TERRAnova:
renewing Teacher Education for Rural and Regional Australia

Volume 1: Project Report

Renewing Rural Teacher Education:
Sustaining Schooling for Sustainable Futures
ARC Discovery Project 2008-2010

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Chapter One

_TERRAnova: Introduction and Conclusions – Summary and Recommendations_

Jo-Anne Reid

The main objective of the project that we have come to know as _TERRAnova_ was to identify the nature of successful teacher education, recruitment and retention strategies aimed at making rural teaching an attractive and long-term career option for teachers. Funded by the Australian Research Council Discovery program, over 2008-2010, our aim was to identify and develop new knowledge that can inform pre-service teacher education, recruitment and retention strategies in systems around the nation.

Staffing rural schools is an issue of continued and longstanding concern for State education departments both around Australia (Hatton et al. 1991, Vinson 2002; Roberts 2004; Green & Reid 2004), and overseas (Smith Davis 2002; Allen 2003). This project set out to discover the nature of successful strategies for preparing, attracting and retaining high-quality teachers for rural and remote schools in six Australian states. Our inquiry has found much that is indeed successful, along with reports from participants some that is not – and we present our findings in this two volume Report. _Volume One_ is structured into two Sections, as described below, while _Volume Two_ presents the full set of twenty Case Studies of rural communities and schools which have managed to ‘keep their teachers’ over time.

**Overview of the Report**

Here in _Volume One_, Section One begins with an introduction and overview of the study and a statement of the key findings and recommendations, in this chapter¹. From here we present a review of the literature consulted in the process of the inquiry in Chapter Two, a description of the methodology employed in the study in Chapter Three, and an account of the conceptual model of Rural Social Space [RSS] that has served as the theoretical framework for our analysis, in Chapter Four. Section Two contains the analytical findings, with chapters focussed on each of the five main themes that emerged as highly significant for the attraction of teachers to rural communities, and their retention in rural schools. These are:

- strong leadership that supports teachers in terms of their careers and their personal lives;
- the environmental affordances of particular places;
- community capital and the attractions of the social space developed in particular rural communities;
- particular experiences in pre-service teacher education; and
- the role of external incentives that appeal to teachers at particular stages of their lives and careers.

¹ This chapter was prepared by Jo-Anne Reid, with assistance from Simone White, Wendy Hastings, Graeme Lock, Bill Green and Maxine Cooper.
Chapters Five to Nine provide our overview of each theme in this analysis, and the background to the summary recommendations we make here in the final section of Chapter One. Chapter Ten is an introduction to the Case Study sites reported in Volume Two, and a discussion of an issue for all research focussed on place – the ethical issues associated with practices of naming. Volume One concludes with a set of Appendices that present the background documentation of the project, and a Bibliography of papers not referenced in this volume, but indicating the range of source material from which we drew the literature we have used here. The sources included in this Bibliography are all related to rural schooling, and we hope will be a useful resource for other researchers in the field.

**Introduction to the Study**

The project was conceived as a national study, and a partnership between teacher education researchers with a history of institutional commitment to rural education, in institutions whose pre-service programs aspire to produce graduates ready and well-prepared to take up positions in rural schools. It was situated in a context of a significant downturn in 2008-9, in rural economies following almost a decade of drought and the resulting social fragility of once-healthy rural communities at that time (Lockie & Bourke 2001; Alston & Kent 2006). Productive, vibrant, and resilient rural communities are vital for Australia’s social well-being and economic growth, and schools are often at the heart of these communities, so that attention to the staffing of rural schools can be seen as affecting the economic and social performance of non-metropolitan communities and the wealth and competitiveness of Australia as a whole.

The provision of high-quality education for the children of rural families is therefore a high priority for government. Further, as the population of Indigenous people in rural locations is increasing nationally, and 40% of the Indigenous population in Australia is under 14 years of age (Bishop 2006), the importance of education provision in these rural area where proportions (if not numbers) of Indigenous children in schools is far higher than in metropolitan areas, becomes even more apparent and urgent.

