**Talking Teachers: Associate Professor Jessica Gerard and Dr Jessica Holloway.**

**Jane Hunter** 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 the series with my colleague Don Carter, and we're both teacher education academics at UTS.

**Jane Hunter**

This podcast is about attempting to address some of the current challenges in education. And in this episode, we focus on expertise. And in fact, we're going to talk to two education researchers who've just written a whole book about it. So Don, when you actually think about expertise, what comes to mind?

**Don Carter**

Look, that's a really good question, Jane, and I do think it depends on who you talk to and the area in which they're working. But I do think there are some intersecting points, such as the length of time the expert has been involved in the field. So that relates to experience, I guess, the levels of specialised knowledge.

and also the specialised activities that all come together to form expertise. And it's things like problem solving abilities, the ability to organise their knowledge quickly and to communicate that knowledge. But I'm no expert on expertise.

**Jane Hunter**

Well, we're going to take up some of those ideas that you have, and I really wanted to talk about the title of a new book published by Bloomsbury and written by Team Double J, as I like to call them. So we have Associate Professor Jessica Gerard from the Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne and Dr. Jessica Holloway from the Institute for Learning Sciences and Teacher Education at the Australian Catholic University in Brisbane. Now both Jessica's have had a long-held interest in social inequalities in relation to education, activism, work and unemployment. And this extends to their current ARC discovery projects. And in Jessica Holloway's case, meant relocating to Australia from Kansas to pursue further research into the research between accountability and educational leadership. But for the full bio details of Jessica and Jessica, I would like to draw the listener's attention to the show notes for this episode. So let's jump right in. So... In my time as an educator, I've also thought a lot about this word expertise. It's throughout my career teaching and working in schools and in teacher education, the idea of expertise and in this instance, teacher expertise is a high frequency word, as you suggest in your book. It's in very much in the vocabulary of teacher education in the context of reform. And I just am really keen to understand why you wanted to write this book and why so at this time, Jessica Gerard.

**Jessica Gerard**

Thanks Jane and thanks Don. I'd like to start by acknowledging the land on which we are. We're on the Wurundjeri lands and it's the land that the book was also written on. And so this question about why expertise, why now, really brings us to how we started our journey with the book, which was noticing a couple of really key things that were happening. One was a really intense focus on expertise and professional status amongst the teaching profession and a lot of... issues and challenges around teachers and teaching. And then on the other hand, in the context of COVID and climate change denialism and the emergence of post-truth and alternative facts, a whole range of really complicated discourses and public kind of debates around truth, experts, knowledge, evidence and so on. And we saw these two kinds of twin discourses circling around and we thought that now was the time to really intervene into this space and to perhaps offer some reflections on expertise in a way that didn't take experts or expertise for granted, but to try and get to the bottom of what we're doing when we proclaim expert knowledge or when we defend teacher expertise.

**Don Carter**

Thanks, Jess. That's really interesting. And your points about post-truth world and COVID, et cetera, there seemed to be a type of skepticism or cynicism towards expertise over the last few years. And then it seems to have been exacerbated by the worst aspects of Trumpism. So, could I ask Jess Holloway, at this point in time, who exactly is an expert and who isn't?

**Jessica Holloway**

It's a great question, Don, and it's actually what, again, kind of brought us to the book. I remember at the beginning stages of COVID, seeing a really kind of popular meme on social media. And it was this cry for everybody to just listen to the experts. And it was round when the vaccine was coming out or whether or not, you know, COVID was even real. And at first, I found myself laughing at it because I thought, of course, you know, if people would just listen to the experts, then we would be OK.

But then upon careful reflection, I realized, well, wait a second, who is an expert? And who is it that got to authorize them as an expert? And what even is expertise? Because we know if we look historically that experts have been wrong about a lot of things. And also, a lot of folks who have been able to claim the title of expert have gotten to those positions on very troubling and complicated conditions. That allowed for particular types of people to be counted as experts and others as not. And so that's what kind of drove Jessica and I to think about this as a potential book because we also see that similar discourse in teaching and in education. And as former teachers, we also found ourselves often saying, especially in my particular background with my research really being with teachers is I found myself often also saying, just listen to teachers as the experts.

