**World Teachers’ Day 2021 podcast series**

**Maree Wimhurst and Scott Millar, Sheldon College**

**Announcer:** This is a Queensland Department of Education podcast.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** World Teachers’ Day is a special day on the school calendar. It gives us the opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the wonderful work of all teachers across our state. I'm Virginia Bowdidge from the Department of Education and I'll be talking to some of Queensland's extraordinary teachers and some of the students they have inspired. Today primary school teacher, Maree Wimhurst, from Sheldon College and former student, Scott Millar, join me.

Hi, Marie and Scott. Thanks for talking to me today as part of our World Teachers’ Day series.

**Maree Wimhurst:** Good morning, Virginia, thank you.

**Scott Millar:** Thanks for having us, really excited to be here.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Can we start with you, Maree? How long have you been a teacher and what inspired you to choose teaching as a career?

**Maree Wimhurst:** I've been teaching for 18 years. Currently, I teach Year Six English and Humanities in the middle college setting.

What inspired me to become a teacher? Hmm. My daughter's Year One teacher was an incredible young man. I went into the class as a parent helper and was totally in awe of this young fellow. We became close and he kept saying to me, ‘Maree, you must become a teacher, you were born to be a teacher’. And I certainly thought about this. Then, due to changes in my personal circumstances, I found myself raising my young daughter by myself. I wanted to be an inspiration to her. Show her no matter what happens in life, with hard work and dedication, you can succeed and thrive. So they were the two main inspirations that set me on my journey to becoming a teacher.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** What is it that you love about your job?

**Maree Wimhurst:** Working with children and building strong relationships. Children's wellbeing and relationships are at the heart of everything that I do. Encouraging children to believe in themselves. Challenge themselves. Be curious, develop a love of learning. Laugh, have fun. Take risks. Stand out from the crowd. My life is built on two basic principles, respect and honesty. I instill this into my students from the moment they enter the classroom. It is integral that each child's ideas and opinions are valued. Students need to feel safe to express their feelings and learn to respect and listen to others. What other occupation allows you to do all of this? Why wouldn't I love my job?

**Virginia Bowdidge:** And what is it that makes teaching so rewarding?

**Maree Wimhurst:** Getting to know children and connect with them. I need to get to know students, who they are, where they come from, how they fit within society. Then, and only then, will real learning take place, I believe. Watching children grow in every way and succeed, use their failures to learn from, but also children who are disengaged, who do not want to learn. Those who cause issues in the class are the ones that need you the most. Getting through to children like this and seeing them start to engage and believe in themselves, wanting to learn, becoming curious, starting to take risks. This is beyond rewarding.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Scott, thanks again for talking to me today. Can you tell me a little bit about what you've done since leaving school? You're 20, is that right?

**Scott Millar:** Yeah, so just turned 21 recently, actually. And it's been a roller coaster since finishing school. So for me through high school, I ended up starting my own business when I was 14-years-old as part of a business program through the school and went from selling keyrings at local markets to selling a few thousand units of keyrings a month on online platforms like eBay and Etsy when I was in Grade 10. And finishing Year 12, I was running one of the country's leading holographic entertainment companies, creating holograms, like you see in Star Wars and Iron Man, for the events and marketing space.

Now, since finishing school I've had, yeah, a rollercoaster of a ride. I ended up running my business full-time, turning down university scholarship offers and full-time job offers after graduating. And at the same time also found myself working in the education space. We had a lot of teachers reaching out saying, ‘Hey, Scott, you've had this experience doing business and technology in school whilst also studying business and technology. Could you come and teach our students about entrepreneurship and innovation in STEM?’. So BOP, today, my company, BOP industries, we're an education company. We teach primary and high school students about entrepreneurship, innovation and STEM. And in the past three years we've worked with 50,000 students in 36 cities around the world, which has been an amazing experience and I've loved every second of it.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** What did you study at school that led you down that path?

**Scott Millar:** So, I think for me at school, I was always a relatively good kid. Like, I applied myself to my studies, I was well behaved and I did relatively okay academically, but I'd never really found that one thing that I was just obsessed with. I was definitely a plane nerd back in the days, I always thought I was going to be a commercial airline pilot, but I think what I loved about business was it helped me make sense of the world around me. I realised that everything we interact with is a business and it's a brand. And what I also loved was that by running my own business, I was getting access to opportunities that most kids my age never got access to. I mean, I was going to corporate networking events and meeting CEOs and politicians and prime ministers, and then getting back in my school uniform and going to school and sitting Maths exams.

