

**TT Series 3**  
**Erin Morley**  
**Transcript October 2024**

Erin Morley is in our studio today.

Erin is the editor of Education Review and Campus Review. Now, these publications will be well known to lots of talking teachers, listeners. And it's a there are two magazines that one caters for K-12. And Campus Review, of course, is a magazine that looks at the university sector.

Every week, Erin produces lots of newsletters for teachers, principals and academics. It's really focused around the news of the day. And during her time as a journalist, she's reported on lots of really high-profile stories and more recently, the university's accord process, changes to international student policy and numbers. Of course, that's something that we're interested in here. And of course, some the wars over public education. So I just wanted to welcome you here today, Erin.

ERIN MORLEY 1:57

Thanks so much for having me.

DON CARTER 1:59

First question I want to ask you is why did you decide on journalism? I mean, were you a good student in English in particular? Was that your favourite subject?

ERIN MORLEY 2:08

Well, in terms of deciding in journalism, I don't actually really know why I chose it. Funnily enough, it wasn't a class or anything like that in high school that I did around journalism, I would say English probably was the closest thing. I think I chose it because it was something different and nothing was really grabbing me. So I'm glad I chose it. But I guess it was kind of fate. I enjoyed school. I did enjoy English. I did advanced English in Year 12, but I probably didn't put all my effort into it because I was I graduated in 2020, so we had that lockdown at the start in March. I think it went for quite a few months. So I did disconnect from school during that year, which I regret now. But yes, so that's kind of put a spanner in the works if you want, in terms of my study. But I look back and I have good memories of school. But yes, that last year was a little bit difficult.

JANE HUNTER 3:02

Doing your HSC in the COVID year, that was that was a huge impact on you. Yes. And you went to in Wollongong actually, and did your degree there. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

ERIN MORLEY 3:17

That was a great experience that those three is at Wollongong Uni. It's a nice uni. I remember I actually did what's called a university-ready course the year before, so that guaranteed me a spot in university, which was a great privilege to go and it was a great experience in during those years. When I visited before I had graduated high school, there was this big building being built. It's called the Gillian Broadbent Building, and that is the journalism building that has great equipment. So I was lucky enough to be able to use that. I did a few podcasts, lots of going out and finding stories like you're on the job in that degree. So it set me up quite well.

JANE HUNTER 3:57

With regard to the job description that you have around Education Review and Campus Review. I mean, they are prolific, and so can you explain your role in those particular publications that come out every week?

ERIN MORLEY 4:16

Yes, I oversee all the content that comes out of those two magazines, and it's really made for workforces, which is which is what's really good about it. So for Education Review, that's for teachers, principals, school staff and then for tertiary, it's the VET sector as well as Uni's administration, Vice-Chancellors and academics and research. So it's a very big area in both sectors and yes so as I said it's made for the workforces so you can really get into practice and policy and because it's not commercial news, I can spend more time on those topics and really talk to people and get a greater understanding of what's going on and do more of that slow journalism. That's really hard to get done today as media moves online.

JANE HUNTER 5:03

Yes that's interesting. Slow journalism. Is there such a thing as a 24-hour news cycle ruined all of that?

DON CARTER 5:12

So, Erin, I'm really keen to find out how you select stories. Are there stories that or controversial issues that you steer clear of? Do you feel that you give voice to teachers and principals? How do you select stories?

ERIN MORLEY 5:25

I mean, I hope we don't steer clear of controversial issues. I think all media probably feeds into controversial issues maybe a little bit too much, but we definitely don't steer clear of them because that's what people want to know about. So journalism is really about creating media for people that don't have the time to investigate it for themselves. So we definitely don't seek to have controversial issues.

Obviously, clicks are driving bulletins in today's newsrooms, so that's something that we need to be aware of. But something I've learned is that everybody does have an agenda and you really do see that even in the emails and the calls I get and the media releases I get from everybody, it doesn't matter if they government, non-government, private public sector is trying to push their own agenda.

So whether that's selling you something or they want you to write about them to sell an audience, something that happens a lot or an agenda like you too are quite aware of about explicit instruction and the like. That does come through and it's almost a muscle that you build and you learn to read those, those agendas that are kind of being put between the lines there.

DON CARTER 6:30

So Erin, that's really interesting. How do you sift through people's agendas and report in a balanced way?

ERIN MORLEY 6:38

Knowledge is power with that. It just knowing where that release is coming from, the people behind it, the people publishing it, knowing a little bit about the sector and who's got connections with who really helps with that. And talking to people. I mean, you asked before, do we represent the voices of academics and teachers? And I hope we do.

