



Nat: I am here today in London with Mr. Rob Loe, Dr. Rob Loe, who is the CEO of the Relationships Foundation based in Cambridge, UK. And this is our first of the five London episodes. It's what I'm calling. Let's call this like the London mini-series. This is the UK mini-series for a Reach Teach Talk. And I'm thrilled because Rob, there was nobody I could think of to be the starting guest, the first guest for the London series. I cannot think of anybody better than Rob. And the reason why is personal and professional. I met Rob about two years ago, maybe two and a half years ago now. And I just finished the manuscript for Time to Teach, Time to Reach.

Nat: I just kind of sent a blind query because I did some searches on Relational Schools in the UK and any sort of think tanks or any sort of university kind of programs and professors that are really keen on the importance of relationships in schools in the classroom. And Rob responded. I found Rob through his website at Relational Schools at the time. He was the head, the director of Relational Schools Foundation, which I'll let Rob kind of go into the weeds on this a little bit later, but it is an extension from the Relationship Foundation.

Nat: Anyhow, so I reached out to you, you responded, you were heading to Australia, and you took the manuscript with you, and what were your thoughts? You can actually pick up the story here.

Dr. Rob Loe: So we had maybe two years before that published a book called the Relational Teacher, and that was trying to capture some of the narratives of teachers in this space who really loved to think intentionally about their sort of the social climate of classrooms. And we'd done something very small scale with one school. But here was somebody who had sent me a manuscript based on a hundred interviews with teachers, not just from one school but from a range of schools, K through 12 in the US and elsewhere.

Dr. Rob Loe: And therefore, I was immediately impressed by the scope of the manuscript and the robustness of the qualitative data. This was something because of that size that was going to say something important into this space. And it was beautifully structured. It was meaty. And if there's anything that's true about our organization, we exist as servants to other people. We're here to try and encourage people to think like this. But there's always that question that people come to us with

afterwards, which is, okay, you've been able to show us what our culture and climate is like in this classroom, but what next? And for me, you represent, Reach Academics represents the what next, the narrative, the conversation.

Nat: Yeah. So this is me counting my money that I'm going to put under the table for Rob. Notice this is in British Pounds. And here you go. Thank you so much for the positive accolades. I'll get you a pint or two at the pub-

Dr. Rob Loe: Thank you so much.

Nat: ... after this as well. But in all seriousness, Rob and I hit it off immediately when we finally met. We worked in the edits for the book and he wrote this incredible forward for the book. And while this is not meant to be a by the book episode, it is more just to kind of share our connection. And plus, you can't beat Nat Damon and Rob Loe.

Dr. Rob Loe: No, you can't, right?

Nat: Come on. You can't get Matt. It's not Matt. You can't get Rob Loe with a different spelling. You got the two of us, we're the educator versions. We're the educational doppelgangers.

Dr. Rob Loe: Absolutely. We're the famous ones.

Nat: We're the famous ones. In our own studio. Look at us, we have the sign and everything. But anyhow, welcome to the London episodes of Reach Teach Talk. And Rob, I'm thrilled to have you here. Let's take a step back now and let me shine the spotlight on you too. You are, in my mind, somebody who has been able to do what I had previously thought impossible, which is to find ways to use quantitative measurements to assess the qualitative strengths, the relational strengths in schools. I would love for you to kind of use this as an opportunity to kind of share, update me, update the listeners and the viewers about what you've been able to achieve with Relational Schools Foundation, again, as a subset of the relationship foundation. And how many schools have you worked with? How have you been able to use quantitative measurements to assess something that has, in my mind, just been so qualitative?

Dr. Rob Loe: Yeah. Sure. Thank you. So let me take you back to the way in which I interacted with this story in the first place. So back in 2012, May 2012, I went to listen to a public lecture given by our founder, Dr. Mark [inaudible 00:04:48], who'd worked across several different sectors and geographies doing all sorts of extraordinary things. I went to this public lecture, which at the time it was actually a lecture on economics. And I shouldn't have even gone. I went to the request and invitation of a friend, and I went reluctantly, if I'm honest.

Nat: Why did you go? You're more of a humanities guy.

Dr. Rob Loe: So he had invited somebody else who worked for a bank. The guy had dropped out. He said, "I don't want to go by myself, will you come with me?" And he's a good friend, so I went. And I listened to this lecture, this public lecture, which was about the need to reframe public policy to encourage harmony and proximity in organizational life and public life. And he spoke, actually just spoke about work in prisons. Relationships Foundation, their first project was this wonderful audit of relationships between prisoners and guards to try and understand, measure the culture of prisons in order to predict the likelihood of rioting and stop it well before. It was the first foray 30 years ago into predictive analytics.

