

***For integrating extensive professional knowledge and experience into quality teaching that supports, motivates and inspires first year education students' learning***

**Overview**

This nomination attests to my passionate, energetic and sustained successful contribution to student learning for first year students in the School of Education at James Cook University. I commenced employment over 3 years ago at JCU as a highly experienced, respected professional and practitioner, drawing on a reflective approach to teaching sustained over many years. I have found a way to bring this professional background to our particular cohorts of students in a way that generates engagement and improves learning outcomes. I have focused my endeavours on improving student learning by enthusing, motivating and inspiring my students in the large, first year professional studies subject which I coordinate and teach.

I attribute my success in influencing student learning so positively to a strong command of the education field, extensive experience in the profession as a leader and practitioner, a research-informed approach, knowing my learners and an absolute passion for teaching. These qualities and their positive influence on student learning and achievement are recognized by students, peers, the broader university and the teaching profession. This nomination shows, with a range of supporting evidence, how this has been achieved over a sustained period of time through carefully planned, research-informed curriculum and assessment; a highly-structured and scaffolded program with opportunities for collaborative learning; focused and explicit pedagogy with a particular emphasis on personal and professional literacies and an emphasis on the development of a professional identity.

The DEST Report into the First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from a Decade of National Studies (Krause, Hartley, James & McInnes, 2005) recognizes the first year of university study as a critical transition period for students. The report also recognizes the particular issues impacting on access, participation and completion of studies in regional areas. JCU students come from diverse backgrounds and the university is proud of its commitment to equity and access in our unique context and to producing teachers with the expertise to contribute to sustainable development in our region and internationally. The unique geographic and demographic context of JCU is also significant for us in the preparation of teachers. More than half the schools in our region (where our students complete their practicum) are rural and remote and have the largest number and proportion of Indigenous students in the state. These factors clearly impact on the design and delivery of quality teaching and learning opportunities which need to be focused, explicit, engaging and supported. A focus on the first year experience is thus a core initiative in JCU's strategic intent (2008) and this nomination explicates my contribution to ensuring the best possible student learning in their first semester of university studies.

**Criterion 1: Approaches to learning and teaching support that influence, motivate and inspire students to learn**

My strong command of the field is reflected in how I construct learning experiences which are based on carefully planned, research-informed curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, including national and state imperatives and professional standards for teachers (QCT, 2006). My work supports student learning and reflects contemporary Australian research into first year student experiences (Krause et al, 2005). I draw on Krause's (2005) ten working principles for enhancing student engagement and learning and I refer to these throughout this nomination, providing examples of how I use them to inspire, motivate and enthuse students and effect positive learning outcomes.

**I know my learners and respond to their distinctive needs** (Principle 3) by organizing student mentors prior to the first weeks of the subject for online and internal students to enable immediate access to peer support to facilitate orientation to university life. I participate in the university-wide *Arrive, stay and succeed* initiative which identifies 'at risk' students in the first weeks of their studies. Relationship-building is critical in the early weeks of a university program (Principle 6). Thus, I organize a 'collective' consultation time immediately after the weekly lecture where students and I can informally discuss any issues raised in the lecture. I also set a goal of knowing each student by name by the second week. The impact of these positive relationships is consistently reflected in student feedback about the subject (SFS) and my teaching (SFT). Responses to questions on "Staff interest in assisting students to learn in this subject" and "The teacher's interest in assisting students to learn" have been consistently in the "more than acceptable" and

“outstanding” range (4 and 5 in a 1-5 scale) across the 3 years I have taught this subject (2005-2007). These scores are significantly higher than the university averages. Student comments include

*I find Pauline a very enthusiastic teacher and when needed has the power to really suck in her students and involve them in learning. She is very approachable.*

*Pauline is great. Extremely inspirational and unfaltering in her delivery. She has always been warm regardless of being quite brilliant. Really enjoy her teaching.*

*Dr Pauline Taylor is an exemplary lecturer, inspiring, motivating and available.*

*Pauline has been wonderful in this first semester at JCU. Having just left high school it was of great comfort to walk into her lecture theatre to be treated as an adult and welcomed so warmly into her course. I have found her explanations and examples of topics to be extremely helpful and rewarding. I particularly enjoy the links she makes between her subject and language. Couldn't ask for a better teacher.*

**I create and maintain a stimulating intellectual environment (Principle 1).** For example, I manage online experiences with care (Principle 9), using technology to complement face to face interactions. Course materials are made available to students in electronic format in the JCU learning management system (LearnJCU), allowing students opportunities for continual review and reinforcement and encouraging more interactive engagement and inquiry-based learning in lectures and tutorials. Materials draw upon scholarly literature, contemporary media and podcasts. Students are encouraged to contribute to these resources to add depth to debate and key topics. I structure the subject in such a way as to encourage increasing independence and inquiry (Principle 7). Students are encouraged to contribute resources and ideas in online discussions and collectively engage in the construction of knowledge. Where appropriate, I include these contributions in the subject resources for the following year.

This strategy encourages engagement and allows students to be active agents in their own learning. “*A lecturer who is interested in my ideas!*” (Student comment, 2007). I also use LearnJCU as a communication tool for continuing asynchronous collaboration and interaction beyond formal face to face sessions, thus encouraging peer study groups. (Principle 5).

I continually review curriculum, seeking input and feedback from practitioners as suggested in the 2007 *Top of the Class* report on teacher education. Members of the Cairns Professional Experience Committee (CPEAC), which I chair, have provided unprompted affirmation of the preparedness of first year students after just six weeks in the program. My command of the field is recognized by the profession, peers (as evidenced in regular invitations to present to staff across the university) and students. Student feedback scores on items relating to knowledge consistently average above 4 (1-5 scale) which is significantly above the university norm. Student comments include

*Pauline's explicit knowledge of subject content was amazing. It is definitely portrayed in my level of understanding of the subject content. I loved her teaching methods and her use of diverse teacher resources.*

*Dr Pauline Taylor has been a great influence for my first year of university studies. Pauline displays outstanding knowledge in her chosen profession and delivers her lectures and tutorials outstandingly.*

Responses to questions which relate to the quality of explanations, interest in assisting students to learn and the structure of presentations also have scored consistently over 4 (1-5 scale) and are considerably higher than the university average.

**I use assessment to shape the student experience and to encourage engagement (Principle 8).**

Assessment items in the subject are authentic tasks and include a rigorous academic writing task, tutorial preparation and participation as well as group inquiry projects and professional experience in schools. One task has an international focus which aligns with national (DEST, 2007) and JCU's (2008) internationalisation priorities. This task requires students to engage in a collaborative inquiry based on the OECD *Future of Schooling* Scenarios. In their first semester, students are fearful of assessment and of academic writing in particular. I use a variety of innovative strategies to address this. I am explicit about the standards required and provide detailed assessment criteria, elaborations and resources to scaffold student learning. I provide formative feedback after the very first week on specific aspects of academic writing. I pay close attention to the particular skills required for assessment success and teach these explicitly in lectures (Principle 4). **I focus on continual modelling.** I review student tutorial preparation notes weekly to gauge

their levels of understanding of key concepts, thus building continual review into my teaching (Principle 7). The question on “How this teacher clarified the subject’s expectations of students” scores consistently in the “outstanding” bracket (>4, on a 1-5 scale) in student feedback. I also elect to include a specific question about writing “The guidance provided by this teacher with respect to writing good assignments was” which also scores consistently (>4 on a 1-5 scale) in student feedback.

**I provide a structured and scaffolded program with opportunities for collaborative learning.** First year students frequently have not yet developed the learning and study habits required for university success (Long, Ferrier & Heagney, 2006). Drawing on this contemporary research on first year university students and JCU-specific initiatives (*First Year Experience Survey*) I address this issue in two ways: First, I design one assessment task which requires defined, regular planning and contributions from students (Principles 3, 7). They have to *prepare* for tutorials each week, submit preparation notes and *actively participate* in the tutorial activities which are all based on inquiry and collaboration. I provide graphic organizers and other resources to support this preparation and participation. Thus, I use assessment to promote organizational and study skills and the subject content is broken down into smaller units with which the students have to engage on a weekly basis. This strategy also allows me to identify and follow up *at risk* students very quickly. I have a consistently low attrition rate in the early weeks of the subject (<10%) and virtually no attrition after the census date. This is in marked contrast to the general trend across the university for first year subjects. Second, all students have a group inquiry project to complete as an assessment task. Students are organized into work/study groups in week one of the subject and tutorial activities encourage peer supported learning and social connections (Principle 5). Scores relating to the quality of the learning experiences are continually high (Principle 1). 2007 scores show 83% of students thought these were more than acceptable (48%) or outstanding (53%). Student comments in response to the question “What were the best aspects of this subject?” include:

*Having to do weekly tutorial tasks really kept me up to date with the subject*

*Pauline used many different activities to keep us interested and make sure we understand what she is saying as best as possible. The notes and work done at home really helped with the subject*

*Being in groups and learning from each other’s experiences which also helped with the learning of the subject.*

These ratings have been maintained over the period of my teaching.

**I have developed a focused and explicit pedagogy with an emphasis on personal and professional literacies.** Knowing the characteristics of my learners (Principles 3, 6), I engage in focused and explicit literacy pedagogies as integral to the subject content, using interactive strategies that are easily transferable to school classroom settings. I continually model effective pedagogy, making explicit connections between theory and practice and emphasising intellectual quality (Principle 1). Prior to joining JCU, I managed statewide professional development for teachers in literacy and I bring deep and contemporary knowledge of the field to my university teaching in this area. This is recognized and appreciated by my students as reflected in the following typical comment:

*I found this subject really interesting, and felt that it was made very relevant to our real life experiences. It tied in really well with the practical part of the course, and I felt it helped a lot with other subjects as well.*

**I contribute strongly to the development of a professional identity for the students.** I have 25 years experience as a teacher, Principal and Senior Education Executive. I have a strong professional identity as an educator and I am passionate and proud of my profession. I draw on this length and breadth of experience and my relationships with the local educational community to focus on inspiring, motivating and developing a strong professional identity in my students from the outset. In the final week of the semester, I invite the major employers to talk to students about the ‘bigger picture’ of employment and the teaching profession. Thus, students become aware, from the outset of their course, of the pathways and goals they need to follow and set to attain their preferred professional future (Principles 4, 10). Strong and productive relationships are developed in this way between JCU and employers and between students and employers. Students are provided with important, current information on employment trends and needs and thus have high levels of employability at the conclusion of their course as a consequence. This strategy has resulted in state education employers offering targeted additional professional learning support and incentives (scholarships) for JCU students in 2008 who may be considering working in state schools, especially in Indigenous contexts.

## **Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning 2008: Dr Pauline Taylor (JCU)**

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Students recognize this as reflected in scores which are consistently very high (> 4 on a 1-5 scale) in the areas of motivation and enjoyment of the subject and their comments about my teaching:

*Pauline showed a passion and enthusiasm in all areas of the course. This heightened my willingness to participate in the classes and showed me that teaching can be as rewarding and entertaining as I imagined*

*Pauline is so passionate about teaching, it is fantastic to see and I aspire to be like her*

*Dr Pauline Taylor is an exemplary lecturer, inspiring, motivating and available.*

*Pauline's enthusiasm was contagious and I looked forward to her classes every week. She is one of the few teachers that have really made me want to learn.*

I model, teach and reinforce not only the formal professional standards (QCT, 2006) required for teacher registration in Queensland but also wider professional norms and standards. In practical terms, this means an explicit focus on professional communication skills, punctuality, respect and continual professional learning. I prepare students for their professional practice through role play, mini teaching experiences with peers and through interaction with invited colleagues from schools. I have strong support in these endeavours from local principals and teachers who regularly give their time and services to us pro bono. Furthermore, these strategies, along with high standards throughout the program, have resulted in strong support for JCU graduates in the local community where they are perceived as both highly competent and strongly grounded in the contemporary reality of schools.

### **Contribution to student learning, engagement, and experience**

My sustained, positive contribution to student learning outlined in this nomination has been recognized by students, peers in the School of Education, across the University and within the broader professional community. As Director of Professional Experience and Community Engagement since my appointment, I brought high levels of professional credibility and experience to the role. I have further sustained and developed very strong relationships with the profession and within the university since joining. The student feedback scores and comments outlined above attest to very high levels of student satisfaction and contribution to student learning, engagement and motivation. Within JCU, I am regularly asked to present workshops to peers in the School of Education and for Teaching and Learning Development across the university. Artefacts such as criteria sheets have not only been shared with peers but have also been requested by other Faculties (Science) as exemplars of good practice. Since my appointment I have actively contributed to teaching and learning committees and projects. My longevity and depth of experience in the profession has prompted invitations to review books and papers in the area of teacher education including for prestigious journals (*Australian Education Researcher*) and national conferences (Australian Association for Researchers in Education). I have been invited onto 2 local school governance boards. I have won grants to evaluate local educational initiatives (DYAP) and produce curriculum. As Director of Professional Experience, I chair the Cairns Professional Experience Advisory Committee (CPEAC). Attendance at these meetings has increased markedly since I assumed the role and the local education community regularly take part in lectures and events pro bono. All this has worked to lift the outcomes for students, which is confirmed by unprompted feedback from the profession, including the following

*I am astounded at the quality of JCU students when they come to my school for professional experience. Even first years who have only been at Uni for a few weeks. (Principal, Catholic college and CPEAC representative)*

*Pauline, the purpose of this email is to highlight some recent observations regarding the quality of preservice teachers coming [to our school] from JCU*

- 1. The preservice teachers are positive and optimistic about the future. They are always willing to participate in broader school life and have a realistic understanding of the barriers and challenges facing the next generation of teachers.*
- 2. These teachers understand the importance of collegiality and work hard to establish effective relationships with their supervisors and other practitioners*
- 3. JCU education students are exhibiting a deep understanding of the implications for classroom practice of the 'Professional Standards for Teachers'. (Email 3/10/07 from Principal, large local state school)*