So, it was a pretty crazy experience, I always say to kids it was like that ‘Hannah Montana experience’ throughout high school. And then since graduating, I've kept having those opportunities and I think it's sort of fast tracked my career. As a 21-year-old with no formal qualifications I'm an entrepreneur-in-residence at Griffith University and lecture at two other universities across the country. I get to work with leading multinational brands, and yeah, I also get to work with principals and teachers and heads of departments shaping what the future of education is going to look like. Which is yeah, just an amazing experience I think as someone of my age, being able to access these opportunities is what I really love about.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Yeah, it's fantastic. And I understand Marie, Mrs Wimhurst, was somewhat of, an inspiration to you. Can you tell me how she inspired you?

**Scott Millar:** Yeah, absolutely. So I think Mrs Wim's Year 3 class was definitely the highlight of my schooling experience. And I think what I really loved about Mrs Wim was she made learning cool and made it a really exciting thing to be a nerd and to have a passion for learning and finding out new things. I remember that was always the highlight. Like every week I would come home from school and just be going on to my parents about something new that I'd learned about a specific Toucan species in the rainforest, or I'd be talking about a new mathematical terminology that we were learning about. And I think that was the cool thing that I loved about Mrs Wim, was it really made me believe that knowledge is power. And I think that's something that I've kept with me ever since Year 3.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** That's fantastic. I know you were quite young when you were in Mrs Wimhurst's class but do you feel she helped inspire you do what you do today.

**Scott Millar:** Absolutely. I think honestly being a Mrs Wim's helped put me on the track that I ended up following after finishing school. What I loved about Mrs. Wim was she wasn't afraid to challenge us and she wasn't afraid to talk to us as equals. Like, we weren't just eight-year-olds and Year 3 students, like a lot of other teachers would treat us, she would treat us as equals. And I think what was also fantastic about it, and values that I still have today, was that Mrs Wim wasn't always the gatekeeper of all knowledge. She wouldn't be afraid to say, "look, I don't necessarily have the answer to that question, but let me help you find that answer".

And I think that's what I really loved about her teaching style was that she wasn't necessarily a sage-on-the-stage style teacher, she was a facilitator of learning and even when we didn't, even when she didn't have the answers she'd help us find those answers. And that's what I really loved about it.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** What would your advice be to others about recognising and valuing the work of teachers and how they can shape and influence students' lives?

**Scott Millar:** I think my advice to others around recognising the value of teachers and the impact they have on a student's life is that you never know what it is that's going to really stay with a student. I think, for us as educators, our job is to expose students to as many different things as possible, to help them find that one thing that really clicks with them. And that might be a particular topic that they're incredibly passionate about. It might be a way of learning that just really works for them. And I think that's the value that educators and teachers really can offer their students, is it's exposing them to different ways of thinking. It's challenging them to push themselves outside of their comfort zones, to be better, to do better, to learn more.

And I think at the end of the day for you as a teacher, something that could be so small, so insignificant, something that you do year after year can be genuinely life-changing for a student and something that your students will remember in 10, 20, 30 years’ time. And I think that's the really special thing about a teacher is you can have such a profound impact on your students through the smallest of gestures and the tiniest of activities.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Maree, it must be very rewarding to see past students, like Scott, making their own way in the world?

**Maree Wimhurst:** It certainly is. I've watched Scott's journey for many years, but I knew way back in Year 3 that Scott was going to achieve great things in his life. As an eight-year-old, he was driven. Scott always stood out and I encouraged him to do just that. He was a beautiful little boy in every sense. He was intelligent, curious, loved a challenge, but most importantly, a risk taker. He possessed a real entrepreneurial sense at an early age. I can recall at our class auctions, many children would sit on a particular item that they wanted and bid all of their fake money on it. Scott, however, would bid on multiple items and walk away with a bag full of goodies.

**Scott Millar:** Oh, I remember those class auctions, they were always a highlight and the little baby Yoda that we had, there was a Styrofoam Yoda when you walked into the classroom, ever since every time I see a Yoda, I get a little bit excited and think back to Mrs Wim.

**Maree Wimhurst:** Still got that, still got that.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Maree, do you have any memorable moments in your career that you'd like to share with us that have helped shape the teacher you are today?

