**Correna Haythorpe transcript S1 Ep6 .mp3**

**Speaker 1 is Jane** [00:00:01] 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 this series with my colleague Don Carter, and we're both teacher education academics at UTS.

**Speaker 2 is Don** [00:00:44] Hi, Jane. It's great to be back on the air with our next podcast installment.

**Speaker 1** [00:00:48] Don. It certainly is. And the anticipation of interviewing our next guest reminded me of when the global pandemic shut down schools across the globe and parents undertook teaching their own children at home. Actually, at that time, there really appeared to be a feeling of widespread gratitude towards teachers and a much better understanding of the complexity of teaching.

**Speaker 2** [00:01:13] Yeah, I agree, Jane, I kind of think that that post-pandemic glow seems to have faded. There's been industrial disputes between governments and teachers, teaching conditions, pay pay of teachers, and it's been exacerbated by a worldwide teacher shortage worsened by teacher absences due to illness.

**Speaker 1** [00:01:33] Yes, I was talking to some teachers yesterday and a couple of principals and that illness factor is absolutely critical. It's really timely, Don, that today we talked to someone who is at the forefront of the campaign to improve the conditions and pay of teachers and someone who has an intimate knowledge of current challenging education issues.

**Speaker 2** [00:01:57] Exactly, Jane. And our guest today is Correna Haythorpe, President of the Australian Education Union, a position she's held since 2015. And I can tell you that Correna has taught in government primary schools in Adelaide, Port Pirie in South Australia, but also in the UK, in Japan. Correnahas been at the forefront of a number of industrial campaigns, including securing paid maternity leave and better conditions for female teachers. The ‘I give it Gonski ‘and the Stop TAFE Cuts’ campaigns.

**Speaker 1** [00:02:28] You know, they were enormous campaigns. Look welcome Correna. And the first thing I'd like to mention to you is that the end at the end of this interview, we're going to give you a 30 second moment and we're calling that our 30 second rant, where you'll get to talk about any issue you like without interruption. For us, the teacher shortage, which of course is not limited to Australia, but it's an international crisis. How did that eventuate in your mind?

**Speaker 3 is Correna** [00:03:00] Correna, yes, thank you, Jane and hello Don. In terms of the massive issue that's facing the teaching profession right now, the teacher shortage. This is something that has eventuated over many, many years and certainly in my mind not, not really been an accident that it's happened. We've seen a significant issue in terms of governments not supporting the teaching profession. We've got major attraction and retention issues that are panning out right across the country. It's a multi-layered workforce crisis that we are experiencing right now, particularly for new teachers in terms of initial teacher education, but also for existing teachers in terms of making sure that they are supported to do their work in schools.

**Speaker 2** [00:03:45] Yes, thanks, Correna. And that brings me to teacher workload. I mean, teachers go into the profession so they can teach a class. What is the biggest impediment to teachers getting in front of their class and doing teaching?

**Speaker 3** [00:04:00] Well, teacher workload has just escalated over the past few years. And certainly with the pandemic, we know that teachers across Australia that demonstrated their dedication and their professionalism but have also experienced a massive increase in terms of that workload. We have departments who really have increased the administrative workload for the teaching profession. We've got a national school reform agreement which was struck under the previous Liberal government, which we also believe has escalated the workload of teachers and our members in any survey that we conduct. And also national surveys say that now the weeks look like on average 56 hours of work. And much of that, as you'd be aware, is over and above the teaching load in a school and certainly unpaid. And it is completely unsustainable for the teaching profession going forward.

**Speaker 1** [00:04:52] Yes, that's really an observation I've also made Correna over the past few years. It's the exponential rise in workload and in terms of government and I guess not only state government but federal government who fund our schools, Why is it so difficult to give teachers a fair pay increase given that increase in workload? Well, that's.

**Speaker 3** [00:05:21] A very good question. And the funding of schools is a joint responsibility of the Commonwealth and state and territory governments. It is the state and territory governments which are primarily responsible for the salary and conditions of the teaching profession. And unfortunately, over the last several years we've seen wage caps, we've seen a decrease in. The percentages that have been able to be achieved through industrial campaigns and governments that have really been reluctant to invest in the teaching workforce. What is happening right now, which brings some hope to the situation, of course, is that the Federal Minister, Jason Clare, has enacted a National Teacher Workforce Action Plan discussion and that is specifically looking at the issues that are impacting on teachers in terms of increased workload and attraction retention. And we are hopeful that this plan is going to provide a good framework for state and territory governments and the Commonwealth from next year to start addressing these issues.

**Speaker 1** [00:06:24] And just following up from that, Correna, so do you think that is going to result in some pay increases?

**Speaker 3** [00:06:33] I don't think the plan itself will necessarily result in pay increases, but it will provide a framework for state and territory governments in terms of the issues that our profession is facing and the need for proper pay and better conditions in terms of teachers work. And so that then will strengthen the arm of our branches and associated bodies around the country as they undertake industrial bargaining campaigns to achieve better conditions. It will also, I think, set out a very clear agenda in terms of workload and the risk assessment that we think is needed for all new national initiatives, particularly national initiatives that might be attached to the National School Reform Agreement and funding agreements.

