

"Place Matters"
Productive Partnerships for Quality Teaching¹

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The Productive Partnerships for Quality Teaching and Learning Project² is an initiative that seeks to address the issues and challenges of rural schooling in NSW in new ways. It links the major teacher education institutions that supply teachers to rural NSW – Charles Sturt University and the University of New England – with the major employing and professional development body, NSW DET in order to address quality teaching and learning in partnership. The project also addresses the issues of high teacher turnover and difficult to staff rural schools as issues of pedagogy. The project seeks to complement the many industrial reforms which have resulted in financial and other incentives for rural teachers with new quality teaching and learning strategies which it is believed will also provide incentives for teachers to live and work in rural NSW.

The research partners will identify sites of 'value adding' in the eleven Western NSW school districts³. Using case studies and interviews with educational leaders, teachers, district superintendents, parents and community members a detailed knowledge of each site will be produced (see Figure 1). This knowledge will then be used to reflect on better ways to equip teachers for rural schools, both in terms of pre-service and in-service teacher education.

The major research questions being addressed by the project are as follows:

- How do the differing contexts of teaching in rural settings influence teaching practices?
- How can the preparation and support of teachers in universities and beyond be improved to enable quality educational outcomes for all students in rural settings?
- How might student outcomes be further enhanced in schools through recruitment, preparation, induction, mentoring and continuing teacher education practices explicitly aimed at developing and supporting quality teaching in rural settings?

¹ ARC Linkage 2002-2004 *Productive Partnerships for Quality Teaching: Quality Improvement, Schools Community Practice and Teacher Education in and for Rural and Remote Settings*. Conducted in Partnership by Charles Sturt University, the University of New England and the NSW Department of Education and Training. Chief Investigators: Bill Green, Will Letts, Norm McCulla, Colin Boylan, Cathryn McConaghy, Tom Maxwell, Andrew Wallace, Bob Meyenn, Wayne Chandler, and Paul Brock.

² Otherwise known as the Rural (Teacher) Education Project.

³ Albury, Armidale, Bathurst, Broken Hill, Deniliquin, Dubbo, Griffith, Moree, Orange, Wagga Wagga

- How can productive partnerships for quality teaching and learning be established or enhanced?

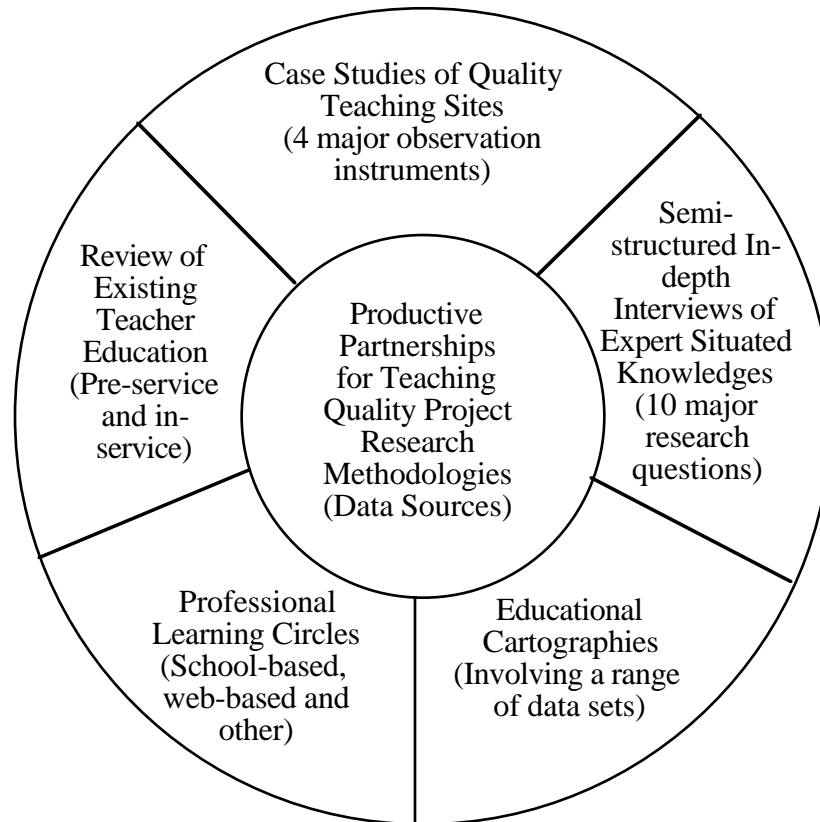


Figure 1 Productive Partnerships for Quality Teaching research methodology

The project is informed to a large extent by three recent major research projects on quality teaching. These are the research conducted by Fred Newmann and Associates at the University of Wisconsin (1996) in the US and the Queensland Schooling Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) conducted by researchers at the University of Queensland in partnership with Education Queensland (2002). The third is the AESOP study, involving a research team from the University of New England and the University of Western Sydney, in partnership with the NSW Department of Education and Training (AESOP 2002).

The Newmann research, couched within a strong equity imperative, considered how all students could participate in quality learning. This research developed a model of what was called 'Authentic Pedagogy' which recommended, among other things, team teaching, extended learning periods, visionary leadership, small school/class sizes and supportive external agencies. While having great value for NSW rural schools we believe the research assumes a 'generic' teacher in a 'generic' context and is thus limited in its application.

The QSRLS is significant for its engagement with globalisation and contemporary and on-going social and technological change. The Queensland study argues that for schooling to adequately meet the needs of students and their communities it must address more directly what are for many members of society very unstable social and economic conditions. As a result, a model of schooling for these 'new times', called 'Productive Pedagogies', was proposed and is currently being trialed in Queensland schools. The main foci of this model are intellectual quality, relevance, supportive classroom environment and the recognition of difference. Productive Pedagogies are supplemented by a 'New Basics' curriculum and an approach to assessment wherein students are required to complete 'Rich Tasks' (see Education Queensland <<http://education.qld.gov.au>> for details).

The Queensland model has an important contribution to make to schooling in rural NSW but, like the Newmann model, there are significant limitations. The 'new times' that the model seeks to address are not experienced in the same ways by all people. We believe that people in rural communities in NSW, for example, experience globalisation and social and technological change in different and unique ways compared with their urban counterparts. Thus our approach works against what may be described as the metrocentricism of many approaches to schooling reform.

Although there may be much about quality teaching and learning that is generic across various contexts, we argue that place matters in any identification of quality teaching and learning. We maintain that quality teaching and learning is situated practice, situated in the sense that teachers must read into their activities the particular aspects of their location. Accordingly our project is based on a model we have called 'Situated Pedagogies'.

Our research into quality teaching and learning begins with a more nuanced understanding of the significance of teaching and learning contexts in quality teaching. Additionally, we suggest that rural communities have a direct impact on teaching-learning dynamics in rural schools. Further, quality leadership in the bush is situated in the specific contexts of rural schooling, that is, it requires leaders to read the specifics of place. Our early observations of quality teaching and learning suggest that there are complex teaching-learning dynamics and subject/knowledge formations that are particular to rural places that need to be factored. And of crucial importance, the difficulties of time and space that are thrown into sharp focus in rural communities require innovative solutions around the formations of professional learning communities within and between rural schooling districts (see Figure 2).

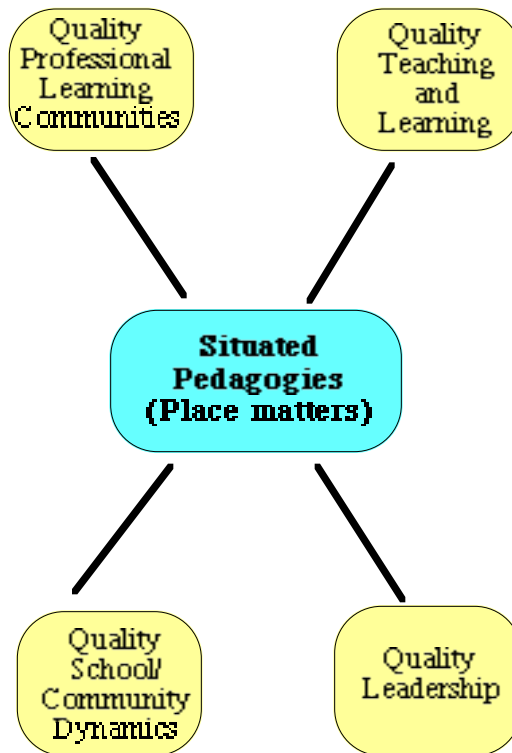


Figure 2 Situated Pedagogies

The above four dimensions, we suggest, are all structurally related in leading to quality teaching in rural schools. This insight has led us to consider the particular structural dimensions that contribute to the formations of particular knowledge, power and identity relations in rural schooling. We acknowledge that there are important historical, spatial, political and psychic dimensions to what counts as quality teaching and learning in rural schools. Our challenge in this large research project will be to identify these dimensions and to understand how it is that they translate to classroom practices (pedagogies, curriculums and assessment) and the work of administering and leading schools. At issue is the need to develop approaches to rural schooling wherein *all* students have access to quality teaching and an opportunity to engage in quality learning.

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References

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