Implementing the National Curriculum in Rural, Regional and Remote Schools
by Professor John Halsey

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is responsible for the design and implementation of the Australian Curriculum from Kindergarten to Year 12 which is introduced to "equip all young Australians with the essential skills, knowledge and capabilities to thrive and compete in a globalised world and information rich workplaces of the current century" (Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, 2008, as sourced from ACARA website, August 24, 2010, emphasis added). The commitment by ACARA to uniform implementation of a national curriculum across Australia means that the implementation of the new curriculum in rural, regional and remote areas must receive the resources and the services needed to ensure this commitment is translated into practice.

In June this year 233 leaders of rural, regional and remote schools, and distance education service providers, were invited to respond to an on-line survey about implementing the Australian Curriculum. 44 leaders or 18.9% responded which is comparable to typical response rates for online surveys.

While respondents recognised some benefits of an Australian Curriculum, many of the leaders who returned the survey have concerns about how they will lead and manage this reform.

Essentially, these leaders want four improvements to assist them:
• firstly, leaders want more information about the Australian Curriculum; there is a strong sense that consultation about implementing the Australian Curriculum needs to be increased
• secondly, rural, regional and remote leaders need sufficient resources to successfully introduce the Australian Curriculum; specifically this means funding, access to curriculum experts and time for teachers to work through what they have to do
• thirdly, leaders want implementation support which is responsive to rural and remote contexts and which recognises that many, perhaps most, rural and remote schools do not have a large pool of relief teachers who can release permanent staff for professional development sessions

(Continued on page 4)

Street Signs? by Dr Aaron Drummond

On September 18th, we went to Kimba, about 460km from Adelaide. The experience was quite unusual for me, because I am a child of the digital renaissance. Specifically, loaded with my iPhone and laptop, I am almost never out of contact with the Internet or the digital world. From the moment we left Port Augusta, I was without phone coverage for the two days until I returned. For me, the experience was wholly unnerving. Not only was I painfully aware of the difficulties a lack of phone coverage would cause should I break down, I was unable to keep in contact with my friends and family as easily, leading to a sense of isolation.

Perhaps most interestingly, I found that without my iPhone’s GPS capability, I was unable to navigate with the efficiency that I ordinarily would. I had to literally rely upon street signs to find my way, something I have not done for years thanks to the digital revolution.

Amusingly however, it was not the ‘city slicker’ who relies upon his gadgets who got lost, but the genuine rural educator, as the professor took a wrong turn which resulted in a two hour detour leaving Kimba and arriving in – you guessed it – Kimba.

Inside this issue:
- The ERPP Pioneers 2
- In the News 2
- Areas Schools 3
- The Ins and Outs of Quantitative Research 3
- Vision and Mission 4
- Upcoming Events 4
**The ERPP Pioneers** by Marja van Breda

You’ll be Pioneers!”, I enthusiastically exclaimed whilst taking part in a meeting with the students who are going on the Extended Rural Professional Practicum (ERPP) from January 2011. Even though pioneering sounds adventurous, as the best of good Australian stories do, the reality of participating in this is a little more down-to-earth: good planning and communication with a good deal of willingness and commitment. The ERPP is a Pilot Project for pre-service teachers to experience living and working for a whole semester in a rural school set within a rural community. Since its inception, a lot of has been achieved. Students applied for the program, were interviewed, went through final selection and were matched to schools. There are nine people in this first group, eight will go to schools in the Riverland and one to Mount Gambier. Currently, students are making contact with their respective schools, questions are being answered and some of the main administrative work has been completed.

The project has been made possible through the assistance of the Principals of the rural schools under the leadership of Mr Kent Spangenberg, and donations from the Myer Foundation and the Credit Union SA. In addition, the Flinders Rural Medicine Program in Renmark have offered to take the ERPP students to complete a country-safe driving course, called ‘Drive to Live’ in February. This will be great fun and a really good thing to do!

It is hoped that this pilot project continues in years to come-to benefit students' professional experience, the rural schools and communities, and to add to the pool of rural teachers.

A combined welcome dinner for the Flinders Rural Medicine and the ERPP students is being held on 28th February 2011.

**Remote and rural response key concern**

by Candice Keller

RURAL school leaders are desperate for greater support in introducing the new national curriculum and have called for flexibility to retain a strong local focus in the content. A survey conducted by the Flinders University rural education unit has shown principals throughout regional and remote parts of Australia are concerned about the successful implementation of the new framework. The Sidney Myer Chair of Rural Education and Communities Professor John Halsey said the study revealed a feeling of anxiety about national curriculum despite the perceived benefits. “The general feeling from respondents was ‘we’re going to come on board with this, but we want to be able to do it without a sense of struggle,’’ Professor Halsey said. Professor Halsey said most commonly principals wanted additional resources in terms of funding right across the curriculum, close contact with curriculum experts and time to work through the changes. The survey of almost 50 school leaders from around Australia also identified a need for implementation support that was “responsive to rural and remote contexts”. Professor Halsey said this included recognising most isolated schools did not have a large pool of relief teachers who could stand in for permanent staff during necessary professional development training “Leaders would like to see better regional coordination of activities as well as enhanced access to online resources.” Professor Halsey said. The flexibility of the new framework to allow teachers to incorporate elements of local content was also highlighted as a key concern for respondents. “In small, rural and remote areas it is extremely important that curriculum content is relevant and based on what the students know and have experienced,” one respondent commented. The core curriculum of English, maths, science and history for Reception to Year 12 is due for release by the end of the year. Further subjects including the arts, geography and languages will follow thereafter. It is expected to be rolled-out by schools from 2011 with all schools picking up the majority of the new framework by the close of 2013. Chair of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority board, Professor Barry McGow, said though the first release of the curriculum had been delayed by a couple of months, all was tracking well for a nationally consistent system soon. ACARA has asked for an extension to present the final draft of the core subject curriculums to education ministers.
**Area Schools** by Professor John Halsey

In 2011, the History of Education Review journal will publish an article I wrote on the establishment of area schools in South Australia, 1941-1947. The abstract reads:

The introduction of area schools in rural South Australia, essentially coinciding with the period of the second World War, is an historically informative instance of how a government and its chief bureaucrats responded to and managed pressures from rural communities and other sources for a wider and better range of education during a time of limited resources. A diversity of factors such as school closures and consolidation, transport and university-based curriculum, coalesced to create a new model of schooling provision—area schools—that continues to function, often under similar pressures to those which existed at the time of their formation.

One read of the history of schooling in rural communities is that of constant struggle. First there is struggle to convince politicians and bureaucrats there are enough children to warrant opening a school and providing a teacher. Second there is struggle to convince politicians and bureaucrats to maintain a school when enrolments decline but the need for local access to education is probably more important than it ever was. Raymond William’s (1973) lucid argument about the interplay between permanence and persistence and country communities captures well the tensions and issues confronting more and more area schools. To illustrate, there is the relationship between a school’s enrolments and its curriculum—essentially, the greater the number and age range of the students, the greater the resources allocated and therefore the more the diverse the curriculum that can be offered. A decline in enrolments occurs—another bank closes, the local mini-market stops trading, a school in a regional centre extends its bus routes and offers incentives to families to enrol their children—and the local school loses enrolments which in turn reduces the curriculum available locally. But, in order to persist, to resist the downward domino effect, the local school needs (Continued on page 4)

The **Ins and Outs of Quantitative Research**

**Duck and Rover**

The team attended the Loxton farm fair in October as part of its data gathering in rural areas. The fair was enjoyable and contained a range of side-shows beyond those that have been in the previous fairs visited. One was a shooting gallery called “shoot out” in which one had to shoot metal ducks. The gallery was given the patronage of your local postdoctoral research fellow on two separate occasions. Not only did I manage to net myself two soft toys out of the experience, scoring 6/6 on the shooting range, but I was also able to use the experience to frame a teaching exercise around quantitative research – specifically, the concepts of validity and reliability.

Validity is a term to describe the degree to which a research implement measures what it is supposed to. In order to establish validity, researchers will typically engage in a ‘pilot test’, an initial collection of data that establishes whether the instrument actually measures the concept they would like it to. For example, if a new intelligence test is developed, does it correlate well with other measures of IQ? If so it is valid. To establish validity of the air rifle sights at Loxton, I paid the least I could for my first three shots to see if the sights were accurate. Scoring 3/3, the sights were clearly valid – useful for determining where the shot from the air rifle would end up.

Reliability is the concept of stability of a questionnaire over time. It is particularly important when trying to assess something that shouldn’t be changing very often. One would not expect moods to be stable, so reliability when measuring moods is not (as) important (there are some exceptions, but for a newsletter purpose let’s assume not). Alternatively, if you are (Continued on page 4)
Vision and Mission

• Vibrant, productive rural communities are integral to the long-term sustainability of Australia.
• It is critical that people who live and work in rural and remote Australia have access to high quality, relevant and affordable education, training and care at all ages and stages of life.
• It is essential that the people who live and work in urban contexts and provide policy advice to governments and others, and who design and manage a myriad of programs intended to benefit country people and communities, deeply understand rural.

The results of this (highly scientific) study? The rifle sights at “Shoot out” are both valid and reliable as a means of measuring the destination of air-rifle slugs over short distances. The proof? Our good friend Bartlet the stuffed dog.

No Sidney Myer Chair or School funds were used in the undertaking of this research. No ducks were harmed in the production of the paper. Until next time, Strength in numbers,

Dr. A.