

2015 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards

National Award Recipient



John Kennedy

Coorparoo State School, Coorparoo, Queensland

As Deputy Principal at Coorparoo State School in Queensland, John Kennedy combines his belief in the basic building blocks of education, an openness to classroom innovation and cutting-edge technology and that leading and learning are indispensable to each other.

A popular member of staff with students, teachers and parents, John is described as an outstanding leader who is responsible for three key initiatives at Coorparoo. He designed and implemented the successful SOAR program setting school wide expectations for academic and social success; he has great engagement and leadership with students, staff and the parent community; and for 'inspiring students to learn, develop and grow well beyond their imagination—at taking a little spark and turning it into a raging fire'.

John is also implementing professional reflection and development for all staff through a collaborative peer-planning program focussing on student outcomes. Peer triads will observe and work alongside each other with input from internationally recognised experts. Coorparoo also has a weekly school-based curriculum cafe for professional sharing and renewal.

Describing student outcomes at Coorparoo over the past five years as 'incredible' John says they are due to 'the drive of a united school community'. The achievements are substantial and are a reflection of a dedicated staff and high quality teaching. Attendance rates for the 800 strong student population were 94.6 per cent over the past three years, and the student and parent satisfaction results tell a meaningful story too. Ninety-nine per cent of students said Coorparoo was a good school, and 97.4 per cent of parents agreed.

John's National Award is for Leadership and Development.

| POSITION | OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES | CATEGORY | SUBJECTS/LEVEL TAUGHT | YEARS TEACHING |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Deputy Principal | | Primary | | 22 |
| YEARS AT THIS SCHOOL/CENTRE | SCHOOL TYPE | NOMINATED BY | TOWN/SUBURB | STATE AND POSTCODE |
| 8 | Government | Parent | Coorparoo | QLD, 4151 |

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What is the most challenging aspect of being a teacher?

Working in an environment that is moving and changing so rapidly around them has to remain the largest challenge for all teachers. Today, teachers are "leaders of learners" and by definition alone, one senses just how detailed this role can be. From offering experiences that are more personalized, more authentic and more connected than ever before, teachers are now required to possess greater expertise in understanding the complexity of learning; constructing and co-constructing complex learning experiences and working collegially within and across schools.

De-privatising classroom practice, acknowledging that expertise and influence reside potentially just metres away and reflecting openly and authentically must all be about learning and not just knowing, and this too remains a highly challenging process for many teachers be they graduate or highly accomplished members of staff.

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?

The highest 'quality' teachers I know cannot be measured along any framework. Curiosity, compassion, one's moral compass, and the impression left on a student are immeasurable and improvement of these can only come from within. I do believe that there are systemic, somewhat non-negotiable aspects to the work that all educators must do to ensure that there is a continual improvement to the work we do and by maintaining a current and authentic approach to these elements, then quality ensues.

I sense that another area for consideration around teacher training is that of recruitment. That is, a sustained focus on attracting the most suitable students into teacher training programs and to re-ignite education as one of the most respected and valued professions alongside health.

How do you think teacher training could be improved?

Quite simply, more time in schools with students, staff, parents; into communities and among networks.

What advice would you give a new graduate?

Most of what we can and will learn we can learn from each other.

In addition, do what you say you will do, remain open to new and different ways of working and thinking, have a thirst and a desire know and understand more, make the concept of community the norm and having the courage to stop what you are doing if it isn't making a difference.

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

Me.

If I continue to remain truthful and honest, create valuable experiences for others, share and affirm those values that best represent my school community, set others free to experiment, to learn, to challenge and to build their own capacity, to hold myself accountable, recognise the experiences, expertise and passion in others ... then nothing needs changing!