ENGAGING PROFESSIONALLY: TEACHING AND LIVING IN THE REMOTE CONTEXT

This is one of seven Teacher Guides in the series *'Teaching in Remote Australian Schools: Enhancing Pre-Service Teacher Education – A Resource Package'*.

STANDARD

7.0 Engaging Professionally with Colleagues, Parents/ Carers and the Community

FOCUS AREA

7.4 Engaging with professional teaching networks and broader communities

GRADUATE DESCRIPTOR

Understand the role of external professionals and community representatives in broadening teachers' professional knowledge and practice.

PARTNER UNIVERSITIES

Curtin University

ECU EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA

Murdoch UNIVERSITY

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

SPERA SOCIETY FOR THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION FOR RURAL AUSTRALIA

INTRODUCTION

Professional Teaching Networks.

The best educators are the best learners and all educators should take responsibility to maintain an open and curious mind and to constantly push themselves to be the best they can be (AITSL, 2012).

The focus of this Teacher Guide is twofold. First, it is about engaging with others to continue your professional learning. Second, it is about engaging with others not only to learn from them but understand how by engaging with them they can be enlisted to support your work as a teacher and the work of the school in general.

Professional associations fulfil a number of roles, mainly focused around the growth and development of the profession. In particular professional associations strive to improve the knowledge base and practice of the profession. The Society for the Provision of Education for Rural Australia is the only professional association focussed s specifically on the field of teaching and learning in rural and remote contexts of Australia. More information about SPERA can be found at: www.spera.asn.au.

One of the challenges facing teachers in remote locations is professional isolation. Active participation in professional associations can assist teachers in remote locations to stay professionally connected, utilise the experience of others and access a wide range of resources. Building a professional network is extremely important in the remote teaching context.

PTCWA note that:

Professional education associations are autonomous groups of educators with a particular area of educational interest. Association members are brought together by their passion for education and their desire to enhance quality teaching and learning through continued growth and development of their craft in an area of shared interest.

A good starting point to find out more about professional associations is the Professional Teaching Council of Western Australia (PTCWA).

The Professional Teaching Council of Western Australia (PTCWA) is the peak body representing voluntary professional education associations within Western Australia. As an umbrella body for individual associations, PTCWA represents over 9,000 teachers across all sectors and all learning areas. The key aim of PTCWA is to promote professionalism in teaching through an enhancement of the work of professional education associations. It provides a wider context for the work of these associations through facilitation of networking and communication between individual associations. A list of the Professional Teaching Associations in WA can be found on PTCWA's website (http://www.ptcwa.edu.au/*).*

Members Professional Associations assist educators to keep abreast of new developments and research; and to improve teaching and learning experiences for their students through constant reflection on their practice.

Associations operate largely on a voluntary basis, fuelled by the enthusiasm of their members.

Income generated from membership subscriptions, publications and workshop fees is channelled back into the association to provide more services for members. These services include professional development workshops and conferences, publications, advocacy and networking support services. (Reference: http://www.ptcwa.wa.edu. au/?page_id=8*).*

Joining a professional association is the best way to maximise the benefits it has to offer.

State teacher registration authorities have built on the work of many professional teaching associations when developing their standards, as has the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Professional

Associations supported AITSL in the validation process of the National Professional Standard for Teachers and continue to work closely with the Institute in the development of support documentation.

Understand the role that community representatives can play in supporting the work of teachers and schools.

Understanding the role that community representatives can play in supporting the work of teachers and schools is important in all learning contexts but none more so than in non-metropolitan locations and especially in remote schools.

