**PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE SCHOOLS- HANNAH MCCARTHY**

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

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Teaching in Queensland state schools, especially in rural, remote, and regional communities offers a unique and rewarding experience that goes far beyond the classroom.

In today’s podcast, we’ll be exploring the Department of Education’s Partnership Initiative and the valuable support it provides to both students and teachers in 42 schools across the state. Whether you're a teacher considering where you can make the biggest impact or simply curious about the opportunities in schools outside of south east Queensland, we'll be diving into how our Partnership Initiative schools offer teachers an enriching experience like no other.

My name is Virginia Bowdidge, and joining me today is Cloncurry State School teacher Hannah McCarthy who is going to share some of her journey and insights about working at a school within a rural community and being in a school that is part of the department’s Partnership Initiative – and what that means.

Hi, Hannah McCarthy, thanks for joining me today to talk about your teaching journey.

**Hannah McCarthy:** Thank you so much for having me Virginia. I'm very excited to be here and answer some questions.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Can you tell us about your teaching journey? How did you get into teaching?

**Hannah McCarthy:** I first started my teaching journey, actually during school, I did a sport and rec traineeship from Year 10 to Year 11, and I was supporting a PE teacher at the school that I was at on the Gold Coast. So, I feel like that's when my teaching journey kind of started, unofficially. From school finishing in 2016 I went straight into university in 2017 and, yeah, loved it ever since. Did a lot of placements, some on the Gold Coast, I did a placement in Roma. I think Roma was a pivotal point for me, which made me realise that I just loved the rural, remote life.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** And what drew you to that life?

**Hannah McCarthy:** Growing up on the Gold Coast and not having experienced anything but the Gold Coast, I just wanted to experience something else. To get out of my comfort zone, go somewhere different. And I think Roma was the starting point for that. I was like, wow, this is just what I want to do, working in these rural, remote communities.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** And at the moment, you're in Cloncurry. Is that right?

**Hannah McCarthy:** Yes, Cloncurry State School P-12, and some do say that it's the heart of the Great North West, or the gateway to the Outback.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** How long have you been in Cloncurry Hannah, and what are the positives about being there?

**Hannah McCarthy:** This is now my third year in Cloncurry. Being from the Gold Coast – teaching there, working there, growing up there, going to school there – it has been a massive eye opener just coming out here and I think I witnessed that within my first year of living in Cloncurry. Some positives for me would be the friendships that I have made. I feel as though I haven't made friendships like this on the Gold Coast. I think that's what it's like just living in a small community and being with these people every day, because it takes one minute to drive to their house or a few minutes to walk to their house. That would be a massive positive. As well as the students, they make coming to work for me so much easier, because I want to teach them. I want to be around them. They're so unique, so versatile, so different, and it's something that I just wouldn't change for the world.

Another positive for me would be the benefits of living out here, such as housing incentives etc. However, being a primary teacher and being primary trained and only thinking that I would ever be a primary teacher this has changed me this year as I’ m now teaching PE across Prep to Year 10 - so a massive step outside my comfort zone. But also, I have been able to grow, evolve and I feel so much more successful as an educator. For me it has been very important to be flexible and to adapt to the variety of situations that you might have been thrown in. If there is someone away, I might have to teach a Year 10 maths class or a Year 7 science class which is very out of my comfort zone. But it has been an amazing opportunity that I have been very lucky to experience.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** What drew you to teaching remotely?

**Hannah McCarthy:** The variety of backgrounds that these kids out here have, that was definitely the main point that drew me. As I was teaching on the Gold Coast full time before coming out here, I think definitely as well, the benefits is what drew me to Cloncurry, specifically. I actually went and spoke to my principal during my first year of teaching on the Gold Coast, and she wasn't able to offer me permanency during that time. And I was like, okay, that's my chance. I'm just going to step into the unknown, go outside my comfort zone, and just going to make the move 18 hours from my home, which was a massive jump, as well as the benefits of housing, the extra incentives.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** You’vementioned a little bit about the benefits and incentives. How else were you supported as part of moving to teach in a rural location?

**Hannah McCarthy:** In Mount Isa, they have the Welcome to North West program. As soon as I signed my contract on my permanent position in Cloncurry they were in touch with me, and they had a five day PD, where all the beginning teachers, or early career teachers that were moving to the North-West, were able to go to Mount Isa, have a three day PD, in Isa, with psychologists, principals from the area, and there's a variety of other people, and then we were able to go to our schools and be in the school for two days, like learning about the school, meeting the students.

