

Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [O] Macpherson Smith Rural Foundation

Reference Type: NGO

State or territory: Vic

Serial Identification Number: 477781

Responses

Curriculum and assessment

6.13 Are there examples of innovative ways in which curriculum is being delivered in regional remote and rural schools?

Macpherson Smith Rural Foundation is playing a small role in delivering curriculum in innovative ways. We have developed a program Dream Seeds that links to the Personal and Social Capability and Creative and Critical Thinking Capability in the Australian Curriculum.

Dream Seeds® has been developed over three years and six MSRF Young Rural Leaders programs. Participants in each program have added to the ideas to create this unique workshop for Year 6 students. The workshop is designed by young rural people, for young rural people. We are delighted to have been able to keep the project alive through successive leadership programs and to create our own unique activities. The core themes are building Aspiration, Resilience and Connection.

Dream Seeds® has been created in response to an identified need. Research and personal experience indicate that some young rural Victorians face barriers to education, aspiration and participation. It has also been discovered that a sense of aspiration needs to be developed in primary school. Over 75 people have been involved in the creation of Dream Seeds and each contribution has helped create the workshop. A fun, interactive workshop, is conducted in Year 6 classes by trained MSRF alumni. The workshop aims to show young people that they have the capacity to be the leaders of their own lives, whatever their circumstances. Original activities and games aim to build the knowledge and skills that students need to create a vision and practical pathways to positive futures.

A pilot was run in three schools in 2016, with 10 presenters and 65 students providing useful advice and feedback. Further programs have been run in Benalla and Wangaratta in 2017 at three schools with 125 participants and 9 alumni presenters. Student evaluations were extremely positive.

Our next stage is to develop the web based resource with resources, links and great stories for students to access after the Dream Seeds workshop. We are seeking support for this.

Rating: 7

Teachers and teaching

6.2.3 From experience as a curriculum consultant in rural schools

Teachers were appreciative of people who bothered to visit their schools. Commented on the fact that they always had to make effort to travel to attend PD opportunities. Identified massive cost of travel, CRT replacements, overnight stays.

PD should be accessible, relevant and cheap. Online training opportunities can help but human interaction is better. Could be an organization devoted to providing PD, coaching and mentoring to rural teachers with a bank of people who are willing to travel and build strong relationships- perhaps calling in each term to work with teachers and communities.

From MSRF Sporting Chance project 2016:

Some communities and schools were not well connected. Schools were not aware of community learning centres. Huge opportunity to provide ways of helping schools and communities to work together to build better employment and training options; to connect communities with curriculum and enhance engagement. PD opportunities could be developed to link schools and communities and provide a place for helping them work together to create interesting authentic learning experiences, that link to the curriculum and future jobs.

6.2.4

Build capacity in the teachers who are in RRR schools.

(Don't assume that young teachers are only there for the short term, they just need to be engaged, supported and given opportunities to develop):

- Connect them meaningfully through ICT or social media sharing resources/ideas.
- Create opportunities for teachers to work in different schools - an exchange to another school- rural or urban- to learn how things can be done differently.
- Encourage extra study through regional unis- build capacity
- Encourage them to travel, take exchanges, visit different industries, shadow others.
- Provide opportunities for career teachers to spend a day or a week in different work places to build a bigger perspective on what sort of employment opportunities and training are available. Many are limited by their own life experiences- and that is not their fault. MSRF Scholars talk of being channeled into a few traditional career paths- or even focusing on just going to uni.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

The leader sets the culture and tone and provides opportunities to students and staff. Leader needs to believe in capacity of students and staff and needs space to support capacity building.

Rating: 5

School and Community

School and community interaction is critical. Many connect well but I don't think they all connect as well as possible. Might be worth thinking about ways of rethinking the school community relationships. Develop an initiative of Learning Communities and Communities Learning. Schools are seen as learning communities but they can often be set in their ways. Maybe develop an Asset Based Community Development project where schools and communities could explore shared resources. And/or community audit of resources to support skills building for new ways of working together. We need a 'disruption' of ways of 'doing' education generally. Communities have amazing, often untapped resources. Would enhance cross-generational/intergenerational learning too.

Rating: 7

Information and Communication Technology

Good ICT is essential in schools. Providing teachers with PD and learning opportunities to use ICT to best capacity is important. Great potential to have students teaching teachers...and students teaching members of their communities. We need to flip our thinking on who is the 'holder of knowledge'. Students can find almost anything they want online. Teachers need to find interesting ways of delivering the curriculum that links to this. Flipped teaching model is good.

Rating: 5

Entrepreneurship and schools

Australian Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship (ACRE) <http://www.acre.org.au/>

Has conducted a pilot of Social Enterprise in Schools – detailed information available at:
<http://www.acre.org.au/what-we-do/social-enterprise-in-schools/>

<http://www.acre.org.au/what-we-do/the-pilot-program/>

This is a powerful program that supports the development of entrepreneurial skills in school aged students. It is engaging, creative, responsive to individual schools and student needs and it has been mapped against the Australian Curriculum.

MSRF is working with ACRE in another development around mentoring entrepreneurial young people and building capacity in rural communities.

Schools need to be building entrepreneurial skills into ways of learning - see FYA report.

