**Talking Teachers – Professor Jo Lampert**

**Jane Hunter** Hi, and welcome to Talking Teachers. I'm Jane Hunter. This is an Australian education podcast series where, in 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 UTS.

There are many current challenges in education and in this episode we're going to examine a program that is directly targeted What teachers for what schools. It's called the National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools or NETDS. It's a program that both Don and I have had a long held interest in.

And today we're going to be talking to Professor Jo Lampert. Jo was the founder and co-director of the NETDS program for 10 years prior to moving to La Trobe University in 2017, where for the past five years she's designed and directed the employment-based social justice teacher education program known as Nexus.

**Jane Hunter**

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**Jo Lampert**

Thank you.

**Don Carter**

And Jo, you're currently at Monash University. As Jane said, in this episode, we want to understand more about your previous work in Queensland in the National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools. Maybe our listeners aren't very familiar with that program. Can you tell us about the program first?

**Jo Lampert**

Sure, thanks and thank you, Don and Jane, for inviting me today. The National Exceptional Teaching for Disadvantaged Schools started in fact around 2011. And really it began Bruce Burnett, who's now at Australian Catholic University and I founded and implemented it. And really the purpose of it at that time was to work with smallish groups of undergraduate pre-service teachers.

in a really targeted social justice teacher education program in order to prepare them to work in low socio-economic schools, if you like, the schools that were considered hardest at that time to staff, although the climate has changed. And so we really tried to implement a program that would be embedded in the Faculty of Education so that there were no additional costs, it was cost-effective.

But we could work really intensively with these very dedicated and committed and high achieving pre-service teachers. Over time, it became a national program. So with philanthropic funding, it moved into New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria, I can't remember where else that wasn't that awful, and around the country. And it was scalable. So there, and there still are several versions of any TDS in existence and really I haven't been directly involved in any TDS since 2017 when I moved to Victoria, but Bruce and now Amy McPherson at ACU really direct it out of ACU.

**Don Carter**

So Jo, casting your mind back, what actually warranted the establishing of that program in the early 2000s? Because you had enormous support, it certainly seemed as, you know, from an outside perspective from the Queensland government.

**Jo Lampert**

Well, first of all, I want to say it wasn't until around 2011. It wasn't the early 2000s. And it was around the time we really wanted to dovetail on some other good work that had taken place, Raewyn Connell's Disadvantaged Schools Program, the Fair Go program that ran out of Western Sydney Uni. And along the way the Gonski Review came out. And so there was a lot of attention on inequity in schooling. But there were really no direct programs at the time that tried to attend to place-based and contextual circumstances that we thought teachers really needed to think about and know about and reflect on in order to be teachers for disadvantaged schools. We probably wouldn't use the word disadvantaged anymore, I might say. Schools never liked it, we never really liked it. But also the other things that were happening at that time is that there was a kind of a teaching sorting going on. So we could see that what we started to call leafy green schools and independent schools were siphoning off the most, the high achieving teachers before they even graduated. And we really wanted to try to nab them early. We selected them in the second year of their four-year undergraduate program and really kind of prepare them to be passionate and also well prepared for the schools that were harder to staff.

**Don Carter**

And what would you say are the major achievements of the program? You've mentioned the student teachers, pre-service teachers. That's one of the achievements. What are some of the others?

**Jo Lampert**

Well, schools loved it because ultimately these were really, really productive partnerships. We would place our pre-service teachers in schools we became very familiar with. There were certainly, and are some schools in Queensland that really prefer any TDS graduates because they had so much input. So they did all of their placements on those schools and really one of the key points is the mentoring. We went out to the schools all the time. So schools were not used to seeing teacher educators coming out so often. It was around the time when we stopped doing school visits. There were less school visits, but we were out in the schools all the time. So schools love it.

The pre-service teachers had a community of practice they didn't get otherwise. We're very bonded. I still know when they have babies, when they get married. So it really became, it has become a really, I don't want to talk in past tense because it still exists, really became a very intimate and personal relational experience for everyone, ourselves included.

