**Transcript – World Teachers’ Day 2025 podcast with Julie Coutts**

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

**Claire Norton:** World Teachers’ Day is a special event on the education calendar. It's a day we celebrate and acknowledge the hard work of our teachers. As part of our World Teachers Day celebrations for 2025, we asked teachers throughout the state to share their teaching story.

I'm Claire Norton and today I'm talking to Julie Coutts. Julie is the Head of Department for the Arts at Pimlico State High School in Townsville.

Hi, Julie. Lovely to talk to you today.

**Julie Coutts:** Hello, Claire. Happy to be here.

**Claire Norton:** What sparked your passion for teaching?

**Julie Coutts:** I actually wasn't sure what I wanted to do as a career when I left high school. I just knew that I wanted to do something with art. So, I came to Townsville to study a Bachelor of Visual Arts at James Cook University, as such a course wasn't offered in Cairns, where I'm from. And in my third year of this degree, I was asked if I'd be interested in teaching one of the first-year units for sculpture.

And even though I was initially very nervous, being an introvert at heart, I found that I absolutely love the challenge of helping others to create artworks, even more than creating artworks myself. And so after this BVA degree, while I taught other subjects at JCU, including bronze casting, I did an Honours in Visual Arts, because I wasn't sure at that point if I wanted to pursue teaching at university or try high school teaching.

And then after the honours, I decided to do a Graduate Bachelor of Education to get the secondary school teaching qualification to have regardless. And here I am, 20 years later, still at my first school of Pimlico State High School in Townsville.

**Claire Norton:** Was teaching your first job?

**Julie Coutts:** Lecturing at JCU was my first casual job, but actually my first employment was as a student ambassador at James Cook Uni. And at different times throughout the year, I would travel with the marketing team to various high schools across the North Queensland region, to talk and answer questions about my experiences of being a university student.

**Claire Norton:** So, what do you teach currently?

**Julie Coutts:** Yeah, so I teach Visual Arts, currently, Year 10, 11 and 12 and Head of Department for all of the Arts, all five areas.

**Claire Norton:** How has your teaching journey evolved over the years?

**Julie Coutts:** Oh, well, I started out as a classroom teacher in 2005, and then I became a subject area coordinator for Visual Arts in 2008. And in 2011, I was talked into applying for the position of Head of Department for the Arts by my Deputy Principal Line Manager at the time. And then over the last 14 years as HOD of the Arts, I've managed the subject areas and extracurricular programs associated with Visual Arts, Media Arts and Film, Drama, Dance, classroom music, as well as instrumental music and choral music at Pimlico State High School.

And while there's always been subject area coordinators to assist me with running such a large department, in recent years, our programs have actually grown to the point where it's just become too much for one person to solely be responsible for all of them. And I'm now very fortunate to be able to co-HOD the arts at Pimlico with a Head of Music who now directly looks after our instrumental music and choral programs.

**Claire Norton:** What an amazing journey. It seems like you've had lots of adventures so far.

**Julie Coutts:** Yes, very much.

**Claire Norton:** What would you say are the benefits of teaching in Townsville?

**Julie Coutts:**  Living in North Queensland is such a great lifestyle. Everything is close by, it’s right on your doorstep. It only takes me 8 minutes to drive to school. And there's probably only three days a year where I wear a jumper past 9 am.

This is actually something I was talking about with some of my colleagues recently, and I have to say I agree with their thoughts in that because of the regional location and smaller size of a city like Townsville, there are generally less educational opportunities to experience and participate in the Arts compared with metro areas.

But what we feel this means is that in Townsville, we really appreciate and value the opportunities that do occur here and our networks across schools are very supportive of each other. And we'll often collaborate to make events happen for our students. And we are then very determined to travel to different locations for competitions and festivals. And we really make the most of whatever we can experience in the times we're there.

