

## Linking Pre-Service Education with Rural Education

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Project Title	Different Places, Different Faces: Linking Pre-Service Education with Rural Education
Project Team	Dr Sandra Frid (SiMERR WA), Ms Karen Wood (DET WA)
Period	2006 - 2007
Funding Agency	SiMERR and Australian Teacher Education Association
Organisational Base	SiMERR WA

### Description

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The main part of this project documented the development of early years/primary curricula in a remote goldfields school and a rural wheat-belt school. It first examined teaching that is developed from principles for multi-age learning environments, the integration of technology, different learning styles, and integration across curriculum learning areas. The theme-based, learner-focused approach used in the two distinct rural/remote environments provided an array of examples of student learning activities in mathematics, science, ICT and literacy that captured the essence of student interests, learning styles, and contextual relevance. Examples included: curriculum development for young Aboriginal students guided by a 'mathematics through movement' approach; a student chosen theme, The Man from Snowy River, serving as a focus for science investigations into energy, water and transport; a mathematics shape and measurement project using quilting and input from the local community 'quilters'; and student-written stories about local history and events. Examples were then shared with pre-service education students to broaden their awareness and knowledge about educational opportunities and experiences in rural and remote schools.

### Participants

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An early childhood/primary teacher at a remote goldfields school and a rural wheat belt school; students in the teacher's classes

### Findings

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The curriculum development initiatives in this project demonstrated that early mathematics, science, ICT, and literacy learning can be motivating, engaging, and rich in conceptual meanings and related skills if children's interests and local cultural and environmental contexts are used to focus curriculum planning that caters for diverse levels of achievement and diverse learning needs. In regional, rural and remote schools, context and student diversity are of particular importance because often the students are in mixed-year level classrooms and, depending on the location, they have limited direct experiences beyond their local geographical, social and cultural environments. The work in this project showed how these unique settings offer opportunities for locally-developed curricula that meet the learning needs of the local student cohort. At the same time they provide avenues by which pre-service teachers can learn about the professionally stimulating, rich, and rewarding opportunities available in regional, rural and remote schools.

This project also showed that the many-faceted opportunities, challenges, and rewards inherent in teaching in rural schools can serve as catalysts for professional growth. In this way, teaching in regional, rural or remote locations, particularly for teachers in their initial years of employment, is not seen as 'survival'. Instead, it is an opportunity to develop personal and professional knowledge of aspects of Australia's unique and diverse communities, while at the same time developing professional capacities in curriculum development, teaching and assessment, classroom environments and management, and community partnerships can be harnessed to develop effective, efficient and rewarding learning and teaching practices.

### Outcomes

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#### Published refereed papers

- Wood, K., & Frid, S. (2007). Bush Tucker: Nourishing early mathematics learning in a rural school through a variety of forms of curriculum integration. In K. Milton, H. Reeves & T. Spencer (Eds.), Mathematics: Essential for learning, essential for life (Proceedings of the 21st biennial conference of the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers, pp. 95-100). Adelaide: AAMT Inc.

- Wood, K. (2007). Mathematics through movement: An investigation of the links between kinaesthetic and conceptual learning. In H. Reeves, K. Milton, & T. Spencer (Eds.), *Mathematics: Essential for learning, essential for life* (Proceedings of the 21st biennial conference of the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers, pp. 404-408). Adelaide, AAMT Inc.
- (Reprinted) Wood, K. (2008). Mathematics through movement: An investigation of the links between kinaesthetic and conceptual learning. *Australian Primary Mathematics Classroom*, 13(1), 18-22.

#### Invited major presentation

- Frid, S., & Wood, K. (2007, July). Bush Tucker: Nourishing early mathematics learning in a rural school through a variety of forms of curriculum integration. 21st Biennial Conference of the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers, Hobart, Tas.

#### Impact

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Through contacts and work on this project in 2006 at a remote school, the project was extended into 2007 as a natural continuation of the professional colleagues and mentoring processes established initially. At the same time, the researcher (Dr Frid) was invited by the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers (AAMT) to make a joint major presentation at their Biennial Conference in Hobart (July 2007) with a teacher on a partnership-research endeavour. The professional partnership/mentorship has continued into 2008 as Ms Wood has taken up a new position as the science teacher at a remote school with students in kindergarten to Year 10. The project has also been a catalyst and model for part of the process that will be followed in a 12 month project to begin in July 2008 that is funded through an Australian Learning and Teaching Council (Carrick) Competitive Grant, titled Developing primary teacher education students' professional capacities for children's diverse mathematics achievement and learning needs. This project has built into it a regional and rural school component in which pre-service teachers will examine work samples from children in these locations and will use blogs to communicate with the children's teachers.

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