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CPL Podcast:
Leading a High Expectations Curriculum 7-12

Host: Carly Boreland
With: Maurie Mulheron and Lila Mularczyk

INTRODUCTION:
You are listening to the CPL podcast from the Centre for Professional Learning.

Carly Boreland: Welcome to the CPL podcast for the New South Wales Teachers Federation. I'm Carly Boreland and I'm the Assistant Director of the CPL. Today I'm talking with Lila Mularczyk and Marie Mulheron about curriculum in New South Wales public high schools and how to offer the very broad curriculum that all our students deserve. We're doing this recording in the Teacher's Federation's auditorium due to COVID restrictions and so you might get some joyful tones in the background of teachers who are participating in various workshops. That just adds to the theme today because we want to talk about teachers and schools, and they are noisy places as you all know. Now you two have done lots of work together and you've been interviewed many times and so I thought we would start today with something different and maybe things that our audience haven't heard before and so I wanted to start with a confession if it's alright with you, an easy one to begin with, and then I'll make it harder if that's all right with you as well. Maurie, would you be brave enough to go first?

Maurie Mulheron: I'll give it a go.

Carly Boreland: First one. How long have you been a teacher for?

Maurie Mulheron: I started teaching in 1978.

Carly Boreland: Can you do the maths on that for us?

Maurie Mulheron: I'm an English teacher. I think I taught for 34 years finishing up as a Principal before I came and worked for the Federation as President for eight years. So that's what, about 42 years in the game?

Lila Mularczyk: 38 years so far in the game and the same as Maurie, not ready to not contribute, so we continue to do it, 34 years in secondary schools and doing multiple roles, at this point to continue to support schools.

Maurie Mulheron: So both 34 years in schools.

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Lila Mularczyk: in schools.

Maurie Mulheron: Yes.

Carly Boreland: In schools, wow, and Lila, you've worked as a Principal and a Deputy Principal and what were you before that?

Lila Mularczyk: I was a head teacher, and a teacher, funnily at the same school that Marie was at.

Carly Boreland: Okay. So we have some common elements here. I'll make it a bit harder then, with the confessions. I'm 38. So you have been walking the hallways of high schools for almost as long as I've been alive. I wondered, if you could give me, if you were willing to confess your worst curriculum decision in those 34 years, one of things you think you got wrong?

Maurie Mulheron: Can I just make the point that we, we think curriculum is just what we teach, whereas that's only 50% of it, the other 50% is the pedagogy. It's how we teach curriculum is what and how, and I guess so I would answer the question about, yeah, the worst mistake is, not killing off in the schools I was at, not being, not being strong enough to kill off the classes being streamed you know, topping English class, seconding English class, third English class, fourth English class and same with Maths, so that's streaming, which is really we're streaming a lot of it on behaviour. A lot of it on kids, background and even if we were streaming on ability, what for? It's a common curriculum, common outcomes and I think that not being able to finally convince teachers that we're doing the all the kids, a disservice by thinking they should be just a top class and then the impact of that was that teachers then add expectations that were predetermined by the label we would've given the class. We said that we're the fifth English class, no matter how much you said, learn about your kids and then teach them, there was an expectation that they weren't as bright as the fourth or the third or the second or the first English class, so I think that limited our capacity to get the best out of kids and I've always been opposed to it. So if we have that broad definition of curriculum what and how the pedagogy, I think that was, I'd put that down as possibly, something that I've still got very deep regrets about.

Carly Boreland: And that's so hard to break, isn't it? I think we had a lot of success with that in the school I was at where we would say, okay, we agree that putting students in streamed classes doesn't actually improve their learning and there's actually plenty of research to show that, but then how do you actually do it? I got the younger teachers to make up the class lists, and I said, okay, you know, these kids better because, invariably the youngest teachers know that the juniors, because they're all teaching them. You make the class lists they need to be mixed ability and you don't get to decide who teaches what class. So there's nine, year nines. You can make them all up but be aware that you're going to be teaching one of them.

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Maurie Mulheron: The irony of it is that in subjects like Lila's subject, visual arts, that didn't get a chance to stream because I only often have one or possibly two, elective classes in the older years. So they intuitively come to the class saying I've got to engage all kids of all ability levels and in the same class and I've got to adopt my, adapt, my pedagogy to make that work. It's only in the core subjects that we do it and I think it's a very old fashioned retrograde and ultimately self-defeating way of delivering the curriculum in your school.

Lila Mularczyk: I would have to concur absolutely streaming is so damaging both for the students, but also for the teachers in terms of their own development and so forth. I guess if I was to take that, a little bit further, I'd also speak about the fact that it took me a few years, too long as Principal to actually, put in place procedures that facilitated identifying the extraordinary pedagogy that was happening in particular classes. Sometimes by the humblest teachers that were not putting themselves forward and you may have had other teachers who were quite vocal and predominant in that sense. Yet when we put in place some mechanisms around that, we had some incredible professional learning that was still coming from the school itself, but from people who had street cred with their colleagues, which I think is exceptionally important, but also it had that deep pedagogy, which transforms, and we don't ever speak about it in this sense, but to andragogy that we need to have a really strong focus on and that took me a few years too long to get into, into that aspect, but it was absolutely productive and fulfilling when it did happen and it changed collaboration across faculties. Still with the approach that I'm the expert in my particular KLA area, but certainly looking at different aspects of how other people deliver and what the commonalities are, so it resonates for the student, the learners.