Dr. Rob Loe: So I'm sat there thinking about, I'm already interested. And then he said, well... That was back in the early 90s. And then they went to work in the measurement of relationships in hospitals. And then in peace-building context, pre-truth and reconciliation in South Africa, post-conflict Rwanda, I worked in Sudan, currently doing work on the Korean peninsula. They've done work in businesses. KPMG had, at that time, the largest worldwide licensees of these audit tools, these metrics. But he makes this throwaway comment at the end, which is, "But we've never done a thing in schools. We've never found anybody to do that for us before." And so I run it to him afterwards and there's all sorts of personal and professional reasons, and part of those, my difficulties in forming and creating relationships at schools, I did not find that easy.

Nat: Why not?

Dr. Rob Loe: I don't suppose I'll ever know why. I just know that it was a factor. I didn't experience relationships of mutual reinforcement easily at school.

Nat: Is this you as a student or you as a teacher?

Dr. Rob Loe: As me as a student.

Nat: Okay.

Dr. Rob Loe: So when I left university having studied education policy, I just really wanted to be a teacher because what I knew was at school, the reason that I did make good friends is because there was an intervention of a third party that helped me do that. So it was either teachers who looked out for you, it was my parents. When we were talking earlier, I gave you the great example, if you want someone to be friends with somebody else, the best thing you do as a parent is just invite them around for tea.

Dr. Rob Loe: And so my mom was really intentional about that, you'd have people over for tea. In order to stimulate and nurture those kinds of relationships, I kind of having experienced the positive third party intervention of somebody else saying, "Look, this is how you do it. This is how you incentivize and encourage it." I wanted to be the relational teacher. I wanted to help other people in that quest, and I could see from all those students around me, that those who really thrived, had really good, strong

connections with the professionals who taught them. And I wanted to be that person.

Dr. Rob Loe: So I'm at the back of this hall thinking, this would play out really well in school. So I ran up to him afterwards and said, at the time I'd been ahead of English faculty, head of English and assistant principal in a large college, and within a year I'd given all that up without the promise of a first year salary to go and set up what was then called Relational Schools Project. It was just an incubator project that sought to try and test these metrics out in schools. And then from that, we've gone from working with just one school and 20 children to... I mean, I work in Australia, we've worked with tens of thousands of children in Australia and Canada now.

Dr. Rob Loe: And we've measured tens of thousands of relationships with students, between teachers and students. And it has become the largest, and other people argue, the most successful iteration of these tools. And for obvious reasons, because teachers love this stuff. They understand it's the reason they became teachers in the first place. However much you love your subject, how much you love teaching the knowledge of your subject, or having a curriculum that is well-focused and balance, ultimately teachers are in it for the human beings in the place. It's not an organization, it's an organism, it's living, it's alive. And teachers get their buzz from that organism.

Nat: And a lot of what you're saying is, this is the reason why we, like I was a teacher for many years as well, and why we get into the profession to begin with. And one of the many outcomes of your work with Relational Schools Foundation is helping to reset the spotlight on what's most important and to help support teachers. Because as you say, and it's so true. We get into this job not for the money and not for status, it's to do good with the next generation, to work with kids, and to have that. And you can't do that effectively without building a strong relationship with them first, right?

Dr. Rob Loe: Right. And what's more is that since I began teaching in the late 90s, the culture of many schools now is so quantitative. We tend not to manage the things we don't measure. And so it's not that teachers don't care or recognize about the importance of relationships, in fact it's probably the most profound challenge we have when trying to talk to schools about relationships because you have two responses to that. One is do you know what, we see that's important, but we've got this other stuff that's more important. It's assessment data, it's the metrics around performance and outcomes, or perhaps the most challenging is the teacher that says, "No, no, no, no, we're really good at relationships here. And it's all right, we've got this."

Dr. Rob Loe: That's more profoundly challenging because it's not until you put a number next to a relationship and understand not only how good that relationship genuinely is, but also some of the underlying fragility behind that relationship that you can begin to act intentionally and positively into that space. And so what we've been trying to do is take our metrics to take something that is inherently intangible and make it known and

knowable and actionable. And that's why these metrics are so important in a culture with foregrounds and values, the empirical. It gives people the mission, but it also gives people a starting point to be intentional.

Nat: That's absolutely awesome because we are living in this age where, thanks to technology, we can split algorithms, we can aggregate information, we can post these metrics that look beautiful and glorious and are incredibly nuanced and incredibly fine-tuned. We've now been conditioned to take more seriously studies or feedback that has, as you say, that number next to it.

Dr. Rob Loe: Absolutely.

Nat: And I absolutely agree with you, it's schools that have the pride or the hubris, the hubristic kind of, "Oh, we got relationships, we do this already." Or maybe also embedded in that Rob, is this idea that relationships are soft skills and oh, really this is... You kind of breathe it through the ethos here. We don't really need to define it because it's just there, right?

