nat Damon: Kind of from England and kindly from England-

Ben Berger: Yeah.

Nat Damon: And you are also a citizen of the world, as we all are. I love that earlier you said... You made mention the theme of kindness is so important when we're thinking today of global climate change and we're thinking today about the way the politics has become so polarized, not just in the UK. Certainly in the U.S., certainly all around the world we have this bifurcation of kind of tribes, but not in the positive definition of tribes. The idea that we are bifurcated, we as people have conflict. We are seeing conflict played out in Brexit vote or in, again, climate change and what Greta Thunberg's doing to kind of pioneer this global attention toward climate change. Just as examples of why it's almost even... It's acknowledging the fact that while we speak different languages and we come

from different cultures, this idea of kindness as a bridge is possible. Or you must see that it is possible because this is what you have based your work on.

Nat Damon: Maybe, Ben, you could speak a little about your work and what brought you here today and what you are really focusing on and where you've found hope in terms of what The Kindness Foundation and what The Kindness Schools have accomplished and have as their future plans?

Ben Berger: I mean, I guess, the whole project started about one and a half years ago. I graduated from university. I did my degree in social innovation and social entrepreneurship. I went through that process like every student does, kind of looking for jobs, going out in to the world and it felt really harsh. I didn't feel like... I'm terrible at writing comment letters, by the way, so maybe that's a good reason. I just felt like it's not a kind of a welcoming environment. I kind of snowballed into this group of people that all for different reasons felt that the world needs to be more kind.

Ben Berger: We sat together and we thought, "Well, what can we do about it?" It was over a casual drink. "How can we contribute towards the world being more kind?" We thought the best place to start would be at school because at school, those early ages in your life where you start developing those social skills that define you as a human being, we thought that if we have a message for the world to be more kind, why not start at primary school level? Then, the next question was kind of, "Well, how do you teach people to be kind? Can you just walk to the front of the classroom and say, "Right, today we're going to talk about kindness, this is what it is and now you know what kindness is, now you can be more kind"?"

Ben Berger: It's not really... It's pretty obvious that that doesn't work. We thought that the best way to learn about the feeling that you can attribute towards being kind and receiving kindness is through experiences and by sharing those experiences and your gratitude with a person that was kind to you. That's kind of where we came up with the idea of children sharing stories and documenting stories. We came up with the idea of The Kindness Book, which is a really, really simple idea where children basically... You give the first page to the first student in the classroom and that child draws and writes about a small act of kindness that they've experienced. You then give the next page to that student that's mentioned. That student writes another story about another people in class, and so on. The book fills up with these small acts of kindness that... Kind of this chain of kindness that goes all the way through the classroom. The book becomes this depository of these small acts.

Nat Damon: This is wonderful. Hey, Ben, this is so... It's a book that over time, your classmates would fill with stories of kindness. I love that it says at the beginning, "If you have any questions about what kindness is, we have a kindness glossary in the back here and here's how we define"... For example, here's your definition of kindness. "Being kind goes in both directions. Kindness can be about giving or receiving. You can feel another person's unhappy feelings and help them by listening to them. Someone can be kind to you by understanding you, supporting you, and giving you what you need." I mean, it's just great because what you're teaching here is empathy and openness. This book, at the end of the school year, or I imagine it's got to take a long time to fill out, is going to be full of only positive stories and stories about others.

Nat Damon: If you have a class where the classmates are thinking about not just themselves in this dog-eat-dog world that we were alluding to earlier, but is able to have the blinders broadened and, "Hey, my desk is right next to Ben's desk and I see that he seems a little bummed out today. I can't quite see why but this book is going to give me the opportunity to write a story for Ben or share a conversation I had with Ben at lunch because I saw that he was seeming a little down and it lifted his spirits." It's about reflection, isn't it?

Ben Berger: Absolutely, absolutely, and it's really about showing kind of a sense of appreciation for someone who's been kind to you and has been there as a friend. It's sharing that experience with the person because sometimes there may be small acts of kindness that you do without even knowing that you're doing it. You're doing something without any thought but that means a lot to the other person. By sharing that experience it's like, "Wow, okay, this made my friend feel good."

