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## CPL Podcast: Researching Together for a *Fair Go*: JPL Special Edition Part 1

**Host:** Carly Boreland

**With:** Wayne Sawyer and Katina Zammit

### INTRODUCTION:

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

**Carly Boreland:** Welcome to CPL podcast for the New South Wales Teachers Federation. I'm Carly Boreland, and I'm the Assistant Director of the CPL. Today we're going to use the word *special* a lot. We're talking to two very special people, Wayne Sawyer, and Katina Zammit, and we're interviewing them as part of a special edition for the Journal of Professional Learning for Semester 1 2021. That is a focus on a fabulous and truly special program that's having its 21st birthday called the *Fair Go Program*. Wayne and Katina are going to take us through some of the theoretical work and the findings of that work and how it came about and what they've learned along the way over 21 years. To find out more, you can also read our special edition and they'll point you through to some of the key articles along the way as well. Wayne, Katina, Welcome.

**Wayne Sawyer:** Thanks Carly

**Katina Zammit:** Thanks Carly.

**Carly Boreland:** It's great to have you here and as I said, we're up to the 21st birthday of *Fair Go*. Many teachers would have known about the program and worked in it. I wonder, can you give us an overview and tell us why it's such an important part of your careers?

**Katrina Zammit:** As you mentioned, Carly yeah, the *Fair Go Program* began 21 years ago under the leadership of Geoff Munns. We all came from an equity and social justice background at Western Sydney University, and we were very much interested in trying to improve the learning outcomes for students who were living in disadvantaged schools. In particular and worked very closely with the disadvantaged school's program in the Southwestern region of Sydney, which went through a number of iterations. You know, you've got the DSP program, the PSFP and a whole range of other, acronyms that people may be aware of in terms of providing that sort of support for teachers really to look at their own practices. Not looking at students' behaviour, not looking at what's happening in the classroom, but trying to change the learning that was going on in the, in the actual classroom using the *Fair Go Program Frameworks*. So that Geoff, along with a number of brought on a whole range of us from the school of education with interests across a wide range of different curriculum areas and hence,



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we began to engage in looking at the inside of a classroom and the learning processes and the experiences that teachers could investigate when looking at it in their own practices and built with the support of teachers and working in classrooms with teachers, the engaging *Framework*. Because we really could understand, historically and traditionally that classrooms were quite disengaging for students from low SES backgrounds.

**Carly Boreland:** Wayne, before you share your perspective, can I ask a Katina, what were you doing before you were an academic at Western Sydney university or then it was known as the University of Western Sydney? I think sometimes we think academics are these people that kind of grew in a room somewhere and I don't know that that is always a fair description of what's gone before.

**Katina Zammit:** Yeah, that's a good point actually, prior to moving into academia, I'm actually a primary school teacher, trained as a primary school teacher and I worked in the Metropolitan East Region back in the day, primarily in primary classrooms in DSP schools as well. I moved into the actual *Metropolitan needs Disadvantaged Schools' Program* as a consultant in the literacy area. I've always worked very closely with teachers looking at their practices in schools.

**Wayne Sawyer:** Before I joined, Western Sydney, I was an English teacher in schools in Western Sydney and I'd been a head teacher of English. I actually did a little bit of a casual teaching at night, at Western Sydney in English curriculum. I moved from being head teacher of English, into English curriculum position there when I've got a full-time position came up.

**Carly Boreland:** And teachers would know Wayne's voice from CPL courses as well because we've travelled around New South Wales together, delivering courses for teachers, especially teachers in leadership positions around, lifting student achievement. So Wayne, what was your involvement and what did you want to tell us to begin with about the setting up.

**Wayne Sawyer:** Okay. So I first came to *Fair Go Project*, not necessarily through a project that had *Fair Go* in its name, but through a project that included the ME *Framework*. This was a project in which we looked at places that had been successful for in getting outcomes for boys across the country and up until that point the *Fair Go* team had developed a *Framework* around engagement that was about engagement in classrooms, and also engagement to the whole project of education, what they call the small 'e' and big 'E' *Framework*. That had just before this particular boys' project had been added to, by the work of Andrew Martin, who's been at Sydney University and University of New South Wales that added a dimension around and get around motivation. That motivation became part of looking at how teachers work with individual kids in classrooms and so then it became the motivation engagement *Framework*, *MeE* which has written about quite a lot in the Special Edition.