Dr. Rob Loe: Sure. But even in the context of your book, which is, a group of educators saying, "Do you know what, when I do this, when I do intervention A, I think relationships improve. When I do intervention D, actually they get worse. And these are the things not to do." In reality, some of these things are definitely true and knowable, but in a context where we have something like the Education Endowment Foundation in England, which has tried to bring a kind of red pill, blue pill mentality; medical research mentality to educational intervention. It's not a bad thing. I mean it's good for us to understand what genuinely lies behind best practice. But in that culture, it's very hard for somebody to pick up your book, I think, and say, "Well, actually here's intervention A, B and C. I'm going to follow those." Because they're in a wider, broader culture, where people say, "Well prove that." Where's your evidence that that works?

Dr. Rob Loe: And ultimately, what we are starting to see is that there is an impact of year group size on relationship quality. We know now that every class you add per year, we see degrading relationships among students by about 4%.

Nat: To put this into American speak, when he talks about year group, Rob, you're talking about the grade levels, right?

Dr. Rob Loe: I am talking about grade levels. That's right.

Nat: So you found in your studies that the larger the grade level, there's a certain number that you don't want to necessarily cross because you lose the relationship-

Dr. Rob Loe: Exactly.

Nat: ...connection.

Dr. Rob Loe: You start to see that degrading of relationship once that tipping point has been reached. Or for example, more positively what we've seen is that there is an enormous impact in taking people away outside of the classroom on longer trips, on expeditions, on residential. So one can say, well, this is a quantifiable intervention. Here's something that lots of schools do every year. They spend money on it, they invite parents to spend money on it, but what's the impact of it?

Dr. Rob Loe: And what we're trying to do is put numbers, empirical data around something so that the soft intangible elements of school culture and practice can themselves be treated exactly the same way as a six week reading program intervention, or the use of peer mentors. All those kinds of fantastic things where we have got that evidence base, we feel it's important to have the same evidence based on the things that other people just think implicitly are important about school culture and life.

Nat: That's fantastic because in a time where the auditors are looking for areas of a school budget to trim, to skim, to siphon off, retreats, field trips, shared experiences are among the first things in arch programs and whatnot. Are among the first things to go. Afterschool programs we would call them here in the US. Yet what you're able to provide now by putting the numbers next to the valued assessments, the survey approach to these experiential based but so critical for relationship building components of the school. That's huge, right?

Dr. Rob Loe: Really big. Take for example, just the concept of the pastoral, which I am a really part... In fact, I'd say the book I want to write next is about the importance of pastoral structures in schools, because they are one of the things that have been cut. So people start to cut away at time for the pastoral. For some people, the pastoral in a school is 45 minutes every day. It's the lifeblood of student culture. It's the place where you have a touchstone, where one professional has an oversight of your academic and personal wellbeing across your entire school experience, and they invest in that time really intentionally. We've got some great case on that.

Dr. Rob Loe: For other schools, there is no pastoral structure at all. In fact, it's one of the things. When we've been doing some work in Canada recently, one of the things we've noticed and one of the things we really struggle with, it was very hard to go and do our measurement in one focused place because there wasn't a consistency between schools. For one school, yeah, we do the pastoral, and it's this. For another, it's just five minutes in the beginning of day and it's roll call and administration. For others, it's like, "What do you even mean by the pastoral?"

Dr. Rob Loe: I made no judgment about that. What we're saying is when we see really strong pastoral cultures in schools, with real value given to mentoring of young people, we see different outcomes, social outcomes in young people. We see better levels of mental health and wellbeing, we see better cohesion between students. Therefore, until we have that debate around, well what is the importance of the pastoral, why must it be in every school? They will always go for that as a first place to cut because if their primary job of a school is to increase math scores, then you invest

in math. Because it is the thing that we know, based on this red pill, blue pill kind of mentality, that if we do this, we do that, we do that, math scores go up.

Dr. Rob Loe: But ultimately, sure, we're interested in math scores going up, we're not Luddites. We see that that level of progress academically is important. It's important for life chances, it's important for mobility of students socially. But at the same time, we have to be aware that internationally young people are not as happy as they were. Levels of subjective wellbeing are on the downturn. Young people are telling us that they feel lonelier than ever before, they feel more isolated, they feel more unhappy.

Dr. Rob Loe: Now, we have to find a system that encourages both of those things to be in healthy tension. How can I succeed academically? How can I progress and have job opportunities and career opportunities that make me feel fulfilled? But at the same time, how can I also be cradled and held at least really developmental early adolescence, that shift particularly between the ages of 10, 11, 12, 13, that period there. In the United Kingdom, where I come from, that leap from what we might call primary to secondary is utterly crucial. What we know is now that if you are not in a good relationship with at least one other peer, and with an adult in the school, by the time you're 10 or 11, you're highly unlikely to transfer successfully to secondary school. You're highly unlikely to form those relationships again. And these are the young people who become socially excluded for the rest of their lives. And we know this stuff now and yet we are not yet having an intentional debate about how to deal with that. How to intentionally improve that picture.

Nat: Wow, there's so many things I'm thinking about as you're speaking so eloquently about the impact and the importance of the impact on the socially based programs or elements of a school culture. When Rob is talking about pastoral, in the US we call it advisory programs or even homeroom.

