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Mediation the key to classroom harmony

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Lisa David drove six hours out to Hillvue Public School for her placement. The school is situated in a low socio-economic area on the western outskirts of Tamworth, and has one of the highest rates of indigenous enrolment in the state. Ms David enjoyed her time so much, she spent an additional two weeks at the school on top of her six-week placement with a Year 5/6 composite class.

Tamworth is roughly a six-hour drive from Wollongong. However another scholarship holder, Kathy Patterson, was completing her placement at Muswellbrook, so Kath and I drove to Muswellbrook together and I continued my journey to Tamworth the next day.

Prior to the commencement of the internship, it had been arranged that I would board with a teacher from the school and his family.

I was nervous about staying with a family that I wasn't familiar with, but within hours of arriving at their house, I felt very much at home.

We have become friends and I enjoyed every minute of my stay with them.

The students in the Year 5/6 class I was assigned to had various learning needs. A number had learning difficulties, and classroom behaviour management was one of the big challenges.

Establishing a rapport with the class and becoming familiar with the kids were hugely important, as I continued on with the classroom teacher's program. Interacting with the students in the playground was helpful and I engaged them in as much physical activity and sport as possible.

I was very impressed with the leadership of the principal at Hillvue. Running a school with immense social disadvantage requires great leadership and teamwork.

Many of the students live in poverty. This does not mean they were any less capable or able than students from other areas, it just means the kids are equipped with survival skills and a

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sense of independence most kids their age would not possess.

Good mediating skills were essential as I often dealt with children bringing issues from home to school and it was quite common to break up fights in the playground and classroom.

At the end of the second week on my internship, I got quite frustrated with my class as I felt I was spending the entire day managing behaviour and mediating fights. But the experience showed me that it takes quite a while to establish a sound rapport with a class.

Another thing I realised quickly was that everyone is familiar with most of the community, and that some of the boundaries in urban areas don't necessarily apply in country towns.

I felt the community were very welcoming and supportive of my role as a teacher in the field of Aboriginal education.

However, it is easy to step on toes when you are addressing inequity. Some people were more encouraging than others in regards to Aboriginal education and ways of improving student's learning outcomes. I found the most important thing was to remain true to my beliefs.

My previous school placement on the South Coast taught me never to assume anything and that every community is different. While knowledge and experience assists you when entering a new community, adjusting to the community and its needs is the only way to be accepted.

My time teaching out west in a school with a high indigenous population was the most challenging, yet rewarding experience I have ever had. I met so many great people, had so many interesting experiences, and learnt so much about teaching, about communities, about kids, and about life in general.

I am now permanently placed at Barrack Heights Primary School in Shellharbour. I am teaching Kindergarten, and am very much enjoying my work. My job is fantastic, mostly because the kids are so great. I enjoy each day at work, and am glad that no two days are ever the same.

The challenges I face in my role as a teacher result mostly from a lack of funding.

Kat