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Tassie educator scoops up national teaching award

An early childhood specialist inspired by the quote, *'the mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be ignited'*–Plutarch', will receive a national award in the ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (NEiTA) today at a ceremony in Melbourne.

David Gilkes from Illawarra Primary School will join 11 other outstanding educators from across Australia in receiving the top awards. Selected from more than 1000 nominations in 2014, the 12 national award recipients will be honoured for their inspiring and innovative contribution to teaching.

Mr Gilkes has been teaching kindergarten at the school for three years and has 21 years of teaching experience. He was nominated by parents and will receive the ASG NEiTA Innovation Award. The award is for introducing new methods or ideas to create positive change in the school's programs and in students' thinking and learning processes.

Mr Gilkes is passionate about getting young children to play and creatively engage with beauty and nature around them, and using the nearby beach and bushland in children's learning.

He says his Australian teaching practice and thinking is also influenced by the Reggio Emilia teaching philosophy, which originated in Italy and focuses on child and family participation in the learning process.

ASG NEiTA Chairman, Allen Blewitt says Mr Gilkes dedication and initiative is a true reflection of what NEiTA represents, celebrating quality educators in Australia.

"As a professional in the education sector, I understand just how committed teachers like Mr Gilkes are to their profession. There is so much emphasis on improved teacher quality and training on a national stage and Mr Gilkes is an advocate that education needs to reflect a constantly changing society. He challenges the one size fits all approach to education and that more emphasis needs to be put on critical thinking and creativity to foster lifelong learning. This sort of approach adds to the quality of education that children can access in schools and is a credit to the value-add our ASG NEiTA teachers bring to education."

Mr Gilkes says there is so much more to education than teaching.

"When it comes to quality early childhood education, I think about the things which can't easily be measured, such as the interactions, the relationships, the experiences, the collaboration, the values and creativity.

"Last year, I decided to walk the class and some parents to our local shopping centre, to help make the children more visible in the local community. We split into groups and gave the children iPads to photograph things they noticed, with the adults recording conversations. I was given an insight into what the children observed, some commonalities in the things discussed and deep wonderings and questions about various aspects of this familiar space. This became known as the 'Empty Shop' inquiry, as it was the empty shop that sparked the curiosity of the children. This is an example of the way I aim to work with children and families, and also reflect upon and improve my teaching."

Parents, grandparents, secondary student councils, school boards, councils, parent associations, committees of management and community organisations throughout Australia nominated these inspirational recipients.

Chief Executive Officer of ASG NEiTA, John Velegrinis says he is humbled by the teaching calibre and the depth of experience of the award recipients.

"I congratulate Mr Gilkes along with the other NEiTA recipients. Their dedication, leadership and initiative is a true reflection of what NEiTA represents, celebrating quality educators in Australia. There is compelling evidence linking teacher quality to student achievement, and accomplished teachers demonstrate inspiration and enthusiasm for teaching and student learning. This is why NEiTA has thrived for the last 21 years, because the community thinks these teachers deserve recognition.

"All of our national award recipients are passionate about the need for greater quality pre-service teaching programs, and they are teachers who also continually strive to better themselves, pushing the status quo and learning and adapting with their students."

The national awards are divided into three categories: leadership and development, innovation and community engagement. For more information on the 12 national awardees, including profiles go to: <http://www.asg.com.au/neita>

Eleven national award recipients will receive \$5000 professional development grants with one teacher getting the incredible opportunity to go to Space Camp in the U.S. One teacher is also awarded a \$2000 Disability Inclusion Grant.

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