Dr. Rob Loe: Yeah. The homeroom is the best metaphor for it. I like it. We don't use the word actually, and I love the word more because I think there is a place where a young person should feel at home each day.

Nat: Amen. Skeptics who are looking strictly at optimal curriculum, will understandably say, "Hey, you know what, a homeroom program or pastoral focus, folks in the pastoral, we don't have enough time to do that because really we need to increase their math scores. So let's focus on math or focused on English or what not. Things that are data-driven and that are standardized test driven.

Nat: I spoke with Andria Zafirakou, who is an art teacher, and she was the teacher of the year and the global teacher of the year in 2018. She's an art teacher and she made this point about art as saying, "Hey, look, there's math in art, there is absolute communication in art, there is logic to art, there is storytelling and art. And if you're talking about art appreciation and criticism, there is argumentative rhetoric in art. Why are we chopping

it off? Why are we chopping off another portal for learning skills that fall under the concrete core curriculum?"

Nat: So that as well as, I guess, I'm thinking of as reason for why what your work achieved is so incredibly important in this day and age. So layered on top of everything is this idea of the technology that we're living in today and our reliance on technology and our faith in technology to be able to expose strengths and weaknesses in school programs and school culture.

Nat: And then also a subset of that would be looking at curriculum and looking at a school where are they put their priorities. And yes, we want our school to do well when it comes to outcomes, standardized testing outcomes, but aren't there other ways to go about strengthening of school curriculum? Not just by hammering kids over with math exercises and English grammar exercises, flashcards, memorization, writing, rewriting, all of that's important but not at the expense of arts programs, not at the expensive homeroom programs that are thoughtfully designed, not at the expense of retreats and off campus opportunities where kids grow in ways that might not be obvious and apparent to the auditor. But thanks to your work, you're able to externalize, make external and make palatable to the quantitative thinkers the importance of these other facets of the school day.

Dr. Rob Loe: Yeah. So one of the new measures I argued for, sometime ago now, in a book called Flip the System is a new measure of school success, which were called the destination seven measure. And this is based on the premise that if he went to find young people seven years after they'd left school, what would you really want to see? Let's just take it for granted that they can read and write, we expect literacy and numeracy, but if you go back to the first societies, particularly biblical society, there were 100% rates of literacy and numeracy. There was a culture where everyone could read and write. But just assume that this is an important part of human functioning and living. But what else do you want to see? Well, for me, I'd want to see people settled.

Nat: Emotionally settled...

Dr. Rob Loe: Yes, emotionally settled. So they might own or at least be renting a house, they might be employed, they might be voting, volunteering, maybe they're married, maybe they have a partner, but they're happy. But then in some way that they are... Well, the Greeks used to call this eudaimonia, right?

Nat: I love that term. Eudaimonia

Dr. Rob Loe: It's flourishing. These guys are flourishing. And that's what you want to see. And so some of that is seeing the absence of certain things. So if you're looking at risk averse behaviors, excessive drink, drugs, alcohol, weaponized crime, all those kinds of things which are sociological determinants of whether people are struggling. So if you want to see



those things, then what kind of education do you put in place to see those things happening seven years down the line?

Dr. Rob Loe: I'm not necessarily sure you'd set up education in exactly the same way that we do it now, and what we're trying to do, and I think we will need to do more of this is think longitudinally about different types of school experiences in order to really have this debate about what is human flourishing look and feel like, and how do we best achieve it? Because ultimately if you don't want people to take drugs because you consider it to be a risk behavior that's worth avoiding or excessive alcohol because we know the damage it can do, well, then you would definitely have a really good program of education of this in school. It wouldn't be something that you just do incidentally and through an advisory program, if you've got time, if a school had a destination seven measure against it, which said, "Do you know what, you're not responsible for, but we're really interested in understanding the link between the education and experience they had here and where they went."

Dr. Rob Loe: A school would be more intentional about apprenticeship, about movement into further education because if one of the things they were judged... No, I don't like the word judged. If one of the things they, one of the conversations we had with schools was around those destinations where children ended up, I think we might think differently about the programs we put in place to achieve that.

Nat: Wow. Oh my goodness. Okay. So this idea of the school of tomorrow, Rob, having the ability or let's just say having the focus on every graduate seven years later being in an area of eudaimonia. And when we say flourishing, I mean it's not like rah-rah, everything is wonderful because we know that happiness is not about that either. It's contentment. It's a feeling of there's value in my being. Right?

Dr. Rob Loe: Yeah.

Nat: There's value in my being. I'm not coming from a place of scarcity. I'm not attaching myself to, if I have this, then I'll actually be happy. I have this, and it's been reinforced in my schooling. A couple of questions for you then. Do you believe then Rob, that the ages in which we are in school are incredibly formative, and do you believe in this idea that your one school life impacts how they are as adults?

Dr. Rob Loe: I definitely do. And perhaps the scariest thing is that I think some of these outcomes are fixed when we are really young.

Nat: Like primary school? Elementary?