And then I started to think about that same kind of complicated acceptance I was coming to with COVID going, well, wait a second, maybe there are some problematics here as well. And with Jessica's background, looking much more at marginalized voices and thinking about the problematics of expertise and how folks have been hurt by such knowledges, then how can we look to see who exactly is an expert, which, of course, became the inspiration for the book.

**Jessica Gerard**

We really wanted to think about that question about who is an expert and who isn't as one that opens up conversation and opens up deliberation. Because of course, as you highlighted at the beginning, Don, there's a whole range of kind of lists that we could kind of talk through in terms of how expertise is understood within the classroom. And expertise has become a really important focus on professional practice upon which teachers can claim their status, claim their meaning, claim their authority and judgment and legitimacy and it's really important to acknowledge that whilst at the same time acknowledging that expertise itself is socially constructed, politically constructed and at times been problematic, you've problematically used. And so we wanted to kind of open up that to explore the tension rather than circling back these perennial debates which try and bed down in quite precise terms. Here is the list of what counts as expertise or not, or who can be counted as experts.

**Don Carter**

Can I ask at this point then, Jess, to both of you, you mentioned being an expert or not being an expert, is there a point in between? I mean, is it suddenly one day you move over that line into expertise from non-expertise or is there a gradual shift from one to the other?

**Jessica Gerard**

I think that the answer to that really depends on the kinds of structures and practices that sit around it. I think for teaching and teachers, there's such a significant infrastructure that sits around the practice of teaching. There's accreditation, there's professional learning, there's years in the classroom, as you've highlighted, there's all of these things that come together at particular moments in time to embolden the possibility of claiming I am an expert. But in doing that claim, there's always a boundary work that's being done. Who's allowed to make that claim and who's not allowed to make that claim. And we know that in our teaching, for instance, and we reflect on this in the book, that we kind of almost feel this collective sigh of relief when we say in our classrooms, oh, we were a teacher. And so the teachers that we're teaching or the teacher trainees are often feeling, oh, maybe they're in safer hands.

 But at the same time, we want to question that a little bit because we see that in the context of education policy, that there is more and more space for people who have a particular orientation or perspective on schooling practice and on classroom practice. So their expertise, for instance, data scientists or economists have more and more space in the education field where ethicists or sociologists might not have those spaces. So...

I guess in approaching that question, we want to think about what happens when we are making claims to be or not be an expert.

**Jessica Gerard**

And just to expand on that a little bit. So it's not just a teacher's expertise that matters in thinking about schooling and education. It's also the types of expertise that we draw on to even define what we should be doing in schooling more broadly. So to take Jessica's point about, you know, economists and data scientists having a very kind of large voice in the directions of education, you know, that would be a form of expertise that in this current climate is very valued within the education space. And so we're trying to, I guess, move away from that black and white kind of definition of expert to say whether or not somebody is or is not an expert but rather saying what are the types of knowledges and expertise that are drawn on and that are valued in a particular time and place? And can we problematize that a little bit or challenge it to think about who else needs to have a seat at that table and what other types of knowledges and expertise need to be drawn on so that we can approach education in a more inclusive and just way?

**Jane Hunter**

Yes, that was so interesting. In the book, and just picking up on those last points, Jessica Gerard, you move across the chapters around knowledge, authority, objectivity, data and governance. And I mean, you've alluded to that in what you've just spoken about. I mean, do all of those areas matter in terms of expertise and you know is there something across those areas that is most critical?

**Jessica Gerard**

We see all of those areas as deeply intertwined and that it's really not possible to think about one without the other. And I think that's one of our disquiet about some of the approaches to expertise that do look for very discrete categories, skill categories, or discrete pockets of knowledge, as if we just added that up, that would equate to expertise. Whereas from our perspective, if you take expertise as socially and politically embedded and constructed, then it's not possible to think about what counts as an expert or what counts as expertise without thinking about how does that sit with curriculum knowledge? How does that sit with the authorizing bodies and the teacher education community? How does that sit with governance? What happens in the classroom? What are the expectations around performance or the way in which that is carried out in day-to-day practice or in staff rooms? All of those things are deeply intertwined. And so in the current moment, you can't talk about expertise without also talking about ed tech or data or other kind of professional contestations or dominant practices that are occurring at the current time.

