Stories: Narelda Jacobs

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Journalist and news presenter

Narelda Jacobs has been a journalist at Network 10 since 2000, spending 19 years in the Perth newsroom before heading to Studio 10 in Sydney.

Ms Jacobs began her career at as a reporter and became presenter of 10 News First Perth in 2008.

In January 2020, Ms Jacobs joined the panel of Studio 10.

Ms Jacobs has shared the stage with prime ministers, international leaders and humanitarian advocates.

She's passionate about promoting equality, diversity and inclusion and has supported charities and organisations like Motor Neurone Disease Association WA, WA Aboriginal Leadership Institute, Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras, The Pinnacle Foundation, Reconciliation Australia, the Disability Services Commission and Breast Cancer Care WA.

Ms Jacobs attended Weld Square Primary School and Hampton Senior High School in Perth's eastern suburbs, before enrolling at the WA Academy of Performing Arts. She is part of the Whadjuk Noongar people. Ms Jacobs currently resides in Sydney.

WARNING: The following article contains words or terms that readers may find offensive.

Western Teacher: How was your public school experience?

Narelda Jacobs: It was great. Weld Square is just a small, suburban school. It was not the biggest school but it was a very close-knit community. I had four older sisters and they all went to Weld Square. They kind of paved the way. A lot of the teachers knew our family. That's why it was such a pleasant experience because our family was an integral part of the school community.

I just remember always telling the news. Telling the news was my most favourite thing to do and every year I would invite my dad to come in and he would play the didge and he would share some culture with the students in my class.

As I look back it is really funny now because the students are the same. We did school with the same people every year. So they would have heard it every year. I guess I just wanted to really impress my teachers by bringing my dad in and sharing culture. That was a huge part of my primary school – to try to share culture wherever I could.

WT: Did you encounter racial issues in your years of schooling?

NJ: I was called boong by some classmates in the playground. I don't think they knew what it meant though, and I was little and didn't know what it meant. I just remember being called that as we were playing cricket with the boys and kinda standing up and going "Did I just get called something racist?" But we just kept on playing.

It was very rare. Our family was involved so heavily in the school community and we were a very sporting family, so we were always playing netball and all the school sports and interschool carnivals – our Aboriginality for the most part was celebrated during school. When you're good at sport, everybody kind of wants you on their team. If I wasn't good at sport, it might have been a very different experience.

I was one of the few (Aboriginal students). I think you could count them all on just a few fingers, actually. You just played as a little kid and that is what childhood should be. In that respect, the school did a good job, just letting us be kids.

WT: How did your public school education helped to shape the person you are today and help you to achieve your goals or success?

NJ: They taught me to read – and that is the biggest part of my job, reading an autocue (laughs). I guess they gave me a really good foundation. When I look back now as an adult – we weren't the richest family, but in those days, I thought we were rich. I would see what my relatives and the sort of disadvantage that other Aboriginal people were living with in Perth. I would go home to my house and would feel rich. Looking back at it now, we weren't.

I had a really good relationship with my teachers, so I tried hard. I wasn't the smartest kid. I always was a participant. I only know through a child's eyes. I don't even know whether it was an inclusive environment or not. I just made it one. I've only got good memories of my school years.

WT: Did you have a teacher or staff member in your schooling that impacted on you?

NJ: In primary school there were some pretty good teachers. My Year 7 teacher, and lots of (other) school teachers. They were just kind of encouraging. They were all pretty good.

Hampton was a great school as well and I think being a performing arts school and doing drama – that was my favourite subject. Having that connection to the performing arts was fantastic. My drama teacher was just incredible and that is partly why I looked forward to drama so much, because of him.

There was a teacher in economics – Ms Howlett, Julie Howlett. I remember in Year 11, sitting in economics and it was time to nominate for head girl and she comes to me and says "I think you should nominate" and I kind of looked around and said "What me?" I nominated. I didn't get head girl, but it was really lovely to have that faith (in me), that belief.

WT: What advice would you have for teachers working with Indigenous students?

NJ: Be mindful of cultural differences but don't treat anybody differently just because of their race. That's just a fundamental in every sector. We all need to check ourselves sometime and say (to ourselves): "Am I treating them any differently based on their race?" and if the answer is yes, then you need to change the way you interact with them.

There are also cultural differences when dealing with Aboriginal people. Their ways of learning might be different, what is good for one child might not be good for another. That is all part of the curriculum and that's all a part of teaching, and the professionals in the industry would know much better than I.

We're going through a big upheaval in every sector of our society, whether it is justice, health, education and in the corporate world, a different way of looking at culture and celebrating traditional knowledge and I think that is really important to recognise children who may not be very literate but their traditional knowledge is out of this world. Look at the skills that children do have and celebrate them and nurture them and come at learning in a different way.

WT: What would you like to see for Indigenous students and education?

NJ: Just achieving the same as everybody else, getting their literacy and numeracy up. But also what I would love to see in more remote areas is testing on traditional knowledge; having them (Indigenous students) be leaders in their classrooms, and sharing their culture with others and that be something that goes towards their end of year results.

WT: Is there a message you would like to give young Indigenous people today about their education?

NJ: I have been hearing a lot lately of "you can't be what you can't see". If you want to be something that you can't see anybody else doing, then you be the person that other people see.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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