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**Carly Boreland:** Before you go on, can we just talk about that for a minute because I'm having put this edition together and then, and read some of your books, which I hope you're going to point us to as well. We've published an article by Geoff Munns called “*All about the Motivation and Engagement Framework*”, all about *MeE* framework and so teachers can read that in detail throughout edition, but you talk about this small ‘e and big E, and motivation combined, and that's, that's really a central part of the whole project from that point on, isn't it? Everything hangs off that it's not only teachers doing research in whatever it's within, a defined *Framework*.

**Katina Zammit:** That's right so, in other words what you will see referred to in all of the actual, articles in the special edition is the *MeE* capital M little e, big E” and so that was the term that was picked up by teachers in schools to refer to their investigations of the practices that they're involved in. So that initially it was the “e and big E” that Wayne referred to, so they were looking at the processes within the classroom. So the inside of the school and the engagement component, which is around looking at the sorts of messages that the practices in the classroom of teachers were conveying to students around their knowledge, their *ability, control, voice, and place*, and trying to embed into their classrooms really positive engaging messages. Now that meant that, whereas the motivational component was very much looking at individual strategies to support individual students within the classroom where the, the *E in engagement* in the “inside classroom” was really around whole school, whole class practices as well.

So teachers actually, the *Framework* was really useful then because in fact, teachers could then based on the students in their, in their classroom consider what they wanted to change and so that they were then able to focus inquiry on a particular question for their students and look at the practices and the learning experiences that they were developing. Often talking to the kids about those as well, because that sort of reflection component was, is very, very strong, not just from the teacher's perspective, but also to hear from the students about. Is this working? How is it improving your learning? If it's not, what can I do to actually change? and so the elements that Geoff mentions in that chapter about all about *MeE* provides that sort of background to what some of the other chapters then actually refer to or articles I should say, refer to because of the focus of each of those.

**Wayne Sawyer:** I think just to, just to sort of pick up from what Katina said, one of the things that the message system, for example, particularly in the *MeE Framework* does, is Katina says around about “*knowledge and ability and control and voice and place*” is to try to work against what, historically negative messages that come, not necessarily from teachers, but certainly from the media about, you know, the way that kids in particular, you know, SES communities and their schools achieve. So for me, coming in as a kind of relatively late person, that was a very, for me, that's very important and, you know,



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attractive part of that *Framework*, because what it does is to, is to sort of counter those messages that those kids are getting. Yep.

**Katina Zammit:** Just expand on that a bit more in regard to, we just didn't come up with this. It was actually grounded in, in theory and other people's work. Newman and Associates, work on authentic pedagogies have ... on star teachers, obviously the productive pedagogies out of Queensland. Significantly on the work of, Basil Bernstein, who's a sociologist and his work was very much around, you know, focusing on how classroom strategies, pedagogy, curriculum and assessment actually all embed those sorts of messages and how they are maybe interpreted, and we sort of teased out that sort of interpretation of what those messages might look like and how we could change those messages around to be really, really positive and engaging for students.

**Carly Boreland:** And something that I have noticed a lot, both when you're talking and through the articles is that it's not asking teachers, what do you want to change about your classroom? It's not saying which students do you want to change? It's saying, - what about your practice do you want to change and your way of teaching. A lot of the articles talk about how they already had a pretty good reputation in the school and that people thought their classes were going quite well because the students were quiet, or the students were not causing any trouble or appeared to be doing work. I thought a lot about my own teaching through that because it really made me stop and think, you know, so much of what I probably got credit for as a teacher was probably the opposite of a lot of this engaging message and having taught mostly in very middle schools, not highly advantaged or disadvantaged. I think I had a lot of students who just go along with me and not upset anything too much Which suits my personality well but maybe wasn't so good for the students and I thought it was so impressive in the articles to see people who were acknowledged by their peers as doing really well. But seeing that actually there was something that needed to change and that they wanted to change. Could you tell us a bit more about that or how you approach that with teachers and get them to start seeing their own practice in that way?