**Don Carter**

Interesting points, Jess. And I was just wondering about the role of governance. You mentioned governance. How does that fit into expertise? And I'm also interested, does the concept of legitimacy come into expertise? So perhaps, Jess Holloway, would you like to address some of those, a couple of those questions?

**Jessica Holloway**

Sure, Don, thank you. So legitimacy is a very, very interesting question because legitimacy, I guess, also comes back to a political sphere in terms of whose kind of knowledge or expertise is considered legitimate. And so when that gets linked up to governance, then you can also think about things that get governed through particular types of expertise that are valued at a particular time in which types of expertise are being legitimized or considered legitimate of a particular time and place. So to go back to the example of the economist who has had a very kind of large influence on education governance over the past several decades, you can see the logics and the discourses and the tools and the features of economics that have shown up in the way that we govern schools from the way that we evaluate, the way that we use metrics.

We associate value add now with whether or not a teacher is performing well because of how much, you know, or how well their students might achieve on a standardized achievement test. And so governance is very much a matter of that kind of political dimension of legitimacy and valued knowledge and expertise. And the way that schools are both organized but then held accountable are also a function of whatever has been deemed legitimate at that time.

**Jane Hunter**

I want to move now to looking at a couple of chapters in particular and I was really I loved the vignette that opened the chapter two with Lean and Curtis who were two indigenous pre-service teachers. So how did their experiences reflect the realities of teacher education and the profession more broadly.

Yeah, this is a really important piece of research undertaken by a Canadian researcher, Lilach Marom, highly recommend it to everyone in Race, Ethnicity and Education, that journal. But in that research, it tracks what she describes, the author describes as covert racism within the profession. And so this Curtis and Leanne are two teacher trainees, indigenous teacher trainees. And in... what we quote in the chapter, are some reflections on their own practice where they're very explicitly naming practices of exclusion and marginalization within their teacher training experiences, within their placements.

And I think that this really raises some really important questions about how the profession addresses exclusion, marginality, colonialism, indigeneity, how the profession is supporting he diversity and support for marginalised communities and the diversification of itself as a profession.

And I say this not to point fingers at individual teachers or anything like that, but to think about it collectively, to think about it at policy and practice level and at the teacher education level, what sorts of practices, theories, sorts of discussions and debates are we having about what counts and who counts? And I think the two quotes highlight very clearly that for these teachers on their journey to become teachers that they very clearly feel like that they do not belong and I think that's highly problematic.

**Jane Hunter**

Is it the same here?

**Jessica Gerard**

Look, I think that obviously settler colonialism isn't the same in Canada as it is in Australia, but there are clear synchronicities in the ways in which Indigenous knowledge has been attempted to be eradicated and then fundamentally excluded from the way in which we understand the value of knowledge, the value of education, the value of schooling. And I don't think that we've really begun to reckon with that in a foundational way.

And I think that is one of the biggest challenges facing Australian education at the moment is how do we address that? And there are plenty of Indigenous scholars, Indigenous activists, Indigenous young people and teachers who are very clearly saying that they need to be counted, that their knowledge, their ways of being need to be a part of how we understand the education system and society and culture in its time that we really fundamentally address that.

**Don Carter**

The word authority appears in your book, an important term. And the word authority is now being adopted by a number of government agencies. Here in New South Wales, we've got a New South Wales Education Standards Authority. And ACARA is a Curriculum and Assessment and Reporting Authority. But who does have authority over teachers in Australia? Is it ACARA? Is it AITSL? Where does the authority come from?