Carly Boreland: So can I ask, how did you, how did you do that? How did you find out? Because I know I've heard you talk before about street cred and I'm always like, you've got to have credibility, you've got to be a good teacher first, but how did you find out who was doing what that was good?

Lila Mularczyk: To be quite honest I think teachers in the school, know, in a particular subject, and it might be everyone in a particular KLA or faculty who has a great depth of experience and expertise in a particular area. But we, we know, I guess the street cred and the identification is actually speaking with those particular teachers who will never put their hand up and if I just, and I don't want to identify them, but I think of a particular science teacher who was extraordinary in the classroom, but you wouldn't know, never addressed a staff meeting, never delivered professional learning, not they weren't resistant to it, but they'd never been asked to and it just was not in their suite of experiences and when we tapped people on the shoulder that way, and that was getting information from peer colleagues, but also, you know, head teachers and deputies. This particular person who is indicative of many others just flew in terms of showing or demonstrating and supporting people in what they could do for our students and I guess it's almost moving into that area of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher now.

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Which is really a way that we should be looking at enriching our curriculum and pedagogy, but that was just phenomenal and it went for years and it actually went across school campuses and school sites, so it wasn't just our school. We were actually working with other schools sharing that and if I could just very briefly, it was a street cred when you work with primary school teachers as well, working across the expertise of content and knowledge, I guess, from the KLA's in a secondary school and working with the extended pedagogy practices that you need in a primary school too and that marriage was just something quite marvellous and exciting to be part of that I took too long to do it.

Carly Boreland: Well. Well thank you for being, for being generous with your confession. I think it's hard to say something that, you know, something that if you're really honest, arh could have done it better and people often go for like easy low-hanging fruit. I wasn't good at technology or, you know, something that's socially acceptable to, to say weren't good at, so thank you for that. I like what you said about primary school too, because that builds up your, your cohort that are coming into the high school too, so.

Lila Mularczyk: It builds your public education cohort in the continuity and without wishing to take too much time, but the fact that we would have one KLA working with one primary school, so you would have PE units and work and scope and sequence so that there wasn't replication of content, as an example, how many years in a row, can you do the rainforest or the pyramids or for goodness sake, the colour wheel out of context, those sorts of things.

Carly Boreland: And how many, how many years in a row can you do it badly?

Lila Mularczyk: Well yes, and so if you work together, so we started off with six KLA's, working with six primary schools and it extended to 15. So you're developing units, you're developing scope and sequence, so the curriculum is being enriched for the students and for the teachers.

Maurie Mulheron: That's right. I mean, we, we did, we put a lot, a lot of resources and energy into the notion of a community schools with the, with the, with our partner, our feeder schools and it wasn't just, the easy stuff. It was a strong curriculum links, strong professional learning links. You discover that, what you might be, doing in Year 7 Maths or Year 7 English suddenly is stuff that the kids had done in years, three, four, and five. You know, you, you're often, there's a huge disconnect between what was happening in the primary school and what's happening in the high school. So if you really want to do the right thing by the kids, you'd need to have a K-10 concept of a continuity of curriculum and you only get that when you start working very closely with your primary colleagues, they may have to adjust as well. It's not just a one-way street, they can learn from the high school, what, what the needs of the high school curriculum are and you certainly can now in terms of what, what, how they prepare their kids for high school, so that when the kids do get to the high school, firstly, they, they,

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that a lot of the anxiety has been taken out of it because they had had these, these experiences with the local high school, but also, their experience in year seven is so much more rewarding because you've done that prep with the primary schools, now that takes resources, it takes release time, it takes money, takes energy, but the benefits of it, I think, are extraordinarily important, to get that notion of a K-10 curriculum continuity.

Carly Boreland: And it, it sets up the primary school students and their parents for understanding, okay, this high school is going to offer everything this like this high school can work for me. We can have music, we can have art, we can have physics, we can have the full range of what's on offer. Our local high school can offer what your students need.

Lila Mularczyk: Our local high school can offer what your students need.

Maurie Mulheron: Yeah, yeah.

Carly Boreland: Can I, can I ask, is there anymore, you wanted to add about why decisions are so important around curriculum for a principal? Because what I understand or what I've heard is that there are so many pressures coming down on principals demanding their different amounts of time, especially around administration and, and responsibility for finances, lots of things and I wonder where curriculum does fit or should fit in there and, if you've got any insights for us on, on why, or how to hold onto it?

Lila Mularczyk: Well, curriculum impacts on every young person in our schools. So that's the first reason and then it actually impacts on the teachers, it impacts on what students are learning, what teachers are teaching. It impacts on the investment and direction of your resources. It should be the number one stage production and everything else is supporting that aspect of it, including the infrastructure of getting your metrics and your timetable, working those sorts of things. It's just the absolute. If we don't have a framework around that, then we don't have a stage for our current cohort or for the future. We don't have an understanding of the requirements of each syllabus too, which is different to your curriculum but you've got to make, make sure that you're getting, the hours as you said, the indicative hours, but, but hitting the points of learning and progression and I don't mean the progressions, but progress of learning that needs to be happening from the K-12 aspect, but most certainly in a high school and the constraints of a timetable do impact on that. That's why curriculum needs to be the driver.

