**My Brilliant Career** *by* Robert **NeiL KIDD** *2024.8.13*

**Teaching career summary**:

* 1971, 1972, 1973; Mount Lawley Teachers College [MLTC]
* 1974, 1975; Pemberton Junior High School / Pemberton District High School [PDHS]
* 1976,1977; Derby District High School [DDHS]
* 1978, 1979, 1980; Northcliffe District High School [NDHS] (Acting Deputy Principal)
* 1981 year off to start building “W’Home” on Quokka Downs
* 1982 - 1995; Pemberton District High School [PDHS]
* 1996 – 2002; Lynwood Primary School [LPS]
* 2003 – 2010; Spearwood Primary School [SPS]

In 2010, I wrote; “*I enjoyed being taught by Len McKenna but was a very cynical student and questioned all the methodology during my training. I challenged the Principal (Bob Peter) at a whole college meeting prior to an open day [*Questioning whether my fellow students DID really have an understanding of the technology that M.L.T.C. was so proud of. Most couldn’t even load a strip film, let alone use a video camera.*]* *I was very concerned about the role computers would play in de-personalising education. I could have done just as well under the old monitor system.*”

In 2015, I wrote*: “I returned in my mind to the time I wrote the skit on the opening of the second stage of Mt Lawley Teacher’s College. I was not a clever parady (sic.) writer but through this piece I could return to the notes I had written on the day. I don’t think anyone else wrote notes on the affair but I can tell what took place because I made fun of it.”* It was a shame David Hough put me off performing it because he thought it contained too much toilet humour!

**1974 - 1975**

After I graduated from Mount Lawley Teachers College with a Sociology award in 1973, my wife and I successfully applied for positions at Pemberton, which was a Junior [District] High School. We had ‘Decided to move to Pemberton while at Mt Lawley Teacher’s College so I wrote a letter to the Director General of Education!’ *“I was proud and idealistic and ready to change the world!”*

No house was supplied by the Government Employees Housing Authority (GEHA) but we managed to get a cute little old weatherboard and corrugated iron house to rent on the street behind the pub. The rent was $7 a week and we could book up any hardware we needed at the local hardware shop. We painted some rooms and even had some of my students over one weekend, to oil the outside boards!

I taught years 5 and 6 that first year and found very little of what I had done at teacher’s college seemed to be of much help. Country schools were quite old-fashioned and the Spelling programme followed the old “My Word Book” (which I had used at primary school) while the Reading programme was based on the newer Unit Progress. I tried to make some use of the ‘free’ texts that were available which had been provided by a Labour government, such as “WORDS” and “GUIDELINES”, but they were quite random, unstructured and the better parts were often cherry picked by previous teachers.

I recall a parent approaching me informally and asking how their child was doing at Spelling. I told them they were having difficulty and the parent thanked me for being honest. They had their concerns but it was never reflected in reports. My honesty was going to plague me throughout my teaching career!

Maths and Science were areas I was already comfortable with but I’m sure I learnt a lot at college. I recall some of the music we heard, such as Greig, but it seemed to me that going to teacher’s college just delayed me being a teacher. I had been a leader at Scouts and YMCA for years.  I did have a good time, however, and I enjoyed doing my seating plans after getting sociograms done. These entailed students being asked a question such as, “Who would you work best with?”

One of my electives at Mount Lawley Teacher’s College was art. Our lecturer abandoned us at times and we quickly learnt to do things for ourselves. I was able to work through most activities efficiently and did many activities that my fellow students didn’t do such as embossing, pottery wheel and silk screening.

I got to know a Pemberton potter who used local clay.  For art with my first class I ‘discovered’ a source of clay in a cutting near the railway station and the children helped prepare the clay. When it was ready, we made pinch pots out of our clay and then fired them in a wood and sawdust Raku kiln, we made out of bricks, at the back of the schoolyard. I still have mine!

I encouraged the students to collect “ring-pulls” [off cans] and we joined them together to make a chain that went around the classroom more than once. This was a litter analysis project and prior to Clean Up Australia or any aluminium recycling scheme. Some information was provided by “Keep Australia Beautiful”.

I arranged with the then Forest’s Department to plant street trees too which promoted trees in the township, even though it was surrounded by forest. I told my class that there were more trees per square kilometre in the area of Perth that I had been brought up in, than there were in the Pemberton townsite.

The Science Teachers Association camp at Mandurah inspired me and I learnt to press and mount plants for my own herbarium. I obtained a wildflower picker’s licence and had to ensure the students and I complied with the rules about what specimens I picked and where they picked from.

