

# 2007 National Excellence In Teaching Awards

## State and Territory Teaching Excellence Award Recipient



## Heather Grunwald

Bachelor of Education (Primary), German (Intermediate), Accreditation to Teach German

Olinda Primary School, Olinda, Victoria

Nominated by: School parent

Position: Primary Teacher • Level taught: General Primary • School type: Government • Town: Olinda • Category: Primary • State: VIC

### *A vibrant member of the school community*

Heather Grunwald is a vibrant and tireless member of Olinda Primary's small school community.

As well as general primary teaching duties and German language classes, Heather is also heavily involved in community-oriented activities that raise the children's awareness of their local environment.

Heather instigated and runs programs on energy conservation and waste reduction within the school. She has implemented the practice of peer mediation among the students, and established a school student council and a buddies program for new students. Heather has organised funding for Olinda Primary to run programs to help prevent youth suicide. It seems little wonder that teachers, parents and students alike, describe Heather as an integral part of their school community.

## *Insight*

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

A: Building rapport with your class. If you are fair, treat students respectfully, and help them gain resilience, and a connection to their community, you have made a good start.

*Q: How do you maintain your enthusiasm for teaching?*

A: You have to consider yourself a learner first and foremost. When you view yourself in this way the challenges are endless.

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

A: More time in schools like an apprenticeship where you work closely with experienced teachers performing different roles within the education system.

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

A: The many roles expected of teachers due to societal changes, such as a call for more social work strategies. Also, the media calls for schools to fill the gaps created by pressure on families.

*Q: What is your greatest challenge as a teacher?*

A: To meaningfully connect with students so they feel motivated, challenged and valued. We need to see each child's potential as an important addition to our community's future.

*Q: How has teaching changed over the years?*

A: Teachers wear a lot more hats – that is, responsibilities. The job has become a lot more complex nowadays than just teaching, as have most professions within our society.

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

A: To be genuinely interested in their lives and aspirations is crucial. You can have high expectations but also give them the wherewithal to achieve them.

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

A: Simplify the curriculum to better reflect children's aspirations and prepare them for an unknown future. Redesign classrooms and reduce class sizes to enable more individual attention and a positive atmosphere.

*Q: What keeps you awake at night?*

A: Thinking about how to best cater for individual students' needs. Sometimes it is difficult to switch off – teaching is not a career that enables you to do that.

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

A: Caring, patient, and weird.

### **Contact Details:**

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