**Rural and remote teaching podcast series**

**Brittany Nolan – Western Cape College, Weipa**

*Britany Nolan is a secondary Health and Physical Education teacher at Queensland’s remote Western Cape College. She is College Sports Coordinator and is based at the Weipa Campus. She also works in the Intensive Literacy and Numeracy program and was shortlisted for a TeachX- – Excellence in Beginning to Teach Award. Originally from the Sunshine Coast Brittany been teaching in Weipa for four years.*

**Announcer**: This is a Queensland Department of Education podcast.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: Queensland state schools offer many different teaching experiences, including the opportunity to live and work in unique, rural and remote destinations.

Hi, I'm Virginia Bowdidge from the Queensland Department of Education, and in this podcast series, I talk to state school teachers living in unique corners of our vast state. Today Brittany Nolan joins me. Britney teaches secondary health and physical education and is the sport's coordinator for the Weipa campus of the Western Cape college. Weipa is a coastal town on the West coast of Cape York Peninsula. It is about 200 kilometre from Australia's northern tip and about 800 kilometres by road from Cairns.

Thanks for joining me today, Britney, to talk about your time in Weipa.

**Brittany Nolan**: No worries. Thank you for having me.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Why did you choose teaching as a career?

**Brittany Nolan**: I had a great schooling experience that I really enjoyed and I was really inspired by the teachers that I was fortunate enough to have. So I think that really shaped my ideals about the kind of teacher I wanted to be and the experiences I wanted to offer to some students.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: What was your inspiration for becoming a teacher? And what was it about teaching that first attracted you to the profession?

**Brittany Nolan**: I was really wanting to be a positive influence on a young person's life and offer the same positive experience that I received during my time at school.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: And do you have any teachers in your family?

**Brittany Nolan**: My Auntie is actually a teacher. She's now principal. So she really guided me and mentored me during my first few years in the profession.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: And how long have you been teaching?

**Brittany Nolan**: This is my fourth year now.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: How long have you been teaching in Weipa?

**Brittany Nolan**: For all of my four years. So, I began my teaching career up here in Weipa.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: And are you from a city initially?

**Brittany Nolan**: I relocated from the Sunshine Coast.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: Why did you move to Weipa?

**Brittany Nolan:** I was in my final semester of the Graduate Diploma in Education, and I had toyed with the idea of moving remote at some stage of my career. As I came from the Sunshine Coast, I knew it was going to be tough to try and obtain a permanent position there, which made me explore some in different options. It was actually through a discussion with my Auntie who had been remote early in her career that I began looking a bit more seriously at those options.

And as I began to research, I looked into the different regions and Far North Queensland just really stood out and looked like an amazing location. I researched the schools within this region and then came across a video on the Western Cape College website promoting Weipa and highlighting the great lifestyle up here. So I think that sold me quite early.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: So what was it about teaching remotely that drew you in?

**Brittany Nolan:** I was really drawn to the idea of a big adventure, which is certainly what it has been. I also value the important role that we play in the school community as teachers.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: And what is that role do you think?

**Brittany Nolan**: I think we mentor our students, but then we're also able to foster a great relationship with community.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: Were the logistics of the move difficult to navigate?

**Brittany Nolan**: After receiving my offer I was contacted by the department who made the move actually quite simple. As it was quite late in the year, it all seemed to happen really quickly. I had an uplift date booked in for a few weeks later and my car was also getting picked up too. So it happened super fast. And I think that when I reflect back on that time, it was my colleagues and community that made the transition so easy as they were so accommodating and helpful. And it really highlighted to me that the sense of community in a remote location was strong and important as everyone had sort of been here in the same boat at some stage.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: And does the department offer any financial incentives for remote teaching?

