Andy and Margaret

[00:00:00] Andy, Margaret, it's lovely to see you both. I'm delighted to have both of you joining me here tonight. So, um, let's jump straight into introductions. Um, Andy, first of all, um, I guess we've known each other over the years, but not seen each other for a number of years.

So for those listening, um, can you tell them just a little bit about yourself and who you are, what you do, where you're based as well? Yeah. Okay. Um, well, listeners can probably tell by my accent, I'm a Northerner. Believe it or not, I've lived in the North of England since 1985, pretty much on and off. So I'm, um, born in a place called Edmonton, North London.

Um, I still got my accent to a large extent, but I'm based in Liverpool now, actually. So, um, I started teaching in 1989 and then I went self employed in 2001, mostly, uh, working with students initially. A lot with excluded students, a lot with projects with comic relief. Um, then I, um, started getting into teacher development [00:01:00] stuff, teacher training stuff, and that's where we met, um, Sarah when I was, um, creating some courses that got scaled up and ended up running quite a lot in Scotland as well.

But yeah, at the moment, I pretty much work in four schools. Across the north of England. Um, I have some more training around that here and there and, um, all of those schools of very, very high, uh, pupil premium percentages. What in Scotland is equivalent of the pupil equity fund. Yeah, so they're all over 50%.

And I've been working in those schools for quite a long time now, and, um, places such as Merseyside, Bradford, and Lancashire. Uh, and and yeah, I love the work I do. So it's really nice because like the community is is like let me into their school, really, if that makes sense. So I'm not a great believer in doing drive by training like staying in a school and have a relationship for a longer period of time.

So, uh, [00:02:00] yeah, do teacher development stuff. And then I create training courses and run programs for the students as well. Yeah, brilliant. Thank you. And we'll come on to some of that in more detail in a minute. Um, Margaret, thank you so much for, for joining us. Um, it's always lovely to have, um, practitioners and people based in schools join the conversations on our podcast as well.

So I've given listeners a clue there, but perhaps you can tell us a little bit about who, who you are and what you do as well. Okay, sure. Thank you so much, Sarah. Thank you, Andy, as well, for inviting me on. Um, so, yeah, I've been a teacher since the year 2000. Um, when I graduated, I worked in St Luke's High School in Barhead all that time.

Um, I'm a biology, chemistry, science teacher to trade. Um, and then spent about 15 years as a PT pastoral care, um, at St Luke's before, um, moving on to my current post, which is as deputy [00:03:00] head teacher since 2019. Um, I think, um, you know, as Andy says, you know, the school that I work in, um, is probably a school that's very similar to the school that I went to as a young person.

And, you know, I really love the school that I work in. I love working with the young people, their families, and many of them have grown up. And I've taught some of the mums now, dare I say. And I just really, I do enjoy my job. I'm head of year for first year. And so they certainly keep me busy. And but, you know, I absolutely love teaching.

And it's so nice to be able to work with such a wide array of different, different people. I feel very fortunate to do the job that I do. So I guess you both have in common that you're both quite connected and integrated within the communities in which you're, you're working for an extended period of time, which is, which is interesting.

Yeah. So Andy, tell us, um, I know it's a big question to [00:04:00] begin with, but what is it you are called to do? Because I guess. Um, having had conversations with you over the time, over the years, I get a sense that the work you're doing now and the work you've done through the book, which we'll come on and talk a little bit more about as well, is really what you probably feel you're called to do.

Maybe I'm putting words in your mouth there, but I'm just interested in your perspective on that. Yeah, I mean, you are putting words in my mouth. But yeah, I mean, called is a strong word, but yeah, I guess I feel most comfortable in settings, which a bit like Margaret was saying really, you know, I'm a, you know, council flat kid, free school meals kid.

Um, I was very, very fortunate that at the time when I went to school in the, in the seventies and eighties, I think government policy that was Residual policy from previous sort of labor governments enabled people like me to go to

university. I got a full grant, you know, housing benefit, bus pass, [00:05:00] all of that stuff.

And, um, I've never, I've never forgotten how, um, grateful I am really to. People I've never really met who have set those, those systems up for me. So yeah, I went to university, got a good degree in economics from a Russell Group University and I guess a lot of people probably would think, well, let's go into finance, let's go into the city banking or something like that.

But I guess I've been drawn to working. And I'd like to say, if it's not, not too arrogant, say you're in a socially useful job. Um, I think it's, um, I feel like I want to make a difference when I've done work and I don't feel I'm making a difference. So I don't feel that I'm in harness with a partner that's got the same values as myself.

I'm nowhere near as happy. So I really enjoyed working with excellent leaders and excellent teachers in school turnaround in particular, especially when those schools [00:06:00] are in socially disadvantaged areas. And by, by turning around the school, you don't just change the expectations, you materially change the attainment levels of more and more students.

