

Be You video transcript

Walking softly in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions

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As an educator, I've practised walking softly in my teaching career with children. And this means taking the time to actually look at the children, listen to the children, take time to step back and allow the child to actually enter your space when they are ready to enter your space.

It's not about moulding that space to suit you. It's about you opening up the space to allow that child to enter into your realm. It's about having a calm presence. It's listening to that child, looking at the child, connecting with that child.

And I think that's very important in education to be able to walk softly so that you're engaging with the child and the child knows that they can actually trust you.

Teaching is about including the world of the child into the classroom. It's not the classroom sitting there and waiting for the community, the family and the child to fit into it. The teacher has to be able to walk softly within the community.

Go and see the families, listen to the families, find out what is important to the family and to the community.

In that way, they can then engage with the child and include a culturally sensitive program into the classroom where the child feels that they have a space and a place to learn.

To be able to bring the Aboriginal child into the classroom or for staff to be culturally inclusive, not only in the classroom, but in the whole school environment, it's critical that teachers get to know themselves. They have to unpack who they are as a person. In that way, they're able then to understand other cultures, particularly Aboriginal culture.

And by doing that, the teacher then is able to be flexible, accommodating, and will also value Aboriginal culture and work with what is important in Aboriginal culture to be able to create that culturally inclusive environment in the classroom.

We do have a lot of Aboriginal children, who are experiencing trauma. And it's a difficult situation for that child. It's a difficult situation for the teacher. It's not an easy thing.

What's happened is – and we've heard lots about trans-generational trauma, intergenerational trauma – but it is a reality.

We have now the impact of those Stolen Generations still out there in our community. We have families who are not coping, cannot deal with a lot of things because there's a lot of pressure. So, teachers are dealing with the after-effects of all these things.

The teacher needs to become fully aware of what is meant by intergenerational trauma, trans-generational trauma, and how does it impact on the children in my classroom? And where do I go to seek support and advice to help that child?

Because the teacher can't do it. It's now a holistic approach. You need to engage with health. You need to engage with cultural Elders. You need to be able to work with programs that are going to support the family.

The teacher's role is not just in the classroom. You have a child that you're going to be working with for the whole school year. So, it means that you have to work out, how do I support this child in my classroom?

A key part of the process of understanding, and I would say embracing, the child that is experiencing trauma is working with all the assets that are in the school as well.

For example, the Aboriginal and Islander Education workers in schools, the teaching assistants in schools, their roles are critical because they come from local families. They see those local families. They talk with the local families. The children know them. They're trusted. They're respected.

So, the teacher must be working with those professional staff in the schools to work out, how do I support this child?

And having been an Aboriginal teaching assistant way back when I started in 1978, I can tell you that it actually works. They are there to support you. But you have to also reach out. Don't expect them to come to you all the time. You have to reach out to them.