



Creating change in one generation

Annie Facchinetti says GenerationOne has encouraged unity through performance

How does a suburban Sydney public school for students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities become an agent for change in the face of Indigenous disparity? The answer lies in the GenerationOne CREATivE Change School Competition, an innovative initiative designed to actively engage young people in making a difference.

GenerationOne is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to ending Indigenous disparity in one generation through education, training, mentoring and employment. It is a movement that welcomes participation from all, and while its supporters include Jamie Packer and Kerry Stokes, it embraces collaboration with and help from anyone who is willing to further the cause. Importantly, GenerationOne recognises the critical role that young people have to play in breaking the cycle of Indigenous disparity. Since 2010, the CREATivE Change School Competition has given the younger generation the impetus to explore issues of social justice, race and inequality of opportunity.

The achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is a concern for all Australians. In a December 2012 media release, Minister for School Education Peter Garrett acknowledged that while some students have made noteworthy gains, “more needs to be done to help Indigenous kids do better at school”. He went on to comment that in Year 5, for example, only 8.6 per cent of Indigenous students in the Northern Territory’s very remote areas are meeting the minimum reading

benchmarks, as against 94.1 per cent of non-Indigenous students in the same schools, a figure that Mr Garrett labels as “appalling”.

GenerationOne cites similarly grim statistics. In the “Facts that matter” section of their website, it is reported that, “In some areas up to 70 per cent of Indigenous students regularly do not attend school!”

Tallowood School

The CREATivE Change School Competition gives students the chance to take some positive action to address Indigenous disparity using the performing arts as a vehicle. This year, a somewhat unlikely entrant was Tallowood School in the Sydney suburb of Kellyville. Tallowood caters for students with special needs from Kindergarten to Year 12, emphasising positive self-image and social competence.

Teacher and head of the creative and performing arts committee Suzanne O’Connor was the driving force behind Tallowood’s entry. “Last year, we developed our first ‘signing choir’ and discovered that it was a success so when the information for the CREATivE Change Competition made its way into my pigeon hole, I decided that while we may not be able to sing the *Hands Across Australia* song, as most of our students are non-verbal, we could give a red hot go at ‘siGning’ it.” It is the first time that the school has entered a competition of this type.

The Tallowood School’s offering features images of students participating in Indigenous inspired activities including art, dance, music



and stories and, of course, the signing choir performing the song to a version of the track supplied by the competition organisers. The joy that the students derived from being a part of the project is evident to anyone watching the video, however, O'Connor says that the benefits extend beyond the obvious. "It was a wonderful opportunity to be part of such a worthy cause that also allowed us to reinforce to our students that while people may have differences, they are all equal with equal voices and rights," she explains. The message was certainly not lost on the audience; Tallowood took out the People's Choice Award category of the contest.

Competition structure

The competition is structured in two sections, each offering \$15,000 in prize money. The primary school category requires students to perform the song *Hands Across Australia*, written by Melinda Schneider and Les Gock, either using the backing track provided or with their own musical accompaniment. The middle of the song has provision for students to include an original rap expressing their thoughts and ideas about Indigenous disparity. Indeed one of the highlights of the Tallowood entry is seeing two older students enthusiastically perform a rap that recognises that we all have a role to play in instigating change.

Winners

The winner of this year's primary school division was Yandeyarra Remote Community School. Located 500 km south of Broome, the predominantly Indigenous residents do not have English as their first language. It is therefore all the more remarkable to see the young students



confidently and competently singing and performing a rap about their community. Their video also features Indigenous Elders and some impressive acrobatic displays by students.

The ante is increased for the secondary section of the competition, where the challenge is to make a video clip using Neil Murray and The Warumpi Band's *Blackfella/Whitefella* as inspiration. The winning entry from Centralian Senior Secondary College in the Northern Territory consists of an original rap and backing track with a catchy chorus urging listeners to "stand up and be counted". The accompanying video is vibrant and uplifting, including not only the students themselves, but also other members

of the broader community. The school was a state finalist in 2010, a result that inspired them to try again this year.

Both primary and secondary school entrants must provide a short statement outlining what the school is doing to raise awareness of and address Indigenous disadvantage. With Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures currently featuring as one of the cross-curriculum priorities in the new Australian Curriculum, participation in the CREATiVE Change Competition is one way to meaningfully introduce some of the underlying concepts to students in any setting.

GenerationOne provides a suite of resources

Simple to use interactive projector in one hand...
the students in the palm of the other.



Interactive teaching is now as easy as turning on the projector and starting your class!

With Epson's latest range of interactive projectors, PC-free interactivity is now a reality. Plus, they're so simple to use, even if you're new to interactive teaching.

Epson's renowned smooth and accurate interactive pen is now improved – two pens enable users to work simultaneously, opening a world of teaching possibilities. What's more, with no need for driver software and one touch auto calibration, installation is a snap.

The Epson EB-475Wi and EB-485Wi are so simple to use, you'll have your students in the palm of your hand.



Call 1300 130 194 or visit www.epson.com.au/interactive





to support schools, including online primary classroom materials such as a video of Midnight Oil performing *Beds are Burning* wearing “sorry” shirts at the Sydney Olympics, and the text of “The First Sunrise” Dreamtime story that can help give context to students’ involvement. Word sheets, backing tracks and even step-by-step dance instructions are also available.

According to Tallowood School’s Suzanne O’Connor, the secret to success in the competition is organisation. “Absolutely the key. Arrange what you want to achieve, work out how you plan to achieve it and schedule each step. And once all of that is sorted – *have fun*

with it and enjoy it the way the children do. It’s well worth the experience.”

O’Connor was lucky enough to have friends who work in film and editing who were willing to assist with the preparation of Tallowood’s entry. It took just two days to complete the filming and while O’Connor concedes that it is difficult to gauge the exact impact the process had on students, there is no doubting that students, “loved being on film. Most of our students get a buzz when they see footage of themselves and will laugh, clap and point excitedly.”

For schools who are not fortunate enough to have production connections, GenerationOne

provides an IT hotline that promises to “do everything we can to help you.” As far as school events go, you don’t find many events offering as much support.

For O’Connor, the process went very smoothly and has provided a way to showcase the unique talents of the students. “The main surprise was how natural the kids were at performing and how much they really got into it. Also how easy it was to capture great footage of them; they’re naturals. :-)”

Further reading

CREATivE Change School Competition website Accessed 23 December 2012 from:

<http://songs.generationone.org.au>

Garrett, Peter (2012) NAPLAN 2012: some signs of progress but a lot more to do Ministers’ Media Centre Retrieved 23 December 2012 from:

<http://ministers.deewr.gov.au/garrett/naplan-2012-some-signs-progress-lot-more-do>

GenerationOne website Accessed 23 December 2012 from:

<http://generationone.org.au>

Tallowood School website Accessed 23 December 2012 from:

<http://www.tallowood-s.schoolwebsites.com.au>

Competition entries can be viewed at:

Centralian Senior Secondary College

<http://youtu.be/enJ1ZPLP5h0>

Tallowood School

http://youtu.be/G-a5_rzkQw8

Yandeyarra Remote Community School

<http://youtu.be/RkM0WNiVplg>

ET