

2007 National Excellence In Teaching Awards

State and Territory Teaching Excellence Award Recipient



Gabrielle Connell

Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Development, Graduate Diploma in Special Education

Albury Preschool, Albury, New South Wales

Nominated By: Committee of Management

Position: Kindergarten Teacher • Level taught: Special Education • School type: Government • Town: Albury • Category: Early Childhood • State: NSW

Free early childhood education advocate

Gabrielle Connell has introduced many new technology advances to Albury Preschool. Smart boards – technology-enhanced whiteboards that encourage interactive learning – now feature prominently in the classrooms, while digital portfolios record the day-to-day learning experiences of Albury Preschool students.

Gabrielle has been a dedicated advocate for the movement to provide free preschool education for all NSW children. She is a voluntary member of SCAN (Supporting Children with Additional Needs) and is a member of the Albury District Children's Week Committee. She was one of the founding members of *Children's Choice* lobby group and has coordinated its statewide activities in an effort to gain higher funding levels for community-based preschools. For her tireless efforts, she was recently awarded the *Early Childhood Australia Advocacy Award*.

Insight

Q: In your opinion, what makes a good teacher?

A: Flexibility and the ability to embrace change in the community and the profession. A teacher needs to understand the community's needs in order to deliver the best education to the children he/she teaches.

Q: How do you maintain your enthusiasm for teaching?

A: No day is the same – there are always new challenges. Children take different directions, families are dynamic and the profession is evolving. The variety and unpredictability helps maintain my enthusiasm.

Q: In hindsight, what do you wish your training provided you with more of?

A: Practical experience. Trainee teachers should be part of a school or preschool for the length of their training to learn how a school runs, to interact with families and staff, and to understand all the routine things.

Q: What is the most difficult aspect of teaching today?

A: The lack of money to provide optimum child to staff ratios, equipment, programs for additional needs, support for children with difficulties, and family support. Also the regulatory compliance issues we have to deal with.

Q: What is your greatest challenge as a teacher?

A: Fitting everything in and making sure it is completed to the best of my ability. Making the time to read and take part in professional development, committees, programs, mentoring etc. is a huge challenge.

Q: How has teaching changed over the years?

A: For Early Childhood I believe the changes are mostly positive. We are looking at children as capable, already skilled individuals able to be responsible for their own learning. It is so much more dynamic and exciting.

Q: What is the single most important thing you, as a teacher, can do to connect with individual students?

A: Listen to them and always view children from the positive – they are capable and skilled with so much to offer.

Q: If you were the Minister for Education, Science and Training for a week, what would you try to change?

A: Reduce staff to student ratios across all age groups, portray teachers and the profession in a more positive light, and introduce free preschool education for all children.

Q: What keeps you awake at night?

A: Worrying about having time to do everything. Worrying about children missing out on vital years of education because of under-funding in preschools and fees being beyond reach of the average family.

Q: If your students could describe you in three words, what would they say?

A: Gabe – you're funny!

Contact Details:

Director/teacher: Gabrielle Connell
Phone: (02) 6021 2050 or 0414 371 816
Email: presalbury@dragnet.com.au

President of Committee Of Management:
Kellie Kadaoui
Phone: (02) 6023 6388 or 0422 165 271

For further information, please contact:

Janet Thomas, Public Relations, ASG on behalf of the NEiTA Foundation.
Telephone: (03) 9276 7758 Mobile: 0402 837 758 Email: publicrelations@asg.com.au

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