Maurie Mulheron: Absolutely. I mean, I'm not sure who said it might have been James Ludwig, who said that "*we're a school, not a hospital*". You know, the core business, the absolute core business is teaching learning. Principal is the principal teacher, not the principal financial officer, or the principal

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personnel officer, when the stuff around, appointments and finances, they, they, they need to be pushed into the background and principals, I think, have to have the courage to say, no, that is not as important as getting the curriculum right, the pedagogy, right, a good assessment strategies, good reporting to parents Having that you know, great continuity from right through, from looking at the syllabus outcomes through to how you going to assess through, to how you're going to deliver the classes, how are you going to evaluate your lessons right through to how you report to parents. That is your core business. That's what should get you up in the morning and get you to school, you know, not the financial reports and those kinds of issues. They're, they're the kind of annoyances that often getting the why and, and over the years, the department putting more and more of that on principals is to the detriment of teaching and learning. You know, they've got rid of so many, positions out of the department as public service positions and others who looked after all those things and that's where it should be outside of the school where the principal can then, can come and sit at their desk, knowing that what they're doing that day is going to be about kids and teachers, teaching and learning as the core business and that should never ever be compromised for the other kinds of pressures that are placed on principals, but it will require principals collectively to start saying, no, we're not doing that stuff, our kids come first.

Carly Boreland: All right. I want to, I want to talk to you more about, about that then the nuts and bolts of how we can make this happen. Not everyone is maybe as passionate as me, but I really was so happy every year when the head teacher of admin would say, all right, it's subject selection time. All right, how are we doing this? And I still love sitting down next to him and going through it and trying to find a way, you know, I just think that's the bread and butter of a subject head teacher, but can I ask you both in your years of experience, how can schools make this actually happen in practical ways to work?

Lila Mularczyk: To work for the students and to work for the staff.

Carly Boreland: And to work for the staff in the other thing I'm thinking about is to work for all the students who live in the community, that we would want to attend our public high school. So I think sometimes schools make decisions about what the students that they've got need,

Lila Mularczyk: What they assume they need.

Carly Boreland: What they assume they need or what they would want to study, and I think sometimes they're a little bit based on, on class assumptions or not really giving the whole range.

Lila Mularczyk: I think it might go back to the term administration too and we often start from the administration and in some schools, you already have a metrics or a timetable already putting

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constraints on what's going to be offered and how it's going to be offered and, and, you know, staffing is a difficult chess board to play with because the part of the resources that you have, and that can't be shifting from year to year, but certainly there were a number of things that you can do and I'm sure Maurie and I will bounce off each other, but, you know, in my first few years as a time-tabler, which scared the bejesus out of me, and then I just fell in love with the whole process. Is that you go to the students before you start to manufacture what the curriculum might look like, and we're not always going to meet every child's needs but you get an idea of the next cohort are looking for this, this, and this, how can we construct it? Part of that is that they, I, I believe that as a leader, there is never an excuse, not to exhaust all possibilities in providing, a broad curriculum and you've got the experts who will deliver a deep-learning experiences, but to do that breadth that you absolutely need. So how do you explore that? I'm sure that Maurie wants to say something, then I could speak more about some other ways of exploring options in and outside of the school too, but still within our wonderful system.

Maurie Mulheron: Look, there's a really important, in a political imperative here in that the public education system and a local comprehensive public high school has to offer the full range of subjects and that requires running small classes in the senior years, then it has to happen. What we can never concede is that we can't run extension classes in english and maths and possibly history, that we can't run the full range of electives in terms of, performing arts and creative arts and, all other areas around the social sciences, HSIE and and so on. But we've got to ensure that we're not lowering our expectations in a structural way by saying, well, we've got eight kids who can do advanced, too expensive for the timetable, therefore we won't run Advanced. Once you get into that loop, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and what you do is the community, then see you as a low expectation high school, and your chances of building your numbers up will be seriously compromised. So, my urging to my colleagues would be whatever it takes, ensure that you've got the full range of subject choices. That you don't put all your eggs in the, lower end ability, but, you know, you don't just run a lot of how a VET courses in courses that, might be popular, but you also run, maybe even just for a small group of kids, you run your physics, your chemistry, your extension maths, extension English, and ensure that those classes are run. I think that's really important because, we are in a difficult situation, in terms of the enrolments in many routes, secondary schools and, we can't therefore ever concede that we are not going to be a comprehensive high school. Now comprehensive is not just comprehensive in terms of enrolment, but also in terms of what you offer, you know, the, it's a very broad term that *comprehensive*, you've got a comprehensive role that is you take all kinds of people into your school, but you also offer a comprehensive curriculum and that's a really powerful concept.

Carly Boreland: If we stick with the theme of confessions, I can confess that I have started my teaching career at Maurie's school.

Lila Mularczyk: And there is a theme happening here.

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Carly Boreland: So, I just always thought that that's how a school was, and I didn't realise that, that it could be any other way. So I just always thought that there were two kids in extension II music, and it could just, that's just how school was and I just assumed that you always ran history extension off timetable if necessary, or you just did it and so I never realised until I stepped out of the model village, I guess, and started to meet other teachers and, and schools that it, that it could be so different. Can I ask?

Lila Mularczyk: I'll just add to that, because part of that breadth of curriculum and I know that Maurie will totally agree with me, so you've got no choice now, Maurie, thank you. But it's also that it's not at the expense or at the goodwill of your teachers either. Which is really important because that seems to be almost a default position to having that breadth of curriculum in some situations so teachers can't be asked to do more and more.

