

## SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORIAL COMMENT

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As SPERA celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> year as the national organisation whose voice on rural and remote education and training in Australia, the Executive determined mark this historical milestone with a number of significant events.

The 2009 annual national conference with its theme Education in a Digital Present: Enriching Rural Communities continues to explore innovative and creative ways of providing education to students located in rural and remote places. During the 25<sup>th</sup> Conference, the roles, purposes and impacts of digital information technologies will be explored as they transform the way we work, learn and communicate. In this digital revolution, educators, parents and systems are engaged in a comprehensive search for strategies and tools for effective online/ digital teaching based on the principles of learning as a social process and engaging the advantages of new technologies to support e-learning decision-making, instructional choices, program and course planning and the delivery of curricula.

A second SPERA initiative is the production of this special issue of the journal.

This special issue of **Education in Rural Australia** will be available to all conference participants at the Flinders University venue in July 2009. In this special issue, the welcome message provided by the current SPERA President **Emmy Terry**, highlights a number of SPERA's achievements over the past 25 years. The success of SPERA at both the state and national level in improving educational access and provision for rural and remote communities is one of SPERA's fundamental goals.

In the second article in this issue by SPERA's three Life Members, **Marie Dale, Sheila King and Colin Boylan**, these three reflect on the origins of SPERA, its growth into the professional organisation that it is today and identify future directions and challenges for this professional organisation. To have all three long-time, dedicated and committed SPERA Life Members contribute to this special issue is a significant event for SPERA.

The article by **Andrew Wallace and Colin Boylan**, the authors expand upon the idea of 'the rural lens' that they raised in their 2007 Keynote address at the 23<sup>rd</sup> national SPERA Conference in Perth. In this article they use the rural lens as a focussing mechanism on policy development matters including the development of a national rural education policy, school and community sustainability, student engagement and retention, and the differences in student achievement levels between rural and non-rural places.

The article by **Graeme Lock, Jo-Anne Reid, Bill Green, Wendy Hastings, Maxine Cooper and Simone White** introduces the readership to the TERRAnova project which seeks to examine successful teacher education course, programs and strategies that promote rural teaching as an attractive, long term career option. This national project is a significant multi-state research project that has the potential to identify best practice and inform all pre-service teacher education programs of successful ways and means of attracting, recruiting and retaining newly appointed teachers to rural and remote locations.

**John Halsey's** contribution to the issue raised the key question: **Australia's Sustainability: A New Policy Front for Rural Education?** analyses five important issues within the concept of sustainability as they relate to rural education nationally. The article argues that now is the time to refocus and reconsider the typical reactive mode of operation for rural education and with the input of good leadership to develop proactive policies for rural education that will benefit not only rural schools and their communities but the whole nation.

Collectively all the authors in this special issue are asking all rural Australians to rethink and refocus rural education in ways that promotes the diversity and dynamism that exists in rural school and communities in the future.

Finally, in 2009, as SPERA celebrates 25 years as the **voice of rural education** nationally, there will be three issues of the journal to mark this important event.

Colin Boylan  
Guest Editor

