EPISODE 4: ANDREW JACK

**0:00:07 Eli:** Hi and welcome to another episode of A Little Bit of Genius, a podcast run by Nord Anglia Education students where we talk to special guests about how creativity has impacted their personal and professional lives. My name is Eli.

**0:00:19 Hala:** And my name is Hala. We're really glad to be your co-hosts for today's episode. If you're new to the podcast, thank you for listening.

**0:00:25 Eli:** Today we'll be discussing the nature of creativity and what it means to be creative in the field of journalism. We are honoured today to be joined by Andrew Jack, who's the Global Education Editor at the Financial Times.

**0:00:36 Hala:** Mr. Jack's work with the Financial Times began in 1990 and he has since held the roles of Head of Curated Content, Deputy Editor of the Big Read Section, and acted as a foreign correspondent for the FT in France and Russia.

**0:00:48 Eli:** Andrew, thank you so much for joining us today.

**0:00:50 Andrew:** Thanks very much, great to be with you.

**0:00:52 Eli:** So, can you tell us a bit about your education background, and do you have an advice for students looking to study at Cambridge or Harvard?

**0:01:01 Andrew:** Yes, so I went to a school in the UK; I was interested in journalism already at school but also other areas. One of my A Levels was geography because I found that to be a really varied range of subjects, if you like, including many issues that then, and still now, are incredibly relevant. Whether it's around migration or climate change, or economic development or meteorology, it was a kind of really mixed range of interesting subject areas. So, I decided to study that at Cambridge as my degree and I wasn't disappointed, it gave me great opportunities and ways to, kind of, apply and learn about the world very practically. I did more student journalism at Cambridge because I think, for those who are interested in going into journalism, what counts most of all is not specific training let's say, in journalism, it's much more practical examples, it's showing things you've delivered, it's building a portfolio, if you like, of work that demonstrates your ability to actually write or craft journalism that's interesting to people. So, I did journalism at university; I then wanted to explore a bit more academic work and I wanted absolutely to, kind of, move to a different culture and country to do that. I was particularly interested in some of the emerging economies in Asia and Africa, for example, but then I got this wonderful opportunity to have a fellowship at Harvard for a year and that was something that was, again, very broadening of the mind. It wasn't what I'd expected at all, I found it very stimulating and then wanted to stay a bit more and I got an opportunity after that to work for, actually, the New York City government. So, moving from semi academic work to practical and political, or policy work if you like; at each stage it was about maximising the opportunities, not only within the classroom to study and learn new academic issues, but also take advantage of networks of friends informally, and societies, and associations, including journalism in different forms, so that I was actually starting to apply, and develop skills that would be of interest to the potential employers that I was interested in moving towards in the years ahead. Well, my advice would be to, kind of, work hard, but not only in the classroom, to use the maximum range of opportunities that are around you including student activities, ways to demonstrate initiative, and leadership, and creativity outside the classroom in ways that could appeal to those that will be relevant in the next stage of your life, and that served me pretty well.

**0:03:50 Eli:** Thank you for that. So, the quote for discussion today is from Victor Pinchuk, a Ukrainian businessman, the quote reads “Art, freedom and creativity will change society faster than politics”. What is your initial reaction to this quote?

**0:04:05 Andrew:** I would agree. He's far from the first person to talk about the role and importance of creativity over time. Politics, inevitably, requires consensus, it requires building coalitions over time, bringing together different groups of people, working often with established political parties, developing manifestos and policy ideas that can take a long time to evolve. Art, by its very nature, can be much more spontaneous and individualistic, can be driven by one single person and so its power to pull people out of their own environments, to think beyond the box, to draw them into different areas to cross-fertilise is incredibly important. We know, very often, that that can be on the leading edge of lots of issues for change and reform directly in politics, or in wider personal and professional spheres. So, it's an incredibly important thing and I think most societies, even the most totalitarian and authoritarian ones, have this undercurrent of creativity which provides, at the very least a steam valve, if not the potential to overthrow unpleasant activities and push people in more positive directions.

**0:05:28 Hala:** So, Andrew, as a journalist who does a lot of writing every day, can you tell us what creativity means to you?

