

Teacher Staffroom Episode 6: Leaders in literacy

Dominique Russell

Thanks for downloading this episode of *Teacher Staffroom*, where we catch you up on the latest evidence, insight and action. I'm Dominique Russell.

These past couple weeks at *Teacher* have been jam-packed. We welcomed a number of guests – from the eSafety commissioner to the ARIA Music Teacher of the Year – and we also featured a lot of content on different aspects of literacy. So, there'll definitely be something to discuss with your colleagues from this episode. I'll pose some questions throughout to help you get those conversations started – which will take you from reading for pleasure to cyberbullying.

That's this episode of *Teacher Staffroom*. Let's dive in.

[Dr Margaret Merga](#), a Senior Lecturer at Edith Cowan University, sat down with us to speak about building a supportive reading culture at school. It's off the back of a paper of hers that was recently published which set out to get a clearer picture of what can enhance or limit a school reading culture. The final report looks at the results of interview data from teacher librarians at 30 Western Australian schools. She had this to say about the research topic:

So what we really want is to have schools where the fostering of a reading culture is seen as something of importance beyond the library, beyond the English classroom, where all of the staff and the leadership are really focused on promoting that kind of a culture. And even beyond the school – bringing in parents, engaging parents and guardians in also promoting within a home context.

So, that point there brings me to a question. Is fostering a reading culture a priority for your school? If you're a school leader, how do you ensure that this a whole staff approach, not just the work of library and English teachers? And, as a teacher, how often are you providing opportunities for reading for pleasure in your classroom?

Now, staying on the topic of literacy, we had comment come through from Juliette, on our article about [a program running at the Art Gallery of Ballarat](#), which invites pre-service teachers to lead secondary students in creative writing workshops using materials at the gallery for inspiration. She had this to say about what seems to be a hugely successful program at her own school:

I've been lucky enough to run an extra-curricular writers club for the last ten years at Mt St Michaels College Ashgrove. We meet for two hours every Friday in term time and my 60+ writers write in a challenge by choice environment. Students write for an hour and share for at least 45 minutes. ... I have noticed that over the ten years of running the club, my writers who might otherwise remain quiet in the classroom, develop a voice and confidence in sharing their ideas.

Remember, we'd love to hear from you about great things going on in your school, or how you're using our content in your school setting. Get in touch by finding us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) just by searching 'Teacher ACER'. I'll also pop a link to that original article Juliette was reflecting on in the transcript of this podcast.

I'd like to take you now to the thoughts of pretty well-known music teacher. We caught up with Scott Maxwell, the ARIA Music Teacher of the Year, to speak about how he managed to so successfully build capacity within a limited budget constraint at his South Australian secondary school. Here's a snippet from [our video on that topic](#).

But even on no budget, there's no reason why you couldn't do a kitchen utensil show or a vegetable orchestra or something like that that is an authentic event in the community. And I guess from there, you know, you build up this little bit of momentum and you become a bit of a, sort of a, frontline to the community between the school and the community.

He went on to explain how, in his own experience, once the music students began to consistently make themselves present in the community, in turn, that helped them access more support from the school.

So, considering what Scott said just there – how present would you say your students are in the wider school community? In what ways could you help present the work you're doing more frequently? How could that benefit the entire school community?

Now, changing gears once again – and over to another exciting guest we caught up with – the eSafety Commissioner, Julie Inman Grant. She joined us to speak about some of the common cyberbullying incidents that are reported to her office, and where teachers can go to get some helpful resources about online safety. My big takeaway from this episode was what she had to say about the rate of bullying in Australia.

About one in five Australian children have been cyberbullied online between the ages of eight and 17. And these numbers have largely stayed consistent over the past 10 years or so. It's also important to know that face-to-face bullying is still more prevalent than cyberbullying. So one in four kids are bullied face-to-face, versus one in five that are cyberbullied online. But we know that the risk factors for young people, in terms of extreme mental distress, are increased markedly when they're both cyberbullied and bullied face-to-face. So that's something that we need to keep in mind.

Now, teacher targeted bullying is also something of concern. And, a recent report out of La Trobe University looked at this issue with the focus on bullying towards teachers which is enacted by students and parents. How common do you think this is?

Of the 560 educators they surveyed, almost 80 per cent said they'd been bullied or harassed by a student or a parent. Interestingly, a teacher's age seem to have an influence on their experience. Almost 90 per cent of younger teachers (who were aged 21-30) reported an experience of bullying or harassment, and that was compared to 54.5 per cent of teachers aged over 60. The lead researcher of this report had this to say:

This report is only beginning to shed light on the problems of parent and student bullying and harassment of teachers. What it is pointing to is that there is a problem in our schools which needs urgent addressing.

Another key finding of this report was that educators felt when they reported an incident, it was often downplayed or ignored by management. **So, that brings me to another question to think about. As a school leader, how could you improve how you're responding to instances of teacher bullying and harassment? What are you already doing well?**

And, finally, to finish up on the topic for literacy – one of my favourite pieces we've published recently is an instalment from our [Teachers' Bookshelf series](#). Megan Daley, an award winning teacher librarian and author has a new book, called *Raising Readers: How to nurture a child's love of books*, and it features a whole bunch of practical advice for educators. In the excerpt we featured, she shares some tips for designing and stocking a reading area in your classroom. Here's one small quote from the book:

I think it's important that you work with the interests of the students and allow them to create the space with you. It can even become a curriculum-related task ... When the students are a part of the process, it gives them a sense of ownership and they are more likely to feel comfortable using the space. This is also a perfect way to involve reluctant readers in a reading-related task that will have a positive outcome for everyone.

She goes into plenty of detail about what students can do to prepare a reading space, and the responsibilities they can have to maintain it throughout the year. **So, here's one last point I'd like to pose for discussion. Do you have a recreational reading space in your classroom? If you don't what's holding it back? If you do, what benefits is it offering your students?**

That's all from me for this episode, and you're all caught up on the latest evidence, insight and action in education. If you want to take a closer look at anything I've mentioned in this episode, you'll find all the links you need in the transcript of this podcast at our website – that's teachermagazine.com.au. While you're there, be sure to sign up to the *Teacher Bulletin* to have our new content delivered straight to your inbox.