Story 10: Teacher story

My most significant change is one that’s occurred I think in all the children in my class, but I think most significantly in two students. They, Jack*, at the beginning of the year, was unable to read and write, but also, and I think more significantly, couldn’t name other students in the class. He could only name himself and his best friend. And that for me indicated that he didn’t really have relationships at school, and didn’t really see school as a place where you built relationships and was therefore disconnected from the class and also disconnected from school in general, because he can’t read and write and he’s a year 2 student. So, most of the other students can.

Having taught the unit of work, Jack has not only improved his literacy skills, but he now values each member of our class. That was demonstrated by the fact that he, we wrote put-ups, compliments for each of the students in our class. So each student wrote one for everybody, and I suggested, given his literacy skills, that he wrote the same one for everybody. And he insisted that he would write a different one for everybody because, you know, each person was different and deserved their own put-up. So even though it was painfully slow, he wrote one sentence for every student in the class, acknowledging their differences and valuing them. Which was perfect, because our value was tolerance, so it was all about valuing differences within our classroom. And then the cycle was complete, because when we did circle time afterwards, a student turned to Jack and said, I can’t remember her exact words, but basically she said ‘thank you Jack, for writing me my own sentence. I know it’s hard for you to write, and it means a lot to me that you wrote a sentence for me’. So not only is Jack appreciating and valuing other students in the class, they are, in turn, appreciating and valuing him and his differences, his struggles, and the fact that he’s really given something to them. And yeah, so that I think was the most significant thing in that class.

...[Reflecting on why that’s the most significant change for me] Yeah, I think that now that, it’s similar to Dianne*. Now that each student feels valued in the classroom and values each other, the classroom is now able to function as we would like a classroom to function. So Jack now feels able to write and he’s not embarrassed that he can’t do as well as the person sitting next to him, and he doesn’t feel any less of a person because of that, because he knows that he’s valued and special in our classroom and that we love him for who he is, and that we’re just proud of the achievements that he is doing. So he can now just get on with his literacy, get on with his numeracy, and that’s the same for all of them. They can just get on with life and not feel like, ‘oh I’m not doing as well as everybody else and I should be embarrassed about that.’

...I think that that’s [‘doing your best’ as a value] probably not reflected in our learning element, but I think in general our school has an emphasis on ‘we’re looking for quality work’. And I know that that’s part of my talk, teacher talk during the day, I would...

[‘Give it your best.’] Yeah, I would say quite often, even though perhaps it’s not written, I know that naturally I would just say ‘I’m expecting you to do quality work today.’ So yeah, I think that would have been in there just because that’s my teacher talk.

*names have been changed