**Maree Wimhurst:** Look, there are so many and, but one in particular really stands out. I taught a young fellow in Year 6, and then again in Year 7, he was the most charismatic and likable young man, a bit of a naughty boy, for our school that is. Everyone loved him. He struggled academically and he knew that he did. I worked hard to make him believe in himself and never give up. Due to his many academic struggles he often wanted to do just that, give up. I built up an incredible relationship with him and worked hard with him to overcome his lack of self-belief. As he went up the ladder, he would still often come back and seek advice or just sit and have a chat, or just annoy me.

Towards the end of Year 10 I'd heard that he was leaving school to enter trade school. On his last day at school he came into my room, gave me a bit of cheek, as usual, then he hugged me and cried and said, "I would have left school in Year eight, but I didn't because of you. I stayed because of you. You made me believe in myself and believe that I'm worthy of achieving things in my life. You mean the world to me. And I will never forget you". That still brings tears to my eyes. And for him to come, I think, and admit those things and it certainly made me see what an impact I'd had on his life. So I've had many stories like that, but that young fellow in particular will stay with me forever.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** That's really lovely. What advice would you give students thinking of studying teaching or career changes moving into teaching?

**Maree Wimhurst:** Well. It is a very hard but rewarding career. I, particularly, started university as a mature age student and I had a complete career change. I worked for an international airline for many years before I decided to become a teacher. Two totally different worlds, but yet there are also similarities. So, to me, if you want to do something in life, go do it. Grab it and go and do it. Believe in yourself and go and do it.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** What are the similarities between the two jobs do you think?

**Maree Wimhurst:** I think, you're working with people. And the minute you work with people, whether it's young people, people of all different ages, walks of life, you see what they bring. And in teaching, you know, it's not only your students you've got in front of you, you're dealing with parents and they can be wonderful or they can be quite tricky at times. You're dealing with other colleagues. So those aspects that I certainly could see pretty much when I entered teaching from flying, my flight days of being a flight attendant, there were similarities there. But I think in dealing with people and coping with people and how to manage people, because both jobs you need very good people skills. And I think that's something often with teaching that people don't see, you know, they sort of just look at you teaching children all the time, but there's so many other aspects to it and so many people you deal with.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** And lastly, Maree, how will you or your school be celebrating World Teachers’ Day?

**Maree Wimhurst:** Great. Teachers at my school are well and truly recognised throughout the whole week. It's a week-long event, almost, as it goes on. There are social streams that are set up, one for students and one for parents, which allows them to write beautiful messages of appreciation for teachers past and present. It is so special to see messages from students that you taught years before, clearly stating why and how you inspired them. And, not only are they stating how you inspire them, but it'll get down to little things that you did when you taught them in a way back in Year 3 or Year 6 or Year 7 and they can recall that. So it certainly means a lot to them and you can mean a lot to them, which is amazing.

Then on our last day of that week, on our Friday whole school assembly is dedicated to teachers. We all sit in our special areas at the front of assembly and are made to feel appreciated and special. The whole assembly is dedicated to us. And then we leave with a little gift bag full of goodies as we leave. So it is a great week, you do feel special and you do feel valued. And I think for teachers, we do what we do because that's what happens, but I don't think we often see how much we are valued and appreciated.

**Scott Millar:** Just thank you, Mrs. Wim, it's been such a pleasure being one of your students. And I think, like I said, the things that I learned back in Year 3 and memories that I've built in Year 3 have stayed with me all the way now until like 21 years old.

**Maree Wimhurst:** Yes, and it's lovely to hear that, Scott, thanks very much. The one that I want you to hold dearest of all though, is when you're rich and famous, remember that dear old year three teacher!

**Scott Millar:** Oh, well, we've actually got a program coming up with Singapore Airlines chartering a jet and we might need some flight attendants and some teachers.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Thanks very much for joining me, Maree and Scott.

**Maree Wimhurst:** It's been wonderful, Virginia. It's been a privilege to be part of this and for Scott to recognize me as a teacher that has inspired him throughout his schooling years and then as he's moved on into the world, so it's been wonderful. So thank you for organising this for us, that we could come together and do this. It's been fantastic.

**Scott Millar:** Absolutely such a pleasure, so great to catch up. And I think yeah, to all teachers out there have a fabulous World Teachers’ Week. And to all students, make sure to appreciate your teachers. You never know how valuable they're going to be.

**Maree Wimhurst:** Oh, that's good advice, take care of those teachers.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Thank you both very much.

**Maree Wimhurst:** Thank you.

**Scott Millar:** Thanks.

**Announcer:** You have been listening to a Queensland Department of Education podcast.

The Department of Education acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands from across Queensland. We pay our respects to the elders past and present that they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture, and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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