I ran a Gould League Club, then a camp at Windy Harbour in some parents’ huts, one weekend in 1974, which became the first of many! Over the years we studied and pressed local plants and did transects of the beach and foredunes.

I had a ‘class party’ at the Pemberton swimming pool and arranged for a tractor inner tube for the children to play with. I organised clean-ups of this local swimming pool in cooperation with the Pemberton National Parks Board. They drained the pool then the students joined me after school to clean it up! I tried to insist the students all wore shoes but to no avail. One student had their foot cut on broken glass but luckily, they lived nearby.

I taught my students to identify trees in the area such as karri, marri (Red Gum) and yarri (Blackbutt). I coordinated with the Forest’s Department staff to visit operations in the forest as I felt the students, and their families, knew little of what went on there.

My wife and I were asked to leave our rental after a year, as it was to be sold. Luckily, we managed to secure a Forests Department house for the second year. I taught years 3 and 4 that second year and continued to try to make honest and meaningful communication with the parents.

Our principal decided we should have some one-act plays to raise money for a photocopier, so we did! Country towns always rallied behind their schools.

We were asked to organize the inaugural Karri Karnival on the football oval and it rained. Dave Evans MLA said; “If it didn’t rain – we wouldn’t have the trees”.

We bought a small farm and a brand-new Volkswagen Kombi, then applied for a remote Aboriginal school, to experience something different, as we thought then that we would probably spend the rest of our days in Pemberton.

**1976 - 1977**

Many of the schools we applied for weren’t on maps so we settled for Derby District High School and flew up while our near new VW Kombi was sent on a truck. The heat was over-whelming and we had to make our way to the GEHA agent for our keys, then onto the school and house. This house was tidy, cyclone proof and just across the road from the school. The back yard was overgrown with Kangaroo Grass, but wisely I had brought up my Dad’s old Victa Lawnmower!

One weekend the parents of one of my Aboriginal students came to my house with a baby Brolga. We named it Freep (the noise it made) and the children studied it, wrote about it and drew it. We were told we couldn’t keep it and when it was sent to the Perth Zoo there was a story in the newspaper. I made a book of the children’s work and the various correspondence we received.

*‘We used to clear up lots of bottles by standing in a large circle and throwing them into the bin! No 2nd chances and most of these kids didn’t wear shoes!’*

I taught years two to four and worked hard to establish a relationship with the local Aboriginal parents. I ran a Homework Club, Sports group (M.C.C. – Mowanjum Cricket Club!] and Adult Literacy and Numeracy at Mowanjum Community just out of town past the airport. Keeping in contact with staff at Saint Joseph’s School and the two “boarding” hostels was also helpful.

We went out on excursions with the secondary ‘Project’ Class and made many lovely friendships. Unfortunately, we burned the motor of our Kombi out twice, but thankfully our Mission Aviation Fellowship neighbours loaned us a car to stop us going “Troppo”! It was rumoured that anyone staying in the tropics would eventually ‘Go Troppo’! Two years was seen as a reasonable length of tenure.

One of my MLTC lecturers (Len McKenna) came to Derby and I took him out to Mowanjum. Several of the children at Mowanjum showed us bush tucker and then we went to see the kids jumping into the water from a tree at No. 1 Gwari (water hole) and they did an impromptu “Junba” (dance *OR “Wangga”*) on the marsh for us! I love looking back and seeing the energy of some of these kids.

Our principal decided we needed a bus so the staff put on a performance to help raise some of the money. The kids were all given raffle tickets too.

My class had a small garden in the front of our house and I brought them over the road to work on it occasionally. They watered and fertilized the vines. There were few European bees there so the flowers had to be hand pollinated.

While searching for photographs for this document I came across some pictures of my class painting themselves on the lawn! *What WAS I thinking?* LOL!

**1978 - 1980**

At the end of our two years, we were unable to return to Pemberton but were offered jobs at Northcliffe District High School where I was Acting Principal and years 5-7 teacher (32 students) for 1978 and 1979. My Windy Harbour camps continued and we had visitors coming down to share their special expertise (e.g. fossils, shells, plants and astronomy).

I helped George Gardner with work in a nearby area of forest and we organised a clean-up of the local swimming pool in cooperation with the local Bunnings mill. We drained the pool, cleaned it up and then renewed the boards in the dam wall.

