

2015 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards

National Award Recipient



Radha Babicci

Emmerick Street Community Preschool, Lilyfield, NSW

Radha Babicci introduces mindfulness techniques to her early learners at Emmerick Street Community Preschool in Lilyfield, NSW. She has found that meditation, belly breathing and yoga increase the children's capacities to focus, listen and stay calm.

Encouraging children to talk about their emotions is also high on Radha's priorities and she interlinks it with the practice of mindfulness. She has found that teaching children to articulate their feelings helps them understand their emotions and how to deal with them. Radha further explores this topic by playing clips from the movie Inside Out to introduce the subjects of happiness, anger, sadness and fear. The children identify situations that give rise to these emotions and talk about appropriate ways to deal with them.

Mindfulness is not restricted to the children, and Radha extends it to the educators and staff as well. She has found that teaching educators about self-regulation and mindfulness helps tune into children's emotional needs better, and has observed changes in the way they respond to children's behaviour. Rather than seeing children's challenging behaviour as something 'to deal with' they look for underlying stressors that might be causing it.

Radha ensures the local community plays a role in the preschool too, and the children visit the nearby aged-care facility and galleries and parks. She has also invited a local Aboriginal woman to come into the preschool once a fortnight to work with the children to develop deeper understandings of Indigenous perspectives and culture.

Radha's National Award is for Leadership and Development.

POSITION	OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES	CATEGORY	SUBJECTS/LEVEL TAUGHT	YEARS TEACHING
Director	Teaching Director	Early Childhood		8
YEARS AT THIS SCHOOL/CENTRE	SCHOOL TYPE	NOMINATED BY	TOWN/SUBURB	STATE AND POSTCODE
4.5	Community	Parent	Lilyfield	NSW, 2040

CONTACT DETAILS:

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What is the most challenging aspect of being a teacher?

Being present while trying to support children's learning and get everything done effectively and intentionally is the big challenge of teaching. We can be pulled in so many directions as a teacher, yet the core of what we do is to support children's learning and to do this we need to be present with them.

I need to be present to support children's learning but also when talking to families, managing staff and doing leadership tasks. Each of these require my focus and the challenge is remain focused and intentional throughout the day with these responsibilities.

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?

Early childhood education is the most important time for children's development and a time where they can develop the skills for lifelong learning. I think the training we have in early childhood is great and I found it very inspiring, but I do think some improvements could be made to improve teacher training and quality to meet the changing needs and expectations of today's world.

How do you think teacher training could be improved?

I think mindfulness should be a standard part of teacher training for the benefit of both teachers and students. I see this being used by teachers to effectively deal with the emotional content of their work and minimise their stress and to support children to deal with life's challenges effectively. An increased focus on social and emotional training for supporting children in this area would be a great addition to teacher training too, as a lot of research is coming out showing how important this is for lifelong success.

I also think teacher training needs to have neuroscience included as current research and literature is showing that these understandings of how the brain works can help us to develop new strategies for learning and also an understanding of ourselves.

Another way to improve teacher training would be to match new graduates with a mentor, particularly in early childhood settings. This could help those situations when you are the only university trained early childhood teacher and are expected to take on a leadership role very early in your career.

What advice would you give a new graduate?

I remember when I graduated I thought that was it I was a teacher. But that was just the beginning. To a new graduate I would say know you are going to learn so much more when you start working as a teacher. Don't just think inside the box as you will find inspiration for your teaching from many unexpected sources.

Find your teaching style but also remember you will learn from any work environment. Be open to learning from those around you and the good and the bad experiences.

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

Increase the time we have for programming and professional discussions and decrease administration tasks. A quality program needs lots of thought behind it and sometimes I feel all the other things we need to do can get in the way of us reaching the level of quality we aspire to.

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