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TODDCAST TEACHER PODCAST

Show Notes

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Hosted by Todd Broadbent

Guest speaker Kelly Chislett, founder of Common Reader

Tell me about yourself, your teaching journey and what are you currently doing?

My name is Kelly Chislett, I'm an Adelaide born, Victorian based primary school teacher, and I'm currently on Family Leave while I look after my two precious little ones. As of 2022 I founded Common Reader which is a digital education resource.

I've declared myself an education desperado before, which means I'm pretty addicted to learning new things and I study all the time. When I left high school I actually didn't know I wanted to be a teacher, I just knew I wanted to keep learning.

Why did you become a teacher?

While I was doing my undergraduate degree I volunteered in a creche at a hospital, and I realised how much joy it gave me to be with people as they explored the world. That's probably what kick started my path into the world of education and has now led me into building Common Reader.

What's your highlight of the day?

I got a real buzz out of something quite ordinary today, which was actually just walking to school with my two kids and dog. It was sunny, the kids were happy, we weren't in a rush. And we were dropping my daughter off at her second Orientation which seems extraordinary to me. I think the gravity of the moment gave me that buzz.

Tell me more about Common Reader.

Common Reader is designed to be a Pillar for Parents® while they navigate early school life with their kiddos. I know there are stacks of tools for students and teachers, but there isn't as much available for parents. In my experience, families are usually really keen to be involved in helping with reading at home, but common obstacles keep them from being

able to make the most out of those opportunities. So Common Reader is there to help families feel confident & capable about their kiddo's early reading journey at home.

What has it been like building something from scratch?

It's been pretty wonderful actually, as I'm away from the classroom on Family Leave, CR has really stretched my skill base. I'm learning how to build a website, how to engage people through simple marketing strategies, and how to create content that is research backed and fun. It's been a cool way to keep connected with education outside of the classroom.

What has been your greatest challenge as a teacher?

It's gotta be those everyday moments when I've wanted to help & share *more*, but I just couldn't for whatever reason. Like if the timing was off, or I had some looming deadline like presenting to colleagues at a staff meeting. So being able to see how to resolve an issue, but not being able to give it the attention it needs, is really challenging. Learning to be compassionate with myself rather than critical does help me through those moments, but it's still hard. I think too, it's why Common Reader came to be, it's sorta one of many things I wished I could have pointed parents to, when they came asking for support with reading at home.

Give us a bit more background about your career.

I graduated in '09 and the majority of my teaching career has been as an Early Years classroom teacher. So Foundation through to Grade Two. I initially hopped around a bit to different government schools, which was good as I could experience different communities and styles of how schools run. But then I was fortunate to be able to spend longer periods at two other schools where I added bigger leadership roles onto my plate like Level Co-ordinator and Transition Co-ordinator.

I've always been fairly active with the parent community in the schools I have worked, with things like by being a School Council member, inviting parents in for the morning literacy blocks, hosting whole school events like the Great Book Swap¹ & school fairs. It's definitely eye opening becoming a parent myself, as I now have a broader appreciation for the impact of education settings like school.

What motivates parents to be engaged?

I can officially say I'm part of both parent & teacher worlds, so my opinion is much better balanced now! So, anyway, this is coming from a professional and personal place... there

¹ <https://www.greatbookswap.org.au/>

are a lot of things that motivate parents to be engaged, but I think two key things are; feeling welcome and feeling capable.

1. Feeling welcome, is that warmth you get from people at school and being given a variety of invitations to engage with the learning happening there

2. And feeling capable is like a parents confidence about their ability, because it can otherwise prevent them from doing more at home. The fancy term for this is self-efficacy. The amount of available time a parent has influences this feeling of efficacy too. So if they're short on time, they may feel like it's not enough, but a confident parent knows that even two minutes a day can help so they are more motivated to be involved.

I think I was probably a bit rough on parents sometimes as a teacher, quietly thinking to myself, how hard can it be to do a Home Reader each night? But I get it now! It's also interesting hearing other parent experiences and I'm trying to use those alongside research and then weave in practical ideas when I help other parents.

Favourite moment at school?

I'm going to say something that might be a bit controversial... but for all the effort (and sometimes trouble) that goes into writing reports, my favourite school moment is re-reading them each semester as I'd do a final edit, and remembering the achievements of my students.

Are there any common misconceptions or assumptions made by parents or teachers regarding home reading practice?

I think there are so many! Things like, that reading at home is always 'picture perfect', or waiting on who should make the first move on giving instruction - like, teachers often assume parents know to read everyday with their kiddo. But then parents often assume teachers will tell them if they need to do anything especially. I often hear, "the teacher would let me know if something was wrong" as a buffer statement from parents who are worried about their child's reading ability. Then on the flip side the teacher might assume parents will let them know if they are concerned.