**Jane Hunter**

So Jo, that, I mean, to go into school so often as teacher educators, how did you manage that? Was that take, I mean, that needs money, I guess, and you have, you know, all your interests in your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and all the other work that you have to do alongside the work that you were doing in this program. How did you kind of quarantine that time and did the university support that financially?

**Jo Lampert**

So that's such a great question, Jane. Truth is, any TDS did not require much money. We designed it so that it was embedded in the program. We had a very, very supportive dean. But the success of it depends on what's going on at the time. So we, it cost, I would say it cost nothing in the first 10 years. Nexus on the other hand is an employment-based program and required more money. We did have philanthropic money to hire a project officer.

I can't remember what else we used the money for. It was not an expensive program. When we transferred it into other universities, there was teaching relief for the people who ran it from those universities. And that's where the money went to. It's time intensive, absolutely. But there are almost no other costs on top of that.

And I probably should say that one of the things that was going on at the time when we started it is Teach for Australia had just started to gain traction. And Bruce and I felt really convinced that a program could be embedded, should be, a social justice program should be embedded in a faculty of education in a more permanent and sustainable way.

**Don Carter**

Jo, just picking up on that, I get the successes of the program. What were some of the big challenges if you cast your mind back?

**Jo Lampert**

Well, the challenges, one of the challenges I think is in the fact that when you have a successful program, everybody wants to grow it and scale it up. I'm not that convinced that bigger is always better. It worked well because, you know, it was so intimate and personalized and the mentoring was so strong. We always worried that we would lose some control over the quality of the program if it got too big. And I would say that's even more an issue now, of course, with teaching shortages, is everybody wants more teachers today. But we weren't under that kind of pressure at that time, but that certainly is a challenge. And of course, it's a challenge that these are challenging schools. So, you know, not every single teacher who was in any TDS was successful. A lot were, but not everyone was. But it was kind of that scalability and the sustainability. These were the biggest challenges.

**Jane Hunter**

Thinking about the programs you've been involved in over time then, what do you think we're doing better now in 2023 and what should we be doing more of in your view?

**Jo Lampert**

Yeah, good question, Jane. Look, what I think we know more about is the fact in some ways that social justice teachers aren't born but can be prepared. So I think that's been one of our biggest findings is it's not by osmosis. It takes an awful lot of time and effort. Do I think we're doing it better now? I think we're at this complex juncture point when I would like to say yes, but everything's about to change. So will we be able to do these boutique if you like or smallish social justice teacher education programs as easily now without losing the strength of them. I would love to be able to say yes, but I'm not 100% sure that the learnings of those 15 years of programs are as easily done as they were in the past.

**Don Carter**

Jo, in August 2022, you posted a tweet about the teacher shortages that went viral. I think something like more than 240,000 likes for your tweet. Can you tell us what you actually tweeted and why do you think it resonated with so many people, teachers, ex-teachers, principles, etc.?

**Jo Lampert**

Well, in fact, I looked this morning and there were over and now there are over 440,000 tweets. It was the craziest thing. It was a little bit of a throwaway tweet in some ways I said something like and you might have to remind me there are no there's no shortage of teachers they're just teachers who won't teach in schools anymore and somehow that Resonated around the world and by the time I woke up in the morning There were these hundreds of thousands of response from teachers saying, agreeing with that.

So I think what happened was it tapped into some grief really from teachers who still thought of themselves, who still are teachers, think of themselves as teachers, are passionate about teaching but for one reason or another didn't feel they could teach in the school system anymore and they were, and people overall were hurt and insulted by the notion that they didn't exist. They do exist. It's just that they are no longer able or well or surviving teaching in schools anymore. So it just resonated in this crazy big way, unexpected for me.

**Don Carter**

It just going back to that actual tweet here that there is no teacher shortage you said there are thousands of qualified experienced teachers who are no longer teaching so there's a shortage of respect and proper compensation for teachers allowing them to actually teach. So do you think we've reached this point at this moment and given the TEEP review very recently how are we going to take the profession forward in view of trying to attract the best teachers to want to be teachers the best young people to want to be teachers?