Maurie Mulheron: And another side of that coin too Lila, is when we don't, when they don't get a chance to teach those courses, we're deskilling them. We lose the expertise. So we, we haven't run those extension classes or the physics class, for some reason we've said, well, let's just, you know, there's only seven kids want to do it and we won't run it. Well, you lose the expertise, and my experience over many years is once you lose a subject of the timetable. It's kind of, almost impossible to get it back on, you know, if you lose economics for instance, for some reason, it just doesn't run that year. There's less of a chance that we'll ever run again. So I think we've got to make sure that we,

Lila Mularczyk: It destabilises your actual staffing as well. You know the unnecessary movement.

Maurie Mulheron: There's nothing better than getting up at a, say a year six information evening, where you are spruiking to the kids who are probably coming into year seven, you've got a large group of parents in the library and you are talking to them, there's nothing more satisfying to be able to say, if your child comes to this school, by the time they reached 11 and 12, there's a full range of courses that will be catered for all ability levels and all interests. So if they start in year 7 be rest assured by the time they get 11, 12, this school will maintain a full curriculum.

Carly Boreland: And to be able to say confidently and here's the music teacher here's, we've got them all. Can we talk about how you can build it back then? So what if you don't have them all? What if you don't have a physics teacher at the moment for, there could be lots of reasons, or what do we do with that? Lila, I think you were talking about the kind of ecosystem that has to come around.

Lila Mularczyk: It was the ecosystem of curriculum but is not always for the immediate solution, but it's long term and we need to invest at some time, not work on an election cycle, either with these sorts

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of things, but we're talking about what the school needs, which is every child in the school, or every student in the school, but the much broader picture is it's the HR planning around that. It's a university intake around that. It's the maintaining expertise in the system. Maurie alluded to it. If they can't teach them, they're being de-skilled, we need to maintain their professional learning. We need that universities need to be working in partnership, which at some point in time they have, but that longevity of understanding and putting in play for years in advance is what's really important. The understanding of what a school needs, understanding your cohorts now, understanding what might be necessary in the future tapping into other options. I mean, well, I shouldn't even say other options, TAFE, you know, those sorts of things. There are some university branch courses, but certainly there's a number of things and whilst you may not have the entire expertise, if we're going to rebuild the curriculum in a healthy manner, across our schools, we can work collaboratively with local schools to do that as well with different expertise and build it up in each site.

Maurie Mulheron: Well, it goes to your strategic planning, so you've got to develop a strategy. You've got to say, right, this, this school as a staff, we agree that this is a high expectation school. That means we're going to try and encompass all ranges of abilities and interests. What do we need to do? Where are the gaps? Where's the professional learning gaps? Where's the gaps in say teacher expertise? You know, do we need to hook you up with colleagues in other schools to, is it can't be a one-two-three-year plan or, you know, by year three, are we going to get to this point? So it's not something that can happen overnight, but if you make it central to your strategic planning and then from that, the staff can get behind it. You put the resources, you then target the professional learning that's needed. So I think that, yeah, I don't think it'd be unfair to say to a school, do it now, do it overnight. You know, you've got to, you've got to build a, give them a chance.

Lila Mularczyk: Those institutions, the department, the universities, to all be working together and I'm sure we'll broach it later, but there's also apart from the traditional and formalised curriculum there's other, opportunities for students to, without going too far or field, but, you know, working with universities, working with TAFE's, et cetera, to offer curriculum provision as well.

Carly Boreland: Yep. So just finding ways and being creative, where you are.

Lila Mularczyk: And understanding.

Maurie Mulheron: I was just going to say that, you know, one of the difficult concepts for is that I don't think as served as well is the notion of KLA's - Key Learning Areas. Now that came in, with, with the Carrick Report, what in the late eighties, 89 or so and it was a time when they tried, the original concept was that a child couldn't just put all their eggs in the one basket. So that they just couldn't become the maths science geek, or just go and fall in love with the humanities. They have abroad at

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least had to have to, sample from these different key learning areas, you know, English, maths, science, the sciences, performing and creative arts, the technology, applied studies and so on. So that concept was fine then because its kind of got us all thinking. The problem is that people didn't realise they were just to be left at a conceptual level. So they started to become an entity, an actual structure in a school. So HSIE, which is just a concept, became an actual thing. There's no such subject, there's no such learning as human science and human studies in an environment. There's no such thing. History is a discipline. Geography is a discipline. So I think one of the things I'd be suggesting now, having looked back at what's happened will be to say to people, stop using the term KLA, stop thinking in KLA's and start and don't even think in terms of faculties, start thinking in terms of subjects, disciplines, physics, chemistry, not sciences in a broad way, start to think specifically of subjects and then marry the teachers to the subjects and their love of the subjects that, that, and the rich content that comes from it.

Carly Boreland: So truer to their university studies.

Maurie Mulheron: Yeah, I think so. I think that we, we now are kind of this blancmange of TAS, blancmange of KAPPA and what's lost in it is this there's this perception that you're doing well, but music might be dying in that area. There might be no music, but ceramics and visual arts might be thriving, or the reverse. You might have incredibly strong music where you haven't got a strong range of subjects there, because you've just put your, all your eggs in the notion of the key learning. I think, you know, we originally were warned at the time that report came out all those years ago, they, they said for God's sake, do not make it a faculty in your school do not make it a structure. It is a concept only, and now it's become, something that's an entity in a school and I think it's not serving as well for the very thing we're trying to talk about, which is a broad curriculum. So I think we should stop to just using the term curriculum isn't useful either sometimes we now need to go back to that really basic concept of the subject, discipline the subject.