Ben Berger: That's all it takes and starting to realize that. Your behavior can actually influence other people's feelings, and I guess that is what it's about in the broader context. It's that it's kind of a self-awareness, but also awareness about your relationship with other people, which feeds into this kind of broader topic of social emotional learning and understanding your place in the world and how you influence other people, but also how you grow as a person.

Nat Damon: I interviewed... Recently, a guest on this show was a 50-year primary school teacher, early primary school teacher, like reception you say here, kindergarten in the U.S. She was talking about where kindness can be taught incorrectly, which is this idea of a classroom which is based on rewards. If you pick up that trash and put it in recycling, then you get a star, you get a reward. What ends up happening, she said is... This is Judy Mansfield, by the way, who's just a wonderful interview, she gives the example of a student who says, "Look at me! Look at me! I did something really kind. I picked up the trash." Or, "I was nice to this student today and don't I get something for it?"

Nat Damon: Can you speak to that a little bit as well? This idea of kindness not being transactional but something that perhaps is, as you say, a two-way street?

Ben Berger: Yeah. I think that kind of... it hits the nail on the head. I think there's a difference between kindness and being a nice person or being a friendly person or... I think, to me, to be honest, after one and a half years of working on kindness, I still don't have a solid definition of what kindness really is, but I think the closest thing to me is a kind of a perception, kind of a really intrinsic view of the world, of how you relate to other people and how you act in accordance with other people. How you don't do it necessarily out of a selfish or... You don't do it for a selfish reason or you don't do it for a reward. You do it because we're all human beings and as another human being in front of you. Just by acting, it can feel good. That sense of... That positive feeling is all that it needs. It doesn't need to be tied to anything beyond that.

Nat Damon: Yeah. In and of itself, that positive feeling is enough. I'm thinking also about when I used to work in high school, as secondary schools in the U.S., and we had service learning programs or community service programs. We would have community service programs and what they were were you would have... Every student would be responsible over the course of the year to log in a certain

number of hours where they were helping a lesser fortunate or a needy organization or group of people or person. It always felt funny because it felt very one-directional because it'd be, "Look at me, I'm helping this person and I'm logging in the hours and I'm checking the box. Then, I'm going to get done my quota and then I'll be done."

Nat Damon: That is a very different way of looking at kindness because it's taking out the genuineness, the sincerity in a way. I don't mean to bash this because I think something's better than nothing in terms of extending oneself to a group or a person that would really benefit from your help. Yet, it feels like help. If it's unidirectional, it doesn't feel like there is this true understanding. What's missing I think is reflection of, "How did my action impact this person? What did I learn from that person?" I think that's where there's a difference between community service in the U.S. and service learning because service learning with the word "learning" in the title opens the way toward, "What did I just impart to this person, the recipient? What did I learn from this kind action?"

Nat Damon: I'm thinking about that because a really important part of The Kindness Book and the input in the stories is this focus on reflection. That takes time, so I'm curious. When you go to schools and you're talking about this book and you're talking about the importance of developing the ethos of climate, I mean a climate of kindness, ethos of kindness in the schools, do you ever have pushback in terms of, "This is great, but we don't have time for this"? Or, do you ever sense that schools get it, but they don't quite get it in terms of what you're really talking about in terms of the need for time to reflect and to meditate on what kindness really is?

Ben Berger: You know, to be honest, I think I'm really lucky because we started this project with The Kindness Book November, a bit more than a year ago, November 2018, and we had six schools. Within about six, seven, eight months, we went up to 3,000 teachers being involved. I think that I'm lucky because it's in the right time and people feel that this is a really important topic. They feel, for whatever reason it may be, if it's political, if it's environmental, if it's technology, that children, first and foremost, need to learn how to communicate with each other and how to live with each other and need to learn those skills.

Ben Berger: That's maybe... Perhaps if I'd done this project 10 years ago, I would probably have had a harder time, but I think that there's this kind of dawn of this awareness of human skills and human values and how education is really the central part in shaping how we as humans grow and how we are able to build those relationships because it's one of the most fundamentally important things for us as human beings is to develop into grown up people that can actually build those relationships. That's one of the key ingredients to happiness in a sense.

Ben Berger: To answer your question, I've not been to a school where the teachers have said, "We don't really have time for this", because I think this really kind of ticks the box for so many teachers that are trying to cover a lot of curriculum subjects and then think about, "Well, what are we actually doing on the personal side of these students? How can we help them become better human beings?" This I think really fits into that box.

