



Early childhood students reflecting on professional practical experiences

Stepping outside the comfort zone

At the mid way point in their undergraduate course, three Australian Catholic University pre-service teachers reflect on the impact of their recent professional experience undertaken in rural settings. These students identify their uncertainties of embarking on this four week practical engagement in two rural community kindergartens and also identify the value of being pushed beyond their "comfort zone". A key element of their learning was the opportunity to experience the diversity of children's lives and enhance their awareness of multiple childhoods. The stories shared below present the students' thoughts on how this experience has helped to shape their identities as future early childhood teachers. ACU and the students appreciate the financial assistance provided via a QIEC Super travel scholarship and the support extended to them from the local communities. *By Anthony Shearer and Louise Thomas*

Courtney Dray, 2nd Year Student, Bachelor of Education
(Early Childhood and Primary)

My experience in Mt Isa was one of the most rewarding I have ever had. The people were so welcoming and friendly. Professional I learnt the importance of connecting to the local context. One of many examples of this was the teacher's response to the children playing with guns. In the community guns were a part of the way of life, and as a result the teacher had to come up with a way of responding that connected to the children's experiences. This way was to say that because we do not have gun licenses we can't use guns. I also learnt about how different childhoods can be, and how treating children as if there is one universal childhood is just not plausible.

Katelyn MacArthur, 2nd Year Student, Bachelor of Education
(Early Childhood and Primary)

The QIEC Scholarship provided me with the opportunity to undertake a four week practicum in Emerald. At first I was sceptical of how I would handle being in a rural town for such a long period of time, however, it allowed me to step out of my comfort zone and proved not to be as isolating as I initially thought. My practicum allowed me to see first-hand a quality play-based program, one that built upon the children's strengths and interests. Observing children actively engaged in their own learning allowed me to explore the diverse methods of documentation and how to plan for meaningful follow-up experiences.

Stacey Lenihan, 2nd Year Student Bachelor of Education
(Early Childhood and Primary)

I completed my practical experience in Emerald. This was a fantastic learning experience for me. I had the opportunity to work with and get to know children from a wide range of contexts, many of which were unfamiliar to me. Working in an environment with such diversity has influenced my beliefs as a student, as well as my identity and understanding of myself as a teacher. I have formed understandings about the importance of knowing children and where they have come from in order to facilitate their needs. This experience has helped me to recognise the importance of valuing and recognising diversity within the classroom, and in the community.

"The biggest thing I learned was to never underestimate the abilities of children to accomplish tasks. I would recommend participating in a rural prac to anyone."

"I thoroughly enjoyed my practicum in a rural setting. It allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of the field of Early Childhood Education and the quality of learning that can take place in these settings."

"I believe this to be an important part of the teaching profession, especially in the early years. After having this wonderful experience, I am certain that I would like to live and work in a rural or regional community."



My Early Years Practicum Experience

Vanessa Fowler, 1st Year Bachelor of Education (Primary), Griffith University

Walking into an early year's primary school classroom for the first time was exciting yet daunting. Having not been in a mainstream classroom since I was a student many years earlier, it was quite interesting to see the changes that have evolved. No longer is there individual desks arranged in rows, no longer are pencils and paper seen as the only tools for learning and no longer are classrooms bland and uninspiring.

As a first year Bachelor of Education student, I was entering the designated Year 2 classroom to observe and absorb everything and everyone. I was fortunate to have a very energetic, enthusiastic and passionate supervising teacher who was willing to impart to me his knowledge and insights into teaching.

My first impression of the classroom was that it was busy, both visually as well as physically. Every wall was covered with charts, word walls, and examples of children's art, from waist height to the ceiling including an entire wall of windows blocking out valuable natural light...The room was set up with five pods of tables placed in a semi-circle with a large open area in front of the whiteboard which was used for group teaching experiences...

The ability of a teacher to cater for the needs of every child is an important factor in ensuring that learning is enjoyable and lifelong. I was impressed with my supervising teacher and his willingness to introduce as many hands-on experiences as possible in order to ensure that the message was understood. This method of teaching assisted the children tremendously, particularly in moving from the concrete to the abstract.

"This practicum experience has highlighted the most significant elements of teaching which are reflection, flexibility, behaviour management, scaffolding, and time management. All of these aspects are vital to the smooth operation of a classroom and essential for the learning experience of children in the early years."



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