PHIL NAYLOR



# NAYLOR'S NATTER

Ideas and advice from the collective wisdom of teachers, as heard on the popular education podcast

BLOOMSBURY

# Praise for *Naylor's Natter*

'The *Naylor's Natter* book is a superb read of some of the best advice and tips from Phil's podcast, distilled into an easy-to-read and humorous account. The soundbites from guests and QR code links to the episodes serve as a wonderful and thorough guide through topics such as CPD, behaviour and leadership. I loved this!'
Rachel Ball, assistant principal teaching and learning, @MrsBallAP

'Phil's ability to identify the golden nuggets in each and every conversation makes this an invaluable read for every educator. A brilliant translation from podcast to book.'
Toria Bono, teacher and host of Tiny Voice Talks podcast, @Toriaclaire

'An inspiring read that distils hundreds of hours of the combined knowledge and experience of so many educationalists. Packed full of practical strategies and recommendations, this book offers plenty of opportunities to challenge your own thinking.'
Stacey Cantley, ECT lead

'Phil Naylor leads us on a brisk Cook's Tour of current educational thinking in England, distilling from his many online "natters" a range of blessedly non-partisan and down-to-earth nuggets of wisdom about how best to run a classroom and a school.'
Professor Guy Claxton, author of *The Future of Teaching and the Myths that Hold It Back*, @GuyClaxton

'Naylor's Natter has come a long way since the first episode, recorded many years ago in our school's sixth form library. This book does a fantastic job of transferring the podcast's accessible and friendly tone to print, and features pearls of wisdom from some true giants of teaching. Highly recommended!'
Simon Cox, Director of Blackpool Research School, @MathsMrCox

'A fascinating read with so many words of wisdom offered and takeaways for every teacher. The likeable, humble and enthusiastic Phil Naylor has brought those qualities and more to his book as well as shining a spotlight on some great individuals in education. A recommended read that has the potential to lead to further conversations and reflections in any school.'
Kate Jones, teacher and author, @KateJones_teach

'A marvellous account of the creation of a highly acclaimed podcast plus a distillation of the main things that make a difference. Great work!'
Mary Myatt, education writer and curator at Myatt & Co, @MaryMyatt

'I was unsure whether it is because I'm from the same era, socio-economic background or geographical area as Phil that I couldn't put this down, then I realised, it's just because it is great – easy to navigate, speaks from the heart and what we all need: simplicity and depth rolled into one.'
Lizy Oakes, assistant vice principal teaching and learning, @LizyOakes

'Packed full of educational wisdom, this book represents a range of voices from across the sector. It is wonderfully concise for real impact, with the bonus of links to the original podcasts to explore ideas further.'
Cat Rushton, assistant principal (teaching and learning), @CatherineRusht2

'This book is accessible and useful. A compendium that can be used for occasional reference or just as easily be read in one sitting. Logical chapters and ordering along with "Naylor's nuggets" and reflective exercises mean it will be one of those books you return to. Useful for teachers and school leaders alike.'
Professor Toby Salt, former CEO of Ormiston Academies Trust and AQA, author of *The Juggling Act*

'In a seamless segue from podcast to page, Phil Naylor has brought together the wit, wisdom and experience of multiple expert contributors in perfect harmony – with his trademark warmth, deep knowledge and passion for education.'
Emma Turner FCCT, Discovery Trust Research and CPD Lead, and author, @Emma_Turner75

# Naylor's Natter

## Ideas and advice from the collective wisdom of teachers, as heard on the popular education podcast

Phil Naylor

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# Contents

Acknowledgements vi

**Introduction: A rationale for podcast pedagogy** 1

**How to use this book** 9

**1 The importance of continuing professional development** 11

**2 Behaviour: Ideology, evidence and pragmatism** 37

**3 Leadership lessons** 55

**4 Pastoral matters** 77

**5 What's next in education? Conversations of the future** 97

**Conclusion** 115

References 117
Index 119

# Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank all the guests who have given freely of their time to educate me and our wonderful listeners. I must also thank Hannah Marston from Bloomsbury for believing that I had a book in me and for her eternal patience through what has been a very challenging first writing experience.

I would like to dedicate this book to my children Liam and Ayda-Rose with a large nod to my mother Sylvia, my father Bill and my siblings Anthony and Alison. I hope this gives them a source of some pride that a working-class lad from Wigan can 'knock out' an education book having enjoyed a fully comprehensive education in Accrington. If I can, anybody can.