**Wayne Sawyer:** So two things, I think the first one is if it just pick-up one area of that. So that's the area of what we call *high cognitive, high cognitive work*. So engagement, it can often be thought of as kids, you know, "being on task", but the Fair Go developers of the theory talked about the notion of "being in task" and for me that's an important distinction because what that does is to say that you can be compliant and working away and in fact, quite busy, but still not be doing anything that's terribly challenging or worthwhile. So the whole point about engagement is to be engaged in something that's actually going to challenge you, it's going to be sort of intellectually developing. Otherwise it's not a, you know, there's not a whole lot of point to it really. So curriculum is as important as the processes, you know, the curriculum, it's plan.



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The other thing is then about teachers work, so theory or *Framework* like *MeE* does two things, I think. So one is that we have one, maybe if I go back a step, there was one project called “*Teachers for a Fair Go*” and in “*Teachers for a Fair Go*”, what we did was to follow the work of 28 teachers who had been regarded by their peers as being highly effective with kids, engaging kids in low SES schools and peers included, principals, head teachers, consultants, disadvantaged schools consultants, professional associations, you know, did the nominated. We put people through a fairly rigorous process before we ended up with the 28 people that we ended up with. It wasn't as if we chose those people by saying, you know, do they teach in a way that fits the *Framework* because that would just be a kind of circular argument. Then you'd find out that guess what they teach, whether if it's a *Framework*. So what you try and do with a *Framework* like this is to kind of test it as well. So we're looking, as we're looking at these teachers work, we're looking to see, and we're asking the teachers, you know, do aspects of this *Framework*, seem to explain what you do and, you know, we thought they did. So, and part of that was having the teachers in on the analysis as well. It's not like we come along and tap teachers on the shoulder and say, you know, your cognition needs to be up in your classroom or anything like that. But you know, if you're interested in working on your pedagogy, where sitting, working with you, here is a *Framework* that you might want to consider and what we'll do is test it as we work. You know, it does it seem to explain your work. Do you think it explains your work?

**Katina Zammit:** And that actually got built upon, particularly for some schools in the schooling for a *Fair Go* as much as anything because the leadership teams within the school and other classroom teachers could actually see the challenges that were happening in the classroom of the teachers, from the teachers for a *Fair Go Project* and thought this was something that should be encouraged and across the whole school as well. So Greg and Melissa talk about how that was, that was the beginning point for, for their school and how that has now moved as Melissa's moved to another school to be embedded within some of the practices within, within that school as well. And that, for them, it was, if I come back to what we were talking about earlier was challenging that notion of compliance they're there, the kids were very compliant. They were “on task”, but they weren't necessarily as well as they were “in task” and actually learning or seeing the class or education as a possibility for them and an option for their future.

**Carly Boreland:** And there's a fabulous article in there an interview with Nicole Wade that talks about exactly that and some of the language you can use and the way you can adjust your own thinking, when you're talking to students and the messages you send about who's capable of what and really questions why we're ever putting a limit on any students. Whether we do it intentionally or unintentionally in the, in the small chats that we have sometimes, or in following up afterwards and asking more questions after an initial conversation.



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**Katina Zammit:** So that working together in the collegial aspect, I think is the other thing that was important for the work of the *Fair Go Programs* in the, in the different iterations of the projects is that teachers weren't just working by themselves. They were working collegially with a coach or a mentor and other teachers as well, and that, that sharing and that openness to share what was happening and their challenges was really exciting because that's a great risk to teachers to actually open themselves up to going, this is not working, or I want to look at this because it doesn't seem to be, how can I, how can I improve what I'm doing is, is quite a challenge.