**Jessica Holloway**

It's a great question because it's a complicated answer. And teachers, I think, are one of the, are teaching as one of those professions where there are a lot of different vested interests, rightfully so, but it also means that there is a lot of different voices in terms of who's saying what teachers should do. But now also in a governing sense, in a very, objective and like real sense of who has authority over the teaching profession.

Teaching is often held up as a profession that does not or does not have the authority to govern itself. It doesn't set its own standards. It doesn't accredit. That is increasingly in Australia done at a federal level. So over the past several decades, you can see that the federal government has had increasingly significant role in dictating what counts as quality teaching, but also how that gets accredited within teacher education. So a lot of colleges of teacher education are also pointing out that where they used to maintain quite a bit of authority and expertise in terms of what teachers in training should be learning, that's no longer entirely up to their authority, that that's also being controlled externally more so in authority over the teaching profession. But then you also see how a lot of that also gets outsourced to a lot of private companies and a lot of private organizations or non-government organizations who also have a great say in what happens in schools and classrooms. We have to think about ed tech as one of the giant actors in this space as well, because a lot of times they're providing the platforms or the data, the data tools, the data coding, like the things, the algorithms that are used, whether it's an assessment or data collection and reporting and whatever those tools require also becomes what teachers have to know and also what teachers have to teach to in order to meet the expectations of these various authorities. So it's a very complicated governing structure, but one that we have to be attuned to and remembering that teachers have a very little say or voice in those decisions as well.

**Jane Hunter**

Just picking up on a couple of those final points and looking into chapter five, but more specifically the final chapter of your book. It seems what you're advocating is that teachers need to become more political. And so they would benefit from doing that. Is that a fair assessment?

**Jessica Holloway**

Yeah, I think our basic premise of the book is that teaching is political. It's invariably political. And that we saw at the same time that we saw this really important moment occurring around expertise, we also see it around some of the key questions around teaching and the politics of teaching. So on the one hand, not to oversimplify things, but on the one hand, you can see some more conservative commentators who will say that they want to get politics out of the classroom, that the classroom is not a place to discuss gender or sexuality or critical race theory, and that you can't really trust teachers to get it right.

And so we should perhaps rely more on standardized ed tech data platforms and more on those sorts of ways of doing things to get a good job done. On the other hand, you might have more progressive commentators who say...

You know what, we also need politics out of the classrooms because politicians just need to step away, trust the teachers and let them do their professional judgment. And for us, neither of those positions really get at the key question of expertise, but also of the political nature of teaching. The intersubjective, relational, social experience of schooling and of the classroom is inevitably political, how we are with our students, how policymakers understand schools, how teacher educators approach their job and the purpose of their job. And if they see social justice or not as being a part of that, all of these things are ethical, political considerations. Every day, every minute, teachers are making political and ethical decisions about what they are doing in the classroom. And at the moment, I guess we see that the pull towards an understanding of expertise that might be attempted to be rid of that and to be a little bit more stripped to a key set of competencies or skills denies the existence of those inevitably political dimensions. And so we are suggesting that there's a need to be attentive to recognise and to address that political nature of teaching.

**Don Carter**

That actually segues nicely into the next part of the interview. And this is where you both get a chance to do what we call a 30-Second Rant. And you can choose, you know, Jess, I think I know what you might want to talk about, just having listened to that answer, but you both get 30 seconds each. We won't interrupt. Whatever you like about education, if you don't want to do it, I'll happily take your 30 second rant because I've got plenty things I'd like to rant about. Perhaps you can have a little bit of an arm wrestle with who goes first, but over to you both, 30 seconds each. Thank you.

**Jessica Holloway**

OK, I'd say my easy one that keeps me up at night is the obsession over the testing and the data and just the very idea that we can measure schooling in the ways that we currently try to do.

And that if we just have the right tools and we just have the right test and we just have the right validity and reliability that we're going to finally understand schooling and we're going to make it better. And I just think that it entirely misses the broader purpose of schooling, which is about well-being and learning and relationships and contributing to society in productive ways. And I think that if we didn't use COVID as a moment to entirely rethink and reimagine what is possible, then

I'm so afraid that we're missing the boat. And I just hope that conversations like this can help us dig into those tricky conversations and recognize that schools are so much more than the test results that they produce. And yeah, that's my rant.

