**JULIE MOON transcript S1 Ep 2 .mp3**

**Speaker 1 is jane** [00:00:10] Hi, and welcome to Talking Teachers. I'm Jane Hunter. This is an Australian Education podcast series wherein each episode will be exploring what is working and what isn't in our schools. We'll be talking to some of the most informed people in the field and asking questions about the big issues in education. We also want to investigate if it's at all possible to find new solutions to the current challenges in school based education. I'm co-hosting the series with my colleague Don Carter, and we're both teacher education academics at Newt's.

**Speaker 2 is Don** [00:00:54] This podcast is about talking teachers and talking to teachers, and it wouldn't make sense if we didn't invite a teacher to interview. And I'm really pleased to say that we've got a teacher today. What do you think, Jane? Are you excited?

**Speaker 1** [00:01:08] I'm very excited. This whole series is exciting and getting to talk to teachers, we have to do that. And too often in education, people pontificate about schools and teachers and principals. And guess what? They may have seen a school or they may have children at school, but they've never actually held their own class. It's wonderful to have somebody like Julie Moon here today who is a teacher. And we're going to hear more about her in a moment.

**Speaker 2** [00:01:40] Yeah. Thanks, Jane. And welcome, Julie. It's really great to have you here.

**Speaker 3 is Julie** [00:01:44] Thank you very much.

**Speaker 2** [00:01:45] Julie has taught as a primary teacher in Wagga Wagga and various primary schools in southern Sydney, including schools which cater for students with special needs. And Julie, you've also toured in Papua New Guinea. You work for the New South Wales Teachers Federation and I bet you that you got plenty of good insights from that, which we'll discuss to a degree. Is it correct that you retired this year or you're about to retire?

**Speaker 3** [00:02:10] I retired from full time union work on the 27th of January and then picked up a temporary engagement under the COVID intensive funding scheme for this year at a high school in southern Sydney.

**Speaker 2** [00:02:22] Fantastic. What do you think? Showing that some Vegemite?

**Speaker 1** [00:02:25] Indeed it is. Look, it's extraordinary when you look behind so many teachers and the work that they have done across their 20, 30, 40 year career. And I'm just wondering, you know, do teachers and principals ever actually retire?

**Speaker 3** [00:02:40] Once you're a teacher, always a teacher. And I think that's anyone who leaves the profession will always say, I'm a teacher, but or I'm a teacher. But now it is one of those things that is a calling, I believe, a passion. It's not just a job. And that's why I become very distressed when I see the way that teachers are portrayed in the press and by the current government. The application and enthusiasm for learning with students has not diminished. It's the circumstances under which those teachers are working that has created issues.

**Speaker 2** [00:03:20] Julie If you think back across your teaching career, what would you say is your greatest achievement?

**Speaker 3** [00:03:28] Mentoring young teachers. I've always believed that if we're not supporting teachers when they first come into the profession, they're not going to stay. I was really fortunate in my first years of teaching to have fantastic principals who were educational leaders in the schools that I was in, and they encouraged me to just learn my craft. In those first years, it was all about classroom practice. You program how you differentiated, which wasn't a big word then, but I was very fortunate with the principals that I had to say, Look at the kids in your class and how you can best help them. Then I wanted to be able to impart to young teachers as I was in the situation where I was experienced and I felt comfortable in my classroom practice and my programing and differentiation and supporting students with particular needs. I wanted to be able to support those students straight out of uni who were then in classroom practice but were under the auspices of local schools, local decisions where our educational leaders then became workplace managers. And that's been a big shift where there hasn't been the opportunity for those new teachers as beginning teachers to be supported by their assistant principal or their head teacher, because there's so many other things going on in the school and the requirements are so great.

**Speaker 1** [00:04:46] I'm just wondering, listening to what you're saying there. Julie, mentoring, that's extraordinary. And it's extraordinary in the way that you have just articulated and gone about that. Do you think that reduced teaching load should be part of that? Because it strikes me that when you go into a school and when our graduate teachers, staff, they've often faced with a full load right from the moment they start their career.

**Speaker 3** [00:05:17] Well, if the schools are using their beginning teacher funding, as they should, every beginning teacher in their first year, whether they're temporary or permanent, has a reduced teaching load of 2 hours and they should have a mentor for one hour per week in their first year. That's in the award. That's part of what what should be happening under the funding that the government has. That's tended to slip aside one, because there is no real oversight by the directors, educational leader leaders in the areas whether that is and I'm talking public schools here. That that's actually being implemented. And the other is because we have this massive teacher shortage. There is not the teacher teachers available to take on those extra load that the teacher the beginning teachers are having reduced. While it's there, it's written down, it's on paper. It doesn't actually happen. And that's a problem.

**Speaker 1** [00:06:17] Yeah. Look, and also, I mean, you mentioned the teacher shortage and that's something that, you know, I guess has prompted us to think about news solutions in this podcast series. What do you think are the real challenges at the moment?

**Speaker 3** [00:06:35] Work like pure and simple. The box ticking compliance that is implemented in schools that would make your head spin. Putting data in for data sake with no feedback from the department, no real feedback from the department as to how the school is actually performing is a problem for me. Data collection is every time you walk into the class and you look around at your kids and you can see the isolates sitting in the corner or the child that is aggrieved or is under some sort of pressure. That's the sort of data. And when I'm working with kids one on one, I'm continually collecting data that then directs my teaching, but sitting down and doing a checking assessment and then having to put that on plan to or whatever process you've got to go through, that creates a workload that's unnecessary. There is just not the time.

**Speaker 2** [00:07:29] Julie Just listening to you talk and and Jane and I, a former secondary school teachers, and we do a lot of visiting schools in our research as academics, teachers work really hard. You've just talked about how hard they work. Why do they get such bad press?

**Speaker 3** [00:07:47] Well, I think external testing has a lot to do with it. PISA seems to be the go to. I don't know that we can really be just looking at one set of statistics and then saying, Well, that has to cover everybody. If you look at the circumstances from, say, south western Sydney to Manly Warringah area, there's obviously going to be a disadvantage gap. Getting teachers into those areas is quite difficult. It is not just about the press but the way the data is gathered that is then presented. If we just looked at the press, all our schools would be failing. But we know that's not the case. We have kids getting great ideas and going into fantastic roles in university or going to Taif. I'm not sure why. I could be very political and say maybe the Murdoch press is looking to have all public schools turned into private schools and we could have the same situation as we have in England, where we are or in America, where we have charter schools or we have academies in England. Maybe that's the baseline that's being looked at. But I think it would be a shame if we kept integrating a great public schools.

**Speaker 1** [00:09:02] Yes, you paint an interesting picture and it's certainly something that's been highlighted in a number of recent publications. The whole notion of what constitutes some teacher quality and quality teaching is a hot issue. Thinking back over your career, what have been some of the real high points for you?

**Speaker 3** [00:09:29] Well, again, mentoring and seeing those beginning teachers who now some of them are principals, certainly are in executive positions and well-deserved. They're good practitioners and they're great leaders. Seeing students flourish where there were difficulties in their home life, being able to support them, to reach their full potential. I think one of the other things I've really appreciated is as a casual and temporary teacher for 17 years, because I did have to resign when I had my children, couldn't afford to stay in the service, was being able to work across a number of educational settings. Space in high schools, being able to use my skills and then adjust them to what the setting is. And I think adaptability is one of the things that teachers are really good at. And seeing that adaptability in those situations, those new situations, is really good. Highlights being recognized as a as a good teacher by my students and their parents has been really great. And even now I still speak to parents of the kids that I taught years and years ago. That community spirit in that interactions feels like been a real highlight.

**Speaker 2** [00:10:40] Think about yourself when you first started. You're in your classroom. You're doing what? Whatever you did then and think about yourself now as a teacher, you just start that question again. Think about. When you started teaching, Julie, you're in the classroom and you're doing whatever you did then and think about yourself in the classroom now. What constraints were apparent in both settings and what sorts of things enabled you to do what you wanted to do.

**Speaker 3** [00:11:09] As a beginning teacher?

**Speaker 2** [00:11:11] Yeah, let's start with the beginning teacher.

**Speaker 3** [00:11:12] There wasn't the massive scrutiny, external scrutiny that there is now. My first experience was at a central school in Riverina and as a beginning teacher I was very much looking to my syllabus to be able to make sure that I was teaching the syllabus and making sure that my kids had a deep understanding and I had time to do that so I could really go from not just scratching the surface but that deep understanding. I still am a great believer in Bloom's taxonomy and Gardner and I would implement that now. The curriculum is so crowded, even in the job I'm doing now, it's scratching the surface with not that opportunity. There's not the time to get into that deep understanding and be able to have that application of knowledge and see the kids applying it. It's really, I think, the time constraint and what the expectations are not only by the department but also by community of teachers and what they're expected to really push in there. But creativity, I think creativity is about your own interaction with the students and how you can help them to learn and knowing how they learn. You know, it's one of the first standards for students and how they learn and being able to get to know them so that you can support them. But the curriculum at the moment is just not allowing teachers to be able to spend the time to get into that deep knowledge.

**Speaker 1** [00:12:46] It's so great to hear about the high points and to be reminded of all those good things about teaching that we love and that have kept you in teaching for so long. Julie if we're thinking about the high points and I would suggest at the moment, I think we're at a very low point, you've had to negotiate with the New South Wales Department of Education in a range of different ways, not only as a classroom teacher in a leadership role, but also as a person within the Teachers Federation. Can you give an example of how that process has worked for you?

**Speaker 3** [00:13:26] I think one of the ways that I've dealt with the department as a teacher has been directly through my principal, because as a classroom teacher, I would doubt that there would be many people who would know who the director is. The director educational leadership is because they're not seen by the general population. So that's that's a hard one to answer, where I'm dealing directly with the department as a teacher, because there is that disconnect. Generally, the director comes in, goes into the principal's office, walks out, and classroom teachers don't really see them. So that's a bit hard. In my role with the Teachers Federation very differently. Union officers have a lot more direct contact with the departmental officers. I was very aware of the deals that I worked with and there was eight of them. I also knew the executive directors and was able to work directly with the executive directors if things weren't going the way they should have with the director. There was a lot more of that conversation and interaction. That's not to say it was always positive. I've had some very disgruntled executive directors come back to the president of the union to talk about me, but we have to be straight talking because it's our members and teachers in classrooms who are the ones who are impacted by decisions made by the department. Negotiation, I think, is a very strong word. I think it's more this is the way it is. You guys are not doing what is in the awards. Whatever policy is there to sell to support teachers. I don't know that the negotiations could work.

**Speaker 1** [00:15:07] Is it a disconnect?

**Speaker 3** [00:15:10] Yes. Yes. And one of the reasons that we have a disconnect is that those people who are making policy are not teachers have never been teachers. They are working in a corporate space where it should be an educational space. DON and I were just talking before we came in here that one of the few people who is still in an education and a night time, Europe is more at death's door. I've had good relations with. I've also had some very poor ones. But I respect the fact that he comes from an educational background and we speak the same language most of the time. Most. The talk. We get a lot of corporatization language now, and that's not helpful for teachers.

**Speaker 2** [00:15:57] Speaking of disconnect and connect, if you had a direct line to the New South Wales Education Minister, Sarah Mitchell, and you're giving her advice on how we solve the teacher shortage. What advice would that be?

