

Queen's Birthday Honour for Dr Helen Moore

Membership of the Order of Australia for Dr Helen Moore announced in 2019 Queen's birthday Honours

As briefly mentioned in last month's VicTESOL Bulletin, VicTESOL members may have noticed this announcement of an award of membership of the Order of Australia in this year's Queen's Birthday honours list:

Dr Helen Margaret MOORE Cook ACT 2614 For significant service to English language education, and to community music.

VicTESOL congratulates Helen on this acknowledgment of her many contributions. VicTESOL members who were students or colleagues of Helen are very happy to see Helen's tireless work and advocacy for TESOL recognised in this way. A review of her many achievements also helps us to understand issues that confront the profession and the importance of professional associations such as VicTESOL and ACTA.

Helen completed her undergraduate studies at the Australian National University and her teacher education at the University of Sydney. She then worked as a teacher in Papua New Guinea before completing a Master of Applied Linguistics at Lancaster University. She was then appointed to the School of Education at La Trobe University in 1975. At the time of her appointment TESOL was a rapidly expanding area within schools, as government funding at last tried to catch up with the needs created by the post-war immigrant boom to provide systematic support to immigrant children. The well-established support for adults was still in need of formal recognition and a career structure. ESL teaching, as it was then known, had grown very quickly, while relatively few courses and qualifications were available for teachers, and many teachers working in the field were 'feeling their way', often working as much from good intentions as a solid professional training that was hard to access. At La Trobe Helen taught in the pre-service 'TESL' method course in the secondary Diploma in Education course and set up a specialist (post Graduate) Bachelor program aimed at the many teachers without formal qualifications teaching ESL in schools and the Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP). While not the only option of its type, this course developed a reputation as the preeminent TESOL program in Victoria and experienced strong demand. Many graduates of the course subsequently moved into senior and leadership positions in ESL education in schools, the AMEP and TAFE colleges, as well taking up academic positions in TESOL in Australian and international universities. In developing the content of the program taught at La Trobe, Helen's approach engaged teachers' professional experience in developing principled responses to the challenges presented by combinations of theoretical linguistic, moral and professional issues facing teachers. This highly reflective and intellectual approach was integrated with intensely practical materials design issues. One strategy she used was to follow a clear explanation of a body of theory or an area of research with tasks that asked her students to discuss and explore the implications of the issue for what they were going to do in class the next day. Reflecting her commitment to acknowledging the professional expertise of teachers, Helen had pioneered the materials development element of her course in co-operation with staff from the (then) Victorian Department of Education who also used a similar approach in materials development workshops for practising teachers.

But Helen's work at that time went well beyond her achievements in teaching. There was a lack of clarity about requirements that should apply to qualifications and awards in TESOL, and confusion about pathways for professional development and recognition of qualifications in the field. Helen was instrumental in working with colleagues from all jurisdictions to bring together administrators and ESL educators from school and adult education providers, and higher education institutions. This collaborative work set up consistent guidelines for TESOL teacher education courses in Victoria. This work provided a very strong foundation for a well-qualified professional work force and the resilience of TESOL programs as universities restructured degrees in the 1990s. Across Victorian universities Helen's work became the basis of a well-articulated suite of awards in TESOL, including TESL method, Graduate Certificate in TESOL, Master of Applied Linguistics or Master of Education (TESOL) and PhD studies that met the needs of teachers as well as the professional learning needs of TESOL providers. Helen also worked with colleagues at the then Canberra CAE (now the University of Canberra) to organise a series of national conferences of TESOL teacher educators and providers.

Helen's recognition of the strengths and capacities of teachers extended to developing ways of recognising and building on the knowledge and resources of migrant and refugee teachers who had come to Australia. She was also responsible for an innovative program at La Trobe that supported teacher trainees from overseas completing courses to meet requirements to teach in Victorian schools – and supported this by challenging employing and accrediting authorities to develop processes to support teachers from these backgrounds.

Helen's work was not restricted to Australia. With other members of staff of the School of Education Helen was active in pioneering connections with China, both in terms of what staff from La Trobe could offer in China and how students from China could be supported in their studies in Australia.

After a short period as Director of the Language Centre at La Trobe in the early 1990s, Helen left to pursue doctoral studies under the supervision of Dr Kari Dehli at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto. Building on her work at La Trobe, Helen's PhD examined the development of TESOL policy in Australian education, taking a critical perspective on the practices and problems involved in supporting sound and strong professional practice and programs through the shifting sands of political and policy upheavals and evolution.

On completion of her thesis, Helen returned to Canberra. She worked as a freelance researcher, being involved in research projects conducted by the AMEP Research Centre. She became a committee member of ATESOL ACT and one of its representatives on the ACTA Council. As ACTA Policy convenor in recent years Helen has been tireless in exploring issues confronting the profession and in coordinating discussions between ACTA affiliate organisations in the different states and territories. She has coordinated and led the development of extensive and well-considered responses to policy proposals or reviews, (most recently in relation to the AMEP), and coordinating and making representations to politicians and others on behalf of ACTA and its members.

She has also made significant contributions to community campaigns in relation to historic buildings and worked to support community music programs in the ACT.

Helen is a key figure in many issues that centre around the values associated with social inclusion and the role of language in enhancing it. Her contributions to the community have always transcended a narrow engagement with the teaching of English as an additional language. Her engagement as an academic and community activist are characterised by a concern for supporting the widest possible inclusion in processes that shape Australia. This characterises her teaching, her national and state-based education policy activism and her work with professional associations such as the Australian Council of TESOL Associations and the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia.

Helen has been influential in shaping the TESOL profession in Victoria and continues this work through her role as ACTA Policy convenor. The many VicTESOL members who have been students and colleagues of Helen congratulate her on the well-deserved award and recognition. For those not familiar with Helen or her work, there are lessons in understanding her achievements in order to find viable ways of navigating the turbulent times in which we work at the moment.

Dr Howard Nicholas

Dr Alan Williams

Howard and Alan were colleagues of Dr Helen Moore at the School of Education, La Trobe University in the 1980s and 1990s. Alan was also a student of Helen in the graduate Bachelor of Education (TESOL) program in the early 1980s.

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