

ENGAGING PROFESSIONALLY IN THE REMOTE CONTEXT

This is one of seven Teacher Guides in the series 'Teaching in Remote Australian Schools: Enhancing Pre-Service Teacher Education – A Resource Package'.

STANDARD

7.0 Engaging Professionally with Colleagues, Parents/Carers and the Community

FOCUS AREA

7.3 Engaging with Parents/Carers

GRADUATE DESCRIPTOR

Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of research into how students learn and the implications for teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Two of the most demanding challenges identified by many graduates and those in the early phases of their careers are classroom management and engaging with parents/carers. These activities are designed to provide the opportunity to prepare for how to engage effectively with parents/carers in non-metropolitan contexts.

Often it is easier to communicate with people when there are common interests involved. For example, people moving into a new environment or situation such as a phase of employment often find it easier to engage with new acquaintances if they share a common interest such as sport or a hobby.

Teachers moving from urban to rural and remote locations can find that transition difficult because they are moving from a familiar environment (a world) to an unknown environment. They can experience culture shock and disequilibrium (Sharplin, 2002 & 2009). Effective communication skills are essential to understanding of people, the context in which they live, and the things that are important to them. New graduates from urban environments need to immerse themselves in the new context to understand the lived experiences of their students and the community.

In addition to building an understanding of the sociology of remote communities, Graduates can gain much by developing the ability to interact with culturally diverse communities. By interacting with others shared experiences and understandings can be established. This is essentially for the creation of respectful partnerships.

The purpose of this Teacher Guide is to encourage thinking and discussion about working effectively, sensitively and empathetically with parents/care givers, the community and colleagues in remote locations.

OUTCOMES

- Graduates understand and apply effective communication strategies to foster engagement with parents/carers, the community and colleagues in remote localities.

- Graduates can analyse a range of resources to build an understanding of remote communities and use that knowledge to effectively engage with remote parents/care givers, the community and colleagues.
- Graduates use build on understanding of the complexity of confidentiality in remote contexts.
- Graduates can apply their understanding of the complexity of confidentiality in the remote setting to create effective interpersonal relationships with parents/carers, the community and colleagues in remote localities.

TOPICS

1. Working effectively with parents.
2. Working with Aboriginal parents.

The need to:

- respect culture;
- be sensitive to culture and customs;
- develop appropriate communications;
- build rapport; and
- monitor one's own culture bias and behaviour.

For an excellent discussion on these points see *Working with Aboriginal communities: A practical resource* http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/working_with_aboriginal.pdf Note the practical tips provided in this publication.

3. Building community trust and collaboration.

For an overview of this see Harrison (2011, p. 165 - 177). Topics covered by Harrison include:

- dealing with our own perceptions, memories of authority;
- reasons why parents stay away from school;
- speaking with the parents;
- getting parents involved in the school;
- building community trust;
- involving parents in the classroom;
- Aboriginal Education Advisory Groups; and
- home visits.

The chapter ends with practical tips regarding effective communication strategies in remote communities.

PARTNER UNIVERSITIES



TASKS

1. Marsh (2008, p. 244–260), provides a good overview of working with parents. Note the Reflections and Issues at the end of his discussion (p.259 – 260). Consider these reflections and issues in the remote school context.
2. What are some strategies you can employ to ensure that you establish effective communication with parents/carers in remote locations:
 - a. prior to arriving at the school/community;
 - b. within the first week of arrival;
 - c. on the first day of school;
 - d. during the first term; and
 - e. over the first year.
3. Familiarise yourself with policies and other documentation relating to working effectively, sensitively and confidentially with parents/carers:
 - a. school level documentation;
 - b. community (often these protocols will not be documented and the school will very likely have incorporated them into their documentation);
 - c. systemic documentation / policies e.g. Department of Education;
 - d. DEEWR documentation;
 - e. other government departments.
4. Given that many Aboriginal parents have had negative experiences of schooling and feel uncomfortable on school premises, list a variety of short term and long term strategies for building relationships with Aboriginal parents.
5. Schools often try to communicate with parents by telephone between the hours of 8:00am and 4:00pm or by mail. What factors impact on the accessibility (both positive and negative) of parents to teachers?
6. In small communities sometimes parents are too accessible. As a Graduate how will you respond to parents asking for information about their child or making complaints to you as the teacher, in the supermarket or at the hotel?
7. Develop a personal set of 'commandments' relating to your own code of conduct in the community and with colleagues.
8. Working closely with colleagues at work and after hours can create tensions. What action can you take to prevent the development of tensions? How can you deal with conflict with parents and colleagues if it should arise?

RESOURCES

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This resource package has been produced for the Tertiary Educators Rural, Remote and Regional Network (TERRR Network) as part of an Office for Learning and Teaching (formally the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) project titled *Developing Strategies at the Pre-service Level to Address Critical Teacher Attraction and Retention Issues in Australian Rural, Regional and Remote Schools*.

Support for this publication has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

