

## Ep.1 Let's Go Further: The Power of Education, Where It All Starts

In the first episode of Let's Go Further, we are joined by Jaz Ampaw-Farr, a teacher, keynote speaker, trainer and 'resilience ninja'. You may have seen her on The Apprentice, in a TEDx talk, or at the Skills and Education Group Annual Conference in 2019.

Jaz is a beneficiary of further education, attending sixth form college, before going on to teacher training and a career in primary school teaching across the UK. In this conversation, she talks about the transformative impact of further education on her own life, and how this experience has shaped her current work to inspire and support educators.

### Transcript

#### Joe Mcloughlin 0:01

Welcome to Let's Go Further, a podcast that shines a light on the role of further education in transforming people's lives. In this first series, we are talking with learners, teachers, business people and professors about why further education matters to them. I'm your host Joe Mcloughlin, Foundation Manager at the Skills and Education Group, an organisation that champions the further education and skills sector. In this episode, we're joined by Jaz Ampaw-Farr, a teacher, keynote speaker, trainer and 'resilience ninja'. You may have seen her on The Apprentice, in a TEDx talk, or at the Skills and Education Group Annual Conference in 2019. Jaz is a beneficiary of further education, attending sixth form college, before going on to teacher training and a career in primary school teaching across the UK. Jaz, hello, how are you?

#### Jaz Ampaw-Farr 0:52

I'm great thank you, lovely to be here.

#### Joe Mcloughlin 0:56

Joe Mcloughlin: So I'd just like to begin this episode of the podcast by talking a little bit about your time at college. So where did you go and what did you study?

### **Jaz Ampaw-Farr 1:04**

So I went to Bilborough College in Nottingham and I did drama communication studies and religious studies with philosophy. I say I did them, I took them, but I actually stayed on at school first in sixth form and, well, I dropped out; I'm not gonna say I had to drop out. I was going through various court cases at the time with my family, I'd left home and we were trying to get the other children into foster care where they were safe. So it wasn't really conducive to studying as well. Also I'd taken a year off school already, so I was 18 and living independently in a community house. And there was just a lot to go on and it wasn't until I started college - I sort of stopped, took a year out, went to college. And everything just changed, I was ready to give up on education and I suddenly became 'seen'. I've got Jazlow's hierarchy of needs right (simpler than the other guy's...). Being safe, being well, being seen, then you can start learning and that happened immediately in so many little accidental ways almost at college. And my form tutor Gilly Archer also taught drama, so we met... my form room was the hall, the theatre and we sat on sofas and that just felt like family and that really summed up my experience of college - it's like being part of the family.

### **Joe Mcloughlin 2:25**

I've seen from other speeches and interviews you've given that you've described her as holding a vision of success for you before you could hold it for yourself, which I think is a lovely phrase. I just wonder if you could explain that in a little more detail - what sort of significance does that have for you and how do you try and pass that on to either your own students or your own kind of teachers and educators, that you work with yourself?

### **Jaz Ampaw-Farr 2:49**

Yeah I always say you need to build ACE relationships - like authentic, consistent and with high expectation embedded. There's nothing in there about being nice and smiling. I mean being human is important, but Gilly was very straight all the time, so I knew where I was with her, in fact when I took my A levels and I failed I got two Es and an N, which I still believe stands for 'nearly an A level' so two and a half A levels. I couldn't do what I wanted to do - I wanted to go to Hull University and my whole life depended on... uni meant that I could go on and get a degree and do what I wanted to do in education, also it meant somewhere to live and food to eat. And my other option was be on the street, literally be on the street, so it was really important... didn't get the grades and Gilly, I went