**Jo Lampert**

Well, I think a lot of people are nervous about the cheap review, noting that they quite rightly in some way say that teacher education needs some revamping, talk about things like worrying about the cultural diversity of the teaching workforce and getting more Indigenous teachers, but at the same time being so critical of teacher education and putting teacher education under threat that there are a lot of contradictions in that deep report that many of us are noting. I'm not quite sure about the teaching workforce. I think there's a lot of research now on why teachers are leaving that combination of retiring teachers, COVID. So this whole kind of mess of circumstances leading to teachers not entering the profession and also leaving the profession, I think teacher education is ridiculously being slammed for things we have no control over really or little control over.

On one hand, we need teachers in front of kids. There's no question of that. We're under this pressure now to fast-track pre-service teachers, give them permission to teach and all of that as well. But I actually think we need more attention on what are the conditions of teachers who are staying. I've got an ARC at the moment on teachers who stay. Why are they staying? What are their circumstances like? What are the real lived experiences of teachers?

**Jo Lampert**

in the classroom and how can we not lose them? So I do think we're going to need stronger partnerships between teacher education and schools. We're all in it together and I'll get back to some of what I think when we get to my 32nd rant.

**Jane Hunter**

So why do you think at this early stage some teachers do stay, Jo? I guess that's something that Don and I have noticed over our long time working in teacher education in schools, conducting research. You know, there are some that do stay and well, many that do stay, but what I hear constantly is those people who I thought would be in it forever, if you like, are really quite at the end of the line.

I'm just wondering from the people that you're speaking to at this early stage of the research that you're doing at the moment, you know, are there some little pointers that we can hold at this stage?

**Jo Lampert**

Yeah, I think you're right. And sometimes we've been referring to these as walking point, kind of the last straw, you know, the camel that broke, the camel that broke the back, whatever it is, the straw that broke the camel's back. So really passionate teachers, you know, they don't wanna leave. Some teachers stay purely because they have to pay their increasing mortgages. You know, there are those teachers. There are some who stay because they're so committed and dedicated, and there are others who are staying but not sure they're gonna manage to stay for very much longer, so there's a real range. We are hearing some interesting things that we didn't know. For instance, a lot of teachers are talking to us about teaching as a less family-friendly profession than they thought it was gonna be.

You know, they, in fact, COVID has changed that. Some teachers have been saying to us, I see my partner able to work from home. I can't work from home. So actually teaching is the least family friendly profession now. I talked to a teacher last week who is teaching remotely and I hadn't really thought about this, but he said there are less planes going in and out of the community and flights are so expensive now and he thinks that has impacted on teachers not coming to teach in the already hard to stack communities he works in. So I'm not sure that I've answered your question, but I think we need ways to mediate in those moments when teachers walk away, in those months or whatever it is, maybe we'll know more about that, when teachers are thinking, oh can I stay? So there must be a period of time in which those crucial decisions are being made.

**Don Carter**

So, Jo, a lot of what you talk about more recently is really about workforce conditions and the workplace as such. Is that where we need to be targeting what we mean by entering a profession and growing in a profession and understanding the complexity of a profession?

**Jo Lampert**

I think so. And that's a nice segue for me to be able to mention that at Monash we are just launching a teaching workforce impact lab. But I think there are many, many layers of this teaching workforce issue that we're now interested in. And everybody is interested. I've had people in the Department of Education say we're just making it up. Now as we go along we really don't know what to do. So I think it's a nice moment.

Nice is not the right word, but a good moment to realize we're all in this moment of inquiry in a way where we really honestly had better think anew.

Bruce Burnett and Amy McPherson and I last year wrote a report for the Commonwealth on 25 years of initiatives to try to attract and retain a teaching workforce and we do seem to try the same things over and over again. So financial incentives for instance or leadership programs. I think we've tried all those things. I don't think we can just keep trying the same things over and over again. So now's the moment when we'll find out what else maybe we can be doing.

