**Teachers’ Mutual Bank**

**Podcast 4**

**Supporting teachers through the Bell Shakespeare Regional Teachers’ Mentorship program**

**Announcer:** This is a Queensland Department of Education podcast. Proudly sponsored by Teachers’ Mutual Bank. The bank founded by teachers for teachers.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Remote and regional teachers face some unique challenges. Access to the Arts is one challenge that isn’t often considered but it can have a significant impact on educators.

Hi, I’m Virginia Bowdidge from the Department of Education. Renowned, Australian Theatre Company, Bell Shakespeare is working to provide education, outreach and access to Shakespeare’s plays to all Australians. Supported by the sponsorship of Teachers Mutual Bank, the Bell Shakespeare Regional Teacher Mentorship provides an opportunity for participants to think and approach teaching in different ways.

Joining me to tell us more about the annual mentorship is Glinda Major, Sponsorship Manager at Teachers Mutual Bank and one of our own teachers and former mentorship participant, Belinda Hampton from Atherton State High School.

Hi Glinda and Belinda. Thanks for joining me today.

Glinda, this seems like an odd thing for a bank to sponsor?

**Glinda Major:** Yes, thanks Virginia. It’s such a pleasure to be here today.

Well, on the surface of it, it does seem a little bit odd, but when you consider that we are the only national bank that is dedicated to teachers and you think about that Bell Shakespeare dedicate 50% of their time and resources to being in the community, particularly the education community, to deliver education programs. You can start to see that there is really an alignment of values between the two organisations.

We have now been sponsoring Regional Teacher Mentorship for 7 years. And we really, like Bell Shakespeare, wanted to make sure that regional, rural and remote teachers had access to world class professional development, even if they were geographically challenged and they are often isolated and they sometimes have limited resources. We didn’t want that to be a barrier to them getting this sort of professional development.

The interesting thing about the Regional Teacher Mentorship is that it really looks at unlocking principles of Shakespeare through looking at a modern perspective and how we can teach this in an innovative way. What I found over the years that’s been quite extraordinary is, as we all know, often teachers are not just teaching English or Drama but they may be teaching Math or Science if they are in a rural, remote or regional setting. We know of Math teachers who’ve actually been using these skills to empower their students to actually understand different concepts through the different techniques that Bell Shakespeare have been teaching. So, on many, many levels the Regional Teacher Mentorship is really extraordinary. It’s a way of having teachers who have very similar circumstances from all over Queensland and all over Australia get together and share their experiences. So, it really is a fantastic program.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Wonderful, thank you, and over the 7 years of your involvement with the mentorship, have you seen common themes emerge from participant’s experience?

**Glinda Major:** Yes, it’s been really interesting. There’s often a real theme around the fact that sport is very much a priority in the communities and that the Arts are often left behind. Teachers are struggling to not only teach Shakespeare but how they’re introducing the relevancy of the Arts into their communities and for their students. So, the Regional Teaching Mentorship really gives them a fantastic grounding on how they can introduce for something that can be quite scary, like Shakespeare, into their different school settings.

The other thing that we have seen, has been, you might have teachers that have been teaching for a long time, and they’re feeling a little bit tired and they’re feeling a little bit jaded. The Regional Teacher Mentorship, because of the way the program is structured over the first 4 days, it really helps them to reignite their passion. And they often talk about going back to school, full of passion and really invigorated to get back into their school setting.

And also, we found recently with younger teachers that actually teaching Shakespeare can be a bit scary. I don’t know about you Virginia but, I remember being taught Shakespeare at school and it wasn’t very exciting and I think a lot of us had that experience. And the teachers actually get an opportunity to have a different way of actually learning about Shakespeare and again, the younger teachers get much more confidence and again go back with a renewed passion to take Shakespeare on and teach it in their school setting.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Okay, thank you. Belinda can you tell us a little about yourself and your school and community and any particular challenges you face?

**Belinda Hampton:** Virginia, thanks for this opportunity.

For myself, I’ve been a teacher in state schooling for over 25 years and I originally worked in Townsville and then was looking for that change and moved up to the Atherton Tablelands and have zero regrets. It’s a beautiful part of the country. A lot of people up here are involved in the farming industry, so whether it’s dairy, we’ve got huge crops in blueberries, avocados, you name it, it grows up here. So, it’s a really diverse culture, but some of the challenges up here, young people move away, so our closest University is in Cairns. So, lots of young people, once they’ve finished school move away. They move to big cities. That’s something I’ve noticed about living up here in the Tablelands.

Another challenge for us that’s really stood out for me in the last few years, it’s just that post COVID world. I think this is happening all over, but for young people up here, just seeing what is the relevance of schooling. What’s in it for them and having some view of who they’re going to be in the world after school is a real challenge for them.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** What prompted you to apply for the regional mentorship and was it a difficult process?

**Belinda Hampton:** I applied originally because I was straight out jealous. Over the years I’d helped a number of colleagues apply for the position and when they came back, each year I was simultaneously, so excited for them. They came back with stories of the wonderful experiences they’d had. They shared so generously, the skills and techniques they’d learnt, but I was also, so jealous. And I was really keen to also test myself. It was an opportunity for me to think about, well, what am I looking for in teaching after a quarter of a decade? Do I need to refresh, do I need to rethink what I’m doing? So, I applied because of word of mouth. It wasn’t a time-consuming process at all, but I really had to think about, what did I want from that experience, what could I bring to it and how would it help me in my community?

Another big prompt for me, I believe really strongly in having quality experiences for all students. So again, living up here on the Tablelands with all its riches, one of the things I do notice is just how challenging it is to get to somewhere like a performance, go and see a big museum, take the kids to go and see a national library. There’s just not really the same options as students who live in Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane have. So, I wanted to be able to bring back to my own students, a world class experience. What could I bring to the table that contributed to their schooling?