So for example, teaching in Townsville for some of my arts staff, has meant travelling with students to Ingham or Cairns, Mackay, Brisbane and even Sydney, in just this past year alone. And as a teacher myself at Pimlico, I've had the opportunity to accompany international study tours to places such as Dubai and Turkey, Greece, Singapore, Vietnam, a number of countries throughout Western Europe. And these are all absolutely amazing and memorable experiences in my career.

**Claire Norton:**  That sounds like those have been amazing opportunities and that you have such a great school community there.

**Julie Coutts:** Absolutely.

**Claire Norton:** How does teaching inspire you?

**Julie Coutts:** Oh, well, as I mentioned before, while I've always loved making artworks, I enjoy the challenge of helping others to create art even more. And when you design a task for students to respond to, and you help them research artists and you help them develop their ideas and show them different ways to use art materials, you then very much feel part of that creative process.

And your students’ achievements in a way, also become your achievements. And when students enjoy making artworks and they're proud of what they do, you really share in that joy. And I think that's what inspires me and motivates me as a Visual Arts teacher.

**Claire Norton:** What would you say are the most rewarding moments you've experienced in teaching?

**Julie Coutts:** A rewarding moment just recently was being able to travel to Sydney in the winter holidays, to watch our symphony orchestra perform at the Sydney Opera House as part of the 2025 Australian International Music Festival. And this is just such an amazing experience. And then last year, I was very honoured to be the recipient of the 2024 TeachX Dr Joe McCorley OAM Outstanding Contribution to School Community Award. And this award recognised my leadership of our arts faculty of more than 30 staff members, as well as my contribution to the design of Pimlico’s new $20 million Denise Glasgow Performing Arts Centre, which also opened last year.

And then I absolutely love when teams of people in my department work together to create opportunities for our students. So two of our annual events – Pimlico Presents Variety Concert and Artscape Exhibition – are always very rewarding for me because they're not just about showcasing our students’ talents and achievements to the wider community, they're also a reflection of our work as teachers, both individually and together.

I also have to say, rewarding moments happen for me every time I see a former Pimlico arts student become a teacher themselves. There's around 10 staff in the Pimlico arts department at present, who I've actually taught at one stage or another. And I love that not only have they pursued a career in the arts, but despite some of them studying and living elsewhere for a time, they’ve chosen to come back to Townsville and Pimlico and be part of the programs that have obviously influenced and shaped them to in turn, inspire current and future generations of students.

**Claire Norton:** How does that make you feel, seeing a student that you've taught come back to you the same school that you work at?

**Julie Coutts:** I'm just really proud.

**Claire Norton:** What would you say drives your enthusiasm for teaching?

**Julie Coutts:** My enthusiasm for teaching is, driven by a sense of, purpose and connection to others. A feeling that what I'm part of is important through helping to shape the lives of young people. The arts in particular, are a way for staff and students to meaningfully connect with and contribute to the wider school community. So concerts and exhibitions, these really help create that sense of school pride and belonging and ownership.

These events are often where students will have a go at something for the very first time, and they discover their lifelong passions, which inspire that pursuit of personal excellence. These opportunities can't be created by just one person. Their success relies on that collaboration of teachers and students and parents, members of the school community, all working together to share their love for and enjoyment of the arts.

**Claire Norton:** That's great. What advice would you give someone considering a career in education.

**Julie Coutts:** That you should never underestimate the impact that you can have as a teacher. Your words, your actions, even just your presence can make a difference. And it's often a difference that you'll never know about. But it's from students remembering how you made them feel in your subject, to inspiring their future pathways. And teaching is challenging, but that's also what it what makes it so rewarding.

It's a job where you have the reliable structures and routines of an institution to bring that sense of certainty and familiarity. Yet at the same time, every day and every year is different because it revolves around people. And one of the best things about being a teacher is the opportunity to connect with all different kinds of people. So I would say that a career in education is incredibly demanding, but it's also one that can give you such a sense of purpose.

**Claire Norton:** Thank you so much Julie, for talking to me today.

**Julie Coutts:** You're very welcome and thank you for the opportunity to share my story.

**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. They hold memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.