Professor Keithia Wilson

Prof Keithia Wilson: I describe myself, first and foremost, as a change agent. I find I can’t be in a system and not try to improve it. I’ve sought to contribute to enhancing the learning and teaching system at a whole of school level through establishing, for example, mechanisms like annual training for sessional staff, indigenous student support systems and co-curricula programs for students from years one through to four.

[presentation]
So welcome and welcome to the training. You’re part of a bigger picture, which is a whole of university strategy around first year orientation and engagement. And what we’re doing in the health group is a whole strategy across the group around peer mentoring training and that’s setting up your mentors, knowing that you will be able to assist first years in a very real way to make that adjustment to university. Any others?

?: Yeah. [0:01:37.1] I know how horrible first semester was.

Prof Keithia Wilson: Right.

?: It’s hard, it’s awful. It really is.

Prof Keithia Wilson: It’s not easy is it, it’s tough coming in. Yeah. And you’re saying with that in mind we thought we want to help people, other people to make that easier for them. That’s wonderful.

Sally Chester-Law: Keithia is so incredibly inspirational because she is so genuine in her concern about students’ welfare and academic and emotional achievement and betterment. And it comes from the heart, it’s not something that is put on, it’s very much real, it’s a part of her. And she is a tremendous inspiration to all of Keithia’s students and also academic staff.

Stacey Vervoet: I think for me personally she’s inspirational because she’s got such a commitment to positive change and improvement for people, which is quite relevant I think to all first year students and international and indigenous students as well. So I find that really inspiring that she’s got such an adamant commitment to that.
Tatjana Djakovic: Keithia is a fantastic human being overall, before being a teacher, I mean that helps a lot and she genuinely cares about students and students can feel it and they respond to it.

Keithia Wilson: My success as a teacher and learning facilitator is based on two key principles. Firstly I’m committed to engaging students as partners in the learning process. I make use of adult learning principles to negotiate learning contracts between my students and the teaching team, thus in the first session of the course, in addition to discussing learning outcomes and importantly establishing a supporting rationale, negotiate with students, a whole of class learning contract regarding course content and structure, learning philosophy and assessment practice. An important part of this is clarifying the roles and the responsibilities of both staff and students, with students having very real input into this process and into the discussion and negotiation of rights and responsibilities of students and staff on the team.

Secondly I am committed to designing courses which encourage students to develop not only their disciplinary knowledge but also their professional skills. So wherever possible I include project work to provide a vehicle for applying theory to practice. I also apply this experiential approach to my lectures. So a typical lecture, in addition to the elaboration of ideas and theory, includes strategies such as posing questions, enquiring about students’ prior conceptions of material, asking students for examples from their experience and inviting contrary or divergent points of view. My aim here is to stretch the lecture format beyond transmission of information, to facilitating engagement and to deepen learning.

My research indicates that this experiential approach encourages surface learners to adopt deeper learning strategies and in combination with project work in the field, becomes a transformational learning experience for many.

Stacey Vervoet: One of the great things about working with Keithia is that you see the change process in action and the effect that she has on people. And by watching it you go, “oh maybe I can do that as well”. And then with the peer mentoring program it’s like you get the chance to emulate that and you see that there’s certain weaknesses that you may have perceived about yourself but by working with Keithia you can use that as a strength through the peer mentoring program.

Keithia Wilson: I feel very honoured to be the Australian University Teacher of the Year and I feel a responsibility to assist other staff in the university to develop both their practice and their scholarship in learning and
teaching, and to be rewarded for their expertise and their efforts. I see my work as the chair of the education excellence committee as contributing directly to this. Finally, I’d just like to say that I think effective teaching requires the engagement of both head and heart. I’m strongly committed to both research led teaching and to scholarship of learning and teaching. And a self reflective question I apply from the transformational learning literature is, “am I modelling in all of my educational processes the democratic, human and social justice principles I wish my students to evidence as graduates in the field?” Ultimately I think students learn from what we do as scholars and as people and thus I believe, to quote Mahatma Ghandi, “you must be the change you want to see”.

Tatjana Djakovic: Keithia was and is my role model and has been since the first day I met, hoping that one day, hopefully I will follow in her footsteps.