Using a government grant, we set up regular dancing classes, the Northcliffe Film Club and a remedial reading programme. I think the first two were popular and marvellous for community-school relations.

I was on the committee for Western Australia Year ‘WAY79’ which co-ordinated the Bibbulmun Track opening. Classes walked various sections.

With some support from the administration and the secondary Manual Arts teacher, I organised to help a group of secondary students participate in CycleWAY’79; a bike-ride all the way from Northcliffe to Perth! This was done in stages and towns along the way supplied the food and accommodation.

The cyclists rode from Northcliffe to Windy Harbour as a group for a practice run. I rode my own ten-speed racing bike during the send-off from Northcliffe on the main street in front of the school.

Unfortunately, I was not able to leave with the students but I rode with them on the first weekend. It was quite an amazing logistical effort and the police had to coordinate traffic with hundreds of cyclists on the road in the final stages coming into Perth. One of our students spoke to the assembled riders!

I was on the school bus committee and gradually learnt more about the district.

My time as acting deputy taught me many valuable lessons. Principally that I didn’t want the grief that can go with those [non-teaching] roles and I also found being in the company of “wanna-be principals” to be quite strange. There was quite a toxic culture. Some I admired – but none I wanted to have to work for! I also was in this profession to work with children.

In 1980, I left the acting role and taught years 3 and 4. The house had come with the job so we moved to a caravan on our farm, “Quokka Downs”, on the Old Vasse Road near Pemberton as I planned to take a year off to build our house.

**1981**

I think 1981 was my most challenging year. A year off in which I foolishly ran the local Census! I began work on our shed and house but time just got away with me and I had to call in help from a relative with diverse building skills to get it to lock up. Many of the materials were recycled such as doors and windows.

**1982 - 1995**

I returned to teaching at Pemberton District High School in 1982, working full and part time until 1995; teaching from Pre-Primary [relief] to Year 10 [Life Science option]. We were the first country couple to Tandem Teach. I became the Regional Resource Person [R.R.P.] for Science and had to quickly develop an environmental science camp for Gifted and Talented Science students in a week!

My eldest daughter was born at KEMH in Perth and I had my bag packed and car ready during the athletic carnival so I could head off as soon as I was needed.

As an RRP, I was expected to arrange to visit teachers in schools in the district to help with materials. Strangely I became a conduit to staff who were often not prepared to share their expertise – even with others at their school!

The Yeagarup Sand Dunes were a popular excursion and in 1985, we set three labelled markers on star pickets in the forest to record the movement of the dunes. One at the base of the dunes, one a metre away, and the third one was a hundred metres away. Years later a four-wheel-driver said he came across one, but sadly he didn’t tell me how far it was from the edge of the sand dunes.

I ran the camp again the next year but then asked for someone else to have a go! My natural science primary school class camps at Windy Harbour were legendary by now but when the deputy said I should go somewhere different the following year – I didn’t take another class on a camp (in my entire career)! I think he was concerned that his son would be in my class again and repeat it.

I once was given a snake by a parent and I made a terrarium so I could have it in the classroom. I met Harry Butler in Manjimup and showed him a picture of it. He identified it as a Crowned Snake; venomous! I relocated it the very next day!

I involved the school in a native plant seed ‘balloon launch’ too but it would not be environmentally / politically-correct these days! Native plant seeds were sealed in paper envelopes tied to Helium balloons with a string and released.

One year my class chose Jail as a theme so it was decorated with bars on the door and windows. Another year I set my stereo up with two pairs of speakers to act as a simulated quadraphonic, put blankets over the windows and played them Jeff Wayne’s “War of the Worlds”! Two year seven girls asked to be excused because it was too scary for them so they spent the time in the library.

I learnt a lot about literature from our teacher-librarian and became a fan of Lucy M. Boston and tried to read one of her novels every year. My favourites were “The Children of Green Knowe” and “A Stranger at Green Knowe”.

My younger daughter was born in Pemberton and I loved that I could just walk next door after work to see them in the adjoining Pemberton District Hospital.

In 1987, I ran a Junior Red Cross Club with students in years 4 and 5. We raised $200 towards “The Hospital of Hope” by selling stamps. I had made the First Fleet stamps a Social Studies topic and the students became interested in collecting stamps. We held regular stamp auctions at our Red Cross meetings.

In 1988 I arranged for Pemberton people to loan me their historical photos which I photographed in the Manual Arts room. I was most interested in the old trout hatcheries and the Pemberton Hydro-Electric Scheme so I made a display.