**Carly Boreland:** There's a, there's an honest article in there by, Brad Tate and Sarah Webb, and Brad talks about how it was not working for him, or the students, and how involvement in the program and reflecting on his own practice really helped and, and the process of doing research as well. Could we chat a bit more about that research aspect? and Katina, you mentioned too, that over time, it's, there's been different versions of the program because this is something where the Department of Education and, Western Sydney University work together to identify schools, provide funding, conduct research. You talked about the schooling for a *Fair Go* as coming later.

**Katina Zammit:** Another a long project as well in that project, Geoff, Wayne and another colleague, Katherine Attard developed a relationship where in fact, the teachers who were identified as “exemplary” in the exemplary teachers for a *Fair Go Project* became mentors of other teachers within their school and then also across schools as well. So starting to build the capacity of others within school and, within the actual area as well. That was a model that was developed by Wayne.

**Wayne Sawyer:** Yeah. So one of the, one of the ways in which it built on a project called *Teachers for a Fair Go*, so *Teachers for a Fair Go*, was the one where we had the 28 teachers that we followed, but we went back to eight of those teachers and, the eight were chosen because they were one urban and two that were still in the same positions as in previous. They hadn't been promoted, but the ones who were in similar positions to what they'd been in when we did, *Teachers for Fair Go* were asked to mentor, as Katina said, someone else in that school. But one of the differences for me, what between the two projects was in, in *Teachers for a Fair Go*, it was true, I think, I think it is genuinely true that teachers work co-researchers. We developed case studies of their teaching in concert with them. We would meet at the end of every day when we watched them teach and we would say, this is what we thought we saw? What do you think? and they'd say, yep, that's what you saw or, no! it's not actually what you really saw, what you saw was this. We would go through, and so we would do that in a collegial way, and we ended up writing reports, which the teachers were also part of. But I have to say that the ultimate research question was our research, which was, what characterises the practices of these teachers. But when we went to *Schooling for a Fair Go* there, there was no alternate research question, which was ours, which was separate from the teachers. So in *Schooling for a Fair Go*, when people were being mentored or when they became mentors of somebody at another school, the only questions were about their own



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practice.

They were asking questions about whatever aspect of practice they wanted to work on and the articles in the Special Edition, you know, pick up on some of those Alex Harris, for example, was interested in looking at feedback in her classrooms because she felt that the kids were not really engaging, in discussion and, you know, particular areas of the work. So she thought, well, developing feedback is one way in which I can work on what I contribute to discussion? So that was a really clever way into that notion. So all the questions were the teacher's questions, not the academics questions and the work was around that. So two of the really characteristic things that are important about *Fair Go* are that teachers do engage in research and two that it's collegial and I think both of those things are really important. You do better work when you're working with others and the model around *Schooling for a Fair Go* was you had a mentor, you also had someone from the University. It was what we call the teacher-research assistant with the hyphen between teacher and research and then they're also academic partners at the university. So it was a, you know, there's a lot of support there for you thinking about your...

**Katina Zammit:** But that also developed into whole schools, looking at it all, more than just a mentor and, and a teacher like a significant proportion of staff actually investigating it and becoming that sort of research community and sharing all their, their learnings with the rest of the staff and building on reading and et cetera that they were doing.

**Carly Boreland:** So there was money, expertise, and time, and then some schools found it so beneficial that they found more money, which is such an important part.

**Katina Zammit:** Time probably the most important aspect. Because having that coaching, a coach mentor, mentor mentee relationship does mean that you organisationally at the school, it's about not just having that person to bounce ideas off and discuss in reflect on practices. It's being able to have the time within the school hours. It's not catching the half an hour before school or having to stay back or can we meet over lunch and such. So it's having that dedicated amount of time to actually have that teacher reflection and evaluation of what's been going on.

**Carly Boreland:** That's important, isn't it? It sounds like that's a reorganisation of the way the school works, because so often there's money given for a casual teacher to replace you for a day but that means you've got to leave lessons. There's a lot of work involved in being replaced for a day and then there's a lot of pressure on what happens in that day and getting things done. But if the, the organisation of the school has time built into it for teachers to work together, then it's probably a more honest way of working in a genuine way together.



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**Wayne Sawyer:** I think that's really important if there's no doubt that money buys time, and there's no doubt that particularly *Schooling for a Fair Go* benefited by having an amount of research money available so that you could have teacher research, assistant mentors and mentees could have time off class and all that. But having said that there were, there were two schools, one Katina knows a lot better than I do and one was a school that are more familiar with the high school. There were two schools which did it without money basically. And in the case of one, it was about, it was about turning over most professional development time or meeting in school, making time to the project and the case of the other school, it was about building into projects that they were already doing and therefore already had time allocated a research component that picked up the themes of *Fair Go*. So it is possible to work as you say, if the school, if the school allocates time in particular ways without necessarily it having to be an extra big financial burden.

**Katina Zammit:** The other aspect of it that does come to mind when you were talking then was in fact it was, and I think this is what was referred to in, in some of the work that I do with them, with the schools as well, is that it wasn't a band aid solution on, we're not just buying, you know, particular program because you think it's going to work, but it's looking at how a program, you know, it may compliment what you're doing. Okay. In terms of your investigation and the use of the *Fair Go Program Frameworks* but a lot of the times there is a tendency to pick up something, as a short-term fix, which doesn't necessarily, have long term outcomes for students.

**Carly Boreland:** And that's something that I wanted to ask a lot of that was a, a line that I read that talks about the goal of the project, not being to replicate good ideas, the same good ideas across lots of schools, but rather for teachers to come up with original solutions to problems, they had identified themselves. I wonder if you could help us more with that. Because I think it's, it's really important because too often I've been to a staff meeting or a professional learning day where someone else has been off to a course, they come back, they say, we're doing this now and that everybody's got to drop everything and try this new idea.

**Wayne Sawyer:** Yeah, I agree. I mean, sustainability is a key, it was a key issue. So that's why for me, at least the notion of teachers as researchers is so basic to all of this, because there's nothing like doing that, that creates a mindset around... in our context, we come up with solutions for our context, as much as doing research does, so it's not about, you know, we'll drop a frame on top of you and you can, you know, turn your teaching over to fit this frame. Now it's really about the mindset of taking on research and thinking about how asking a question about your practice, working with somebody else around that question, and then looking for evidence around whether we found the answers or not, is the, is the, you know, the key issue. That's much more sustainable, I think around professional development, than the sort of one off.



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**Carly Boreland:** There's a really nice expression, I think it's from Bob Lingard "*that research... disposition*" that you're quoting a lot in different things that you've written. It's just so nicely captures, I guess, the intellectual work of a teacher.

**Katina Zammit:** And it does. And I think also one of the things is that it's about individual professional learning. So where you might have that one idea, you don't know if that strategy or that idea is going to work until you actually apply it in your classroom and if it doesn't and look, that's fine, it's okay if you are doing, if we do something in the classroom and the evidence says that hasn't made any difference, okay, it's not working, that's fine. So we go off and talk about, well, what else might work as well?

**Carly Boreland:** And you don't have to persist with something that's not working for too long. Do you, could you decide in a lesson, this is not working and maybe be open with your class about that and say, okay, let's try something new right now?

**Katina Zammit:** Yeah, that's right. There were, I think initially in the *Schooling for a Fair Go Project*, some strategies that were picked up on as very valuable, but then tended to have a life of their own. Okay and you go, that's one thing that's great, but is there other things that can be used beyond just that particular strategy, or what is it that that strategy is enabling to occur in the classroom? That means you can build that aspect and so it might be about reflection and listening to students and adjusting what you're teaching based on what the students have said or how it impacts on the differentiation that you're using as well.

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**Katina Zammit:** It's an interesting notion of being comfortable. So, you get into a mindset of this is working and I don't have to do anything else and everything's going along fine. But as we found in some of the schools, just because it seemed to be going along fine doesn't mean that actually students were improving in their learning, as well. So I think, and for, for some of the teachers at one of the schools, they who were very good teachers, I'm not, so, you know, they, everyone was, it made them reignite their passion for education and for teaching again, because they had found that really, when you scratch the surface and dug a little bit deeper, those practices, weren't working for everybody in the classroom as well. So it was, yeah, it's really nice watching kindergarten doing some of these works.



