

2015 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards

National Award Recipient



Jarrod McGrath

The Woden School, Deakin, Australian Capital Territory

Jarrod McGrath is motivated by a passion for service, particularly when it pertains to young people with disabilities. As Pastoral Care Coordinator at The Woden School (TWS), he's in exactly the right place to make a difference.

Among Jarrod's significant achievements at TWS is the development of 'Wodenstock', an annual music festival for young people with disabilities.

Young musicians from across Canberra flock to Wodenstock where they perform in a 'Battle of the Bands', which allows young people with disabilities to experience an age-appropriate music festival in a safe and supportive environment. Wodenstock has been so successful that this year it partnered with 'Groovin' The Moo'—a long established national music festival featuring international acts.

Jarrod also coordinates programs where students from mainstream schools mentor students with disabilities. This helps students with disabilities to develop communication and social skills while mentors develop vocational and practical skills. These young mentors will grow to become future employers, and so this program facilitates employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

For Jarrod, TWS is an inclusive environment where each student is unique and staff are dedicated to responding to individual's needs to achieve individual goals. He participates as much as possible in the entire range of school activities—from dancing at weekly discos to engage students who are reluctant dance to wearing the team uniform and washing cars with students in the school car wash program.

Jarrod's National Award is for Innovation.

Jarrod is also the recipient of the 2015 Disability Inclusion Grant

| POSITION | OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES | CATEGORY | SUBJECTS/LEVEL TAUGHT | YEARS TEACHING |
|-----------------------------|--|--------------------|---|--------------------|
| Teacher | Work experience coordinator, staff wellbeing team leader | Secondary | Pastoral Care, music, Special Education | 7-12 |
| YEARS AT THIS SCHOOL/CENTRE | SCHOOL TYPE | NOMINATED BY | TOWN/SUBURB | STATE AND POSTCODE |
| 3 | Government | Parent Association | Deakin | ACT, 2600 |

CONTACT DETAILS:

Teacher: Jarrod McGrath
Phone: 02 6142 0200

Principal/Director: Ian Copland

Email: jarrod.mcgrath@ed.act.edu.au

NEITA is administered by the Australian Scholarships Group Friendly Society Limited
ABN 21 087 648 879 Registered Office 23-35 Hanover St Oakleigh Vic Australia 3166

For further information, please contact:
Nicole Gundi, Public Relations, Australian Scholarships Group
Phone: 03 9276 7520 Mobile: 0448 167 578 Fax: 03 9276 7798
Email: publicrelations@asg.com.au asg.com.au/neita



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What is the most challenging aspect of being a teacher?

I think the most challenging aspect of teaching is responding to the diverse needs of young people whilst balancing the various other demands of the profession. I entered the profession to help young people build skills, knowledge and attitudes for a successful life. I soon discovered that I would have to attempt to achieve this within and amongst various other priorities, frameworks, policies and philosophies. I found that my time commitments to planning engaging lessons had to be balanced with attending various meetings and staying abreast of changing departmental and school policies. I discovered that some other educators did not share the same outlook I had on student behaviour or pedagogical practices and I had to balance maintaining collegial and professional responsibilities whilst upholding my own philosophies.

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?

Just as a good teacher does with their students and self, we can certainly identify some excellent areas of teacher training but there is always scope for evaluation and improvement. I believe the training improvements I can identify would ultimately improve teacher quality.

How do you think teacher training could be improved?

To improve the tertiary training component of education we should increase the amount of time and focus spent on the practical placements of new educators. In particular we could increase the amount of time spent in each school. This would allow new educators to gain a more holistic understanding of the profession. As well as focussing on lesson planning and pedagogical practices they would develop an understanding of additional components of the profession such as managing behaviours on the playground and working with families.

To improve teacher training for qualified teachers involves focussing on more specialised areas of the profession and allowing for more individual development. Existing and developing teacher skills can be expanded by training in other areas of the profession such as community networking, rapport building, developing collegial relationships and educational leadership.

What advice would you give a new graduate?

Be grateful for the privilege to educate young people and shape the future of our world. In assuming new graduates enter the profession with the same passion and enthusiasm for helping young people as I did, I would advise to be prepared to have this passion challenged at times in different ways. I would also advise new graduates to not be afraid to carry their personalities into the classroom and to be authentic and build relationships with students. We all learn best from someone we feel we understand, connect with and respect. I'd also recommend to share and utilise your passions in your school community. Whether it be sport, music, social justice and fundraising, there will be a student out there with the same passion as you who will truly appreciate you sharing your passion, and by getting to employ your passion in the profession you will remain grateful, motivated and engaged.

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

I believe through building relationships with young people and their families, we increase their respect for teachers, which in turn makes it easier for us to achieve outcomes. I think we need to create some space in the curriculum for social and emotional learning and incorporate some 'case management style' skills into the profession. When a teacher shows that they care about the whole student, that is their mental wellbeing and academic development, they build a rapport and can engage with the young person to develop specific pedagogical practices. This rapport building process would also involve getting to know the students family and living arrangements. If a teacher is able to communicate and work effectively with both the student and their family or carers a link between school and home is created that then allows learning to happen in more spaces.

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