



THEME 1: Promoting High Quality Teaching and Learning: The Interactive Experience

THE PROMISE AND THE REALITY: EXPLORING VIRTUAL SCHOOLING IN RURAL JURISDICTIONS

Michael K. Barbour
Wayne State University

The history of distance education at the K-12 level is almost as long as the history of distance education itself. The same is true of online learning, where the first web-based distance education programs at the K-12 began in the early 1990s. Initially, these opportunities were designed as a way to provide rural students with access to more specialized courses, such as advanced level mathematics and science or foreign language courses. Over the past two decades K-12 online learning has become organized into virtual or cyber schools that operate within the traditional brick-and-mortar, and in some instances in competition with the traditional system.

Unlike distance education and online learning in general, much less is known about virtual schooling – even less based on systematic research. What we do know about virtual schooling is often based solely on practitioner experiences. In the past decade, there has been a more concerted effort by researchers in Canada and the United States to better understand the design, delivery and support necessary to ensure effective virtual schooling. However, much of this research has either focused on trying to “prove” that virtual schooling is as good as traditional face-to-face schooling or has been methodologically questionable. Regardless, the growth and practice of virtual schooling has far out-paced the production of reliable and valid research. This pattern has meant that most decisions related to virtual schooling have been based upon the intuition of proponents or the experiences of early adopters.

This presentation will focus upon describing the evolution of K-12 online learning in Canada and the United States, how that evolution has impacted rural schools, and what lessons can be learned from the experiences with K-12 online learning in these two countries.

DIGITAL REVOLUTION OR DIGITAL DIVIDE: WILL RURAL TEACHERS GET A PIECE OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PIE?

Tania Broadley
Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia

In order to sustain the rural education community, access to high quality professional development opportunities must become a priority. Teachers in rural areas face many challenges in order to access professional learning equitable to their city counterparts. In the current climate, the Federal government of Australia is committed to initiatives that support the use of ICT in education. These include initiatives such as the Digital Education Revolution, including the National Broadband Network. This “revolution” includes the committal of \$2.2 billion funding over six years from 2008 – 2013 which purports to bring substantial and meaningful change to teaching and learning in Australian schools. Of this funding, the Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, has committed \$11.25 million of the total budget to ICT related professional development for teachers. But how will rural teachers ensure they get a piece of the PD pie? Access to professional learning is critical and isolation from colleagues, professional associations and support structures can affect the retention of teachers and in turn affect the sustainability of rural communities. This research paper describes the findings of the first phase of a study that investigates access to professional learning from rural and remote areas of Western Australia, the efficiencies of this approach including teacher perceptions and possible opportunities for improvement through the application of technologies. A survey instrument was administered to 106 teachers within the Remote Teaching Service and the Country Teaching Program of the Department of Education and Training (WA).



Qualitative data was collected by semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals. The findings from Phase One discuss the teachers' perceptions of their access to professional development opportunities, professional learning communities and their use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to bridge the gap.

LESSONS FROM COLLABORATION: A JOINT USA - AUSTRALIA PRE-SERVICE EXPERIENCE

Colin Boylan and Ted Munsch
Charles Sturt University and Alaska Pacific University

During September - October of 2008 and 2009, pre-service teachers from Alaska Pacific University and Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga collaborated in small groups to produce USA and Australia- ready classroom lessons and activities. Differences in expectations, timelines and numbers of participating pre-service teachers following the 2008 experience prompted an improved product and more favourable ratings in the 2009 collaboration. Lessons created by and learned from pre-service teachers in Alaska and Australia will be shared along with plans for improving a prospective 2010 collaboration and its progress.

THEME 2: Promoting High Quality Teaching and Learning: Developing Professional Capacity

PROMOTING RURAL/REGIONAL SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH THE PROVISION OF A QUALITY HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

Bronwyn Ellis, Julie Watkinson and Janet Sawyer
Centre for Rural Health and Community Development
University of South Australia

The final stage of a longitudinal research project that focused on identifying the impact of a new university presence in a South Australian regional city is presented in this paper, which continues the account given at the 2009 SPERA Conference. The early stages comprised focus groups of stakeholders, staff involved, and students, and surveys of the pioneering student cohort (2005 enrolments) during their first and third years of study. The project's action research nature gave the opportunity to implement improvements in course delivery and administrative matters as needs were revealed.