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**Carly Boreland:** It really, it certainly has scratched something. I feel like I need to go back and try again, or the, you know, all of the things that I had gained along the way can stay, but I just need to re go back and do some more other things and, and as you've taught for longer and you're more experienced in school, I think you actually a much better position to do a lot of that.

**Katina Zammit:** I think you become, but I also think you'd become less focused on the actual behaviour of behavioural aspect and more on being able to look at what is happening in the classroom in terms of the curriculum and the, and the learning strategies and the learning experiences, because you feel more confident and more comfortable in being a teacher as well. I think that there is also a huge amount of challenge for classroom teachers and schools these days because of accountability and system driven, aspects, in terms of, you know, it just so crowded, and there's just so much it's, to a point where you wonder what's how much teaching based on student needs is going on in the classroom in comparison to well, ticking the box, because that you've done that assessment for that particular program that's being promoted by the department or the latest or part or a part of the department, because the sustainability has been apparent in a number of the schools that we worked in. How that might contradict what the teachers have actually been doing, not contradict, it's supposed to compliment. However, the approach may not have actually been complimentary and in fact, the classroom teachers were actually doing far greater, investigation and work. Based on their own research their reading and the collegial discussions that they were having.

**Carly Boreland:** It seems like we're too often hearing that thing are coming to teachers that are just counter to their own sense of what they need to be doing for their students at any given time.

**Katina Zammit:** I think he's also that it promotes that the feeling or the position or agenda that there is a problem with the teaching profession and with teachers and that has to be fixed and I don't know that that is actually true

**Wayne Sawyer:** And that's why I think that phrase you used earlier "*teaching is intellectual work*" is so important, because it stands up against that notion that, you know, there are these things that have to be fixed and, and we've got a really program teachers to, to do these kinds of particular things in the classroom that can be done almost automatically. I think that notion of teaching is intellectual work is really important because what it does is to recognise that there is a kind of intellectually satisfying challenge around taking this thing over here, called the curriculum and having to marry it to these kids I face every day. Because the answers, the way that's done is going to be different for every teacher all the time and so there is a certain, that is intellectual work and there's a certain intellectual satisfaction about doing that well.

**Katina Zammit:** I think Julie Fendell and Rebecca Rivers picks up on that in the Special Edition as



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well, particularly, as Rebecca was a new teacher and how that can assist her to, you know, refine her practices and pedagogy.

**Carly Boreland:** That's something else that I, I noticed in the project, you don't have to be an experienced teacher to be a mentor in the *Fair Go Program* in general.

**Wayne Sawyer:** Well, in, *Schooling for a Fair Go* that was certainly the case. So he had some teachers who were beginning teachers. In fact, we had teachers at the beginning of the whole project that said, I'm really happy to be in on this, but there's no way I'm going to be a mentor in, you know, X number of months you know, I've only been teaching for X a couple of years, but they were very confident by the time that their turn came to be a mentor and did a really good job.

**Carly Boreland:** How many schools and teachers, and I won't ask students, how many people as this project touched over 21 years, do you have some rough ideas? Have you counted it up?

**Wayne Sawyer:** Actually I tried counting it up a few times, by the time you include things like the number of schools that are involved in the rollout of say *Schooling for a Fair Go*, or the number of schools that were, involved in say the *Rural Boys Project* you're looking at, we think over 70 schools that have had fairly deep involvement with action research, that had a *Fair Go Framework* around it.

**Carly Boreland:** This is a broad research base then. This is a lot of people who've been involved over 21 years.

**Katina Zammit:** That's not counting the teachers and the leadership within those schools and the movement of those people to other schools and, you know, and how that impacts and cascades across the...