Lila Mularczyk: I totally agree with what Maurie is saying and I was actually going to speak about having a consensus of understanding of what subjects are and where their place is which is equally within the school. But, you know, I mean, some have more, you know, priority areas, but if you don't have a consensus across all your colleagues or a critical mass of your colleagues, then you're not going to have that enrichment of growing or reclaiming some of the curriculum at any point.

Maurie Mulheron: So it also comes down to, another concern in terms of keeping the broad curriculum of a school alive. I'm worried about the loss of subject head teacher positions, that have been cashed in for, what I regard as relatively nebulous positions. I mean, I heard one the other day, head teacher future learning. I mean, seriously, you know, but you know, we shouldn't laugh cause it's probably one of our colleagues has got the gig, but the point is it should never have been created. I mean, I'm even worried about concepts like head teacher teaching and learning and I apologise with

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people, it might get their nose out of joint. I don't mean any disrespect to individuals, but I just want to stop and think about that. Surely every head teacher is head teacher teaching, learning. We don't come and kind of have nurse stroke patient care. Do you know, it's, it's not a separate position? If we were to start thinking that a head teacher science is a head teacher, science teaching and learning, head teacher math - teacher and learning, head teacher history - teaching and learning because the closer we can get an advocate, a passionate advocate, and a subject expertise in an executive position in a school, the greater, the chance that the curriculum will be protected, that there'll be good expertise developed and good resources. The more we lose those, actual subject head teacher positions for the range of nebulous administrative positions, then less chance I think we've got to protecting the broad curriculum. That's been my experience when I was seeing it happening in schools. So if you lose head teacher history and, and you amalgamate that into a big H faculty called HSIE, which has got, God knows how many sub syllabuses they've got to be responsible for and subject, then it's a very good chance if that head teacher is not from a history background, that history will be not as well supported or vice versa. If it's a history person gets a position, then maybe the social sciences will be... So that's just one example where I think we have to get back to protecting our subjects in our schools and start using the word subjects again and not that what I think is, a term that's now well past its use by date and that's KLA's.

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Carly Boreland: I think the things that that sort of happen in the real world, once teachers start being grouped in a, in a faculty in that sense and become like interchangeable people who can have just a few periods of geography, a few periods of history or, or in, in TAS faculties where people who've spent their life learning how to be a food technology expert are suddenly hammering and nailing and doing design. You know, I think they, what they inherently do is teach it through the discipline they know, so the geography lesson becomes essentially a history lesson.

Lila Mularczyk: Well, we have to make sure that teachers remain empowered to be teaching their subjects and, and, you know, in any given climate, but, you know, it's easy to disempower when decisions are made that aren't going to be helpful to anybody and part of that is going over different subjects that is not healthy for the student, the learner, or for the teacher.

Maurie Mulheron: And kids pick up the passion that a teacher displays towards their subject. So if you've got someone, you know, a chemistry student with a year 11 class, and this teacher's passion is

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chemistry, the kids pick up on that enthusiasm, they pick up on, on that passion and on that expertise.

Lila Mularczyk: And that expertise.

Maurie Mulheron: Yes, and that expertise.

Carly Boreland: So it sounds like, it's a good idea to build up that expertise in your faculty as well. So, so Doris who's taught ancient history for, since the Sydney Olympics, shouldn't have it again every year. We need to keep

Maurie Mulheron: You'd negotiate with Doris. You say, look, we've got someone else coming in who's got ancient history in their background who needs a chance - Would you mentor them? You know, and maybe over the next couple of years, we can, we could get to a point where, we can give them the class can get you. I think we can. I think most teachers would, would, would accept that.

Lila Mularczyk: And it's that culture of understanding and kindness and collaboration and professionalism that really changes the face of what happens.

Carly Boreland: And probably improves both people's practice as well. I was thinking about global examples too, and I know this is something that you're really interested in Maurie. Sometimes I think teachers can get a sense that there's only one way to do it. So for example, KLA's or the only way, I know in, in other countries, students are doing biology as different to chemistry in what we would call primary school, and they know that they're different from, and they have sometimes a different teacher as well and the same thing in high school, you know, it's not that year eight do science, year eight do biology or year eight, do more specific disciplines in that kind of way. Are there any things that we can learn from, globally that you think are worth looking to here?

Maurie Mulheron: Look I think we can learn both positively and in a negative sense too, of what not to do at the risk of, kind of, sounding like a, in favour of New South Wales exceptionalism, New South Wales still has some of the strongest syllabuses, certainly within Australia and, and I'd say in many parts of the English-speaking world, that's not to say that there aren't good examples elsewhere, but I think we've got to be very careful that there's not a grass is greener approach. You know, we just have had a part of that tradition comes from the fact that New South Wales has always had an authority where it be the old Board of Senior Studies, the old Board of Studies and then now NESA, we've always had a structure which has had heavy teacher and allied academic input into the creation of our syllabuses, and it's been a fair degree of rigor in them. Yeah. The GTIL blueprint that came out, suggested that we could have some expertise in the primary and areas like music and maths and that, and I'm not opposed. I don't think that, that they, some good recommendations to have someone on

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staff that has that. But I think only is terms of a colleague with professional development capacity. I wouldn't like the notion of creating a moving away from the generalist primary school teacher. I think that they have a good integrated approach to learning, but in high schools, I think separate subjects with the teacher expertise is, is the model. I think that we do it pretty well.