You improve their experiences, increase their enjoyment. Um, and in England at the moment, there's huge challenges since the pandemic around attendance. I'm sure it's the same in Scotland around engagement with pupils. So just being part of that challenge is something I really enjoy. And from the work that you're doing now, or the work you've been doing in recent years, what do you feel is the, is the difference you're making?

You talk there about making a difference and, you know, many of us can resonate with that and connect with that. But for you, what is that difference? So I work within the system. I'm not, I'm not a level where I'm influencing politicians. So I see myself as a trainer really. So I create training courses that for both teachers and for [00:07:00] students.

So by, by and large, I, I hope the training courses Are enjoyable and a meaningful for the people and they and they and it leads to improvement or it leans to changes in mindset. So on the teacher training side of things, if say, for instance, I've worked in the school for 3 years and I work with staff with whole school in set and I do interventions with teachers and do coaching with teachers.

I'd like to think that helps to improve the average lesson for the average. Uh, the average experience in the school. So a lot of my work's about improving the

default lesson in the school, moving the bell curve of teaching quality to the right, if that makes sense. Um, and then, and then latterly, I guess, working with students, I've set up programs which For instance, the scholars program is a program set up now with three different [00:08:00] schools.

I just believe that in some communities, um, because of disadvantage, some students need the extra and the different. So, so that's a program where, because, because those students are not from families that are going to have the money to pay for private tutors, um, I set up a program, which, which does.

Deliberately trying to close that gap, if you like, compared to a household that would have that home advantage. So, yeah, I see myself as a trainer, Sarah, and so But in quite an entrepreneurial wide way, not in a financially entrepreneurial way, I just say, give me a challenge and I'll create a training course and I'll deliver the training course and hopefully it will be successful.

Sometimes it's not initially successful, but I'm really determined as a person to, to create good training products. And of course, they're evaluated in different ways, qualitative and quantitative. But I think. You know, [00:09:00] um, certainly in England with the schools that I've helped to improve in relation to Ofsted levels.

And the teachers are getting better grades now for their students and then and then students as well getting better grades and feeling just more aspirational about their future and more determined is, is, is, is measurable and something I'm really, I'm really proud of. Hope to continue for many years to come.

Yeah, thank you. And Margaret, how does that, um, how does Andy's story, how does Andy's kind of purpose connect and resonate for you as a, as a school leader in the work that you do? Yeah, I mean, I think that, um, just Touching on what Andy said about, um, you know, investing in teachers, we've, our school's done a lot of work, um, using one of Andy's programs through our learning and teaching coach, Judith Hitt.

So we call it, well it's the OTI program. [00:10:00] We call it our Outstanding Teacher Initiative. And about half of our staff have, um, you know, been trained through that and some have achieved. GTC accreditation. And I think, you know, as a school we recognize, you know, that time and investment and pedagogy and really taking time for teachers to take stock and to look at, you know, the different, um, learning and teaching approaches and really engaging young people in their learning.

Um, we recognize the importance of that because especially, um, after covid that engagement of young people. Um, and we found that. you know, to really make a difference. When you talk to young people about what do you think a good learner is, and they would come and say somebody who wears their uniform and somebody who is on time for school and does their homework.

But in actual fact, it's more about, you know, we're trying to build our young people up to be what we've called an assessment capable. So, you know, where they are confident in the learning, they know where they are, they're confident [00:11:00] to be able to find out. The next stage in their learning, and it's only when you get that true engagement in the classroom that that's when I believe that you're going to really be able to close that gap for young people.

So, our school has done a lot of work in using Andy's OTI program and Andy also very kindly came and spoke to our staff and did a bit of work with our staff back in May. At our learning and teaching conference and he also worked with some of our teachers and young people and as part of his scholars program that he was talking about.

So, yeah, you know, I think that as a teacher, first and foremost, it's really important to teachers that you have got that engagement in the classroom. You want young people to do well and how good does it feel when you get that penny drop moment? There's still nothing beats it in the classroom when you hear them going, ah, all right, I see.

Just absolutely love it. It's why we do what we do. And I think it's amazing that the work that Andy has done, um, and really [00:12:00] recognized that, you know, to get in amongst, um, doing that teacher training is so valuable for schools and certainly my school have really benefited from that. Yeah, but, and I guess what I'm hearing as well is that your school has really benefited from the investment the school has made in the school and the staff.

Yeah. That's not easy to do. I think we all recognise that, but you've obviously made a significant investment in many ways there. Yeah, I think we felt, um, our new head teacher, Christine Downey, started in 2016, and, you know, the school was in a good place then, but sometimes it takes for new people to come in with fresh eyes at things, and the school have really been on a journey then, and we've heavily invested in pedagogy, and, you know, at the beginning, staff undertook professional inquiries, and, you know, at that time, although professional inquiry is more common now, at that time, back in 2016, 2017, wasn't really heard of, so, um, We felt that it was important that, um, you know,

we invested time in taking staff with us [00:13:00] rather than, you know, there's nothing worse than people feeling like things are being done unto them.

