Working with Refugee Children in Western Australia
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Location and Agency Information
- Koondoola Primary School - located approximately 17 kilometres from Perth in the city of Koondoola.
- Koondoola Primary School has an Intensive English Centre which caters for the needs of recently arrived migrant and refugee children who have a limited or no understanding of English.
- The school has a rich multicultural environment that is built to show how different groups can work and play together in harmony.
- Teachers are trained to be trauma informed, with many having migrant backgrounds and proficient in multiple languages.
- CHOICE - To gain experience working with children in a unique trauma informed environment and to observe some of Australia's programs for refugee children.

Placement Description
During my time at Koondoola primary school I worked as an assistant teacher in a Phase 2 classroom, and a pre-primary classroom. Phase 2 classrooms are for refugee children who have been in Australia for 1 year, and range between the ages of 8-12. Pre primary classrooms have children who are ages 5 and 6 who's parents first language is not English. In addition, I co-facilitated a therapy group with the school social worker, called Rainbows for refugee children who have been in Australia for less than 1 year. The English Intensive classrooms use activities to develop language. I spent a lot of time gardening, doing arts and crafts, cooking, baking, and going on excursions with the children.

4 weeks, that's just not long enough
What is long enough I ask?
4 weeks, long enough to grow and to change
4 weeks, long enough to make connections and build relationships
4 weeks, long enough to witness various acts of compassion and hospitality
4 weeks, long enough to hold the hands of children, who's touch extended to my heart
4 weeks, long enough to make a difference in the life of a child
The length of time has nothing to do with the power and impacts of moments

Advice
- Take advantage of this amazing opportunity
- Be aware of your own American privilege, especially while aboard.
- Open your mind and heart
- Seize each moment
- Acknowledge that everyone you met knows something you do not
- Utilize all your free moments
- Represent yourself, U of M, and SSW with humility, integrity, and pride

Skills Learned/Aquired
- Using empathetic listening while interacting with children who have experienced trauma
- Avoiding counter transference
- Facilitating group therapy on life transitions across countries
- Rapport Building
- Utilizing reflective supervision
- Professional boundary setting
- Increase competency in non-verbal communication

Classroom Connections
Knowledge guides experience. I was able to immerse myself in a high stress environment and draw from prior class learning. Specific relevant classes were all Interpersonal Practice required courses, particularly SW 625 IP with children and youth. In addition, having taken SW 790 Trauma and Treatment before leaving was vital.

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