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# A RESOURCE PACKAGE TRAINING FRAMEWORK FOR PRODUCING QUALITY GRADUATES TO WORK IN RURAL, REGIONAL AND REMOTE AUSTRALIA: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to advocate the resource package for producing quality graduates to work in rural, regional and remote Australia (TERRR Network), using a global perspective. This paper argues that the resource package achieves more than the objectives of the original project; 'Developing Strategies at the Pre-service Level to Address Critical Teacher Attraction and Retention Issues in Australian Rural, Regional and Remote Schools'. Through implementation of the resource package, subsequently all Teacher Education students develop the ability to understand context and build confidence to adapt curriculum accordingly, thus enhancing learning and teaching. This often requires extension from ones 'comfort zone' in order to experience and understand 'context'. It also requires teachers to be flexible and understanding, an essential role of Teacher Educators in the modern world.

It is relevant that when viewing rural education on the global stage, the theme of the 3<sup>rd</sup> ISFIRE Conference that this paper shares the author's story reflection as an international school leader in a geographic remote Middle Eastern location. The author reflects on his position as the Head of Key Stage One and Head of Foundation Stage (3-7 years) and member of the Senior Management Team (3-18 years - 1200 students) at the Dukhan English School between years 2007-2009. The challenge of Head Teacher extended the author's cultural, religious and regional/rural/remote contextual experience boundaries from that of metropolitan Australia.

The author illustrates how such a Training Framework would have assisted in preparing his global experience by examining the Seven Focus Areas of the National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST), chosen as a Framework for pre-service teachers to develop knowledge, understandings and skills for working in remote contexts. It is concluded that the resource package therefore, also prepares students to be *responsible and effective global citizens who engage in an internationalised world and exhibit cross-cultural competence* ([Monash Graduate Attributes Policy](#), Academic Board, 2008), an attribute that is similarly advocated across universities. Hence, this argument adds strength to the significance of this resource package for preparing all Teacher Education programs, nationally and internationally.

## BACKGROUND

The national curriculum reform within Australia has involved development of The National Professional Standards for Teachers. This development began in 2009 by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) and was continued by the National Standards sub-group of the Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee (AEEYSOC) during 2009 and 2010. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) assumed responsibility for validating and finalising the standards in July 2010 and are renowned for this role (AITSL, 2011). AITSL provides leadership for the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of

teaching and school leadership with funding provided by the Australian Government (AITSL, 2011). Simply stated, AITSL's role is a *national effort to improve the quality of teaching and school leadership* (Evans, 2010).

Promotion of excellence evidences the governments' commitment to quality teaching. Learning and teaching involving 'quality experiences' is pertinent as quality of teaching has the largest impact on student learning outcomes, other than a student's socioeconomic background (DEECD, 2012). It can be argued that quality teaching in schools is a dimension that can be improved more successfully than an attempt to improve student's socioeconomic background. Hence, preparing teachers during university pre-service teacher education courses plays a major role in what is determined within schools now and in the future. Professional Standards for Teachers is becoming a regular occurrence as *Internationally and locally, education systems are developing professional standards for teachers to attract, develop, recognise and retain quality teachers* (AITSL, 2011, p. 1).

The National Professional Standards are significant for teaching and learning in rural, regional and remote schools. *The Standards support the Melbourne Declaration, which describes aspirations for all young Australians for the next decade* (AITSL, 2011, p. 1). The goals established at the Melbourne Declaration included:

- Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence
- Goal 2: All young Australians become:
  - Successful learners
  - Confident and creative individuals
  - Active and informed citizens

The goals were *about equity and social justice and improved learning outcomes for our most disadvantaged and isolated students* (Ewing, 2010, p. 127). A commitment to action in achieving these goals included: promoting world-class curriculum and assessment; and improving educational outcomes for the disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds (MCEETYA, 2008).

Support materials derived from the National Professional Standards for Teachers have been developed by the Tertiary Educators Rural, Regional and Remote Network (TERRR Network). The support materials form a Training Framework for Producing Quality Graduates to Work in Rural, Regional and Remote Australia, thus assisting with the promotion of quality teaching and learning experiences in schools.