Not only do we need teachers in rural schools, we need high-quality, well-trained teachers who are personally and professionally equipped to address the educational needs of their communities. Nationally, all states treat the task of attracting and retaining teachers and other professionals to rural areas as a high priority (Corcoran, Faggian & McCann 2010), and supply and demand projections for teachers and other professionals lead large systems such as the NSW Department of Education and Communities to advertise for example, in terms such as the following:

| There is a wide range of incentive benefits to teachers who accept positions in many rural or remote areas. |

The benefits vary from school to school and can be substantial. These may include:

- additional training and development days;
- a rental subsidy of 90% in the most isolated locations and 70% in some other isolated locations;
- eligibility to apply for incentive transfer, special provisions for transfer which provide you with priority for appointment to a vacancy at another school in an agreed location after serving a required number of years in a rural or remote school;
- compassionate transfer status for your teaching partner, if you are appointed to and moving out of some rural and remote schools;
• an annual retention benefit of $5000 for teachers in around 40 isolated schools (listed in the table below);
• a number of locality allowances such as a climatic allowance, an isolation from goods and services allowance, vacation travel expenses, reimbursement of certain expenses related to medical or dental treatment and an allowance for dependants. The allowances are paid in addition to your salary; and
• one week of additional summer vacation for schools in the western areas of NSW.

For example, teachers appointed to Ivanhoe Central School may be eligible to receive allowances of up to $7000 per annum on top of their salary. In addition they are eligible for vacation travel expenses, medical and dental expenses, a 90% rental subsidy, additional training and development opportunities and an extra week of summer vacation. Teachers in this school who choose to remain for more than three years may also be eligible for a retention benefit of $5000 per annum. (NSWDEEC 2012)

States such as NSW, WA, SA, Queensland and Victoria all report significant problems in staffing rural and isolated schools (MCEETYA 2001, Halsey 2005), and have introduced a range of financial incentive programs to attract student teachers to ‘hard to staff’ schools in inland regions, in the hope that they will then apply to teach in these locations after graduation. Programs designed to support the transition of these teachers have declined in recent years, and induction to the profession is predominantly a matter for the school. There is also a range of university-based programmes in each state which target rural teaching in different ways, all aimed at improving rural recruitment of high-quality teachers and educational outcomes for rural and isolated children.

The Basis For Inquiry Into Rural Staffing
In the face of a long-standing deficit view of teaching in rural schools (Hatton et al, 1991) our histories in our particular institutions had produced recurring interest and intrigue about the existence of regular anecdotal evidence about some rural schools and communities that actually appeared to have good teacher retention rates (more than three years), and of targeted mentoring programs and leadership approaches in some schools that were beginning to produce extended tenure of staff (Williams 2004). At that time, however, there had been no recent systematic, national research on the actual success of the various incentives designed to attract rural teachers, or any research into those school communities where teacher retention was reputedly high. Building on the previous scholarship and research of those in the research team, and on other recent studies in this area, including: the Rural (Teacher) Education Project (Green 2008); research into the rural practicum conducted by the Rural Education Forum of Australia [REFA] (Halsey 2005); the National Survey of Science, ICT and Mathematics Education in Rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR 2006); and REFA’s ‘Pre-Service Country Teaching Costings Survey’ (Halsey 2006), we designed this study as a means of providing a strong evidence base for teacher education providers and national/state jurisdictions to:

• develop and enhance state and national funding policies and practices to encourage and support beginning teachers to take up a rural career;
• develop a database of current national rural teaching incentives and establish cost-effectiveness;
• develop institutional policies and practices that reflect ‘best practice’ in Faculties of Education.

