**Talking Teachers - Randall Mumbulla**

**Jane Hunter** [00:00:10] 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 this series with my colleague Don Carter, and we're both teacher education academics at UTS.

**Don Carter** [00:00:54] Jane, I'm looking forward to today's interview. And one of the great things about this podcast is that we get to talk to a range of people and listen to a range of perspectives about education. And one of the most important perspectives is that of the teacher education student. That is someone who's doing their teacher education course but isn't currently in a school doing their school placement. And today I'm really happy that we're going to be talking to Randall Mumbulla. Randall is a teacher education student at the University of Technology Sydney. Randall was also one of the winners of the recent ‘If I Was Prime Minister’ essay competition run by the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation. And the award was actually presented to him by the Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese. In this episode of Talking Teachers, we speak to Randall about this award and also his experiences as an Indigenous teacher education student. First of all, welcome, Randall.

[00:01:53] Thanks.

**Don Carter** [00:01:54] And congratulations on your award. Could you tell us about what you had to do to win the award and why you entered?

**Randall Mumbulla** [00:02:01] I was about year ten or year 11 Will. I still had high school. There was like a competition that if I ran for all the scholarship students and yeah, so we just entered something that we couple of things that we'd changed as the first Aboriginal Prime Minister and I remember just riding it and I was kind of, you know, like, I don't know what to do, I don't know what to really say and sort of just threw a few things in there and sort of entered and then forgot about it for a couple of years. And yeah, then COVID happened and it kind of messed things up a little bit. And yeah, I got a phone call earlier this year and they told me about it and I, you know, I thought it was a bit of a joke cause I'd forgotten about it. Didn't even know it was a thing, to be honest. And but yeah, so I wrote a speech and it came on through.

**Jane Hunter** [00:02:51] Can you give us a few little snippets of the speech?

**Randall Mumbulla** [00:02:54] From what I can remember, because it was a while ago, but I remember writing about having Indigenous history culture in primary schools compulsory just because I thought it's really important that we learned about, you know, our shared history and, you know, the culture that stretches back and predates 1788. So I thought that was really important for younger kids to understand. And then the other main point that I spoke about was just creating equal opportunities for all Australians will thrive for the best.

**Jane Hunter** [00:03:31] So you're doing pre-service teacher education at UTS, so why did you actually make the decision to become a teacher?

**Randall Mumbulla** [00:03:39] It was the tough decision, I guess, because I was so not like my first choice, but it was like a really something that I really gave a lot of thought about because I wanted to do something a little different but to work with people. And that was probably my main thought when I wanted to do something after school was to work with people and help people as much as I can. I remember going on a school trip where we went to Vanuatu and there were these young primary school age kids that were working at these rundown, you know, like schools. And it was really, really interesting to see an eye-opening experience. And, you know, the teachers that they had, they didn't have a lot of teachers, to be fair, but they left us with classes and stuff and we got to hang out with the students. And it made me think like, just can I do this as a career and stuff like that. And, you know, that lit the fire in me from helping students and stuff like that.

**Don Carter** [00:04:40] That's really nice that it lit a fire in you. What about your own school days in so far as did you have a favourite teacher and favourite activities? What were some of the good things that happened when you were at school?

**Randall Mumbulla** [00:04:51] Well, for me at high school there was a lot of stuff that I could do with my academic sport, extracurricular activity. So there was a lot to do and a lot on offer. And I think as I got older and in the years that same year and high school, I really kind of enjoyed particular subjects because I got to choose them. And you know, the electives really made me want to actually study and stuff. And some of those teachers that I had, you know, made it an easy, fun process rather than like a chore, like actually having to do this because we have to do it. But doing it because I wanted to do it.

**Don Carter** [00:05:27] And what were your favourite subjects at school? So in high school.

**Randall Mumbulla** [00:05:33] At the time. Probably like Drama and PDHP and stuff like that. But now that I think about it, you know, thinking back to time at school, I really liked English and, and even now as I'm teaching, I like teaching English the most.

**Jane Hunter** [00:05:49] So you're doing primary education. I know that you grew up on the South Coast and you mentioned a while ago that you had a close association to Narooma Public School. So can you tell us about what you remember most about your time at primary school and what you noticed as a student at that school?

**Randall Mumbulla** [00:06:11] Yeah, it's going back now. That was like ten something years ago. More than ten years ago. But it's a really sort of small school, so it's like a tight knit community. And so I just I really liked that. And the teachers really do care about the work that they're doing, you know, the sort of older teachers like compared to the rest of like people that I've worked with. But even then, you know, like they taught my siblings, they're taught by a lot of people that I know. Yeah, I remember that very fondly. The school was really, really, really good to be a part of.

**Jane Hunter** [00:06:49] You're going back there to finish your pre-service teacher education degree. So what's that going to be like going back to your old primary school?