### ***The Training Framework***

Quality teaching and learning specifically within rural, regional and remote Australian schools is planned to be achieved through three outcomes:

1. Pre-service teachers will have greater knowledge of rural, regional and remote education and what it means to be a quality teacher in those demanding locations.
2. As a result of having access to authentic knowledge about rural, regional and remote Australia, more pre-service teachers will be attracted to and apply to work in these areas.
3. The Training Framework will improve the quality of graduate teachers. (TERRR Network, 2012h, p. 1).

The TERRR Network identified the National Professional Standards as a *major milestone* (TERRR Network, 2012i, p. 2) as:

*They articulate what teachers are expected to know and be able to do at four career stages: Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead. The Standards and their descriptors represent an analysis of effective, contemporary practice by teachers throughout Australia. Their development included a synthesis of the descriptions of teachers' knowledge, practice and professional engagement used by teacher accreditation and registration authorities, employers and professional associations.* (AITSL, 2011, p. 1).

Therefore this became the focus of the Training Framework. Furthermore, *TERRR Network is supporting and supplementing the work of AITSL in providing documents that will assist graduates and proficient teachers to apply Standards to their work in the rural, regional and remote context* (TERRR Network, 2012i, p. 2). From the seven National Professional Standards for Graduate Teachers:

1. Know students and how they learn (professional knowledge);
2. Know the content and how to teach it (professional knowledge);
3. Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning (professional practice);
4. Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments (professional practice);
5. Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning (professional practice);
6. Engage in professional learning (professional engagement); and
7. Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and communities (professional engagement) (AITSL, 2011).

Three Standards were specifically selected for this initiative, as were the Focus Areas that are embedded within (Figure 1). Four Focus Areas were derived from Standard 1 - Know students and how they learn: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4. One Focus Area from Standard 6 - Engage in professional learning: 6.1 and two from Standard 7 - Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and communities: 7.3 and 7.4. Seven Teacher Guides form the core of the Training Framework and were developed from the seven Focus Areas embedded within the National Professional Standards for Teachers.

**Figure 1:** *Seven Teacher Guides developed from the National Professional Standards for Teachers.* (TERRR Network, 2012i, p. 3).

Teacher Guide	Standard	Focus Area	Descriptor
1	1.0 Know students and how they learn.	1.1 Physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students.	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students and how these may affect learning.
2	1.0 Know students and how they learn.	1.2 Understanding how students learn.	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of research into how students learn and the implications for teaching.
3	1.0 Know students and how they learn.	1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds.	Demonstrate knowledge of teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.
4	1.0 Know students and how they learn.	1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.	Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.
5	6.0 Engage in Professional learning.	6.1 Identifying and planning professional learning needs.	Demonstrate an understanding of the role of the National Professional Standards for Teachers in identifying professional learning needs.
6	7.0 Engaging Professionally with Colleagues, Parents/Carers and the Community.	7.3 Engaging with Parents/Carers.	Understand strategies for working effectively, sensitively and confidentially with parents/carers.
7	7.0 Engaging Professionally with Colleagues, Parents/Carers and the Community.	7.4 Engaging with professional teaching networks and broader communities.	Understand the role of external professionals and community representatives in broadening teachers' professional knowledge and practice.

### ***Understanding Rural, Regional and Remote Contexts***

The Teacher Guides were significant for teacher education and rural, regional and remote Australian schools, which were in desperate need of attention. This neglect was identified during the preparation of the Teacher Guides when a comprehensive mapping exercise was completed by TERRR Network at state and national levels. It was revealed that there *was not a strong focus in Australian universities on preparing pre-service teachers for the challenges of education provision beyond the metropolitan cities* (TERRR Network, 2012i, p. 2). This is supported by recent national research:

*The 2008-2011 Teacher Education for Rural and Regional Australia (TERRAnova) study revealed that the majority of Australian universities have no explicit focus on rural education in their teacher education programs; have random and ad hoc rural practicum opportunities and no obvious link to any of the various financial incentives across Australia to encourage graduates to work in rural areas* (White, Kline, Hastings & Lock, 2011).

Hence, the guides provided for the first time an explicit focus on preparing pre-service teachers for rural, regional and remote education. They were user friendly and available for teacher education programs across Australian universities. International curriculum initiatives for preparing teachers for geographic remoteness in countries such as Canada (TERRR Network, 2012i) were also investigated and assisted with planning. Hence, efforts to prepare graduate teachers beyond contexts of metropolitan cities, subsequently allows them to experience various and diverse contexts within Australia and globally, similar to those they well may find themselves teaching.