3
Background of the Study

It is significant that ‘the rural problem’ for Australian schooling has troubled state governments across three centuries now, and history shows that the none of the range of suggestions and solutions to the perennial issue of attracting and retaining teachers for the bush has ever had more than temporary success (Green & Reid 2004; Skilbeck & Connell 2003). The staffing of rural, regional and remote Australian schools impacts on the quality and equity of educational experiences for the people in these areas (HREOC 2000; Sher 1991; Sharplin 2002). The NSW Public Education Council’s 2005 report clearly links staffing and educational quality, particularly in the so-called ‘hard to staff’ schools with a continued history of staff turnover. This ‘staffing churn’ (Roberts 2004) results in perceived lack of commitment from schools to the community they serve, disengagement of school staff from the community itself, and often a resultant unwillingness for students and their families to provide commitment to education, especially when it is not met in the schools themselves. Most commentators on rural and remote education reiterate the challenges associated with staffing rural and remote schools. A decade ago, Vinson (2002) reported that in a survey by the NSW Primary Principals’ Association, 92% of respondents were experiencing difficulties in finding casual teachers – a situation that is even more difficult to remedy in small rural population areas.

Although governments agree with the report from HREOC (1999) which argued that the future of regional Australia is dependent upon an educated and skilled population, there are significant barriers to the achievement of this goal “which not only restrict access to education and training in rural areas but which also deprive rural people of their basic human rights” (HREOC 1999). The issue is made more difficult because of the complex nature of our understanding of the term ‘rural’ and the need for us not to generalise the ‘rural’ across the specificities of place, and to acknowledge that “a ‘one size fits all’ approach is inadequate for addressing the education issues of rural and remote schools” (Lettts et al. 2005, p.11).

Understanding Rurality

There are two distinct elements to the term ‘rural’ as we are using it here. One is the notion of rural as different from ‘metropolitan’; and the other is related to accessibility to services and remoteness. According to McGrail et al. (2005, p. 22), “[t]here is no essential rural or metropolitan, but a concept of rural or metropolitan based on a continuum in regard to population numbers, accessibility of services, attitudes and values.”

For the purposes of the study we adopted a practical definition of rural schools and teaching which includes those categorised as regional, rural and remote. According to 2004 ABS data, seven million people, or 36% of the population, live in a defined, rural or non-metropolitan location. Official government reports state that in Australia, ‘84% of the population is contained within the most densely populated 1% of the continent’ (ABS 2012) and that 2011 ABS data shows population growth highest in “inner-city areas, outer suburbs, urban infill areas and along the coast. Areas that have seen decline include inland, rural areas that have been affected by drought in the last few years” (ABS 2012). This study therefore potentially impacts most strongly on the 16% of the Australian population that is dispersed across well over 3/4 of the landmass of inland Australia. This indeed was our focus, as rural communities on the coast appeared to present slightly less difficulty for staffing than those without the natural affordances of beach and surf.

Many of these people live in inland regional cities, with populations of over 20,000, and enjoy many of the benefits and services associated with a metropolitan lifestyle. They may have a choice of public or private schooling for their children, and have secondary education available close to home. For this reason, schools in these centres are often not classified as rural, and they
are certainly not ‘hard to staff’ or ‘difficult’, even though they may be located many hundreds of kilometres from a metropolitan state capital. Other people live in smaller ‘rural’ locations, where schools are predominantly provided by the government, and where services such as churches, hospitals, newspapers, clinical and judicial services are generally sourced from a regional centre. Finally, some people live in areas that are classified as ‘remote’, either because of their distance from a regional centre, or because of the difficulty of access due to transport, terrain or weather difficulties.

As Stehlik (2001) notes, while we speak knowingly about ‘the rural’, we must not fall into the trap of thinking that if we ‘know one rural place then we know them all’. It is precisely the diversity of rural Australia that needs to be articulated and highlighted in research of the kind we are reporting here, along with its corollary understanding of the impossibility of any single solution being satisfactory.

