

# Episode two, November 2021, transcript

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Music – Success by Marble Sound (Adobe Stock)

Interviewer (INT): Kate Stephenson

Respondent (RES): Christopher Cook

INT: Hello and welcome to another Physical Activity and Well-being in Education podcast episode with me Kate Stephenson Education Advisor and Physical Education Specialist in County Durham UK, we continue our PE, School Sport and Physical Activity and Well-being dialogue with you today with another one of our delightful guests.

INT: **So good morning listeners, so delighted to have Mr Christopher Cook with us this morning. Chris swam for Great Britain in the Olympics World Championship, European Championship and competed for England in the Commonwealth Games, pretty awesome CV Chris. Double Commonwealth Championship I hope I get this right, British Record Holder, Commonwealth Record Holder, World Medallist, European Medallist, Olympics finalist.**

RES: Wow you're doing well.

INT: **I am. According to Wikipedia, the source of all fountains of knowledge, you specialise in the breaststroke, Chris, and let's not forget 2006 BBC North East Sports Personality of the Year. So listeners that gives you a little insight, especially the last one there, about the fabulous Chris. We are so delighted to work with him an awful lot in County Durham, and I know Chris that you present to a large audience, sharing your experiences and learnings from performing at that top level: Can you talk me through some of the highlights? The 2008 Olympics for instance, and your Commonwealth gold medals in particular? I guess.**

RES: Yes, so it sounds crazy when you were talking there. You know it doesn't, it feels like someone else's story you know, sometimes when I hear it played back, when I get introduced on to a stage I think, oh my God, is it my turn is that me? Am I getting introduced? It's crazy.

**INT: I know, I forgot to press the button that brought in the applause and the fanfare.**

RES: I am disappointed like. But yes, it does seem like a little bit of a whirlwind if I'm honest, you know and from the inside it's really, really, how do I put it? It's really mundane and boring it's, I don't want to downplay it, but it's true. You spend a long vast amount of your time staring at a black line on the bottom of a pool or you're in a gym, throwing yourself about and then you go and get some food, then you're back again a couple of hours later and you do that every day, a couple times a day. So yes when I look back, I think the achievements are for when you finish, not for when you're doing it. I think the achievements are like, I have so much pride now looking back and I go, "Oh my God, that was me. I did that I'm only a little lad from Shields you know." There's nothing, nothing exceptional about us, and that's kind of my message when I go out there, you know, standing on the podium at the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne 2006, was kind of, I suppose a defining moment for me: it was a moment when all the work come together and yes, there was a big double thumbs up at the end of it because there was so many times when it wasn't. There were so many championships where you didn't hit the headlines, or if you did hit the headlines it was for a disappointing reason, and that's hard, because nobody goes into a competition wanting to lose or not give their best. So yeah, finishing at the Olympics in 2008, I retired or expired as I always say, because I got to the grand age of 30 which is quite old in swimming I guess, and my last race was the Olympics final alongside Michael Phelps, when he picked up his eighth gold medal and I haven't raced again since and I want to tell my grandkids eventually, later down the line, you know, when I do have them, you know, I want to say, you know, "My last race was an Olympic final and if you want to do something just get out there and do it regardless of what people say."

**INT: That's wonderful and you talk an awful lot about that commitment to that journey along the way, and how to instil the motivation behind that. I know you've worked with children and young people in County Durham and elsewhere in the country, around The Inspire Project in County Durham and then you've been working with Team GB as well on another inspirational aspect, to build those characteristics and personality. Would you like to talk a little bit about that Chris?**

RES: Yes, definitely. So, when I retired in 2009, pretty much straight after Beijing Olympics. I spent a couple of months kind of just training and seeing what I wanted to do. But I pretty much knew that I didn't want to go for another 4 year cycle and I didn't know what to do with my

