

What Does Success Look Like?

The following is a blog written by Nikiesha Stevenson from Toogoolawah State High School in Queensland, Australia.



What is Success?



When I first started teaching, I thought I knew exactly what success looked like. It was neat, measurable, and could be tracked on a spreadsheet.

In the Arts, my definition of success was student grades. I aligned junior Drama and Visual Arts assessments closely with senior tasks so students would be prepared for the demands of Years 11 and 12. If my students achieved high marks out of 100, I believed I'd done my job well.

And for a while, it worked. The results looked good. But deep down, something was missing.

Why I Became a Teacher

The truth is, I didn't get into teaching for grades. When I was at school, I was never truly seen as an individual. No teacher took the time to get to know me — my interests, my struggles, my voice. **I promised myself that one day, I would be the teacher I never had.**

Somewhere along the way, though, I lost sight of that. The pressure of preparing students for senior assessments and chasing results pulled my focus away from the bigger picture. I was teaching for outcomes, not for individuals.

The Two Students Who Changed Everything

I've always had students who finish their work quickly, then disappear into their own world of doodles. They'd complete the set task, and then — almost in secret — fill the margins of their books with drawings.

For years, I ignored it. I told myself, It's okay, they're still doing something art-related. But I didn't engage with it. It felt like "off task" behaviour, and I didn't want to encourage it.

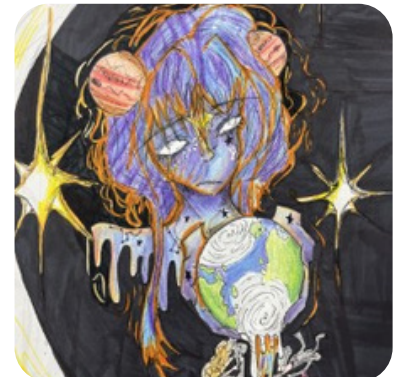
Then I attended my first Learner First meeting and was given permission to shake things up. I realised I didn't have to treat learning as something that only "counts" if it matches the set task.

So I did something different — I asked two of these students to show me what they'd been drawing.

They looked at me in shock, hesitant to share, as if they were about to be told off. But when they opened their books, I was blown away. Their drawings were rich with creativity, skill, and personal expression.

I validated their work and, for the first time, assessed their "off task" drawings alongside the set task. Everything changed. The next lesson, they came to me first, eager to share what they'd drawn. They asked if those pieces could "count" too.

They no longer hunched over, hiding their work. They sat upright, drawing with purpose and pride. Their "off task" had become on task — and maybe it had been all along.



Bringing Joy Back to Teaching

That experience, along with prioritising student wellbeing and using Authentic Mixed Method Assessments, brought the joy back into my teaching.

These changes gave students more ways to demonstrate understanding, connect learning to their own lives, and show their strengths. The pressure to perform on a single assessment was replaced with opportunities to explore, create, and collaborate.

And I realised something important:

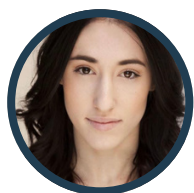
learning isn't always loud, obvious, or happening where we expect it to. Sometimes, it's hidden in the margins — in the work students do when they think no one is watching.

Redefining Success

Now, I measure success differently. I've realised it happens when students feel safe enough to bring that hidden work into the open — when they know their voice, ideas, and passions are valued, even if they don't fit neatly into an assessment brief.

Today, success looks like a student who once hid their art now holding it up for everyone to see. It's the quiet pride of a learner who wants to share their creativity. It's a class where students feel seen for who they are, not just for how well they can follow instructions.

For me, success is no longer only defined by the number on a report card. It's about whether my students leave my classroom knowing their individuality matters, that's something you can't easily measure and more importantly is the source of my joy.



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