

2015 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards

National Award Recipient



Narelle Henderson

Landsdowne Crescent Primary School, West Hobart, Tasmania

Narelle Henderson has been teaching children for 37 years and her enthusiasm 'hasn't waned yet', she says. At the age of 50 years she, and a group of colleagues, won a fellowship to study in the United States. She has spent the eight years since incorporating that learning into her pedagogical practice.

She has a keen interest in forest and bush kindergartens, and is currently developing a strong outdoor education focus and bush kinder program with the support of her Principal at Landsdowne Crescent Primary School in West Hobart.

Narelle organises regular mornings where her class sets up 'camp' in the bush adjacent to the school. There she encourages the children to investigate their surroundings, climb trees, balance on logs, build shelters, and play imaginatively.

As part of the fellowship, Narelle visited Project Zero at the Harvard School of Education where she discussed new strategies with researchers that she implements in her classroom today. She also met the principal investigator of 'Artful Thinking', Shari Tishman, and uses many elements of that approach in her classroom. Her kindergarten students view great works of art, discuss them and then paint their own versions.

Another strategy used by Narelle is the 'Tribes' process, which helps her develop her students' resilience, attitudes and communication skills. She uses many games to assist individuals to come together as part of the Kindergarten community.

Narelle's knowledge and expertise help her create tremendous learning opportunities for her kindergarten children, as well as a 'beautiful, welcoming and caring atmosphere'.

Narelle's National Award is for Leadership and Development.

POSITION	OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES	CATEGORY	SUBJECTS/LEVEL TAUGHT	YEARS TEACHING
Teacher	Launch into Learning	Early Childhood	Kindergarten	37
YEARS AT THIS SCHOOL/CENTRE	SCHOOL TYPE	NOMINATED BY	TOWN/SUBURB	STATE AND POSTCODE
3	Government	Parent	West Hobart	TAS, 7000

CONTACT DETAILS:

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What is the most challenging aspect of being a teacher?

Juggling time constraints would probably be the most challenging aspect of teaching as this encompasses so many other areas – thorough planning takes time as does the gathering of resources. Setting up exciting learning experiences, documenting children's thoughts, keeping on top of assessment, reporting to parents, dealing with occupational therapists, speech pathologists, school psychologists are all a big part of the school week. I think many teachers feel they are never quite achieving everything they aspire to as so many other issues are included in a 'typical' week.

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?

Teacher quality: I believe we have many very dedicated and professional members of the teaching profession but we need to have some kind of accountability. While we want teachers to retain their uniqueness I think the introduction of the National Standards is very important. Working with your principal to produce a professional development plan helps you to focus on your priorities and what areas you need to strengthen.

Teacher training: University teaches pre-service teachers about the National Curriculum while supervising teachers in schools model behaviour management, time management, organisation, timetabling, relating to parents, teaching children with special needs, and a host of other skills whilst maintaining a high level of learning in their own classrooms. Various elements of the curriculum are taught as discrete units with discrete assessment tasks without providing pre-service teachers with the practical skills or broader contexts to facilitate the integration of all these elements in their classrooms.

How do you think teacher training could be improved?

We have a national curriculum but not a national approach to teacher training. There needs to be more continuity between the states and territories. For example, in NSW the masters course is one year, and two years in Tasmania.

More practical experience for pre-service teachers - In the real classroom we have to work with a variety of academic levels, behaviours and learning styles. These topics need to be at the forefront of teacher education. Behaviour management strategies should be a high priority as many of our newly trained teachers are sent to schools where student behaviour needs to be addressed before any curriculum content can be delivered.

What advice would you give a new graduate?

Don't try to do it all! Ask for advice from colleagues but only take on board what you are comfortable with. Don't be afraid to rethink your planning or organisation. Don't feel like you have failed if something doesn't work—try again.

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

I would like to see a limit on class sizes. Some research concludes that class size doesn't matter but after 37 years of teaching, I know that each year I had an early childhood class of around 20 students I was able to provide more individualised teaching.