life Kate I honestly did not know what to do and it was a bit, how can I put it? It was very, very stressful, very weird, almost out of body experience and no one was really talking about how athletes retire or anything like that or need support. So what I was going through I just, I hid away from everyone and I probably dismantled a lot of friendships and relationships on course of the journey that I went on. But, I remember, I started just going into some primary schools and secondary schools, sharing my story didn't know what to do, what to say, but watching the reaction of youngsters and teachers, I was thinking, oh that went down well, or, that didn't go down that well I'll take that out, and before I knew it I started to gain a bit of a reputation. Got this phone call one night, about three years into retirement, got this phone call one night from this guy, and he called me up, and it was about 8:50 at night, and he said, "What are you doing tomorrow? I need a speaker, your my desperation call." it wasn't the greatest start to a conversation and I said, "Well, I'm not doing anything, it's a day off tomorrow, but I'm quite willing to work." and so we started to chat about some of the detail and I was packing the car as I was talking to him because I knew I'd have to kind of, get ready for the next day. I said, "Just out of interest, where are you?" he said, "Kent." I was like, "Oh my goodness.", I was up in Wallsend at the time, that's where I was living, so I was like, "Right, you are going to have to sort me out hotel for tonight" and I got there at 2:00 o'clock in the morning and ended up getting up at 8:00 o'clock next day and I did a job for him across all these primary schools come together for this for this sport festival, but they've been let down by a big name in sport. I don't know who to this day let them down, still desperate to find out, and he ended up filling my diary as a thank you, for three weeks in Kent. It was only supposed to be three weeks and due to demand from the schools and the teachers, it end up being seven years, and I went down every week. That was the programme that we called Inspire off the back of the Olympics in London, and I was desperate to bring it back and I brought it back to the North East and we ran it in Durham. It was such a good project, and it ran for such a long time and I just loved it. I loved trotting around schools, working with young people, hopefully inspiring them to think, well, if he can do it I can do it. That was my message, and that's morphed and changed, yes.

**INT: Yes, and it's wonderful, isn't it, because actually, it's about the journey isn't it?**

RES: Yes.

**INT: It's about having those role models, and you do you come across so well when you are talking to youngsters, Chris, and you've got two of your own is that right?**

RES: Yes, a little boy and a little girl yes. So seven and ten, so they are still very young and you know, they're desperate for their dreams and goals and whatever they are, they can chase them and sport or non sport.

**INT: Absolutely, absolutely, and it's about that isn't it? Because, you don't just talk about swimming or your career pathway within swimming, it's about all sport and it's about all learning as well; building those characteristics and the personality traits that allow you to thrive in whatever you choose to do, but having those options as well. I was talking to you before we started recording Chris, about me sitting on a beach in Northumberland -what a link to listeners, but really getting to think about swimming in particular, and obviously on the back of that being delighted that you could join us today and I was thinking about, you know, the learning journey for swimming. It's so crucial and it's a very difficult physical capability to achieve, and I know you're involved in swim teaching, with your swim buddies and do you want to talk to me about how that makes you feel when you see that progress of youngsters learning to swim from that very first splash your face or blow bubbles?**

RES: It's amazing, me and my wife Erica, we run our learn to swim business called Swim Buddies in Darlington and we've got what, pre Covid we had nearly 1000 children. Obviously Covid's put restrictions on that, but we are coming back and we will get back there. But yes, we started it nearly eight years ago now, and it was just off the back of a conversation of, you know, "What would you love to do?". I wanted to put something back into sport, and some of my best times were when I was learning to swim in Temple Park leisure centre in South Shields and my teacher Linda Woodhouse, I remember her really well, just making it really fun and really engaging and I wanted that for children. I wanted children to find the fun in working hard as well, because hard work is the reward you know, we tend to veer away from that with children and just play play play, but it isn't always about play, you know. It's about finding the joy in working hard and really looking back and going, "I did that." and that sense of pride, and I feel like we've got that in the business. So, I get in the business and teach myself as well so I get in and I teach the little ones and I just love it. There's nothing better Kate, than watching a four-five year old coming in kicking and screaming because they don't want to go swimming and then leaving in three, four or five years time, just swimming like a fish and just enjoying it and going on to pastures new. But, it is so important as a fundamental that we teach swimming. You know school swimming is a little bit hit and miss, because it's one of those activities, I suppose like many, but swimming in particular is, you're not going to learn it overnight. You know you can't just cram all of your sessions into a week long lesson. It takes time, we are all

in this mad rush now in society; you know, everything from ordering parcels, you know, if you don't get it within 24 hours, you're disappointed, it's crazy. You're like, where's my parcel, or if your text message doesn't send within seconds your slamming your phone, you're like, what's wrong with this? Well, it's kind of got to go up to space to a satellite and back down it's doing a pretty big job. You know, we are in this crazy rush and time has been warped now but with activities such as swimming we have to accept that we need to tun up, show up and repeat, repeat, repeat until we get it and with that comes this sense of reward like no other. You can't just buy your way through it, you can't pay your way through it, you've got to put it down in hard work, effort and commitment and that's the bit that I love about sport is: we can take as many shortcuts as we want, but there's nothing better than just taking that journey yourself, and learning to go with the ups and the downs and I say this to parents all the time. You know they constantly come at you saying, "My son's not progressing." I'm like, "Good." and I just leave that, "But my son is not progressing.", "Good, let them work it out, stop rescuing them, let them work it out and they will, they will learn that lesson right there and then," and it's amazing and they have more fun when they do that and you almost leave them to trip over the answers themselves. It's amazing.

**[00:11:57]**

**INT: It's so crucial, isn't it that's a really good point about it taking time and not rushing the process, and I think you know, as many of the listeners will be teachers in particular, that's something that you know, they probably need to also hear; because the pressures of school life and pressures put on teaching staff and youngsters is immense. That swimming provision in school in particular, which you know, the three aims of the national curriculum swimming programme it is a levelling up, really. It's about all children across the nation having that minimum amount of swimming, and yet we don't always have it as such a high profile in our school provision as we should, or it's that tiny little blasted amount that is provided, which isn't sufficient, and it doesn't have that timescale to allow them to make progress in the smaller way that builds and builds.**

**RES: It's so true, and there's a big difference, you know, and my coach was big on this when I was younger he said, "You know, we're not just building a skill we're building a habit." and a habit doesn't happen over two or three weeks. A habit happens over months and years, and actually, that habit of me turning up and doing physical activities is still with me, now. I'm 42 and I still wake up, going, right, where am I going to put in my fitness today? Because that's**

really important, even if I am hitting the road for a few hours in the car, I prioritise fitness. Why? Because when I was seven, eight, nine, ten and beyond, I was building that habit, it wasn't just about the skill.

**INT: Yes, that's a good point about physical activity as well, Chris. So in County Durham we have the active 30 Durham campaign, built around the Chief Medical Officer's recommendations for that 30 to 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity. 30 within school, the other 30 at home, so we are aiming for 60 minutes daily and sometimes that shocks people. You know, they're like, "How can I put an hour in?" and it's not necessarily one hour on the treadmill. It's about those accumulative minutes and hours that build, so that you're less sedentary and it becomes a life building habit like you've said. It's embedded in your everyday, so that we sit less and we move more. But I think you know, with the busyness of modern everyday living as adults, we sometimes need reminding that actually, probably need to turn the computer off for a moment, take a quick walk and get into those healthy habits and swimming in particular, is so important, about you know that life skill that lifesaving skill. I did write down and I think I talked about in my last podcast that you know, because of Covid, you've felt the effects with your business, but it was something like 8 million lessons and leisure services were cancelled because of Covid, and I'm thinking, you know that figure doesn't necessarily always include the swimming provision, which completely stopped at a certain point, and for some children, the swimming in school is the only access they have, so that's an awful lot of Covid, Generation C they keep calling it don't they, coming through with poor chances within learn to swim programmes and opportunities. So we're going to see a little bit of a knock on effect of that, and we need to raise its profile of importance. So talk to me a little bit about drown prevention, and the, is it #respectthewater campaign?**

**RES: Yes, I love it and you know, I feel really lucky because I get involved in quite a few projects and programmes, and this one's a really important one. It comes up every year, every summer holidays there's always that kind of lead up into the summer holidays to respect the water, think about your actions, that sort thing and it's generally aimed at young people, sort of secondary school-ish. You know, I think the most important part of all this is, you know, during Covid we've all been locked away from the things we love, we spent all last summer not knowing what the heck was going on and this summer we've come in with a little bit more of an insight, but I think people have almost been let loose and with that the drownings is clearly going to go up which is just, it's heart breaking to think about it. So I think there's a couple of things for me: one, is that foundation of learning to swim is really important, but also that**

wider awareness, just because you can swim doesn't mean to say that you can just step into a river, a beck a weir, you know, they are very, very different environments from learning to swim in a nice 25 metre, 29 degree, fluffy towels at the end of your lane, all that to jumping in a river where you don't know what's underneath, you don't know how fast it's flowing and also the temperature as well, there's so many differences. I noticed this when I finished swimming, I decided to go and do some open water swimming with a wet suit on and all of that and I noticed a huge difference: there's a massive adjustment that I had to make even just to my breathing, the way I placed my head, yeah, and everything and the temperature. So it's just so important that every year we keep this campaign going, we make it a kind of in the faces of people and in their ears just purely and simply because I don't want unnecessary lives to be lost. It's just, it is unnecessary and it's heart breaking. Every summer this happens, every summer.

**INT: I wrote down here: 254 people died from accidental drowning in 2020. Chris, so you know what that figure is going to be you know, in the 2021. We already know of some fatalities from this summer, but yes, it needs to be you know, really targeted in those summer months, but also cumulative, you know, I think it should be conversation throughout an academic year, in schools.**

RES: 100 percent.

**INT: Making sure we target right from reception age about water safety all the way through year six and beyond in the secondary and targeting the audience, not just the one off assembly, perhaps. We need those because you know, we need it constantly in the mind, my niece and nephew in the last podcasts sang a song-**

RES: Did they?

**INT: I don't know where they learnt it from, but I was I was talking to them about water safety and they had this gorgeous song so I coerced them into singing on the podcast.**

RES: Well done.

**INT: But their swimming journey, you know they're really keen, they have their swimming lessons and they love it. We do an awful lot of water based activity in the sea up in**

Northumberland, so they're on little kayaks, they're on paddle boards and things now with myself and their grandad and their daddy and mummy, and you know, I've notice each summer they get better and more confident in the water and where we go is perfect: it's very shallow, but there are still riptides and all of that, that we have to be aware of. So as adults we have to constantly supervise, but you talk there, a little bit about that difference in swimming in the swimming pool to swimming in the sea or whatever, and it is huge. You know, they've got their wet suits on, gives a little bit of buoyancy, but you know we're swimming in things that are not even past their navel really. But, I'm still trying to get them to take their feet off the sand and tread water and feel what it's like to float and really be water confident, they don't like the salty water in their eyes, but, jumping off the board into the water to feel what it's like to submerge, but to then float and how to build that skill so if they ever were in difficulty, maybe something is[s/I still there 00:20:05]. We forget that, don't we?

[00:20:07]

RES: We do.

INT: **When children are running into the sea or into rivers or adults as well, because it's hot and it's the summer and we think that's what we should do, and we're not always safe.**

RES: It's true, it's true and it's so important. I think that there was a time when I was out in Australia, obviously during my swimming I went to Australia a lot, which is awesome, but going backwards and forwards I would often try different types of training programmes and I went out there one summer of their summer, which is our winter and we did a little bit of beach training, which is great on the beach it early morning and the lifeguard had said, "Just keep yourself to the left hand side between the flags." and this group of us, we were like, "You know we're Olympic swimmers thank you very much." You know, the ego was truly on and I will never forget, we swam out to this buoy and back and on my way back in it felt like I was on a treadmill and I couldn't get any further past the second set of waves, and I was coming back and it start to freak me out a little bit, and I managed to get beyond the waves and as I was coming out the water -I was the last one out, this wave hit us and took us under and took me back to the original spot, and you know it was at that moment that I realised that I didn't respect the water and it just showed me a lesson and I was petrified, genuinely petrified, to go back in because that feeling, that power, the sheer power and the force it felt on my body,

there was no way as strong as I was in the water, that I could fight that force. It's that difference is what we're really talking about. That's the difference we are talking about, that force of nature, whether it be the temperature where the power whether it be just the magnitude, that's what we're talking about. There is a big, big difference between learning to swim and staying safe in outdoor swimming.