**Randall Mumbulla** [00:06:59] I'm just really excited to get back to like, I don't get to go or leave Sydney much at all and to go back home is really good to go. And do something that I've set out to finish and I get to go home and finish, you know, something that I really, really wanted to do. It's kind of fitting, really. And so like, I'm really looking forward to it and yeah, it's just a really good thing, I think.

**Jane Hunter** [00:07:23] Are all, all the teachers or some of the teachers that used to or that taught you still there?

**Randall Mumbulla** [00:07:29] No, they're all it's like a changing of the guard kind of thing. There's no teachers that I had. They are all gone and retired. And like I was saying, they were kind of older when I was still a student. So they're all kind of, you know, gone now.

**Jane Hunter** [00:07:44] Because those coastal posts have always been sort of ones that in my observation over the years that, you know, once you got appointed to a coastal school, you rarely moved. So that that makes sense.

**Don Carter** [00:07:57] It does indeed. And Randall, what is your favourite part of being a qualified teacher?

**Randall Mumbulla** [00:08:03] There are a couple of things, but I think my favourite thing about it is like kind of why I started doing it in the first place is when you know, I'm in the classroom and I'm at the control of the classroom as the teacher and, and I'm teaching a student something and, and you can see that the student didn't understand it. And then, you know, you figure out a way to help them understand it. And then they're like they feel like they've accomplished something. And like, it just makes me feel good that I've helped the students achieve something.

**Don Carter** [00:08:36] So that's good to hear and totally understand what you're saying. And it's great that you're doing your teacher education program. It’s a question I'd like to ask is how do we encourage more Indigenous young people to go into teaching?

**Randall Mumbulla** [00:08:52] I've given that a little bit of thought, but it's like a tough question. And so there's a lot of, you know, outside noise and there's a lot of other factors that affect us all like, but yeah, there's stuff that just, you know, affects Indigenous Australians as well that come to mind. And I think just for me encouraging other people like myself, just trying to be a good role model for them and showing them that can achieve a lot. You know, if they just put in and do the work and there's so much support around the university. I've noticed that. Yeah, there's a lot of support around for people like myself. And I think that's, what we need to do is reassure them that the process will be hard, but the support always and you can, you know, do it if you really want it.

**Jane Hunter** [00:09:46] Jason Clare has talked about and is actively pursuing a goal of many more Indigenous young people going into teaching and certainly at UTS, that's a big focus in terms of our social justice framework. So what are the key ideas that really have made a difference to you being able to continue with your studies and therefore finish?

**Randall Mumbulla** [00:10:15] Yeah, I've been particularly lucky with my education. I went to a private school on a life scholarship, so yeah, like I might be sort of, you know, an outlier in that regard. So I like to think of other Indigenous students is creating sort of, I suppose, incentive to get to just finishing high school like that was a big deal for me and my family and myself. So I think incentivising, getting more conversation around and doing further education, tertiary education, making it sort of normal for people like myself, like it's not like a normal thing for Indigenous students to be at like a higher level of education. Like in my experience that I know about yourselves just creating like normality around the situations that we're in. And you mentioned the financial aspects as well and there is just all round support I think as well from our own families as well can be a bit lacking. So I think just sort of an internal thing for ourselves, but there's ways that people can help support that. My school and the university has been great with that. So I think once you're in, you're in and like they can they understand that the support systems are there. They they can do they can do what they need to.

**Jane Hunter** [00:11:34] Then when you're teaching and on your placements, you're preparing lessons. Do you see a lot of opportunity to be able to draw on your own cultural background in what you're teaching? Is it the text that you might choose, the stories that go with that, the learning that set up in a much more hands on way or. Or what do you try to keep front of mind drawing on your own cultural background?

**Randall Mumbulla** [00:12:03] Well, yes, certainly like looking through syllabus documents, we see that there's opportunities to incorporate Indigenous perspectives. So obviously when I'm looking at programs or looking at the syllabus will be sort of front of mind to sort of bring that to the lessons. I think. And generally though when I've been teaching, there's opportunity for just discussions or they might even be opportunities to do particular learning activities that incorporate Indigenous perspectives. Like, for example, we did *The Man from Snowy River* and I just found like the text was in a geographical location close to my country. So it was really easy to incorporate that. And so it kind of does come to mind when I first writing lessons, but you know, it's not always my main focus, but being an Indigenous man, that is something that I really do push forward with a lot of what I'm trying to teach.

**Don Carter** [00:13:00] Just going back to your university experiences and the question of getting young people to go into teaching degrees, is there one particular set of experiences or experience at university here at UTS that you really liked, that you think other young people might find attractive to get them into teaching?

**Randall Mumbulla** [00:13:25] I think the practice was really good from the first semester. I can't remember too much about it, but yeah, I remember doing like one day here and there and like, I saw some people leave the course and some people that stayed. Obviously a lot of people stayed. And you know, that experience early on really kind of pushed me in the right direction. It was like, actually I do want to do this. Then it sort of cemented in the second semester when we actually taught the classroom.