Nat Damon: You're getting me thinking that it's not necessarily either/or. It's not like, "Oh, okay, we're going to teach kindness and then we're also going to drive hard

standardized testing." It's both. What I'm not hearing you say is if you were to recommend to the Education Department here or to Ofsted to eliminate testing and just replace it with kindness lessons, that's not what you're saying, is it? The real world doesn't work that way, either. I'd love for you to elaborate a little more on kind of, how do you... Here's the question, Ben. How do you know that a school is teaching kindness when it's really difficult to qualify or to quantify?

Ben Berger: You know, that's probably one of the biggest challenges that I'm focusing on right now is, how do you kind of measure it? We're still kind of in that... The reality is that, I guess, any new implementation, any large-scale project that you introduce into a large amount of schools, you need to kind of measure the outcome. How do we measure that teachers are doing this? How do we measure that children are being more kind? How do you measure kindness? I mean, I don't know.

Nat Damon: You can't even define it yet.

Ben Berger: We can't even define it yet. I mean, I've been talking with different university professors from the LSC where I did my postgrad degree. There's different ways that you could assess the impact of introducing kindness measures so to say on pupil outcomes. There are things like disciplinary measures, there are things like school retention rates and so on, but I don't think it really captures it yet. I don't know how we can actually get to a point where we can measure and say, "This is really changing people's lives. This is changing students' lives."

Nat Damon: Right.

Ben Berger: Yeah.

Nat Damon: Right. I'm thinking about The Relationships Foundation, which has found a way through Relational Schools Foundation, to quantitatively assess the relational strengths within schools. They've done an incredible job using a survey-based approach to assess, analyze, aggregate the student-teacher relationship, as well as the student-to-student relationship, and to make correlations between the strength of these relationships and the academic outcomes, the testing outcomes and whatnot. It's fascinating to see what they're doing. It's almost like you are where they were years and years ago when they were just beginning to figure out how they can really assess the strength... In your case, it would be the strength of kindness in these schools.

Nat Damon: Yet, even without being able to do that, Ben, it's this idea that schools are... As you said earlier, schools are kind of microcosms of society at large. These are young kids with brains that are developing and growing, and we can talk about that in a few minutes, this idea of neuroplasticity and this idea of how the brain grows and how we are teaching kindness. Yet, it doesn't sound like you're suggesting that schools should be above aware. There's no difficulties, no challenge, no negativity. It's how you just... These are all human... You even said yourself, you're not a hundred percent kind all of the time, right? Who can say that-

Ben Berger: Yeah.

Nat Damon: About themselves, right? I think you have Mother Teresa said in her autobiography, "I'm not a perfect person." We're not perfect because we're

humans, because we're persons. How kindness, even just the intentionality of kindness in schools is enough because if you're thinking about kindness... If you and I, for example, are taking a math test and I want to cheat and you see that I'm looking over at your test as you're taking it and you see that I'm... A kind response on your part would be A, B, or C. We could talk about different ways you can respond to that without making it a negative conflict between you and me or humiliating for me if you were to like call me out. I don't know if that's a great example, but just this sense that every day in school there's challenges that come up with kids and with teachers. If we have an intention toward kindness, then at least the way we handle these situations can be unified. Does that make sense?

Ben Berger: Yeah. I mean, I think also that everyone has that kind of memory of going to school and the social structures in school. You see it in films all the time. It's like there's the cool kids and then there's the bullies and there's the kids that feel left out. How does that influence your whole experience of being at school? How does it influence if you like learning or not? I think if you can support a school environment in which the students in a way take care of each other, then that is such a valuable lesson for life. It can also improve your overall experience at school, like your learning experience.

Ben Berger: I remember one of the most remarkable teachers I've ever met is this teacher who's... He's a teacher in Bhutan. I went to Bhutan this summer to do a workshop for about 500 kids in the Himalayas somewhere in the middle of Bhutan. It was absolutely amazing, and this teacher that introduced me to Bhutan and took me around for four days, he has this remarkable story of how he gave up his career, so to say of going to one of the big schools. He graduated top of his class and he went... He decided to go to this really remote village in the Himalayas, somewhere in the mountains of Bhutan where there was no infrastructure. I think there was a wooden shack somewhere in a part of the valley.

Ben Berger: Over the course of I think about six or seven years, he basically built up this school. He got the local community to support it and he got a lot of children into school. He also went around to family who had children with disabilities. He started or he encouraged the families to send them to school no matter what, despite their disabilities, because there seems to be a culture in which you don't want to... How should I say? There seems to be... They don't want to show that their family has a child with disabilities. He got these children to school and he also got the children that were already there to support those children. He would every day carry those children to school, and if he couldn't do it, he would get other students to go to the families' homes, pick up the students, and carry them all of the way to the school.

Ben Berger: Now, what he was telling me was that this created this incredible school environment in which all of the students... There were almost no conflicts and the students just... It became this space in which the students could come together and they'd build relationships and they'd build friendships. Learning became this fun activity in the context of a group of friends, rather than the classical school environment of, "How do I relate to the other students? Where am I placed? Who am I friends with? Who not?" I think that's where encouraging a school environment based on kindness and empathy and compassion is really, really helpful.

Nat Damon: I love that you just shared that example because it makes me think about two things. One is there's an organization that's been around for decades now called L'Arche, which is French. It's in Northern France and has gone global. What L'Arche is is they take normally functioning adults and they place them in communities with special needs adults. I say special needs adults, I have a sister who's special needs who grew up with an intellectual disability and she is living in a group home in the U.S. in Massachusetts and she's thriving. She's got independence, but she also has 24/7 care, of course, because she cannot be on her own on her own, yet what L'Arche does is it takes it a step further because it could be somebody like myself or you or somebody who's normally functioning living with them as well. It's a community just like what you described.

Nat Damon: What that does is it absolutely... My understanding is that it certainly promotes empathy and it's also... It again gets back to this service learning because the folks who live with those who have got intellectual disabilities, they just talk about how much they have learned about life and about being human and humility, and also about hidden strengths. Those with disabilities, they've all got skills, they've all got strengths. It's just a matter of how you pull them out. The teacher in me kind of relates to that because that's how we want to look at every student as well. Every student's got areas of strength and areas of challenge. How do we pull them out in a unified classroom environment?

Nat Damon: The other thing I'm thinking about more relating to schools is, based on what you were sharing about your experience in Bhutan and this real pioneer of integration, is schools that have these... I guess you'd call them cheekily like buddy programs where you have students who are in year six or something, students who are sixth grade, seventh grade, eighth grade, matched up with students who are in first grade, second grade, third grade. They've been through early primary, early elementary already, and yet they've got a buddy and they've got... There's this deliberate effort structurally in the school to have the older kids with the younger kids and to help them and to have this community community that's based on empathy and based on, "Oh, I've been in your shoes five years ago. Let me help you with your math or your addition or your simple writing skills, handwriting, cursive."

Nat Damon: I always find the schools that have got those programs in place just feel like kinder schools because the older kids by and large just love working with the younger kids, so you see that, too, right?

Ben Berger: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. I was actually just at a school in... I always try and say it, a school in Wales called [inaudible 00:28:44]. That's the name of the village.

Nat Damon: In the northern coast of Wales, right?

Ben Berger: Yes, that's right. I can't [crosstalk 00:28:50]-

Nat Damon: North of [crosstalk 00:28:50]-

Ben Berger: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Nat Damon: Yeah, I've been there.

Ben Berger: There's a school there. It's called [inaudible 00:28:56]. I probably pronounced it completely in the wrong way, and there's this remarkable head teacher and he's been I think on various BBC podcasts. He basically... He created this whole school environment based on understanding the natural environment on how teaching the children topics such as climate change and biodiversity. They've got about 150 chickens and they've got I think about 20 lizards and geese. They had goats and everything. They also... He created this environment where the older kids take care of the younger kids and they do all of the activities together. They go and collect the eggs and so on.

Ben Berger: There's so much good work out there and I think it's really remarkable. Then again, I'm not a teacher. That's a really important thing to mention. I'm not a teacher. I've never been a teacher. I've never worked in the education system, but I come from a family full of teachers. I kind of see my role, I guess, in working with teachers and understanding their approaches and looking at how they do it and sharing those methods with other teachers as well, and kind of creating a link between the education system and the sustainable development goals to some extent to say, "Right, we're facing a lot of global challenges. How is education this really remarkable tool for us to tackle these global challenges?"