Late in 2009, a survey of graduates explored their overall perceptions of their university studies, as well as identifying their employment outcomes and aspirations, their motivation for pursuing further study, and their perceptions of the influence exerted by this university regional centre. Their ideas about further opportunities for university engagement with the region were sought, along with any research needs of which they were aware and their interest in being involved in future research projects.

The story of three participants is considered in further detail, providing insight into the experience and views of these graduates.

As well as confirming and amplifying many of the findings of earlier stages of the project, which included high levels of overall student satisfaction, the final survey, along with other data from stakeholder consultations, and significant anecdotal material, demonstrates the role that this regional university centre is playing in contributing to the employment needs of its region and the retention of its current and potential professionals, and provides lessons for other university outreach. Its presence, made possible by the collaborative efforts of university and community,



has helped residents of the region to see higher education as a normal option for them, rather than something that previously seemed out of their reach.

SUPPORTING INNOVATION IN PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION: CONTEXTUAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SUPPORT FOR ACADEMIC STAFF

**Dr Karen Noble, Dr Henriette Van Rensburg, Dr Barry Fields, Dr Henk Huijser, Ron Pauley, Jennifer Bundy & Jeanette Rose
(University of Southern Queensland)**

With an increased focus on the broadening participation agenda in higher education in Australia generally (DEEWR, 2008), the remit of teacher education becomes increasingly complex also. With the increased development of virtual learning contexts available via the internet, students and universities are now more easily able to traverse geographical borders. Teacher education programs need to be able to develop and deliver curricula in more creative ways than ever before to respond to these broader political agendas.

In response, USQ, as a regional Australian university well known for its distance education has developed the first fully-online pre-service teacher education programs. Although only one year on from its introduction, clearly there have been many challenges as well as opportunities in terms of development and delivery for staff (as well as students). Data was gathered through a series of focused critically reflective conversations, with the aim to interpret the meaning of professional learning for a small team of faculty and divisional staff charged with supporting academic staff in curriculum design and development. The approach taken in this paper acknowledges the impact of quality and assurance issues, as they explore pedagogy that promotes individual and community professional identity and connection within such a learning space.

SEE YOU IN CLASS: PROMOTING A QUALITY PROGRAM FOR PRE-SERVICE EDUCATORS IN REGIONAL LOCATIONS THROUGH A VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

**Tania Broadley; Lina Pelliccione
Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia**

The quality of an online university degree is paramount to the student, the reputation of the university and most importantly, the profession that will be entered. At the School of Education within Curtin University, we aim to ensure that students within rural and remote areas are provided with high quality degrees equal to their city counterparts who access face-to-face classes on campus.

In 2010, the School of Education moved to flexible delivery of a fully online Bachelor of Education degree for their rural students. In previous years, the degree had been delivered in physical locations around the state. Although this served the purpose for the time, it restricted the degree to only those rural students who were able to access the physical campus. The new model in 2010 allows access for students in any rural area who have a computer and an internet connection, regardless of their geographical location. As a result enrolments have seen a positive increase in new students.

Academic staff had previously used an asynchronous environment to deliver learning modules housed within a learning management system (LMS). To enhance the learning environment and to provide high quality learning experiences to students learning at a distance, the adoption of synchronous software was introduced. This software is a real-time virtual classroom environment that allows for communication through Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and videoconferencing, along with a large number of collaboration tools to engage learners.



This research paper reports on the professional development of academic staff to integrate a live e-learning solution into their current LMS environment. It involved professional development, including technical orientation for teaching staff and course participants simultaneously. Further, pedagogical innovations were offered to engage the students in a collaborative learning environment. Data were collected from academic staff through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The findings discuss the perceived value of the technology, problems encountered and solutions sought. In addition, the pedagogical approaches used by academic staff to create an effective online teacher presence will be discussed.