**Don Carter**

Thanks, Jo. And now we're moving on to our favorite part of the interview. It's the 30-second rant. It's where you get to talk for 30 seconds about something that you feel passionate about, something that may make your blood boil, but it's your choice. And we will let you go on, but for no more than 30 seconds. So over to you.

**Jo Lampert**

Okay, I think this is probably everybody's favorite point. This is fun. So I've written mine out so I won't go over necessarily. And I thought that I would end with a rant against ranting. I'm pretty fed up with the shame and blame game against teacher education, which is frustrating and infuriating and in mind a real backward step. I do think teacher education can improve, but the notion that teacher education has been doing it all wrong or weren't at least partly responsible for preparing some of the excellent teachers that are out there at the moment, or even worse, that we have been intentionally lying to teachers is just absolutely insanely ludicrous in my mind.

This binary where either with you or against you runs contrary to everything I know about the power of dialogue. I am exhausted by the ranters who claim nothing good ever happened before they came along.

Knowledge, co-creation, dialogue, humility, and listening over ranting. And I look forward to the end of the cycle when we can return to scholarly and professional ways of learning and working with each other. And I continue, I hope we continue to prepare teachers who approach their job through a lens of social justice, and I hope we don't throw the babies out with the bathwater at this crucial point. That's my rant.

**Jane Hunter**

Well done, Jo, and we enjoyed listening to your rants. It's very good. Thank you. Fantastic, and wow, you certainly packed a lot into that 30 seconds. Goodness me. Yes, let's be big ticks all the way through and I can hear the crowds roaring, the listeners roaring. Thank you, Jo. It was really wonderful to have you respond to our questions and to do the work that you do and have done for such a long time now. And I know a number of teachers that have passed through your hands and are so grateful for the generous way that you conduct your work in schools and alongside a team and the work that you did with Bruce Burnett. Really inspiring and we just so need our, you know, current federal minister, our local state ministers to really take a lot of the gems from that program and really listen to that because that's been so missing in recent conversations. So thank you, Jo.

**Jo Lampert**

My pleasure, it was my pleasure. Thanks, Don and Jane.

**Don Carter**

Thank you, Jo.

**Don Carter**

Well, Jane, that was really interesting and so many points that Jo mentioned, we could use as stepping off points. I particularly liked her 30 second rant. So much blame in education.

**Jane Hunter**

We blame teachers, we blame students, now we're blaming teacher educators. I thought she hit the nail on the head with that rant and so many great things during the course of the interview. It was great to hear first-hand about the NETDS and that was very interesting, the amount of time that she said that she and her team were spending supervising pre-service teachers and that's something I've noticed. I mean I did a lot of supervision work in my early career in teacher education, and you really have an opportunity as a teacher educator to see your pre-service teachers in a different context. I think that they like it because you're there on the ground. I mean it's very different when you're in a course teaching the unit content and it's kind of removed from the classroom. I know a few years ago I said that as teacher educators and this is probably going to make me very unpopular, but my idea was that every five years those of us in teacher education should have to spend some time in schools just so that we can get the feel of classrooms. For some of us in teacher education, it has been a long time since we've held responsibility for a class and I think that in 2023 and certainly after the past few years, classrooms are very, very different - probably a total understatement. But unless you've had that responsibility you don’t know the complexity on a day-to-day basis. I think it's hard to imagine - perhaps what I am suggesting is a mini-internship back in schools.

**Don Carter**

Yes, interesting point Jane and as you say the classroom has changed particularly over the last few years and we've had the COVID lockdowns etc where schools had to pivot very quickly to online learning so that would have generated a lot of discussion and a lot of change and the upskilling in the use of technology. But some great points from Jo and very, very worthwhile interview. Yes, really looking forward to hearing more about her work after this and she certainly made quite a difference with that tweet that she did that went viral. We need to be much better at communicating our work in teacher education and I think social media has a place for that. So yes, look forward to the next interview.

**Don Carter**

Yes, me too. Thanks, Jane.

**Jane Hunter** 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 specialises in turning research into quality audio. We wish to acknowledge that the series is being recorded on Gadigal Land of the Eora Nation. We thank and pay our respects to elders’ past, present and emerging.