



When education student Meenu Fernando (pictured second from left) won a travelling scholarship to gain work experience at a school on the outskirts of Darwin, her eyes were opened to a rich Indigenous culture she would love to see shared with all primary school students in Australia.

Meenu returned to the Melbourne Campus of ACU National fired with ideas to promote social justice, use Smartboard technology in imaginative new ways, and immerse herself in the Indigenous way of life on completing her Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) degree at the end of this year.

"I want to live on the land with the Aboriginal Elders for a year and get the knowledge of these people and their ancestors to not only use in the classroom but also integrate it into wider society," said Meenu, whose fascination with Indigenous ways was fuelled by her own experiences arriving in Australia at

the age of seven, an immigrant from Sri Lanka.

"One initially feels disparate, isolated and helpless," she confided. "This feeling of inadequacy was something that I dealt with and fought to overcome. Initially it was hard, as nobody else around me was in a similar situation, but through education and schooling, I learnt that the first people of this land are also experiencing a similar sense of isolation from the people around them."

Meenu said she was shocked and then embarrassed to realise that Indigenous Australians so often felt like outsiders in their own land.

"I feel as a teacher and an immigrant I have a unique opportunity to help bridge the gap between these two cultures in working towards reconciliation."

Meenu is excited by the possibilities of Smartboard technology. "A child in Melbourne can talk to a fellow student

in Darwin," she said. "I want to try to make a connection, with the information technology being used widely by teachers and kids."

She dreams of benefits for "Western" school pupils, Indigenous children, and those in third world countries alike.

"You can get a mix of people with diverse backgrounds, and everyone is learning from each other."

Such communication would enhance respect and appreciation of the similarities and differences in their young lives, and make learning about geography, mathematics and history more real, memorable, meaningful and relevant, she believes.

Meenu also feels the experience would help children in the city better appreciate their material advantages, accept responsibility for improving social justice, and help them respect the life skills that children in other cultures must master.



The late Sarah Frawley

Thanking scholarship donors

Meenu's teaching practicum at St Paul's Catholic Primary School in Nightcliff, Darwin, was made possible by the Sarah Frawley Memorial Scholarship. "I was honoured to receive this," Meenu said.

"I had been wanting this scholarship since I heard about it in my first year at ACU National. I am still shocked and grateful that I was selected.

"I want to thank the Frawley family for giving this opportunity to ACU National students throughout the years and in the years to come. It is not only a special way to remember Sarah and the ambitions that she had, but through this fund I also had a chance to 'feel' her courage and determination."

The travel grant, awarded by the Sarah Frawley Memorial Trust, honours the memory of Sarah Frawley, a teacher education student at the ACU National Melbourne Campus who died suddenly in 2001 aged 19.

Sarah was an adventurous young woman who had a keen interest in travelling. She had the opportunity to travel to Bathurst Island and other Indigenous communities with her uncle not long before she passed away and was inspired by culture and schools she saw in these communities.

It is in honour of her life and sense of adventure that her family presents this travel scholarship every two years to a third-year education student.