**INT: Absolutely, absolutely, that's a really good message. So you heard it here everybody, Olympic swimmer Chris, struggling in the sea and that's a really strong message isn't it, about the force of nature, thanks so much for saying that. Yes, so apart from the doom, gloom and thing about risk prevention, swimming also builds capabilities and broadens exposure and experience to other things, doesn't it? As well as that skill set, that we want to build with children, such as when you're working on your Inspire project. Can you talk to me about any particular successes maybe, with your youngsters? Either in the water or dry land around some of those projects that you've done in your conversation with children and how they feel about their learning journeys?**

RES: Yes, definitely. I remember there was one in particular I'm really proud of, down in Kent and I'd got the chance to work with a cluster of, I call them education establishments, so they are PRU's, people referral units. So generally speaking, most of these students they've either been kicked out of two or three schools, you know, society's kind of let them down a little bit, they've let themselves down if they're perfectly honest with you, when you get chatting with them they are really open about it, they will call themselves the bad lads and stuff like that. There's a group of boys in particular I was working with on this PRU, almost like a prison, if I'm honest with you it was like a secure unit down in Kent, and these boys they wouldn't handle any length of particular session. So 50 minute session you couldn't do you maybe do 20 minutes let them blow off a bit of steam then another 20 minutes and we kept going backwards and forwards doing these sessions and most of them are really, really disengaged Kate, like it was mayhem at times. There was one lad in particular, who was sat on the front and he just, there was a point at which, I think it was the third session in, he stopped clarting about, he stopped messing about and he asked a really profound question, and I was like, I think I've got him like on the inside, I was like, I think I've got one. I always look for one person in every audience, one person that I could just get my message across to. Anyway, throughout the course of the day he would come and sit next to us during lunch, and I thought, there's another signal, I've got him here and I was getting in his ear a little bit, just mentoring him as we go because that's where you get the real breakthroughs in the break time, in the lunchtime

walking down the corridors, you get some amazing breakthroughs there. This boy in particular turned his life around in the space of four or five years. He kept in touch through his key worker, he went and got his Gas Safe Certificate, became British Gas I think or he worked for a big gas firm and became a boiler installer and just took his career off in a completely different direction from a guy who would, by his own admission, create havoc in his community: his thing was climbing cranes, the highest crane in the dock and be climbing along it and put a flag there. They used to have a competition to do that between the boys in this secure unit when they got out and they would brag about it, they'd put it on social media, it was crazy and he just ditched it all. He just ditched it all, and he sent, they sent me a photograph through of him with his little girl and his partner, eventually went on obviously to have a family and just that for me was real success. It wasn't about someone standing on a podium, it wasn't about someone even joining a swimming club or anything like that, I wasn't there for that. I was there to just help someone have a glimpse of a life that could have if they wanted it, and it was that third session in, whatever we said, whatever was done, it just clicked with him, it just clicked. It's those stories amongst the thousands, it just it makes me feel amazing that it was that moment, I feel privileged to be that person and whether he attunes it to that or not, for me, there was something in that moment that I was meant to be there and he was meant to listen and hear it.

**INT: Ahh, that's lovely. Thanks so much for sharing, and Chris, you know things like that are a bit of a snowball effect: so you know those values that he's put into play, will you know, go into his parenting. So his children are on a different course now than perhaps They may have been or they may not have existed, you know, because his pathway has changed completely and to be part of that process, and that's just one example. You know, there'll be so many that you have supported through these sort of programmes and that's a really great example. So thinking now, I've got you sat in front of me, and I know when I dropped you a message to entice you into this podcast, I didn't arm wrestle you to do it or pull too many strings, but you were pretty busy at the time and I remember thinking, why I have I just sent that message, what was I thinking? It's the middle of the Olympics, Tokyo 2020 is in full play, of course Chris is going to be involved, so share with me Chris, what it's like to be back with Team GB doing what you were doing and some of the successes that we've achieved.**