**Speaker 2** [00:07:17] That you mentioned Jason Clare the Federal Minister for Education. We'd love to get him on this podcast series. Just say he was sitting here with us chatting now. What would be your main messages to him? You've mentioned quite a few points, but in a nutshell, what would be the things that you would say to him?

**Speaker 3** [00:07:36] Well, these are things that I have said to Jason Clare. As a matter of fact, we believe that right now in Australia we have a a deep vein of inequality that exists in terms of school funding and that has really impacted not only on our members but on their capacity to work with students who need the most help, particularly students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds or students who experience compound disadvantage. And, you know, our significant disappointment over the last decade is that the initial Gonski recommendations about having a schooling resource standard along with loadings that would counteract that disadvantage, you know, it's just not played out in terms of government policy. And so what we know is that our schools are denied the resources that they need to teach every child, and that is the responsibility of the Commonwealth in terms of leading this next round of funding discussions. So we would say to the Minister Clare that he has the opportunity now to deliver the promise that was made to Australian students and to the teaching profession, and that is the promise to make sure that we have a public school education system that is fully funded and can cater for the needs of every child, regardless of their background or their circumstance.

**Speaker 2** [00:08:50] Yes, I mean, that's a powerful point. And Correna at the start of this interview, we mentioned the pandemic and lockdowns, and there seemed to be goodwill towards teachers. I think it was perhaps because parents got an insight into what teachers have to do, etc., and curriculum insights, etc.. But that seems to have evaporated. If that's the case, why do you think it's happened?

**Speaker 3** [00:09:13] I'm quite astonished by this, actually, in terms of that evaporation, because there was a point in time in the last two years where teachers were praised and everyone realized that in fact it was an incredibly difficult job given that they were trying to support their children in terms of their learning at home. Post those two years, what seems to have happened is we've not learned the lessons of the pandemic and people have become busier than ever. And as parents have moved back to, you know, working in offices and dealing with the sort of day to day lives, I think they've forgotten the big impact that teachers do actually have. However, having said that, one of the things that's happening in the national conversation around workforce is that both the federal government and state and territory governments are talking about the issue of raising the profile of the teaching profession and raising the profile of the importance of teaching in particular, because we know that many of our students, senior secondary students, don't see teaching as a particularly attractive career pathway. And therefore, I'm not going into university. We do have to raise the status of the teaching profession, and it's very good from our perspective to be at a place right now where we've got governments talking about the importance of that and we hope that we can actually lift the status of the profession, particularly in the media and in the public debate.

**Speaker 2** [00:10:40] Look, I agree totally and the mainstream. Media seems to thrive on negative stories about teachers. And it seems to me that the different platforms and publications in the mainstream media need to be informed about the role of teachers and what they actually do. Aspects of a teacher's workload. What's your experience with dealing with the mainstream media? Do you have pushback from journalists or do they seem to listen to what you have to say? Do they report what you say accurately?

**Speaker 3** [00:11:15] That's a very good question. What I would say is that every day in every school across the nation, there are incredible people who are working very, very hard, delivering a high quality education. But they're not the stories that are told. The stories that we say are the sensational stories which have a negative impact on teaching more broadly. I have to say that in terms of my dealings with journalists and mainstream media, one of the things that I've always thought is important is to stay true to our members and that once I give a comment, what I can't do is control what the media does with it. Most journalists have been very good in terms of honoring those comments. However, occasionally you do get journalists who have got a particular story or an editor that has a particular story that they wish to tell, and your comments will not be used in the way that you expect them to be used. I think it's really an unfortunate legacy of the last nine years of a Liberal government. We had education ministers who actively talked down teachers in the public school system, including Acting Education Minister Stuart Roberts, who said the hashtag that teachers wear in the public education system and it's really a headline grabbing moment, but it's also an insulting intervention which was taken very much to heart by our members. And what we need to see is leadership from the political leaders of the country. And then I believe that that will filter down through the stories and the support that the media will give to the teaching profession.

**Speaker 1** [00:12:53] Correna something that is reported is the decline in union membership. Now you've got a union and the EU with over 198,000 members. So if some of those stories are true around decline in union membership, why is that actually happening, do you think.

**Speaker 3** [00:13:18] With the stories reflect, I guess, the neo liberal agenda that we've been through over the last decade or so in terms of the trade union movement more broadly, and the fact that I guess it's not been a positive thing in terms of being seen to be a union member. But our experience goes against the strength in terms of union membership because we have grown over the last couple of years from 183,000 members to almost 200,000 members now. And we work very hard to be relevant to our members. We think it's very important that we actively campaign on public education issues because if you think about school funding, for example, that has a direct connect with everything that our members are experiencing in schools in terms of their professional work and also their capacity to educate their children and deliver high quality teaching and learning programs. And we actively have conversations with members about the importance of being a union member so that we can build our critical mass. This situation has led us to be the third largest union in Australia. And I guess the other thing that I hold very true to is the fact that we are a democratic organization, and we have processes in place, as do many unions or unions, in terms of engaging with the membership and making sure that their issues are front and center to our campaigning.