**Don Carter**

Thanks, Jess. Just over 30 seconds, but we'll give you that. Over to you, Jess.

**Jessica Gerard**

OK, so I guess I'll talk a little bit about one of the things that's been annoying me, which is how in response to populism that there's been a little bit of a pushback against, and I'll put this in quotation marks for those listening along, the uneducated. And I think that there's been often a sense that if people just had the right education or got more education, that they'd be the, you know, that the problems of the world wouldn't exist in the same way that they do. And I see this as a real problem because of course, our education system is structurally exclusionary and marginalises folks. And that it actually, the people who are pushing the agenda of post truth, are often some of the most educated and elitist out there.

**Don Carter**

Thanks Jess, thank you both. They were both really excellent rants. I like them both. Jane.

**Jane Hunter**

Yes, I agree. If only we had more than 30 seconds, but then the whole podcast could perhaps become a rant. So, and I'm not sure whether that would be such a good or a bad thing. Look, thank you both so much for your time. And first of all, for writing this really important book. And I hope we've given you a little bit of an opportunity to kind of dive into little parts of it. And it is just sort of skipping over the surface, but.

I really enjoyed the read. I kind of read it cover to cover when I first downloaded it. And it really takes us into places that I think need to be addressed. And I just wish that ministers and departmental heads would A, have the time, B, be motivated to look at a book-like expertise. So congratulations and thank you to you.

**Jessica Gerard**

Thanks for the opportunity to come on. It really is a delight to be able to talk about the work, having written it. So a real privilege. Thank you.

**Jane Hunter**

Double J, that was a terrific opportunity to speak to Jess and Jess about their expertise booked on. And, you know, that point that was made right towards the end around pre-service teachers and about teachers getting more political, and it reminded me of when I first started in teacher education.

I remember talking about politics in one of the very first lectures that I gave. And at the end of the lecture, three students came down to see me. You know, that's when we had the formal lecture. And they said to me, Jane, I don't want to have to think about politics as a teacher. I just want to go in there and teach. And so we had this lovely conversation where I had to say,

The mere act of teaching is a political act from the moment you choose a text to focus on. And so it was great to be reminded of that. And at the end of the semester, those three students came back to see me and they said, we know exactly what you mean now.

**Don Carter**

Yeah, that's a good story, Jane. And I can relate to that because teaching is a political act. No matter what anyone says, no matter what any conservative commentator says, it is a political act. Sure, teachers don't push a particular view down the throats of students, buteverything that happens in the classroom is ultimately political. And we don't want students leaving school being completely unaware or unable to be to critique what's happening in the world around them. And I think when the two jesters talked about a number of things, particularly with regards to marginality and authority and legitimacy, that's where it becomes really important.

**Don Carter**

Certainly was some very interesting and inspirational points that we can think about some more and I'm sure our listeners will as well.

**Jane Hunter**

Yeah, look, I also think in teacher education, we have to actually talk about the politics. And I think that sometimes it's a hidden curriculum in lots of ways. And I know that policy, if you bring somebody from into your classroom as a HSIE teacher, you need to represent both sides or across the political spectrum.

You can't just favour one party over another, for example. So, but I actually think in teacher education, we need to do much more of having those overt conversations. And in the unit that I teach, issues in education, I've just been astounded, even in the last few weeks, when these final year students have said, we have never talked about these things throughout our degree. SoI, love to talk politics. And I try to be even-handed about that. And I think that we need to, all of us, make it much more overt in our practice.

**Don Carter**

Hear, hear. And just picking up on that point there too, Jane, I think teacher education programs of study are like school-based programs of study. They are jam-packed with things that are required from external agencies and that squeezes out some of the subjects, for example, we would like to teach. So I think part of what you're saying is a result of requirements imposed on us externally.

**Jane Hunter**

Thanks so much, Don. A great conversation and yes, series two, we're off and running.

**Don Carter**

Thanks, Jane.

**Jane Hunter** 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.