**0:05:36 Andrew:** Creativity is about stimulation, about the development of new ideas, about coming up with different ways to think about things, about pulling you out of your comfort zone to reflect beyond the day to day, whatever you're focused on, to, kind of, have things come at you from left field that maybe spark new ideas. I think it's something that should be part of all of our daily lives, like education in a wider sense, if you like, so I'm always open to those sort of different stimuli, trying to find through, contacts with people, through new experiences, through things I observe, ways to think differently and that might be important in either, kind of, directly feeding into my daily work and what I'm writing about, or things to lodge at the back of the mind that you might then come back to at some future date to stimulate new ideas and approaches, whether it's in your work, or your life more generally. I certainly get great pleasure personally through art and all sorts of different forms, whether it's music, whether it's the visual arts, cinema, all sorts of areas where it just pulls you back, and absorbs you, and draws you in different ways, pulls you out of whatever you're thinking about to a wider range of issues, and challenges you to think of that differently.

**0:06:58 Hala:** Just curious, do you think people are born with creativity or is it something you have to work at?

**0:07:05 Andrew:** There's no doubt that some individuals with extraordinary talent do have it genetically, if you like, but I think all of us have creative aspects and, you know, you see that developed in different ways. If you look at some social media and the way people interact, and share images, and forge messages, if you like, in some ways creativity is becoming more and more democratic, now not everything would be judged equally in terms of quality, but I think a huge amount of creativity can be fostered in people. I also think on the receiving end, if you like being open to creativity, and to new ideas, and to wider stimuli, is something that should be and could be encouraged and trained in for people to pull back and absorb in different ideas and use that to spark the ways in which they interact and get enjoyment and develop ideas and their own lives.

**0:08:08 Eli:** So, ft.com currently has a paywall put in place to view their articles. Do you personally think that a paywall is the best method of monetisation for FT? And what do you think some of the methods other companies use such as advertising or sponsorships, what do you think of them?

**0:08:24 Andrew:** So, the historical way that most media have generated income in order to reinvest in their journalism is really twofold, it's either subscriptions or it's advertising. Over time, as you say, some have also expanded with wider sponsorship deals, or conferences and events and the FT has had experience of those full range of approaches. Over time our reliance on advertising has dropped sharply, and that's been both a strategic decision but also a response because the reality is, over the past few years, the big tech giant's Google, Facebook, and others, have essentially sucked out a lot of the potential for any media organisation to generate income for advertising because readers largely go through the aggregated sites, their news feeds, from the big social media companies, rather than going to the individual home pages of media organisations. So, it's actually becoming more and more difficult to generate income for advertising. I personally think that subscription is actually a more comfortable business relationship, in that there's less risk of conflict, if you like, with individual advertisers who might be trying to apply pressure that greater variability because of the influence of the big tech companies, as I said, in terms of drawing away revenue, and you feel there's a stronger alignment with your readers when they're paying for what you're delivering. Now not all media organisations, of course, can rely on subscriptions, I think the FT is in a quite lucky position because we obviously have a particular niche, we have specialist content that not all other media organisations can offer, which isn't therefore available at the same degree of quantity or quality online and for free, and our particular niche readers are ones that typically can afford to pay, so, it works well for us, it's been increasingly explored for other media groups like the New York Times, and The Wall Street Journal. It's rather more challenging, I think, for more general media organisations where there's a lot more free available information online from elsewhere, so I think we do need to find other business models, as I say advertising is a huge challenge for organisations, and what's perhaps slightly concerning is that you're seeing increasingly, you know, covert influence essentially, for example, in a lot of digital marketing, where the boundaries between high quality independent journalism are blurred with individual influencers and so on who are more or less explicitly connected to certain commercial interests and products that they might be promoting. We would be, of course, completely the opposite end of the spectrum from that, and quite nervous of it. I do think there's potential from events and from conferences and things like that, and I think there's a growing appetite for live events but um to create those at scale, in a way that can compensate for the reduction of revenues from advertising and other sources of income, is a huge challenge. So, it's an important area but it's far from enough to compensate, I think, for the huge hit that traditional media organisations have suffered over the past decade or two from the fall in advertising.

**0:11:55 Host:** Subscribe to this podcast hear A Little Bit of Genius in our next episode where we're discussing why music education matters with Dr Joseph Polisi, the longest-serving president of the world-famous Juilliard School, “If you were a weight lifter, and you kept lifting weights until you couldn't feel your arms anymore, somebody would tell you right off the bat you're doing this wrong, but that happens to an awful lot in music. People think well if I put in three hours it'll be good, if I put in six hours it'll be better, by putting in nine hours that'll be the best, well that's not the case”.

