

# G"aim"ing to be a rural teacher?: Improving pre-service teachers' learning experiences in an online rural and remote teacher preparation course

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**Abstract:** Many Australian teachers will spend part of their careers working in small rural schools and communities, yet specific preparation for rural and remote teaching contexts during preservice teacher education remains very limited. While recent government reports recommend the use of innovative and engaging teacher education approaches to enhance the classroom readiness of pre-service teachers, the use of such approaches to the contextualised preparation of rural and remote teachers has not been specifically addressed. In a teacher education program, offered by the University of Southern Queensland, an innovative place-based pedagogy has been utilized to redesign an online preservice teacher rural education course. A gamified, case-based approach was applied to increase student engagement and motivation. The development of game-based curriculum design has progressed since the mid 1980s to enhance engagement and collaboration, based on cascading information theory. Preservice teachers are immersed in a simulated rural context, where they navigate the experience of appointment to a rural school. This paper describes the rationale for the course redevelopment and outlines the design process. Student course feedback pre and post development were quantitatively and qualitatively analysed to evaluate the outcomes achieved from the course redevelopment. The findings indicate that student engagement within the course rose after the redevelopment, and critical reflection from the course team indicated that students were more effectively able to connect with course themes and project themselves into the position of a beginning teacher in a rural or remote location. While the development of the course is a continuing work in progress, the gamification strategy has enabled preservice teachers to improve their classroom and community readiness for appointment to rural and remote schools, while

modelling effective and contemporary use of technology and pedagogy which can be applied to their future classroom contexts.

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