And so I think Andy does that really well and so does his program and the OTI program, but just that real investment in teacher pedagogy. Um, and allowing teachers that time and space away from the classroom to get together with other practitioners, it's so important. And it's actually been really beneficial to get us to where we are today, which is in a really great position, I think.

Yeah. So important. It really is. And it's, it's part of that being valued and being trusted as a, as a profession as well, I think. Yeah. I think young people, um, get that from their teachers as well. You know, young people will be the first to recognize if a teacher's invested in them and be the first to, you know, critique your lesson and give you that feedback.

Um, and sometimes, you know, it's [00:14:00] hard to take or you'll go away and think that lesson was awful. Um, or it's really good when actually they say, I really enjoyed that or I loved that lesson today. So I think getting that You know, that's really important to teachers as well. And so giving them the time and space to go away and work with and people like Judy and you using the OTI program, you know, when people feel really valued, that's when you're going to get the best out of them.

But I think it's the same for young people as well. And, you know, and that's what we're trying to do. Um, you know, enable young people, empower them to see that, you know, they can lead their own learning, that they can be confident, be engaged in their learning, and then they can start to reap the benefits of that.

That's really what it's all about. Yeah, absolutely. And I can tell you're invested and passionate about your school and the impact you're having as well. Which is a good thing. That's a, it's definitely a compliment. Um, so Andy, you've [00:15:00] just recently, um, published, released, um, another book. Um, and this one, I think, takes a slightly different perspective or a different lens, um, and is titled The Working Classroom.

Um, and I'm going to start with the title. I'm curious about the title. I'm curious about the intentional. choice of words there. Can you help us understand that a little bit? Yeah. My, my, my oldest son is a, is a script editor and he, he came up with the title. He's very good at that type of thing. He was, he was, I'll give him a plug now.

Cause he was script editor on, um, Jimmy McGovern's latest, uh, drama time, you know, so if listeners haven't listened to it yet, uh, what's he is on the iPlayer, but, uh, yeah, obviously he's been working with Jimmy McGovern and, uh, some other really talented writers. Um, yeah, I mean, I, the, the book is really about working class students.

Mm-Hmm. and their families. I think it, um, in Margaret, no. [00:16:00] Um, you know, we, we, when I train I try to use humor quite a lot and Yeah. But, but it's, it's not really, it, unfortunately, it's not really a place for that. I mean, the book's really written out of anger, Sarah, in a way, because I think that. the working class get a really bad deal in education.

People like Margaret and, and thousands of others do their best to make, um, try to mitigate some of those systemic, um, challenges, if you like, you know, assessment systems and, and, and, and just general prejudices out there, I guess, in, in society. So, um, Yeah, so the book really is about working class underachievement, how working class may be underrepresented and undervalued.

So, we start off by defining the working class, which, which we use a common, um, sociological definition of people in social classes, C2D& E. And, um, that's about 50% of the [00:17:00] population in the uk. Yeah. In interestingly 50, sorry. 60% of of people in the UK claim to be working class. So there's an, there is some, there's a, there's a somewhat effective elements of class because a lot of people identify being working class and proud of being working class.

And yet a lot of what education seems to be about is trying to get kids to be more middle class and, um. Again, if you listeners haven't heard, um, haven't watched Anwar Rajan's, um, BBC, uh, program, How to Crack the Class Ceiling. That's a two part documentary on the iPlayer. if you've seen it, Margaret, but it's a really, really interesting program.

In fact, you would have seen it because we talked about that when I came up to Luton. Yeah. And it's, it's, it's in a way it's, it's about four young people. Yeah, who could be in any school in the UK, but they're from working class backgrounds and they're trying to break into non traditional working class jobs.

And it's really, really interesting. I won't [00:18:00] spoil it for people, but I think what the program comes to as a conclusion over to over the two episodes of the two hours, Sarah is do we try and change the system or do we? Posh wash our kids. Do do we teach them to be more middle class so they fit in with the system?

So it's it's an interesting dilemma that Amourage imposes. And I guess it's we, we have to, we have to be very careful with the way that we teach certain things. One of the things being oracy. So oracy, which I predict will, um, will have a greater emphasis should labor get elected the next election. Within curriculum.

I mean, it may, it may not happen in Scotland because there's obviously different systems, but there's, there's a real danger. I think that a lot of working class kids could really, really be switched off by this, but [00:19:00] equally, there's a really, I'm sure Margaret, you'd agree. There's, there's ways of teaching.

It's a really, really interesting dynamic and just teaching children um, about code switching when it's appropriate, but not feeling that they should be at all ashamed of their working class culture or their working class roots. So then what's your take on it, Margaret? What do you think about that? Yeah, absolutely.

