

Groundbreaking education research takes teachers overseas

Four Australian teachers travel to find new ways to teach and learn with the Churchill Fellowship



Churchill Fellowship Award winners Liz Healy (left) will study support of graduate teachers in the US and Louise Burke (right) is investigating management of non-physical aggression

Four Western Australian educators awarded the prestigious Churchill Fellowship earlier this year may have widely different motivations but they share a common goal – to seek out and learn from groundbreaking programs across the globe for the betterment of education in Australia.

Secondary music teacher, Wendy-Cara Dugmore, Professional Learning Institute manager for educational development, Liz Healy, Kingsley Primary School principal, Louise Burke and principal consultant, Robyn Cleaver, are among the 120 Churchill Fellowship winners given the opportunity to travel abroad in search of best-practice teaching methods in specific areas of research.

Travelling to the US to investigate innovative ways of supporting new teaching graduates, Liz Healy sees the fellowship as an opportunity to enhance the programs that are currently in place for teachers beginning their careers in WA public schools.

As the manager of educational development at the DET's Professional Learning Institute,

Liz's work has seen her become more aware of the issues facing newly graduated teachers since implementing the Department's Graduate Induction Program in 2006.

"As I became closer to the issues, I kept thinking 'What more can we do to help these young people?'" Liz said. "Many of them have a sense of being overwhelmed.

"Frequently they aren't getting the support they need in the workplace and they feel isolated – as a result many are leaving the profession."

Scouting the globe to identify programs which have increased teacher retention, Liz has found examples in California, New York, Arizona and Louisiana which may help to address the issues that saw 22 per cent of new teachers leave the Department in 2006.

She believes that looking at the unique issues facing the highly networked generation Y graduates may hold a key to combating their feelings of isolation and lack of self-efficacy and has found a program in California which demonstrates this, along with 'the mother of all induction programs' in place in Arizona.

Just like Liz, WA principal consultant Robyn Cleaver is excited by the opportunity of winning a Churchill Fellowship yet is all too aware of the immense responsibility that comes with receiving such a prize.

"Someone is putting significant trust in you as a recipient – it is a position that comes with great responsibility," Robyn said.

Robyn is compiling an eight-week itinerary for her fact-finding mission to the US and Canada researching methods of improving opportunities for gifted and talented (G&T) students in rural areas.

She said the tyranny of distance in WA called for intelligent on-line solutions for reaching gifted students who may be one of only a handful of G&T students in a town.

Online programs in Iowa and at Stanford University offer great potential and Robyn also plans to delve into residential programs which focus on bringing G&T students from regional areas to a central location for intensive study.

Her journey will end with a visit to the World Gifted Conference in Vancouver.



Wendy-Cara Dugmore will use her Fellowship to visit the Kodaly Institute in Hungary

“I just feel like, these things happen to other people – not to me,” Robyn said. “I really hope that my research allows me to make a significant difference to the way things are currently done.”

For secondary music teacher Wendy-Cara Dugmore, winning a Churchill Fellowship will allow her to delve deeper into the Kodaly Music Pedagogy with a visit to the Kodaly institute in Hungary.

“From a young age I was fortunate to be a student of this methodology without even realising it,” Wendy-Cara said. “I went on to do my masters and in Queensland completed my Kodaly study. Winning the fellowship allows me to visit the Kodaly Institute and take a closer look at the methodology.”

She said many primary schools incorporate elements of Kodaly in their music tuition, few use the detailed sequential development throughout their programs. However, this specialised technique is suited for all musicians developing individual musicianship from early childhood development to professional musician.

“There are so many ways that these methods could be put to use more effectively,” Wendy-Cara said.

For Louise Burke, her passion is the management of non-physical aggression among girls, sparked when she first read *Queen Bees & Wannabes* by Rosalind Wiseman who cracks the ‘girl code’ and explains how girls’ friendships are the key to enduring adolescence as well as the biggest threat to their happiness and well-being.



Robyn Cleaver's Fellowship will take her to the US and Canada to study teaching gifted kids

“Last year I came in contact with a group of girls who were particularly adept in using this subtle form of bullying. What I was observing was so incredibly destructive,” Louise said.

Starting in October, Louise will visit New York to study Rosalind Wiseman’s ‘Owning Up’ program and will attend the national convention of the Ophelia Project during her 71-day trip, which also takes in British Columbia and Chicago.

“Relational aggression has only recently been recognised as a form of bullying,” Louise said.

“I am hoping to come away with a sense of how the different communities support girls.

“I think ultimately, we need to support our girls so that they can become more confident and able to deal with these types of relationships.”

Since the Churchill Trust was established in 1965, more than 3200 Churchill Fellows have made valuable research contributions to education across Australia.

Recipients receive an average of \$25,000 to undergo research abroad. Visit www.churchilltrust.com.au to find out more.