But that is the thing that has helped me the most is just talking to people in the sector, whether that be teachers, academics, a lot easier to contact because they just need to get a little bit of media clearance. But talking to academics and researchers who are actually experts in this and have been in the sector for so long, they will be quite candid, which is really great. And that's what's really needed, because the journalists can't be an expert about everything. Yes. So I would say that that's the main point is just having conversations and and being observant of that.

JANE HUNTER 7:30

So I'm just wondering with regard to controversial issues and the ways in which you publish, do you use a calendar approach to news stories, for example? You know, the start of each year, it's obviously children are going to school for the first time. It might be in the latter stages of schooling, an HSC year in a family, there's always those stories around school fees that seem to pop up right at the beginning. Later on in the year, the public private debate seems to rear its head. And then of course, you've got NAPLAN and test results and all of that. So do you kind of plot the year or how does that actually work?

ERIN MORLEY 8:12

You did pretty much hit a lot of those things on the head. We do have an idea of what's happening. Much to journalists' dismay. We can't plan the news, which would be handy, but we can't. So every day, every week, I have to look for what's happening. So I have an internal news wire that helps me with that as well. So other journalists are actually supporting me there. So we are looking at very much of the news of the day about we're aware of, just like you said, back to school, school fee increases have actually been announced recently. So that's something that's happening this time of year. NAPLAN is always a big one. You know, things like why do we still do not plan getting opinions and voices from the sector about what they think of standardised testing and, and all of these kind of pinpoint moments. Open up big conversation. So we do try to hit that just so it's relevant for the audience. And again, like something that people want to be reading.

JANE HUNTER 9:06

I mean, you said you've got an internal news wire that you use, but you've got to be across so many areas. And it even though you talked about slow journalism, it seems that the rapidity and the number of publications that you're producing every week, it's a huge workload. I mean, do you ever actually get to sleep? I'm wondering.

ERIN MORLEY 9:30

Surprisingly, I do. It's I made a I've been doing it for a little over a year now, so I am better at it now than I was. I did come in as a news editor, so I used to actually work across four mags, but I wasn't responsible for any of them. So I worked under two editors, a health editor and an education editor. So that was good to slowly introduce me to that responsibility. And then I got promoted to education editor. So you need to find your feet. I think as within any job, I mean, a newsletter style is I get more

sleep than journalists who are on the 24-hour news cycle. The biggest thing for me is just being nervous that I haven't captured everything. I think sometimes it can be limiting what I can put out. If there are lots of things happening, there usually is towards time. As things are starting to wrap up. For example, it can be stressful to try to get everything out, but I think I do an OK job at it.

JANE HUNTER 10:31

Yes, I absolutely agree you to do more than an OK job at it.

DON CARTER 10:36

Erin. I'm just wondering how influential you think Education Review and Campus Review are. Now, I realise you would have a number of subscriptions for both publications, but how do you get a sense of the influence of those two publications?

ERIN MORLEY 10:52

I always am proud when a story elicits a response and I get emails back. You can email my boss, my editor, nice things about me. Of course, at the end of each story and she will forward them through to me. So things like I published a story last this year, actually early this year, about gendered uniform in private schools that got quite a response from a lot of teachers who care about that issue. And I'm wondering what else they can do. And similarly with civics and citizenship education, that is something I'm quite passionate about personally. But there is an inquiry into that right now about how civics and citizenship is being taught to everyone in the country, but especially in schools. That got quite a response. So that is a marker for me. Obviously, we have data that tells us various things, but I enjoy engaging in conversation and that again, that muscle of having conversations and observing things, it's a lot easier to do that when people are talking back to me as well. So that's really positive.

DON CARTER 11:58

Thanks, Erin. Another thing I wanted to ask along those lines is you have a number of competitors in this space. What makes your two publications different to the others or better?

ERIN MORLEY 12:09

I think we really try to put a mark on practice bit on classroom practice and about practice in university classrooms and policy as well. I think that our coverage, what it does really well is, is look at what's happening on the ground so much we do look at obviously what industry news but I really like to get in there and ask well is this actually going to work? You know, these guidelines or this report, whatever it might be. So we've got the theory down.

But what do you actually need right now that you're not getting? So that is something I'm quite proud of, that we do. And there is there is a lot of media out there. I think there is an oversaturation of media period in the world. I think that everybody has a responsibility for themselves to identify what they're consuming. And if they not even if they agree with it, but if they if it's for them.

So by all means consume lots of different publications. I don't consume just one type of news media. Have a look at that agenda and see where it's coming from and see how those, those little implications are being woven into that.

JANE HUNTER 13:27

That's so interesting. I mean, I think that it's a very fine line that you always tread and I think that the fact that teachers in particular and probably principals can actually email you or email your editor back after I noticed at the bottom of the byline, there's often Rebecca Cox's email address, for example, because certainly in New South Wales and if you're a teacher in a public school, you just simply can't be vocal and push back against things that you might disagree with.

And so people, you know, used to use Twitter, that was a very big space. But then the Department really clamped down on that. And then, of course, you know, X came along and even less teachers now are in that space for all sorts of reasons. But and the same with LinkedIn. That's become a space that lots of people have migrated to. And but again, it's very rare that teachers certainly in public schools will really air their views.

So the fact that they've got an outlet to come to a space like yours I think must be very comforting because we are in a I would say there's a real kind of reckoning happening in education across the world. And with the teacher shortage. But, you know, okay, that's a global situation, but we're absolutely not immune to that in New South Wales and in Australia more broadly.

So I just think that I want to thank you for enabling teachers to be able to have that avenue to vent how they feeling. An okay, it may not go any further, but at least you get a kind of a sense of what is really antagonising or resonating with teachers. So that's great.

DON CARTER 15:23

Thank you. So, Erin, we're coming to the part of the interview where you get to do a bit of a rant. Each one of our guests has been given 30 seconds to talk about something that might make their blood boil or something that they're passionate about, just 30 seconds worth. And so I'm going to hand it over to you.

ERIN MORLEY 15:41

Thank you, Don. Well, I have not really decided the topic for this thread. Well, I have decided, but it was hard, really. I finally decided to because before I came here, because there are a lot of things I could rant about, I did want to go on a bit of a funding rant, but I think I'll leave that because you can read my stories about that. But this is something I haven't really written about much and I don't know what know about it much.

So I was hoping to maybe put it back to you too, to tell me what you know. But it is that season where Year 12 sit their exams. It was an eye opener for me and you can call me a typical young person, but I don't necessarily know if exams are the most effective way of assessing. And I have been talking a lot about AI in education and a big question is how are we going to use an assessment?

And I'm hearing, well, we can use e-assessment, but it might exacerbate issues that we already have in terms of is it the most effective in capturing students' knowledge, especially those big written English exams in the HSC?

I remember my creative writing HSC exam very well, and I remember the appalling story that I wrote. Yet because I had I had only what, 15 minutes to make up a story and I really made it up on the fly. And, and I didn't do very well in that test which, which, you know, it worked out fine for me, but I still remember that stress. And this time of year, you know, of getting lots of things in my inbox is about year 12 exams. So but the funny thing is and why I feel so passionately about it is that I've never had

to undergo a creative process like that in my professional career because a creative process is not one done under time restraints.

So I've never had to quickly think of a whatever it might be an idea or anything like that and executed in what you get maybe half an hour or so. Every creative process I've been through and you know, ones that have been successful take time and they take conversations and then you talk about it with a group and then you go and do your own work and then you come back and show them something. And I'm wondering why we assess people in English like that.

DON CARTER 17:57

That is such a great question and it's such a big question, and we would need a whole series.. But I really take your point about being creative. It's a process. It's not based around a product that you produce within 40 minutes, right? I agree with you totally. And that's one of the conundrums about examinations, particularly in English. I'd like to come back to this. We really don't have time to get into it, but Jane and I have some ideas about this. We have some views about this. We are both former English teachers. So, yes, let's come back to it another time.

JANE HUNTER 18:36

Yes. Look, you know, just in a nutshell, Erin, I've never been a fan of the HSC. I've been calling for no ATAR for probably at least 15 to 20 years now. It was always anathema to me having come from my last position as a head teacher in the A.C.T.. So teaching year 11 and 12 where there is no HSC, it's done on continuous assessment. Students do a creative writing unit for a whole semester. They can then take those four semesters, take three of them, do a whole moderation test, a Year 11 test with their cohort, and then that mark is looked at against the average of their results across three semesters.

So in that time we were teaching things like Sylvia Plath's poetry for a whole semester, really digging deeply into the creative process. So exams and the short termism of an exam and what you have to produce is just unrealistic.

And so for me, we've tinkered around with the HSC, we've tinkered around with a to, you know, shock horror. The students in New South Wales suddenly have early entry. Well, I actually got early entry to ANU in 1976.

So for me, New South Wales has always been a very big, immovable force in education. And I just think with the numbers of students who are alienated from school, the numbers that that home schooling numbers are rising through the roof, the teacher shortage examinations in the way that we know it are well and truly past their use by date.

So anyway, I could probably talk for at least another half hour about this or maybe more, but I won't. So look, let's just finish off. But it's a great question and I'm glad that that's a conundrum that you've felt yourself and totally, you know, memorising the essays was an HSC marker for a number of years. You know, they were just no matter what the question was, students would reproduce what they had memorised and often didn't necessarily match the question that they were being asked. But that is not good learning in my view.