THEME 3: Promoting High Quality Teaching and Learning: Pre-service Experience

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT FOR RURAL AND REMOTE PRE-SERVICE EDUCATORS: EDUCATION COMMONS AND ITS IMPACT

Dr Karen Noble; Dr Robyn Henderson; Ron Pauley
University of Southern Queensland

Students entering pre service teacher education have a variety of reasons for their selection of program and subsequent career as an educator. Indeed, they also bring to their studies a variety of experiences of education, and knowledge of what teachers do and what teaching is. At a regional university in Queensland, in the Faculty of Education, an initiative has been initially piloted where preservice teachers, academics, novice and experienced teachers, administrators and directors come together on a regular basis to participate in a community of practice. Within the Education Commons, important local, national and international issues affecting education are the focus of the panel discussions, which are then followed up with pedagogical conversations, where academics and students unpack the panel discussion and relate to theory and their own practice. Education Commons then is seen as an effective means of developing professional networks within the local community as well as connecting distance students to the profession through Education Commons (Online), which is an interactive community website.

The focus of this paper is to outline the experiences of participation in Education Commons by a small group of students undertaking their preservice education studies via distance mode, as they navigate their way through the fortnightly program and to place this experience within the context of the larger on-campus cohort of students. The study aims to develop understandings about the process of 'becoming a teacher'. More particularly how has voluntary participation in the Education Commons affected their perceptions of personal and professional identities? The research is driven by a number of questions, including: What are their experiences of education, and how does their participation in Education Commons mediate the process of becoming a teacher and sustain them during difficult times? How can we better prepare pre service teachers for a sustainable future in education at a distance?

DEVELOPING STRATEGIES AT THE PRE-SERVICE LEVEL TO ADDRESS CRITICAL TEACHER ATTRACTION AND RETENTION ISSUES IN AUSTRALIAN RURAL, REGIONAL AND REMOTE SCHOOLS

**Sue Trinidad (Curtin University), Elaine Sharplin (The University of Western Australia),
Graeme Lock (Edith Cowan University), Sue Ledger (Murdoch University), Don Boyd,
Emmy Terry (SPERA)**

This ALTC project is a collaborative endeavour between the four public universities involved in teacher education in Western Australia (Curtin University, Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University and The University of Western Australia), focussed on improving the quality of preparation of pre-service teachers for rural, regional and remote appointments. The project will



create a nexus between the theory and practice of teaching and learning by developing models of pre-service teacher rural, regional and remote practicums. The project builds on the work of other recent Australian rural education research projects (conducted through TERRA Nova and the Renewing Rural and Regional Teacher Education ALTC Curriculum Project). Existing rural health collaborative models will be drawn upon to inform the developing project. The project brings together rural community and professional partnerships (including SPERA and SiMMER) that will help to sustain rural communities through the provision of quality, prepared rural, regional and remote teachers.

CONTINUING TO SUPPORT PRE-SERVICE TEACHER LEARNING FROM NEAR AND FAR: FYI (ONLINE)

Dr Robyn Henderson; Dr Karen Noble; Ron Pauley
Faculty of Education, University of Southern Queensland, Australia.

Across colleges and universities, a plethora of approaches, from stand-alone institution-wide programs to more holistic, faculty-based or embedded approaches, have been designed to initiate beginning students into higher education using a range of modes of delivery. This paper describes a particular approach, the First Year Infusion (FYI) Program, which operates in the Faculty of Education of an Australian university and is based on a design and implementation strategy that sees a Learning Circle inform pedagogy and practice. Through privileging relationships and social support, the on-campus program offers evidence of tangible impacts upon the quality of participants' interactions, relationships and friendships, as well as upon their commitment to complete their undergraduate student learning journey. Following 3 years of on-campus delivery, the program is now being piloted in the online environment to support those students enrolled in blended and fully-online modes of study: FYI (Online). Initial perspectives of academic and support staff as well as students inform initial critical reflection on design and delivery. The notion of presence in terms of the creation of Thirdspace is applied to these critical reflections.

In providing a time and a place for students to meet with a group of academics on a regular basis, face-to-face as well as virtually, the program operates with no fixed academic agenda and positions students and academics as life-long learners. Through the adoption of an enabling pedagogy authentic presence is achievable for academics and students. The paper posits that regardless of access and mode of study, high quality interactions, with peers and academic staff in an informal context are vital to the building of enhanced capacity for higher education students in contemporary times and the formation of a sense of 'professional presence'. It is through such interactions that students develop qualities appropriate to their future work as teachers.

