

Leave your program behind: collaboration with educators delivers better student outcomes

Tony Jarrett, PhD Candidate¹

¹ School of Education and the Arts, Central Queensland University, Queensland

Agency experts supporting bush fire disaster resilience education with Primary School students: A Case Study in New South Wales, Australia

It is vitally important to engage collaboratively with educators and involve young people, hear their voice, and empower them to adapt to and mitigate natural hazard risks such as with bush fire.

Research aims and questions

The current NSW Geography K-10 Syllabus is an ideal opportunity to engage with young people where Stage 3 (Years 5 & 6) students explore how bush fires impact on people, place and the environment.

Educators align student learning with the curriculum requirements and can apply teaching and learning practices that drive discovery of issues, problems and solutions to authentic local bush fire problems.

External experts such as NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) volunteer fire-fighters commonly collaborate with educators to contribute to classroom learning across curriculum areas, including with this Geography Stage 3 unit of study. However, there is a lack of evidence about the educational value of the contributions of those external experts.

Research is underway to investigate and understand the impact that volunteer fire-fighters have on students' understanding and interest in bush fire risk during Stage 3 Geography.

The primary research question is: *To what extent do NSW RFS expert partners impact on students in the Geography Stage 3 Unit on bush fire to build capacities to deal with bush fire?*

With the secondary research question being: *What impact does this have on family understandings and actions to reduce risks?*

Research methods being applied

This research is using Case Study to gather in-depth information from educators, students, parents and NSW RFS fire-fighters at two Case schools to develop an understanding of the contributions that the volunteer fire-fighters make to student learning about bush fires.

Case A Primary School is in an area of extreme bush fire risk.

Qualitative methods applied included semi-structured interviews with three educators and two NSW RFS experts before and after the unit; observations of planning meetings between educators and NSW RFS expert partners; observations of classroom activity across the unit; and small group interviews with 47 students of the Stage 3 cohort.

The Case B Primary School is located in an area of extreme bush fire risk. Case B is a reflection on the enactment and impact of the Geography Stage 3 bush fire unit that was conducted in 2016. Semi-structured interviews have been conducted with a cohort of teachers and NSW RFS fire-fighters involved in the 2016 unit.



Students at Case B school using empathy mapping

Expected findings and benefits

Analysis of the data collected is underway. The research findings are expected to identify effective methods for expert partners such as NSW RFS volunteer fire-fighters to employ in classrooms to support and enhance student learning about natural hazards and bush fire.

The outcomes of the research is also expected to benefit any organisation whose expert members are engaged with school students in any natural hazard context. The findings are also expected benefit educators by identifying the value of collaborations between teachers and expert partners such as NSW RFS fire-fighters to support student learning.



Further information

For additional information scan the QR code or contact:
Tony Jarrett, PhD Candidate, Central Queensland University
tony.jarrett@cqumail.com