PRIMARY SCHOOL COLLABORATIONS TO ENHANCE LEARNING ABOUT NATURAL HAZARDS AND BUSH FIRE

Tony Jarrett

PhD Candidate, School of Education and the Arts, Central Queensland University

The opportunity to engage with children

The 2019/2020 Black Summer bush fires and the multiple flood events on the east coast in 2021 and 2022 are notable recent examples of major disasters from natural hazard events.

Climate change is expected to contribute to more frequent and more intense large-scale bush fire events over the next 50 years.

Children are agents of change. It is vitally important to engage with and involve young people, hear their voice, and empower them to adapt to and mitigate natural hazard risks such as with bush fire.

Geography in Stage 3 (Years 5 & 6)

The 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.

Volunteer fire-fighters as expert partners

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.

A NSW RFS volunteer fire-fighter engaging with students

Research aims and questions

Research is underway to investigate and understand further 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 to develop an understanding of the contributions that the volunteer fire-fighters make to student learning about bush fires.

Case A Primary School

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

The Stage 3 Geography bush fire unit of study is being conducted in Term 3, 2022. Data collection is underway with educators, NSW RFS experts, students and parents/carers research participants.

Qualitative methods being used include semi-structured interviews with educators and 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; focus groups with small groups of students; and focus groups with parents/carers after the unit is completed.

Students at Case B using empathy mapping

Case B Primary School

Case B is a reflection on the enactment and impact of the Geography Stage 3 bush fire unit that was conducted in 2016.

Data collection is underway with a cohort of teachers and NSW RFS fire-fighters involved in the 2016 unit, using semi-structured interviews.

Expected findings and benefits

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.

For further Project information:

Mobile: 0408 839 600

Email: tony.jarrett@cqumail.com