to Gilly and I was furious, I was like you've lied to me, you've let me down, you told me focus, work hard, you know, believe in yourself and look where I am now - nowhere. Having wasted time and it's cost me, this time, it's cost me. And she said to me, if you are truly committed to yourself, you would ring every university in the country until you got a place. I was like "that would take ages!" and she said "Well I'm glad you've got a plan". And half despite her I went home and did that, and I remember I rang Aberdeen University and I said "Oh I got two Es" and they said "Oh that's amazing, two As come for an interview" because E sounds a bit like A if you're Scottish. And I was like "No!" and then I thought actually if I was Scottish, it would sound like two As so I called the next place, Bishop Grosseteste, and I attempted a Scottish accent and said "I got two As, can I come for an interview?". And I went for the interview, and at that interview I knew I was gonna have to tell the truth, I couldn't pretend to be Scottish for four years. So I was gonna say, you know, so sorry I was accidentally Scottish, but what I did say is "Look, I want to come here, but I don't have the grades" and... the guy, luckily the guy's cousin had worked on the estate where I lived as a youth worker, knew that people left school early, got pregnant, by the time they were like 14. He said to me why are you here, so I told him about Gilly, I told him about the experience I told him about the reframe, and that is how I got into uni. I'm not saying we should all lie but I don't think saying you're Scottish is lying, I think it's aspirational, personally.

### **Joe Mcloughlin 4:59**

Jaz so you've gone from college you've made it to university... as you're at university was it a gradual move into teaching was it very much like a definite, this is the direction I want to head in now?

### **Jaz Ampaw-Farr 5:11**

It was a decision and it was made based on another everyday hero, Mrs Cook, who was a teacher early on, when I was in primary school. She asked me, she used to ask us who you're going to be, instead of what you're going to do, and I said I want to be just like you. And she said that's a great idea, you should be a teacher, you'd make a fantastic teacher, and it was the first and only time someone had suggested something so audacious to me, and I remember thinking people like me don't do things like that, but it lit this candle of hope, like those birthday candles that you blow out and then relight again and every time I came across an adult in education who reinforced the value that I had and held that vision of success for me, it just kind of relit it the whole time. And Gilly was the icing on the cake, she was like it it's untenable...you can give

up on yourself as often as you like but I am going to stay here and stand shoulder to shoulder with you and believe in you and if you don't trust that then go ahead and try and prove me wrong but I'm confident and there's something about someone else having confidence in you that kind of melts the ice around your own heart, so I got to teacher training college and it was horrible, it was really hard, so I was the only brown person at the entire campus which caused just a multitude of issues and problems because I hadn't really dealt with that before, and it was sort of being seen differently and I struggled, I really struggled with that. Also, I had nowhere to live in the holidays, so people were getting ready to go home... I didn't know that you had to leave, I remember asking uni if I could stay and they were renting the rooms out, so I slept rough, I went back to Nottingham and slept in doorways for the first week of the Christmas holidays and then I just turned up at people's houses and... I remember... cos I was so embarrassed about my X factor backstory, I'd say to people "Oh yeah my parents are taking me skiing, Tarquin my boyfriend is taking me skiing." - none of it was true - but I just thought I'd come to you for a couple of days, so I would stay with people and that's how I navigated getting back to uni so I could do the next term, so there was something I think... Honestly, my first year of university is the last time I didn't want to be alive in all honesty. And I remember being alive and saying if I'm going to be on this planet, there are going to be some changes around here, and that audacious statement of intention is a direct result of being at college at Bilborough College and having Gilly in particular just do that 'witness' piece and leave a mark on me that cannot be erased, so I navigated that and from the second year, when I had a house, that changed everything, it was like the only reason I finished my degree. And that just... the day I graduated and threw my cap in the air, I tell you, nobody, nobody was floating on air like I was that day it was a complete miracle, and it was down to these adults who fought for my highest good no matter what.

### **Joe Mcloughlin 8:02**

And it goes back to, as you were saying, the 'Jazlows hierarchy of needs', taking care of the fundamentals and the basics and then letting people almost take care of the rest themselves.

### **Jaz Ampaw-Farr 8:13**

Yeah, yeah.