THEME 4: Promoting High Quality Teaching and Learning: Enriching Rural Communities

MANAGING TENSIONS IN PROFESSIONAL STATUTORY PRACTICE: LIVING AND WORKING IN RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Dr Paula Jarvis-Tracey
**Professor Lesley Chenoweth, Associate Professor Donna McAuliffe, Associate Professor
Barrie O'Connor, Dr Paula Jarvis-Tracey (Griffith University) Professor Daniela Stehlik
(Curtin University)**

This study will explore the management of tensions in work-life balances for professionals not only having statutory responsibilities in health, education, human and police services, but also living in the rural and remote communities they serve. It will also investigate the views of community members impacted by their work. It aims to generate new knowledge about: how professionals and



their local communities can forge productive links to enhance collaboration and service delivery; and factors contributing to professionals' training, recruitment and retention in such communities.

Delivering essential health, education and human services in rural and remote communities remains a critical problem for Australia. When professionals have mandatory responsibilities (in child protection, law enforcement or mental health matters), tensions can arise between workers and the community in which they live. The study will offer solutions to the complex medical, legal and social issues that arise for different professional groups in the discharge of their duties. It will increase current knowledge about the nature of their roles and responsibilities in small communities, and about improving professional practice and retention, leading to improved service delivery and outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

This research project also aligns with the Queensland Police Service strategic priorities for 2009-10, under the key output areas of Community Safety and Engagement, and Professional Standards and Ethical Practice. This 3-year project uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to map the terrain of rural and remote statutory work, to explore the nature of the relationships between professionals and communities and examine how professionals manage ethical and allegiance conflicts which arise.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: UNDERSTANDING THE EXTENT AND VALUE

Dr Nita C. Lester, Griffith University

Relationship building in the remote rural settings studied occurred at various levels: professional, school-based, personal, and community-wide. Principals and teachers who understand the importance of relationship building—especially its personal and community-wide facets—who take the initiative in establishing and nurturing relationships and improving them through reflection over time, are more successful at motivating, inspiring, and aligning country people to facilitate change. The acquisition of supportive relationships is presented as a possible precursor to successful school leadership and teaching in small remote rural school settings.

A RURAL TEACHING AND COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE: A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

**Colin Boylan and Andrew Wallace
Charles Sturt University
Wagga Wagga**

For the past 10 years, Charles Sturt University students from the Wagga Wagga campus have participated in the New South Wales Department of Education and Training's *Beyond the Line* program. In this paper a longitudinal analysis of the feedback provided by the students is collated and discussed.

The successful and non-successful aspects of the program are identified along with analysis of the impact of participation in the program on students' preparedness to seek a rural appointment following completion of their undergraduate course of studies.

This data is then contrasted with final year student understandings of rural communities, and findings that engagement in rural communities is not enough to generate deep understandings of the rural communities within which we all work.



INTERACTION BETWEEN EDUCATION PROVIDERS AND COMMUNITIES IN THE WHEATBELT SOUTH

Janine Hatch
University of Western Australia

Changing economic, social and political rural environments continue to impact the provision of rural education and the capacity of rural communities to effectively engage in education service delivery. An article printed in *The West Australian* (1998) highlights that 'a school is more than the sum of its buildings, equipment and education programs. It is an expression of the values and aspirations of the community it serves' (Forsey 2007, p. 16)¹. More than this education is identified as one of the key service contributors to regional development in the Western Australia's Wheatbelt South study sub region.

The aim of this paper is to investigate how communities in the Wheatbelt South interact with education providers. Research in the study area suggests that effective and sustainable collaboration between community groups, businesses and education providers has the potential to create stronger schools and indeed stronger communities. The capacity of local communities to be a significant and innovative resource to their local school often goes unrecognised. Similarly, the value of a quality local school as a community asset, both in terms of services and infrastructure, is under-utilised and thus deserves exploring and highlighting. This paper identifies that principals as community leaders, institutional structures, and community context play significant roles in both facilitating and hindering effective community-school partnerships.

FARM FAIR VOICES: MESSAGES FOR SUSTAINING RURAL EDUCATION COMMUNITIES

Professor John Halsey
Sidney Myer Chair of Rural Education and Communities
Flinders University

This presentation is based upon data collected at a major rural farm fair as part of a larger rural shows research project. The aim of the project is to better inform what rural communities require in terms of education in particular in order for them to be vibrant and productive places to live and work.

