

NEWS RELEASE

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Cultivating critical learners

Dr Arlene Holmes-Henderson, a graduate of the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to discover ways to improve the teaching of critical literacy in UK schools. She travelled to New Zealand and Australia for seven weeks in early 2014 to observe teachers, interview school leaders, meet policymakers and collaborate with researchers.



Arlene is awarded her Churchill Medallion by Dame Mary Peters

Critical literacy means equipping learners with the knowledge and skills they need to critically analyse communication. This involves helping them to identify ways in which language is being used to persuade or manipulate emotions.

'Australia is approximately thirty years ahead of the UK in the field of critical literacy education,' said Arlene. 'It was a fantastic opportunity to learn from their wealth of experience. I became increasingly aware of the challenges and the triumphs which had accompanied the critical education 'movement' over three decades.'

In addition to visiting schools and universities, Arlene was also invited to a meeting with education ministers at the Australian Government in Canberra. She shared her knowledge of educational policy, curriculum change and assessment redesign by giving talks to state governments in Victoria and New South Wales. In New Zealand, she met policymakers at the Ministry of Education and academic colleagues at the Universities of Auckland and Otago. She was interested to note the similarities between the Scottish and New Zealand approaches to curriculum reform.

Impressed by how embedded critical literacy has become in classroom practice in New Zealand and Australia, Arlene will present her recommendations to Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the British Educational Research Association.

Since her return to the UK, Arlene has joined the University of Oxford's Faculty of Classics where she works on the 'Classics in Communities' project (classicsincommunities.org) which aims to increase the teaching of Latin and Classical Greek in UK primary schools.

'My new research involves designing and conducting a study which measures the impact of learning Latin and/or Classical Greek on children's cognitive development. With an international perspective on the role of critical skills in educational policy and practice, I look forward to interrogating the links between critical literacy and Classical languages: two subjects for which I am a passionate advocate.'

Arlene received her Fellow's medallion from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust at a ceremony in Westminster on Wednesday. Her report, '*Reading between the lines: improving the UK's critical literacy education*' can be accessed at <http://goo.gl/Bickel>.

For more information:

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Patron:

Her Majesty The Queen

This living memorial to Sir Winston operates a travelling fellowship scheme which enables British Citizens from all walks of life to acquire knowledge overseas to the benefit of Community and Country. Subjects cover the widest variety of topics: from the arts to industry and leading edge technology; conservation and the environment; social concerns and animal welfare and from exploration and adventure to services for the disabled. As well as promoting a greater understanding between peoples, the experience makes Churchill Fellows more effective at work and in the community. Approximately 100 awards are made annually with an average duration abroad of 4-8 weeks.

Full information and details on how to apply can be found on the Trust's website: wcmt.org.uk

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Notes to Editors

We formed an **Educational** partnership with **The Mercers' Company** (www.mercers.co.uk) to jointly fund 10 Fellowships a year from 2013-2015, to develop linked projects to improve the educational achievement of young people aged 5-19, with particular emphasis on English, Maths, Science and Technology. The Mercers' Company is closely involved with the running of 17 schools across the country and makes a number of grants to improve the availability and quality of education for children and young adults, focused on young people from the ages of 5-25.