**0:12:30 Eli:** Something I've personally seen become more prevalent in online news articles is the use of interactive forms of data visualisation. So, for instance, I saw an article about size of men and women's pockets and it was incredibly insightful and it had mountains of data, it had a very, very interactive way of presenting the data and I was very impressed by the way that it was done. So, I would like to ask, do you feel that news being presented digitally presents more opportunities for creative journalism, and do you feel that these opportunities are currently underutilised?

**0:13:02 Andrew:** You know, I think there's been a huge growth in the interest in data, both in crunching numbers, and then visualising them in different ways, whether it's kind of you know statically through, images, or whether as you say, it's through trying to develop interactivity, in some form, with the reader so that they can then take the base that you provided and manipulate it or rearrange it as they like. The FT has more than 20 journalists in a sort of data and visualisation team so we're, more than ever, like many other organisations, exploring this, and it is it is very powerful I think, you know, many people do draw a lot of value from seeing things in a visual way, you know. Different people taking information differently, but there's no doubt for me that that's an incredibly important and growing area, and a role for journalism to explore still further in the future.

**0:13:59 Hala:** Absolutely. Can you tell us about Financial Times for schools, which is aimed at 16 to 19 year olds?

**0:14:07 Andrew:** So, as you said earlier, of course, the FT typically has a paywall to help invest in our journalism, but we started thinking a couple of years ago, partly under the influence of a couple of students in schools, that it would be great to offer all our content for free to this next generation. So, as you say, particularly to 16 to 19 year olds in schools, high schools, to their teachers, and to schools around the world, anyone who has digital access and has enough access to the English language to make it a benefit. We're doing it because we certainly think we're delivering very high-quality journalism, whether it's news, or analysis, or opinion and indeed data and videos, and all sorts of other content that's being used daily by decision-makers around the world. Therefore, to be able to share that with a younger generation I think is incredibly important. So, again, that just pulls them back from whatever they might normally be reading, or absorbing, to give them a different perspective. I think if you look at, whether it's for classroom discussions, preparation for exams, everyone trying to select students and identify talent is looking for those who can apply wider lessons, concrete examples from the real world, fresh ideas, and so, I think those who are willing and open to reading our case materials from the FT can provide a lot of those additional insights that flesh out the theory that you learn in the classroom, that provide practical examples for projects, or wider work. So, all of that I think makes it really valuable for us to provide that insight. First and foremost, we're simply providing, we're opening the box, if you like, to the full range of FT content. In addition, we're developing a series of initiatives specifically for schools, including a number of writing competitions that give insights from this generation to our existing older readers who are keen to gain insights and understand more about the passions and the interests and the suggestions of the coming generations, so it's a mutual benefit I think, and as a result we've had strong growth over the past couple of years. We now have many, many hundreds of schools around the world that are regularly reading the FT and we encourage any who aren’t to sign up, and those who are to engage with our content, not only to read it but to use it, and to interact with it, whether to write letters, comments to come back to us with their insights, and reflections, and opinions, and reactions to all that we're delivering.

**0:16:49 Eli:** It sounds like an incredibly ambitious programme and it's really great to see that FT is aiming to provide for students that are looking to learn both, maybe through English skills, or in having a greater global awareness in the world that they live in. So, Andrew, thank you so much for sharing your thoughts as a guest. It's been really, really great to speak with you, unfortunately, that's all the time we have for this episode.

**0:17:11 Andrew:** Thank you very much indeed, it's been a great pleasure really good questions, and I think your focus on creativity and for the wider reading and the engagement with journalism is really important, so I wish you all well.

**0:17:25 Eli:** Thank you. Before we sign off, thanks to everyone for listening. We hope you've enjoyed this episode if you want a little bit more genius, subscribe to this podcast. If anyone listening would like to learn more about the Financial Times for schools, you can visit them online at ft.com/ft–secondary-schools.

**0:17:43 Hala:** Through FT for schools, students aged 16 to 19, and their teachers, can receive free access to the FT, and there are articles with suggested questions and classroom discussion points. Or you can email schools@ft.com for more info. This podcast is brought to you by Nord Anglia Education students, if you want to learn more about Nord Anglia Education you can visit us online at nordangliaeducation.com. We’ll be back again soon so thanks again for listening, and have a great day, goodbye.