**ALAN REID transcript S1 Ep 3 v2.mp3**

**Speaker 1 is Jane**[00:00:10] 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 NTS.

**Speaker 2 is Don** [00:00:55] Okay. Welcome, everyone, and welcome, Jane. Jane, I know you're really chomping at the bit here because we've got a very special guest today. I'm excited, too. How are you, Jane?

**Speaker 1** [00:01:06] I'm well. Thanks, Don. Really looking forward to this conversation. Lucky you. Alan Reid, he's made himself available to talk to us about education. Such wise counsel and can't wait to hear what he's got to say.

**Speaker 2** [00:01:23] Same here, Jane. And Alan's a legend in education, both nationally and internationally. We're going to get stuck straight into it. Alan, before we get into the questions, I really need to let our listeners know a bit about your background. And because your background, your bio is distinguished, I'm going to read it because this there's a lot to read. Alan Reid is Professor Emeritus of Education at the University of South Australia and has a long and distinguished track record of publications, positions and research. Alan has held a number of positions, including Dean of Education, Director of Research Centers and Professor of Education. His research interests include educational policy, curriculum, change, social justice and education, citizenship, education and the history and politics of public education. Plus, Alan has published widely in these areas and gives many talks and papers to professional groups nationally and internationally. Alan's most recent book is ‘Changing Australian Education How Policy is Taking US Backwards and What Can Be Done About It’. This is a favorite theme of mine and I hope we get to discuss it. Jane, I'm going to throw it to you to ask Alan our first question.

**Speaker 1** [00:02:49] Great to have you on this podcast, Alan Reid. Wonderful. I've been looking at your work and examining, discussing, and using your work for a very long time in my own work, and it's been very central to my research in schools and certainly the teachers and principals that I've had the pleasure of working with over a long time. I want to start by asking you to talk about neoliberalism, and it's had a very big effect on teacher education and on education more generally. But from your perspective, how has it affected teachers work specifically?

**Speaker 3 is Alan** [00:03:35] I'd start by contrasting it with what it was like perhaps before the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s, When I started teaching a long time ago in the 1970s, there was a growing an awareness that schools were becoming more diverse, there were more challenges for teachers, and that the old kind of traditional ways of doing things were no longer appropriate. Young people were staying on at school for a longer period of time. The student population, as I say, was more diverse and so on, and teachers were starting to play around with alternative approaches. And at that time there was the realization that if teachers were going to do that, they needed to have the space to be able to do it, the autonomy to be able to do it. And in South Australia, where I started teaching, the director general of Education had just actually promulgated something called the Freedom of Authority Memorandum, which said that schools and teachers have the autonomy to develop their curriculum to suit the needs of their particular students. There were broad curriculum frameworks, but they didn't really they weren't strictures on teachers as tight as they are today. And from that time when I started for the next few years, it was a really exciting time. We were debating and discussing. We used to spend hours after school designing programs to suit what we thought were the needs of the students in our care. It was great professional fun. There was a lot of zest and zing and vigor. People just enjoyed the task of teaching. In fact, I remember I used to drive home thinking there's nothing I'd rather do than be a teacher, you know, because it was so intellectual, It was such intellectual work and it was so exciting. And then from about the mid-eighties, things started to close down slowly. There were tighter controls on teachers. There was more forms of intrusive accountability and so on. In my book, I put that down to the rise of neo liberalism.

**Speaker 1** [00:05:40] So can you define neo liberalism for us, please, Alan?

**Speaker 3** [00:05:44] So neo liberalism in the economic sphere is about organizing economies without very little market regulation. An unregulated market reducing the size of government, ensuring that governments get out of the way. Tax cuts for the wealthy, which would then trickle down to the rest of society and so on. It's sort of a life size fair economy. And with that sort of economic theory with ways of seeing the world, for example, people were seen as consumers exercising choice in their own self-interest rather than members of a community working for the common good. The private sector was seen as the best place to deliver programs rather than the public sector and so on. And what happened is that neoliberalism, this this philosophy. He invaded areas of social policy like education. And in education, I think it saw the rise of what I call the standardizing educational agenda, which has at least two parts to it. The first was the transfer of private sector practices across to education. And then we had the rise of what was called corporate managerialism. The place was awash with key performance indicators and vision and mission statements and strategic plans and intrusive accountability and so on. And things were starting to closed down for teachers and for education. And the second aspect of the standardizing agenda was choice and competition, that the best way to improve quality was to get teachers and schools to compete against one another, to give the customers who were the parents and students choice. And I think those two things combined have had this negative deleterious effect on education. If, for example, they've increased the increase, the funding that goes to private schools. They've increased the social segregation of schooling. Equity has been marginalized as a concern. Education has been privatized and commercialized in many ways. And then to get to your question, Jane, it's had this really bad effect on teachers and teachers work.

