



CGGS Celebrating Diversity – A reflection for Senior School Assembly 18 May 2021

Speech given by Kath Woolcock, Deputy Head of Senior School – Student Wellbeing

It is an absolute privilege to speak with our school community today on the topic of diversity and the importance of celebrating diversity, something I am both personally and professionally passionate about.

To begin, I'd like to share a story with you all. A few weeks ago, I was watching Paw Patrol with my eldest daughter Evie who is 4. For those who haven't yet had the pleasure of watching this excellent show, it is about 6 puppies, each with their own super power, who save the residents of adventure bay from harm.

One of the wonderful things about this show is that it subtly tackles and explores contemporary social issues or concepts at an age-appropriate level and on this occasion it was about adoption, where Everest the snow dog, was adopted by Jake.

During the episode, Evie turned to me and asked what adoption meant and I tried to explain it as best I could, using an example of her friend Lisa. Lisa attends Evie's Kinder, she is also 4 years old and Malaysian. She was adopted by two Caucasian Australian parents when she was a baby. Evie then proceeded to tell me that I was wrong and that Lisa wasn't adopted (4 year olds know everything you see), but then a few moments later, she then stopped and asked how I knew.



After this discussion I spent some time reflecting. For me, this exchange highlighted the beauty and innocence of childhood. As a 4-year-old, Evie saw Lisa and her parents as a family, no different to her own. She saw no clear reason why this child, with her Malaysian physical features was any different to her non-biological parents who were blonde or brown haired.

Race, gender and the other difference we see are all social constructs. They are learned responses brought about by a lack of understanding, a lack of education, fear or ignorance. And it is this fear that leads to some very alarming and dangerous statistics for minority groups.

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission:

- 1 in 3 women have experienced physical violence
- Of the LGBTQIA+ community, 6/10 experience verbal homophobic abuse
- Australian ranks the lowest in OECD countries for income of people with disabilities
- 1 in 5 Australians have experienced race hate talks

Rigid stereotypes about what is considered normal or appropriate are one of the driving factors that contribute to these statistics, but not the only reason.

Stereotypes about what is normal in terms of love, appearance, behaviour, beliefs and self-expression create fear about those that break free from these and it is for this reason that the values of respectful relationships between and across people in our community is threatened and compromised, not just nationally and internationally but also locally.



While many consider Australia to be at the forefront of acceptance with its rich diversity and multiculturalism, we only have to look at the injustices that prevail across many community sectors to see that this is not necessarily the case for all people. Our indigenous population are still striving for equity, refugees and immigrants still experience poor treatment, vilification based on race still exists, prejudice occurs those of faith, discrimination of the LGBTQIA+ community is still prominent and, as highlighted in recent discussions around consent, gender equality and parity is far from where it should be. As a country, we have a long way to go.

In 2017, the same sex marriage debate divided Australia. What many considered to be a parliamentary issue became an issue of the people and the dialogue quickly became hateful and toxic. While the people eventually voted in favour of the changing of the marriage bill, there was a lot of damage done. In recognition of this and in an effort to support and show solidarity to those who were impacted, two students came to see me to propose what is now known as Celebrating Diversity Week. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Veda Surapenini and Nina D'Souza for their foresight, and am so grateful that their legacy continues 6 years later.

As an Anglican school, we are committed to acknowledging that every person is made in the image of God and that recognising our diversity is an important part of helping to create safe and inclusive communities. For me, I am filled with incredible pride to work at CGGS and to belong to a School community that celebrates and embraces all types of diversity. Diversity in terms of those with different abilities, cultures, religions, sexualities, genders, learning abilities and those from other diverse backgrounds.



Each year we celebrate each of these in our week-long celebration, held this week, but it is also part of the fabric of our school, or our dialogue, of our culture, and this is incredibly powerful and humbling.

Today we take another step forward in this journey, as we announce our CGGS Pride Group, and I take this opportunity to thank Zara Price and her entourage, as well as Rev Creed and Mrs Dunwoody, for the work they have done to bring this to fruition. This group will act as a place where interested students, regardless of their sexuality and gender identity, can come together to facilitate discussion, deliver initiatives and instil understanding and respect for all, and I look forward to Zara sharing more about this later in the assembly.

In closing, there are two final points I would like to make.

Celebrating diversity is not about us all having the same opinion, in fact, this contradicts the very definition of diversity. It is about us all feeling safe and supported, knowing that there is mutual respect as we share our perspectives and opinions.

Secondly, and for me most importantly, it is about everyone knowing that they are valued, loved and that they belong. So, as I stand here before our school community, I hope that you, as staff, teachers and parents, know that you are valued, that you do belong and that you are loved.



I would now like to hand over Annaliese, Esther and Carol to provide an overview of the Celebrating Diversity Week plans for 2021 and to reflect on why this event is so important to them. I would also like to thank them for their organisation and planning of the event, it has been a pleasure to work with them in this significant celebration.