It is important, too, to note that we do not necessarily equate ‘rural’ with ‘disadvantage’. An early study by Doecke (1987) questioned the extent to which rural students were disadvantaged, arguing that many of the so-called notions of disadvantage were actually constructed from an urban perspective. Sher (1991, p.1) noted that rural schools are often places of educational innovation and improvement, and we have found this exemplified in our own recent work in rural schools (Reid, Nixon & Comber 2007). This study understands the potential of rural schools in this light, and we hopes our focus on quality teaching as well as longevity in rural teaching careers will unsettle metrocentric perceptions of rural communities as ‘old fashioned’ or backward, without romanticising or glossing over the challenges that all ‘peripheral’ communities face. In reporting our own findings here, we are struck by the fact that our conclusions are not new in themselves, and that rather than ‘providing a solution’ they instead ‘support the struggle’ to provide quality education in rural settings. They do suggest that for educational systems, taking up what Ankrah-Dove (1982) and Hatton et al. (1991) have called a ‘challenge’ rather than a ‘deficit’ approach to staffing rural schools is both productive and achievable:

The challenge approach is based on the assumption that teachers can be encouraged to work in disadvantaged areas, then become further motivated through increased satisfaction which flows from successful experiences while teaching in such locations. The answers to staff shortages are to be found in selective recruitment, specific preparation, more effective induction and on the job support (Hatton et al, 1991, p.279-80).

In both Australian and international literature, it is accepted that rural areas have more difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified staff (Ballou & Podgursky 1998; Gibson, 1994; Martin, 1994; McEwan 1999; Sharplin 2002; Roberts 2004; Halsey 2005; R(T)EP 2002). What must be placed on the Australian education agenda is a systemic and systematic approach which focuses on how best to prepare our teachers for rural and remote schools. While Roberts (2003, p. 4) places the responsibility for rural schooling outcomes squarely on the inability of ‘the system’, at all levels, to place quality teachers in rural schools, noting that “the most significant factor in education quality is the provision of appropriate quality stable staff”, his analysis can be critiqued in terms of its disregard for the larger social and environmental context. There are, for example, impacts of drought on teachers that deserve attention. When drought impacts on student numbers, teacher numbers are also affected and as Alston & Kent (2006, p.192) note: “In many remote high schools there are fewer experienced teachers to guide new graduates and beginning teachers.” Accordingly, the professional development of teachers in rural and remote areas is an area that requires significant attention.
This focus on professional development places attention firmly on the process of teacher education – both in-service, as referred to here, and pre-service, as currently controlled and offered by the university sector. Most of the literature on rural education in Australia centres on the notion that things are ‘tougher’ ‘out there’ – more of a challenge for the teachers placed in schools in rural and remote locations. The literature points to several related issues - students from low socio-economic backgrounds, many Indigenous, in geographical and social landscapes of rural decline and drought, isolated, insular, with low academic expectations, lower test scores, and more social welfare issues. The rural student population, it seems, suffers a disproportionate level of disadvantage.

However, as Apple (1996, p. 107) points out, to focus only on disadvantage can breed a certain fatalism - the idea that “it is impossible to change schools unless the social and economic relations of wider society are transformed first”. Furthermore, the idea of the ‘bush’ as being ‘disadvantaged’ perpetuates the idea that ‘the rural’ is failing and that rural students are failing. This deficit approach to rural schooling is misleading in that it ignores the many successes at individual and school level (Reid et al. 2007), and fails to encourage the sort of ‘challenge’ approach advocated by Hatton et al (1991) as best suited to attract enthusiastic and committed teachers to rural schools. Through our focus on successful examples of rural schools where the ‘challenge’ has not proved insurmountable, and where teachers have found much to keep them interested and prepared to continue to work, we have been able to identify the factors that contribute to this phenomenon. We have also been able to consider the effects and benefits of systems-initiated incentives and interventions across states to determine which of these seem more successful in attracting and retaining rural teachers.

Teacher Education for Rural Schools

Clearly, teacher education is implicated in the provision of quality teachers for rural and remote schools. At the turn of the century, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission conducted a national inquiry into rural and remote education which reported a crisis for rural schools attracting new teachers. That inquiry linked the crisis with a lack of rural preparation in Australian universities, stating that “most teacher training does not equip new recruits with the skills and knowledge needed for teaching in rural and remote Australia” (HREOC, 2000, p. 43). It is striking to us that this phenomenon has been noted for almost a century now, and across the whole nation. The earliest graduates of a teacher education college specifically set up in 1928 to draw from and service inland areas of New South Wales at Armidale Teachers College, for instance, noted the inadequacy of their preparation even in this context for the realities of rural schools (Reid & Martin, 2004). Lake (1985) focused on the perceptions of 186 newly appointed teachers in rural Western Australian schools, finding that their pre-service training had been inadequate for the challenges they faced. These teachers reportedly felt ill-prepared and were dissatisfied with respect to the lack of attention in their training to multi-grade classrooms, rural communities, and expectations of the rural teacher. McSwan & Duck (1988) reported from their research with teachers in rural western Queensland that, like Lake (1985), they found that their sample of teachers felt inadequately prepared for what they faced in these schools.