Dr. Rob Loe: Yeah. There's lots of studies to say that some of our later sort of employment or social outcomes are fixed at the age of seven, but you can start to predict children's test scores by the books they have on their shelves at home. And therefore, one of the things... I mean, I don't want

to age this podcast by referencing something that is in the moment, but right now in the moment we've just seen the PISA results related to 2019.

Nat: Just this week.

Dr. Rob Loe: Just this week. And everyone's talking about Estonia. Why are they talking about Estonia? They're talking about Estonia because Estonia has seen a meteoric rise up the other PISA tables. And what do we know about Estonia? Again, a little like perhaps Finland, we've been very interested about Finland for some time now. Culturally, more homogenous. It's very small. I think about 1.3 million sort of population. But the thing that really interests me is just the amount of investment they put into their early years. They invest heavily, financially and relationally in young children.

Dr. Rob Loe: That was definitely true of Finland. You see the expenditure on special educational needs provision, which is a very broad term in Finland. It's massive when children are young. In the United Kingdom, what we see, is we see this upward curve of investment, which gets even steeper as children reach the ages of 15 and 16. In Finland, that's a downward trend. They invest heavily at the start and a small upturn at the end. But the principle of it is if you invest early, you reap the dividends later. So if anything we're seeing now is that sure you might have to invest two or three times the amount. So we're seeing now in school in order to give the levels of support and nurture that all children need. But it would have to come simultaneously with a rebalancing of investment, which has to be heavy early on.

Dr. Rob Loe: The Australians call this the Billabong Effect. If you have a stagnant pond, then what you need to do is you need to go upstream and usually what you'll find is that there is a dead animal somewhere in that stream and it just needs to be cleared, moved away, and fresh water will flow again. We must understand that in order to impact young people's lives at the ages of 14, 15, 16, you have to invest heavily at the ages of four, five, and six. And I think when we realize that and appreciate that, we will see different outcomes later down the line.

Nat: There's a great organization in the US called Defending the Early Years, which Nancy Carlson Page, who is Matt Damon's mother. (Not Nat.) She runs this nonprofit and she's a professor at Lesley University, which is one of the great education universities in the US. And she, her whole life, has been as a professor of early education and also as a spokesperson for really preaching this message, as you are, about the primacy of the early years, and how incredibly critical it is to get this in. And if we can invest more money in head start programs in the US, for example, headstart programs or certainly primary schools and programs to help raise all ships at a young age, we will be a healthier and better society for sure.

Nat: You said earlier, Rob, about school size, about grade level sizes. I want to get back to that because it relates to what you're talking about here. In the sense that you were kind of conflating the loneliness, the focus on

loneliness here in the UK is huge, and it's recently huge. It's really looking at the idea that 25% of pensioners are folks, I think, 60 or 65 and older, don't have anybody giving them a phone call on Christmas. They're alone at the holidays. And this loneliness has physical manifestations, it's got emotional sense of self manifestations, and health manifestations.

Nat: What's your discoveries in your research about loneliness in schools, and what happens to a student who is marginalized or invisible, I.e, lonely in a school? What kind of path does that student typically take have you found? And how can schools address loneliness in their ecosystems?

Dr. Rob Loe: Really good question. So there's two things I'd say about that. One, we have developed a new way of looking at this. So we've developed some social network analysis mapping tools, which map both the kind of relationships between all students in classrooms. And then we also have like a thermal imaging sort of tool, which measures wellbeing on top of that. And so we can start to see where the heat maps are of real sadness amongst young people.

Nat: Can you explain that a little bit. Define this through words because most people would be listening.

Dr. Rob Loe: Yeah, good. So basically what we do is using our relational proximity framework tool, we ask every child in the class one question about their relationship to everybody else, and they must answer that one question, sometimes one, sometimes more. And then what we can start to correlate. And there's some machine learning in it. So what the program does then it isolates those students who have no connections, where there's really strong connections between students, we see the nodes on the maps grow in strength and we see lines emerge between them. And what you can start to see is where the children are really connected, where they're fragmented and why.

Nat: So if I'm seeing this right, so I think I've seen this before through you. It's a scattergram of students. Every student is a dot and the name or initials or whatever, numbers. And then you literally are drawing lines connecting them, right?

Dr. Rob Loe: Yeah, that's right.

Nat: And you can see visibly. It's almost like looking at a cell or looking at a-

Dr. Rob Loe: Yeah, in data. Because we then measure their wellbeing over the top and we cover that map, so you can see literally that the heat areas, the ones you worry about, the redder those students are the more unhappy are. And usually there is a consistency between those who are fragmented and pushed outside who have few or no connections, and those children who are deeply unhappy.

Dr. Rob Loe: But then of course, because we've got such large data sets, we can start to say demographically, sociologically, what are the factors that lie behind

these young people? And there's usually three or four factors that are consistent particularly young people in primary schools. Number one, that they often live at least one postcode away from the school. So they don't live near the school. And why is that important? Well, clearly it's important because what you notice is that the children who walk together to school tend to spend more time together, they tend to get invited back together because particularly young children they're not as driven as other children. Because if you can go to somebody's house for tea, who is two or three doors away, you do. And what you notice is that those children who at least one postcode away, they don't form relationships as well, nor do they if they have started mid-year or midway through a school career.