### **Joe Mcloughlin 8:15**

So you've qualified, you're teaching - where were you teaching and how long were you teaching for?

### **Jaz Ampaw-Farr 8:21**

So I moved to Clacton-on-Sea because huge Eastenders fan at the time and that's where Pat Beale went on holiday so I thought it was London, Clacton-on-Sea. So I taught in Clacton-on-Sea, Reception and Year One, I stayed there for a couple of years, I went to Nottingham, I went to my hometown and taught there, and then London, so I was in East London teaching and I taught until I had my first child in 2003 so what's that 10 years? It's full time, I was doing like literacy consultancy as well, I was very passionate, still very passionate about reading, writing and spelling being the tickets out of mindset poverty. But when I had my first child I realized I couldn't be the mum I wanted to be and the teacher I wanted to be at the same time. And because it's frowned upon to leave your kids in a box outside a church I decided I was going to do the mum bit, but that's when I started going full time with kind of training and coaching leaders in education and the move to the TEDx talk and what I do now.

### **Joe Mcloughlin 9:18**

Fantastic, and that phrase 'mindset poverty', so I've got a rough idea of what it is, I think I've got a rough idea of what it is based on those words, but could you just explain that to me in a bit more detail?

### **Jaz Ampaw-Farr 9:29**

Yeah you know we talk about social mobility and aspiration quite a lot, but sometimes that's just rude - it's asking someone to dream when you don't know if you're going to eat that night. Dreaming is... it's not audacious it goes way beyond that, it's almost offensive so... the idea that my world was so small, and was limited to the hardware shop at the end of the road which sold black octagonal plates, which I assume the queenie must eat off because they were the poshest thing I'd ever seen. So my world was so small, and so limited, and I was very firmly in... sort of in between suffering and surviving. So, moving into thriving and then being truly alive and driving change, that only happened once I was able to start dreaming, I was able to start imagining something outside of the garden of possibility that I lived in, which was tiny. So other people lobbing apples over the wall and giving me a taste of what could be possible, alongside changing my mind about myself, which is mainly what I do now, they are the things that got me out of mindset poverty... like when I left university I remember saying to my brothers and sisters, you

know this is great, I felt like I've climbed out of this pit and there's mud everywhere and it's steep sides and I've got to the top. And I looked down and my brothers and my sisters are reaching up for me to help them out, so I reached down to pull them out, only when I reach down do I realise that they don't want to be pulled out, they want to pull me back in. Why? Because people like us don't do things like that. And if it's possible for you to do what you've done we've got to look at our own identity, and that is hard and painful so it's easier from an amygdala point of view... for you to either be weird or just come back down here, and when I left, I gave up my community. Like I'm working class at birth, but you know I don't belong to that community now, I can't belong, I can be adjacent I can work... so you have to give up so much and the answer isn't making everybody, you know white middle class to save them, the answer is valuing them where they are. And I was lucky enough and blessed enough to have that from people and that's how I'm the phenomenal human female I am today.

### **Joe Mcloughlin 11:30**

So along with the sort of mindset poverty and the valuing people where they are, what are some of the other key philosophies that you try and pass on now in your training and in your speaking?

### **Jaz Ampaw-Farr 11:40**

It's definitely the human first piece, my company is called Human First, me and Ed my business partner and husband, he does... I'm the sizzle he's the sausage. So he does coaching and consultancy and I do keynotes and our biggest thing is knowing what it's like on the other side of you. Being human first doesn't mean, you know, turning up and dishing all your dirt, it means being professionally vulnerable and personally authentic. Everybody wants to do the authenticity piece, but authenticity without vulnerability is... Donald Trump - massively authentic guy but not vulnerable at all, so it's really important that people... understand what it's like on the other side of them so they can meet people where they are, have empathy with... not sympathy, sympathy is useless, that's just saying "I'm sorry" and feeling bad about it. Empathy means I don't know how you feel, but I will stand here and feel it with you, then engage that... that garners trust, it pays into someone's emotional bank account. Then garnering like a conversation... Engage is the next 'E', empathy, engage, enroll. Engaging in a conversation that is... goes beyond what they thought was possible, and the final 'E' is enrolling them into doing just that. That's my journey. It's like it's the 'shero's' journey, which is the hero's journey, but with a woman at the centre because basically it's