It can be argued that through implementation of the resource package, Teacher Education students develop the ability to understand context. *The Teacher Guides are a reference point for pre-service teachers who are thinking of working in geographic remote locations to prepare them for living in what, for most, will be a very different environment* (TERRR Network, 2012h, p. 1). Through understanding the context of the children in their care they are provided with the opportunity to experience and build confidence adapting the curriculum so that it is relevant and meaningful; best fitting the 'world of the children'. This is supported by the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA) who are responsible for the development of the national curriculum:

*Jurisdictions, systems and schools will be able to implement the Australian Curriculum in ways that value teachers' professional knowledge, reflect local contexts and take into account individual students' family, cultural and community backgrounds. Schools and teachers determine pedagogical and other delivery considerations* (ACARA, 2010, p. 10).

Such preparation often requires extension from ones 'comfort zone' in order to experience and understand 'context'. The comfort zone for most pre-service teachers in Australia is working in metropolitan Australia (TERRR Network, 2012i). Understanding context also requires teachers to be flexible and understanding, an essential role of Teacher Educators in the modern world. Hence, graduate teachers are equipped to be community ready, school ready and classroom ready (White, 2010); no matter where this context may be located (place), or the school environment the teachers' find themselves in. It can therefore be argued that the resource package achieves more than the objectives of the original project; 'Developing Strategies at the Pre-service Level to Address Critical Teacher Attraction and Retention Issues in Australian Rural, Regional and Remote Schools'. This paper builds on the author's experiences as an international school leader in a geographic remote Middle Eastern location, illustrating that whether intended or not, the resource package Training Framework preparation of graduates is not limited to schools within Australia. Rather, it prepares graduates for rural, regional and remote schools throughout the world.

### ***Remote Schools: A Global Perspective***

This storyline is presented from the author's reflections as an international school leader in a geographic remote Middle East location. The storyline interweaves narrative threads to emerge ideas, themes and patterns (Ewing, 2010), thus illustrating how such a Training Framework would have assisted in preparing him for this role and experience. This reflection therefore strengthens the argument that the Framework prepares pre-service teachers for rural, regional and remote schools both nationally and internationally. Ewing (2010, p. 17) defines reflection as the *deliberate and focused attempts to make greater meaning and understanding of our experience*. This storyline reflects on parallels drawn between the author's role and the seven Teacher Guides developed by TERRR Network:

1. Understanding the impact of remoteness on student learning
2. Learning in the remote context
3. Teaching students from diverse backgrounds in the remote context
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
5. Engage in professional learning in the remote context
6. Engaging professionally in the remote context
7. Engaging professionally: Teaching and living in the remote context

The author reflects as Head of Key Stage One (Year 1 and 2); children 5, 6 and 7 years of age and Head of Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception); children 3, 4 and 5 years of age. This position included being a member of the Senior Management Team for the whole school, primary and secondary combined (3-18 years) at Dukhan English School (DES), (2007-2009). Dukhan is an oil and

gas town in Qatar and the school caters for Qatar Petroleum (QP) employees who are entitled to receive a free education for as many as four children. Although the entire school's student enrolment comprised of 1200 students and the sector of the school that the author led had 410 children, which could be considered as a medium to large school by Australian metropolitan standards, DES is categorised as a geographically remote school. This claim is due to the difficulties experienced with accessing English medium education services, education support and professional development for implementing the National Curriculum of England & Wales in an Arab Islamic country.

While Qatar was rapidly developing, it was also extremely transient due to the nature of the large expatriate workforce. Expatriates were mainly from Arab nations and the Indian subcontinent (India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). There were also a strong number from Southeast Asia (Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia) and a smaller percentage from other countries such as Britain, United States, Canada, South Africa and Australia. Although the author had lived in rural Australia where he attended school as a child, and had visited and spent time in remote Aboriginal schools as an adult. The role of Head Teacher challenged and extended his cultural, religious and regional/rural/remote contextual teaching experience boundaries. The author's experience was similar to teachers who take up appointments in remote locations who "often find their new environment very alien, sometimes threatening and nearly always extremely isolated" (TERRR Network, 2012h, p. 1). Hence, it is the 'remoteness' that strongly bonds the author's experiences to the focus of the Training Framework.