And the work that Andy, you did with our staff on Odyssey was something that we are really keen to be taking forward. It's taking a backseat at the minute because of what I've just said about HMI, but, you know, certainly, yeah, I totally agree and I think we're already looking at, you know, asking teachers to have a think about, you know, what does that look like in their classroom and, you know, teaching young people how they can switch between, um, you know, the skills that they're learning in one subject.

Can they transfer that across the, that real importance of recognizing [00:20:00] when, um, you know, they're using language in English or, you know, modern languages, but then switching to science or maths and really, you know, upskilling them so that they are confident and don't feel like they just sit in, um, sort of.

the boxes. A lot of times young people, I think they don't quite appreciate the skills that they're learning across the curriculum and that they can transfer across. So we are certainly taking that work forward, Andy, that you did with our small group of staff to look at Oracy and how we can then really incorporate that into the work that we've already done around learning and teaching and building that engagement of young people, but building that confidence.

And young people so that they don't shy away from things and they're not, they've not get barriers because, you know, they don't understand the context of a question. And when you were working with our staff as well, Andy, and you mentioned in the book about cultural capital of young people. [00:21:00] That

was something that resonated with us, and you don't want it to be a barrier, and you're trying to make sure that your curriculum and your experiences that you're giving young people, you know, that you're giving them as wide an experience as possible, and within the confines of, you know, the day to day, .

But interestingly, Margaret, I mean, In England, schools are now inspected by Ofsted on their provision of cultural capital. But, but one of the things we did when, when I, when I worked your staff, one of the things we talked about is all different types of capital, didn't we? Which is, you know, social capital, educational capital, and generally working class people have less of all of those things.

They also have less economic capital, which means they've got less money to spend on things like. Private shooters and their parents have got less connections and they got less social capital. So I think what's really interesting series that, um, what the book tries to do is to give some practical solutions [00:22:00] now to teachers teaching.

Working class students about what they can do to raise those capitals so that they, so that those students are less disadvantaged by, for instance, their lack of connections that their lack of money. And of course, it can't make up for, um, some of the, some of the, you know, the issues. But, but I think it's quite an interesting debate to have, because, um, and again, Margaret, jump in any time here, or you, Sarah, but, you know, there's been a lot of play in schools around mindset for maybe last 10, 15 years, and I'm okay with that.

But what Pierre Bourdieu talks about is this word habitus, and I think that's a much more interesting concept. Habitus is about understanding growing one's comfort zone. Now, in a way that's similar to mindset, but it also is an understanding of why you might [00:23:00] feel like that as well. And if you're living in a damp flat or you've got, um, you know, you see your parents working three shifts just to sort of just about get by.

That that is hard to have a growth mindset in that context. So I actually think that, um, that studying, um, things like cultural capital, social capital, studying habitus, studying some of those sociological terms, it should be something that I think all staff get involved in because it does give you greater empathy and understanding.

And if I'm just say one thing for hand over, um, you'll see at the moment in, in um, On the BBC, the COVID inquiry and some of the interviews that are taking place. Well, what's absolutely obvious is that there was, I mean, one of, um, the

former government's advisors talked about this. Is that some, he sat around the table once and there's 20 odd people around the table, civil servants, politicians, and not one of them [00:24:00] was a free school meals background.

And I do think that at all levels of society, but particularly the senior levels, there is a lack of understanding about people who perhaps are most struggling in our society. And there's also a myth. around this, that you deserve what you get, you know, at both ends. There's the myth of meritocracy, which, which some people think that, well, if I've done well, that it must all be down to me.

And there's also the myth that a lot of people that are struggling, that have got issues with poverty and that type of thing, have brought it on themselves. And I do feel that both of those things need to be, and schools by and large do a fantastic job about that, but our book is really trying to get rid of two types of classism.

within schools, downward classes, and where you, you've got, you've got people [00:25:00] looking down on people from lower social classes. And seeing that there's something wrong with them that needs fixing. And then the other one is an internalized classism. And, and Margaret, I'm sure you see it with students, I see it with students all the time, who, who, who say, well I can't do something like that because, you know, I'm from this estate, or I can't be that because And we've got, we're trying to challenge both of those forms of discrimination.

So one of them is a mental one. And, and I guess Sarah, that, that's Far more significant to me than mindset, which is almost like saying, you know, regardless of your economic circumstances or lack of connections, you can do just as well as someone else. And I just don't think that's true, you know? Yeah. I think as well, Andy, you know, the school that I work in.

We're as whenever, um, like part of our vision values and aims is no poverty of aspiration for young people and, you know, really trying to upskill them [00:26:00] to say, you know, you can absolutely, you can absolutely do anything that you want to do. Um, but it's getting that self belief. And again, I think that's where the curriculum is so important as well, as well as the teachers that are there in the school, having that real understanding of the young people who are in front of you.

