Browne Jacobson

Transformative leadership: In conversation with Lauren Thorpe

28 February 2025 Nick MacKenzie

Ever wonder how childhood curiosity can shape a career in leading educational innovation?

In an interview on the increasingly popular #EdInfluence podcast, Lauren Thorpe, Chief Transformation Officer at United Learning, shares her unique path from tinkering with toys under the guidance of her engineer father to spearheading transformative initiatives in schools.

Leading digital strategy, data and insights

Lauren draws on her experience leading digital strategy, data and insights, curriculum and assessment for England's largest trust and chairing the CST Data and Insights Professional Community. She also sits on the DfE's Ed Tech Advisory Board and is a serving Ofsted Inspector.

Her story is a testament to how a relentless curiosity and love for problem-solving can lead to a career focused on balancing efficiency with emotional intelligence, ultimately creating a more connected educational environment.

Childhood curiosity

From an early age, Lauren's fascination with understanding the mechanics of how things work was nurtured by her engineer father. This childhood curiosity laid the foundation for her career in educational leadership. She explains:

"I used to dismantle every single toy that I ever had. I'd get a screwdriver to it and take it apart and try and understand what all the different things did. I just had this constant interest in how things were built, designed and why they were the way they were, and I think that that then flowed through my whole childhood and the interest in the subjects I really enjoyed at school. So, I did computer science, I went on to do a computer science degree and I think it's also reflected in my career..."

Educational technology: Friend or foe?

As the discussion unfolds, Lauren delves into the complex landscape of educational technology. She shares the challenges of balancing immediate needs with long-term goals while managing diverse stakeholder expectations.

The episode highlights the importance of questioning the necessity of tech-driven solutions, especially post-COVID-19, when technology's role in education has been heavily scrutinised.

Lauren emphasises that not every educational challenge requires a technological solution. Instead, she advocates for a thoughtful approach where educators decide on tech integration or tech-free environments based on their vision and objectives.

Problem-solving

One of the key themes discussed is the balance between rational problem-solving and emotional intelligence in leadership roles. Lauren emphasises the importance of maintaining this balance, as it creates a space for reflection and connection in the fast-paced educational

environment.

Her approach to leadership involves creating a framework that allows for quiet yet impactful changes, ensuring that transformation efforts align with the organisation's broader objectives. She talks about the *importance of clear communication as a leader:*

"What's really important is that you've got clarity of vision and purpose. So, where are we going? And we've actually set that out through some very easy-to-digest headlines around the sorts of things that we want it to feel like in the organisation in three, five, ten years' time. It's a little bit easier at the moment, given there's a lot of talk about technology and education and schools, for people to be able to hook on to that."

Seeking inspiration

Lauren's insights extend beyond her immediate role, as she discusses the value of seeking inspiration and diverse perspectives from both within and outside the education sector. By learning from successful corporate transformations, Lauren enriches her approach to leadership and educational innovation.

Overall, this episode offers valuable lessons for leaders in education, underscoring the importance of curiosity, integrity, and collaboration in driving transformative change.

Find out more

Hear more of Lauren's personal and leadership insight by listening to the EdInfluence podcast. Available via all the usual podcast platforms now.

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