But look, let's go to perhaps by way of finishing what are some of the most interesting stories that you've done just in the last couple of years that really captured your imagination and creativity?

ERIN MORLEY 21:14

Well, I mean, to stay on topic, a big one, probably my first investigate investigative story I did when I came on board was looking into early entry because it is something I am passionate about, as you can tell. And a lot of the things I heard from teachers were things like even if students have an early entry, if where, if they're a high achieving student or for a generally a high-achieving school, that offer the university has made doesn't necessarily take down the willingness to do well in HSC. It is about intrinsic motivation a lot of the time, although I think there is a place for early entry.

But there has been controversy with the time in which students are told that they have an offer, especially, I mean, last year there was a little bit of an allegation by the Education Minister that some universities here in Sydney and Melbourne were giving unconditional offers to students to try to poach them. And that's a big no no, the unconditional offer.

So that was a big one and one that I think was done quite well more recently, the international student cap process has been so interesting to watch those hearings where I watched all of them, you know, many hours and they were very interesting and very telling of the legislation.

And I've really enjoyed covering that topic recently. I've enjoyed recently covering, as I mentioned before, a story about gendered uniforms in private schools and how that influences perceptions that young people form about men and women and their roles in society.

That was a very interesting one from a psychological point of view. Oh, the right to disconnect legislation that's been passed recently. That was an interesting chat I had with the lawyer about that and how it will affect teachers and how it exposed big issues with teachers' workloads as a whole and how there's no set hours in a week for teachers or expected to work, you know, sometimes on weekends after school and how that's impacting their lives

And then after COVID and with technology that has been exacerbated so much in terms of working after they get home, etc.. So that was an interesting one.

JANE HUNTER 23:34

They are such great examples. And so just one we need to finish now, Erin. But you mentioned AI before. Do you think that is in danger of taking over the role of journalists or maybe it already has?

ERIN MORLEY 23:47

I think everybody in every industry is worried about that. It's taking their jobs. I know it's happening. I have friends who are accountants and do quite repetitive administrative tasks and the such and that that is a threat to those jobs. It's not a threat in the way that it will take away the profession of accounting and the like, but it will change it dramatically. So I think AI is going to change industries. It has taken on those simpler tasks earlier. There are elements of journalism that definitely need to be done by a human, but not all elements. And I think there are elements in every industry that can be done by a computer and are probably already being done by a computer. I mean, it's been around for two decades at least, but it's really when generative AI was made accessible through chatbots to a few years ago that we've started kind of having more conversations about it. So no, I don't think it would take my job.

DON CARTER 24:45

Erin, that's been fantastic. Very interesting stuff and thought provoking and we can tell that you are really passionate about your job and you're across the issues. Thank you so much.

JANE HUNTER 24:55

Thank you so much, Erin. Lovely to meet you and really thank you for your time.

ERIN MORLEY 25:00

Thanks to you both and thanks for the great work you do. And my job is only possible with the researchers and the teachers in the classroom. So thanks to you all.

JANE HUNTER 25:18

Excellent to have a recent communications graduate this morning, Don. And Erin Morley, she has only been in the field and actually being employed as a journalist for a very short time, but very much across the issues, but also the way that she writes. And you and I have done pieces for her, and it was very good to be able to understand how she thinks about stories and also something that she didn't mention is she comes from a teaching background. So I just wonder how much that is influence the empathy that she shows towards understanding practice and how important it is to get that across.

DON CARTER 26:03

Yeah, I think that's an important point, Jane. Erin certainly has empathy and knowledge, broad knowledge, but also quite a deep knowledge in specific issues. And that's really heartening to know that an education journalist is not only really keen to get out there and investigate the issues, but understands the issues, has firsthand experience of many of those issues. And I really like the fact that she brought up the exams. I mean, that would have been great to have continued that discussion. There's so much to say about the HSC, about exams, particularly with regard to creative writing. For example, another huge topic.

JANE HUNTER 26:43

Yes, we certainly could have had another half hour on that topic alone. But she mentioned the word muscle, and I haven't heard that mentioned before in certainly in the context of journalism. But I think writing is a muscle. And you know, something that as a former English teacher and I don't know if you've found this, that you know, when students can exercise that muscle to really, you know, be creative or to really tease out ideas around authors and so on, it does seem to make a difference in their writing.

DON CARTER 27:18

I agree. And I like that analogy of the muscle as well. I mean, an athlete who's competing at a high level always has to practice, rehearse as such, and that involves activating muscles that writers at the same. They need to activate the muscle, get it fit, get it going.

JANE HUNTER 27:39

Thank you so much and look forward to the next interview and yet, Erin, a refreshing, wonderful young journalist and look forward to seeing how her career grows.

DON CARTER 27:51

Thanks, Jane. I'm looking forward to the next one as well.