Lila Mularczyk: It is important to expose young and new learners to a breadth of curriculum before we start to ask them to specialise, or we suggest any of that. So it's, it's wonderful to have the curriculum that we do provide in primary schools, moving into the progress into secondary.

Maurie Mulheron: So one of the things about a state-wide run, curriculum that we have that NESA delivers to us to teach is that it immediately doesn't create at least at that level, having a state-wide, curriculum is very important that children, whether in Walgett or Woollahra, are expected to have a degree of resourcing and a professional qualified teacher in front of them to teach these the more, the more you get away to a localised kind of curriculum then that's when that exacerbates the inequities that exist. So in America, for instance, they've got some very weak curriculum depending on where you live, depending on the resourcing of the school, even it might be the public system. There's no, not necessarily it's a systemically delivered curriculum. So there's the commercial textbook publishers stepping in, and that becomes a curriculum. And the other thing that happens of course when there's that void, that's a vacuum I should say, that's created with weaker curriculum. That's when the testing, industry step in and so we, we will make sure that all things are covered because they've got to have to sit for our tests. So, testing then drives the curriculum and that's happening in the US you know, where there's an extraordinary number of standardised tests being issued and I think that's because there was, or is a much weaker approach to the curriculum than here.

Carly Boreland: And they have maybe funding comes from a state level, but there's a lot of fractured sort of smaller associations of schools and things like that. It's not like New South Wales for the broad.

Maurie Mulheron: No, I think we've always had a pretty good curriculum and we can always, I mean, I can criticise my own subject area of English and history. There's certain things that I like to see in the syllabus that aren't there, there's some things, and I would not like to see, but on the whole it's… there just personal kind of biases at what gives me confidence is that there is a group of colleagues of mine, fellow English teachers, fellow history teachers who sat down and, and wrote it, and they had good advice and input from academics with specialist knowledge in that area.

Carly Boreland: And we should, we should add that, was BOSTES or NESA or Board of Studies, whatever version of it has been previously has always had syllabus developed by teachers through, a long process of consultation and an equally long process of implementation to give teachers time.

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Maurie Mulheron: What they are saying is the children of our population, the children, and of our citizens, should have this common experience in the teaching and learning. So that's how it's expressed.

Carly Boreland: On the subject of syllabuses and syllabus development. We're going through a review of curriculum in New South Wales, and there's been some reports handed down on that and announcements about a series of new syllabuses that will come out and, and some questions about how quickly they'll come. What do you think we need to be paying attention to with these new syllabuses that might be developed?

Maurie Mulheron: Oh look, I'm pleased that there's a relatively, slow implementation process. I think that's good that, you know, I'm always a great believer in when it comes to education reform that you should hasten slowly, not rush into things. You know, you can't do things quickly and you shouldn't. But one of the, one of the things that are the warnings that I would, would sound, it, it concerns me that there's so many, there's calls in different areas for the reduction in content. The warning I would sound would be *"be careful, be careful what you wish for,"* because this notion that you've replaced content, the content will be, if they do reduce content, it will be replaced with something else, make no mistake about it. They will not be a reduction in content to give you more hours. That won't happen. What will happen though, is, are replaces much more nebulous kind of things like general capabilities, whatever that is, or an emphasis on certain skills development and that loss of that rich subject area, that, that knowledge that we expect young people to leave school with the scientific knowledge, historical knowledge, knowledge about the literary canon about the big historical art movements, all the content that we think are important to become a citizen, an informed citizen is a danger of losing that. Now that's not to say that we can't tweak it better and we can't put more options and give more flexibility and so on and, but it's also more resources. But if we do get to a point where content is reduced significantly, what will happen as has happened overseas, you mentioned overseas earlier, what will happen is the testing industry don't like localised national curriculum and the reason they don't like it is because they can't sell universal international tests. So what what's the danger is we can have replaced with these general capability's kind of things that the Gonski 2.0 talked about and that falls right into the, into the hand plays right in the hands of the big testing dudes and now we'll supply the test for those general capabilities and so we get further and further away from teachers owning and driving the curriculum content. So I just had to be very careful about calling for content reduction because what you will get possibly is jumping out of the frying pan into the fire, something far worse and far less controlled by teachers.

Carly Boreland: I think we can't say enough that the evidence is in on transferability of skills and they don't transfer without specific teaching in subject discipline.

Maurie Mulheron: Yes and it's a, and it's a false dichotomy to say content versus skills. Because you

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teach the skills through the content. I mean, surely good teaching is really about relating to something interesting around content and then the skills are taught with it. You don't teach skills on Monday, then go and teach content on Tuesday then, you know.

Lila Mularczyk: And you don't want the imposition of, of a cluttered curriculum where we're solving yesterday's headline in the newspaper and that's just parachuted in on top of what should remain as the priority which the content to begin with in the first place. If you have that flexibility, it's going to be mud and we're not going to get any wins out of that at all. Now or into the future for our communities and our nation. It's just not okay.

Carly Boreland: And so hasten slowly allows us to be separated from political imperatives in that kind of way. Can I ask you about resources to make some of this happen? Sometimes we can say, okay, yes, but I've got this situation at my school that means that I can have whatever it is that I really want to have. Have you got any hot tips on magic ways to, to find it, or is it more complex?