**RES:** Oh yes, so I feel really lucky: I applied for a programme called The Ambition Programme which the BOA, the British Olympic Association run, and it's Team GB's kind of flagship mentoring programme if you like. So, what they generally do is, less than a few years ago, less than 8%

of Olympians, first time Olympians, medal. So the stats tell you that 92% of first time Olympians take an Olympics to get into an Olympics. So it's in their second Olympics where they will feel their success comes. So what Team GB did, was or the BOA did was they thought well, could we take them to experience all the stuff that they're going to get to do but not compete? So they get a kind of flavour about what the games are about it is very different, it is a very different environment. It's like a huge global festival in a city, and then you've got a perform and focus, and there's so many distractions going on and so that's what they did. So, over the years they'll take them to the previous games, so they will identify athletes who potentially could go to Paris and then take them to Tokyo. So they would identify them for real, but take them to London four years beforehand. So in London, I was really lucky to be involved in the ambition programme, and it was very much a take them round the venues, show them what it's like, make observations, have a mentor and chat about it and coach them, that sort of thing. Now, when we came in to go to Tokyo, I was one of three that was chosen alongside Hannah England, who is a track athlete, Lizzie Simmonds, who was a swimmer as well so I shared the team with Lizzie, and we pulled together a programme that would show the young athletes around Tokyo, but unfortunately when Covid hit, that was the first thing that got cancelled because it's kind of non-essential, they weren't competing. So we were devastated, we'd planned for a year for it, it got cut short and we thought, do you know what? There's no reason why we can't just make this a virtual one. So we planned to make it virtual but as Covid started to release a little bit more and we are coming out a bit, we got the chance to bring everyone together, so we took them down to the London venues and we just did stayed in the UK and we created a kind of learning programme as opposed to kind of a recce programme, go out and have a look at it and it's just been, honestly, amazing Kate. Like, just watching these athletes who are fantastic at what they do, just gobble up all of the information we were giving them and watching them chat amongst each other, sharing amongst sports that they never get the chance to: you know, equestrian talking to track athletes, it was like they would never, ever get the chance to meet or cross paths and it's just set them on -for me, it's set them on this course for, this is here for you, if you want it come and get it. There were athletes there and we've got to understand there's athletes there who were nearly going to make Tokyo, and they didn't. So, for us it might have been a bit of a disappointment for them to turn up to this, cause it was kind of second best; they walked away like, "Listen, I came in disappointed but I'm leaving just with my heart filled with so much inspiration, I can't wait to get back to training." and that for me was just, job done. It was amazing.

**[00:30:52]**

**INT: Wow and have we got anyone in particular we need to be looking out for, for Paris?**

RES: There are so many, there are so many. So I mean when you consider that into 2012 Lizzie Arnold, the bob skeleton she came on the 2012 programme as a winter athlete, but on a summer programme and a couple of years later became Olympic champion. You know, she went from zero to hero overnight and she [s/l attunes 00:31:19] a lot of it to that Ambition programme. She said, you know, "That was the thing that opened my eyes, that set me on the course." and it's just that little bit of extra something that is not quite involved in everyday training, that just lifts your head up and makes you look at the horizon

**INT: Yes.**

RES: I feel so lucky and privileged to be involved in it, so many athletes went for that post and I was very fortunate.

**INT: Yes, so amazing. That's a real good insight into how it works and the success of that then, so I presume that's something that they want to continue, the Inspire project?**

RES: Hopefully, yes.

**INT: It's a great model isn't it?**

RES: Yes.

**INT: I'm just thinking about like you say, you know, once you're competing, you've got all those additional pressures to cope with-**

RES: Yes.

**INT: And the whole festival atmosphere, but wow, amazing. So would you say that, you know what has it been like for you, now that, not retired, but you know you're not competing in that way: but what skills have you taken from The Olympics, from the Commonwealth and what have you, that have allowed you to do your new pathway? So you know, speaking like this or you know, I mean, did you have to talk to reporters and journalists and things when**

**you were competing Chris, and you'll have been rather young at the time? Because like me you are really young, still. I think you're actually slightly younger than me, but we'll not tell the audience too loudly that. But so yeah, you know, how did they support you to prepare for that? Because some athletes struggle with that aspect then yeah, I think it's requested or it's something that they have to do, is that right?**