**Carly Boreland:** And the places they go to. As you read through the articles, you also get a sense of the careers of some people who started in different versions of the program maybe 10 or 12 years ago and where they've gone to and, and who they've touched along the way and in these particular articles they talk about bringing the *MeE Framework* with them to different places and sharing that with colleagues and the impact must be vast. Can I ask you about some things you could recommend for teachers who want to do research on their own practice or read more about the *Fair Go Project* outside of the Special Edition of the Journal?

**Wayne Sawyer:** Well there are a couple of books we can recommend that came out of those two projects. So one's called "*Exemplary Teachers of students in Poverty*" and the other one's called '*Engaging Schooling*' and each of them picks up *Schooling for a Fair Go* or *Teachers for a Fair Go*, but I would also



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recommend that people have a look at, read about doing action research in your classroom, as well as the particular *Framework* that is using *Fair Go*, because that phrase, you use researchly disposition. The notion of doing research on a question in my classroom with somebody else, I think is a real formula for sustainability

**Carly Boreland:** And the Teacher's Federations library has a lot of those resources on loan and we're in the process of collecting a few more and making a special hot topics guide for finding more things that you can access and we can say that the library will send you things and give you a nice little return post pack to send them back.

**Katina Zammit:** And the authors within each of those books that Wayne has mentioned, have also published with teacher colleagues in other areas as well. In terms of the future within where *Fair Go Program* is going you within the Special Edition. There's a couple of articles that mentioned that notion of sustainability and spreading, spreading the word, it's not the gospel, but it is spreading the word and the ideas to improve it. Based on Greg and Melissa's work on the school that they were part of and other teachers, one of the examples of that is in the *Schooling for a Fair Go*, is that we looked at *Leadership for a Fair Go* in terms of why the school direction of the whole school plan was, was enabling teachers to make that difference in the classroom, because there's a bit of a gap between leadership and student outcomes and obviously there *is* research that says that their leadership does make a difference, but it's an indirect difference then. So, looking at how the *Fair Go Framework* because we have an insider of school framework and the development now with colleagues in the school around a engaging framework for teachers. What is it that the messages around "*knowledge, ability, control, voice and place*" present in an insider school that promotes teachers to investigate their own practices and promotes them as professionals?

**Carly Boreland:** I like how you mentioned that, there's a gap between leadership and outcomes, because so many findings that you read, they keep saying that the teacher is a really important in school factor, but then there's so much leadership stuff still and pressure from leaders doing things and I sometimes wonder how well they're matched up. Because the findings are still that the teacher is the thing.

**Katina Zammit:** The leadership is actually an enabler. I think we mentioned the fact that, you know, that organisational change to allow, to provide time for teachers to actually get to work together and discuss and reflect upon practices is very important that the leadership's direction and its relation or leadership aspect is very important as well, to develop that culture within the school, that means that teachers are not afraid to take those sorts of risks. If they don't have a quiet compliant classroom, the principal or executive is not going to come along and go, well, "what's going on in this classroom, this is obviously not a very good classroom, they're not under control." We're in fact, they're actively



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engaged in learning as well. Principal and the leadership team are also the mediators between policy and system directions. Also, they're the ones that, interpret policy and directions that they are accountable for, but they may not necessarily meet the requirements, the needs of the students in their school. It takes nouse to be able to be both a systems person, but it takes courage to take that step, to say this, what needs to happen in this particular school for this school community.

**Carly Boreland:** In attempting to sum up 21 years of research and your involvement and the findings in that. We could start by saying that the foundation for the *Fair Go Program* is an intellectual one with the theoretical work of folk like Bernstein, Newman and others Habermann and the productive pedagogies from Queensland, and then went into a goal of trying to improve learning outcomes for students in disadvantaged schools and everything else comes from those two places. Working with teachers then as co-researchers to look into their own practice and identify what they want to change about what they're doing. As opposed to what perhaps the behaviour of the students looks like or something else and to change the learning that's occurring in the classroom. Along the way, some of the things that were developed to support that research were ideas of an inside a school or an inside a classroom, and what that would actually look like and how to describe that and also the “motivation and engagement framework” as a key point for teachers to begin and come back to with their questions about their own practice. To support teachers, through a partnership between the Department, the Western Sydney University and having time and money and researcher support to actually undertake all of this work and especially time being a big factor and the way a school would be organised so that teachers have time to discuss and work together. We talked about the messages that teachers send to students as being a really important focus of the whole project over these 21 years and that it really deliberately tried to push back against some of the negative perceptions that are existing about students who come from disadvantaged communities in schools and trying to make school a positive place and a safe place, I suppose, in that way.

