

Our podcast highlights for 2019

Jo Earp

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Jo Earp: Hello, and thanks for downloading this special podcast episode from *Teacher*. I'm Jo Earp.

Rebecca Vukovic: I'm Rebecca Vukovic.

Dominique Russell: And I'm Dominique Russell.

JE: Thanks for tuning into our end of year edition. This edition we're going to take a look at the year that was for *Teacher* podcasts. It's been a busy year, as usual. We've published 32 podcast episodes this year – can you believe – and some exciting news as well; I've just had a look and we have broken through the half a million listens barrier.

This year we've also spoken to some fascinating guests, as usual. From all around the world – from here in Australia and overseas – and we've had a look at the latest in evidence, insight and action. So in this episode I thought we'd go through some of our personal highlights. Rebecca, you're going to start us off.

RV: Fantastic. Thanks, Jo. When I look back on this year, the moment that really stands out for me is [the podcast I recorded with Dr Lyn Sharratt](#), here in Melbourne, in front of a live audience of teachers and school leaders. It kicked off our *Teacher* Talks podcast series, which we intend to build on next year with a series of live events with a range of different speakers and topics.

With Lyn Sharratt, it was a really exciting event right from the outset. On the day we released tickets, it was booked out within an hour and I guess it was a really good opportunity to connect with readers and educators. The thing I enjoyed most about it was it was a really focused discussion. We focused on one specific area – Learning Walks and Talks – so Lyn was able to go into a lot of detail about it. We discussed what they are, how to do them effectively, and the impact they have on the classroom. I'd like to play a short excerpt of the discussion for listeners. In this clip, Lyn is discussing the protocols for learning walks and talks.

...We don't interrupt the instruction. So there's no greeting to the teacher, if we're walking with someone else, we don't talk to each other. It's a time for us to really observe what we're seeing in the classroom and if we get a chance, after we are in the classroom and there isn't direct teaching, we may kneel down and ask a student five questions. So after many walks in classrooms, the last protocol is, is there an authentic question we want to ask the teacher that we want to know more about as a leader?

So this podcast was one of our longest, it runs for nearly an hour, but it also proved to be really popular with *Teacher* readers. In fact, several people mentioned it specifically as the topic of most interest to them in our annual reader survey this year.

Dom, you were at the event in August. What did you think?

DR: It was amazing, it was one of my favourite days of the year. I think what I liked the most about it was the fact that we invited some of the guests to ask their own questions, too. Because, you know, often on our podcasts we get these comments and people are asking follow-up questions and we kind of build on that rapport, but to have that in person – and to also see what a range of people we have who listen to our podcasts; we had a casual relief teacher, we had a couple school leaders, we had some teachers – primary and secondary – it

was amazing; and hearing what they wanted to find out from Lyn was probably my biggest takeaway.

RV: Yeah, I agree. Okay – the next podcast I'd like to share was one I recorded at the beginning of the year with the wonderful [Yasodai Selvakumaran](#), a humanities teacher at Rooty Hill High School in New South Wales. When we recorded this episode, Yaso had been named in the Top 10 finalists for the Global Teacher Prize and was in the running to win \$1 million US dollars.

The Global Teacher Prize is awarded annually and recognises one exceptional teacher who's made an outstanding contribution to the teaching profession. The discussion covered social justice, connecting with students from different backgrounds, personalised learning plans and building confidence. What I loved about this interview was how Yaso really related to the students she teaches. She said:

I think sometimes, contrary to what some people think, sometimes there's students in classes that will say, 'I don't have a culture' when they're comparing themselves to other students who might have come from overseas or their families are from migrant or refugee backgrounds. And I think the key is to actually be able to work with students and say, you know, 'your values and where you come from and what you're aspiring to is just as valuable as anybody else's life experiences'.

It was quite a powerful message from Yaso.

JE: Yeah, I think the last part of that quote in particular really strikes a chord with me. You know, that idea that 'your life experiences are just as valuable as anyone else in this classroom'. And we often talk about that in the articles and the podcasts about trying to build on student's experiences and backgrounds and actually, you know, their starting points and we're they're coming from and use that as a strength. So, yeah, I think that was another good episode to choose.

