

FOREWORD

For some time now it has been recognised that students in rural and regional schools have not been achieving to the same levels in science and mathematics as their capital city peers, and that rural and regional teachers have less access to resources and professional development than their city colleagues. I believe the underachievement of rural school students, approximately one-third of our student population, is one of the most pressing issues in education in Australia today.

Concerns about these issues prompted the Federal Government, through its Regional Partnerships Program within the Department of Transport and Regional Services, to establish the National Centre of Science, ICT, and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR) in July 2004. The SiMERR National Centre conducts targeted research that helps identify areas of educational inequity, and promotes strategies to support rural and regional teachers in providing quality education for their schools.

When we read the chapters in this book about rural schools and their students, teachers and parents the resulting stories allow us to see beyond the statistics of the main report. The vignettes drawn by research teams from the SiMERR hubs provide first-hand perspectives on the rural-urban education divide.

In talking about rural education, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the complexities of the issues identified and their apparent intractability. It is also easy to slip into a deficit-type model where everything is negative. However, we know that this is not an accurate portrayal of rural and regional schools.

Woven within the case-studies in this volume is another side of the story. A side that does not negate the data concerning inequity but one that talks about hope, achievement, possibilities, and potential advantages. There are stories of capable and talented students, committed and enthusiastic teachers, and involved and caring parents. There are examples of innovative practices at work in difficult situations. Most significantly, there is the sense that the many problems currently being experienced by rural and regional students are not inevitable. These case-studies offer glimpses of new or alternative ways of thinking and acting that highlight an exciting potential for rural education and allow us to contemplate that, with national collaboration, there may be an opportunity to bring about real and sustainable change.

I commend this volume to you.

I add my thanks to those whom Dr Terry Lyons has acknowledged and in particular the work of the SiMERR research teams in what was our first truly national research project. However, I especially acknowledge the quality work, energy, conscientious approach and good humour that Terry has brought to his role as the SiMERR National Survey Manager and as the editor of this volume. His relentless pursuit of excellence and the strength of his abilities across a wide range of activities are amazing. The quality evident in this volume is but one manifestation of his extraordinary efforts.

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