I was on the bus committee for many years and would occasionally go out on the bus after school to check out the behaviour and the various routes. Eye opening!

I was on the committee for the new school site and took photos before it was cleared. I initiated the recycling of timber on the new site and it was cut and stored for later use by the school gardener. I also arranged for the purchase of a set of binoculars, for bird watching, when we were in the new building.

My classes went on various excursions and in 1988, I was determined to ‘capture’ the moment for the town. One bus trip saw us at old Group Settlement School sites looking for evidence that they had been schools (*e.g.* inkwells; but none were found!). Another was the new Recreation Centre being built and the Dave Evans Bi-Centennial Tree in Warren National Park was the final 1988 excursion.

My class also came to my farm to plant Karri trees with my eldest daughter.

Although athletics were not my forte, I usually coached High Jump after school as it was so time consuming to do eliminations during school athletics practice sessions. Usually far too many students turned up so we worked quickly.

I established a paper recycling scheme at the school and entered the 1991 Education Innovation Awards with it. I was also running a pioneering glass recycling scheme and a solar marketing business. It was a very busy life!

I was still working on building the farmhouse and a beach house at Windy Harbour, when I contributed to the W.A. Recycling Blueprint and was quoted by the Minister (Ian Taylor MLA) at the launch, and was thanked by the Pemberton Progress Association on our departure.

After a disturbing incident when I was threatened by the principal, the deputy asked me about my allegiances. I felt my priority was the students, their parents, the community and finally my employer. He said, “What about your family?” That became apparent when my young daughter got off the school bus one day and asked why I was greedy. I said I didn’t think I was greedy and she said, “One of the boys on the bus said ‘YOUR DAD’S A GREEDY!’” Oh boy, he had probably said GREENY. I realised my kids were probably under pressure being teacher’s kids in a country school.

I had taken pride in being able to cover topics in the classroom without showing bias. I recall a particular “Cooperation and Conflict” topic where the students asked me what my opinion was at the end of the term. They had no idea what I thought and I was pleased. One of those students went on to a life in politics!

We sold our farm and almost built a home on a block in Pemberton. I fell out of my two-storey shed while preparing for the auction of my old “treasures”. This meant an ambulance ride to Pemberton, car to Manjimup, then Royal Flying Doctor flight to Perth. When I eventually returned home, I was in a wheelchair which made it hard to go to the opening of the Windy Harbour Sea Rescue; for which I had supplied the solar panels, batteries, inverter and installation contract!

**1996 - 2002**

We eventually moved to Perth and I went back to full-time teaching at Lynwood Primary School in 1996, for seven years, where I started the Bannister Creek Project. I had noticed a ditch on the way to the school the first day and asked my principal what it was. It ended becoming a school priority and the mother of one of my students was actively engaged in its restoration. Bannister Creek had been used as a drain when the Canning Vale Industrial Area was established. A film crew did an interview of me at the creek but I don’t have a copy of it.

Relations with the parents were good and we set up a nice place where the parents could sit outside the classroom at a table, with an umbrella, towards the end of the day. The families were from a variety of backgrounds. Occasionally, they would join us for the final “Warm Fuzzy” activities such as ‘speaking stick’.

My class followed the Solar Car Challenge, went and saw an associated movie (“Race the Sun” 1996), and made it the theme of our class work and assembly.

It was here I learnt of ADHD and when I questioned one of my students being on medication and the Mum said, ‘I’ll take him off them one day and you’ll see’!

My class watched the film “Took Them Away” Ruby Hunter and Archie Roach and the children and I were overcome with emotion.

The deputy approached me one day with another administrative task to add to my workload and I said, “Think of me as a full truck. If I’m going to put your new thing in; something has to go.” She didn’t get it. I was finding teaching stressful.

I went to an in-service presentation of Autism to prepare me for my first student on “the spectrum”. He had an aide and I think I worked well with him.

**2003 - 2010**

My last appointment with the Department/Ministry of Education was from 2003 until 2010 at Spearwood Primary School, where I taught from year 3 to year 5. I once wrote, *“I settled into my new school as the token “Freo feral” and prepared the students for my departure. They had some amazing questions to ask about where I was going. I love kids and hope I can keep teaching …”*

I took three months’ long service leave in the first year there and went to Gallipoli for ANZAC Day. I left the relief teacher the task of allowing the students to follow my world journey via email updates and postcards. They made a chart; “Where in the world is Mr Kidd?”. It is hard work when you are travelling without a computer, but I think the educational exercise was worthwhile!