**Speaker 2** [00:14:42] Correna, you mentioned the difficulties in attracting people into the teaching profession now here at UTS. Jane and I teach some absolutely fantastic pre-service teachers who can't wait to get into the classroom and when they get there they thrive, etc.. Why do you think it is difficult to attract people into the profession? I know there are ongoing salary disputes, but does it go deeper than that?

**Speaker 3** [00:15:07] I think it does go deeper than that. You've got to start with initial teacher education. We were quite shocked to see the latest figures that show around 50% of students who undertake a teaching course do not complete their course. We welcome the National Workforce Action Plan, which has a section which will look at the issues around why student teachers are not completing their courses. The other issue for us is making sure that when student teachers finish their degrees that they are supported in the classroom and when we conduct our state of our. School survey. We get quite a lot of feedback from new educators which say that the critical issues for them in terms of feeling unprepared for teaching relate to working with students, particularly students who have compound disadvantage or behavior management issues. They also say that they don't feel prepared to work with students from First Nations backgrounds in terms of understanding and cultural competency and issues like that. Ee believe that we need to have a much better mentoring program in place to support students, and also that we should have an extended practicum, perhaps an internship. Maybe it's time that we started talking about internships for students in their final year so that we can put the supports in place for them so that they can be successful when they enter the workforce.

**Speaker 2** [00:16:31] Just talking about young people Correna, what would be your advice to someone who a young person who's thinking of going into teaching?

**Speaker 3** [00:16:39] My advice would be it is an incredible career. It is a wonderfully exciting, incredible career, but it's also can be very complex and very difficult. And you need to surround yourself with a critical circle of people that can help you and support you, and that leaders in schools have a very big role to play here to make sure that students and young people are supported when they enter the teaching profession. But I don't think people should be put off by, I guess, the negative narrative that's at play, because one of the things that we work very hard to do is to make sure that education departments have programs in place that support people as they begin their teaching careers.

**Speaker 1** [00:17:20] Well, thank you, Correna. That's great advice. Well, it's that time for your 30 second rant on any topic you'd like, and we won't interrupt you and we'll stop you after you've had your say. I hope you're ready. On your mark. Go.

**Speaker 3** [00:17:40] Well, I could probably go longer than 30 seconds because my rant would be about school funding. I cannot believe that right now in Australia we are in a situation where most schools are denied the funds that they need to cater for students. This is just a shameful situation and quite often we are profiled in the media as having low pays the results and low this and low that. Yet it's our system that has been denied those funds. We cater for many students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. You know, it is our job to make sure that we develop the future population of Australia, and we do so in a way that, you know, that students can understand their role and responsibilities as citizens. But we need the backing of governments to do that. This is the number one issue. It's time to get this right.

**Speaker 2** [00:18:27] Fantastic. That was just about 30 seconds, you know, Correna a little bit either, but we'll give you that. Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

**Speaker 3** [00:18:35] You're very welcome. You're very welcome. Thanks.

**Speaker 2** [00:18:38] You brought some great points and hopefully our listeners will start to talk some more about the points that you raised. Once again, thank you.

**Speaker 1** [00:18:46] Correna Haythorpe thank you. Lovely to hear your up to the minute views, we see you in the media clearly setting out why it's important to be a member of a union and how funding really needs to shift in this country. Thank you for the work you do.

**Speaker 3** [00:19:05] Thanks very much, Jane. And thanks, Don. It's a pleasure talking to you both.

**Speaker 1** [00:19:16] I really enjoyed our conversation with Correna. She has such an insight from her position as head of one of Australia's largest unions and she is always so articulate but also deeply understands the inherent challenges at the moment Don.

**Speaker 2** [00:19:37] Most definitely, Jane. And one of the things that impressed me about Correna was her depth of knowledge. I mean, she knows all this stuff off by heart. She's across all these issues and these serious issues. People who have school aged children would have to be worried about industrial disputes, about conditions for teachers, about pay. That's not commensurate with the workload.

**Speaker 1** [00:20:01] Highlighting the equity issue in Australian education in Australian schools is something that she has continued to do, and she certainly mentioned that in our conversation today. And I think, you know, trying to somehow solve that chip away at it, we really haven't got that far forward in all of that now. And, you know, I'm just hoping that 20, 23 and the years to come now that perhaps with a change of government, we're going to see more movement in that area in a very real way.

**Speaker 2** [00:20:36] Most definitely, Jane. Here's hoping. It's been great conducting this interview with you. Correna was fantastic. Thanks, Jane.

**Speaker 1** [00:20:44] And thanks, Don. 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 Aurora Nation. We thank and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging.