



*Proceedings of the 'Narrowing the Gap:
Addressing Educational Disadvantage'
Conference*

*SiMERR National Conference
University of New England,
Armidale NSW*

26 – 28 April 2007

Proceedings Edited by:
Lorraine Graham



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The National Centre of Science, Information and Communication Technology and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia

Proceedings of the Narrowing the Gap: Addressing Educational Disadvantage Conference

Edited by: Associate Professor Lorraine Graham, University of New England

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(http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/research_sector/online_forms_services/higher_education_research_data_collection.thm#2008_specifications)

The Narrowing the Gap: Addressing Educational Disadvantage Conference was held at The University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales, Australia from 26 – 28 April, 2007.

FOREWORD

ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE: INTRODUCTION TO THE NARROWING THE GAP CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS.

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As Chair of the Narrowing the Gap Conference Committee, I would like to thank all members of the committee (John Pegg, Deb Jenner, Russel Glover, Jenny Thomas, Noelene Raymond, Tony Brown and Sharon Gallen) who worked so hard to make the conference such a success. Director of SiMERR, John Pegg was instrumental in envisioning, planning and supporting SiMERR Australia's Student Diversity Hub representatives to attend Narrowing the Gap. Deb Jenner kept the conference organisation on track and worked capably alongside Sharon Gallen, manager of the UNE Conference Company. Tony Brown developed the website and tackled the complex job of providing ICT support for the three days of the conference. All members of the committee, but especially Deb Jenner, Russel Glover and Debbie Sozou made the Narrowing of the Gap conference very special by providing the extra touches of hospitality that set this important gathering apart.

To recap, the Narrowing the Gap Conference held at the University of New England from the 26th to 28th April 2007 brought together practitioners, academics, and administrators concerned with the conference theme of Addressing Educational Disadvantage. National and international keynote speakers elaborated on different aspects of this theme in their presentations.

Professor John Hattie discussed the major findings and practical implications of his extensive meta-analyses of educational research. The key concepts he elaborated on included teachers' conceptions of learning, the power of feedback, and multiple notions of achievement. In his address, **Professor Mike Royer** highlighted the critical role that efficient use of working memory plays in academic achievement. He pointed out that low-level aspects of academic skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics can become automatic and that virtually all higher-level academic learning is dependent on these automated low-level skills. Professor Royer also discussed how the development of automated cognitive skills can be blocked by individual differences in cognitive capacity, variation in world languages and poor instructional practices.

Whether education is failing to live up to its promise for many young people was the quandary posed by **Professor Geoff Masters** in his address. In his presentation, Professor Masters focused on two related concerns for Australian education: (i) the significant proportion of young people who become disengaged during their school years, achieve only minimal educational outcomes and have limited subsequent engagement in work or further learning; and (ii) the shortage of young people with the knowledge and skills required for effective participation in the future Australian workforce. Regarding such essential educational skills, **Professor Ian Hay** and **Professor Adrian Ashman** presented complementary keynotes on the importance of language skills to children's early reading acquisition and models of recreational reading and engagement, respectively. Lastly, **Professor John Pegg** and I gave the final keynote presentation that focused on ways to improve the performance of low-achieving students and described some key features of the *QuickSmart* intervention which targets students who consistently experience a lack of success with basic academic skills.

Alongside these international keynote speakers were 28 paper and symposia presentations delivered by presenters from the United Kingdom, New Zealand and throughout Australia. The papers included in this book of proceedings were written based on authors' conference presentations and have been successfully peer reviewed. Several established publishers have also been approached to support an edited book based on the major research themes presented at the Narrowing the Gap conference.

The ten papers included in this book of conference proceedings have all been peer reviewed in accordance with Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations regulations for Higher Education Research Data Collection. (http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/research_sector/online_forms_services/higher_education_research_data_collection.thm#2008_specifications). All authors have responded to reviewer comments in a professional and collegial manner.

As editor of the proceedings, I am very pleased to recommend this collection of papers to you.

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