The Training Framework enables pre-service teachers to develop knowledge, understandings and skills for working specifically in remote contexts.

*While there are many similarities in non-metropolitan education across rural, regional and remote, the impact of remoteness on people's lives and service delivery received in these very isolated locations presents additional significant challenges for teachers (TERRR Network, 2012h, p. 1).*

When aligning the author's experiences with 'remote', the same definition of remote is used as the resource package; Accessibility/Remote Index of Australia (ARIA). This definition excludes socio-economic, urban/rural and population size factors and concentrates on accessibility to services. A report submitted to Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) by Jones (2000, p. 9) explains in more detail:

*Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) measure remoteness in Australia and was developed by the National Key Centre for Social Applications of Geographical Information Systems (GISCA) at the University of Adelaide on behalf of the Department of Health and Aged Care (DH&AC) (DH&HC, 1999). It is 'designed to be an unambiguously geographical approach to defining remoteness', excluding socio-economic, urban/rural and population size factors, 'as a continuous variable measured in terms of accessibility' to services, 'especially those routinely available to people in metropolitan areas.*

ARIA developed five categories, defined as:

- Highly accessible - relatively unrestricted accessibility to a wide range of goods and services and opportunities for social interaction.
- Accessible - some restrictions to accessibility of some goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.
- Moderately accessible - significantly restricted accessibility of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.
- Remote - significantly restricted accessibility of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.
- Very remote - locationally disadvantaged - very little accessibility of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction (Jones, 2000, p.11).

The following storyline accentuates the author's contextual experiences of remoteness and subsequently espouses how the Training Framework would have assisted in preparing him for this international role.

The Teacher Guides are the crux of this paper, strengthened by the author's connections to his time in a remote international school. The first four Teacher Guides are derived from the first National Professional Standard for Graduate Teachers; Know students and how they learn (professional knowledge).

### ***Teacher Guide 1: Understanding the Impact of Remoteness on Student Learning***

The Focus Area for this Teacher Guide embedded within 'know students and how they learn' is; 1.1 Physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students. The Teacher Guide 'Graduate Descriptor' is; Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students and how these may affect learning.

Dukhan is an oil and gas town located on the west coast of Qatar, approximately 72 kilometres from Qatar's capital, Doha. The town is a compound and is surrounded by a large fortified wall. Although Dukhan is experiencing rapid growth, at the time it could reside approximately 2500 people. The whole town, including Dukhan English School was administered by Qatar's state oil agency, Qatar Petroleum (QP). Any person wishing to visit or work within this town required a special permit from QP.

QP's core business is to *maximise contribution to the national wealth of the State of Qatar, through the safe, efficient and environmentally acceptable exploitation of Qatar's hydrocarbon reserves and through related activities* (QP website <http://www.qp.com.qa/en/Homepage/AboutUs/VisionAndMission.aspx>). Approximately 75 per cent of the population of Qatar consists of non-Qataris, often employed by QP or its subsidiaries (DES, 2008). DES was purposefully operated to cater for Qatar Petroleum employees, as a fringe benefit they were entitled to receive a free education for as many as four children. The school functioned as a QP department and therefore had to endure various dynamics that were in the best interest of a business operation rather than a school community. An example of this was the job title for Head of Foundation Stage and Key Stage One; 'Head of Sector 1 - Human Resources'. Such dynamics appended to the remote location of DES.

The business model of operation impacted on the everyday running of the school. Recruitment for teachers was conducted by QP recruitment officers and Head Master in London during February, to begin at the start of the academic year (September). It is the responsibility of the QP Human Resources - Recruitment Department (HRR) to administer contractual procedures and mobilise new staff from their home base to Doha, Qatar. Teaching contracts usually start on or very close to the 20<sup>th</sup> August each year. Flights are organised by the QP Recruitment Department, as part of a linear process where many stages need to be sequentially met. If stages are not met then the process can take a considerable longer period of time or may not eventuate. An understanding of this complex process will enable one to comprehend how the school was disadvantaged due to its location.

When new teachers arrive at Doha International Airport, there was a QP driver to meet them. New staff members were taken to a local hotel where they spend a few days in Doha under the supervision of QP recruitment to finalise medical and administrative details. Once Recruitment had completed documentation, medicals and other procedures, new staff were transferred to Dukhan. Only when records and files arrived in Dukhan could new teachers sort out items such as Driving Licence, Bank Account, Residence Permit and Liquor Licence.

A briefing with the Human Resources Department at QP Management was then arranged where car loan applications and furniture allowance details were then disclosed. Passports were submitted to Immigration as soon as possible so that Residence Permits could be obtained which enabled staff to travel outside of Qatar. QP employees' wives (whether working for QP or not) required a residence permit as did children. All QP sponsored staff required an Exit Visa to leave Qatar. Authorisation from QP Human Resources would usually be given once the form was completed by the staff member and signed by the DES Headmaster. Staff were advised to allow one week for this process. When leaving the country a similar process to arriving was completed, only it was more complex. Again, it is necessary for the passport to be submitted to QP Management for a period of time (usually one week).

Due to potential employees not always successfully completing the rigorous recruitment and induction process, the school was often a number of teachers and teaching assistants short of what was required and originally approved by QP's Human Resources department. While the school would do the best they could under unforeseen circumstances, the problems were exacerbated when staff members were ill or terminated employment before the end of their contract. Within this context 'supply teachers' were also a rare commodity.

The business model enforced that annual resource budgets were completed by November for the end of financial year, which ran January to January. However, due to the process of auditing within QP, items arrived often 18 months to two years after they were ordered. As they were ordered from around the world it was not uncommon for them to take even longer. This made it quite difficult for teaching staff to plan ahead and was intensified by the transient nature of employment and movement of teachers across sectors and roles.

With more than 30 different nationalities represented in the student population, there were at least 85 per cent of pupils in the school who were non first language English speakers (English Additional Language -EAL). In the nursery EAL students were closer to 97 per cent and often consisted of children who had no or very limited English language development. As aforementioned, DES has no school fees and is financed fully by QP. As a result the school was obligated to accept pupils from all QP employees who were residents in Dukhan. There were no other education alternatives other than what the school offered, and this became problematic for children with Special Education Needs (SEN). Although the school's academic staff included five EAL specialist teachers and three SEN specialists this was not enough to meet the demands of the school and to support families whose children's special needs were ascertained as severe. Furthermore, there was no governing education department or support structure for DES students or staff. In this respect the school was extremely isolated.

### ***Teacher Guide 2: Learning in the Remote Context***

The Focus Area for this Teacher Guide embedded within 'know students and how they learn' is; 1.2 Understanding how students learn. The Teacher Guide 'Graduate Descriptor' is; Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of research into how students learn and the implications for teaching.

Living and working in this context brought a cocktail of diverse styles of teaching and learning, also expectations of education within the community. Parents' experience of education in various countries differed quite considerably. There are two metaphors that have influenced education over the years that best describe this situation. These are the 'factory' metaphor and 'schooling as travel' metaphor (Stufflebeam, Madaus, & Kellaghan, 2000). In the factory metaphor the child being educated is likened to an object efficiently manufactured in a factory. This is associated with rote learning the content and regurgitating when required. The teacher is the expert and contains all the information. The schooling as travel metaphor likens the education process to a guided tour, a life-long journey. It is the school as travel metaphor that best fits with the learner-centred approach espoused by the English Curriculum of England and Wales, where the teacher guides and facilitates the children's learning. This is evidenced by the themes underpinning the Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage (birth to five) document published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (May, 2008).

The principles which guide the work of all early years' practitioners within the National Curriculum of England and Wales are grouped into four themes:

*A Unique Child* – every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

*Positive Relationships* – children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.

*Enabling Environments* – the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.



*Learning and Development* – children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of Learning and Development are equally important and inter-connected. (Department for Children and Families, 2008, p. 5).

Within this context the author's role was to enable opportunities for the staff in Foundation Stage and Key Stage One to have a common understanding of what this looked like in practice. Also, with professional development opportunities few and far between, leadership required a welcoming and comfortable environment where sharing of good teaching practices, free from fear or embarrassment, could enhance the learning opportunities for the children.

*There are a number of factors impacting on the physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students in remote locations. Quality teachers are able to understand these factors, and rather than see them as impediments to learning, use their knowledge, skills and abilities, especially in relation to their understanding of how students learn, to ensure that the teaching program they are providing is enabling every student in their class to learn.* (TERRR Network, 2012b, p. 1).

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) consisted of six areas of Learning and Development, all connected and equally important:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Communication, Language and Literacy
- Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy
- Knowledge and Understanding of the World
- Physical Development
- Creative Development

Considering the context and limited English language skills of most children, literacy in Foundation Stage and Key Stage One became the school's priority and the author's priority as Head. *Being able to read is the most important skill children will learn during their early schooling, it enables lifelong confidence and wellbeing* (Department for Education and Skills, 2007, p. 1). A literacy program was collaboratively designed that was progressive, most appropriate for this context and timely, coinciding with the release of the National Curriculum of England and Wales 'Letter and Sounds: Principles and Practice of High Quality Phonics' programme (Department for Education and Skills, 2007).

The Foundation Stage and Key Stage One High Quality Phonics programme began in Nursery (Foundation Stage - 3 years of age) with a focus on 'Speaking & Listening'. Regular planned opportunities to listen carefully and talk extensively about what they hear, see and do. This involved playing, talking, exploring and investigating through activities that are fun, interesting and motivating. Teachers planned to use story, rhyme, drama and song to optimise children's imagination. In Reception (Foundation Stage - 4 years of age) the 'Jolly Phonics' program was implemented. The focus here was learning a selection of letters (graphemes) and the sounds (phonemes) they represent through using a number of senses (multi-sensory) and resources. This programme continued throughout Key Stage One (Year 1 and 2), where children developed the sounds and the letter/s that represent them. This included words that are an exception to the letter and sound relationships, known as 'tricky'. As a result phonics was comprehended by the children as a step up to word recognition, where automatic reading of all words (decodable and tricky) was the ultimate goal.

As there was no community or system support other than the SEN and EAL teachers within the school, parents played a key partnership role in supporting their young children. Information nights were held regularly sharing the learning opportunities occurring in school. This enabled professional development of parents so that concepts were correctly reinforced at home rather than concepts that were conflicting and confusing for the child.

### ***Teacher Guide 3: Teaching Students from Diverse Backgrounds in the Remote Context***

The Focus Area for this Teacher Guide embedded within 'know students and how they learn' is; 1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. The Teacher Guide 'Graduate Descriptor' is; Demonstrate knowledge of teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The school's view of the unique context was that teachers were guests of the Qatari people and were choosing to live in their country, *a remarkable example of a tolerant, harmonious multicultural environment* (DES, 2008). The school was respectful of all cultures, but was non-religious and non-denominational. Local Islamic religious traditions and Qatar Petroleum days were observed with the school week running from Sunday to Thursday. Within Foundation Stage and Key Stage One there were four simple rules used consistently that advocated safety, equity and harmony amongst the children:

1. Walk around the school pathways
2. Take care of the school environment
3. Treat others kindly
4. Always give your best effort

Appreciation of the rich qualities various cultures brought to the school were celebrated at school and Key Stage assemblies, through extra-curricular activities and clubs offered, design of the curriculum specifically for the class or year level, House system and inter-house events - house points and award criteria, induction of new students and class allocation, Teaching Assistant allocation, design of creative-arts curriculum, and school music productions. Furthermore, Languages Other Than English (LOTE) from the beginning of Nursery included Arabic, French, Spanish, and Hindi. Urdu was also offered during Reception, Year 1 and 2. This assisted with the children feeling comfortable and welcome which was pertinent:

*...to ensure that all students, no matter what their background or where they live, achieve their full potential. This requires teachers to build on the contributions that diversity brings to the classroom, being able to use their pedagogical knowledge to ensure that teaching strategies, responsive to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, are used. (TERRR Network, 2012c, p. 1)*

Tolerance and understanding was advocated during Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Science classes where sexuality with relation to various religious beliefs would be respectfully and carefully addressed for the older students of the school. Physical Education and swimming were compulsory for all students, although teachers were considerate of cultural and religious rituals. For example, during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan students would only participate if they felt they could. Also, during swimming, boys and girls would have separate change rooms from the beginning of Year 2.

Entry and exit procedures for EAL children were the same for all students, as were all teaching practices. Some children were from wealthy Qatari families where money was plentiful, the family owned many assets and had a maid, driver and family cook. Other families were not so fortunate and while they received free accommodation, free living costs and education, the father's income may have only been a very small amount. The only school expense was a school uniform which could be purchased cheaply at large department stores. All students would enter school and join their class where the teacher would monitor their progress. The child would be referred to the EAL department by their teacher where he/she would be observed in class and at play, and then assessed according to a seven point EAL band descriptor based on Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) levels from the National Curriculum of England and Wales. If ascertained at a low level the child could be withdrawn to work in small groups for periods of time or receive focussed in-class support.

A clear and common understanding of school routines and expectations between teachers within the school and parents was a priority. Information evenings and progress report evenings were held regularly and as Head of Key Stage, the author advocated plentiful contact to clarify any query or misunderstandings.

#### ***Teacher Guide 4: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students***

The Focus Area for this Teacher Guide embedded within 'know students and how they learn' is; 1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Teacher Guide 'Graduate Descriptor' is; Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

There were no Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the school. However, it can be argued that the topics of this Teacher Guide assist with preparing teachers to live and work within international contexts such as DES. The topics identify how teachers and schools can work with communities in the remote context through:

- Establishing relationships of trust with the community based on shared values.
- Building processes for shared decision making and expectations.
- Addressing issues surrounding parents/ carers' own poor experiences at school.
- Demonstrate the value and positive culture of schools.
- Actively promoting the benefits education can provide to children and young people.
- Providing opportunities for carers to obtain positive educational experiences.
- Demonstrating respect for Aboriginal people and culture.
- Eliminating racism in schools.
- Developing programs to set school, community and parent/carer expectations for improving attendance at school. (TERRR Network, 2012e, p. 2)

Many of the children were the first member of their family to receive an education within recognised world-wide standards and in some instances the first member of their family to attend school. Acknowledgement and celebration of the Qatari Bedouin traditions include: nomadic lifestyles, emphasis on hospitality, perfume and incense, markets (souq wakif), falconry, Arabian horses, camels and traditional architecture. Coupled with this the fact that Qatari nationals increased from ten to 20 per cent enrolment in Foundation and Key Stage One during this time, clearly suggests significant relevance.

### ***Teacher Guide 5: Engage in Professional Learning in the Remote Context***

The Focus Area for this Teacher Guide embedded within 'Engage in professional learning' is; 6.1 Identifying and planning professional learning needs. The Teacher Guide 'Graduate Descriptor' is; Demonstrate an understanding of the role of the National Professional Standards for Teachers in identifying professional learning needs.

In Qatar the National Professional Standards for Teachers would have been a *valuable reference/starting point for teachers to develop their professional skills and knowledge as an effective and quality teacher* (TERRR Network, 2012e, p. 1). As earlier mentioned, the author's role within this context was to enable opportunities for the staff in Foundation Stage and Key Stage One to have a common understanding of what 'quality teaching and learning' looked like in practice. This involved creating a learning atmosphere amongst staff, where teachers had the courage to try new pedagogies and strategies.

Adhering to the QP business model all professional development was coordinated by the department for Corporate Training (CT). The Deputy Head Academic began working with CT on 'in-house' educational courses for all at DES, which involved international guests such as Jenny Mosley visiting the school to in-service staff about using 'circle time'. However, the business process was problematic and professional development opportunities were seldom. Hence, having the ability to effectively use the Australian National Professional Standards for Teachers (or similar) depended on attributes that would have provided for successful in-house professional development. Such attributes included teacher:

- willingness and ability to reflect on professional practice;
- attitude and willingness to be a life-time learner;
- ability to establish effective working and learning relationships with colleagues;
- ability to be an effective and constructive member of a learning community; and
- extent to which teachers engage in keeping themselves current with theory and practice. (TERRR Network, 2012e, p. 1)

## ***Teacher Guide 6: Engaging Professionally in the Remote Context***

The Focus Area for this Teacher Guide embedded within 'Engaging professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community' is; 7.3 Engaging with parents/carers. The Teacher Guide 'Graduate Descriptor' is; Understand strategies for working effectively, sensitively and confidentially with parents/carers.

It was made clear that any communication between a staff member and parent/carer was to be through the author as Head. This involved any parental contact through phone calls, arrangement of meetings and face to face interviews/ meetings. Also, no parent was allowed to enter the school without the author's permission. As archaic as this may appear such policies had evolved due to certain circumstances within this context before his arrival. The core reason for this policy was the limited English language amongst community members.

