

The magic weaving business

What does a compass, magic weaving, an Austrian Archduke, World War 1, and a teacher from Rockhampton called Mr Miles have in common?

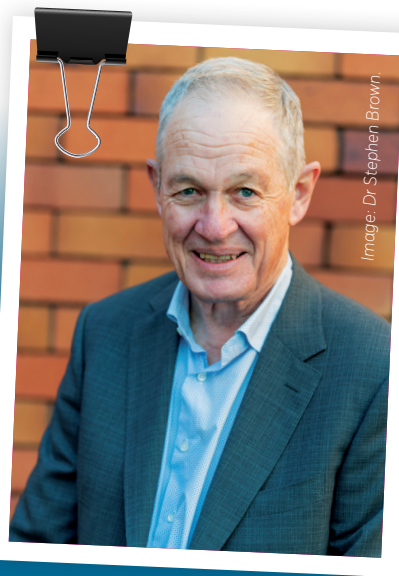


Image: Dr Stephen Brown

Dr Stephen Brown is the Managing Director of The Brown Collective, focused on the formation of educational leaders and partnering with schools, networks and system to enable sustainable impact. The organisation reflects both his collective experience over 40 years in policy, strategy and leadership development – and that of the remarkable global network he has developed during this career.

During a recent visit to Singapore with a group of fellow educators I noted the following quote on display at the National Institute of Education that resonated with me and caused me to reflect on my lifelong work as a teacher:

“Embrace your core purpose in teaching: Evaluate your beliefs about learning. As you enter the heart of the profession, understand the profound impact you hold. Remember, every lesson you impart, every word of encouragement, shapes the minds and futures of your students, nurturing their potential and guiding them to dream more and become more”.

This statement encapsulates for me the power, importance, and the impact of our wonderful profession. The Ministry of Education of Singapore in their *Ethos of the Teaching Profession* have articulated five important and integrated facets of what it means to be a teacher. A powerful symbolic recognition of this is the presentation of a compass to each graduate to depict the true north and the importance of values, standards, and the moral purpose of the vocation of being an educator. Just like so many other educators I have enjoyed a lifelong commitment to a profession and vocation that changes lives, lifts people up and contributes to the formation of the next generation of citizens.

Sir John Jones in his wonderful book, *The Magic Weaving Business: Finding the heart of learning and teaching* (2009), beautifully evokes the essence of teaching as the magic weaving business. Sir Jones notes that if you participate in developing the potential of young people as a teacher, coach, or mentor when someone asks you what you do you should with confidence that you are in the magic weaving business and watch their reaction.

What is the business of magic weaving? Sir Jones (2009) describes the characteristics of a magic weaver as:

- Having the ability to win from young people their permission to take them to places where they cannot go alone.
- Possessing the ability to see beyond the sometimes-ugly drab little cage.
- Being the keeper of their dreams and
- To know where they are, yet always see what they could be.

Teaching requires a significant amount of emotional energy in the formation of the special relationships with young people. My former students who have reconnected with me over the years have not once remembered that worksheet I spent hours on but all of them remembered respectfully the experiences and interactions we enjoyed.

Have you ever experienced a teacher who has been a magic weaver?

What made them your magic weaver? What did they do? My magic weaver was senior English, Modern History teacher and first eleven cricket coach, Mr Miles. Why? What was his alchemy – his special ‘potions’ that made him the best teacher I ever had?

He had the respect of students, he cared, spent time to get to know his students beyond his five periods a week of History and English chatting with me watching cricket or in the playground. Sir Jones notes that his experience with magic-weavers has confirmed his belief that children will forget what teachers made them think but never forget how they made them feel (p.5). For me Mr Miles was an expert teacher, with deep knowledge and expertise, who conveyed an infectious interest in the subject matter to be covered according to the relevant syllabus documents.

The other core aspect of his magic was that he was an expert storyteller using the appropriate mix of logos, pathos, and ethos. Earlier this year I stood in a park looking up at the statue of Franz Joseph, the late emperor



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Image: Bibaram/Shutterstock

of Austria and King of Hungary. His younger brother, Archduke Ferdinand, was assassinated, and this is accepted as the most immediate cause of World War 1. I felt a deep sense of connection to this statue. My mind raced back fifty years to Mr Miles’ history lessons and the examination essay on the causes of World War 1. I remember as a teenager being enthralled by his explanations and the maps, he drew on the blackboard like a wizard. His only technology was a stick or white chalk with a duster to erase.

In retrospect, having become a teacher, he exercised what good teachers do – agency and judgement-deciding what content needed to be reduced, and concepts amplified.

Henry Adams, the nineteenth century American Historian stated that “a teacher affects eternity; he (she) can never tell where his influence stops”. It is because of the inspiration of Mr Miles that I became a teacher. As a profession, our practices continue to be reviewed, described, prescribed, criticized, and commented on by so-called experts, who live far away from the reality of today’s classrooms. The purpose of this article is not to debate the right or wrong of this but to remember that teaching is both art and science.

The business of magic weaving focuses on the heart of learning and teaching. Good teaching goes beyond a set of student results and numbers-such teachers bring the special magic that builds the essential ingredient of quality relationships with young people. Teaching for magic weavers is a calling-a deep desire and commitment to making a difference. They commit to teaching emotionally, intellectually and physically with passion, care, compassion and respect for others.

Let the teachers teach. The profession, the practitioner voice must inform and lead the discourse on policy and practice. We need to continue to foster the magic weavers within our education community.

Thank you to all the magic weavers wherever and whoever you are. For those of you reading this, please make contact, if possible, with your special teacher and tell them what they have done for you.

Thank you, Mr Miles, for being my magic weaver and seeing something in me that I could not and giving me the guidance and inspiration to pursue a life-long career as an educator. A gift that keeps on giving and brings me personal joy.

In an interview with Queensland’s *The Courier Mail*, a 90-year-old Mr Miles in 2022 provided the following comment and reflection on his 46-year teaching and school leadership career: “I loved teaching kids. If you do not love the kids, then you should get out of teaching.”

I have managed to reconnect with my now 92-year-old magic weaver. He remembered me and immediately wanted to know how my life story had progressed. Magic weavers care, take an interest in you, your identity and remember you.

Finally, as teachers we must always pivot back to our purpose, our why?

“Education is a powerful engine for personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the manager of the mine, and the child of farmworkers can become president of a proud nation” (Nelson Mandela, *The Long Walk to Freedom*, 2003).

In these challenging times of teacher attraction and retention, it is important to continue to foster and celebrate the magic weavers who exemplify the incredible career that is teaching. **EM**