I sent regular newsletters to the parents and once asked them, “What sort of person do you want your child to be?” I collected their answers, then made it into a survey. The results of that formulated my goals for the class.

I liked teaching in Room 9 the best as we had our own garden, it was close to the oval, and at times I could do my own thing. We planted sunflowers, nasturtiums and ice plant to make what was a barren ‘rockery’ into a garden.

I tapped into “The Mouse and the Motorcycle” for Technology and Enterprise (T and E) and the students designed a helmet for a mouse. Another T and E activity was to design a house that The Big Bad Wolf (an old hair drier) could not blow over. We learnt how to measure things like the cricket pitch after guessing and estimating. The flagpole was the hardest but we eventually used shadows!

I gave the class the task of assembling a cheap gazebo which was a lot of fun!

I wrote a letter to my boss entitled “Drowning in a SIS-pool” but the schemes kept coming and eventually we lost touch with the real reasons we were there.

We had “Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing” and “Bernard was a Bikie” for literature and I dressed up as Bernard for the Book Week 2006 fancy dress.

One year, we did “Happy Feet” as our theme and I scrounged the movie foyer props from a local cinema. The class dressed as penguins for our assembly. The Worker Of The Day had their photograph taken with a large blow-up penguin!

In 2007, I began working towards Senior Teacher status but it was not to be.

In 2008, while my older brother and sister were away, I was my elderly father’s primary carer and it put a lot of pressure on my teaching and me personally.

I photographed the students all around the school site to record how it looked before extra buildings, were added. I documented the trees that were removed for the (Commonwealth funded) buildings but my heart was not in favour of these changes. “Lost Beauty” is a photo I took that captures that.

I felt the education ‘tail was wagging the dog’ so I was pleased to be able to retire early on the grounds of ill health in 2010. I thought I might do relief teaching, but I didn’t. I also tried for other jobs that I thought I might enjoy.

In 2015, I wrote *“I was a pretty inspirational teacher! When I had longer hair and it wasn’t grey.” “I’ve touched many other people’s lives as you do when you are a teacher.” “I had to get out before the system killed me!”* I was spent!

*Bye Bye* Portfolios, Making Consistent Judgements, Principles of Teaching and Learning and Getting It Right Numeracy!

*Farewell* Individual Education Programmes, Managing Student Behaviour, Student Information System, Reports.

I started off my teaching career as a sceptic … and I was still a sceptic towards the end of my career when I moved to Perth. I think in some ways I was meant for something that valued the child more.

The pendulum of trends had taken its toll on this once-enthusiastic teacher, but I did enjoy the freedom in running a tutoring business (Freo Mentor) for a few years and still have contact with some of those students and their parents. I occasionally bump into parents of my former students and their memories of those days are generally positive. I have former students, teachers and parents that I keep in touch with via social media. The feedback from photos of those earlier days is quite rewarding and this task has made me search my photo archives thoroughly.

I had difficulty getting ‘back in the system’ and most of the relief places I applied for were not Education Ministry! I had had enough of THAT system.

I used my retirement to write and illustrate a book about my great uncle Tom’s Gallipoli diaries entitled “Uncle Tom’s Diary”. This was launched on ANZAC Day 2014. I did theatrical-style presentations at various schools and libraries across Perth.

I also wrote a series of children’s photographic picture books about a dog called Doffie and was working on a photographic book called “Chimneys of Solomon St”.

I began writing a book about a girl living in post-apocalyptic Fremantle but the publishers weren’t interested.

I also enjoyed researching the life of an interesting Fremantle man who was a young, part – time World War One volunteer ‘gunner’ who wrote many articles for local newspapers. After World War One he spent time on a pearling lugger in Broome and finally left Australia for seven years; living and working in New Zealand.

An operation at the end of 2016 to remove an Acoustic Neuroma (tumour) growing on my auditory nerve left me with Single-Sided Deafness and poor balance.

*This was to become my ‘new normal’ …*

I now spend my mornings at the beach collecting rubbish and things for my environmental art. My art was displayed at the 2019 Artsource Salon, 2020 and 2021 City of South Perth Emerging Artist’s Awards, 2021 City of Melville Art Awards, 2021 Dardanup Art Trail, the 2022 and 2024 City of Cockburn’s Show Off and 2023 Sculpture on the Scarp.

I also take photographs of the beach and the built environment to help document change.

(Robert) NeiL KIDD 71 years old