

I've recently returned from a clinical teaching placement in a remote indigenous community in Yirrkala, Northern Territory. I am extremely grateful to have received a NAFEA Scholarship that provided financial assistance, allowing me to engage in an incredible learning experience without any cost-related anxiety! I wish to extend my sincere thanks to the NAFEA team and hope my experiences encourage prospective applicants.

My teaching placement involved teaching a multi-age class of Year 7-12 students for several weeks at Yirrkala School, Yirrkala. I was mentored and supported by local indigenous (Yolgnu) staff and visiting teaching staff, and was responsible for designing, implementing and evaluating learning experiences for my students within a bilingual context. Partnering with local teachers, I helped aid in the development and delivery of in-school lesson and diverse extra-curricular activities; including creative arts, language, sports and environmental stewardship programs. In addition, we were privileged to visit several thriving Homelands communities in extremely remote areas, learning innovative teaching practices directly from indigenous families and their communities.

Constant adventures each weekend saw us learning to care for country with elders, teachers and their families - and learning how country cares for us! Whether we were exploring coastal rainforest, combing beaches and deltas for beautiful shells, or fishing for delicious seafood, we were constantly immersed in community, and quickly felt part of the extended Yirrkala family.

A special highlight included attending the "Galtha," a week-long learning festival designed and delivered by Yirrkala School each year. Galtha is a dynamic learning-on-country experience that celebrates many aspects of indigenous culture and heritage, from creative arts and dance, kinship relationships and political leadership. All lessons are richly informed by intergenerational dialogue and embedded within the context of community participation, as Yirrkala School enables and empowers students of all ages.

I was hugely grateful for the opportunity to observe Yolgnu educators in action, and learn both about and from past, present and emerging indigenous leaders respectively. The learning experience taught me much about bilingual education and indigenous living culture and heritage, refining my TESOL skills and inspiring me to work long-term in a similar indigenous setting in future years.

My professional skills developed quickly, as I learnt to work amongst complex, intercultural staff teams, and developed a better understanding of the nuances, challenges and unique opportunities that are presented to graduate teachers seeking to work in rural and remote settings.

The challenges and opportunities afforded to students undertaking placements in rural areas are many and varied. As a graduate teacher, I was humbled by the time invested in me by mentors and teaching staff, the degree to which I was able to immerse myself in the design of bilingual learning experiences, and the integration of school and community – a gap I find challenging to bridge in Melbourne. In what other context can I teach students in class, before caring for country, training for our next AFL game, beachcombing, camping and sharing picnics altogether, within the same week? Such experiences come with their own highly contextual challenges, but I left my teaching placement keen to return as soon as possible to teach remotely. Having networked with a variety of inspiring graduate teachers now teaching in Yirrkala, I am confident that such enthusiasm and commitment can be sustained across many years.

I cannot recommend this experience enough to prospective applicants – take a leap of faith and enjoy experiencing complex challenges and holistic professional growth! I have developed richly as a graduate

teacher, young community leader and Australian citizen, and I am incredibly grateful for the NAFEA Team that made it financially possible: this experience has become a catalyst for my future engagement in indigenous and bilingual education and will continue shaping me as an educator for years to come!