This teacher knows the secret and it won’t win any Oscars

Sydney Morning Herald, Sydney, General News, I Josephine Tovey

05 Sep 2013

Page 13 - 469 words - ASR AUD 14,349
Photo: No - Type: News Item - Size: 414.72 cm² - NSW - Australia - ID: 211698935

View print article

COPYRIGHT This report and its contents are for the internal research use of Mediaportal subscribers only and may not be provided to any third party by any means for any purpose without the express permission of iSentia and/or the relevant copyright owner. For more information contact copyright@iSentia.com

DISCLAIMER iSentia uses multiple audience data sources for press, internet, TV and radio, including AGB Nielsen Media Research, Audit Bureau of Circulations, comScore, CSM Media Research, OzTAM, Nielsen, Research International and TNS. For general information purposes only. Any ASRs and audience figures are an estimate only and may be subject error or omission. iSentia makes no representations and, to the extent permitted by law, excludes all warranties in relation to the information contained in the report and is not liable for any losses, costs or expenses, resulting from any use or misuse of the report.
This teacher knows the secret – and it won’t win any Oscars

In the movies, the best teachers are usually those who transform a class almost overnight by leaping atop a desk or delivering a rousing speech. In reality, it is sustained hard work, sometimes using data and evidence of what works to drive incremental improvements in their students’ abilities and achievements, that distinguishes many of the best educators.

“The whole Dead Poets Society concept is Hollywood,” said Dace Elletson, a teacher at Granville South Performing Arts High School. “It’s definitely scientific, and it’s becoming more so.”

Politicians of all stripes have emphasised the importance of quality teaching ad nauseam lately, but the NSW Minister’s Award for Excellence in Teaching, which recently recognised Mr Elletson, among others, provided some tangible examples of what quality teaching actually looks like.

An enthusiastic public school teacher, Mr Elletson was nominated by his principal, Warren Finn, for his achievement in improving literacy at the high school in south-west Sydney, which serves a richly multicultural, low socio-economic area of Sydney.

Mr Finn credits Mr Elletson, the school’s student engagement officer, with implementing a “challenging and confronting” reading program designed for primary school, while demonstrating “outstanding” teaching practice of his own.

Mr Elletson showed other teachers how to identify strengths and weaknesses among students, set targets of achievement, gather and analyse data and celebrate successes, as well as modelling pedagogical techniques in classrooms for other teachers to observe. “Dace’s ability to mentor teachers, develop their classroom practice and increase their self-confidence is second to none,” Mr Finn said in his nominating statement.

Using an approach to reading designed for younger children was initially met with scepticism by some but has proved effective.

“It’s a complex community that our kids are drawing from. Many kids don’t come to school being articulate, fluent readers,” Mr Elletson said. “We have to adapt what we’re doing to meet the kids’ needs, rather than throwing content at them and having them fail, which no one wants.”

Education Minister Adrian Piccoli said Mr Elletson received the award because teachers don’t just educate students. “The awards recognise those teachers, like Dace, who have not only had a positive impact in the classroom, but on their colleagues as well,” he said.

Mr Elletson, 40, developed a love of teaching while doing work experience at a school for children with severe disabilities when he was still in year 12. In his 19 years in the profession he has tried to seek out challenges, working predominantly with disabled or disadvantaged students, a desire he says was probably driven by his own working-class background.

“There are lots of parents out here like mine who just want the best for their kids ... and I really want to be a part of that and making that happen.”