

2015 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards

National Award Recipient



Carolyn Coote

Blackmans Bay Primary School, Blackmans Bay, Tasmania

Carolyn Coote has gathered wisdom and insight from her travels across the world, and has utilised this knowledge and resources to broaden students' global perspective at Blackmans Bay Primary School in Tasmania. With a Diploma of Interpreting in Spanish, and experience in teaching German and Italian at the upper-primary levels, she is well positioned to cultivate her students' intellectual curiosity about the world in which we live.

Carolyn works to promote her students' capacity for philosophical thought, encouraging her students to make choices and take ownership of their own educational journeys. She seeks to find out what they already know, tapping into this prior knowledge and their interests to build a curriculum that allows for individuality and creative expression.

Carolyn keeps an extensive library of more than 1000 books in her classroom, and uses it as a basis for her own structured library lessons. Her library also serves as inspiration for much of her literacy program including the production of students' own books and the creation of individual book blogs by students. She believes quality picture books are an integral part of teaching values education.

She uses weekly Maths relays to motivate and extend students' thinking in mathematics, with excellent results. One of her two teams achieved the second highest score in the State annual Maths Relay, scoring 180 points out of a possible 200. She also integrates the visual arts with mathematics, where possible, to promote student interest.

The main aim of Carolyn's teaching, she says, is for students to become self-sufficient independent learners. She actively encourages students to develop a high level of conceptual knowledge and skills that can be applied to new learning situations and form a solid foundation for life-long learning.

Carolyn's National Award is for Innovation.

POSITION	OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES	CATEGORY	SUBJECTS/LEVEL TAUGHT	YEARS TEACHING
Teacher	Maths Relay Team Coordinator, Camp coordinator, extension programs, High School transition program	Primary	Year 5/6	32
YEARS AT THIS SCHOOL	SCHOOL TYPE	NOMINATED BY	TOWN/SUBURB	STATE/ POSTCODE
4	Government	Parent	Blackmans Bay	TAS, 7052

CONTACT DETAILS:

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What is the most challenging aspect of being a teacher?

It can be just as bamboozling for a teacher as it is for a student, especially for a primary school teacher who instructs and facilitates learning across many subject areas. The biggest challenge for me is integrating the subjects to ensure coverage of important concepts and skills and also the differentiation of the curriculum. This means consistently creating programs of activities and studies which allows for multiple entry points for students with differing interests, abilities, knowledge and skills. It also allows for the richness of human capacity and gives students the opportunity to have a say in what they learn and how they learn. Students have an extraordinary capacity for innovation, something which should be actively encouraged in education.

There is a lot of discussion at the moment around improving teacher training and teacher quality. What are your thoughts around this? Do you think teacher training and teacher quality needs to be improved in Australia?

Universities are generally doing a fantastic job especially in terms of helping future teachers unpack the national curriculum and in planning lessons. However, I feel that there could be a greater focus on the area of assessment in terms of the use of rubrics, the development of systems for organising assessment data, as well as opportunities to collectively look at work samples and to identify actions to take based on the assessment data collected. Being in front of the children is the most informative, empowering and beneficial aspect of university training and provides real opportunities to plan, teach and assess. I also believe placements are valuable for exploring the many ways that teachers manage to data they collect and how they can use it for planning and reporting. Summer school for long distance education students also provides excellent opportunities for the teacher trainees to feel less isolated giving them opportunities to work with their peers and share lesson plans and sequences.

How do you think teacher training could be improved?

I believe there needs to be more emphasis on helping trainee teacher to select valid and relevant assessment procedures. They need to be equipped with a "kit" of assessment strategies which allow for measuring students' numeracy, literacy and creativity. I would also like to see picture books being promoted more in teacher training as valuable vehicles for values based education as well as a vehicle for creativity. Teachers should also be encouraged to join professional organisations such as mathematical associations and the Australian Literacy Educator's Association and attend workshops or conferences as they are so beneficial.

What advice would you give a new graduate?

Focus on the children you have been entrusted with and don't lose sight of who they are as individuals. Teaching can at times become all consuming so I believe it is important that you don't forget or neglect your own family and friends.

I sometimes feel students work hard and sometimes unfortunately don't receive the necessary recognition and assessment of their work that they deserve. Allow them to give feedback on some of your lessons; this can be a real eye opener and something we forget to do this in our quest to amass results and assessments.

If there was one aspect of teaching you would like changed, what would it be?

I would like to see creativity being given more emphasis in the curriculum; it should be right up there with literacy and numeracy. Creativity can help learners not only survive, but to thrive in our quickly changing world. The only thing we can be sure of in this world is change. Developing skills in creativity helps students to be motivated and welcoming of change. It helps them be confident in their capabilities and their viewpoints. Teachers should be giving students ample opportunities to transfer their creativity skills to new contexts and to lead and work with others.

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