Not so much safe from their teachers, but safe from the community, in general, and negative media stereotypes perhaps and trying to bring out student voice as a priority in developing teaching ideas and monitoring how they're going and focusing more on sustainability of teachers working together.

Inquiring into their own practice and of students being more ‘in’ a task rather than ‘on’ a task and those being important differences. Most of all, teachers working together to improve things that they thought needed to be improved in their classroom. Does that sound about right?

**Wayne Sawyer:** Can I just say one other thing, actually, it doesn't necessarily fit into that. It's, it's just, just this and it's to do with sustainability. So our colleague, Geoff Munns is fond of saying that, “*you know, one of the things that, Fair Go has done is get people to think about schooling as a long project*” I think that's a really important thing because even though we, we do, and it is true that action research works in small cycles. You know, you try something out, you decide that it's working or it's not working, you make particular adjustments, and you try them out again. You know, that's, those are kind of small cycles.



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There is, I think what it does though, is still drive you to think about what my classroom is going to look like in 12 months' time, I've got this thing, I need to change why do I want to change it. I've got this vision of how things could be. That's not going to change overnight. That's going to be something I'm going to work towards over the next 12 months. I think that sustainability, that action research brings part of that is to think about it, your classroom itself, as a long project, something that's going to be changed over time.

**Carly Boreland:** And 21 years is a long project for both of you. I know it's certainly not the only thing you've been working on and, and you've written widely on lots of other areas, and we could chat endlessly, I think, about the different experiences you've had, but I should say here, thank you so much for your time today.

**Katina Zammit:** Thank you for you know, to, CPL and JPL for allowing us to have this Special Edition since it's very exciting and as well.

**Wayne Sawyer:** Yeah, that's great. Thank you.

### CONCLUSION:

**Carly Boreland:** 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 talking with Wayne Sawyer and Katina Zammit about the *Fair Go Program* and the Special Edition of the JPL, which is coming out and semester one, 2021 to support teachers wherever they are to get better at their own practice and what's important to them. To find out more and to listen to further podcasts, you can visit our website at [CPL.asn.au/podcasts](http://CPL.asn.au/podcasts).

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.

*Professor Wayne Sawyer* is Emeritus Professor in the School of Education at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) and is a member of the Centre for Educational Research. Before joining UWS, he was a secondary Head of English in Western Sydney. Wayne is the author/editor of over 30 books on education for audiences of teachers and academics. His research interests are in secondary education, in particular secondary English teaching, literacy policy and effective teaching - the latter in particular in low SES contexts. His most recent book - co-authored with Geoff Munns, Bronwyn Cole and the UWS *Fair Go* team for Routledge - is entitled *Exemplary*



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*teachers of students in poverty* and highlights the work of a number of teachers in NSW who are highly successful in engaging students from low SES communities with their education. Wayne has a particular interest in the work of teachers-as-researchers.

*Katina Zammit* is currently Deputy Dean and a Senior Lecturer in English and Literacy curriculum and pedagogy in the School of Education, at Western Sydney University. She has been passionate about improving student learning outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students and students from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds since she began teaching in schools. Katina's experience spans being a classroom teacher, school executive, literacy and pedagogy consultant for Met East DSP and curriculum consultant. As a university teacher and researcher, she has continued her commitment to making a difference for students and supporting teachers to make a difference through their classroom practices. She has been involved with the *Fair Go Program* from the initial phase and has published widely on its research. Katina continues working with her school-based colleagues to improve student engagement in learning and is investigating leadership practices that engage teachers in pedagogical whole school change.