Um, you're right, I remember when I first started in the school, the headteacher at the time told me something really important and I've always sort of passed it on, you know, do you know much about the area that the school's in, in Barhead in the west of Scotland? Um, Go and take a drive around and about because

you'll see the real differences in the demographic of the area and that's really important to have an understanding of where the young people in the school are coming from.

Because in some areas of my school you'll have young people in the most affluent areas, but then you'll have young people who are experiencing you know real poverty every day so it's really important I think that we do have an understanding. But that we as educators, you know, really [00:27:00] make sure that young people don't feel that that's a barrier to them.

Um, and you're right, it is a, it's a mindset, but I absolutely think that, you know, that's sort of why, um, well, I certainly do what I do. Um, and I think that, you know, everybody wants the best for their own child. That's why it's really important to work so much with the community and with parents. Um, just to make sure that everybody, um, you know, is.

It's coming with you, I think. Yeah, I agree completely there. And one, quite a few of the things we talk about in the book aren't just things that we hypothesize would be good, it's things we've actually done and including examples in your school, you know, I love the atmosphere of St Luke's as well, really, really do.

So as one practical example, um, one of the, one of the things that a lot of the students will struggle with Like a social capital. So for instance, if you've got a student who wants to study [00:28:00] law. By the way, the statistics on this are quite frightening. You're 17 times more likely to go into law if your parents are in the legal profession.

So if your parents aren't in that, you're already at a disadvantage in terms of lack of knowledge. So things like doing the mock trial competition, which has been going for years in England, things like having zoom conversations with barristers. Now, that's something that's really interesting. The scholars programs I've built don't just happen in school time, but there's experiences such as trips, there's extracurricular provision, but there's also a research element to it.

So students will have zoom conversations with people. And begin a relationship with people who often, uh, come about to a connection to a connection. So we've had students. [00:29:00] We've gone to staff in all three of the schools and said, look, do you know a barrister? Do you know a, um, a chief engineer? Do you know a, and we had an amazing, um, situation, um, just last year, Sarah, where, uh, one of my students, Erin, and, and you, you know, you ask students what they want to do, and she was very, very clear.

I want to do makeup in films. I want to do film makeup. I want to do prosthetics, all that type of stuff. Wow. Okay. So we put out some feelers and I've got a mate who's a painter and decorator. Yeah. Who's my used to work in in the film industry, whose brother still does, and he's done the makeup for David Bowie in labyrinth.

He's worked with Jim Henson, and this guy is has had multiple zoom conversations. With this girl, he's got a work placement, you know, so this is this is massive because this isn't a connection through her family. It's a connection for the determination that the team of the schools got to try [00:30:00] to be, you know, be that family for her, you know, so in that respect, we've got a student who is on a pathway now.

Not just dreaming of something because a lot of students don't know where to start, you know, so, so those are a few practical things that we do and it does involve some, some, you know, evenings being given up by some teachers doing what we're doing now, you know, maybe an hour zoom call to make some introductions and the parents will be on and that sort of thing.

And actually what's really interesting. And, and I don't know if you guys can jump in on this, but you know, when you meet people outside of education, a lot of them are only too pleased to help, but they're just, you've got to find a way of asking them, you know, so I'm very cheeky about that. It's going back to being entrepreneurial again, and look, you know, can you speak to one of my students at six o'clock one night and, and actually what, what that's done is snowballed from maybe three or four zooms a year to about, I think, 25 zooms that we currently got on the schedule.

[00:31:00] Um, this year, and, and, and that's no small thing, because what will happen is that a student will come back into school and be absolutely buzzing, and a bit of language that we talk about in the book, it's, they've been sparked, there's been some sparking that's taken place, and sparking can also take place, because I know, Margaret, you take your students to university visits, don't you?

Um, sparking can take place in extracurricular clubs, It can take place when a visiting speaker comes into the school, especially if that speaker looks and sounds like them as well. They're from a working class background. Yeah. And they can see that that's, that's therefore a pathway. And something that certainly, you know, with COVID and the lockdown, obviously, um, technology was wonderful at the time because as we all started to return, you know, we still had young people that we were trying to prepare for leaving school for, you know, the world of work or college or university who weren't then getting the

[00:32:00] opportunities that we would normally have with a big careers event and the partners being able to come in.

So in some respects, we had to be really creative with that, but then it's about. You know, maintaining those contacts and, um, still keeping things like that going, um, the, the Zoom conversations or beaming people in so that they can talk to groups of students. I think as well, what's been really good for us is we've recognized the importance of, as young people who have been at the school have gone on and, you know, have had successes in whatever their career pathway is to really invite them back in.

