Tracey – Research Project Teacher

I think some of the things I love is when it comes from a student’s own personal interest. And it’s more specified. And that comes from spending time, having a chat with students about what they’re really interested in.

So for example one of my students at the beginning of this year turned around and said ‘I’m doing the Napoleonic War’. That’s such a vast topic that’s already been researched so intensely and then you know just saying ‘but why but why’, I said ‘why are you interested in history?’ And then that became a ‘well my great grandfather was in World War II’ and you go well ok so my grandfather was in WWII, and you go ok so, ‘and we was a prisoner of war’ and you’re going ‘well what was his name?’

And she said ‘well I don’t really know’ and like ‘where was he a prisoner of war?’

‘well I don’t really know… and what would have he experienced, well I don’t really know’. And that became a Research Project.

And it’s been fantastic, it’s been him immersing himself in his, in the history of the War, the whole family has now become involved in trying to find out so much more.

When students find their niche and then they dive into that world, they enjoy spending time on it, they enjoy spending time talking to people. They’ll find experts in the field that they can engage with as well. I keep saying to the students, you know, if you’re great at a sport what’s something you can really enhance? And so one student, was his weakness in his game was his vertical jump. So to investigate how to improve your vertical jump, what exercise should you do? Safety in exercises, to create a program to experiment with it. And then to turn around in the end and go well I actually increased my vertical jump, I’ve created a program that I can share with other people who’ve got that sort of weakness or an area to improve.

Advice

It’s really crucial that you spend time skilling the students up. When there are a lot of people say ‘well the students know how to research’, you go, ‘they do have the basics but it’s that in-depth analysis that you’re wanting’.

And so there’s nothing wrong with stopping and skilling the students up.

In regards to, you know, the research methodologies, and thinking about ethics and thinking about refining a topic as you go. Having that one-on-one conversation about finding their niche topic and really refocussing it. Then having that ongoing, in a perfect world, students are independent learners. But the reality is sometimes all of us need someone to say ‘stop, how are you going? What are you doing?’

And then regrouping and refocussing and then what’s your next goal? And going to that level. Helping students draw limitations to say ‘actually I need to put a stop here because I could keep on going forever, that point forever but if I keep doing down that line, I’m never going to get to my other key points’.

It’s actually about working alongside and for some teachers it’s really hard, because I’ve always been in control of this subject. But this time it’s ‘I’m journeying with you and I’m walking with you’. I know what you’ve got to do and then you’re helping students scaffold that so they come to a meaningful end point.

Support

People love talking about what they know and want to share that knowledge and so as soon as that happens you just have to help the students open up those doors. But then there are people on the other side who are just so willing to work with you and that’s what, I think that’s the exciting part. Because for the student who’s gone down the path of finding out about pole-vaulting, vertical jumping, cooking Polish, you know whatever it is, sailboat, how to fix your sail, your sail yacht. You know, there are already people in the field and all you’ve got to do is access them.