

NAFEA report: Natasha Koutsoukis

I recently completed my final teaching placement of my Master of Teaching (Secondary) at the Yirrkala Homelands School in East Arnhem Land. For four weeks I was based in the town of Yirrkala, and travelled and taught at two Homelands – Garrthalala and Dhalinybuy. I travelled as a visiting teacher with my mentor teacher, and while in the Homelands worked in a team-teaching setting, planning and teaching with Indigenous Homeland teachers.

This placement offered the opportunity to teach in a unique setting that is very different to any pre-service teacher placements available in Victoria. There are several Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL Standards) that are concerned with teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. On my two previous placements, I did not feel that I learned much that addressed these standards, which was not in a tokenistic manner. However, this recent placement allowed me to gain a much better understanding of effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the linguistic background and histories of Indigenous students.

One of my learning areas is TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). The students I taught on this placement were all learning English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D). Therefore, I was able to advance my professional skills with regards to implementing TESOL pedagogies. Along with developing my TESOL teaching skills, I was also able to develop my teamwork skills and ability to plan and teach together with colleagues.

Due to the very remote location of this placement, there was a significant cost involved. The NAFEA scholarship greatly assisted financially in being able to go to East Arnhem Land for my final teaching placement. The scholarship allowed me to focus on my studies and not have to worry about taking on extra work to cover the cost of the placement. During this placement, I gained a greater understanding of what it is like to work in a remote school. I experienced many rewarding aspects of working in a remote setting, along with some of the associated challenges. Overall, as a result of undertaking this placement, I feel confident about applying to work as a teacher in remote and rural settings in the future.