

NAFEA Scholarship Report - Michaelle Tomolo

My name is Michaelle Tomolo and I am studying a Master of Teaching (Secondary) at the University of Melbourne. With the help of a NAFEA scholarship I was able to undertake my final teaching placement in remote North East Arnhem Land (NEAL). I was placed at Nhulunbuy High School and I worked with Indigenous students in the Liya Djambatj programme.

The teaching placement in NEAL transformed my approach to teaching. In Nhulunbuy I worked with Yolŋu students as well as students from Croker Island where the teachers and students welcomed me into their class with open arms. Throughout the placement I was able to learn from the students about Yolŋu culture, kinship systems and customs. Developing this knowledge of Yolŋu culture has broadened my knowledge not only about remote communities but has allowed me to sensitively introduce Indigenous perspectives into other Australian classroom contexts, a key Australian Professional Standard for Teachers (APST).

In Nhulunbuy I taught English as an Additional Language and Mathematics to a group of students ranging in age from 14 to 17 across Years 10 to 12 who possessed a range of language backgrounds and proficiencies. Given the wide variety of experiences, the placement allowed me to hone in on differentiation by catering to students' diverse needs. In particular, the placement in NEAL allowed me to work with students who were resourceful in ways uncommonly found in metropolitan settings, for example the students' fluency in Yolŋu Matha languages and their deep knowledge about the importance of place and country.

Not only did this experience have a positive influence on my overall teaching practice; it has greatly motivated me to learn from other remote Indigenous educational contexts. In a short time I was lucky to be able to forge some strong connections with the students in an area where ŋapak people (non-Indigenous people) are sometimes a transient presence. During my time in NEAL, it became apparent that maintaining relationships is one of the most important factors in generating positive learning outcomes. What I take away most from this experience for my future practice is an emphasis on relationships, as well as a desire to further develop these relationships in rural and remote educational contexts.

The NAFEA scholarship was pivotal in allowing me to reap the professional and personal benefits of my experience in NEAL. The cost of flights from Darwin to Nhulunbuy alone would have prevented me from undertaking this experience without assistance from NAFEA. The NAFEA scholarship allowed me to support myself independently and focus on the pedagogical and professional applications of the teaching placement. I express my deepest appreciation to the NAFEA Executive Committee for helping me have this experience.

Michaelle Tomolo