The links that rural, regional and remote schools have with their communities is very strong. The school is often the heart of the community and along with the provision of health is the biggest "industry" in the community in terms of people employed and daily activity. The strong links that exist between rural, regional and remote schools and their communities foster many opportunities for partnerships that can support and enhance learning. Pre-service teachers are directed to the curriculum modules produced by the Renewing Rural and Regional Teacher Education (RRRTEC) team and in particular Module 4 – *Understanding working with rural and regional communities and Module 5 – Getting to know students' lives* http://www. rrrtec.net.au/modules.html

As has been pointed out in other Teacher Guides in this resource package, building relationships and trust between the school and Aboriginal people in remote communities is extremely important and multifaceted. If this can be achieved effectively, the role that community representatives can play in supporting the work of teachers and schools is of tremendous value and reinforces the notion that teaching and learning is a shared responsibility. As noted in other places in this resource package, protocols associated with working with communities, especially remote Aboriginal communities are complex. Part of understanding the role that community representatives can play in supporting the work of teachers and schools is having the knowledge of the appropriate behaviours and conventions associated with working across the wider learning environment.

Understand the role of support agencies and specialist external staff

External Staff
There are many people in roles external to schools who can support the work of teachers. These include specialists who are employed by systems and sectors, who might be located in

other schools to serve regional hubs, in regional centres or in the capital city. School Psychologists are a good example.

Support Agencies/Cross Agency Approach
Over the past twenty years there has been a trend toward multi-agency approaches to improving outcomes in health, education and other human services. This is especially so in Australia's geographically remote locations. Specialists who are employed by agencies external to education can provide a service to a school. School nurses and speech pathologists are good examples. The extent to which schools have access to specialist external staff varies from system to system and across sectors. One common theme in geographically remote locations is that the provisions of all services face many challenges with access to specialist services limited or non-existent in some cases. Pre-service teachers and graduates need to make a point of finding out what specialist external staff are available in the school in which they do their practicum experience or to which they are appointed on graduation. They need to work with their mentor and other experienced teachers to understand the role of other professionals and the processes for accessing the support services they provide.

As one of the strategies to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal children and young people, the WA Aboriginal Child Health Survey recommended that:

Education systems and health systems should work together to provide appropriate support and assistance to Aboriginal students with emotional or behavioural difficulties. [Arguing that:]..the high proportion of Aboriginal students at moderate and high risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties and the strong link between these difficulties and poor attendance and academic performance makes it very important for education systems, health systems and family services systems to work together to provide appropriate support and assistance to students with emotional or behavioural difficulties (Zubrick, et al., 2006, p. 510).

Atkinson, et al. (2007) and Sharplin et al. (2011) note that the research literature identifies factors that can both facilitate and block multi-agency work including working relationships, processes, resourcing and management and governance. An issue in remote locations is often the short term nature of many posting which prevents the building of effective working relations especially around building trust (Jarvis-Tracey et al., 2011; O'Connor, 2007). Likewise, the high mobility of

professionals in remote locations can impact on the continuity and sustainability of multi-agency work and programs.

In March 2012 the Western Australian Premier and Minister for Education announced a new phase in the development of multi-agency and integrated services within the education context with the establishment of 10 new Child and Parent Centres. In addition to the 10 new centres, 75 schools will receive grants of up to $10,000 to support the concept of combining services such as education, health, parenting and playgroups on school sites across Western Australia. The Media Statement announcing the new initiative can be found at: http://www. mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/default. aspx?ItemId=148999&page=4

An extract from the Media Statement notes:

The State Government will open 10 new Child and Parent Centres across Western Australia to provide vital services to families with young children at risk…

These centres, to be located on public school sites in areas with the highest concentration of developmentally vulnerable children, will provide fundamental services to help young children develop into healthy and well educated young people…

The State Government will invest $28.8million in the next four years to establish the centres and provide integrated services for children and parents...

We have learned from the successes of various models where parents and teachers work together including…

Parents will be able to come to the school and ask for advice. The programs and services on offer will be family friendly.

These might include:

- *child health checks and referrals by a nurse;*
- *parenting information and programs;*
- *student assessment referrals, counselling and family support delivered by school psychologists;*
- *playgroups and early learning programs with parental involvement;*
- *advice on supporting children's physical, cognitive, language and social and emotional development; and*
- *allied health services such as occupational therapy, speech therapy and physiotherapy ….*

The centres would allow professionals to:

- *provide services targeted to the specific needs of individual families;*

- *identify and engage with 'at risk' children and their parents;*
- *work to ensure the proper, healthy development of young children;*
- *improve learning outcomes and school attendance;*
- *provide a welcoming space with a range of easily accessible specialists; and*
- *better support for parents to help nurture their children…*

Teacher Resilience

While teaching in remote locations provides unsurpassed opportunities for career development and personal experiences of unique locations, adjusting to unfamiliar environments, unfamiliar cultural context and often dislocated from family can produce personal and professional stresses (Sharplin, 2008). Keeping a balanced perspective on the experience can be assisted by healthy lifestyle choices including daily physical activity.

A range of information and support services are available to assist Graduates from two particularly useful websites: Keeping cool: Building teacher resilience at http:// www.keepingcool.edu.au/node/181 and ResponseAbility at http://www.responseability. org/site/index.cfm?display=134392.

OUTCOMES

- Graduates understanding and appreciate the role of professional associations in supporting their professional knowledge and practice.
- Graduates recognise the role community members can play in supporting the work of teachers and schools especially in the remote context.
- Graduates understand the role of support agencies and specialist external staff in working with teachers and schools especially in the remote context.
- Graduates understand the concept of resilience and monitor their own personal and professional wellbeing in the remote context.
- Role of professional associations in teaching and learning in supporting teachers' professional knowledge and practice.
- How professional associations and networks can help overcome professional isolation experienced in the remote context.
- The role of profession associations in a Community of Practice especially in the remote context.
- How professional associations can help build personal and professional resilience

- Identifying services to support the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and students in schools.
- Understanding the role community representatives can play in supporting the work of teachers and schools.
- Identify and understand the role of support agencies and specialist external staff in working with teachers and schools.

TASKS

Role of Professional Associations

Go to the Professional Teaching Council of Western Australia http://www.ptcwa.wa.edu.au/

1. Select three or four professional associations from the members section of PCTWA's website. Prepare a report to be presented at a tutorial of pre-service teachers on the professional associations you have selected and the reason why this group may be valuable to you. Your report needs to cover such things as:

- purpose;
- history;
- structure (for example is state or nationally based?);

- services provided to members (publications, professional development, awards and acknowledgements, etc);
- list of Executive Members;
- membership fees; and
- contact details.

Role of Community Representatives

2. Based on your research and knowledge gained as a result of your practicums:

- Make a list of roles community representatives play in supporting the work of teachers and schools.
- Using the framework below developed by Kilpatrick, Johns & Mulford (2003, p. 9) categorise the list under the headings, *public relations, decision making, community empowerment, shared vision, taking risks and community resources.*
- Further categorise the examples you have listed into one of the three phases of "maturity of partnerships" suggested by Kilpatrick, et al. Why do you believe the example fits the level of maturity you have chosen?
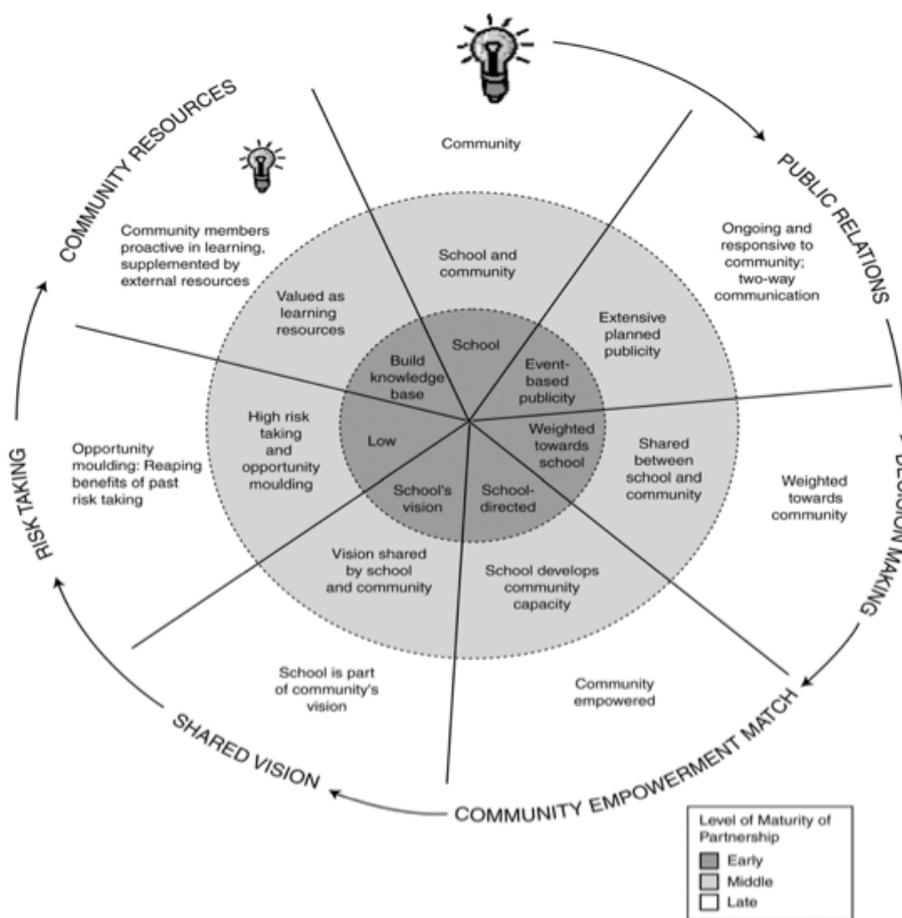

Figure 1: Relationship between indicators and level of maturity of the school – community partnership Source: Kilpatrick, Johns & Mumford (2003, p. 9)

3. Note the innovative strategies for small and remote schools identified by Wildy and Clarke (2010). http://cap.nsw.edu.au/files/Innovative%20Strategies%20for%20Small%20and%20Remote%20Schools%20-%20A%20Literature%20Review.pdf
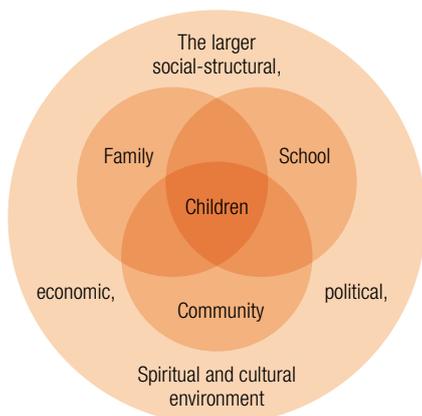
Identify:

- The intended audience for each strategy.
- The extent and role of community/parents/carers in each strategy.
- Examples of cross agency support.

Select three or four of the strategies and suggest ways you could support the strategy if you were teaching at the school. Discuss your ideas with your mentor to "quality assure" your idea.

The WA Aboriginal Child Health Survey (Zubrick et al., 2006) used a survey model, below, titled *Children Within Contexts of Influence*.

Figure 2: Survey Model: Children Within Contexts of Influence. Source: Jessor (1993)

4. With this model in mind, identify the State and Federal agencies that work mainly within the context of:

- the family;
- the community; and
- the school.

5. Identify a range of programs operated by three (3) agencies and:

- Locate within which context they target (i.e. family, community, school).
- Find evidence in the documentation from the agency you have identified around the extent to which the programs have a "*cross-agency*" approach including working with the school. Alternatively:

- If the main focus of the programs is the school, what evidence is there to suggest that there is a "*cross-agency*" approach to the program?

6. Identify two or three schools in the remote or very remote parts of Western Australia as per the Accessibility Remoteness Index Australia 2006 (see map in the Overview to this resource package). Using *Schools Online* facility provided by the Department of Education (WA) http://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolsonline/home.do find out the extent to which these schools are using other agencies and external specialists to support teachers and the school.

Teacher Resilience

7. How do you recognise you are stressed? List the behaviours and emotions that you exhibit when you are feeling stressed.

8. The recreational opportunities in remote communities vary enormously. Some locations have desirable sporting facilities while others have a limited range of activities and resources. What sporting and social activities are you most likely to engage in within a remote community if it is possible? If you cannot access the activity of your choice what alternatives would you consider?

9. Staying connected to friends, family and other professionals external to the community is vital for health and wellbeing. Identify your existing personal and professional networks and consider how you can expand these within a remote location.

10. Explore the resources available on the Keeping Cool and ResponseAbility websites. Prepare some strategies and advice to offer a colleague that may be feeling stressed.

RESOURCES

Beltman, S., Mansfield, C.F. & Price, A. (2011) Thriving not just surviving: A review of research on teacher resilience. *Educational Research Review*, 6, 185-207. See Teacher Resilience Website Keeping your cool at http://www.keepingcool.edu.au/

Campbell, A., & Yates, G. (2011). Want to be a country teacher? No, I am too metrocentric. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 26, 1-12. Retrieved from: http://www.jrre.psu.edu/articles/26-4.pdf

Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS). (2011). *Building teacher-family partnerships: the role of teacher preparation programs*. Retrieved from: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3673/

is_3_129/ai_n31481903/

Commonwealth Government of Australia (2009). *ResponseAbility*. http://www.responseability.org/site/index.cfm?display=134392

Corbett, M. (2010). Backing the right horse: Teacher education, sociocultural analysis and literacy in rural education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 26, 82–86.

Eppley, K., Shannon, P., & Gilbert, L. K. (2011). "Did you like living in a trailer? Why or why not?" Discourse and the third space in a rural pen pal exchange. T*eaching and Teacher Education*. 27, 289-297.

Groundwater-Smith, S., Ewing, R., & Le Cornu., L. (2011). *Teaching challenges and dilemmas*. (4th ed.). Australia: Cengage Learning Australia.

Harrison, N. (2011). *Teaching and learning in Aboriginal education*. Victoria, Australia: Oxford University Press.

Hudson, P., & Hudson, S. (2008). Changing pre-service teachers' attitudes for teaching in rural schools. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 33, 67 – 77. Retrieved from: http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol33/iss4/6

Jessor, R. (1993). Successful adolescent development among youth in high-risk settings. *American Psychologist*, 48, 117-126.

Keeping cool: Building teacher resilience. http://www.keepingcool.edu.au/node/181

Marsh, C. (2007). *Becoming a teacher: Knowledge, skills and issues* (4th ed.). Australia: Pearson Australia.

Mansfield, C. F., Beltman, S., Price, A., & McConney, A. (2012). "Don't sweat the small stuff:" Understanding teacher resilience at the chalkface. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28(3), 357-367.

Sharplin, E.D., McGowan, W., Fisher, C., Forsey, M., Lea, T. (2011). *Equity in health: Relevance for educators*. Australian College of Educators.

Stewart, J., Lohoar, S., & Higgins, D. (2011). *Effective practices for service delivery coordination in Indigenous communities - Resource sheet no. 8*. Retrieved from: http://www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/documents/resource_sheets/ctgc-rs-08.pdf

Wildy, H., & Clarke, S. (2010) Innovative strategies for small rural schools. A Literature Review. University of Western Australia.

Zubrick S.R., Silburn, S.R., De Maio, J.A., Shepherd, C., Griffin, J.A., Dalby, R.B., Mitrou, F.G., Lawrence, D.M., Hayward, C., Pearson, G., Milroy, H., Milroy, J., Cox, A. (2006). *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: Improving the Educational Experiences of Aboriginal Children and Young People*. Perth: Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research.

TERRR Network Team

The TERRRN team consists of: Professor Sue Trinidad (Dean of Teaching and Learning, Curtin University), Associate Professor Graeme Lock, Director, Learning and Teaching, Edith Cowan University, Assistant Professor Elaine Sharplin (Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning, University of Western Australia), Dr Tania Broadley (Flexible Learning and Academic Development, Curtin Business School), Susan Ledger (Director of School Experience, Murdoch University), Emmy Terry (President, Society for the Provision of Education for Rural Australia [SPERA]) and Don Boyd (Executive Member, SPERA).