**Don Carter** [00:13:58] We mentioned Jason Clare and actually in this series too, Jason Clare is one of our guests for interview, so I know he'll be listening to what you have to say. But say he was here in the studio with us now. What message would you like to give him?

**Randall Mumbulla** [00:14:13] I remember meeting him in Canberra when I met Prime Minister Albanese and we spoke about sort of education and obviously the reasons I thought I'd say, you know, to get more people into education is it's an industry wide problem with teacher shortages. So you know, it's even more of an uphill battle with Indigenous students. But I think just like I was saying before, just more incentive, more support and like all around, like showing them that the there's enjoyment out of the career.

**Don Carter** [00:14:52] Okay. Randall, we're at that part of the interview. That's our favourite part, isn't it Jane?

**Jane Hunter** [00:14:57] Indeed.

**Don Carter** [00:14:58] This is the 30-second Rant where you get to talk for 30 seconds, obviously, but on an education topic of your choice. So are you ready?

**Randall Mumbulla** [00:15:07] Yes. Well, I think I will talk about what I spoke about in my speech. Like I really want to have Indigenous lore, history and culture pre 1788 included in schools in syllabus. Compulsory like that would mean a lot to Indigenous people and would see a lot of change in the social narratives. I think we're not born racist, we're not born prejudiced. We learn those things from our experiences. So if we have these experiences and exposures at a younger age, I think then we're going to be, I would say, more progressive as we get older, but just more open minded, probably the better term for me to say. And so that's what I think I would do.

**Don Carter** [00:15:55] Fantastic. Thanks, Randall. Well, it's been an absolute pleasure to be able to talk to you and listen to your insights.

**Jane Hunter** [00:16:01] Thanks so much, Randall. It was a real treat to have you in the studio today and so important to hear your perspective as a pre-service teacher, because at the moment, as you are fully aware, the teacher shortage, the comments around administration, low pay and so on, but also the fact that we have new syllabus documents being prepared all the time that are making a much more real attempt, I think, to be inclusive. So to hear some of your insights, but also your own history as a student is very enlightening. So thank you.

**Randall Mumbulla** [00:16:48] Thanks, guys. Thanks for having me.

**Jane Hunter** [00:16:57] Don. Amazing to hear Randall and his Prime Minister's award. It's such an important marker of his decision to leave school and go into teaching. And now he's almost finished. And I couldn't help but think about how Indigenous education has really shifted over the years. And, you know, from the time of textbooks, you know, which was so out of date and now thinking about a research project that I was involved in on the Central Coast last year where so many Indigenous elders were coming into the classroom and speaking to students about their local environment. The students just loved it.

**Don Carter** [00:17:39] Quite right, Jane, And we've come a long way with regards to curriculum, inclusion of Indigenous knowledges and practices, etc. But as Randall says, there's room for greater improvement, greater integration into the curriculum. And you're right, kids in classrooms love getting out of the classroom in particular and learning about these things. So it is time for further improvement.

**Jane Hunter** [00:18:03] You know, there's still not nearly enough young people like Randall coming in. The only person from his cohort finishing school who wanted to do teaching and another aspect of I guess his decision was being able to get into schools early on and have it confirmed. And you just wonder how many other Randalls there might have been out there that had circumstances been different, would have chosen a path to teaching. And I think that Jason Clare, as our Federal Minister and you know, the current debates around The Voice campaign and so on are all part of really trying to expand how the voice of Indigenous people is heard. And that needs to come through having young people like Randall in classrooms. And that just becomes a common sight in all schools.

**Don Carter** [00:19:06] Yes, I agree. And we seem to be at a critical point in our history, our social and cultural history in Australia with the voice and the debates surrounding that and curriculum change and curriculum reform, a review of teacher education. It is the case that we can make some substantial and positive changes, but we need to keep the debate positive and constructive.

**Jane Hunter** [00:19:31] Something I've noticed in children's literature, an area I've always been interested in, in. I guess it sort of goes back to my English teacher background, but the number of beautiful Indigenous stories now that are in, you know, hardback form in, you know, some for babies right through to the early years has just ballooned in the last few years. And so I think it's much easier now for teachers to draw those literatures into their lessons and to link them to local community and to those much more expansive ideas around that. This is who we are as Australians and who we've always been. And being able to draw on those examples, it's much more prevalent I think, in our schools.

**Don Carter** [00:20:23] Yeah, that's true. And as you say, there is a wider array of rich textual material that's available for teachers and for students and for parents. And that's the other part of the partnership that is probably underrepresented, that partnership between parents in the school. But you're quite right, Jane. There's a lot of good things happening and room for more good things to happen.

**Jane Hunter** [00:20:46] Yeah, we need to build on that. Thanks so much, Don.

**Don Carter** [00:20:49] Thanks, Jane.

**Jane Hunter** [00:20:58] 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.