As Glinda had said earlier too, last year I was really prompted by 2 elements. One was, I was tired. It was a tiring time to be a teacher in schooling, and in Far North Queensland, we didn’t have the same challenges that colleagues in Victoria or New South Wales had with remote learning, but some of that washback effect of trying to re-engage students, the fatigue of planning online, just all the demands that came.

The other part of me too was, the role of the Arts and I was watching with concern, some of those cuts to federal funding for Arts programing. What is happening in universities and I felt really strongly, something is being lost if we don’t take care of our Arts and what that brings to students’ experiences in schools.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** What do you think, you gained from participating in the program?

**Belinda Hampton:** For me, what I gained from the program, number one, I loved being reminded of learning and how joyful it is to be challenged in your thinking. I loved, not having that pressure to think about Shakespeare for assessment purposes, instead thinking about Shakespeare and what it contributes to conversation, the human experiences and its relevance. I was reminded, I don’t need to be the expert and that was a great part of the mentorship. It was being supported to test my thinking and I really felt valued being there. Another part I put down that I gained from the program, I loved the different perspectives that were on the table there to think about Shakespeare.

So, what the mentors brought to support teachers to be able to think about how this would look in the diversity of classrooms out there, but also from other participants that came from all over the country. I really also felt so valued and supported as a teacher professional. We were treated so well and the concerns that we tabled, they were treated as being valid and then I loved that the team worked to come up with practical solutions to make Shakespeare come alive.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Were there any big surprises, things that you weren’t expecting?

**Belinda Hampton:** I went down thinking, I’ve got this. I know what’s going to happen, but no, by day 2, I was so exhausted, mentally and physically and looking back, I think it was because you are out of your comfort zone, and I didn’t expect to feel that way. I was really challenged in what I had to think about for Shakespeare, my own references for it as an English teacher. Having to put myself out there and actually be a member of those learning experiences.

Some other big surprises for me, I really liked being reminded that, while everyone who was there participating had their own unique context. w ’re all really united by some common experiences and agendas and beliefs. And that was in a way really supportive and helpful. When I think of another really big surprise I had too, I really didn’t expect to be confronted by some of my own barriers and beliefs. At times, it was my own ideas about what schools could do, that were getting in the way of being a good effective teacher and what Shakespeare could be.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Have you got any examples of what you mean by being challenged in that environment?

**Belinda Hampton:** Virginia, in Queensland, one of the most popular texts students’ study in Senior, is Macbeth and watching the way schools shape up experiences so that whole encountering of Macbeth becomes about exam. It’s a high-stake experience but the Bell Shakespeare mentorship reminded me, there’s study and enjoyment and engagement with Shakespeare that sits outside of the assessment. The assessment shouldn’t be the driver for all of those rich learning experiences in classrooms.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** And what has changed for you and your students, since you participated?

**Belinda Hampton:** When I think back Virginia, one of the big changes for me, I look for opportunities to say, yes. Yes, to Shakespeare. So, it could be as simply as saying, yes, we will have Shakespeare performances as part of our programs in Grades, 7, 10 and 12. I look to say yes, about text choices. So, when teachers have come to me saying, I think there is a relevance here to do with conflicts and feuds and I want I want to put it into my Grade 7 unit, I’m thinking of using Romeo and Juliet, I’m looking to say yes. And I’m also looking for opportunities to say yes, in the way we did our programming. So for example, in our Grade 10 program at the moment, we are encouraging all students to engage in Shakespeare, but we changed the way each class was able to approach it and we are trying to cater for some of the different interests and backgrounds of the students in our classes.

Another part that has changed for me, the regional mentorship gave me tools to solve my own problems. I could think about how it was going to look in my class. I could think about other networks and resources that were available to me and I had a whole group of fellow teachers that I could contact and share resources and ideas with.

And the final one for me like Glinda said earlier, I just felt reignited. What changed for me was my own passion and reminder of what I could bring to the profession and the experience of the kids in my class.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** And what would you say to say to anyone thinking of applying?

**Belinda Hampton:** I would say, don’t think about it, do it, do it. It was an investment in teachers. I found it challenging and confronting, but I was so much richer for the experience. And I would really encourage too, people who sit in positions like Heads of Departments, or lead teachers to apply. I was reminded so much of the experiences and knowledges we have and how does that remind us of ways to do things that can get us back into a practice that we might have lost along the way. I would definitely as well, encourage deputy principals and Principals to say, yes to having their teachers just go. Yep, it was times out of classrooms but what the teachers brought back just paid for it in so many ways. It was really exciting to be challenged and you’re just reminded about, you have agency in what you can give back.

So again, don’t think about it. You should apply.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** That is a fantastic wrap for the program, Belinda.

Glinda, how do people go about applying for the mentorship if they are interested?

**Glinda Major:** Well, thank you. Basically teachers can go to the Teachers’ Mutual Bank website which is [www.tmbank.com.au](http://www.tmbank.com.au/) and they’ll see the landing page there, which will tell them about the mentorship or they can go to Bell Shakespeare’s website, which is [www.bellshakespeare.com.au](http://www.bellshakespeare.com.au) and there is an application form there, where they can apply as well.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Well, thank you both for your time, it’s wonderful to hear about mentorships available like this to teachers.

**Belinda Hampton:** Thank you Virginia.

**Glinda Major:** Thank you so much Virginia and thank you to you Belinda.

**Belinda Hampton:** Thank you as well Glinda.

**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 to the traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.