

## **“THE INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE”**

**Josie Davidson**

**(4<sup>th</sup> Year BTeach(Sec)/BA)**

*Charles Sturt University  
Wagga Wagga, NSW*

### **INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>**

My name is Josie Davidson and I am in my final year of my double degree - Bachelor of Teaching (Secondary)/Bachelor of Arts at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga.

I have just completed my internship of 11 weeks, broken into a 5 week block in Term 2 and a 6 week block in Term 4, at Northern Plains High School.

Northern Plains High school is located in the small rural town of Northern Plains in the Riverina Region of New South Wales. The 2006 census recorded the town of Northern Plains as having a population of just over 4000 and it is largely a farming and agricultural town. There are currently approximately 400 students enrolled at Northern Plains High School, which is less than it has been in previous years. The school believes this to be due to the drought, as opportunities for agriculture in the area have reduced and more families have moved away and so therefore student numbers have decreased. The school draws students from surrounding districts and is one of two schools in Northern Plains; the other is a private school. It has a well established reputation for sporting and academic excellence and contains special programs to cater for the needs of all students in the town and surrounding areas.

In my first 5 weeks at the school I taught a Year 7 mixed ability English class (7x1hr periods a fortnight), a Year 8 mixed ability English class (7x1hr periods a fortnight), a Year 9 mixed ability English class (7x1hr periods a fortnight), a Year 11 lower ability Standard English class (7x1hr periods a fortnight) and Year 9 mixed ability History class (3x1hr periods a fortnight). When I returned to complete my final 6 weeks at the school, I had all the same classes except my Year 11 English Standard class was traded for a mixed ability Year 7 History class (5x1hr periods a fortnight) which contained all different students to those in my English class.

While I was at the school I took over the roll call group of one of my supervising teachers, also the corresponding SWOT (Study With Out Talking) group on

---

<sup>1</sup> The school's name is a pseudonym

Wednesdays and I also become responsible for supervising and coordinating her sport class on Wednesday afternoons, under her supervision. Additionally, I participated in all staff, welfare and faculty meetings and counselled a number of students with bullying issues, behaviour issues and referred a couple of students to the school councillor. I also performed 2 playground duties per week, one with my mentor and the second with another teacher from the English staffroom. I also initiated the idea and held a number of "essay" help sessions for my Year 9 students during a number of lunch times in the second half of my time at Northern Plains High School, where a number of students came voluntarily for help. The purpose of this was to help students with essay tasks that I had given them in class (both in my English and History classes) and also to help students to develop the skills they were going to need in Year 10. As it was Term 4 and some of these Year 9 students had never written an essay before, I believed it was really important to help them with these skills and that by making the focus an in class task, it prompted more students to take an interest in their essay writing skills and also to help me get the work from a year that was renowned for not submitting tasks.

## **HIGHLIGHTS AND BENEFITS OF MY TIME AT NORTHERN PLAINS HIGH SCHOOL**

There were a number of highlights for me during my time at Northern Plains High school, such as the breakthroughs with two students in particular who had very poor attitudes to teachers and very poor work ethic. I worked with them to the point where their behaviour and work in class improved and they were handing in assessment tasks. I also worked with two Year 8 students with poor literacy skills to assist them in working well in class and also handing in their assessment tasks that they had previously refused to complete. The essay sessions for Year 9 at lunch were a real breakthrough with having such a large number of students come voluntarily in their own time. When I first held the sessions, prior to the due date of the task, there were approximately 10 students attending in their lunchtime. This number decreased after the tasks due date yet remained around 2 or 3 coming to ask for assistance during lunch times after this or for help with other English/History assessment tasks. Even the principal commented that it was impressive to have certain students there that had been attending, due to their behaviour and learning issues.

I feel that I obtained numerous benefits and learnt a lot from my time during my internship at Northern Plains High School. I feel that teaching a number of mixed ability classes in which the range of literacy, social interactional and intellectual skills was diverse provided great opportunities for developing behaviour management strategies as well as content and material suitable for all students in the class.

I think that the concept of the 10 week professional teaching experience is a great idea as it provides a perfect opportunity to bond with a class over the period of a term and also test out numerous teaching strategies and behaviour management

techniques, as well as develop content knowledge for a much longer period of time than in our previous practical teaching experiences. Having my internship split into two blocks meant that I lost the continuity and some of the opportunities this extended period offers, but I also felt it gave me numerous other opportunities in that by teaching a class in Term 2 and then coming back in Term 4 I am able to see how they have developed over the year in terms of their learning and behaviour, and also test my ability to teach the same class again; an opportunity that we don't get in our other practical teaching experiences.

I felt it was great to go back and see how the students had developed. Some students had really made some great improvements while others were on a downhill spiral that I worked very hard to help with their attitude and behaviour. I worked hard with these students in terms of supporting them and assisting them in their submission of assessments, also in being a teacher they felt they could talk to, resulting in 2 instances of bullying being uncovered and resolved. I also worked with the attitude of two Year 9 male students who were rude to their teachers and refused to hand in work. I used discussion and numerous examples of significance and relevance of the content to help engage them, which also worked excellently for the rest of the class as well as these students.

I really enjoyed my time at Northern Plains High School and I feel that it is a fantastic school and I was so fortunate to have been able to spend such a great deal of time there. The English staffroom was so welcoming and incredibly supportive of each other as well as myself, something I haven't seen a great deal of in my practical teaching experiences so far, and also they all had such differing and great experiences and knowledge to share, which they did. It was really a great chance for me to work on my English content and skills, as History is my passion and where most of my practical teaching experiences have been focused on.

In terms of the school itself I also loved the aspect of the Support Unit within the school. This Support Unit allows students with severe autism or conditions that would prevent them from attending a general public school, to attend school everyday with specially trained staff where they study according to their abilities and also engage in activities such as Yoga and music. It is a place where mainstream students with autism/Aspergers or other learning or behavioural difficulties have somewhere safe to come for assistance and also have a member of staff who monitors their work and progress and is aware of their needs if spoken to by teaching staff. I believe this is a great opportunity not only for the students within the support unit but also all the other students in teaching acceptance of differences and such. I was impressed with this aspect of the school.

Another thing I really appreciated at this school, which I have not found as evident in previous practical experiences, is the high expectations the teachers I encountered had of their students. I feel high expectations are crucial in a classroom because if the student feels the teacher has no faith in them they aren't going to work very hard. In contrast, if the students feel safe, comfortable, supported and that their teacher has

faith in them, it creates a much more positive, productive and quality learning environment where the students do make the effort for the most part.

## **CONCLUDING REFLECTION**

I feel that I have learnt so much from my experience at this school and the ability to spend such a great deal of time there was a fantastic opportunity to get to know the staff and the students and learn a great deal from everyone at the school. I feel it is really important to have this 'real' taste of what it's like to be a fulltime teacher and even though my Professional Teaching Experience was broken into two parts, I was really able to watch and appreciate the development of a class over the year. Also I found it very fitting that it was the school I was at for my first prac and have now completed my internship there. It is a very changed school but still with a fantastic and supportive English department.