So yeah, absolutely. I, I totally. That graduate thing is absolutely massive. And I'm using graduate in the, in the, you know, in the widest possible sense. So we had something recently, um, Margaret where one of the schools I work at, which is in Kirby and just in Merseyside, we, we recognize that there's about 15 to 20 students.

in [00:33:00] what you would probably call year four, we call year 10, who best will in the world are not going to do the full suite of GCSEs and they're going to get ones and twos in a few of those GCSEs. So we've got them on apprenticeship pathways. So we, we took them on, um, A visit to a couple of workplaces and while those at these workplaces deliberately, okay, deliberately.

And again, Sarah, that's something we talk about in the book, deliberate and specific interventions. Deliberately, we got that workplace to send us down their apprentices who had come from our school the year before. And they sat and had a cup of tea with them, and they can, they can see, it's not a, it's not a definite apprenticeship, it's not a promise, but it's very, very strongly intimated that, well, this can be your pathway.

So, you know, this school is now building a skills centre, which is alongside the school, and they're recognising that, you know, [00:34:00] that one size fits all curriculum just doesn't work for a lot of students. And one of the things, again, that. Everybody should be interested in who's listening to this, regardless of their social class, because no class is an island, is that we have got over 10 percent of our young population who are currently not in employment and training.

That's 720 odd thousand. young people. That is just such a waste of talent and resource. So anything we can do to spark, to get students on the right pathway, not to squeeze them through some sort of, you know, middle class curriculum or

assessment regime that doesn't fit them, we should always, we should all be embracing.

Yeah, I think as well, um, when I talked about us starting out on that journey back in 2016, 2017, as well as looking at our pedagogy, we also then started to, we started what we called our [00:35:00] big curriculum debate, and we went to the staff, but we went to pupils and parents and we said to them, you know, What do you think of the curriculum as is?

Um, what do you think the jobs of the future are going to be? What are you worried about? And it was really interesting what came back, especially from young people. You know, they were talking about, they were worried about, was there going to be a job for them when they left school? They talked about, they were worried about war, disease.

I think Ebola was, um, at that point, quite prevalent. They talked about climate change and, you know, following on from that and. also listening to what employers were telling us and what universities were saying, you know, we need young people who are going to be able to come with the skills and the confidence that they're going to need for us to help them, um, you know, become the, the workforce of the future.

And that has been a journey that we've been on as well. And, um, We've really, you know, been quite brave, I would say, and that we've really started to redesign our curriculum, especially for our broad [00:36:00] general education, S1, S2 and S3, so every faculty has started to look at moving away from the traditional topic by topic, so I'm a science teacher, so you used to do your chemistry topic, your biology topic, your physics topic, and, you know, it wasn't really It wasn't working, it wasn't sparking young people like Andy's talking about.

So, um, about two years ago, the science team, and it was similar across the different faculties, but we got together and we really revamped our curriculum. So now, the young people come in and we're doing the Martian. Might have been based on a really famous film with, you know, a certain actor who, um, you know, is quite easy on the eye.

Um, but it's so exciting because the young people come in and like, we're doing the Martian and but it does interconnect all the aspects of the curriculum that they need to know about, but it also gives us the opportunity as teachers to bring in, you know, things about AI and like exploring the planets and can you really.

But Margaret, you've been, you've been too modest because you won a, you won a [00:37:00] creativity award didn't you for your curriculum design. We were finalists, yes, we were, we were. finalists. Thank you, Andy. We're down to the last three in June. So yes, for Education Scotland. But yes, you were robbed. You should have won it, I think.

But there you go. I do think that's so important what you're saying. You need to find the spark for young people. Again, that's something that, um, you know, that's your why, I suppose, isn't it? It comes back to, it comes back to also what you said earlier, Margaret, isn't it? That, you know, feedback is so important.

And I mean, my first year, I'll never forget my first, um, if you call it term of teaching 1999, I just asked some of my students, you know, as my teaching, you know, I've got quite a few satisfactories, you know, but, um, but yeah, you know, you're starting out in your profession, you're starting out to, to, but, but it's, it's important to ask, isn't it?

It's, it's, it's the easiest thing in the world, really, but many, many teachers almost resist the easiest thing in the world, just get them to write your lesson and, and okay, sometimes they say, There's [00:38:00] short term unpopularity, but I think if you explain to students that learning is about challenge, it is about going through cognitive and emotional challenges to get to a different feeling.

And like you say, get that eureka moment. It's a fantastic feeling and you want your students to have as many of them as possible. Definitely. Yeah. I think a lot of what comes out, Andy, when, um, staff have done the OTI program and, um, when we've looked at it as part of our work in visible learning, you know, that feedback is really important.

Um, and what does it actually look like? And lots of the staff that have participated in OTI, they talk about, you know, when they get filmed. And then they get given the film and they watch it back, just themselves. But then they meet the next day to talk about it. And, you know, I think that's quite powerful as well.

It's quite a difficult thing to do, but it is so important, you're so right. So, picking up that theme of feedback, Andy, what would be the feedback you would like to get from [00:39:00] teachers when they read your book? What is it you want it to do? So, so I think there's a couple of things really. I guess, um. I think we define success very narrowly in education and in society too.

Uh, I can't remember the last time I met you, Sarah, but it was, I don't think I was in a very good place in all honesty. I didn't feel full that my sort of success, if you like, didn't feel that happy. I'm much, much happier now as a person because I think I really I've got my metrics spot on, you know, I've got a good balance in my life between family, friends and doing something which I think is socially useful.

I always need that in my life. So I'd like people to read the book and think, right, okay, I'll try that idea out. And There are many, many ideas in the book. For instance, improving the quality of reading interventions, improving the quality of literacy. Mm-Hmm. Is a, is a, is a [00:40:00] massive thing you can do. And I think it really can be, um, game changing.

I mean, if you can get more young people embracing the love of reading or as, as you say, mark, the love of film, there's so much that can come outta some of that media. So there's, there's a, that's a, that, that, that's one thing. I think the other thing is, um. As a young teacher, I wasn't a big one on asking permission.

I just did stuff, which is probably why I'm not self employed. So I, you know, if you want to run an extracurricular club, if you want to bring something, you'd be an absolute mad if you was, if you was a head teacher and you said no to that, that enthusiasm. There's also, I think, a discussion to be had around do, do the working, do working class, um, students see themselves in the curriculum.

So when I went to school in London in the 70s and 80s, it was just emerging, you would get more female writers, more black writers, there was no themes around sexuality, no gay [00:41:00] writers, but that's changed now, and it's been brilliant that you've got a much more diverse, um, uh, if you like, set of resources for students and examples for students, but I think class has often been neglected.

And because it's not protected under law, because it's not a protected characteristic, I think sometimes class is overlooked. And although there's, I want to be really clear about this, although there's still evidence of racism in society, still lots of issues to do with, you know, sexism and other, other forms of discrimination.

There's been a lot of progress in those areas where there hasn't been as much progress, I think, with people, um, from a working class background, especially those who within the working class are actually materially poor as well. So, yeah, I mean, it's partly about raising awareness, partly about changing teachers metrics of what you measure success.

I do think, though, um, Sarah, more teachers should challenge the [00:42:00] system. You can challenge it in different ways because I think that if you're a teacher and you, and you honestly think that the system is right, that almost everything culminates and an exam in silence in a hall at the end of all that time, you've got to be, you've got to be, Seriously wrong there.

I'm sorry, but I really do think that some assessment needs be done that way. But that's a university model. That's a model that's, you know, let's show that you can do written exams so you can go to university. I feel there are too many young people coming out of our system who are looking back and have not enjoyed their education or found it useful.

So, so I guess there's, um, Yeah, so there is a little bit of that within the book. Try and challenge the existing system, but control what you can control if you're [00:43:00] into this type of issue that Margaret and I are, which, which is to do with putting your energy into a community, uh, then put your energy in, run some after school clubs.

Offered to run some interventions, some programs that will, um, stretch and enable more, more, more students to have more advantage. So, yeah, I guess that's a, that's a key part of it, that it gives them some practical examples to, to, to make more of a difference more of the time. Yeah. And Margaret, I can see, I can see how you spark off Andy, and I can see the relationship and the, and the connection, but how has his work and your connection with him either kind of endorsed the work you do or challenged and extended the work you do?

And you've touched on some of that already, but just curious. Yeah, I mean, I think, um, a lot of what Andy does or talks about in the book really chimes with, you know, where we are as a school and, you know, things that Andy's talked about, about [00:44:00] just try something new in our school, you know, we're really open to teachers bringing new ideas or things that they've seen or if they've read about something, I'd like to try it.

Start small, you know, in our school as well. We try to really develop maybe bespoke interventions as well for groups of young people rather than trying to, you know, try something on master a year group, you know, invest the time, try and identify, look at your information that you've got, get to know the young people and really try things out and then see, you know, has that worked?

It's important to, um, you know, track it, if you like, measure it. What was the impact? Get the feedback from the young people and then see, is it something that we want to scale up or do we think, you know what, we tried it out, it's not

really for us, let's look at something else. And I think that's where Andy's book does give lots and lots of different examples that schools can try to suit their context as well, because I think that's something that's got to be really important.

I think, I think you're right. I mean, I think [00:45:00] interventions, I mean, I mean, if I could give a plug to my daughter, Anna. My daughter, Anna, runs a, um, a community interest company called Dramatic Recovery. So they do drama interventions for mental health, uh, and, you know, they've got contracts in different schools in, in, in England, but it's, it's a short intensive program, maybe over six weeks, as you say, Margaret, with, with young people that have been identified as having an issue.

But if, even if, Even if a small percentage of that, even if one student suddenly is turned around by the intervention, switch back on, I go back to that language of sparking. If it can spark them, reconnect them, their attendance goes up, their engagement goes up, and their whole association with that, with education goes up.