RV: And on the topic of the Global Teacher Prize – nominations for the 2020 awards are now closed, and the top 50 finalists are due to be announced in early 2020. As always, *Teacher* will be covering the awards, so stay tuned for updates in the New Year.

Okay, the third piece I'd like to share is one I found really personally interesting and I was thrilled that *Teacher* podcast subscribers also loved it. It was [my chat with Dr Margaret Merga](#), a senior lecturer at Edith Cowan University on the topic of building a school reading culture. Margaret visited our offices in Melbourne and I jumped at the chance to sit down with her to discuss her research. It was published in the [Australian Journal of Education](#) in a paper titled, '[Building a school reading culture: Teacher librarians' perceptions of enabling and constraining factors](#)'. The part of the discussion, I guess, that I found the most interesting was when we spoke about the importance of having school leaders who read and how it works to build a school reading culture. It may seem obvious, but I love the way Margaret described it. She said:

So where the principal is a strong advocate of reading, in some cases as I mentioned in the paper, they're sending home newsletters around the importance of parents reading to their students at home, they're really acting as an advocate for reading beyond the school context, so both within a school and also beyond it. And so they're providing that modelling.

And I found that to be a really interesting point, because we're often talking about modelling here at the magazine and we know that that's really important.

JE: Yeah, and actually we might just actually take a pause to see what everybody's reading around this table, because I know that we're all avid readers. So I've just finished the latest Steven King. You know, fantastic horror writer. It's called *The Institute*, it's another one that keeps you on the edge of the seat so I'd recommend that one. I've got to go back to *Mythos*, and that's from Steven Fry, which is amazing. So I'd definitely recommend that one. Dom, what have you been reading?

DR: I've been reading a lot. I'm trying to read a book a week this year. I've just finished *The*

Great Believers by Rebecca Makkai. Incredible, it's a long book, it's about 600 pages, but it's worth every minute of it.

RV: I'm like Dom. Well I don't have any specific titles that come to mind. Because I've just joined a library recently so I'm just churning through books. I'm basically reading one a week at the moment. The thing with the library too is I'm not necessarily going off recommendations, I'm just scanning the shelves. So I'm picking up a lot of doozies as well. So there's some that I can't quite get through which I've never experienced before actually.

DR: Yep, just move to the next one.

JE: Good, so the important message is, yeah, let the kids know what you're reading, that you are a reader. Have books around the classroom. Make sure you've got plenty of material. Margaret Merga – look up some of her other work as well, she's published so much. We've done several articles that feature her work, in addition to the podcast. Jump on the site, the teachermagazine.com.au and just have a look in the archive there, there's tonnes of stuff there.

RV: Fantastic, well that's it from me, they're all my favourites. Jo, over to you.

JE: Okay, now I didn't do many podcasts this year, actually, you two led the way. But the one that is just – oh, it was brilliant for me – definitely, you knew I was going to pick this one. It's [the chat with Dylan Wiliam](#). I was lucky enough to catch up with him, in March I think it was, in Melbourne and it was just so enjoyable. We just chatted about all kinds of things to do with effective questioning in the classroom.

And it's sort of similar to what you were saying about the Lyn Sharratt podcast, we just took that one topic of effective questioning techniques and really sort of dissected it. I really enjoyed that. As a former teacher, there was a lot that came up that struck a chord with me. I know that listeners really enjoyed it too. It's already, as I say, only March that we recorded and published that. It's already our most popular podcast of all time, so it really was a hit with listeners.

So there's lots of things that Dylan shares about practical advice to do with questioning. He goes through a classroom display technique called the 'parking lot', so have a listen for that when you listen to the episode. He also takes us through the concept of using 'hinge' questions and planning for these questions throughout the lessons. But, in the clip that I've chosen, he explains the problem with the traditional teacher approach of asking the question and then getting kids to put their hands up to answer. Here he is:

The real problem is that teachers tend to ask a question, have the confident, articulate students volunteering to respond, the teacher gets an answer from those students and, therefore, if they give a correct answer the teacher tends to move on. All I'm saying is, if you're only hearing from the confident, articulate students, the quality of your evidence about who is getting it and who is not is rather poor. So the big idea, in terms of classroom questioning, is 'how good is the evidence you have?' – and if you're only hearing from the confident students, you can't be making decisions that reflect the learning needs of a diverse group of 25 or 30 students. So it's about broadening the evidence base, getting better evidence of what's happening in the heads of the students in the classroom, there and then.