So that was an awesome support system for myself. It wasn't a really try before you buy, as I'd already signed my permanent position, but it definitely solidified that I had made the right choice to come out to Cloncurry. And I kind of felt this feeling of just being at home, straight away. So that was how I was supported moving out here. With moving my furniture and things with my house that was all done through HR. So that was a massive support too. It was pre-arranged for me. I just had to be there on the day to drop my furniture to them and then meet them at my house to unpack it all. And yeah, that was really how I was supported.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** That sounds like wonderful support.

**Hannah McCarthy:** Yes, 100%. I think it's very important for people to come and see the town, especially if they are thinking of going out west, remote, rural, wherever you choose you're going to, to not try before you buy, but just check out the town first, see if you do like it, because it is such a big move to make at any age of your life. In Cloncurry I already knew where everything was before moving out here. So I think that was a very good thing as well.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Yeah, that helps you to feel a little bit more settled.

**Hannah McCarthy:** Yes, especially for my parents, when they drove me up in at the start of 2022 they felt a lot more settled knowing that I already knew where I was going. I knew how to get to my house. So I think they were very happy with that, too.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Yeah, that's great. Cloncurry is a school within the Partnership Initiative. What does that mean for those who don't know?

**Hannah McCarthy:** The Partnership Initiative is based off a school's ICSEA. The ICSEA is a scale which a school is rated on, and it's based off their First Nations students, disadvantaged children, as well as the socio-economic background and other factors. The Partnership Initiative at Cloncurry State School has been a massive support for us as it allows us to receive support from the department, also other organisations such as Allied Health appointments for the children who might need that, such as counseling, occupational therapy, speech pathology, and a lot of other support systems that have helped these students. It's not just schools in remote or rural areas, there are a lot of schools in regional centres like Cairns or Townsville. There are some down in the Darling Downs region, the central west region. They are also on the coast and closer into those regional areas as well.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Would I be correct in saying that schools in the Partnership Initiative are in our most disadvantaged communities in terms of socio-economic backgrounds and other factors?

**Hannah McCarthy:** Yeah, 100% that would be correct. As a teacher, this means for me that we have to have a commitment to understanding the students, understanding our community challenges, understanding and doing what we can to support those who are disadvantaged, who are First Nation students, who need the extra support. So I feel like that is my role as a teacher, to work with the organisations that we have got coming in, being a partnership school, as well as helping the students.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Would you recommend teaching in a school within the PI?

**Hannah McCarthy:** I would definitely recommend teaching within a school that is a part of the Partnership Initiative. For myself, we have only been a part of this initiative, not for a very long time. When I first came out to Cloncurry, we weren't a part of the Partnership schools. It's only a new initiative that's come out. However, I feel empowered because I am a part of a community where students, their families, are seen, they're heard, and they are receiving an education, which is one of our top priorities as a teacher, is that students are able to access the curriculum and they're able to access the learning.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** How has working in a Partnership Initiative location broadened your experience and skill set in terms of support from the department, the school and connections within the community?

**Hannah McCarthy:** I have been able to go and be a part of multiple professional development opportunities such as Level One Classroom profiling, Level Two Classroom Profiling. I'm also a part of the SWAT team, which is an abbreviation for the Staff, Wellbeing and Action Team, which was a three day PD (professional development) based off trauma informed practices and how we can support teachers who may have gone through a behavioural issue, or they may have been in a situation where they need support.

So just for me, that's how it has supported my experience out here, and how it's broadened my skill set. For the school we have included now being partnership school, we now have the flexi space, which is basically for students who are disengaged with their learning. This space enables them to have that connection back to the classroom, and then slowly bring them back in. So this is across Year 3, Year 6 and Year 7 and 8s at the moment. For the school as well, we have gained a lot of funding for infrastructure within the school, classroom refurbishments, our hearing bell systems within the classroom for students who have disadvantaged hearing. We've also had bell upgrades to the school to support our emergency evacuation processes and our big Burke and Wills shed that's down on the oval, which is a massive basketball court. It's basically getting knocked down and redone next year, and that has come from the Partnership Initiative, which is just awesome, especially being a PE teacher. This is, it's going to make a massive difference to these students, because they just love playing outside. So it's going to be awesome.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** What previous experience have you drawn on to help you be successful in this role? You do sound like you love it.