And so I think, I think that's really interesting. Equally, behavior interventions, you know, you have to evaluate it, and that's why it's always good to start small. Yeah. But if you've got a program from an outside [00:46:00] organization or a member of staff within the school or the community, they can come in and it seems to be working, let's just keep doing it because it can change a young person's life, you know.

Absolutely. Um, thank you both. You barely needed me there. It's funny, Sina. To facilitate the conversation yourselves. Um, but what I think you've given us, not just insights into the book, which is always interesting and always useful, but the connection with you, Margaret, has helped kind of locate and embed that in the Scottish context as well.

And, um, brilliant just to hear the two of you. bouncing ideas and sharing reflections and experiences together. So thank you both for your time. A very busy, a busy time of year. We're recording this just before Christmas, so I know it's a busy time for both of you. But before you go, um, we finish our podcast with the same two questions every time, so I'll ask you both the same questions.

Um, first question is, what are you reading at the [00:47:00] moment? And can I come to you first, Margaret? So, um, probably changes what I was talking about. I'm reading at the minute Putting Faces on the Data. Um, it's Lynn Sharratt and Michael Fullan just because, you know, the things that I've been

talking about, we've got a wealth of data in school that looks like, um, you know, year groups and attainment data.

But what we find in our school is, you know, that's not enough because our young people are so complex that we need to really get down to look at each individual person and make sure that whatever we're designing fits them, and it's going to benefit them. And such a powerful statement as well or tag, you know, putting faces on data because I think that can really shift the science and how we think and how we feel and how we connect with that data as well.

Yeah. Um, Andy, how about you? What are you reading at the moment? So it's a, it's a guy we quote a lot in our book, but he's got a new book out. It's [00:48:00] Professor Danny Dorling has written a book called Shattered Nation. And the book talks about the five new social evils that, um, that, that exist in the UK. He builds on the, um, You know, discussion of the beverage report after the war and every political party after the war wanted to get rid of those five social evils that beverage identified, which were idleness, squalor, disease, ignorance and want.

And I think what Danny Dorlin, uh, is writing about and he's a, he's a, um, he's a geographer. Um, really, really great guy. You'll see some of these lectures on YouTube as well, but he's talking about things that really resonate with us. Uh, elitism, prejudice, despair, waste, and exclusion. And there's a chapter on each of them.

And, in some respects Sarah, it's a depressing read. Because like James O'Brien's latest book, we are as a nation in a pretty bad place at [00:49:00] the moment. But But there's hope. And I think, you know, um, what, what gives me hope is I, the quality of the, the, the people that I've met in education who could easily do lots of other things, but they choose to stay within that sector.

And then also the young people come across on a daily basis. And that gives me massive hope. And I just hope that some of these people grab the reins of power and let people like, you know, Danny Dorling make up make a big, um, Have a big influence on policy going forward, because it would be a lot easier to swim with the tide of change rather than against it, um, because it's very hard sometimes.

I'm sure you'd agree. Um, Margaret, a lot of schools just massively under resourced, uh, financially in terms of people as well. So we'd certainly both be lobbying for more resource. But yeah, we'd, we'd want, and we're absolutely comfortable with, um, [00:50:00] you know, with that being measured. But

yeah, I really recommend Professor Danny Dorlin's work, but Shattered Nations, what I'm reading at the moment, Sarah, yeah.

Yeah, well, I'm glad there's hope in it as well. Yeah, absolutely. There has to be. There has to be. Um, and just to finish off, is there a quote or message that you would like to leave listeners with? And again, I'll come to you first, Margaret. To all teachers, you know, I always think teachers are amazing and really thankful that that's the profession that I'm in. And just it's, you know, teaching young people is why we do what we do. Absolutely. Thank you, Margaret. And how about you, Andy? Well, I echo what Margaret said. I haven't I, I, although I've been self employed a long time, I've always worked pretty much within education as an industry and I haven't regretted it at all.

I, I do think that, um, my [00:51:00] message would be that don't just look at the metrics of happiness or, or, or success to do with what you own. I think the people that, um, are happier in life is, is people that give more than they get. And, and certainly, um, what's great about working education is you meet a lot of people who every single day they're thinking about somebody else.

And I can help them to, to, to live a better life. So it's very, very healthy place to work in, in, in, in the mental health sense. So, um, I'd recommend teaching as a profession, 100%. Um, Yeah. And, and, and, and there's ups and downs, but I think the amount of people you can help, uh, with, with doing that job is, is immense.

And that's what I love about it so much. It's just getting that penny drop [00:52:00] moment, Yeah, brilliant. Yeah. And I have no doubt that tonight in this conversation you have both sparked enthusiasm and ideas and given a bit of hope as well to to others and given ideas about what people can do and be brave about doing as well.

So a massive thank you. And thank you for your time and thank you for sharing your insights and your wisdom with us. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thanks.