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As I embark on yet another geographical and professional shift, it has been timely for me to reflect on what changes I have made professionally and how these changes have impacted on my professional and personal life. In short, I left the safety of family and friends when I completed my EC degree to find solitude in the mid north coast of New South Wales (NSW), becoming the director of a small preschool for eight years. I then moved to a remote Indigenous community in the Northern Territory (NT) as a primary school teacher for two years. Returning home to start life with my wife as a family in rural Victoria, I was employed as a primary school teacher for four years. I wrote this profile, surrounded by boxes, awaiting the next shift to another rural region to lead Buxton Primary School, located in a small community ravaged by the bushfires on 7 February 2009. This school has been through a difficult period, including several changes of principal. When I think about each of my big moves, there are some consistencies that appear and remind me of three pivotal factors that surface each time I face a new challenge.

### Professional capacity

I have always been drawn to extremely challenging professional opportunities. Importantly, I take these on only when I have felt my skill set would at least enable me to have some level of success! Stepping straight into a leadership role as a preschool director straight out of university definitely threw up many challenges. Here, I quickly built a safety net of like-minded colleagues who could support me. Consultation has always been key for me. When I have a sense of the perspectives of all stakeholders, decision-making is more transparent. Difficult decisions still have to be made. When you can consider how decisions impact on others, however, I find much greater confidence in collaboration and the paths our decisions have created.

My experience and love for EC education led me to question how adapting an EC lens to primary education might look. The natural direction for me was to find a place where I could have some autonomy over curriculum design and implementation, and this led me to the NT. This was an extremely challenging environment, and it reaffirmed for me that learning occurs everywhere, and is embraced when communities have an understanding of its greater purpose and are provided with opportunities to be involved. The relationships I developed with the families, children and community were reflective of the EC ethos of inclusivity and social and emotional understanding.

Returning to rural Victoria to be closer to my family was a significant factor underpinning my return home. I was fortunate to find a role in a school that was transitioning from traditional curriculum design to the International Baccalaureate, which was built around inquiry based teaching and learning. Any small teaching successes I had in the NT were about to be developed further in a larger school setting. Reflecting on this decision professionally, it was a practical evolution from my previous 10 years in education: I gained great understanding of the complexity around curriculum planning, play based learning, and working within a large organisation.

My latest challenge is to move with my wife and baby daughter as the teaching principal in a very small school in another community that's new to me. I will, again, draw on my previous experiences in this new role. The opportunity to have autonomy over decisions that impact learning, the experience of working with a small community and the possibilities of learning alongside children for a number of years is incredibly exciting. This new move is also very daunting, much like the ones before it. However, the opportunity to apply what I know, and to have confidence in my expertise and experience, can alleviate these concerns. I draw confidence in returning to something familiar in leadership—that is, being a director of a small preschool has many similarities to becoming a principal of a small school. I have come full circle!

### Personal stimulation and work–life balance

In each move, a significant factor in embracing change has been the opportunities to enjoy experiences outside my professional work. Moving from Melbourne to the mid north coast was a bit of a no-brainer really! Spending time in a warmer, more consistent climate was incredibly enticing for someone who is active and needs to be outdoors to de-stress. Similarly, in the NT, living in a remote community with people who still embrace a very traditional lifestyle was a unique opportunity and incredibly motivating. My most recent move will see our family living in a small town, with access to beautiful mountains for walking, riding, hiking and skiing. Creating balance in the work–life relationship can be incredibly difficult, but, in seeking to make positive influences over communities, this balance has been critical for me. Therefore, finding a community and environment that we connect with is vital for balancing out the sometimes difficult or challenging work environments. Of course, at times this balance tips too far one way, and I have been fortunate to have people around me who can gently steer me in the right direction when this has occurred.

### Purpose

Finally, understanding the greater purpose behind the change has been a conclusion I have only recently come to realise, but one that has been significantly and perhaps subconsciously driving change for me anyway. At different points over the past 12 years I have been motivated to make change based on a professional challenge and opportunities to achieve the work–life balance. Beneath that sits a greater driver, and that has been to embark on a personal journey that tells me something about who I am.

My shift away from Melbourne to the mid north coast was also a chance to prove that what I thought I knew and believed in about learning in EC and working with young children could be applied. My philosophy and understanding around this grew exponentially because of the eight years that followed the shift; however, I was seeking experiences to be part of the decisions that led to learning. When moving to remote NT, I was driven by a need to understand more about myself—something that had been prompted in the Aspiring Leaders Forum sponsored by Children’s Services Central in NSW, and implemented by Macquarie University and Semann & Slattery. I was fortunate to be part of this year-long professional development experience as it proved pivotal for me in reflecting on the question of self-identity and leadership. I returned to Ballarat to be with family and loved ones and to reconnect with my parents, siblings and grandmother. The move I am embarking on now has a greater purpose of bringing up my little girl in the countryside with opportunities to build connections with the world around her in a beautiful region in Australia.

Each professional change has been carefully calculated with the three drivers sometimes outweighing each other. However, elements of each remain the same. My greatest moments have come about because I have remained true to the purpose behind the change. The challenges I have faced and the experiences I have had could not have been predicted, nor would these have deterred me had I known them. I am a better person for taking a leap. I would encourage anyone to do their research, but to also listen carefully to the heart and head talking to each other about the greater purpose you are seeking! I do feel that I have a strong philosophy around my role as a teacher, a facilitator of learning. No doubt it will continue to evolve, and when I feel that professionally and/or personally I am no longer being challenged, or I am not seeking challenge, then it is time to reconnect with my purpose again.

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