Citation for the ALEA Medal
Helen Chatto
July 2017

Helen Chatto has been an active member of ALEA since joining the association in 1984. From this time, she has been a dynamic ambassador on behalf of the association and her expertise has been recognised within the NT and nationally as a recipient of a number of teaching and leadership awards. As a teacher, and more recently Principal of Girraween Primary School, she has been energetic in her pursuits to engage other principals and many teachers, to become active members of the association. She has strongly influenced teachers to become members, present at conferences, write for the journals and take active leadership roles in the association.

Helen's leadership in the association has been clearly evident at local, state and national levels. She has had an active role in the Top End Local Council where she has served as president, treasurer and secretary in this successful Local Council. Critical too, has been her ability to bring people into the Local Council and offer mentorship in ways that are supportive of their professional needs and respectful to the demands on teachers' time. This is more recently evident in her coaching and mentoring of the current president and vice president. Her contributions to National Council as State Director Northern Territory from July 2008 to 2016 have been considerable.

Helen is acutely aware of the needs of teachers and principals at local, state and national levels. As both a Principal and ALEA National Council member, Helen has sought to understand teachers’ everyday literacy teaching and learning needs and in response, has been instrumental in organising highly practical professional development opportunities to support sound literacy pedagogical practices. These are always firmly embedded in contemporary theory and best practice. Helen is well connected with other literacy educators and has invited key literacy practitioners, authors and researchers to build professional learning momentum in the NT. Quality professional development for teachers focused on literacy is something Helen has been instrumental in delivering to the NT. In addition to external practitioners, Helen delivers a variety of professional learning around reading and writing to her own staff, parents and those of the wider school community.

Helen co-convened the National ALEA/AATE conference in Darwin in 2014. Her ability to plan and run the conference on top of her busy Principalship (with a considerably small team) was testament to her literacy knowledge, organisational skills and networking ability, all of which contributed greatly to the overall high success of the conference.

During her time on ALEA National Council Helen facilitated a Literacy Links project where she organised for professional development to be delivered to teachers in Alice Springs. She demonstrated literacy expertise as co-creator of the “Principals Leading Literacy - what works and why?” ClassMovie and publications such as “Leading Literacy: What works and why” in the ALEA newsletter (2013). Helen served as the ALEA representative on the Asia Education Foundation (AEF) committee contributing to the “Engage with Asia” project and has worked alongside others to forge closer links between ALEA and the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA). She has actively supported initiatives such as the ALEA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mentoring program and ALEA’s involvement in National Literacy and Numeracy Week and takes every opportunity to promote the aims and purposes of ALEA.

Helen’s daughter recalls attending ALEA meetings with her mother as a child, and shares that she now attends ALEA conferences as a teacher of 10 years with her mother as a colleague and valuable mentor. An important belief that Helen holds and practices is building capacity within the professional ALEA family. To this end she quietly encourages and mentors educators and leaders to share their professional expertise and knowledge beyond their classrooms and schools and state to participate in a national professional learning community.

It is therefore with great pleasure that ALEA honours Helen Chatto with the ALEA Medal in recognition of her outstanding contribution to ALEA over many years.