I must also cite an underserved but not insignificant influence on my improved productivity. An influence in my life five years ago showed me that the road to success is paved with extremely hard work and dedication, much more than I had ever realised. Endeavours like this are not completed without effort levels that I saw first-hand and have influenced me ever since. For that and nothing else, I must thank them.

Phil Naylor
February 2022

# Introduction: A rationale for podcast pedagogy

3rd January 2019, Naylor's Natter launches to rapturous reception from thousands of expectant teachers just waiting for a weekly dose of educational expertise dropping into their podcast provider of choice… well, not quite!

At the time of Naylor's Natter's inception, I was the self-titled Assistant Director of Blackpool Research School, part of the Research Schools Network, a collaboration between the Institute for Effective Education (IEE) and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). (I'd seen the title 'Director' on future guest Alex Quigley's door at Huntington School and decided to adopt my title.) Future guests Stephen Tierney, Simon Cox and I were looking at ways to promote our upcoming researchED Blackpool conference. The prevailing wisdom amongst us at the time was to explore Stephen's book of Twitter contacts and persuade them to appear by offering them a night in Blackpool. This approach had begun to work; we had a stellar list of speakers and a venue that could hold 600 guests. As the weeks rolled by the tickets sold gradually, but we were struggling to get the required interest in the conference to justify our venue choice. We looked at paid marketing, promoted tweets, sponsored Facebook posts and all manner of networking, but nothing really captured the zeitgeist.

At one of our regular meetings with Stephen, I tentatively floated the idea of a Blackpool Research School podcast. This was far from a new idea and one that I had clearly plagiarised from the guru of podcasting, namely Mr Craig Barton. This idea met with a positive response from both Stephen and Simon but with one sticking point:

> *'Probably best not to call it the Blackpool Research School podcast. We don't want to damage the brand if it isn't very good.'*

A very sage point at the time as the research movement was in its infancy and the Research Schools had to ensure they were on message. As someone without a brand to tarnish, I happily volunteered to put my name to the podcast and take any brickbats that may come my way. Note that it is 'Naylor's Natter', singular, meaning I only ever expected there to be one episode.

Looking back from the vantage point of a pandemic-scarred 2022, it is easy to forget that buried deep inside computers in 2019 we had all the technology required to easily record, edit and distribute a podcast. But I either didn't know or didn't look because the earliest episode features Simon Cox and me recorded live into an iPad and then emailed across straight to anchor. As you would expect, the episode sunk without much of a trace (despite Simon's excellent interview – use the QR code on page 23 to have a listen). As it went largely unnoticed, this provided breathing space to at least begin to hone the craft of interviewing, source guests from Stephen's contacts and invest in some sound effects and jingles.

Ah, the jingle… You're singing it now, aren't you? I'd love to claim credit for its earworm status and of course I do retain writing credits for the lyrics at least. This came about through friend of the show Benjamin D. Barker, who was already an established host, recommending a website called Fiverr which allowed creators to advertise their craft to budding entrepreneurs. I figured to sound more professional, Naylor's Natter would need some voice overs and jingles. I invested in numerous versions, some you can still hear in early episodes, but one really stood out. The jingle that has adorned most of our output since then was recorded by an established American country artist who, like me, was just dipping his toe into the new technology. This was without doubt the best £17 I have ever spent. He must be aware of the podcast's prominence now as I asked him for a new version recently, but the price had increased exponentially!

With a jingle in place, we then needed to up our game with guests, and a notable early coup was Professor Daniel Muijs (at the time Ofsted's Head of Research). The excitement in the Research School broom cupboard when he was confirmed was palpable. Whilst our marketing had progressed, our sound had not. For any reader expecting George Martin sitting behind a mixing desk whilst Simon and I stroked our beards, chewing the research fat with Ofsted's head honcho, think again. This episode was Simon and me with a hastily arranged 'Do not disturb' sticky note on the research cupboard door on the phone to Daniel with the voice recorder from an iPad trying to pick up the sound! We got away with that one as the small room enhanced the audio; I was not so lucky when I lured one of education's titans Professor Michael Young onto the show. Michael was a delight to host, and I remain a huge admirer of his work, but the audio was so bad it is almost unplayable. These episodes increased our listener base significantly, our ticket sales modestly and our negative reviews judiciously.

I am a firm believer in the positive power of social media. The support received for this book has kept me going through its 18-month gestation. In the early days of the podcast, we had some great support. An early supporter and one whose influence can still be heard was Ollie Lovell. Ollie is an extremely successful and

respected podcaster in his own right, and I wholeheartedly recommend his ERRR podcast to all readers. In the early months of 2019, he got in touch with me to ask what software I used for recording the podcast. Somewhat taken aback, I replied that I used a phone, an iPad and an anchor! He was so generous in his advice around selecting a microphone, using GarageBand and Audacity, and how to improve our production. This advice made a huge difference, and his generosity is something I have tried to emulate with new podcasters to welcome them into our thriving community.

