

Southern Cross Primary Annandale, QLD

“He knows my name!”



Teachers and parents often comment on my ability to remember the names of children I have been working with for only a few hours during the course of a school workshop/concert day. It's not something I have deliberately worked on but it certainly is an asset. Children love to hear their own name and it is the beginning of a connection between teacher and child.

As a teacher in schools I made an effort to get to know as many names as possible beyond my own class. Knowing each other's names is part of building community. I have mentioned elsewhere in this book the talent of Brian Lacey, at one time the principal of a school of more than 800 children, but who, by the end of first term each year, could name all the children in the school. Knowing a name acknowledges the value of an individual and lets a child know that they are important to you.

During my visit to Southern Cross Primary in Annandale, a suburb of Townsville, among other children, I called on a real character in Year 6 or 7, called Nicole. Nicole was one of those children who “lit up” during the workshop so I called her up to help with a song. And her enthusiasm quickly spread to the rest of this older group of children.

So during the afternoon I made a real fuss of her, calling her up for about five songs in all. And she had that same positive, “freeing” effect on the whole school. And she stayed behind at the end to thank me- the whole experience must have “made her day”.

As I was packing up, the school's principal, Gerard Hore, started to chat with me and he commented on my ability to remember names. He shared my belief about the importance of knowing children's names and how it can have a significant and positive effect on their sense of well-being. And he shared with me this beautiful and true story about names that he'd picked up at a Principals' Conference in Adelaide some time before.

A dad took his five-year-old son, Robert, to Disneyland on Christmas Eve to see the annual Christmas parade. The highlight of the parade was, of course, the arrival of Santa Claus and they had waited for more than an hour before there was any sign of him. By this time Robert was getting pretty excited. As Santa finally came in to view Robert's dad encouraged Robert to call out hello to Santa. Robert proceeded to do just that and Santa came closer and closer yelling “Ho, ho, ho! Merry Christmas!”

Just as Santa came within earshot of Santa, the father gently urged his son forward and at the same time pulled a large sign out of his coat pocket which had the word “Robert” with an arrow pointing down on it, which he held just behind his son's head. As excited boy yelled, “Merry Christmas, Santa!”, Santa replied with, “Merry Christmas to you too, Robert!” The father swore he never saw his son smile so big and that there never was a Christmas present to match it.

Robert turned around just as the sign was safely returned to the pocket and said, with tears in his eyes, “Dad! He knows my name!”