Findings from the farm fair are presented and considered in terms of implications for educational leaders, teachers and the community more generally. The presentation then introduces the idea of searching for the fertile middle ground as a way to explore afresh, how to sustain rural education communities.

RUNNING THE BOUNDARIES AND ERECTING THE FENCES: PLACE-BASED APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING GRADUATING TEACHER PRACTICE 'NO-GO ZONES'

Dr Rick Churchill; Dr Karen Noble; Janice Jones; Michelle Mingay
University of Southern Queensland

In Australia, recent reviews of higher education such as the Bradley Report (Council of Australian Government (COAG), 2008) highlight the importance of a progressive education system that meets the needs of the 21st century and functions as an integral part of a globalised economy stressed by the global financial crisis (GFC). Furthermore, there is a strong focus on enhancing participation rates for those who are socially, economically or demographically disadvantaged. In one specific area of higher education, educating pre-service teachers, research shows that there is high

attrition from the teaching profession and that 30% of beginning teachers either leave or intend to leave the profession within the first five years of practice (McCallum & Carter, 2008; Noble, 2006, 2008; O'Brien, O'Keeffe & Goddard, 2007) so it would appear that there is a possible disjuncture between the preparatory teaching degree and the realities of the practice context. Davis (2008) advocates for educators to “think globally, act locally, think future, act now” (p. 4) in order to redress such trends in initial education degree programs. That is, context is seen as a significant influence on job satisfaction or intention to leave.

In this paper, a place-based approach has been chosen as the framework for analysing student motivations for their choice of context upon degree completion, as a means of understanding issues of personal and professional presage that affect their career development. Given that the study has been conducted in a regional Queensland university, we are specifically interested in issues of regionality and remoteness as opposed to the more predominant metrocentric view characteristic of students graduating from metropolitan universities. The authors posit that such understandings impact undergraduate program design and need to be considerations in curriculum renewal and development to ensure that undergraduate programs adequately prepare teachers who are global educators for a broad range of contemporary learning contexts, including regional, rural and remote locations. Attention is given to both the formal and informal aspects of initial teacher education programs from this perspective.

THEME 5: Promoting High Quality Teaching and Learning: Sustaining Rural Communities

THE PRAXIS OF BUILDING CAPACITY IN MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE IN A RURAL, NON-GOVERNMENT SYSTEM OF SCHOOLS: VOICES OF TEACHER LEADERS

Vince Connors

Much has been written about teacher leaders and the impact they have in promoting and influencing change. This is a reflection from four teacher leaders from four secondary high schools of a rural, non-government system of schools as they seek to build capacity in the learning and teaching of mathematics and science within their schools. The original study began in 2007 identifying that participation rates and achievement rates in senior mathematics and science were below NSW state average rates in higher order courses, but above average rates in the general and lower end courses. Yet, a study of all subjects and courses in the senior years of this system since 2001 shows student achievement across the schools is slightly above state average. This trend in mathematics and science has been acknowledged anecdotally at school level for many years, and more recently in Brown's *Review of Education in Mathematics, Data Science and Quantitative Disciplines Report to the Group of Eight Universities* (2009). The question has been asked “What can be done to improve student participation and achievement in harder senior Mathematics and Science?”

This presentation tells the story of the action research undertaken from the perspective of four teacher leaders who form a guiding Taskgroup. Their testimony identifies the praxis of forming learning teams that are isolated and autonomous. It engages the principles of change management identified by Michael Fullan and the professional development guidelines of Thomas Guskey.

THE POLITICAL SCIENCE OF SCHOOL DISTANCE EDUCATION IN NEW SOUTH WALES, EXAMINING WHAT MIGHT BE APPROPRIATE COMMUNITY AND PROFESSIONAL REACTION TO THE NEED FOR SUSTAINABLE, DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Charles Bradley
Retired Distance Education Teacher

In Australian civil society there is growing assertiveness in raising concerns about the failure of the neoliberal ideology in the provision of health, education and welfare in a socially just way. It is the future of humankind that is at issue. In education, neoliberal political economy has supported neoconservative values that are a threat to democracy by being sectarian, exclusive, and anti-science. The audacity of hope has been vanishing as the Rudd Government has been unwilling or unable to devise and implement educational policies that match its rhetoric.