Fewer than one in five teachers had completed any subjects, activities or experiences as part of their pre-service program that were relevant in these settings. Clarke et al. (1990, p. 3) confirmed these criticisms of rural pre-service teacher education programs, arguing that “the lack of training and support (time and resources) for teachers in multi-age settings is significantly affecting the quality of education of many students in these contexts.” Gibson (1993) argued that the pervasive attitude in Australian policy documents appears to assume no need for specialised training or selection practices for rural, remote or isolated teaching personnel. Despite much
research that identified the need for specialised pre-service preparation that accommodates social and professional aspects in rural teaching contexts, the implementation of such programs by universities has been “sparse, haphazard, and in many cases, non-existent” (Gibson, 1993, p. 76). Yarrow et al. (1999, p. 2) claimed that many pre-service programs at that time had only recently begun to address a “historically enduring and well-documented concern about lack of effective preparation of teachers to teach in rural schools”, in spite of a significant literature concerning teacher preparation for rural and remote teaching positions in which:

... there were no examples where the need for some sort of specialised training was not advocated. Indeed, there seems to be almost universal recognition that pre-service teachers require better preparation for their likely early teaching positions. (Yarrow et al. 1999, p. 5)

Acknowledging this lack of cohesion, and noting it ourselves both in our survey of pre-service teachers and in an environmental scan of universities around the nation that provide their students with information about rural teaching on their websites (White et al., 2008) we have worked to re-position the ‘challenge’ of rural teaching as an opportunity for enhanced teacher education that uses understandings of situated pedagogy (McConaghy, 2002) and place-based education (Gruenewald, 2004; Green & Letts, 2007; Smith, 2002) as keys to successful teaching and learning practice, particularly for Indigenous students (see Danaher et al., 2003).

As Connors (2007, p. 17) notes, there is “a generally acknowledged national problem of insufficient data for the purposes of teacher workforce planning.” This study does address this gap in knowledge about teachers who stay in rural schools and the things that schools and communities do to keep them there. The inter-related issues of recruitment and retention of high quality teachers in rural schools are of extreme importance to all states and systems, including parent and community groups, and this work contributes to knowledge about the best teacher education approaches to prepare and recruit good rural teachers. High quality pre-service teacher education for rural teaching is noted by some as the single most important issue for the future of rural education (Roberts 2003; Halsey 2005). Halsey’s (2005) report for REFA on the size, scope and issues of country teaching placement programs in teacher education in Australia noted that new and better ways of preparing for country teaching preparation are needed to make a real difference to teacher retention. Two key policy recommendations from his study, directed at teacher education programs, were that universities with teacher education programs be strongly encouraged to develop policies to increase significantly the number of pre-service country teaching placements; and that metropolitan universities and key stakeholders be strongly encouraged and provided with incentives to progressively and significantly increase the proportion of their teacher education cohort that participates in a country pre-service placement.

We have worked from these recommendations to investigate the success of teacher education programs that are designed as models to actively increase country teaching recruitment. However, as noted above, this is only one side of the issue. We have also sought to find out what aspects of the initial and continuing experience of new teachers appointed to rural and remote locations provide incentive for them to stay in the community for a significant length of time, and thereby provide some continuity of teaching and learning for the children in the school. This duality of focus will hopefully provide a strong and useful data source for state, Catholic and independent schools and systems faced with the annual (and sometimes continuous) problem of ‘staffing the empty schoolhouse’ (Roberts 2004). The findings have already contributed to the knowledge base informing curriculum and planning decisions in teacher education around the nation, through the parallel project led by Simone White, Graeme Lock and Wendy Hastings to
develop high quality on- line teacher education resources at the Renewing Rural & Regional Teacher Education Curriculum (RRRTEC} website, http://www.rrrtec.net.au/ (White et al., 2011).