**Hannah McCarthy:** I definitely do love my job and being out here, and no, I'm not getting paid extra to say that. Definitely previous experience would have had to be doing a year and a half, a year and a half on the Gold Coast, definitely made my transition out here a lot easier. I feel as though this is because I was already able to have a sense of what it was like in the classroom, and know my practices and what, worked for me and the children who I was with at that time. I have drawn on my experiences from the Gold Coast, it has shaped me the teacher that I want to be. And I think having the care for the students and hearing them and understanding them, that's probably one of the biggest things, and having those student teacher relationships has made me be so successful as a teacher, because I can connect with them. However, also doing the PDs from classroom profiling and the trauma informed practices, I was able to gage a better understanding of how to engage those students who might be disengaged, or why they might be disengaged, and then have all these different behaviour management strategies that work for the learners in the classroom in front of me. Although this might change for every classroom I'm in, because there's different learners in there. I feel like I have a very big toolkit of things that I use every day.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** How important is culture and community in our remote communities, especially as all PI schools are focused on teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander English and additional language dialects?

**Hannah McCarthy:** At Cloncurry State School, a massive part to having the sense of community with the students, the parents, the carers, the guardians, is actually being a part of the community with them. So, for example, I'm a part of, like, our school netball team, rugby, touch footy, volleyball, where students who I teach come along to watch the games. They come to watch the training. I might train or play with some of their parents or their guardians or their uncles or their aunties. Because I've got that relationship with the people in their family that has created a safe learning environment for myself and for the students as they're able to trust me as I have got a connection with them.

Integrating their culture within our school environment and within the learning that we're doing with them every day enables them to learn about things that they might not know within their culture. It also enables them to feel heard and feel safe, because we are talking about their culture and we are talking about it in a respectful way.

Relating to real life learning for them also enables success for the students, and that also is massive for First Nations and for disadvantaged students, because they know the reason why they need to learn certain things, because we're relating it to real life for them. A cool initiative that Cloncurry state school does, which is a part of the PI initiative, is that one day a week, certain students go, On Country with Uncle and with a PCYC representative, where they are able to learn about their culture.

That's just an awesome initiative that we do, and that has come from the Partnership Initiative. So it's a very cool thing.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** As a teacher in a PI school, how do you best manage your health and wellbeing?

**Hannah McCarthy:** Being a teacher at a PI school, I'm understanding that we are exposed to students who have witnessed, and been through and are going through, some sort of trauma in their life. We are the trusted adult for these children.

I have been very fortunate enough to have found friends outside of school, so I am able to switch off from that school mental load. Another thing that I do to manage my health and wellbeing is exercising. Every morning, I make sure that I go for a walk or a run. I try and get involved with lots of the sports that are available to us in Cloncurry and then also taking the holidays when we get them. So that might be just getting out of town for two days, going up to Karumba, or going to Townsville or going home for a few days.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** What's your biggest aha moment since being in Cloncurry?

**Hannah McCarthy:** My aha moment actually happened at the start of this year, when I had arrived back from being on the Gold Coast after Christmas, and I was walking through the IGA before coming back to school. I think it was about two weeks before school was about to start, and a bunch of students who I had taught in my first year of being out here were in there, ran up to me, and said to me, how excited they were to see me back in town, and how excited they were to come back to school and to see me and hang out with me. I feel like this has been my biggest aha moment, because I know that I matter to them, and I mean a lot to them.

I feel as though, when they did come up to me and they did say how excited they were to see me back that really brought back home to me that what teachers and any staff member in rural and remote schools do have an impact on these children and their day to day lives. That is, what has also empowered me to be a teacher, especially within rural, remote communities and Partnership Initiative schools. Even though you might have a terrible day when nothing's just gone your way as a teacher, but looking back on that moment and being like that's the reason why I'm out here is because of these teacher, student relationships that I have created with these kids, and just knowing that I might be their safe person in their life. So I think that was definitely my biggest aha moment, and that is what will make me stay out in Cloncurry, which is very, very exciting as well.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Thanks, Hannah McCarthy, that sounds like a very rewarding and in some ways humbling experience.

**Hannah McCarthy:** It definitely is rewarding looking back on it. And I think as, just as teachers and a human being in general, we, we tend to always look at the negatives and never the positives, and I think that aha moment was such a big positive in my life. It's kind of been my why as to why I'm still out here, and why I'm still teaching, and why I want to continue teaching. So, I think that it is very rewarding and humbling as well, and it's something that I will never take for granted.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Well, thank you for your time, Hannah it's been really wonderful talking to you.

**Hannah McCarthy:** Thank you so much for having me, and I've loved every second of it.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** If you are interested in finding out more about the opportunities for beginning and experienced teachers in our Partnership Initiative schools, visit the Teach Queensland website.

**Announcer:**  You have been listening to a Queensland Department of Education podcast.

The Department of Education acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands from across Queensland. We pay our respects to the Elders, past and present, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture, and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.