

**Embargoed: Until 6am Friday 16 March 2018**

## **NSW teachers earn national recognition with awards**

Three New South Wales teachers will receive national awards at the ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (ASG NEiTA) today at a presentation ceremony in Melbourne.

Elana Shatari from Mount Sinai College (Maroubra), Nicolette Wheaton from MET Armidale Campus and Catherine McCann from New England Girls' School (NEGS) in Armidale will join 9 other fine educators from across Australia in receiving the top awards.

Selected from around 1450 nominations in 2017, the 12 national award recipients will be honoured for their inspiring and innovative contribution to teaching. Now in its 23<sup>rd</sup> year, the ASG NEiTA awards have contributed more than \$1 million in professional development grants to outstanding teachers in Australia and New Zealand.

Elana Shatari is the sole music teacher at Mount Sinai College and has been described as a 'rarity amongst educators' by a board trustee. Elana will also receive an ASG NEiTA Innovation Award.

Teaching at a Jewish school for 23 years, Elana has woven Jewish music, singing, dance, composition and listening into the NSW Department of Education curriculum, allowing students to immerse in their musical heritage.

Elana says she hopes to pass on the heritage of Jewish music to many generations, using 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching techniques combined with the Orff/Kodaly approach.

"Carl Orff, a German composer, lived by the saying 'Tell me I forget, show me I remember, involve me I understand'. I have taken his words to heart and make my students are always creating—they don't have time to be bored and disengaged.

"This concept is essential for those with challenges such as ADHD or autism or sometimes students who don't see the value in music lessons. My greatest achievements are from the students that have learning challenges and or struggle academically. It gives me personal satisfaction that I'm helping a child have a successful day, use growth mindset in their attitude and accomplish a task that might have been unreachable. It's about orchestrating opportunities to allow their confidence to flourish."

She also considers herself to be a 'Kdorff' teacher.

"Zoltan Kodaly, a Hungarian music educator based his program on singing and was also very involved in promoting nationalism through music in the classroom, promoting teaching children in their mother tongue."

"I have created techniques of teaching songs and music associated with different festivals by singing, dancing, creating movement, developing iPad and smart board lessons composition using GarageBand techniques, percussion instruments, recorders, xylophones and boomwhackers as tools. I have an empathetic rapport with all my students, making teaching the best job in the world.

"A musical marriage of both Orff and Kodaly is the success to my success".

In Nicolette Wheaton's classroom, you'll find her students designing, building and testing solar cars and boats, launching rockets and mixing and burning chemicals.

The science teacher at MET Armidale Campus was nominated by a board trustee for her outstanding passion in engaging students in their learning to create an intrinsic desire for education.

Nicolette who teaches across physics, senior science and chemistry says, 'We experiment and investigate as much as we can. Most of all though, I have also ensured that my programs are predominately built with fun, hands-on, concrete learning activities.'

She has worked with NASA Scientists and as a Space Bound participant in Australia and in the USA and is also a recipient of the Churchill Fellowship.

"I have an obsession with Mars Rovers and engagement of students in STEM through Mars Exploration."

Nicolette draws on Harvard University's Project Zero (PZ) and Advancing Science Through Enhancing Learning in the Laboratory (ASELL) strategies to encourage critical, creative and innovative thinking in inquiry.

"My students observe, infer and then develop authentic research questions that they seek to answer through hands-on investigation. Using these methods, new concepts are accessible to all students and there is greater opportunity for greater extension and enrichment. The student also become more confident in taking risks and are more willing to contribute their background knowledge.

"The preparation required for such open and innovative lessons is extensive, but the increase in engagement and improvement in individual student's learning outcomes has made it more than worthwhile."

Nicolette's students have competed and achieved success in: the University of Newcastle's Science and Engineering Challenge (Year 9 and 10 students, 1st place 2017); STANSW Young Scientist Awards, ICAS Science Competition and participated in the MAAS Mars Lab program.

Catherine McCann is the transition teacher at NEGS junior school in Armadale.

She was nominated by a parent who says Catherine has built a strong reputation for the transition program and distinguished herself as an enthusiastic and inspirational early childhood educator.

"Catherine displays a genuine passion for her teaching practice and fosters strong connections between the school and families as they commence their learning journey."

Catherine says the excitement of learning has become contagious in her classroom.

She says 'igniting the spark' is at the heart of her teaching and incorporates Maker Spaces and Making Thinking Visible (MTV) routines, which complement each other, into her daily practice.

"I want children in my care to really think and learn, not to just memorise facts and copy others like sheep.