In Chapter Three we describe the study design as a mixed-method approach (Cresswell 2003) that uses the methodological expertise and strengths offered by the research team, in both quantitative and qualitative procedures including both large scale (state→national) surveys and small scale in-depth interviews, as well as local community/school ethnographies. Its longitudinal nature has provided a valuable set of data and findings from student teachers undertaking pre-service education into their early-career experience as teachers who take up appointments in rural schools. The ethnographic studies have canvassed a broad range of views – from student teachers, parents, new and experienced teachers, community and school leaders – and our analysis combines these across states and locations to provide a national consensus of experience and understanding.

Importantly, by our focus on successful schools, we have sought to position rural teaching in a positive light and unsettle the perceived ‘deficit’ view of working in rural communities. This is the significance captured in our title, and we seek to showcase those communities whose schools have successful programs involving committed teachers whose country teaching experience is of high quality, rather than simply increased length of ‘country service’. In this way the project aims to identify success indicators in building a ‘stable’ rural workforce – without the assumption that stability can only be measured by the length of time a teacher spends in a particular school. Indeed, for the sustainability of rural education, increasing the time served by a teacher in a rural school may no longer be an adequate or useful indication of quality teaching or learning.

**Recommendations**

**Recommendations to Teacher Education Institutions**

- All teacher education courses should embed a focus on place consciousness, place-based pedagogy and community readiness (see RRRTEC www.rrrtec.net.au).
- Teacher education courses to develop an elective/core unit on teacher leadership and to better prepare graduates for an understanding of the leadership roles beginning teachers can be involved in particularly in regional, rural and remote community locations.
- Partner with each State based Shire/Council to identify a person to become the Professional Experience Liaison contact (see Hamilton AISV example).
- Partner with Local Councils and employing authorities to develop a community-based approach to recruiting and retaining new teachers.
- Examples of materials/events and strategies might include information and support to:
  - provide community welcome events;
  - provide community based information booklet of key services and community information;
  - provide locally based community walks (including Indigenous and non-Indigenous) perspectives on the local community and the people and place.
- Increased preparation in IT-supported teaching as increasingly rural school (secondary particularly) relies on online, interactive “connected classroom” models of teaching.
Recommendations to Departments of Education - In-service Professional Learning/Development

- Compulsory professional leave – Teachers to receive sabbatical and professional development opportunities as part of package for teachers after three years in rural/remote school. Sabbaticals would be in partnership with partner university and be focussed on program to enhance some aspect of “life” in that school/community.
- Establish a Beginning Rural Teacher network – beginning teachers taking a position in a rural school to have access to an on-line mentoring and induction support network.
- Experienced teachers to participate in compulsory mentoring workshops to examine the work of mentoring pre-service and beginning teachers into a whole school community network.
- Aspiring principals be required to undertake mandatory leadership training prior to their appointment as a principal.
- Increased value of funding/scholarships for preservice teachers to have experience in rural school/communities that more accurately reflects the costs of such opportunities.
- Partnership as outlined for tertiary institutions – working with local Councils, etc..

Recommendation to Registration Authority

- Registration subsidised for beginning rural teachers.
- Mandatory training/qualification for (rural) leadership in the “steps” of national standards for teachers.
- National standards to reinstate the mandatory component for Special Education in ITE programs.

Recommendation to State/Local Government

- Provide adequate and affordable accommodation.
- Incentives include increased travel allowances/support for rural/remote teachers.

The following recommendations are built upon a premise that rural teacher education, both pre-service and in-service must be a genuine partnership between employers, universities and rural communities. The reader can determine if there appears to be increased opportunities for collaborative work if the following recommendations are to be adopted.

