**Nikki Makamba – Ōritetanga Learner Success Conference, August 2019**

[THEME MUSIC]

So nice to be up here.

Kia ora, and kia orana. As you can tell, you probably know I'm from Africa – a.k.a The Lion King, or Wakanda.

As you already know, my name is Nikki.

This is my whānau. As you saw yesterday, or if you didn't see, I wear my human handbag with me. He comes to school with me. His name is Christian. And he's started coming to school with me on my first day and my interview. And he's probably going to be at the last one and when I finish my degree.

And this is my family. So my mum-- just telling you a bit about my journey. So my mum, when I was seven years old in 1998, 23rd of March 1998, my mum started to play a prank on me. Because my sister, in the middle, then moved to England. And that's all I knew as a young student.

She said to me Nikki, we're going to England to visit your sister. Little did I know that I was coming to Aotearoa. And all I knew about Aotearoa was Tana Umaga, I had a huge crush on him.

[LAUGHTER]

And Shortland Street. But little did I know that I was actually being ripped from my home country. And when I deal with students, especially from minority groups, I understand. Because I understand how it is to be a minority student.

My child right now, he's going through a lot. And why did I choose education? Because I wanted to change the status quo. I always say, be who you want to see in the world.

As an African student, I probably-- I do not know why I'm here. I should be in jail because I went through a lot of stuff. When you come as a minority student, it is hard. It is really hard. And trying to prove that you actually have a right to be in this country, it is hard.

And every single time when I was here, Bob Marley and Pacific students, it resonates to me because I actually understand. I know we come from a different cultures, but to me, this is my home. And I actually understand how it is.

Last week, when my son has been kicked out of school-- that's why he's with me all the time at school. Last week, when I went to talk to the Principal, she said to me that your child is beginning to be a burden.

And this is what my Principal, when I went to Ramiro Primary School, said about me. That you're beginning to be a burden. And sometimes people have said yesterday, are we the problem?

Sometimes, yes, we are the problem. Sometimes we want to say that it's the students. Students come to us because they want to feel safe. They want to feel at home.

I always wanted to feel at home. I am a teacher by profession as well. That's something that you probably don't know.

I went to Auckland Uni to become a teacher. Why? Because my mum said, if you do not stand up for Africans, no one else is going to do it. You have the power in you, and I believe in you. My mum passed away two months ago. And sadly, she cannot see me graduate next year.

Every single time, as part of Student Council, what I do with this amazing team, I do feel supported. Because, as you can see, they are a diverse team. And we're also part of a diverse whānau. And they're seated over there.

When students come to us, they come to us because they don't have money to go home. They don't have food. And sometimes, they just want someone to relate to.

And actually, to me, this is not my job. A lot of students say, you, you're getting paid. This is your job. Yes, it is my job because they elected me to be in this role.

But as you all know, we don't get paid on it because we carry out our jobs in our hearts. It's not a nine to five job. And sometimes, when we get tired and we're just like, oh, it's just another student. It's just another student, this Māori student, or a Pacific student, or an international student, they will come to the door because they don't feel supported.

But it is our job because we wear it in our hearts. And this is our job. And when we have a passion, we wear it in our heart. And we have a responsibility, not just as a Student Council, or lecturers, or wherever we come from, as teacher educators.

This is our job. This is why we come here. This is why we're here, not just to be on the professional development. So we can reflect and learn from other people.

I'm going back to what I see when I'm a teacher. I thought, nah, I don't like kids. I love my child by accident. Sometimes I let him know, let's be real sometimes.

I always say, when I went to Middlemore Hospital, I had two percent patience. And probably, when I gave birth to him, I had zero. When I want to pass, sometimes I'm like, yeah, yeah you're listening. No, no, I'm like working right now.

But it is real. But I realised because he is going through a lot of stuff, I have to bring back the teacher role that I had in me. Because as students still come to me because I have answers. Little do they know, I'm just with my role. I don't know what I'm doing.

As a teacher, we do have answers. Because those students, they're looking up to you because you're a port in the sea to be a representative to them. And whatever we can do, as teachers and institutions, makes a difference for them to keep coming back.

And it's not just about graduation. It's about setting a good example for all kids, for that little boy, and a whole lot of kids that we're going to teach, because they're going to be the future of today-- of tomorrow.

So I just want to leave you with the notion. Sometimes we treasure things, but we forget in our roles that it is people that drive our country. It is people that drive the world. It is people that make the change.

And if students were actually going to be evaluating you, would you actually like what they will say? Would you actually like or see what they will say about you? Be the change that you want to see.

And I would like to also thank Helen, my boss, for trusting me to represent you. I'd like to thank Annette for trusting me to represent Unitec. And just that it's such a humbling experience being under these prestige people. I'm learning from you.

And my journey doesn't finish because I'm, yeah, I'm looking for a job. And I wanted to--

[LAUGHTER]

to change. And I would like to upgrade from not eating too many noodles and Jacinda wants some money back.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

[APPLAUSE]

[THEME MUSIC]