... I think there are two good reasons to ask a question. One is to collect evidence that helps you make decisions about what to do next. The other, of course, is to cause students to think. So, I think that there's a range of things we can do with classroom questioning but, in general, if the teacher is asking a question for the purpose of finding out whether to move on or to reinforce a point, then you need better quality evidence than you can get by hearing only from the confident, articulate students.

RV: So obviously that's something that teachers really need to consciously think about, because it can be so easy to turn to students who always have their hand up and get them to answer the question, but that's certainly not 'broadening the evidence base', as Dylan puts it.

JE: Yeah, and I think it's a trap that all teachers fall into, to be honest. You know, he was

saying whether you're new to it, or whether you're very experienced, it's a very difficult thing to get right. And so, yeah, trying out some of these techniques – and even making a really small change like that one; 'don't put your hands up, I'll come around and ask different people', or perhaps do an A-E question. Again, there's so many practical tips in there. Have a listen to the full podcast, it's about 20-25 minutes, so there's tonnes to get from that podcast.

So that's my choice. Dom, we're on to yours now.

DR: Yeah, there was actually something in my first pick about questioning in the classroom, a completely different take on it though, of course, but it's interesting to compare those two things. My number one pick – I think it's probably a pretty obvious one coming from me, because it was just my absolute highlight for the year, such a standout episode, was when I spoke to Dr Rowena Conroy about [identifying and managing student anxiety](#).

It's obviously a really broad topic, unlike the specific topics of Dylan Wiliam and Lyn Sharratt, but she did delve into quite a number of practical elements and one of them was the concept of questioning in class. So something that I found quite interesting was that if she's working with a young child who does have that fear of always needing to be correct in the classroom – whether that means that they stay quiet in the classroom, or whatever the situation might be for that student – what I found interesting was, it's quite common for her to actually encourage a student to raise their hand and deliberately give the wrong answer and see that they can cope with that.

So we spoke a lot about how teachers and psychologists can work together; about how to teach students about how to cope effectively on their own, which was something that was really, really insightful for me. And there was one point in particular about that I liked in the interview that she focused a lot more on the teacher's role as opposed to a lot of the previous conversation which was based on student behaviour that could indicate anxiety. Something that she mentioned that I really liked was that she suggested that teachers can actually start to look at and start to question the atmosphere that they're creating themselves. Do teachers actually speak about when they themselves are feeling anxious about something and how they've overcome that?

So this clip that I'll play here is all about that and she really delves into what you as a classroom teacher can do to create a comfortable environment for students.

I think there are a number of things that teachers can do in terms of perhaps the atmosphere or the culture that they're creating. One of the biggest ones is just to normalise discussion about anxiety and fear. So, to have open discussion from time to time about the different fears that we all have, given anxiety and fear are such a normal part of life. And so being really sort of open and normalising about the concept that these are really normal parts of the human experience, I think can be really helpful.

I think that another thing that teachers can do is provide, or serve as really good role models for students around how to approach things if things do perhaps not go to plan or if something unexpected or difficult happens to model themselves that they're able to be flexible, or stay calm, or not catastrophise. Or that if teachers can model more of that approach and less of that avoidance behaviour, they're again setting a really helpful example for students.

JE: Yeah, I can see why you've picked that particular one. Like you say, there's lots of practical pointers in that one and some of the things that schools can be thinking about as well on a school level.

RV: This is definitely one of my favourite podcasts of the year, because, I guess, issues of mental health and anxiety are certainly something that teachers are grappling with in the classroom. And this podcast, like you've said, has so much practical advice.

In particular, the part I liked was when she discussed perfectionism and the fear and anxiety that students have about making mistakes, like you just mentioned. I think that a lot of teachers can relate to those behaviours and they'll take a lot from the podcast.

DR: And just on that as well, when she said that, you know, perfectionism can often be confused with conscientiousness and a student trying to be prepared, but that actually could be masking their fear of not knowing what's next or not doing anything correctly, which was really interesting, wasn't it?

JE: Yeah, I think it can sometimes go under the radar, can't it? Okay, number two?

