Features: Signs point way to reconciliation action

A Perth southern suburbs primary school has shown its commitment to reconciliation by installing Noongar language signs around the school.

Palmyra Primary School has installed the signs as part of its Reconciliation in Action Plan (RAP), with an additional Acknowledgement of Country sign greeting visitors as they enter the school.

Palmyra PS teacher and SSTUWA member Jade Elvin said the school's committee wanted to do something that was visible to show that the Noongar language was just as important as English and Indonesian, the school's other chosen language.

The signs were designed and made by a wholly-owned and operated Indigenous company, Melbourne-based Kinya Lerrk, which has designs to choose from their website.

Jade explains how the project came along and the reception from the school community.

Western Teacher: What were the reasons for this project?

Jade Elvin: As a part of our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) our very small committee wanted to do something visible for the whole community.

We wanted Noongar language to start being used as an everyday language. Firstly, we changed our sports factions to Noongar language for both the colour and the animal. For example, Mirda Yonga: Red Kangaroo. We then moved to the language signs.

We plan to have a local elder, Marie Taylor, come in to record the pronunciation of the signs. This will then stay on the schools shared drive so that all teachers, every year, can help facilitate the learning of these Noongar signs/words.

WT: How did the project proceed?

JE: The website gave us the designs, and our RAP committee decided on what we thought reflected our school the best.

One of our Aboriginal parents helped us initially with some ideas and words, then I contacted the Department of Education (DoE) who advised me of the Noongar language consultant located at the North Metropolitan Education Regional office. This was interesting as I didn't know that this department within the DoE existed.

The longest part (a few weeks) was working out the interpretations for the signs. (I learnt it's not a translation but an interpretation).

We used Partnership Acceptance Learning Sharing (PALS) grants to help us pay for it, as well as some excellent budgeting.

WT: What has the reception been like so far from staff, students and parents?

JE: It has been received positively. They have been shown at both lower school and upper school assemblies, school council and at the staff meeting. Throughout the process there was a lot of communication with staff about what we were doing and there was the ability for feedback and questions.

WT: How do you think a project like this can benefit a school community?

JE: It shows respect for our local First Nations peoples. It shows the students and community that we value our local culture and that we think it's important enough to be on the walls of our school and taught in our classrooms.

This is such an easy way for schools to be able to show their respect and admiration for our First Nations peoples. The benefit is not just for students but for the whole community. It's a great way for schools to reach out to their communities and

get these conversations happening, conversations around respect and language. Everyone benefits from this story and it creates a ripple effect, which is a positive one for reconciliation and our ongoing relationships with the First Nations peoples.

WT: What has been your role in the reconciliation in action process at your school?

JE: I am a Year 3 classroom (Senior) teacher. I volunteered to take on the role to coordinate and organise the RAP for our school because I thought it was important.

I organise Reconciliation and NAIDOC Week celebrations every year for the whole school because I believe that these should occur and I am happy to make them happen. I believe each small step we all take, takes us towards a reconciled Australia.

I would be very happy to liaise with staff or be contacted about schools starting their own RAP. I can be reached on jade.elvin@education.wa.edu.au

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