1. Major employers and universities need to work in tandem to develop and promote programs that are mutually beneficial. The current arrangements suggest that employers have their agendas, and universities may have similar objectives, however, much of the work appears to be undertaken independently. There is a disjunction between university and state-based systems, such that university programs do not typically build a developmental sequence of awareness, introduction and induction re: rural teaching. State-based incentives are provided to pre-service teachers with the support of the universities, but employers provide no support to the universities to run these programs. Teachers, in case study schools, reported that they, as metropolitan-based students, had been actively discouraged while they were at university, because the university did not wish to provide support to any student who was placed in a remote school.
2. Some communities themselves worked to actively link university and employers to ensure that teachers were retained, while some schools actively linked the two systems for their teachers. The role of community was identified as a significant component of all incentive systems. Active community programs were instrumental in attracting and retaining teachers in the majority of case study schools.

3. Incentives are not sufficient in and of themselves, as it would appear evident that schemes such as those listed above have little chance of success unless teachers taking up such incentives have actually been prepared for teaching in non-metropolitan schools. Programs such as those offered by NSW DEC under the badging of “Explore your Future” have a series of staged programs from tasters to embedded placement for pre-service teachers and now aspiring leaders, as well as the Teacher Mentor program for beginning teachers. Most states have some aspects of this program but none appear as comprehensive.

4. While incentives may attract new and experienced teachers, employers must recognise those dimensions of life in rural schools and communities that will ensure longevity of quality teachers – effective leadership (in school and community); professional development and study leave opportunities; “senior” curriculum; quality, affordable accommodation; XXXXX Jo.....add as necessary.

5. Teacher induction, while described as an important policy by all states, is inconsistently enacted across each state, such that little genuine, structured support for beginning teachers through the induction phase of their career, particularly then into the in-service phase exists. Induction and ongoing professional development/support are seen by teachers to be an important incentive to retain teachers in these schools. There is significant funding at a systems level but this is not always accessible to teachers working in rural schools.

6. The TERRAnova project found that there appears to be limited public commitment by Australian universities to promote and educate pre-service teachers about teaching in rural schools. Faculties and Schools of Education should conduct a thorough overview of the information provided to their pre-service teachers about rural incentives, to ensure all students have up-to-date, relevant and accessible information about university as well as any state-based incentives for pre-service teachers.

7. Many participants indicated that if they were to leave the rural school/community it was often so they could be closer to their families. Consequently, judicious targeting of financial support to increase opportunities for connection with family, such as reimbursed costs and more time for “distance” travel would potentially support retention of teachers for longer periods beyond “minimum”.

8. Universities (TEC /PCAP) link to dept staffing for workforce planning.

9. Hamilton example.

10. School and local community tours and intros community induction.

11. Because longevity in a teaching position does not necessarily equate with quality teaching, aspects of retention should be explored. Professional development opportunities need to be varied, ongoing and well-funded, recognising that distance and travel are imperatives that need to be addressed. Policies that permit experienced leaders to be refreshed through paid study leave, that targets the needs of the local school and/or community such as paid study leave, as is provided in SA for staff working in remote Indigenous communities. This research project recommends that jurisdictions should introduce a policy of paid study leave, undertaken in direct partnership with a partner university. School leaders could engage, for example, in induction and mentoring of new teachers into the school, research projects addressing school/community needs. Study leave could be
built into retention incentives after, say 3 years, such that if leaders opt not to undertake study leave after 5 years, they would be required to re-apply for their position.

12. In an ideal world, this is a model that incorporates some of the “best practice” features from all of the analysis and case studies.