Dr. Rob Loe: If you join a school, you onboard separately and onboard mid-year, you are overrepresented in that population. If you have weak academic ability, you are overrepresented in that loneliness population. And if you have, in some countries, some kind of difference, and particularly this is a language. If English is an additional language, we often see this amongst European migrants as well in parts of the world, then you are likely to be one of those people who doesn't connect as well and you're pushed to the outside.

Dr. Rob Loe: Now what does this do? Well, it makes people really intentional about their policy of onboarding children culturally into a school. If you are that child who doesn't live close, so you started midway through the year, that you're weak academically, that you have some kind of difference that is completely... You can't do anything but just celebrate it, manage it, and deal with it, then what do you do? You have to be intentional, and you have to think through the strategies that enable that.

Dr. Rob Loe: The second thing I want to say is, well, what are the consequences of not doing that? Well, the largest project that we are involved in at the moment is a study of alternative provision in England. So these are the places that young people get excluded to. So when there've been in mainstream school, their behavior has been such they'd been kicked out. So they're sent to these places where they can be educated in a different environment. They're usually smaller, they're high staff student ratios. Some of them are semi secure. These are very different sort of environments for young people to be. So what characterizes those young people and their success and flourishing in these new places? Well, we've interviewed a bunch of them, and a consistent thing they say is... When we ask them the question, what is the difference between the school you came from and the school that you are in now? This organization, this alternative provision? And their consistent comment is this, "Here we feel known."

Dr. Rob Loe: And so what does that tell you about school? The whole understanding, the whole measurement of relationships, you don't measure relationship between two people by the degree to which you like somebody. Relationship measurement is based on the degree to which you know and are known by somebody else. And our premise is simple, the more you stimulate an environment, which then allows people to be known, particularly that's true of teacher student. That's why class size matters.

Class size doesn't matter because... Yes, it does matter to the own personal relationships of a teacher because if I have too many papers to grade, too many books to mark, then their time, their own personal time is going to be stretched. But ultimately what does a small class do? It allows a teacher to have individual conversations regularly with a young person, which means they know them and they are known. That is the point.

Dr. Rob Loe:

And what we're seeing is that those young people with particular needs and real difficulties, they don't necessarily come from the kinds of demographics or home lives where they've experienced relationships in a positive sense. They're often coming from really difficult home environments and they need nurturing in a way that they've not experienced. If you then go into a school that has two, 3000 pupils in it, of course these young people feel lost and they feel marginalized. And of course they tell us, in these environments where there's somewhere between 20 to 50 students, "Do you know what? Here we feel known, here we feel valued, and here we are flourishing." There are some really important things. And so yes, school size is a driver of that. Class size is a driver of that. Grade level size is a driver of that. But there's also some of these demographics things that we see in our earlier studies as well, that when we know them, when we have tangible data around them, we can start being intentional about them.

Nat:

And this is a Political issue, I think, in the States. So obviously when we have school shootings, which happen... Well, anytime it happens obviously is a horror and a tragedy and a mandate for us as Americans to look at ourselves and hold a mirror and ideally in a healthy government we'd be able to foreign policy around it and make positive steps toward eradicating this horrific phenomenon.

Nat:

You and I've written in the past about this. Like in Education Week, we had an excerpt that was published there a couple of years ago after the shooting of Florida with Nicholas Cruz, where it was this idea that... And you can look up also, there's a couple of reports that have come out recently, which are also the idea of the essential components or the traits that every school shooter has in common, and male disenfranchise, has been expelled from school, but it's also more than anything else has been invisible and has a sense of, it doesn't matter whether I'm there or not. And clearly you don't care for me to be there because you kicked me out anyways, and I do not have a sense of self. I'm hollow. I'm hollow shell. And then there's access to guns and then there's family, broken family life, that factor in as well to these traits and the definitions of American school shooters.

Nat:

So what schools can do. All right. And I bring that up because it is to stress the importance. It is about size, not salary. I wrote a blog once called Hashtag Size Not Salary, which is it's about classroom size. Like come on. When Ellie USD teachers went on strike last winter, a year ago, and they were protesting for smaller class size over anything else because they're like, look, we cannot know our students with an average of 37 kids in this classroom, times five sections. How am I supposed to know my kids and how am I therefore going to be able to do what, Rob,

you're talking about, which is the grace filled, the humanistic educative part component of being an excellent relational teacher.

Nat: I want to get back. I think that was really well said, Rob, what you said about just that, and looking at those studies of the heat maps about how it... And especially the example you gave about kind of the students who've been expelled and having them come together and share, this is why I feel happier in this secondary school home, because I know that I'm known. I mean there's 50 to 100 of us at maximum.