DR: Number two for me, on a completely different note, but this was actually one of the most popular episodes that I did, too. And it was an interview all about [co-teaching and how that can improve student outcomes](#). So I spoke with Gail Smith, the principal at Rosebery Primary School in the Northern Territory. She comes from a really interesting perspective, because their school was actually purposely built for a co-teaching environment. She had some really, really good pointers to take away on the benefits for both teachers and students.

But what I liked most about it was the opportunities that it opened up for our listeners. With our annual reader survey, we got one particular bit of feedback, which was probably my favourite that I've read of the entire survey, of a teacher in Victoria who'd listened to the podcast, and then contacted Gail, the principal, on her own time and they'd actually realised that they'd both be in Victoria at a certain time and that Gail could come and visit and give some advice and talk to her in person. So it set up that connection for them which was just amazing.

JE: Yeah, I mean we often talk about the insight and the evidence side of things and the action bit is you know, that's the important bit as well. And so to get feedback like that is amazing. And, actually if there's anyone else out there – you know, we're always keen to hear the stories of how you've used the content or what you've done with the information that we've broadcast or we publish.

DR: Definitely. So I'll move onto my third? The third one's a nice one to finish off on. It was my interview with a researcher, Rachel Bolstad, she's from New Zealand and it was all [about games-based learning in the classroom](#).

So she'd done a huge body of research about the benefits of long term integration of games-based learning as opposed to what she found happened in most schools in New Zealand was that they'd integrate it for an inquiry-based unit and then let it go afterwards. So she looked at primary school and secondary school, and it was board games and digital games, it was really, really in depth.

So the one point that I really wanted to pick out from this that I found was quite a highlight was she spoke a lot to students themselves about their perspectives on games-based learning. So through these interviews with the students, particularly with the secondary students, she found that a lot of them actually came back to her and said that they felt they were looked upon by the adults in their schooling lives – playing games in general was a waste of time, it was distracting.

And then, on the flip-side, when she would speak to the teachers, the teachers would say 'what is it about the games that gets them so invested? Why they won't be fully immersed in schoolwork?' And so Rachel commented on that and said it was the addictive nature for it, the instant feedback that they get. So it was a really interesting perspective and I'll just play that clip now.

Actually the students were able to really clearly articulate, for them, what the differences were and why it was that games kind of, even if they were struggling or failing in a particular aspect, still gave them that kind of pull to continue. And they often felt like school didn't give them the same degree of sort of instantaneous feedback on how well they were doing, or the sense of gratification that they would get within games that would keep them going.

RV: Like Rachel said, I guess with games-based learning it's a medium that students are already familiar with and they're doing it at home and at school. I guess it makes it easier to understand why they are so highly motivated by games and persist with them as well. They're used to failure and they have that drive to succeed because that's what games teaches them. There are a lot of lessons we could learn from this kind of approach.

DR: Yeah, definitely. It was that whole point there that she made about instant feedback that really made it click for me.

JE: What I liked about this particular piece of research was that it broadened the idea of games. So I think quite a lot now, well, certainly in an education sense, when you think of games in the classroom, you're probably going to think of digital games, I would think.

Now as you know I'm a big board game fan, often do a bit of board games on a weekend. And as you also know, my chess wins in my lifetime are coming up to double figures. So I need a little bit more work at that one. But yeah, I was really excited that the research was actually about board games and she also talks about gamification; she talks about the games that the kids themselves have made up. When you think about how creative kids are with games, it's fantastic, and yet I think it's something that's often overlooked. So that for me was a big bonus with that particular study. So again, great choice. I definitely recommend going back and listening to that episode.

RV: And these were just some of our podcasts that we've published in 2019, but you'll find all of our episodes from our series on Behaviour Management, School Improvement, The Research Files, Teaching Methods, Action Research and Global Education wherever you get your podcasts. Make sure you subscribe to our channel on [Apple podcasts](#), [SoundCloud](#), or [Spotify](#) to make sure you never miss an episode.

JE: And as usual, of course, you'll find the full transcripts to every episode at the website, teachermagazine.com.au. Well sadly that's all from us in 2019. Thanks to everybody who's listened this year, to all our guests and to our sponsors. We'll be back in January 2020. In the meantime, though you can stay up to date with *Teacher* via our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages by searching for 'Teacher ACER'.

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