

ANNA HILL

Early Childhood &
Primary Teaching
Vanuatu

Where the bloody hell WERE you?

In November, 2009, I was fortunate enough to complete one week of my teaching practicum in the Pacific island nation of Vanuatu. Travelling alongside eleven other third year EC students to the capital of Vanuatu, Port Vila, I quickly became immersed in the local Melanesian culture; experiencing what it is like teaching outside of Australia, by planning and implementing lessons in three schools in the area.

The Short Term Program was organised to fit in with our other practicum requirements; which made it possible for us to incorporate the Vanuatu theme into lessons while on placement in Australia. In the weeks leading up to the trip, as students in my classroom prepared projects on Vanuatu, they became just as excited about the trip as I was, and were eager to hear tales from my overseas adventures upon my return.

So, in the early hours of the morning, and under the guidance of our esteemed lecturer, Sharon Milsome, we boarded a plane headed, via Brisbane, to our tropical destination. We were greeted at the airport by a group of local performers, who performed a hearty rendition of 'You Are My Sunshine' for us. And in no time at all, we were lapping up the sunshine, cooling off in the pool, and eagerly planning lessons for the week ahead.

There was an air of anticipation when we arrived at Central School for our first day of teaching in an international classroom. The staff and students regarded us with interest and made us feel very welcome, even holding a morning tea in our honour. I had planned to teach Art in my first lesson; but quickly realised that the Year 3 students were more eager to learn more about my life in Australia.

As I answered a flurry of questions, I felt rather like a celebrity at a press-conference! An education is not something that these children take for granted; they actually look forward to coming to school. It seemed such a stark contrast to others I have encountered on placement in Australia, who openly express their dislike of school. I was struck by the reality that – even though these individuals have few material possessions – they are genuinely happy.

In the subsequent four days, we taught at Port Vila International School (PVIS), and Peter Pan. The conditions of these two schools were vastly different. PVIS was a well-equipped, modern building, and most students were children of Australian or New Zealand expats; whereas, Peter Pan is actually a converted house, with greater class sizes and few teaching resources. Yet, despite their differences, both schools offered some valuable insights into teaching in multicultural settings, particularly the need to be flexible and create open ended tasks.

We were very fortunate that the school day in Vanuatu begins at 7.30am and finishes at 1.30pm, as it enabled us to make the trip even more memorable by participating in some tourist activities. It is amazing to think how much we achieved in the space of one week; from touring a local village, visiting Port Vila markets, trekking up

Waterfall Cascades, dining at island restaurants, sailing on a pirate ship and snorkelling in tropical reefs... to sampling some traditional Melanesian fare, including Kava. Drinking Kava is not an experience I would repeat in a hurry; though I would gladly consume a few more South Pacific cocktails!

I admired Vanuatu for its beautiful crystal-clear waters, its tropical landscapes and friendly locals. But what made my time there so enjoyable was sharing the experience with my peers; whether it involved pooling ideas for lessons, taking in the sights of Port Vila or sharing a laugh over a cocktail at Happy Hour.

The Vanuatu placement has had a positive impact on my teaching style, and I feel sure that it is something that will stand out to prospective employers on my CV. I also have a newfound appreciation of the Australian education system, and I am more understanding of others from different cultural backgrounds. It was an experience that I will NEVER forget!



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FACTS IN BRIEF

Geography

Vanuatu is an archipelago made up of more than 80 islands. These islands sit in the Pacific Ocean, about 2,400km northeast of Australia, and stretch for about 800km.

The capital of Vanuatu is Port Vila, which is located on one of the larger islands called Éfaté. Most of Vanuatu's islands are peaks of volcanic mountain ranges that rise from the ocean floor. Many of the volcanoes are active, including Mount Yasur on the island of Tanna.

Climate

Vanuatu has a tropical, humid climate. The average daily temperature ranges from 22°C to 27°C. Vanuatu has a cyclone period between December and April.

Vanuatu's people

The population of Vanuatu is estimated to be 218,519 (in 2009). The native people of Vanuatu are known as ni-Vanuatu and make up 94 per cent of the population.

The remainder of the population are French, Vietnamese, Chinese, Polynesian or Micronesian. There are also approximately 2,000 Australian and New Zealand expats that live in Port Vila.

LANGUAGES

The main languages spoken in Vanuatu are English, French, and Bislama (a form of pidgin English).