"MTV routines encourage children to think out loud, to question, observe, share ideas and encourage deep reflection. The Maker Space area gives the children the opportunity to further extend their thoughts and knowledge, to express their ideas and to solve problems creatively, independently and in groups. When working in small groups I observe children sparking ideas off one another, developing skills in collaboration and communication.

Catherine adds, "When the focus is on the child's thinking rather than correct answers, the child becomes aware that their thinking is valued as are the amazing discoveries that they can make independently. It also teaches me that the children understand, and what they want to know more about."

She also has worked with children with additional needs, consulting with speech and occupational therapists.

"Having worked in special schools I am well aware of seeking intervention as early as possible and working alongside families and specialists to create a collaborative plan with achievable and measurable goals.

"Our Sensory Gym was created in consultation with an occupational therapist to support each child's sensory development. The gym program has been a valuable resource for children with sensory processing disorder and has helped students with physical coordination and regulation of emotions."

The national recipients are selected by a panel of seven judges comprising Director of Early Learning, Ruyton Grammar School, Sarah Denholm; Director of Collegiate Institute, Julie Rimes; Zig Zag Public School and previous ASG NEiTA national recipient, Tiffany Sirisavath; Principal, Saddleworth Primary School and previous ASG NEiTA national recipient, Sheree Mader; Director of Leadership, The Southport School and 2016 ASG NEiTA national recipient, Keith Fennell; Emmanuel Christian School, previous ASG NEiTA national recipient and Space Camp leader, Drew Roberts and ASG NEiTA Chairman Allen Blewitt.

The selection process is rigorous, including a comprehensive nomination outline, a written paper and video presentation by the nominated teacher.

Parents, grandparents, secondary student councils, school boards, councils, parent associations, committees of management and community organisations throughout Australia nominated the 12 deserving and inspirational recipients.

ASG NEiTA Chairman Allen Blewitt says the national recipients have made their mark in local communities throughout Australia.

"It's so wonderful to see teachers being singled out by members of the community for their personal contribution to education. It's in local townships, villages and indeed larger, city centres where our ASG NEiTA recipients can be the heartbeat of these communities. For every student they teach, they could be impacting multiple lives as they establish relationships with parents, grandparents and connect the home and school life, creating an eco-system of continued and shared learning and support networks.

"The thread that ties our 12 ASG NEiTA recipients and brings communities together are their common values and educational aspirations. Motivating students to push themselves, creating inclusive spaces, identifying specific developmental and communication needs, and letting students take charge of their learning are the key drivers behind teaching strategies and innovative approaches happening every day in schools.

"I thank our ASG NEiTA recipients for their passion and persistence in teaching today's young people and for the communities who nominated them, in recognising their outstanding and inspirational qualities."

ASG CEO Tim Mitchell-Adams says the ASG NEiTA recipients are passing on one of the most valuable gifts a young person can receive.

"I congratulate the ASG NEiTA recipients for their significant and personal contribution in achieving better education outcomes for Australian school children. Teachers have an enormous responsibility and right from early childhood education, our ASG NEiTA recipients are putting the building blocks together so that young people are equipped to become confident and competent lifelong learners.

"As students navigate their educational and life journey, our ASG NEiTA recipients are going on a journey of their own. A journey of excitement and wonder as they see their students achieve, through taking risks, accepting challenges and breaking down barriers. Some of these teachers have seen students blossom on the world stage and have careers they love. Our ASG NEiTA recipients are a huge part of these success stories, encouraging, mentoring and leading students to map out their future and reach their full potential, regardless of what that looks like. This is why ASG NEiTA has thrived for the last 21 years. The community thanks and applauds you for the countless hours and dedication you put into teaching their children."

The 12 national recipients will each receive \$5000 professional development grants. For more information and to view their ASG NEiTA profiles go to: [www.asg.com.au/neita](http://www.asg.com.au/neita)

**For more information, images or to arrange interviews please contact:**

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**Editor's notes:**

*The Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) is a member owned organisation, helping to create educational opportunities for children. ASG has been helping families and their children for more than 40 years. During this time, more than 540,000 children have been enrolled with ASG and more than \$2.8 billion in education benefits and scholarship payments returned to members.*

*The ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (NEiTA) started in 1994 in Australia and 1996 in New Zealand. Since inception, more than 35,500 teachers have been nominated by the community in the two countries. More than 1000 teachers have received \$1,000,000 in professional development grants, prizes and endowments.*

*For more information visit: [www.asg.com.au](http://www.asg.com.au)*