

Early Childhood Australia National Conference: 19th September – 22nd September 2018

Theme: Leadership & Ethics

Presenter: Michelle Hamilton Indigenous Education Consultant Gowrie NSW

Presentation Title: '**Being a reflective leader and making a difference**'.

Presentation date: Sep 20, 2018. Time: 12:10 PM - 12:55 PM - (45 min)

Meeting Room C4.4

PowerPoint

Photo's

Housekeeping

Overview

Sensitivity of content

Introduction

My name is Michelle Hamilton a proud Wiradjuri woman and an Indigenous Education Consultant with Gowrie NSW's Education Hub, I am an educator, a work colleague, a chairperson, a mentor, an artist, a sister, an aunty, a cousin, a driver, a confidante, a financial manager, among many other things.

I say this because we don't acknowledge who we are and how many roles we play often enough and give ourselves the credit due.

In saying that we should also acknowledge those who came before us!

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered today, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, I would like to acknowledge our elders both past and present, I cannot stand before you and talk about reflective leadership and not acknowledge our elders and thank them for the path they have laid before us. I would particularly like to acknowledge my elders who have contributed immensely to who I am today, and they are my mother Janet Isabelle Elizabeth Ingram my grandmother Muriel Ruth Hamilton, my Aunty or 2nd mother Kathleen Maude Ingram, my father Walter Arthur Hamilton and his father before him Stephen George Hamilton just to name some, these amazing individuals have been my inspirations and have influenced me in both my personal and professional life.

About me:

As I previously mentioned I am a sister one of 7 children (6 sisters and 1 brother) born in Surry Hills and raised in the inner-city suburbs of Alexandria, Waterloo, Redfern and Erskineville. We also spent some time living in Bidwill a suburb of Mt Druitt.

I have a very large extended family and grown up within a strong kinship system even though I was raised by many family members. This upbringing and these communities have all contributed to my life and my work and to the person I am. I feel like it was all meant to happen the way in which it did because it brought me to this place right now.

I have now been in early childhood education industry for just over 27 years and would not change a thing about my experiences in this sector as it has educated me just as much or more than I have contributed to the education of others. It was my calling and I knew this from a very young age as did my family.

Presentation:

Before I begin I am just going to pose some rhetorical questions? Because I want everyone here to start to reflect from this very moment.

As we don't have a lot of time, they are rhetorical questions these are things you can continue to reflect on after you leave this session today.

It is about you and your thoughts, assumptions and/or perspectives?

You have been sitting here for a few minutes now, had a chance to look around, check out who is at your table, your presenter, your colleague across the room you have been meaning to catch up with, the other colleague you may be avoiding?

These are just a couple of thoughts (I believe) that have most likely been going on in the past few minutes.

'oh there is so and so over there"

"I need to see them"

or

"that outfit is nice" or "why did I wear these shoes"

"I hope this session doesn't drag on" I've got other places to be"

Just general common thoughts we have

I am not making these comments to place judgement on anyone for the thoughts they have, it is to bring awareness to the "thought process" itself and that it is always on, sometimes we are conscious of it and other times not so much!

I say these things because everyone has thoughts and makes assumptions about other people, or has a "first impressions". And sometimes the first thing we notice is their nationality and/or race.

At times when I walked into a room, a shop, a meeting I feel like the first thing people see is an Aboriginal person, not another woman, another educator, a sister, a daughter or friend, so when that happens all the other perceptions or assumptions of who Aboriginal people are come with it?

I then feel like I have been stereotyped before I even say hello and introduce myself.

I would like to walk into a place and just be recognised as the person I am which is Michelle – the sister, daughter, friend co-worker etc. Don't get me wrong my culture is a huge part of who I am and where I am and I proud that I have that, my culture is intertwined in all that I am.

So, one of the first things I would like to ask of educators today in this room is to think about this in your daily practice and to first see the family, the child and then begin to build that relationship with that individual which in turn will be reflective who they are, where they come from and their values....

I have never considered myself a leader, or a reflective leader for that matter! However, it is what I feel I am becoming in this sector and across my own community anyway and feel blessed because of it, but it has not come around easily, is has been hard work, consistent work over a long period of time.