RES: Yes, you get media training, but it's very much at the time. It was very kind of static, you know? It's very much like, "Don't do this, don't do that." you know, if you get asked this question, you don't have to answer it. I think the world changed a lot since I was swimming. You know, social media has facilitated that a lot and I think people will not accept now, the general public will not accept now, just athletes being a robot; they want to know who's behind the performance, that it. Social media is a great opportunity for to do that, but it also can be a bit of a trap: you know, the amount of athletes who say the wrong thing, do the wrong thing, or they've said something 10 years ago and it gets dragged up as soon as they become a hero. They've got to be really, really careful about how they do that. But yeah, there's loads of skills that I have brought across from swimming, loads of skills I had to ditch, because it's very insular, I was very, yeah you are very cocooned in the sport; You only see the sport, you only do the sport. So since coming out, I've got to be honest with you, I'm having more fun now than I ever have done, and I feel like every year that goes on is another level that I kind of peel back, of enjoyment: I feel like I'm just finding my groove, I feel more comfortable in my skin than I've ever felt, and I can't quite 100% put my finger on where that's coming from. I think a lot of it's do with just age and just not caring about what people think anymore-

**INT: Maturity.**

RES: Yes, I think so. I think I'm finally maturing which is nice, but I think you know, I read a book ages ago called, What got me here won't get me there: and it's all about using the skills that have got you to where you are, but understanding that that knew level is going to bring new devils. You know, if you move from being, I don't know, teacher to deputy head there's a big shift there, how people treat you, how you treat yourself, how you grow in that environment and we've got to get used to that step up; somethings you lose somethings you gain. That's life and moving out of swimming taught me that, that was big, big lesson in I suppose, you work out what you going to take forward work out what you need to take and then just enjoy growing your skills. I think the most important one was, being willing to start again. That was the thing that I need, that was my biggest challenge, I wasn't willing to start again. I wanted

to be successful, I wanted, that was my ego talking. That was, you know, I can't fail, of course you can, I made a career out of going from one failure to the next until I got success and it was letting go of that, and just almost being childlike again; I'm just experimenting, I'm just going out there and trying something new, it's okay. What I found was, nobody else was keeping tabs on my failures like I thought they were, they weren't going, "Oh, there's another failure for Chris, there's another one." they just weren't, they were too busy invested in their own.

**INT: Yes, and that's a great message as well, you know, because our youngsters struggle, don't they? Sometimes, with coping with failure or the pressures of life or succeeding, and we often put pressure on, you know, winning the medals or gaining the result, when we're thinking about PE and school sport and it's about the journey and it's about that value added progress and every little is something. Same with swimming you know, and I talked briefly, I think, in the last podcast about the fact that actually small gains are huge. So for some children, in the swimming for instance, it's getting on the bus to go because they're so anxious about it all, that's one small step, and then the next week, actually we will take our swimming kit with us and the next step, we might actually change into it and maybe put our toe in the water. But it's all about those little steps up, build up over time.**

RES: You're right there, right there, you know I coach and speak on a lot of stages, but I coach one to one online and the one thing I always get my clients do is stop focusing on the outcome and start focusing on the process. Because, when we start focusing on the process, that's when we can influence and affect the outcome. When we are constantly looking at the outcome, we miss the chance to focus on the process and it sounds so simple because it is. But it's not easy and it's a big difference between simple and easy. But you're right, you know you work on the progress, you work on the process and the outcome invariably happens every time.

**INT: Yes, and overcoming those barriers if you like as well,**

RES: Yes.

**INT: You know, keeping a positive attitude about everything so, Covid has stopped school swimming, but what else can we do? Talk about drown prevention all of that, you know, it's now reopening in schools, et cetera. So what are our strategic steps to support, you know, which children are we going to target first and what are we going to do about it, and make**

**every little bit count, so important. Thanks so much Chris, you mentioned there about your mentoring and your coaching, I was in a CPD event with Sport England, and I've forgotten the name of the two presenters. But you were mentioned, or there was a picture or something, or a quote from you on one of the slides. Something like that, and I popped in the chat, "Oh we all know Chris Cook in County Durham, he's very well liked here." so I was like, I must tell him that you we're either on a picture or a quote and it was to do with coaching and mentoring and it was about the journey. I should have written it down so I could have shared it with you.**

RES: Oh, that's cool.