Rating: 7

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

6.6.4

MSRF - Rural Sporting Chance scholarship design project 2016

Responses to research informed the design of our Rural Chances Scholarships specifically for vocational training for rural young people. <http://www.msrf.org.au/ruralchances/>

Gaps identified:

- Some evidence that school teachers have limited vision of what is possible post school
- Evidence that if young people don't go into study or work then they can quickly become disconnected. Recommend developing a model of support that keeps young people connected to local learning opportunities and real and virtual communities. MSRF interested to pursue this – seeking partners and funding.
- Young people need confidence and support to keep pursuing post school learning and work options. Both drop quickly and some older people are too quick to judge rather than support. Happy to explain further.

6.7.1

There is a need to build a model that links schools, communities and philanthropy in meaningful ways. Having worked in school, university, community and not-for-profit sectors I can see a really important place for linking philanthropy to schools more strongly.

Businesses linking with schools to run programs to engage students or provide potential future employment and training – to meet their workforce needs.

6.7.2

MSRF Scholarship applications show the disadvantage felt by RRR students when it comes to VCE and outside support, such as VCE Revision lectures and Melb based events. The cost of time and travel, possible accommodation away, etc makes it impossible for many ambitious students to participate. We have raw data on this and need funding support to analyse this further. It comes up every year in applications.

The answer to high quality education is not necessarily to make students move to 'better' schools. Develop better internet for all so they can access international learning opportunities, (eg Khan Academy and all the dozens of amazing online learning resources); MOOCs etc to extend their learning. We need to develop virtual networks and communities of young rural people wanting to learn. MSRF Alumni is looking at developing an online platform that connects young rural people and provides role models, Q and A times, opportunities to learn and share.

Rating for enrolments: 4

Rating for clusters: 7

Rating for distance education: 4

Rating for boarding: 3

Diversity

Rating: 4

Transitioning beyond school

6.9.1- encourage students to imagine different futures and how they could develop and contribute. Help them learn about different training and learning opportunities available whether they are a 'stayer' or a 'leaver'.

- support rural businesses to take on apprentices or trainees by reducing the bureaucratic paperwork required. This whole space needs a re-think.

- build cross generational mentoring experiences in rural communities- young people can learn from others and older people can learn about young people.

- use young people friendly ways of communicating and sharing information about employment possibilities. Overwhelming complexity of 'the system' particularly for those who are first in family to consider post school training.

- build a culture of support for young people, and communities, working together to solve their problems.

- stop seeing staying local as a deficit option. Build capacity in young people who want to stay close.

6.9.3

Accept that some study can only be done in regional or urban centres.

Work with young people to build their connection to their rural community, before they leave for ever. MSRF Young Rural Leaders specifically addresses this as part of our Sustainable Communities pillar. <http://www.msrf.org.au/leadership-development/>

Encourage people who leave to have a commitment to rural communities through:

- returning in the future as a skilled worker;
- explicitly building skills to contribute to the community;
- supporting young rural people through contributing to scholarships to support their learning or providing work experience opportunities in different work places

MSRF has raw data identifying young rural people's interest in returning to rural. Many want to return at some stage and need support to do that.

Older people in communities have trouble letting go of leadership roles, or have set ideas about what sort of leadership is required.

Rural Chances scholarships are designed to support vocational learning, in areas of skills need, in rural areas in Victoria. Scholarships are awarded to people who can demonstrate a need for their qualification in rural areas, along with other criteria. We also offer mentoring and leadership opportunities to recipients to build their capacity to contribute to rural communities.

Rating: 7

Additional Comments

We are at a critical time in our history. The recent work of Foundation for Young Australians paints a bleak picture of the future for our young people - in terms of employment opportunities and career stability. (e.g. 4.7 years post degree completion until full time employment). It also shows the new ways we can think about skills for work. RRR Education needs to pick these up.

RRR young people need a sense of hope and potential to lead good lives. They need to build capacity to succeed in their world.

There have been a whole range of reviews and research into rural education over the last twenty years (my background is in teacher education at Federation Uni prior to moving in to MSRF space).

We need to use the information collected in this review to really challenge old paradigms ways of operating and look towards building a robust and engaging rural education system that connects young people and their communities and encourages every Australian to have a good life and a sense of connectedness. Fewer words and more action.

For the last seven years I have been reading scholarship applications from rural Victorians wanting to attend university. We have so many amazing young people who want to contribute to their communities but the opportunities are not growing.

I am deeply concerned about the rise in mental health problems identified by applicants. I am deeply concerned about the research from FYA and Mitchell Institute and ABS employment data all pointing to difficult lives (HECS debt, unemployment/underemployment) etc. We need to face the connection of these events.

I am passionate about the well being of young people, and rural young people in particular. I am happy to contribute in whatever way I can to improve their lives. My work at Macpherson Smith

Rural Foundation is one way I can do this, and I would be pleased to speak further on this submission.

MSRF is committed to supporting and building the capacity of young rural Victorians and their communities. We offer scholarships to university and vocational training; mentoring in transition to further study, career mentoring, leadership development and wrap around care of young people. Much of our work could be scaled and we are happy to collaborate with others.