

Mathematics in Early Years

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Project Title	A Feasibility Study of Rural Professional Development in Early Years Mathematics
Project Team	Dr Robert Hunting, Associate Professor Judith Mousley, Mr Brian Doig (SiMERR Victoria)
Period	June 2006 – December 2007
Funding Agency	SiMERR
Organisational Base	SiMERR Victoria

Description

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An important task facing Australia is to improve the numeracy capabilities of its citizens, and earlier years mathematics is a critical component of this. In particular, the provision of quality teaching and learning in mathematics to young children in rural areas of Australia is an area needing expert attention and the development of effective policy at a national level.

This project brought together Australian experts in rural professional development in mathematics curriculum and teaching, early childhood mathematics education researchers, and early learning and development leaders, for two days to plan a longer-term project with the aim of developing an optimal model of local and distance learning strategies and interaction and to develop recommendations for ways forward. The theme of the content was Fostering the Mathematical Thinking of Young Children.

A central aim of the Early Years Mathematics Forum was to consider ways to guide and empower early years (0-5) leaders, teachers, and childcare professionals in rural and regional Australia so that the mathematical potential of young children could be enhanced and developed. The Forum was divided into four plenary working sessions. The focus of the first two sessions was brief presentations of on-going and recent work. The focus of the second two sessions was on visions, possibilities, obstacles and challenges, and identification of possible future projects.

Participants

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10 mathematics educators with experience in early years mathematics in rural Australia: Janette Bobis (University of Sydney), Lyn English (Queensland University of Technology), Bob Perry (University of Western Sydney), Joanne Mulligan (Macquarie University), Robert Hunting, Judy Mousley and Brian Doig (Deakin University), Cath Pearn (University of Melbourne), Jill Robbins (Monash University), Jenny Young-Loveridge (University of Waikato, NZ).

Findings

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The forum resulted in a number of specific recommendations for further research and action:

- Elaboration of a recent national position paper and support by collecting video samples of children learning mathematics, as explanatory material;
- Seeking of federal support for an early childhood mathematics 'state of the field' mapping project; and
- A series of studies focusing on the mathematics knowledge and practice of early childhood professionals, and the type of support materials that would support mathematical growth in young children.

Outcomes

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- A report (24 pages) which was prepared for members to support approaches to government and potential funding bodies for initiatives in early years mathematics in rural and regional areas – Early Years Mathematics Forum: Report to the National Centre of Science, ICT and Mathematics Education in Rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR).

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The report identified major directions for research in early years mathematics, and contains a number of specific recommendations for action which were followed up by members of the forum. SiMERR National Centre funded an ongoing project under the leadership of Dr Robert Hunting entitled Mathematics Thinking of Preschool Children in Rural and Regional Australia (see separate report under National Centre)

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