Ben Berger: I think one thing that really strikes me is the role of the education system to create a sense of community. I've always been thinking of this in terms of human beings having lived in communities for their entire existence and communities have been kind of a way of us to tackle the challenges that we faced as human beings from the outside world. A community is something that strengthens you. You have safety in numbers, and that community has a certain sense of kindness, of empathy, that the individuals show respect to each other. By being together, working together, they can face off the challenges from the outside world.

Ben Berger: Kind of as our world has become more globalized and more connected, the challenges that we now face our global as well, and so it's my kind of sense that in order to tackle those global challenges, we need a global community as well. That's really difficult because, how do you create a global community? How do you create that connection between human beings that you would have in a small village between the individuals where they show kindness to each other and empathy and compassion and they know each other? How do you create that on a global scale? How do we as human beings... How can we show empathy with someone on the other side of the planet?

Ben Berger: That is so vital and I think that's where the education system comes in and where we have this unique chance of creating so to say a next generation that really, really cares because we are obviously failing. The signs are there, the signals are there, and so my hope is really... That's where I see myself is like getting in some way contributing towards an education system in which these human values and skills are central and the kids of the next generation kind of go out and becoming human beings that can work together.

Nat Damon: Without a doubt, you're addressing the call to action that we all must feel right now at this day and age and this time. Technology has prompted it. I think it's exponentially sped it up, and as you were alluding to, made the world smaller. Perhaps what we're talking about here... This whole conversation, Ben, has been about what you've done with the Kindness Schools Movement and what we've

been focusing on with... Perhaps if you can focus on the classroom and teach at this young age the elements of kindness, empathy, reflection, patience, tolerance, inclusion, appreciation for change, for differences, for community. Start locally and have that lens installed and then instilled.

Nat Damon: Then, you can as you get older look broadly and start acting globally, but with those... I come back to earlier when we were talking about tribes because perhaps that is... We had this amazing gentleman named Adrian Bethune, who was on this show earlier, and he wrote a book about mindfulness in the primary school classroom. He talks about tribes. There's this professor at Pepperdine in California who... Lou Cozalino, Louie Cozalino, who is kind of the founder of the term "tribe" in the classroom way. What a tribe is is what we're talking about in this positive definition of tribe. It's the idea that we have a common purpose, we accept everybody, and we appreciate everybody for all of the patches of the quilt that we create together, and we together formed this quilt that then comforts and is unified and strengthens and gives us shelter when it's raining and gives us warmth when it's cold and all of that.

Nat Damon: That's our tribe, but if we can then take that as we get older and broaden that into a world view. This is where technology is pretty awesome because, as you were saying, somebody halfway around the world from us can be experiencing something that we can relate to, even though we're from a different culture, a different language, different... but we get it because we're human beings. If we can use technology in that way to connect from our hearts and our spirits together, then we've got a whole kind of transcendent movement going on.

Nat Damon: That's really why I was happy to have you on this show because you are doing this, and what I'd love to do is just leave this episode with you, giving you an opportunity to really kind of share your vision for kind of where The Kindness School Foundation is going and also where The Kindness Movement is really heading. Also, how can we... I'm American, many of our viewers and listeners are going to be Americans. How can we kind of involve ourselves with starting perhaps with ordering The Kindness Book for our schools?

Ben Berger: I mean, The Kindness Movement is a great project and it's been an amazing year and a half and kind of connecting teachers and understanding that this is a topic that they feel is relevant. That's really humbling for me to go out there and get all of that positive feedback. Kind of at the end of the day, you've got a book and a child writes one story and passed the book on. Then, what happens? That's not going to necessarily turn you into a kinder human being. You might become more aware of these small acts by writing a story in a book, but there needs to be more. That's why I started The Kindness School Foundation in kind of an attempt to provide schools with a whole set of resources that they can introduce. This is all stuff around social and emotional learning and it's built on this philosophy of kindness.