**Speaker 1** [00:08:05] Just thinking about that a bit further, Alan, how has neoliberalism been so damaging to teachers work?

**Speaker 3** [00:08:13] What goes along with choice and competition? The notion of customers is the need to provide them with data. And we saw the rise of standardized testing and standardized tests, these narrow tests only of literacy and numeracy, not of other broad areas of the curriculum, became the arbiters of quality of schooling and the curriculum. And so league tables to establish accountability regimes were put in place and the purpose of education became one of improving test results. And all of this has had this really negative impact on teachers work. Teachers, I think, are now subject to increase administrative demands and paperwork. Its intensified their work. And that work intensification has led to rising rates of teacher stress and burnout and cynicism and disillusionment and resignations. And teachers work has been deep professionalized as experts from outside the school establish goals of schooling, the specific policy interventions to achieve them, and the ways to assess them. While school based educators, teachers are charged with the task of implementing it all and are held responsible for the outcome. And as a result, teacher morale plummets as their professional expertise is undervalued and as they're excluded from making important decisions about their work and as they're subject to ongoing criticism about their work based on those simplistic measures that I've described.

**Speaker 1** [00:09:52] Alan, if this is as damaging as you say, then why has this been allowed to happen?

**Speaker 3** [00:09:58] What is surprising to me? Jane it's had that negative impact on teachers work and the very people that have devised these standardized tests and at these narrow programs of what education is about, these very people over their time for the last 20, 25 years, say that standards and education are declining based on these test results. And yet their response is not to question the whole approach, but rather to ratchet it up, to increase accountability, to increase the focus on these narrow areas of curriculum. And the standardized agenda is never questioned, despite its manifest failure as judged by its own measures.

**Speaker 1** [00:10:46] Thank you, Alan. That was very fulsome response and it was carefully set out for us. I just wondered in terms of your latest book, ‘Changing Australian Education, why policy is taking us backwards and what can be done about it’. In the book you are absolutely setting out a new narrative for Australian education. What are the key issues in that narrative that you think are going to offer a new solution to turn the very large ship, if you like, or ocean liner that is education around?

**Speaker 3** [00:11:25] When I was writing the book, I was thinking we've been challenging standardized testing or that regime for so long and nothing much has happened. But it does seem that some of the policy makers are starting to question the approach. What I was concerned about was that you could perhaps remove the tight focus on that NAPLAN and PISA as the sole arbiters of education quality. But if you didn't change the narrative around education, that is what its purposes are. And if you didn't change that narrative, then all that might happen is that something just as toxic as a narrow standardizing agenda would be put back in its place.

**Speaker 2** [00:12:08] Alan, can you talk about what you proposed in your book and how it's going to make a difference to education?

**Speaker 3** [00:12:14] I came up with what I proposed might be a new way, a new narrative, the way we need to talk about education. And the first aspect of it was to have a focus on the purposes of education. Because the purposes of education have become so narrow now, they've only been primarily focused on developing kids for the economy or focused on improving standardized test results. I think a discussion in the education community about what are the broad purposes of education is fundamental. I mean, I say in the book, I propose, at least for there's a democratic purpose developing young people for democracy. There is an economic purpose, developing young people with the skills and capabilities for the workforce. There's a social and cultural purpose developing young people who can work productively in a very diverse society with others, develop relationships with diverse others, and so on. And there's an individual purpose which is about trying to bring out the best in every young person. I thought, although it sounds very general, that a discussion in the education community about purposes, a genuine discussion, would show us that actually the education policy direction has been so narrow, focusing as it is on just these test results. I think it's an important first step in to stop the narrowing of the curriculum and the narrowing of educational aims.