There was a history of family maids often presenting themselves to the teachers and taking children from class which interfered with the child's learning. There was also a history of parents not leaving their children which upset both the child and parent, and disrupted the learning of others. More so, there were incidents of parents who became frustrated, confused and subsequently volatile due to their inability to understand or be understood. When the author began in the role as Head of Foundation Stage and Key Stage One there were closer to 200 than 400 children, hence this role was manageable. As the school grew, parental involvement was encouraged and trust was gained, more of the responsibility for parental contact was disseminated to Year Leaders. However, there was an expectation that the Head was informed about every child's learning development or needs and any parental concerns.

Communication skills that enabled the author to work sensitively and empathetically with parents/carers had been developed mainly through previous experiences as a teacher and sports coordinator, and these skills were essential. *Two of the most demanding challenges identified by many graduates and those in the early phases of their careers are classroom management and engaging with parents/carers* (TERRR Network, 2012f, p. 1). Hence, activities within Teacher Guide 6 are *designed to provide the opportunity to prepare for how to engage effectively with parents/carers in non-metropolitan contexts* (TERRR Network, 2012f, p. 1). While there were Key Stage rules to be followed by all, exceptions were made to suit individuals when there were special needs or requirements to be considered.

## ***Teacher Guide 7: Teaching and Living in the Remote Context***

The Focus Area for this Teacher Guide embedded within 'Engaging professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community' is; 7.4 Engaging with professional teaching networks and broader communities. The Teacher Guide 'Graduate Descriptor' is; Understand the role of external professionals and community representatives in broadening teachers' professional knowledge and practice.

Dukhan community offered many sports throughout the year where teachers and parents could enjoy socialising outside of school-related issues. Community sporting events included volleyball, golf, basketball, soccer, tennis, touch rugby, cricket and badminton competitions. There were social sporting activities such as sailing, harriers (fun run), swimming, squash and gym. There was also horse riding available nearby. *As the school is often the heart of the community* (TERRR Network, 2012g, p. 2), it was important as Head teacher to be immersed in the community and perceived for human qualities rather than an authority figure at the school. This played a significant role in building trust amongst parents.

The school was fortunate enough to have a nurse who was a Qatari national and therefore spoke Arabic as her first language. The author had a strong professional relationship with the nurse which involved her assistance with interpreting when English language skills were limited. This was vital to communicate with the Arab community. Teaching Assistants' were from various Asian countries which would also assist with similar situations or to assist with new children settling into a foreign environment. Hence, strong relationships amongst all staff members were necessary for optimal learning.

The author was one of approximately five Australians on a staff of 120, and the only Australian in a leadership position which appended to the already isolated experience. With almost all teachers being from the United Kingdom, there were some similarities in culture and background however, there were also many differences. The author has very fond memories of his time in Qatar, he made friends for life with people from all corners of the globe and would seriously consider returning to work again in the future. Naturally he missed Australia and found travelling back even for short periods of time assisted in embracing this unique experience. A quote by Sharplin (2008) best surmises the author's position of this opportunity:

*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 (cited in TERRR Network, 2012g, p. 3).*

## CONCLUSION

The National Professional Standards are significant for teaching and learning in rural, regional and remote schools. Support materials derived from the National Professional Standards for Teachers have been developed by the Tertiary Educators Rural, Regional and Remote Network (TERRR Network). The support materials form a Training Framework for Producing Quality Graduates to Work in Rural, Regional and Remote Australia, thus assisting with the promotion of quality teaching and learning experiences in schools.

This storyline reflects and evidences on how this Framework would have assisted in preparing the author for this unique teaching experience in Qatar. Subsequently, the Teacher Guides allow pre-service teachers to experience various and diverse contexts, similar to those they will find themselves teaching in the future. Hence, this paper argues that the resource package Training Framework prepares graduates for rural, regional and remote schools throughout the world.

Teachers are required to be flexible and understanding in the modern world. Preparing teachers during university Teacher Education courses plays a major role in what is determined within schools now and in the future. In conclusion, it is strongly argued that through implementing this resource package pre-service teachers subsequently develop skills to be "responsible and effective global citizens who engage in an internationalised world and exhibit cross-cultural competence" (Monash University Academic Board, 2008), an attribute that is similarly advocated across universities. Hence, this argument adds strength to the significance of this resource package for designing and preparing all pre-service Teacher Education programs.

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