We started to settle on a formula which has seen some iterations, but the core concepts have remained the same. I personally enjoy many different kinds of interview, whether this be education, politics, history or sport. Where I do take issue and usually turn over is when an interview becomes more about the interviewer than the interviewee. When I was discussing my interviewing style in the early days, I rather impertinently compared myself (in style – not quality) to the great Michael Parkinson. I would like to ask prepared questions to allow the guest to feel comfortable, I would read everything I reasonably could about their work to be informed and I would never interrupt. I would of course allow some natural follow-up but never at the expense of the guest's contribution. I think at the time, and even now, this marks Naylor's Natter out as different from other podcasts and is the reason we have expanded across the world.

The formula became about continued professional development (CPD) for me as the host and then hopefully vicariously for the listener. If I was gaining professionally by having one-to-one access to these experts, then surely the listener would also be benefitting from their wisdom. My vision became and remained that if one person benefits from the conversation then it is worth doing. I have often been reminded of the power of this when I return from work, exhausted and caught up in the thick of thin things, and I have a podcast scheduled at 7pm meaning I literally have 23 minutes to get ready! As I slump into my recording chair, I summon up enough energy to get started. But when the podcast starts and the knowledge of the guests and their enthusiasm for their subject infuse me with a new energy, I imagine listeners having the same feeling. I hope they bound into school the following day imbued with new ideas that they can share. This is our *raison d'être*.

The podcast succeeded in attracting our guests with some notable education figures gracing early episodes. Once you had interviewed Person X, it made it much easier to interview Person Y and this culminated for me with the episode where I interviewed E. D. Hirsch. Having seen at first hand the influence of Don's work through involvement in the research and evidence movement, I literally had to pinch myself when he agreed through his PA to appear. My preparation,

always thorough, hit new levels in anticipation of a conference with the great man. The day itself was everything I expected and more. I can still recall the Skype dialling tone fading as the camera switched on to Hirsch resplendent on a leather armchair in a palatial office in America. The titan of knowledge must have wondered what he had signed up for as he gazed upon a young Ken Bruce, sat on a computer desk amongst Minnie Mouse teddies in child number two's bedroom! These conversations hopefully serve to inform and inspire the reader that anyone can become involved in podcasting and further their own professional growth on the way.

Collaboration has been a huge part of the show over the years. The first supporters of the podcast, with time, resources, equipment and moral support were the Teacher Development Trust (TDT). I cannot express my gratitude enough to David Weston and the team, who as well as buying me my first 'proper' microphone contributed influential sections to many of the first 100 episodes. TDT were able to connect us to many of the guests we interviewed; they were also able to have their collective finger on the educational pulse, often guiding the listener to the latest research, evidence and CPD. TDT decided to go their own way in 2020, but they have remained supporters of the podcast. A public thanks is due to them all and I wouldn't be in a position to write a book without them. As 2020 began and the pandemic hit, it allowed time for reflection. I felt that seeing the world as I did through the paradigm of secondary education and a senior leader of some ten years' standing wasn't the only vista that the listeners needed. I felt that it was important for our listeners to diversify both our topics and our presenters. Many teachers have helped to co-host and indeed host Naylor's Natter over the last three years and each of them has brought a unique perspective. This is a feature that we intend to continue.

Features have been, well, a feature of Naylor's Natter since the beginning and something that my restless energy has been channelled into with a varying degree of success. As lockdown hit in early 2020, I started a book and film review section. The thinking was that the short three-week lockdown could give teachers an opportunity to delve into areas that previously their busy lives had prohibited. I'd long been a fan of *Kermode and Mayo's Film Review* on BBC Radio 5 Live and attempted to channel my inner critic to signpost listeners to classic films. The feedback was non-existent, and this feature slowly ebbed away and has never been reprised. The book reviews have had much more success and have now become the staple of the show. Thanks to the explosion in teacher authors and books about education, I decided to look into reviewing them. This was slightly at odds with my non-judgemental approach to the podcast and therefore precluded some books that I was either not interested by or some that I intrinsically avoided.