Ben Berger: There's three parts to it. There's a kindness towards yourself, which touches things such as physical health and mental well-being. Then, there's kindness towards others, which is everything about building long-lasting relationships. How do we act respectfully towards other people? Then, there's the third part, which is this kindness towards the planet and the wilder world. I think that's where a lot of the educational for sustainable development comes in, talking with children about global challenges, talking about things like climate change, like gender and

equality, like poverty, and bringing these subjects into education at an early stage. That's the kind of the aspect of The Kindness School formation.

Ben Berger: Any school that signs up kind of becomes a Kindness School and they get access to all these resources. Then, there's a cool logo that they can put on their website. There's a ton of stuff there. What I envision is that things relating to social... Anything related to social emotional learning becomes more of a topic within the education sector because I think they're so valuable. I'm really happy to see that next September, there are two new subjects entering the English curriculum, and that is relationship education and that is health education, which is physical health and mental well-being. This is for primary schools, although it's also for secondary schools.

Ben Berger: That's really a strong signal, to me, that there is a priority there talking about relationships, building relationships, talking about mental well-being. It's amazing, and it gives a sense of urgency and maybe a sense of necessity at schools to say, "We also need to talk about this. This is really important." What I'm actually working on at the moment as well is I'm working with the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Peace and Sustainable Development, the UNESCO Institute, the MGIP Institute, and we created with about 20 other UNESCO youth leaders this Global Youth Alliance for Kindness. What we're doing is we're connecting these organizations that are working on things like kindness or empathy and compassion.

Ben Berger: We're also pushing for a UN declaration basically to highlight the importance of social emotional learning. We want to get it signed by UN members states. We just started this two-year process of getting that through. That has been really something that different organizations can point to and go to their governments and say, "Look, we've got this UN declaration. We need to do this in our country." That's what I kind of see is that we start this global movement for which is supported for on a policy level as well.

Nat Damon: That's fantastic.

Ben Berger: What was that [crosstalk 00:39:29]-

Nat Damon: That you just answered... You gave the strategic plan. All along, I was thinking in the back of my mind about how this is the time for schools to really, really prioritize. I'm encouraged to know there's a focus on relationships and a focus on mental health and well-being at the primary level here in the UK. All that we need to know is on our phone right now. Everything, information bits, everything we can access is all right here, so why not use this time knowing that answers to the question are on here? Why not use this time to then kind of give the teachers a bit of a break? They don't have to be the fount of all knowledge, and instead, lead by example and allocate time to the social and emotional health of our students because everything you said is absolutely spot-on about this world that they are growing up in.

Nat Damon: We're seeing it with statistics that prove that there's a rise in depression, a rise in anxiety. The first time in the U.S., suicide over road homicide as a cause of death in U.S. teenagers, and that's been in the last 10 years. We're witnessing clear evidence-based examples of a broken system or a sick nation or a sick kind of veil on our students that, yes, the way to present themselves could be super

happy. It doesn't give you any pause, but we also know the world that they're growing up in is quite challenging. Efforts like The Kindness Foundation, efforts like the book here, The Kindness Book, efforts like The Kindness Schools Project, which I really encourage schools, if you're an American school teacher or leader, to really go to this website, which is... What is the website, by the way?

Ben Berger: kindness-schools.org.

Nat Damon: Kindness-schools.org, all right. Is there something between the kindness and schools?

Ben Berger: Yeah, a dash.

Nat Damon: Yeah, kindness-schools... kindness-schools [crosstalk 00:41:31]-

Ben Berger: kindness-school.org.

Nat Damon: That's close enough.

Ben Berger: Yeah, sorry [crosstalk 00:41:35]-

Nat Damon: Kindness/school [crosstalk 00:41:36]-

Ben Berger: That's the new website. I don't have the domain yet.

Nat Damon: That's right. Everything's so fresh [crosstalk 00:41:40]. It's fantastic. I would love to get you back on here in five years from now and have you celebrate kind of the growth, the trajectory that you've achieved because in 18 very short months, I mean, Ben, what you've been able to do and your organization's been able to do is really phenomenal and I just want to thank you so much for being on this episode, A Focus on Kindness, on Reach. Teach. Talk.

Ben Berger: Thank you very much, Nat. Thanks for having me.

Nat Damon: My pleasure.

Announcer: You've been listening to Reach. Teach. Talk. With Nat Damon. If you'd like to recommend a guest for a future episode, you can send your suggestion or questions to nat@reachacademics.com.