**Brittany Nolan**: So depending on the locations, there's quite a few different benefits. In the location where I am, we receive financial allowances in forms of RAIS (Rural Area Incentive Scheme) payments. So, that happens throughout the year. And then you also are eligible to receive more in your third, fourth and fifth years teaching. We also receive a locality allowance each fortnight. We receive extra RAIS leave. So if you have an emergent appointment to attend out of town that you can't do in town, you can receive leave for that. We also get subsidized housing and we get all of our relocation expenses covered, which is great.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: How does it differ to the teaching in an urban or metropolitan setting?

**Brittany Nolan**: As I began my career in Weipa, I can't really make comparisons to an urban or metropolitan setting. However, I do love driving three minutes to school every day and not having to make plans based on what the traffic might look like or be like to, or from work. So, that's great.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: Yeah, that does sound very good. What do you love about our job?

**Brittany Nolan**: I love the students that I teach and watching their personalities develop. I also love the opportunities to build rapport and relationships with the entire school community.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: What have you found surprising about working in Weipa?

**Brittany Nolan**: I've definitely been surprised by the amount of professional development opportunities that I've been fortunate enough to attend despite being in a remote location. I'm extremely lucky to work in a college that really invests in beginning teachers and staff capability. I also have been offered so much support as a new staff member to the college and region. The department really values the wellbeing of staff and we are offered a lot of support through the region's CLaW, which is the Centres for Learning and Wellbeing.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: How long do you think you will stay in Weipa?

**Brittany Nolan**: I love Weipa. So I'm staying indefinitely. I think I will stay as long as I'm still being challenged in my work, which I've been able to teach across a few different subject areas and I've been out of my comfort zone there. So I really enjoy the challenge there and I'm loving Weipa.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: And can you tell us whereabouts Weipa is?

**Brittany Nolan**: So Weipa is located in far, far, far, North Queensland, very close to the top of Australia.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: Has the reality lived up to your expectations?

**Brittany Nolan**: I think I came to Weipa, honestly, not knowing what to expect. And I think that having an open mind wherever you go is really important. So I didn't really have a whole lot of expectations and I think that's really paid off.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: How do you spend your time off in such a small community?

**Brittany Nolan**: Come the weekends we're definitely spoilt for choice. We will go out quad bike riding, we'll go fishing in boats, or just off the jetty. We get to go camping to really remote and amazing locations that just seem really untouched. And I also go help out at my partner's cattle station.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: Can you describe a typical school day?

**Brittany Nolan**: So I teach in secondary. Our college is Prep to year 12 and I teach in Year Seven to 12. I work within the health and physical education departments, so HPE, as well as our intensive literacy and numeracy program. So I sort of arrive at school about 7:30 each morning and make sure my lessons are all good, make any final touches to my lessons for the day. We have four blocks per day. So between those, it will vary between HPE or literacy across secondary year levels. And then before I leave each day, just get ready for the next day and make the long arduous three minute journey home.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: What do you wish you knew before becoming a remote teacher?

**Brittany Nolan**: I think that although geographically, you may be far away, you definitely still can be connected virtually to friends and family. I also love that we have everything we need in our community. So we have a supermarket, hospitals, sporting recreational facilities, which is great. I also think that the rural or remote experience is what you make of it. And coming with an open mind and a positive mindset is really crucial. Find people within your communities who will show you places or new experiences that might be outside of your comfort zone and make sure you say yes to stuff and be open to these opportunities.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: Would you recommend teaching as a profession?

**Brittany Nolan**: Absolutely. This profession has been extremely rewarding. And so has the decision to go remote.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: And lastly, what advice would you give students studying teaching or thinking of studying teaching?

**Brittany Nolan**: I think during your prac get into as many classrooms as you can, even as a beginning teacher. Be the master of your own professional learning and don't be afraid to ask for help. So speak to your program coordinators at uni, they're full of knowledge and they'll be able to help you with any questions you may have.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: Thanks for your time, Britney. It sounds like you're having an excellent adventure.

**Brittany Nolan**: Thank you, Virginia, for speaking with me today.