Robert Manne and David McKnight (2010) provide a framework for the political analysis of contemporary educational developments affecting rural education and for exploring questions for community and professional action by those who are “committed to building a fairer social order and a more sustainable world.” Federal initiatives by the Rudd Government provide a backdrop to Australian responses to the educational crises of “growing inequality; weakening social bonds; rising individualism and materialism; (and) paralysis in the face of global warming.”

School distance education in New South Wales has fallen short of its potential to foster inclusion generally and to support the needs of rural education in particular. It has not only been poorly resourced. It has also failed to apply understandings from the social sciences regarding learning and healthy community life. There is great scope for using digital technology more effectively. Further changes in the relationships between students, teachers and student support staff are needed. Indeed, distance education provides opportunities to explore the more radical changes that will take place in the nature of schools and schooling this century. Detailed political questions about national, community, and professional action will be raised in a review of the 2010 report into school distance education in NSW** which addresses these issues.

* Manne, R and McKnight D (Eds), **Goodbye to all that: on the failure of neo-liberalism and the urgency of change**, Black Inc: Melbourne (2010)

* * The analysis will be based upon experience in the micropolitics of industrial relations and professional development in distance education in NSW, along with the wider politics of its organisation for more than 30 years.

THEME 6: Promoting High Quality Teaching and Learning: Building Opportunities

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING UNIMPORTANT: SMALL TOWN AUSTRALIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Matthew Tonts
University of Western Australia

The title of this paper is borrowed from a Canadian book of the same name. This particular book reflects on the importance of Canada's small towns to the country's economy, social makeup and national identity, despite their often forgotten status within wider Canadian society. Arguably, a similar situation exists in Australia, with small towns generally having rather marginal status in both popular and political discourse. In part, this seems to reflect Australia's urban-centric settlement pattern, and perhaps the continued focus on the problems of small town decline. However, as this paper points out, despite the many challenges being faced by small country towns they remain an



important part of the nation's economy, demographic and social fabric. Moreover, they are often highly resilient, innovative and adaptable; something that sits in stark contrast to wider perceptions about the sleepy nature of rural life.

CREATING AND CELEBRATING PLACE AND PARTNERSHIPS: A KEY TO SUSTAINING RURAL EDUCATION COMMUNITIES.

**Associate Professor Simone White
Deakin University**

This presentation brings together the findings of research conducted across three large Australian studies into the recruitment and retention of rural teachers and leaders. Key themes drawn from each study for ways of promoting quality teaching and learning and sustaining rural education communities will be discussed. All studies have highlighted the need to better prepare rural teachers and leaders to create and celebrate a notion of 'place' and to identify and strengthen partnerships within and across rural and urban spaces.

The presentation will focus in particular on the emerging sub-themes of linking rural school leadership and community renewal, the importance of developing partnerships to sustain the rural workforce and the need for creative enterprise to be acknowledged as important work of rural teachers and leaders.

The analysis of the student interview and survey data produced a view from 'below' that indicates a disconnection between students and their school about what values and experiences influence their choices about school completion and their chances of achieving their chosen transition to further education and employment. The paper concludes that the focus on 'disadvantage' that underpins the school's transition preparation plans and practices, are for significant numbers of students, very much less relevant to them than individual, family and community identities, connections and expectations. The findings from the research calls into question the relevance of programs that are designed to redress educational 'disadvantage', and especially this school's emphasis on VETiS programs. The findings also indicate that the design and delivery of 'rural' education curricula may align school programs with individual rural student's needs more effectively than compensatory measures to equalise *delivery* of a mass education curriculum to 'disadvantaged' students.

THEME 7: Promoting High Quality Teaching and Learning: Dis-enfranchised Youth

HONOURING OUR STRENGTHS

**Scott Gorringe
Leadership Coordinator
Stronger Smarter Institute**

Persistent perceptions of deficit and conflict have characterised and constrained the history of relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians since contact.

The success of their saturation is apparent in a continuing approach that presents the response to Aboriginal needs in terms of health and education 'gaps'; 'the Aboriginal *problem*', 'mainstreaming (making *them* more like *us*)' or 'interventions' (and all the lack of ability that such a word implies).