Maurie Mulheron: Well, I think it's really complex. I mean, it's, that's the first point I would make is that we still, as a public education system, seriously underfunded, we didn't get the Gonski money. We've got some of it and then when we did get it, it wasn't the, you know, the whole way then the whole structure of it was not done well in terms of the system driving reform and change. So there is a resourcing gap that, that needs widgets. You can't talk about teaching learning without talking about the fact that we're, we have enormous expectation on our schools and our teachers that is not met by the funding they need to do the job that we do. Let's assume that we can keep issuing the resourcing. We should be able to say to a small country high school, that you will be subsidised at a greater level than a large city high school to ensure that your kids have the full access to the full curriculum in Year 11 and 12. And if that means that you've got to, if there's another high school in town and we, and we have a good relationship between the two and we can run a joint senior curriculum if that's what the two schools think will work and jointly timetable, we will give you the resources to make that happen, or we'll give you resources for the additional staffing that are required to compensate you. So there are, it does come down to whether you've got the, the government have got the courage and the capacity to fund it. We've done it in the past we've had, reductions in class sizes that it's helped in terms of the pedagogy to make the pedagogy work better in some very difficult disadvantaged schools. So there's plenty of examples of where resourcing in the past has worked and can work.

I think if we can say that the curriculum that we teach our children is the most important thing in the system, then it should be the thing that's resourced first and, I think that we should do it and we should be looking at where the resources are needed within our system and on the equity areas, sure, the five or six equity areas that Gonski identified, but have, make sure that you look at it through the prism of the curriculum offering that you, that the school is giving these students.

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Lila Mularczyk: I think it's really important to have that collaboration across school sites. That's absolutely wonderful, but I also caution, in some settings, we almost go to the default position that, resourcing can look different for our remote colleagues and our remote students. So it becomes a virtual experience, which is not, it is not the first position that it should be. So we need to work around that, and we can work around that, and it has been worked around, but we need to ensure that default isn't the easy answer and so I think what you're saying is absolutely we can share across sites whilst we are working towards having resourcing for each site, but make sure that we don't go to the default.

Carly Boreland: So rounding up what to do with curriculum in your school. We did acknowledge that there are a lot of other things going on in schools these days and I think we've agreed that it's the responsibility of school leaders to put the curriculum and the pedagogy that goes with delivering their subjects, at the very priority of their thinking each day. We talked about some of the things that get in the way of doing that, like, the challenges of streaming classes, the challenges of keeping teachers updated with all of the subjects that you want to be offering at your school and the pedagogy that you want to offer and making sure that the teachers in our schools are confident and they have that street cred to be able to, to deliver at the very highest standard in all settings and we're not saying that country and city are different in this situation.

It sounds like we're saying that all kids need an excellent teacher in all subjects, standing in front of them and that's their entitlement. We talked about the delivery of curriculum in New South Wales public schools as being something that is owned by and delivered for the community, and that we need to make sure that we're meeting the needs of everybody in those communities and that it's our responsibility to find ways to make that happen so that we leave no stone unturned as we try to find the resources that we need to make sure that every student has what they need. Sometimes that means pushing things to the background that might slow us down. It means sometimes that we need to offer very small classes so that we can get that full range of subjects and that we shouldn't do this at the cost of our, our teachers and the goodwill of our teachers and the time that they put in. It means to make this happen, realistically, that we need strategic planning at the school level and probably a bit of a long-term plan if we're talking about trying to build it back if we've lost some of the subjects and some of the pedagogy and curriculum that we need and, and then at a bigger level cooperation between universities and the department and really the State taking responsibility for ensuring that there's enough resources to meet the challenge of staffing everywhere that we find it. At a closer to home level we want teachers to have ownership of their subject discipline that they teach and feel empowered that they can deliver that well and that they are entitled to do that and that all head teachers should feel that they're responsible for the learning and pedagogy of their subject area and that, that shouldn't be given as a responsibility to somebody else. That's a lot. Anything else?

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Maurie Mulheron: Oh, look the thing we didn't touch upon is one of the impediments to this has been the obsession with NAPLAN, since it was introduced what 2008, 7, 8, 8. So we've had, that, as a huge obstruction, in schools and I'm talking about NAPLAN as a mass census test where every child and from three, five, seven, and nine sit for it, as opposed to a sample test, which could produce the same kind of information system. So NAPLAN has been an issue and I understand why teachers could say, well, what about, you know, we've got all this pressure on us about NAPLAN, and it has been a problem, you know, it is actually distorted the curriculum. We've become obsessed with kind of, literacy and numeracy as though there's only two subjects in the school now, literacy and numeracy, and everything has to hang off that, rather than build it into your programs. I think the other point I'd make in terms of summing up would be, the Department really has withdrawn from the field. There was a time when I started teaching, where there were subject inspectors with, with respect and subject expertise who would cross-fertilise schools with information and good ideas and would facilitate kinds of discussion. We've lost all of those. So we're more siloed than we've ever been before and so for this kind of thing to work, where we, where we put curriculum and at the centre, we need the Department to create structures where they're providing the principals and the school with support, so the schools aren't sitting out there by themselves saying, well, that's all very well, but where, when, and how am I going to do it? You know, we've got Directors that they are just not quite sure what they're doing, you know, quite frankly, when, if they're not doing this kind of work or what's, what are they doing? What's more important? Because I'd like to know.