**Speaker 3** [00:16:13] First of all, unclutter the curriculum. Secondly, get rid of a lot of the unnecessary data collection. In fact, I'd say it could probably just be disbanded or at least downsized. Get back to what teachers want to do and they want to teach. Teachers love the classroom. Teachers love their kids. But if you start throwing impediments in their way, that means that they lose the time that they want to have in the classroom to bureaucratic box ticking. Then we've got a problem. That's what low morale. And you couple that with the minister getting on to get back to the minister, but the minister getting on TV and saying there is no teacher shortage. To the teacher shortage keeps me up at night to. We're going to recruit teachers from overseas. We get all this harebrained advertising to to appease the rest of the government, the Premier and the community and teachers sitting in a classroom going, well, that's not helping me. That's not helping me in my job day to day. That would be my words to Sarah Mitchell, actually talk to teachers and find out what they need, what is going to help them instead of listening to the press, other members of the government, and just trying to put out very glossy advertising, which we all, when we see it, to shake our head at, you know, because we know it's not going to happen to teachers have moved from the middle career people to we need 10,000 teachers. It's really that's what we shake our head It it's not it's a band.

**Speaker 2** [00:17:51] I just want to go back to a point you made about decluttering the curriculum. There was a review done and the results released ran about June 2020, I think, and the New South Wales Standards Authority, Nyssa, have embarked upon modifying syllabuses, etc.. Are you saying this has not been successful? They haven't done enough.

**Speaker 3** [00:18:13] I'm not saying that at all. There have been some improvements. However, the timeframes to implement them and this professional support that teachers are going to get, that's the part that is going to be inadequate and that's putting additional pressure on teachers to be able to have deep knowledge of that curriculum, be able to implement it and have access to specialists to come in and support them through professional learning. Because right now, professional learning is something that has to be done. It's not directed at where it needs to be.

**Speaker 1** [00:18:46] This raises a really interesting point because I'm working in a number of schools at the moment and the teacher professional learning space in school sales staff development days, which has traditionally been a place and space where principals could invite outside people in as partners – time is all taken up with compliance. And so this seems to be the story for 2023. In the schools and I'm working at the moment, there is no space except at the end of the school day for research and PL when teachers have already been on a full load and so on. This is not only harming the possibility of understanding or building capacity, whatever it might be, of teachers and their professional learning, which they love to do. But it also means that any kind of deeper understandings that research may give in partnership with schools is also stalled. I and the principals I've been working with simply have no avenue for really putting in place where professional learning can actually happen.

**Speaker 3** [00:19:58] Yes, the professional learning, again, is it's another box tick. It's not targeted where teachers need it. As a faculty member of the teaching and learning, teaching and learning faculty. I don't need to sit through pile on cleaning up the playground or, you know, we're going to have a more sustainable community in our school. I could be sitting down looking at how I can support students who have a class that I really need to do some work with and the other part around people, which I find very, very distressing. Let's face it, there's a lot of money in schools through the Gonski money that's come in and whether that's being spent in the correct way. I don't believe that these companies that have sprung up, these Atos, if you like, that charge enormous amounts of money to come into a school. And not really targeting what teachers need. And you walk out of those polls and you think, well, that was a waste. That's $6,000 or whatever it costs. I'm pulling an amount out of the air. We could have had another teacher in here one day a week for however many weeks to support our teaching and learning programs rather than these guys walk out and take the money with them. That's another issue for me around professional learning. It's not targeted, it's not relevant, it's not supportive, but it takes up an enormous amount of time.

**Speaker 2** [00:21:28] Two days ago, Julie, we had just 50 students from a south western Sydney High school here at UTS, and they're students who are thinking of going into teaching. They came and we did activities with them, etc. A really great day. Had you been there. What would you have said to them to persuade them to become teachers?

**Speaker 3** [00:21:48] There is great satisfaction in being a teacher because when you are part of a child's life, you may not see the immediate impact, but there will be a long-lasting impact. And having that ability to touch a child's life, a student's life, and be able to support them. There is nothing like it. Absolutely nothing like it. It is lifelong support.

**Speaker 2** [00:22:17] Julie as part of each interview we do, we give each participant the chance to do a rant. Oh yes, a rant for 30 seconds, a whole 30 seconds, and we won't interrupt. We'll just sit here and listen to you so you can choose any issue to do with education, and then you go for it for 30 seconds. Are you ready?