about me so...the shero's journey is that thing of becoming a fear fighter, going beyond what you think is possible, a mistake artists, like making mistakes and picking yourself up again, a resilience ninja, knowing how to reframe and getting comfortable with being uncomfortable and then a positive disrupter, and that's the T-shirt I wear. So it's that idea of inviting people into a different way of being because everything we want is on the other side of a 10-minute courageous conversation, sometimes that conversation is with yourself so we're inviting people into that space, swapping fear for curiosity every time.

### **Joe Mcloughlin 13:28**

So I know that you mentioned courage and elsewhere kind of in a lot of your work that I've read, and bits and pieces that I've seen, you talk about how much more we could accomplish if we were 10% braver. And I was just wondering if you could sort of explain to me or take me through what does a 10% braver classroom look like, or what does a 10% braver life look like?

### **Jaz Ampaw-Farr 13:46**

I love that, great question and 10%, this is the... route out of mindset poverty, a 10% braver classroom looks like a 10% braver tutor, that's where it starts, because you can teach what you know, but you can only create who and what you are. And this whole thing around being a human being, rather than a human doing, the kind of you know personally authentic... is really important, so it starts with you being able to be honest about why you're there and reconnecting with why you started the job in the first place. And standing on the truth about yourself we don't... you don't have people describing themselves as just 'insert job title here'... just a 'insert job title here', no no no, you're not 'just' an anything, you are a tutor, a parent, a whatever so it's important that you take the role on yourself before you start trying to grow that in someone else. It's like resilience, can you embed ambitious resilience in someone else if you are a hot mess? Like I used to teach swimming in year one, and I can teach year one kids to swim - well five metres with the float after a whole year of lessons, but... I'm not a swimmer. I know how to swim I've watched a YouTube video and I'm a great teacher. But is it the same as resilience? I don't think so, I don't think it is, so there's something that people notice around you being 10% braver and it's whatever that looks like. For some people that's putting their hand up in a meeting, for others it's starting an entire revolution. That's why it's 10% and not an actual number, 10% braver than you were yesterday about speaking your truth, saying why you're there, explaining about why you

will fight for the highest good of your students. And a classroom that does that - they know how to reframe. They know what to do when they don't know what to do, and it's not just "I'll ask someone". It's like when I get stopped, first of all I'm comfortable with being uncomfortable, second of all I have a range of strategies and resources that I can draw on, third of all I will participate in my own rescue and that's the piece that's missing. In teams, just in teams in colleges now it's sort of... often you know the leader wants to like make everybody's wellbeing okay and it's like you... we all have to participate in our own rescue and you can't do that unless you're valued, not rescued, if you're constantly rescued you don't join in yourself. But when you're valued and when you see someone else going first you get to be what you can see, and so I think 10% braver in general is not necessarily skydiving - that's maybe 12% braver - but it is realising you're in a toxic relationship and making the tiniest next step to doing something about not allowing yourself to be destroyed. It is going and doing a course when you failed at school and you feel like you're unteachable but you're going to show up and trust in the process and trust in the person who's got your back - it's that, it's just a little bit further than you believe is possible.

### **Joe Mcloughlin 16:33**

With that in mind then, and I appreciate the kind of importance of individuals taking that 10% further step to the, you know, putting your hand up or signing up to a class or doing something tomorrow that you wouldn't do today... what are the challenges or kind of how would you overcome the challenges of passing that on in a classroom say where in the FE sector, our learners have you know they might have jobs they might have caring commitments, other time commitments, they might have a personal life... do you know what I mean? Sort of the educators we work with might only see their students for a fraction of the week so how do you, I suppose, how do you boil that - all that kind of passion and that 10% energy down into a weekly kind of nugget almost?

### **Jaz Ampaw-Farr 17:18**

Yeah, well we've got a series of tools that we use, the first thing I want to say is like - the amount of time doesn't make a difference. I can remember like foster homes that I was in as a teenager that had me for 10 minutes and still you know Janet made a difference, I mean I remember because of what she did and who she was, so it is a way of being that's intentional that, if you're turning up to college you know as a tutor, knackered and bitter and twisted, you can filter as much as you like but that's going to be noticed. It's gonna be noticed by people who



navigate chaos on a day-to-day basis, so half the time it's being able to take care of yourself, so you can show up as your full fat self. And the other half the time it's the consistency and the nature of belief and holding on to what success looks like for people when they've got amazing lives that they've got to navigate, look after others, do this, because what you're doing in FE is not getting people qualifications - it's literally changing people's lives. And the input affects every aspect of their areas of influence, leading themselves at home, leading their family leading in their team and community, leading an organisation, it's right across the board, it's literally remoulding someone's life with greater possibility involved so it's not just the little things that happen, and the way that you connect and the availability that you draw a picture of in the sessions, it's also having an eye on the prize the whole time, it's like Simon Sinek says, starting with why and then working out the how afterwards. And that's honestly what it was for me, it was a complete life reframe - it's like an MOT for life, college, and I wouldn't have... it wouldn't have happened at school. I'm just going to call it - it just would not have happened it wasn't possible, so the unique role that colleges play for young people and young adults and older adults and just everyone, don't underestimate the power of those tiny interactions, every connection is a chance for compassion and courage, every connection.

### **Joe Mcloughlin 19:17**

And so then you take... you kind of take all these ideas, all this sort of compassion and kind of commitment to sort of human-first teaching, as you describe it, and then in 2020 you launch your manifesto for educators?

### **Jaz Ampaw-Farr 19.30**

Yes so lockdown hit didn't it! And I was kind of like okay, accustomed as I am to navigating chaos - I'm a seasoned chaos navigator - the world stopping for me is kind of... I've imagined this scenario I don't know how many times and I've lived through hairier and scarier things than, you know, perhaps running out of toilet roll now and again, and obviously I'm not underestimating it and I know it was a time where we didn't have vaccines and we didn't have... testing, and it was awful, what I knew is that I had a home, I had food, and I could live for a couple of months without worrying about "oh my gosh I've got to go and earn some money quick"... so I showed up for my community, the people who I love the most and that's educators, and one of the things I was noticing was the amount of kind of concern... and sort of 'what am I going to do, how am I going to do this' and I'm like guys, this is your moment, this is the time

for you to do what you were designed to do, to come into teaching, come into what you were designed to do, what you wanted to do - make a difference, this is the moment. So the manifesto is really a series of videos with statements on a post that you could click and watch the video. It was taking people to... some encouragement, I like to call it a kind kick up the bottom, because I don't like to mince my words, but I am keen to meet people where they are, so a kind kick up the bottom encouraging people to stand where they are and go forward from there, not to give into fear driving the bus, if you know what I mean, so I just sent it out to a few people, I didn't expect it to kind of trend and go everywhere and be put on doors and be televised and stuff, that's fantastic but really it was: just remember who you are, you're the beating heart of the community and don't let anyone tell you anything else, so it was that kind of call to action.

### **Joe Mcloughlin 21:08**

Joe Mcloughlin: And is there - now we've sort of gone back to school and we've had a sort of return, a stayed return, is there anything you'd add to the manifesto now that you've sort of... what you've noticed over the last couple of years or..?

### **Jaz Ampaw-Farr 21:21**

Oh good question, I mean we've got the human first manifesto now so there's like an education version and a corporate version, all different versions, but one of the things that i've added, and I keep saying this, is everybody wants things to be better, but nobody is that keen on change and change brings conflict, it brings complexity but complexity is fertile ground for growth. So it's got to be on your terms, but when you're ready to opt in to like you know... moaning is not a strategy, I know it feels like it's the only strategy... Moaning is not a strategy, you've got to add something into that that says you know what me and my... me and my tutor group me and my college me and my family... This is what we stand for, and people like us do things like this, so I think it will be the sustainability piece, and I did put it in the manifesto, but also the... Trying to go from... trying to serve others when you haven't served yourself, you know like on planes where they say put your own oxygen mask on and then pick your favourite child or whatever it is they say. It's that - we hear it but we don't do it, you're supposed to fill your cup of tea up so much that it's overflowing and then you serve others from your saucer and too many people are serving from the cup, they've got nothing left and they're carrying on serving which means you're an iPhone, you're an iPhone tutor - you're alright for three years, then you'll be knackered

and we'll have to chuck you out and get another one, no, you deserve better, the students you serve deserve better, the people you live with and love deserve better, so I'd want to ringfence and make that clearer in the manifesto: that it starts with you, and it ends with you and everything else is a gift.

### **Joe Mcloughlin 22:50**

So, starting with you and ending with you, then, I just want to have a final chat about one of the... I think what you singled out as one of the toughest things about teaching is the legacies you can't see. And the idea that you can put so much effort into someone, and so much support and so much love and kindness, but actually you may never know... what they do next, and kind of it's what happens when you're not in the room, I think as you said before, so I'm just curious on a kind of personal note what would you like your legacy to be to your learners, either in the classroom from your teaching career or from the more recent work - kind of training and speaking?

### **Jaz Ampaw-Farr 23:36**

Like yeah this is good! I usually... I always hate it when like politicians talk about their legacy and stuff I'm like "oh get over yourself!" but I... I've never really thought about my... what I feel like is, like I can't save my brother, I can't change what happened when I was a kid, but I can encourage people to understand the power they have and that thing... the mark of a great leader is what happens when you're no longer in the room. That came out of this... you know I'm alive because of my tutors, like I'm literally alive because of the input they put into me and I don't know, one that I could track them down, and two that I could even explain how much that meant and I really want people to see themselves as if they're running a relay and the student is the golden baton that you're passing between you, but you're number 73 in 100 runners, no one's clapping for you people haven't even stayed to watch you, they've gone to get ice cream, they'll come back for 99 and 100. So you don't get a round of applause, in fact you're probably just going to get spat at and disrespected but if you're not there, there's a big gap between 72 and 74 and that gap means it's no longer 100 runners needed, it's 100,000 needed to get that baton, that student over the line, so I want, I want people to see the importance of what they do in the bigger picture of a whole and I kind of feel that's... that's my thing, I couldn't care less if I'm not remembered - obviously, you know, people who love me I'd quite like them to remember me - but what I want is for people to change their mind about themselves. I'm not doing this because it's fun I'm not doing



this... this isn't therapy, I've had therapy it's much better than what I do on stage. But I am compelled to remind people of the agency they have, and my legacy would be them taking on that agency and not even remembering how they realised how powerful they are, but knowing it's an irrefutable fact - that's something that I'd want to happen.

**Joe Mcloughlin 25:31**

Great... that's a fantastic answer I don't think I can add anything to that. Jaz, thank you ever so much for joining us today.

**Jaz Ampaw-Farr 25:38**

My pleasure, thank you.

**Joe Mcloughlin 25:42**

Thanks for listening to this episode of Let's Go Further, which was produced by the Skills and Education Group. Don't forget to subscribe to receive future episodes, and you can let us know what you think about what you hear on Twitter and LinkedIn. So join us next time for more honest, insightful and inspiring conversations from Let's Go Further.