

READING 1: AN INTERVIEW WITH NICOLE WADE (edited) JPL, NSW TEACHERS FEDERATION

INTERVIEWER: You often speak about your Indigenous 'Nan' as one of your greatest influences and you have described the stories, songs and warmth between her and the kids. You have also shared that you left school early because you found it a 'lonely and disconnected place'. What, from your Nan, do you bring to your professional work?

My Nan, Joan Eggington, was a strong Nyoongah woman. As a young child, she gave me powerful messages about being a proud Nyoongah person. I vividly recall telling her about how I hated school and how the other kids would tease me for having brown skin. My Nan would say, "The price you put upon your head is the price that others will place upon you. We are a strong people." As a child, I never really understood the nuances of this message, but the fire in her eyes and voice told me that I was meant to stand tall and not listen to others.

My early experiences in primary school did not make me feel *moorditj*. I can't pinpoint exactly what didn't work, but I know I felt disconnected. I felt that school was not for me. I remember trying to become invisible. Sitting hidden off to the side, never saying a word or contributing my ideas or thoughts. If the teacher did notice me, I just froze. Even in the playground, I felt lonely and disconnected. It was like I was an outsider viewing the happy kids playing. My thoughts were always about escaping, and school refusal became a real problem.

Fast forward 20 years down the track and now I am a proud Principal of the best school. With a talented team of educators, I have worked tirelessly to build a learning community focused on belonging, connectedness and quality relationships. Every child in our school is known and our motto has become: 'At Campbellfield, Every Face Has a Place.' High expectations are interwoven into our fabric. Student voice is also strongly supported within our school culture. Students take ownership of and agency for their learning. They contribute to the shaping of our learning community by evaluating ways of learning. This school culture sends powerful messages to children about school not only being a place for them, but actually *their place*.

When we first interviewed you, you talked about students having dreams, goals and aspirations, and the importance of conversations in the classroom: Building a dream, keep a goal: something you want. Where do you want to be? What do you want to be? Can you tell us something about what these conversations can look and sound like in the classroom?

I firmly believe that building aspirations from the time children start Kindergarten is powerful work. Schools are in such privileged positions to have conversations with kids about dreaming big. My experience as a Principal is that children don't get asked enough, 'What do you dream of being?' When kids shrug their shoulders, the conversation can't stop. What do you enjoy doing? What are you passionate about? Who are some people in the community that you want to be like?' These questions generate the basis of a conversation. When you are authentically invested in these conversations, they are never 'one-off'. You will always find time to revisit these conversations across time. This is the real game changer. Children know when someone is genuine about believing in them. Following through with conversations builds trust, connectedness and a self-belief in students that they can succeed.

In your case study we observed that you were able to 'weave a balance between keeping a lesson on focus whilst allowing reflective moments and discussion'. There was a term you used - 'spontaneous discussion' - where students 'simply comment without raising their hands.' It would be interesting to hear more of what you think about the importance of reflection and discussion in your teaching.

Student voice and reflection are key to successful learning. Deep learning requires teachers to thoughtfully plan questions or thinking routines that act as a catalyst for spontaneous substantive discussion. Students must be provided the space to clarify, analyse, justify, reason, problem-solve and think critically when learning new skills and knowledge. The teacher has a pivotal role in developing a classroom environment that encourages risk-taking free of judgment. The teacher shapes the culture of the classroom through the expectations they set around classroom talk.

The best teachers vacate the floor. They teach students dialogic talk that moves and send messages around the importance of every voice contributing to the growing knowledge in the learning community. Students are taught how to clarify, revoice, add on or revise and extend thinking. They are taught the pragmatics of conversations. This is powerful because students can see themselves as active learners and resources for each other as learners. We want students to develop independence and learning agency. That can't be achieved if teachers hold all the talk and knowledge. As a teacher, I gauge student learning through surges of energy in conversation. When students are bursting to add their ideas and thoughts, and challenge or extend each other's thinking, there is a productive flow that leads to a building river of knowledge. Even the pauses in conversation

are highly valued. These pause moments are when students are clarifying and revising their thinking. The challenge is 'internal' and they are 'thinking big'.

The best teachers also embed opportunities for student reflection. Student reflection really needs to occur throughout the learning experience and across the learning sequence. This means that reflection is not viewed as something we do at the end of the lesson. Instead, student reflection becomes a tool that builds students' metacognition through all stages of learning. Teachers encourage reflection on personalised learning goals and success criteria. The learning goals and success criteria are most effective when co-constructed between teacher and students. In my experience, students are driven to achieve co-constructed learning goals that provide them the right amount of challenge. Students are motivated to progress as active participants in their learning.

What is your advice to others about engaging students? Be a fierce advocate for your students. Have high expectations of every student and aspire to students having high expectations of themselves. Actively encourage students from a young age to dream big and continue having authentic conversations with children about their future pathways. Make time to get to know every student and build a positive relationship with them. And most importantly, set challenging learning tasks that encourage students to think deeply and to see themselves as successful learners.