**Speaker 2** [00:13:45] Alan, what are you thinking here about the values and principles?

**Speaker 3** [00:13:49] We need to agree both as educators and policymakers need to conform to what we come up with on the values and principles that should inform policy. I'm thinking here about principles such as ensuring that all public schools are well resourced and inclusive and don't segregated, or being concerned about inequitable educational outcomes or valuing a broad and comprehensive curriculum, or actively involving parents and students and community members, as well as education in the life of schools and so on. Those broad values and principles that I think most educators would agree are important and yet are often marginalized when education policy is made. I want to bring them to the forefront. Lay them out and say we need to check policy against these kinds of values and principles. And my third aspect was I began thinking that we keep talking about a rapidly changing world and how much is changing with technology and the economy and the environment and so on. And yet we have a model of curriculum change, which is every five or ten years we decide that we're rewrite the curriculum and that may or may not involve teachers, but there's a bit of work, a bit of desultory consultation, and the new curriculum emerges.

**Speaker 2** [00:15:15] How do you propose addressing that issue?

**Speaker 3** [00:15:17] It seems to me that kind of isn't adequate for keeping up with the rapidity of change in the contemporary world. I think we need a new approach to curriculum change. And in the book, I came up with one approach which placed at its heart the involvement of teachers in discussing and talking about on a system wide basis and within schools, key contemporary issues such as technological change and environmental change. And asking out of those discussions, really trying to understand what was happening, but asking out of those discussions, what does that mean for the sorts of things we want young people to to learn and to be able to do. And making curriculum modifications and changes as we go. So, Jane, that's again, a very broad answer. But I was thinking of new ways of talking about education, which involve a focus on purposes agreement about values and principles and some consideration about new ways of dealing with curriculum change.

**Speaker 2** [00:16:21] Alan, thanks very much for that answer. And I'd like to pick up on a point you just made that you made a lot of points and one how we talk about education. And it seems to me that education is now talked about in those neo liberal terms. You mentioned customers. And I know for me, every time I get on a train and I get called a customer through the announcement, it annoys me. I'm a passenger, actually. But education has its customers now and its clients. And we hear terms like evidence based user pays, quality teaching, quality teachers, etc.. So when we talk about the purposes of education and you've outlined your purposes, what do you think are the key terms we need to be using to develop a shared language to move us away from the terms of neo liberalism?

**Speaker 3** [00:17:08] There's a couple of things there. I mean, it's not just about the key terms. It's about the the process. Mean, it seems to me if we're going to have a genuine discussion, then rather than seeing teachers as the people who are going to deliver what people external to schools decide, they've got to be intimately involved in this conversation. They've got to be central to it. Teachers, together with their school communities, need to be part of that, A discussion and debate about what we're doing and why. And the education policymakers need to take what they're saying seriously. So that process is important. I think that at the heart of any change like this is the need to professionalize teaching again, to see teachers as professionals, as as as their work, as being intellectual work, not as technicians who would just have to deliver some programs that are developed externally within that. I'd be in my discussions about alternatives to neoliberalism. I'd be placing at the forefront the public good or the common good. That is, how do we think as collectives, as groups, as a society, about what benefits us all and not just what benefits? May I be trying to change the conversation away from looking through the lens of the individual to looking through the lens of us together as a community? That for me, would be a significant shift from the consumer to citizens caring about the common good and caring about all of us and our society as a whole. I think that would be, for me, the most significant shift in terms of language.

**Speaker 1** [00:18:50] Alan, I just want to cast your mind back to a paper that you wrote in 2016, and I see that when you speak and your responses today. I mean, there's a common theme across your writing and research and activities, but it was a paper that you wrote called ‘Building the Nation through Public Education’, and it was for the Australian Government Primary Principals Association, and it formed the basis of a national campaign by the government of the day on behalf of school principals to promote public education. Now, I remember that that campaign was very effective. And if you think about the money that Jason Clare is talking about allocating to a public relations campaign which will involve a range of different stories about education, good news, case studies and promoting public education, what sort of factors can you draw upon from that campaign in 2016 that will be pertinent and helpful for the new agenda and the millions that have been allocated by Jason Clare from the roundtable discussions?