You know I didn't want to be a leader I was happy to stand in the background and slowly chip away day to day in the hope I would eventually make a difference in some child's life. I do want to be remembered for what I do, and hope the work and the advocacy speak for itself.

I have seen many leaders be given opportunities and they have filled their own glass or stuck to their own agenda's and this is not who I wanted to represent me. So, if and when I am given an opportunity I take it very seriously and think deeply about the things I say, the words I use, the affects on others not just myself.

This is what has brought me to this point and so with that I would like to share 3 personal short stories and 3 things for you to reflect on when you leave today.

Firstly:

"one of my teacher's in primary school has always stood out to me in my memories of school, and not for a good reason. This teacher chose to humiliate me and ridicule my work in front of the class and laugh, inviting the rest of the class to join him, this particular moment deflated me immediately as a very young and vulnerable 8-year-old student who loved learning, I don't want to think about him but unfortunately, I do, this moment has stayed with me.

With this in mind, I am asking you to think about the things you say in the presence of children – all children because they are always listening, and words have power, they can lift someone up or tear someone down, think about the educator you want to be and how you want to be remembered, think about the memory you are leaving in that moment for the children as well as your peers because it may very well stay with them for a long time.

Secondly:

I did not really know we (I mean Aboriginal people) were different until I started to be teased about it in early primary school by other children in our neighbourhood, being called all the derogatory names they learnt from their parents, being singled out because of those differences and being made to feel ashamed of it. I now know that these individuals were not culturally aware it was an accepted behaviour and a learnt behaviour.

I heard a story recently in my travels across the state where an educator made a comment "Oh is he here again agghhhhh" referring to the 4-year-old Aboriginal boy who was within ear shot and his eyes lowered, and shoulders dropped. This is still occurring today in our early childhood environments and we are allowing it.

We as educators should not underestimate what our children comprehend as I said words have power. From this second scenario I would like you to think about and discuss "conscious bias" and "unconscious bias" which can be expressed in the things we say and/or the way we act toward certain people and /or children. It is important for you to reflect on this and think about what biases you may potentially have expressed without being aware of it.

Third and final story:

Lastly, I would like to say thank you to Pedagogy + for allowing me to contribute to their last issue along with my good friend Assoc Prof Alma Fleet. Our piece all stemmed from a question and that was,

Why do we need Aboriginal Educators?

At first I didn't know how to respond to that questions but thinking more deeply I reflected on all the teachers I had in my life and of course my first teachers were my parents, my aunties and other extended family members, they taught me about my people, my culture, my county the good and the bad things that were happening for our

people. When I was handed over to non-Indigenous teachers I was taught that I was not capable, I was taught I could not achieve the same as my peers, that my people were pretty much non-existent in our countries history.

The Aboriginal education from my elders I received gave me a strong foundation to stand on and go back to whenever I needed to reconnect and refuel. It is something that could have been reinforced in all of my education, the opportunity was always there.

I don't want my experiences to be repeated for any child, that is why I share this with you.

I am also sharing this with you because we need Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander teachers, because we need teachers of all cultures, we need teachers all ages, we need both male and female teachers. We need to provide all children with a strong sense of being and belonging, a strong sense of identity and confidence to go forward and live in a world full of diversity and beautiful differences. We need you as educators to be that difference in the world of every child you come into contact with. Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander educators and leaders and not many we need ALL educators to speak and teach and be proud of the countries first people and the richness the culture can bring into our early learning environments, lets all be proud of the oldest living culture in the world.

Please take the time to reflect and be the best you can be for all our children.

Michelle Hamilton

Question

"Great leaders create more leaders, not followers."

— Roy T. Bennett, The Light in the Heart

"Shine your light and make a positive impact on the world; there is nothing so honourable as helping improve the lives of others."

— Roy T. Bennett

"Leadership is practiced not so much in words as in attitude and in actions".

Harold S. Geneen

"Leadership is an opportunity to serve. It is not a trumpet call to self-importance".

J Donald Walters.

"The standard you walk past is the standard you accept". Lieutenant General David Lindsay Morrison AO