The Vinyl Suite is another feature that has proved to be very popular indeed but hugely time-consuming. The concept came from the office Andrew Perman and I shared at school at the time. Being two gentlemen of a certain age, confirmed audiophiles and music snobs, we decided that a record player was the perfect addition to our office. The thinking was to ease our path through the pastoral trials and tribulations of a Blackpool day and help to educate the young people and the teachers about the importance of music. The selections opened up discussions that were outside of the normal conversations in schools, which so often start:

*'Did you get my email?'* Any colleague, every school

The format is an education version of *Desert Island Discs* where listeners get to see behind the curtain and into the lives of our guests. Some of the suggestions have made a huge contribution to the making of this book. The two best exponents of the art of the Vinyl Suite were Dave McPartlin and Doug Lemov. Their episodes, featuring stories behind their choices, continue to attract large audiences months after their release. Dave shared his and Flakefleet's journey to the *Britain's Got Talent* final and their bid for Christmas number one. His choice of Dire Straits' *Local Hero* and Queen's *Don't Stop Me Now* raised the hairs on the back of my neck and really emphasised the power of music to shape people's lives. Doug Lemov, unscripted, hit upon a golden formula for the Vinyl Suite where he shared what he was listening to as he wrote his epic *Teach Like a Champion 3.0* (2021). Doug challenged the listener to see if they could hear the music coming through the pages of the book and with it opened up listeners' collections to music that they may not have ordinarily sought out. I have bought, shared and treasured many records as a result of this feature and at the time of writing I am listening to William Basinski – thank you, Simon Cox.

Having begun to diversify the range of guests and the presenters on the podcast, I had become open to voices all across the education sector. This crossed the false dichotomies that exist within education and developed relationships with teachers who previously would not have been listeners or contributors to the show. Following our most successful podcast ever with Paul Dix, I applied to host a weekly show on Teacher Hug radio, which would essentially be a version of the podcast. This community moved the podcast on immeasurably. The kindness, expertise and advice given graciously by the Teacher Hug team improved our production, the diversity of thought and the content of the show.

Ultimately the editing and scheduling became too much alongside the regular everyday job of a busy, by now, deputy head. I also became conscious that we

were drifting away from the core of what made the podcast useful to listeners. We had stopped 'just talking to teachers' and had spent less time on research- and evidence-based practice. We had also largely moved away from giving listeners practical tips from serving teachers that they could use in the classroom. We had tried to be:

*'. . . all things to all people.'* 1 Corinthians 9:22

At the time of writing, we have gone back to basics in terms of content but, excitingly, have been chosen by Spotify to be an early adopter of their video podcast format. This means that rather than having to release a multi-format podcast on various providers, we can now offer listeners the chance to view guests as well as listen simultaneously. We feel that this will increase our appeal as teachers can now demonstrate as well as articulate their points. The medium will also lend itself to CPD sessions for staff, provided for free. This means 2022 will be an exciting step on our continuing journey of 'talking to teachers'.

Having taken you through the genesis and evolution of the podcast, here is our rationale for the book and how it can benefit you:

*'The best that has been thought and said.'* Matthew Arnold (1869)

Not for a minute am I comparing the output of an educational podcast to the classics of modern literature, but I have kept Arnold's words with me and they have provided the inspiration and the guidance for this book. An education book written by a teacher of over 20 years' standing may have some use. My perspectives on educational developments may be of note. My wisdom (such as it is) gained from working closely with some outstanding practitioners over a long career may help prevent others from making similar mistakes to my own. This book, however, is not that. This book is the accumulation of hundreds of hours of conversations with over 150 guests on the key topics in education, from CPD, behaviour, school leadership and pastoral care to the future of education. Reading this book may serve to increase your knowledge in much less than the three years it has taken me to accumulate this information and compile this book.

For each topic, I have distilled hours of relevant conversations into a set of clear, practical recommendations, translating the collective wisdom of the podcast guests into actionable advice for teachers, school leaders, governors and the wider profession. A key theme throughout is cutting through the binary debates that happen on social media in order to unite tribes and escape echo chambers. I hope that by exploring the thoughts and opinions of a wide range

of podcast guests, you will find that there is more to unite us as educators than to divide us.

The advice draws upon my conversations with all the guests on the podcast to date, at the time of writing in early 2022. However, for each topic, I have selected a range of key expert guests whose contributions and thinking I am keen to explore in more detail. From Professor Michael Young and Professor Becky Allen to Dr Jill Berry, Aziza Ajak, Pritesh Raichura and Paul Dix, my hope is that this will set you off on an educational journey to the works of these luminaries in the world of education. I hope the book will serve as a reference text for study into the outputs of the featured educators, set up as it is with handy QR codes to directly reference their podcast episodes as you go along your journey.