Lila Mularczyk: My final message messages would be similar to that. It is, it is really a difficult place for educational leaders and educators at the moment, but that's not a reason not to prioritise teaching and learning or the curriculum pattern and developments that you have at your school. There are so many ways of doing that apart from collaborating, you've got your networks, you have to have a voice in this, not just at your own school, but you have to have a voice. So that is a united voice about the importance, the imperative of repositioning, what has happened in schools, the agenda, the agenda has to get back to teaching and learning of students, support and maintaining teacher knowledge and skills. It has to go that way, work through your networks, work through your associations, work through your profession, be committed to doing that so that something will change because it is only as Maurie as just said, the curriculum can be narrowed when you look at NAPLAN, when you look at, in positions that come into the school, when you ask for things to be decluttered, what does that actually look like? So be really wary of that; and my final message apart from, although second final message would be, there are so many places to look for support in delivering your teaching and learning and, and I'm not saying this for any reason, but you know, you've got your Teachers Federation, CPL and the library if we were to look at resources outside of that, you do have your associations, you do have NESA and the department websites, which don't replace, face-to-face, but there's those sorts of things and quality professional learning and my last point, which is something that I started with is you exhaust every

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opportunity to meet the needs of your school community, starting with your learners, the young people in your school equally for your, for your staff and your colleagues that are delivering the quality curriculum that we have done for decade after decade and need to maintain.

Carly Boreland: That's great. Maurie and Lila, you've both reach very high levels individually in your own careers in public education and representing teachers and representing principals and I think it's really correct that you're able to talk about the importance of curriculum and pedagogy as the primary work that school leaders would be doing. I hope there are a lot more people out there like you.

Maurie Mulheron: I'm sure there are.

Lila Mularczyk: Thank you for the opportunity.

Maurie Mulheron: Thanks, Carly.

Lila Mularczyk: Thank you.

Carly Boreland: Thank you. You've been listening to the CPL podcast for the New South Wales Teachers Federation. I'm Carly Boreland, and I'm the Assistant Director of the CPL. I've been speaking with Lila Mularczyk and Maurie Mulheron about curriculum, pedagogy, and how to offer a very broad curriculum for all of our students across New South Wales public schools, to find out more and to listen to further podcasts, you can visit our website cpl.asn.au/podcasts.

CONCLUSION:
The CPL podcast is produced by the Centre for Professional Learning and the New South Wales Teachers Federation. All opinions expressed in this podcast are those of the individual speakers only and do not represent the views of their employer or associated organisations. Technical direction by Jason Nicholas.

Maurie Mulheron began his teaching career in 1978 in the outer south-western suburbs of Sydney and taught in a number of high schools in rural, regional and metropolitan New South Wales (NSW).

From 2001-2011, Maurie was Principal of Keira High School in the regional city of Wollongong, NSW. In 2011, he received an award from the NSW Department of Education for "Excellence in Leadership Demonstrated by a Principal".

Maurie was elected to the full-time position of President of the NSW Teachers Federation President in 2012 and held that position until January 2020 leading the union's many campaigns on salaries and working

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conditions, schools funding, against the privatisation of the vocational education sector, in defence of teaching standards, and in opposition to mass testing and league tables.

Maurie represented the NSW Teachers Federation on the Federal Executive of the national union, the Australian Education Union (AEU), for over twenty years. From 2015-2020, he held the position of Deputy Federal President of the AEU.

He also represented the AEU at a number of international forums and conferences including Education International's Global Response Network which coordinated opposition to the growing commercialisation and privatisation of education.

Maurie served on the state government's NSW Education Standard Authority's Quality Teaching Committee and was a member of the University of Sydney's Teacher Education Advisory Board (TEAB).

Lila Mularczyk Lila's commitment to education was recognised by being honoured with the Order of Australia Medal (OAM), announced 2017. Lila has been contributing to public education for 38 years. She currently is undertaking a portfolio of work including leading or participating on multiple National and State Education Boards and Reference Groups (including, PEF, ACE, UTS, UNSW) professional experience officer, coach and mentor, UNSW Gonski Institute, State and National Chair and Vice Chair ACE, supporting HALT's, tertiary lecturer, work in and for schools, research, contract work, NSWTF and CPL.

In recent years, Lila was the Director, Secondary Education, at the Department of Education. Immediately prior, Lila was President of the NSW Secondary Principals' Council (SPC) from 2012 to 2016. As President and as a school Principal, Lila represented Public Education around Australia, and also frequently globally, at conferences over many years. Lila was Principal at Merrylands High School for 15 years until 2016.

Lila has been awarded an ACE and ACEL State and National Fellowships and was acknowledged through the NSW Meritorious Service to Public Education Award along with Justice Michael Kirby and Richard Gill in 2012. In 2013/14 and 2020 Lila was included in the International Who's Who Register and from 2005 to 2021 she has been the subject of several publications because of her leadership in educational roles as exampled by numerous journals and books, including: "The Stupid Country", Empowering, Executives leaders, Entrepreneur's 20th Edition, Movers and Shakers and "Wise Heads, Wise Hearts" and Leadership for the future.

Early in 2015, Lila was highly commended for her work with Bridges to Higher Education as a Woman of the West and has been awarded the prestigious NSW ACEL Patrick Duignan and the Principals' Australia Institute (PAI) John Laing awards. Lila was also nominated for 2015 Australian of the Year. In 2016 she was awarded the Sir Harold Wyndham Award NSW and delivered the Wyndham Oration. Lila was awarded NSWSPC Life Membership in 2016 and Teachers Federation Association Level Life Membership 2017.

Lila loves her work life.