Nat: There's something you said earlier in this conversation that I wanted to come back to. And this is a way that we're going to have to start wrapping it up here, for time sake. Is you mentioned, just in passing, the idea of a healthy school, being able to also maybe have an apprentice, kind of an outlet for apprenticeships or mentoring. In implicit in what you said, Rob, and I want to have you clarify this yourself is the role that schools can play for students who, and there are many, who might not be motivated by math, who might not be looking at a professional degree at university, and then, I want to be a lawyer, I want to be a doctor, I want to be an engineer. Students who know that their calling is in something more trade-oriented. Right? What's the importance then on school size and schools that are strong in relationships in terms of being able to promote eudaimonia in students seven years hence, who are not going to go to uni or who are not going to go into a white collar profession, and that's by choice or by skill?

Dr. Rob Loe: Let me give you an exemplar of that. One of the most important case studies that we undertook as a project was a piece of work with the XP School in Doncaster. Now XP comes out of Expeditionary Learning, comes out of the work in the States with Ron Berger, EL education. It was originally a collaboration, I believe, between Harvard Grad School of Education and The Outward Bound Trust. I've got to say I'm a real evangelist here. I'm not on their staff, but I am a big fan.

Nat: I'm sorry, of Outward Bound or of Expeditionary?

Dr. Rob Loe: Of Expeditionary learning, the EL of Ron of XP School.

Nat: What's his name again? Ron? So people can look him up.

Dr. Rob Loe: Berger.

Nat: Ron Berger. Look him up.

Dr. Rob Loe: Amazing.

Nat: He's the founder of Expeditionary Learning. He's connected to Outward Bound, based in Maine, Boston, all over the place.

Dr. Rob Loe: And you've probably seen some of his stuff. So if you ever seen Austin Butterfly, that is Ron. That's an example of just some of the beauty of

what they do. Now, we were introduced to XP. I met their really outgoing trust CEO, and he said, look... We were at a conference together and he said, "Well, you should come and measure relationships in my school, because I reckon we've probably got the best relationships anywhere in the world."

Nat: We do relationships.

Dr. Rob Loe: Yeah. And I said, "We'll see." Anyway, we measure relationships between them and their teachers, and between the students themselves, and I don't think we've measured relationships anywhere internationally better since. I mean, genuinely was an extraordinary community. And it's based on human scale values. These are small schools within schools. The schools never bigger than 350, only 15 a year group. When they wanted to double the size of the school, what did they do? They built one next door. So they have XP, XPE. They're talking about XP North, there's an XP Gateshead. They recognize that these small known environments lead to fantastic outcomes.

Dr. Rob Loe: Interestingly, we'd only gone in because I was fascinated by one particular intervention, which is the use of the expeditionary trip at the beginning of the school year. Most schools take young people away every year on some sort of trip. And they do it usually at the end of the year.

Nat: That's right.

Dr. Rob Loe: Just before they're going to break on holidays. You form these great relationships and then you bust them all up by just going on holiday. What this school did was something more fundamental, and it had a profound impact on the relationships between teachers and students.

Dr. Rob Loe: Even onboarding staff at XP school, they send all the new staff away themselves for a couple of weeks of introduction in the Welsh mountains, just the teachers go away, just so they can bond. They call this and they call their fantastic homeroom structure, they call it Crew. And every day they have these bands, it's not trite. This is not glib. When they say we are Crew, these kids, these teachers, they mean it.

Nat: And that's what they say. So you hear that phrase, we are Crew, when you walk down the hallway.

Dr. Rob Loe: Indeed. And there's something about that because what do we mean by being crew on a ship? Well it means that there aren't any passengers, everybody's responsible for everybody's else success and flourishing and growth. And there's something profound about that.

Dr. Rob Loe: But in the EL model, just to your question, which is how do we ensure that there's this real and progression from the education environment to the outside work? Well, that's the one thing that I loved about EL. And that's around the purpose and beauty of all work, and that there is this relationship with school and the community in which it sits. And that

everything they do has some kind of resonance and purpose to the people around it.

Dr. Rob Loe: So what young people are doing every day in their projects, which are always outward focused, is doing something that is good and beautiful and that means something to somebody else. And through that, you know what those within the movement say is, that we don't necessarily see the distinction between blue collar, white collar, those kinds of things. But what we do want is young people to be university or college ready and that's our job, and then what they do however is up to them. But what we've given them through this particular program is a taste of whatever they do, that it would be for somebody else's service.

Dr. Rob Loe: We made a film by XP school and Ron Berger said, it's so powerful in the film we made, "We're not here to encourage young people to be smart, we're not encouraging people to be wealthy, we are helping young people be able to do good in the world." Which is back to the flourishing point. I'm not here to plug what we did, but if you really want to look at that, you ought to go in and explore the materials we created around the XP school not because, as I said, I sit on their board, but just because we think it's a very special model of education, which is doing some really great things.