I guess the key for both parties, is to own that teachers and parents have a shared interest and responsibility to our little people. School and family make up two of three parts of the Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence², the third being community. So if

² Epstein, Joyce, https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/6799_epstein_ch_1.pdf

you imagine the kiddo in the middle with those three influences around, you can see how important it is for everyone to be accountable for home reading practice.

What were you like as a student?

A pain mostly. Well, for some teachers I was a delight and for others a nightmare. I'm a late diagnosed 2e nuerotype (2e means Twice Exceptional). Maybe if my educators knew that I am gifted and autistic, it would have been an easier journey. But we're moving into a new era of understanding, so I am accepting of all my history and am optimistic moving forward.

What is one teaching resource you couldn't live without?

Unifix cubes. They're so good for literacy and numeracy - if I had only one physical resource in the classroom this would be it.

What are some of your top tips and ideas to support parents in getting their child reading at home?

I think one which isn't spoken about enough is that reading can be developed without reading. That sounds crazy! What I mean is, (and of course I strongly believe in the work the Science of Reading has proven), but parents at home who don't have specific training in teaching decoding or phonemic awareness, can support other reading skills from frameworks like Scarborough's Reading Rope³ or the 5 Pillars of Literacy⁴.

So, to support kiddos reading at home, parents can

- play verbal to-and-fro games, like it's tennis without the gear, so for example, take a CVC word (we have lists of these for CR subscribers) and then change the first sound - cop, bop, stop, flop, etc.
- use a broader range of vocabulary, swap out known words like 'big' for 'massive', swap out regularly used phrases like 'lets go' for interesting ones like 'put your skates on'
- sneakily force reading practise, so instead of getting a book off the shelf at bedtime, ask your kiddo to choose one that starts with the letter 'K' or that rhymes with 'mat'
- after watching a movie, encourage them to retell what happened in order

³ <https://institute.aimpa.org/resources/readingrope>

⁴ <https://fivefromfive.com.au/the-five-keys-to-reading/>

Why engage families?

Australian teachers would be familiar with AITSLs 7 Professional Standards for Teachers; one of these is based specifically around engaging professionally with families and the community. This can feel a bit scary at times, I remember feeling intimidated and underprepared as a graduate in this area. So, currently a new section of CR is being developed, hopefully for release in early 2024, as professional development for teachers about how to engage families at home with reading to really maximise student outcomes. Hopefully it takes the scare-factor away for teachers from inviting parents to be more involved. I'm about to complete a Harvard Online course about '*Family Engagement in Education*' which is keeping me up to date with current best practice. It is also encouraging me to keep going with the work I'm doing in designing Common Reader as I see how valuable it can be.

Why else is it important to engage families/parents in home reading?

There are a swathe of studies, some are listed on the Common Reader website, which show significant positive effects on things like attendance and reading ability. By ignoring this resource teachers are, albeit a tad dramatic, neglecting their students. It's like scraping a portion of what is known to be a positive contributing factor straight into the bin, when we should be leaving it on the plate.

What would you tell your younger teacher self?

Reflecting on my career I feel like many of the ways I engaged with families was 'just nice'. Meaning, it was an enjoyable experience and typically a once off opportunity. For example from my own prior practice, it was things like sending home newsletters, inviting parents to view student work at the end of a unit, or hosting an info night on literacy. These are nice and a good start. But having learned from research, and tools like the Dual Capacity-Building Framework⁵, I would amp these up now to change them from 'just nice' to being *goal-oriented*. Teaching specific skills to use at home requires the most effort on the part of schools, but it also garners six times a greater effect than just reading to a child, and two times a greater effect than listening to a child read⁶. So I feel like I'd tell my graduate self to try a *goal-oriented* reading information night. That might look less like a 'once off teacher created info dump' and more like; asking families for their Qs or experiences prior to the night, then during the night it would let them be hands-on and test a new technique related to their needs, then after the night it would send home ideas

⁵ <https://www.dualcapacity.org/>

⁶ 'A New Wave of Evidence'

or opportunities for further integration of those skills. It requires more effort for sure, but it'll pack a bigger punch, so investment well spent I'd say!

Did you have a teacher throughout your schooling that inspired you?

I'd have to say that my Italian teacher from primary school, Signorina Conte, really made an impression on me. I felt like she really cared about me and saw the potential I had. It really helped me be motivated to do my best.

Proudest moment as a teacher?

When parents come to tell me that I was their kid's favourite teacher. It really is a special feeling knowing you're an important part of someone's education journey.

Anyone wanting to get in contact with you - how do they go about getting in contact?

Just google search 'Common Reader' and you'll easily find me. The Common Reader website has a 'contact us' function on the home page, I manage the Common Reader Instagram and Facebook accounts too. I love digitally meeting new people with similar interests so reach out. I feel like Toddcast Listeners need a little present too, so if they use TODDCASTTREAT at the checkout, they can get \$10 off the first payment to a Common Reader subscription.

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