**Speaker 3** [00:20:15] What came out of that paper and then subsequent talks like I have. And so a discussion with the education community about public education was that it was really central that we both identify and value what I think are the sort of organic characteristics of public education, which often we talk about public education so well, it's just schools where we've got to improve the quality of education and so on with that, recognizing that at the heart of. Public education like these fundamental characteristics. And in fact, in South Australia I chaired the Public Education Advisory Committee for a couple of years that the Minister set up, and we developed a public education statement which tried to to state what one of these fundamental characteristics of public education. Now we went beyond the very public and secular, which are important, but we went to things like a characteristic of community. I mean, every public school is in and of its community. Whereas, say, private schools, I have school communities, but often students travel across a number of local communities to get to a private school. Every public school is in and of its local community. And I think that's a really important characteristic that we need to recognize and build from. A second would be because public schools take all. They can't exclude students on any kind of basis that they represent the diversity of our community. At the heart of public education is diversity. And in a community where we're trying to develop cohesion from diversity, seems to me that those public schools are such essential places to develop the capacity to be able to do that because public schools take all comers. Public schools have the largest percentage of students that come from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, and because of that, equity and innovation become absolutely key parts of any public school.

**Speaker 1** [00:22:29] How do you propose to deal with this issue?

**Speaker 3** [00:22:32] For me, it's that, yeah, we can think of these programs that might help promote education, public education. But I think identifying and celebrating in our community what lies at the heart of public education, those particular characteristics and those wonderful characteristics of public schools. I think that's what I'd I'd say is one of the missing elements in all of these efforts to promote public education.

**Speaker 2** [00:23:00] Thanks, Alan. That was really interesting. And we're moving on to the next part of this interview, and this is where you get to do a 32nd rant on a topic of any choice of yours. We're not going to interrupt. We're going to let you go for 30 seconds. Are you ready?

**Speaker 3** [00:23:19] For me, one of the big issues is that this talk in binaries like a disciplinary versus interdisciplinary teaching. And in my view, those both of those things are fundamental to education. Another example of a binary that I think is unhelpful is the current mode of promoting just explicit instruction as being the answer to everything. As long as we have explicit instruction, we're going to have quality education. And so in the process of making that case, they downgrade things like inquiry based learning and so on.

**Speaker 2** [00:23:57] Thanks very much, Alan. And you've covered a lot of ground there and we really appreciate your insights. We'd certainly recommend your work to our listeners, particularly your latest book. And I know Jane has really enjoyed that.

**Speaker 1** [00:24:11] Yes, Alan, it was great to connect with you again and to hear the wisdom. And often I think that our conversations around education don't come from that wise base. And I've always seen you as a person who had tremendous insight through the way that you've, you know, worked at the elbow of teachers right through to the work that you've done with our largest research organizations. I just wanted to say thank you for the work that you've done over the years, but the work that you continue to do, and it was fantastic to be able to talk to you again.

**Speaker 2** [00:24:50] Yes, Thanks, Alan.

**Speaker 3** [00:24:52] A terrific. I enjoyed talking to you both.

**Speaker 2** [00:25:04] Well, Jane, what did you think of that?

**Speaker 1** [00:25:07] When you talk to somebody like Alan. You not only have confirmed in your own mind the complexities of education, but how amazing would it be for our recent education ministers to have listened to Alan? I know that he's been to Canberra many times. Ministers of Education in this country need to draw on the advice and the experience of people like Alan Reid.

**Speaker 2** [00:25:37] Quite right, Jane. Alan has a wealth of knowledge, a wealth of experience, and he's there. He's ready to share with policymakers, with politicians, etc. Let's hope they do that.

**Speaker 1** [00:25:49] Yes, there's lots of interesting points that he was making. And this is again, a situation where not only is it drawn from a breadth of experience, but there's a lot of fresh ideas that he presented today. And I think that they would be extremely useful in the current consultation period. And even if that finishes, there are many ideas that he shared with us today that could be taken up and really looking forward to the possibility of that. Yes. Thank you, John.

**Speaker 2** [00:26:21] Thank you, Jane.

**Speaker 1** [00:26:27] 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.