Dr. Rob Loe: And if you look at iterations of that, if you look at the Polaris School, which is Chicago, and some of their work on creating peaceful neighborhoods, some extraordinary work about young children reclaiming Parkland Space back from those who had taken it away from them. And every day in Chicago, every year in Chicago rather, so I understand, there is a day when the Polaris School and their children, they go into this big park land, which is often sort of an out of bound kind of place for young people to go now. They take it over and they run fete there, they run activities there and it is known to be one of the lowest, if not the lowest crime days in the States. And this is young people saying, "This is our community, this is our neighborhood. We're going to do good and beautiful things in it." And the school has given them a vehicle and model to do that. And it just relational, it is future-orientated, it's amazing.

Nat: I think there's something ironic about the idea that by taking students out and putting them on retreat or having them outside in the wilderness or out of the school structure for a few days even actually has a positive impact on the school environment itself.

Dr. Rob Loe: Absolutely.

Nat: Once they come back, they've kind of built up these, I'll say crew, I'll see tribal relationships. It gets me thinking actually about a conversation that I'll be having shortly with a teacher and a writer, Adrian Bethune, who cites in his work, he wrote a book called Mindfulness in a Primary Classroom. He cites Louis Cozolino, who's a professor at Pepperdine University in Los Angeles, who really talks and focuses part of his work on the importance of tribe in the classroom and building a tribal classroom. And getting the politics out of the word tribe and actually



looking at tribe for 100% beneficial reasons, positive incarnations of the word tribe because it's all about belonging. It's all about belonging.

Dr. Rob Loe: Adrian's work, and I've heard him speak about the tribal classroom. I think it is really great and powerful stuff. The only thing that I think we need to be better at as educators is trying to find the commonalities and synergies within our tribe. That on the one hand that people will be listening to this podcast and they'll say, "Well, here's a specific and distinct movement, and we need to get involved with this." And what we might also do is go and listen to the guys in positive educational, slow education, or whole education. We ought to go and listen to the stuff about tribal education.

Dr. Rob Loe: Ultimately, what we're all talking about is a very, very similar thing. And we need to be a bit better within our community at recognizing that if we continue to speak with lone and fragmented voices then we will always be quiet people just shouting behind a closed door, where it's actually the groundswell of knowledge, understanding, belief in the importance of reaching students in this way, of being intentional about relationships with students is massive. It's international. There are lots of people speaking in this space. While this podcast series is important because what you're starting to do is gather several people across a series of weeks who are all speaking from the same page, they're singing the same song, and the more we do that together, the more we won't have this kind of polemic debate between traditional or progressive, between the academic or the pastoral or the homeroom. We will understand that one is the foundation of the other.

Dr. Rob Loe: That when people genuinely connect in school, when they are known personal communities, the philosopher Stern, who's a York University professor here, he said that what school should be is places or abodes for an unforgettable path with teachers that you'll always remember, with children who are like peers or like siblings. And that's what great schools. They are positive personal organizations where children fundamentally are treated as an end in themselves and not a means to an end. Yeah.

Nat: Schools are organizations and organisms. Getting back to what you said earlier in this conversation about schools and their definitions. And the book by Adrian Bethune is Wellbeing in the Primary Classroom. Wellbeing in a Primary Classroom. And the book for Rob, for those Relational Schools Foundation is called The Relational Teacher. And Rob, we can keep going and going on this because it is just so awesome.

Dr. Rob Loe: We often do.

Nat: We often do, exactly. I just feel like we removed the pub, we removed the pints, and here we are with two mics instead. But I hope that this is something where anybody listening, anybody watching can visit the Relationship Foundation website, the sub site Relational Schools Foundation website, you can just Google it. You can get on there. Look at the resources and get a really good understanding for yourselves about how Rob and his organizations and his team and his tribe with RSF has been able to really use quantitative metrics to assess the absolute critical

and the most valuable parts of learning, which is opening up the heart and the social being as well as the mind, which can only be done through strengthening relationships; teacher to student, student to student, teacher to teacher, parent to school, administrator to teacher. There's so many constituencies in schools. It's all important. So Rob, I'll leave with you the final word, but just thank you so much for being on the show.

Dr. Rob Loe: Yeah, thank you very much. Well, just thanks very much for having me. The Relationships Foundation has been set up over the last 25 years to incubate new organizations. That's been our posture. We've set up new organizations to work in different sectors. But then this next season we don't really want to be the heroes of the story, we want to be the guys, we want to be the servants of other people. And so it's been a pleasure and privilege helping you publish your book, connecting you to people because it's quite clear that Reach Academics is doing some great things. The podcast series is a brilliant example of that. Yeah, the more teachers who appreciate and become intentional about best practice, the better schools will be.

Nat: Absolutely. Absolutely. Thank you. And the better our future, our future will be too, because this generation is going to be working with us before we know it. And that's going to be important. So thank you. Thank you Dr. Rob Loe. And again, welcome to the London episodes of Reach Teach Talk.

Speaker 1: 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](mailto:nat@reachacademics.com).