

2015 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards

National Award Recipient



Joyce Michael

Lynwood Senior High School, Parkwood, Western Australia

Joyce Michael is the Learning Support Coordinator (LSC) at Lynwood Senior High School in Parkwood in Western Australia.

With more than 1000 students and 130 teaching and non-teaching staff 'Life at school is busy,' Joyce admits. During any school day Joyce supports about 25 per cent of the student population. These include students with disabilities, learning difficulties and low literacy skills.

Managing a team of 14 Education Assistants who work with at-risk students is a responsibility she embraces. Joyce has developed effective programs and plans that support the students at LSC, as well as up-skilling their teachers. Her work includes case-managing students on Learning Engagement Plans, Risk Management Plans, Attendance and Behaviour Plans.

Joyce also coordinates a team of more than 20 volunteers who visit the school weekly to support, mentor and tutor at-risk students. In addition, she is the Reading Resource teacher and, in this capacity, works closely with the Literacy Coordinator to implement a whole school approach to literacy.

'My door is always open for students and staff to come in for a chat and for support,' she says, and clearly they do.

After 15 years at LSC, Joyce's role as a prime mover and advocate for children is well known. Her workdays routinely involve acts of compassion and generosity, and her desire to help children reach their potential is etched in the memories of the families she has helped.

Joyce's National Award is for Leadership and Development.

POSITION	OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES	CATEGORY	SUBJECTS/LEVEL TAUGHT	YEARS TEACHING
Teacher	Learning Support Coordinator	Secondary	Learning Support	18
YEARS AT THIS SCHOOL/CENTRE	SCHOOL TYPE	NOMINATED BY	TOWN/SUBURB	STATE AND POSTCODE
15	Government	Parent	Parkwood	WA, 6147

CONTACT DETAILS:

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What is the most challenging aspect of being a teacher?

The most challenging aspect is how you can make a difference in the lives of the students you teach. It's not just about what you teach, but it's about who you are as a teacher and how you engage your students in each and every lesson. It also means admitting to being a learner yourself. To engage, you must be enthusiastic about what you are teaching and also enthusiastic about every student with whom you are engaging. It's being yourself and being on your own, out there, up front, on show, with students, and with your colleagues, who may be judging everything you do and say, day in and day out. There's nowhere to hide, because every day and every lesson you have to be there.

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 need for improvement is inevitable, because change is always with us. We have the changing face of the curriculum, the classroom and the students. Teacher training and teacher quality also needs to keep abreast of the challenges of the global workforce. As the world shrinks, competition expands, and Australian students need to be able to as competitive in the marketplace as the graduates of any other education system. Whether we need improvement in literacy and numeracy skills, or in the sciences and technological fields, or in humanities and other languages (especially lacking in Australia due to its geographical isolation); teacher training needs to attract the gifted, talented and high achiever so that teachers have the qualities and skills required to provide an excellent education.

How do you think teacher training could be improved?

Teacher training needs to be improved to highlight to graduate teachers, that their own well being and mental health are paramount to the effectiveness of their teaching practice and what they bring to the classroom. Socrates said "Know thyself", and teachers need to develop strong self reflective skills. If this is not a part of their teaching philosophy and pedagogy, they will not make a difference in the lives of their students. If teaching is only about teaching a particular subject, then we could have computers take over the role of teaching. But, being a teacher is about teaching the whole of the student, and implicit in that is to consider mental health and well being, including social and emotional intelligence, as vital areas that should be a part of teacher training. Teacher training should also cover how to reach disengaged students, whether disengaged through disability or learning difficulties, home and social issues, trauma and mental health impacts or cultural differences.

What advice would you give a new graduate?

Put yourself in your students' shoes and walk a while in them (to borrow from Harper Lee in *To Kill a Mockingbird*); this will help you understand what the students are bringing to the classroom and to their own learning. In the same way as "a village raises a child", so it is the school community that educates the child. So open your classroom to all and sundry—colleagues, support staff, volunteers, and parents. Don't limit your classroom to a room filled with desks. Get out into the playground, the community, the world. Everyone has a contribution to make in educating a child.

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

Reduce the pressure on teachers when there is so much expected of them. Teachers have the pressure of a huge burden of expectation to perform to a very high standard so that their students can achieve top outcome. There is the expectation that the teachers will produce well behaved and responsible students who then mature to be responsible and valuable members of the community—citizens who will make a positive contribution to the nation. Yes, teachers need to be educators, but they are also expected to be mentors, carers, disciplinarians, society's morality police, advisors, adjudicators, experts and even friends.

So, it's not what you teach, but who you are. Teacher training courses and society need to look at how they can better support teachers and share the load of expectations.

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