Language in programs and the underlying approach to address very real health, economic and social need continues to carry (and replicate) an implicit assumption of deficit and a positioning of the locus of control away from Aboriginal people (i.e. service 'delivery' instead of service 'access').

This paper recognises that an erosive mindset of deficit perceptions of Aboriginality is also being widely adopted by Aboriginal people by ourselves and other Aboriginal people – that if un-discussed will continue to impact on the Aboriginal struggle. This paper will unpack an Aboriginal framework (Engoori) that can reconnect people and reignite authentic community engagement discussions.

EDMUND RICE EDUCATION AUSTRALIA.....YOUTH+.....A NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVE SUPPORTING AUSTRALIA'S MOST DIENFRANCHISED YOUNG PEOPLE.

Dale Murray, Edmund Rice Education Australia

Mainstream schools just don't work for some kids. In several parts of the world, the spirit of Edmund Rice is providing alternative pathways for such kids. Queensland's innovative Flexible Learning Centres are a fine example of this. The latest one opened last month in Mount Isa with a great show of enthusiasm from government and non-government sectors and from the local community. Presently about 35 students attend this Edmund Rice Education facility every day, representing a significantly high 80% attendance rate. With enrolment increasing, the number may reach 100 by the start of 2011.

Six such Flexible Learning Centres across Queensland currently serve about 500 young people. The other facilities are at Noosa, Logan, Albert Park in Brisbane, Townsville, and the one in Deception Bay which opened in October 2009. Outreach programs enable the FLCs to extend their support to young people beyond these fixed locations.

THEME 8: Promoting High Quality Teaching and Learning: Curriculum and Social Networking

CHOICES AND CHANCES IN PROGRAMS AND PLANS FOR THE GAINING OF CREDENTIALS: PERSPECTIVES FROM A SMALL RURAL HIGH SCHOOL.

Janice Franklin

Research about rural education, and education policy directions for rural schools, both sit deeply within the context and discourse of 'disadvantage'. The indicators and measures of 'disadvantage' have been persistently defined, evaluated and described by comparison to the measured indicators about the most advantaged in the total student cohort. Rarely has educational research or policy been 'inverted' to be defined, evaluated and prescribed from 'within' the rural to focus on education *for* rural young people.

This paper attempts to test the validity of the historical and contemporary emphasis about comparative disadvantage in rural and remote education delivery, as this might be reflected in the ways staff and students each prepare for student transition from school to employment or further education. The focus of the research for this paper was a small rural high school situated in a community which has experienced profound contemporary economic and social upheaval. Prolonged drought and the government induced replacement of native timber harvesting with plantation softwood timber production on farmland, have together produced a measurably low socio economic status for the community.



Student achievement in NAPLAN literacy and numeracy scores, low retention rates to Year 12 completion, and the high number of enrolments in VET subjects, also appear to justify the view that the students of this high school are 'disadvantaged'. The school's plan and programs for preparing its students for their transition to employment and further education, acknowledge that the high school, the community it serves and its students, are 'disadvantaged' in all available measures. The data from interviews with the school's key staff members, endorses and supports an evaluation of the school's key public documents about its suite of programs, activities and endeavours. Together these two sets of data about the views of the school staff, show that their programs and practices have been designed and delivered to redress acknowledged measures of 'disadvantage'. This view from 'above' was compared and analysed with data collected from senior students. Year 11 students were invited to participate in two Focus Group Interviews, and a *From School to Further Education or Work Survey*.

WHAT SHOULD BE MEASURED? ASSESSING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RURAL SCHOOLS

**Ted Munsch, PhD
Alaska Pacific University
Anchorage, Alaska, USA**

Rural schools often provide several advantages for teachers and learners: small class sizes, community support, and fewer distractions than are normally found in urban settings. However, the degree of remoteness, lack of appropriate materials and inadequate funding can limit the potential of the best teaching and learning environments rural communities can offer. Students in rural communities are expected to perform as well on standardized tests as their more urban peers. What happens when they perform better? What metrics should be established to determine success in teaching and learning for rural schools? Examples of successful rural schools in the United States and Australia will be shared to demonstrate how rural schools measure up to their urban counterparts. Suggestions regarding authentic assessment of teachers, students and rural communities will be discussed.