

EDITORIAL

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Welcome to the second edition of the Australian and International Journal of Rural Education (AIJRE) for 2015. We are pleased to offer our readers a range of articles to stimulate discussion and creative thinking around the issues facing rural and remote learners, educators and institutions broadly grouped into areas related to relationships, overcoming isolation and curriculum.

Opening the issue, the importance of relationships is highlighted in Jennifer Charteris inquiry approach to teacher professional learning. It demonstrates that Assessment for Learning (AfL) pedagogies can have a significant impact on student learning and achievement. In particular her paper explores how teacher feedback for professional learning can be nuanced and dialogic. Tiffany Jones' paper continues the focus on learners by considering the differences between the experiences of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (GLBTIQ) students in rural locations compared with those in urban education contexts. Studies have repeatedly confirmed that GLBTIQ students from rural and remote towns experience isolation, social discrimination and a lack of appropriate services and support. Safe space provision and anti-discrimination policies and approaches consistent with new national legislation have been found to reduce incidences of bullying and wellbeing for the group. Issues related to older learners in rural communities are explored in the paper by Bronwyn Ellis. Ellis provides an overview of the variety of learning activities available for a particular community's older citizens emphasising that learning activities for older people should serve a real purpose: disseminating information, meeting social needs, fostering equity, nurturing skills to be responsible citizens, and providing service opportunities. Partnerships can involve information sharing, collaboration and cooperation, increasing social inclusion benefits the whole community.

The paper by Sue Gregory, Lisa Jacka, Mathew Hillier and Scott Grant explores how educators might overcome some of the issues arising from isolation. Their paper presents four case studies from regional and metropolitan Australian universities, showcasing how 3D virtual world platforms have been used to connect, engage and motivate students in both co-located and non-co-located contexts. For rural educators looking for innovative ways to enrich the student learning experience, the case studies offer first hand insights into the potential and the problems of using virtual worlds for educational purposes. The next paper by Kathy Jenkins and Linley Cornish reports an approach they adopted to preparing pre-service teachers to teach in both rural and urban contexts. A unit was developed to prepare pre-service teachers for the issues they may face, especially in rural schools, including multi-grade teaching, coping with isolation, working as a casual teacher, and communicating with parents and caregivers.

Curriculum designed by Judith Miller, John Haynes and Jim Pennington from UNE was used as a vehicle to improve a rural schools Health and Physical Education program. Two joint research projects are outlined in their paper. The first project involved a school based evidence driven curriculum and a remediation program for children identified through a coordination testing process. The second project investigated students' Health Education knowledge and explored behavioural changes in and around nutritional choices. Finally, Robert Whannell and Stephen Tobias' paper outlines the steps taken at UNE to improve the provision of mathematics and science education (MS) in rural Australia it is in response to reports of a steady decline in the number of secondary and tertiary students studying mathematics and science and rural schools experiencing a shortage of qualified teachers in these disciplines. Initiatives such as the use of an online interactive digital classroom by rural NSW schools presenting MS contexts based on a SMART (sustainable, management, and accessible rural technologies) Farm are investigated. Research to improve teacher confidence and competence in these areas is discussed along with the steps being taken to develop a Higher Education Research Facility (HERF) which will support research and engagement in the STEM domain.

We hope that you will enjoy engaging with the initiatives and research findings in these papers. We are supremely grateful to our authors, members, readers and SPERA for the ongoing support to help make this journal the flagship rural education journal for Australia, and to grow the journal into one that is internationally renowned.

Aaron Drummond & Sue Ledger: Chief Policy Editors.