

Spotlight on Out-of-Field Teaching in Mathematics: Fast-Paced Research Highlights to Build Community Connections

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Australia's long-term teacher shortage has reached a crisis point, with mathematics among the most significantly impacted disciplines. Current estimates indicate that as many as 40% of secondary mathematics teachers are teaching out-of-field (OOF) in Australian schools (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2021), highlighting the systemic nature of the problem. Out-of-field teaching in mathematics (OOFTM) is unevenly felt across the system, further exacerbating equity issues (Hobbs et al., 2022). This situation poses challenges to the integrity, quality and continuity of mathematics education, as schools increasingly struggle to recruit and retain knowledgeable and skilled teachers (Goos & Marchant, 2025). As concerns about OOFTM have intensified over the past decade, MERGA researchers have increasingly sought to deepen their understanding of this nuanced phenomenon and identify strategies to educate and support teachers, school leaders, policymakers, and the public. The growing prominence of this issue within the MERGA community is evident, with conference papers and presentations focused on OOFTM being a stable feature of the MERGA conference program since MERGA42 in 2019. This growing body of work reflects a sustained, collective effort to study and develop interventions to address one of the most pressing and complex challenges currently facing mathematics education. This roundtable marks the beginning of a community conversation. Short five-minute lightning talks from MERGA members working on OOFTM projects will offer a snapshot of the field, showcase the breadth of expertise within the community, surface emerging themes and tensions, and spark conversations about future directions for research and collaboration. By bringing together researchers at different stages of their OOFTM inquiries, the roundtable aims to build a clearer picture of the landscape and strengthen the foundations for an ongoing Special Working Group (SWG). Participants will be invited to reflect on the collective insights that emerge: What patterns or gaps become visible when we view OOFTM research side by side? How might these insights inform the development of a coordinated research agenda? And, in what ways can a MERGA SWG foster deeper connections, shared resources, and sustained collaboration across the community? Through fast-paced sharing and open discussion, this session seeks to energise and connect the growing network of OOFTM researchers within MERGA.

References

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