**Speaker 3** [00:22:39] I am ready.

**Speaker 2** [00:22:40] All right. Well, the clock is about to start taking. Off you go.

**Speaker 3** [00:22:43] Merit selection processes in the Department of Education. They need a complete overhaul. We have people sitting in leadership roles now who can write a great CV, can do a great interview. And, then when they walk out with that job under their arm, nothing they've said in that interview, nothing that's been in their CVS implemented in their school. If I see the words must have excellent interpersonal skills on one more ad for a leader in a school, I think I will just throw the tail in. It's very easy to say you have excellent interpersonal skills. It is much more difficult to demonstrate excellent interpersonal skills. We need to have a change from merit selection to somewhere where we have teachers who want our aspirational leaders to be seen in situ so that they can be judged on what they are in the classroom and in their leadership role before they can go for a job as a leader.

**Speaker 1** [00:23:46] Are you thinking, the inspectoral system? Or something else.

**Speaker 3** [00:23:51] Not at all. Or is that.

**Speaker 1** [00:23:52] More about evidence-based practice?

**Speaker 3** [00:23:53] Evidence based practice? I think there is nothing better than evidence-based practice. But someone must be responsible for that. And we need to have that balance between. These people have been seen and not in the old sit at the back of the room with a clipboard like when I went for my first list 100 years ago. But that team teaching being part of the process at school, seeing these people can conduct themselves in a leadership role. Maybe they go on a list and then when a job comes up, they are the ones that can apply because they've already got that qualification, not principal credentials, not talking about that.

**Speaker 2** [00:24:36] Julie Moon It's been a pleasure having you here in the studio talking with you. We could talk all day and all night probably, but we're going to have to wrap it up. We really appreciate it. Thank you.

**Speaker 1** [00:24:46] Thanks, Julie. It's wonderful to meet a teacher who has given so much to the profession. I'd just like to say thank you on behalf of the community and New South Wales. You've done probably all your wisdom and your teaching and your creativity has spread much further than that. Thank you for what you've given them, this profession.

**Speaker 3** [00:25:10] Thank you. And thank you for having me.

**Speaker 2** [00:25:19] Jane, what really struck me about Julie is her commitment to education and students and her deliberate focus on quality teaching. It was undeniable that she is committed to her profession.

**Speaker 1** [00:25:35] Yes. It's the voice of teachers. And, you know, it's across that career of hers, you know, which started in a small country town. And now she's still working with young people despite saying that she has retired. I loved the way she talked about mentoring those new graduate teachers and how wonderful and comforting to know that, you know, when we sort of our graduate students pass through our hands that they're going to places and there are lots of Julies in our system. And to be picked up and nurtured and supported in the profession so that they can absolutely do their best work, but they need to have much less administration.

**Speaker 2** [00:26:23] Yes, that's right. And Julie's been very fortunate insofar as she's taught in several primary schools, starting off in a small private school in the Riverina, and then she's been able to get a bird's eye view of the system through her position in New South Wales Teachers Federation in her negotiations with the upper echelons of the New South Wales Department of Education. It's a unique set of experiences she's had, but you can tell she's still connected to the classroom.

**Speaker 1** [00:26:50] She is, and so many of our teachers that retire, I guess I've heard a similar story to the one today with Julie. Thanks very much, Don, for organizing Julie to come in and speak today. It's been a really, I guess, reassuring set of voices, set of ideas, if you like, that have come forth from this start. Thanks very much.

**Speaker 2** [00:27:11] My pleasure. And I'm looking forward to the next one.

**Speaker 1** [00:27:16] Thank you for listening to this episode of Talking Teachers. If you'd like to know more about Don and me, you can look at the UTS website, simply Google UTS Teacher Education, where you'll also find show notes for this podcast. The podcast was produced by William Verity for Impact Studios at UTS, which specializes in turning research into quality audio. We wish to acknowledge that the series is being recorded on Gadigal Land of the Auroral Nation. We thank and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging.