**Teacher graduation ceremony occasional address 2018**

**Fiona Walsh**

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, members of Council, Staff of the university, Families and friends of graduates, and most importantly, Graduates.

May I commence by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land we are meeting on today – the Awabakal people – I pay respect to Elders past and present, and with the graduates here today, have the privilege and responsibility of educating the Elders of the future – I offer that respect to all Aboriginal people present and to you all gathered here today.

It is an absolute pleasure to be delivering the occasional address at your graduation ceremony.

It is my belief that teaching is the most important profession because it makes all other professions possible. I feel privileged to do what I do every day. I hope that you feel the same way throughout your career.

My educational journey, by today’s standards, has been innate in nature and very linear. I come from a middle class family with a long line of educational ancestors. My father was a great educator, along with my sister, three aunties, one uncle, brother-in-law, niece, cousin, husband and now eldest daughter. My great aunt, who was like a grandmother to me, was one of the first female teachers permanently appointed to teaching in NSW. She instilled in me a fantastic love of learning that has stayed with me throughout my career. Some say I was born to teach and born to lead.

The lineal progression of my career over the years has been from targeted graduate to head teacher, then onto deputy principal, acting college principal, until today, very proud principal of WWHS. In my early 20s I became a degree junkie, utterly enjoying the completion of three postgraduate degrees.

The knowledge I have gained through my experiences has helped me in my current role as Principal, and certainly as Secondary Principal Council President for the Hunter and NSWSPC Reference Group Leader. My focus today and into the future is about improving our system rather than an individual school or clusters of them.

As a result of my experiences over the last few years I thought it might be appropriate to share a few career wisdoms that I have learnt along the way. I have three key messages for you. Please take what you will from the messages and make your own. All of these tips will hopefully help you as you negotiate a wonderful career in education, or perhaps another field.

**Career wisdom No 1: Spend time developing and refining your educational philosophy**

Your philosophy will mature with time and provide you a ‘go-to’ when your decisions are questioned or you are challenged as an educator in some way. Be clear on who you are and what your professional purpose is every day. When things get tough, I go to my educational philosophy every time. I would encourage you, as part of your educational philosophy and subsequent actions, that you educate and nurture less experienced educators than you. Take the time to professionally develop the next generation. Play it forward to ensure we have the best education system in the world. Our students are worth it.

**Career Wisdom No 2:** **When adversity knocks – find the positive because optimism is your friend**

My journey all sounds very rosy – but it has been far from plain sailing. When adversity knocks don’t despair – I have found it’s often a catalyst for change or an exciting new opportunity and it builds resilience. The first time I experienced this was in my first year of teaching. I was fortunate enough to begin my career on the Central Coast. First term saw me contend with a Federation meeting organised by staff complaining about the unfair appointment of targeted graduates into highly desired positions, a riot by 13 Year 9 boys whilst on playground duty leaving me verbally and physically abused, and continuous verbal tirades, known these days as workplace bullying, from two casual staff members ensuring that I understood that I had taken their job and it was their school, which they had been part of since 1978.

It was a fantastic opportunity to build resilience.

**Career wisdom 3: Challenge yourself and dream big**

I passionately believe in life-long learning and this is one of the core beliefs that underpin my work as an educational leader. Be passionate about your continuous learning and work and challenge yourself to make a difference every day. Through the process of lifelong learning and metacognition you have the opportunity to be exceptionally good at what you do.

I ask that you do this. Why? Because students and our society deserve it.

Not just as a professional educator but as a human being I want all future teachers to abide by three fundamental principles that I believe should underpin teaching and learning in every public school.

First, to nurture and challenge students’ intellectual and imaginative capacities way out to horizons unsullied by self-fulfilling low expectations. Don’t crush their love for learning through boring pedagogy. Don’t bludgeon them with mindless time wasting activities or limit the exploration of their world of evolving knowledge merely to the oppressive practice of repetitively churned out recycled work sheets. Please ensure that there is legitimate progression of learning from one day, week, month, term, and year to the next.

Second, to care for students with humanity and sensitivity as developing human beings worthy of being taught with genuine respect, enlightened discipline and imaginative flair. Relationships are key.

And third, please strive to maximise student potential for later schooling, post school education and training and employment and for the quality of life itself, so they can contribute to and enjoy the fruits of living within an Australian society that is fair, just, tolerant, honourable, knowledgeable, prosperous and happy. When all is said and done surely this is what every parent and every student should be able to expect of school education, not only as delivered in every public school in NSW but within every school – not only within Australia but throughout the entire world. So I challenge you to be the best educator and leader you can be. Dream big and make a difference.

A wise person once said to me when you have the opportunity to speak publicly remember three things – stand up to be seen, -speak up to be heard and finish up to be appreciated.

So, in finishing, can I congratulate you all – thank you education and teaching graduates from the Faculty of Education and Arts and welcome to the best and most important profession in the world.

**Contributor details**

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Fiona has been Principal of West Wallsend High School since 2014. Currently she is also President of NSWSPC Hunter Region, Leader of the Professional Learning Reference Group and a Member of the SPC Executive. The focus of Fiona's PhD was professional learning. Her current interests include sport.