**INT: Yes, but yes, so tell me about how, you know, your motivational speaking has evolved now I guess, into this specific one to one coaching and mentoring?**

RES: Yes, so it's kind of organically happened you know, I would get down off stage and people in business would come over and go, "There's something here that I need to explore. Can I have a chat with you?" and before I knew it I was having these conversations one to one. I've obviously moved that all online now with Covid and it has worked in my favour, you know. I lost a lot of my face to face business last year and went eight months without any income, which was tricky, but then I was just willing to be agile and I moved online. I didn't want to, but now I see the massive benefit in it and started coaching people just one to one. In fact, after this podcast I've got a client call at 9:00 o'clock with someone, and I'll be chatting about just, all the stuff that kind of holds people back, it holds people in those old patterns that just don't, they don't serve us, and it's just, my job is to just ask enough questions and scratch the surface to just shine a torch and maybe a space that they haven't checked, a blind spot, or just check around them: is everything actually in full flow here or have we got the handbrake on with a foot on the accelerator at the same time, that weird mix? Often it's just that little subtle shift, or that one conversation that makes someone go, "I've seen what it is, I know what it is now I'm off." and they go and it just takes them in a completely different direction, that's the bit that I love, so I've kind of morphed it and changed it from the school work, and I'll be honest with you it's pretty much identical. It's identical, it's the same skills, but just a little bit older, and I always say, "Just a few more wrinkles, that's it." the conversation is pretty much the same, and it's very similar things which hold people back, impostor syndrome or as I call it impostor moments; it's not a syndrome. You know those moments when you think, couldn't possibly be me? Well, yes it can, don't let that be the hurdle and getting people to check their

internal voice, the rhetoric that's going on is it. Is it assisting you or is it pulling you back? Just put it into one of the two categories and often you'll find that it comes down to something very, very straight forward and simple but often not easy to fix.

**INT: Yes wow, that's great that. I mean, it's about a healthy mindset isn't it?**

RES: Yes.

**RES: Some of those skills there that you've talked about actually, you know, for our teachers with our youngsters, these are lesson elements and skills and knowledge that we want to develop with children, right from that young age as well, to have a healthy mindset and then use those skills into adulthood. Thanks so much, Chris, we've talked an awful lot about just about everything.**

RES: It's awesome, I've loved it.

**INT: Yes, it's great to catch up and I'm sure that I'll be dropping you a message and saying, "Oh let's do another one."**

RES: Yes, why not?

**INT: Yes, and there's so much to explore isn't there? Swimming and then beyond into everything, so much. So it'll be an interesting term for teachers coming back to school in September, is there anything you would like to say to, you know, your primary class teacher who is worried about the swimming provision in their school, you know; what could they say to their senior leaders in school to make swimming a real priority?**

RES: Oh, that's an interesting one. I think swimming is such a personal journey, you know, my coach used to say to me, "You can't get your mam to do your lengths for you." and it is so true, no one can do your homework for you in swimming; there's nowhere to hide, you have to turn up, you have to show up and you have to repeat. I think that's the main one to get across is, this is a personal journey and a bit like riding a bike: once you've got it under your belt, you got it forever it's a skill, it's an investment. It's an investment in their future, and I think there are so many things you could be learning whilst we're going through that swimming journey about resilience, about coming back and returning again, that it's always got to come back to,

the conversation has to come back to, what is that personal journey? What is happening in that personal journey? Because, we all enter into a slightly different level, we are all the different stages, but we can all exit swimming at pretty much the same standard; it's universal, it can happen. Even children with disabilities, in fact more so because it's a bit of a leveller, swimming, and it can help those children, just have that spatial awareness that body awareness, and again go on that personal journey of failure, success, failure and just repeating it. So for me, it would be having that conversation with the head teacher to say, "Listen, this is a personal journey, how can we make it part of their education diet? "

**INT: Yes, wonderful, and with that, that's a fab message. I'm going to end it there. Mr Chris Cook, thank you so much for joining us this morning.**

RES: Thank you.

**INT: I'm pressing the round of applause button now. Many thanks, we shall see you soon. Thanks for listening, everybody.**

**[Audio ends: 00:44:21]**