13. The federal government should provide funding for universities to work collaboratively with state-based employers to develop a suite of staged and fully funded initiatives to encourage and actively support interested pre-service teachers to participate in rural/remote professional experience opportunities. In the spirit of collaboration, universities should also provide authentic experiences associated with place-based pedagogies embedded within their teacher education (and other professional discipline programs, such as medicine, law).
Chapter Two

*Rurality, Educational Disadvantage and Teaching in Rural Schools*

Jo-Anne Reid, Kristina Gottschall, Bill Green, Kim Booby & Kylie Press

Australia's future depends upon each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just and open society (MCEETYA Adelaide Declaration, 1999). High-quality schooling is central to achieving this vision. Students in rural, regional and remote Australia have the right to an equitable and quality education, and we work from the assumption that it is imperative all education stakeholders work to ensure that they have access to it. This study has come at a time where, nationally, we face a crisis in attracting and retaining teachers and other professionals to rural areas. There are national and state projections of a teacher shortfall which will affect all school, with significant numbers of the current aging teacher workforce expected to retire in the next five years (see NSWDEC, 2012, p.5). This will be strongly felt in rural schools and communities, as traditionally these are the schools identified as harder to staff. Share, Lawrence & Boylan (1994) argued that attracting and retaining teachers for rural Australian schools is not an issue only for the state jurisdictions that operate them. Australian rural economic and rural educational policies are inextricably linked, in that rural restructuring, notably significant demographic change, exerts pressure on the availability and quality of education and training. Further, McSwan's (2003) analysis of data on rural economic change, showed that in terms of rural schooling, a “depth of resource in human, social, cultural and economic capital is crucial to sustainable community development” (McSwan 2003, p. 22).

In this chapter we review a selection of the large body of research literature that focuses on rural schooling. Subsequent chapters include reviews of literature specifically related to each of their thematic concerns, and a larger Bibliography reflecting the full range of the work that has been consulted and reviewed during the project as a whole can be found later in this volume. This review is more general. Within the framework of the report as a whole, we provide background argumentation here for the major theme of the study: the imperative for high quality education for the children of rural families and the need for high quality, well educated teachers who are personally and professionally equipped to address the educational needs of their communities.

The chapter aims first of all to examine the concept of rurality as a geographical, social, economic and educational and political construct, including policy-driven definitional work that drives classification and resourcing decisions. We argue that for teachers to be able to think realistically about teaching in a rural place, and to get the most out of a rural position, both for their students and for themselves as professionals, it is essential for us to demystify the rural as an abstract concept as well as a physical reality. It goes on to provide an introduction to the idea of teaching in rural communities, and to outline why the problem of staffing rural schools is so important for the provision of equitable education provision for children in rural and remote locations. We also introduce current research and scholarship in the area of rural education, beginning teaching and teacher education; and provide a rationale for the importance of focusing on a form of ‘rural education’ that looks holistically at the needs of people in place.

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2 This chapter was prepared by Jo-Anne Reid, Kristina Gottschall, Bill Green, Kim Booby and Kylie Press, who have each contributed at different stages to the gathering and production of a large annotated bibliography to inform the project, the synthesis and thematic analysis of this, and the production of this review.
Understanding Rurality

The well known image, below, is iconic. It speaks to a dominant ‘rural imaginary’ understanding of rurality in Australia. Rural places, as in the image of the signpost, are often defined and mentally viewed as somewhere ‘out there,’ ‘out back’, referred to by their distance from a metropolitan place, often along a long solitary (iconically dirt) road.

Figure 2.1: Rural Inland Australia

Visual images of rurality are very important in perpetuating our beliefs about rural places. The idea of rurality as something at ‘distance away from’ the city, carries with it mental images of places that are thus ‘isolated, removed, backward’. Defining and therefore understanding rurality in ways that support our understanding of rural teaching and teachers, we argue is far more complex than this. The conceptual framework of Rural Social Space, outlined in Chapter Four has helped us understand and work with this complexity.

In *Schooling the Rustbelt Kids* (2002) Pat Thomson demonstrated connections between the social and schools. She argues that teachers and principals deal with the results of inequalities but can also reproduce them due to the ‘institutional mediation of policy and the broader social context, and the distribution of the cultural capital that counts’ (p. 181). Thomson described a commonality between ‘rustbelt’ schools in that:

the majority of their students come from families who are currently “doing it tough”… However, it is not a simple matter of rustbelt schools being poor and irrevocably divided from more privileged locations and schools. There are differences between schools based on sector – primary or secondary, and on school enrolment. There are also substantive differences between each rustbelt school. Each of them is unique as well as occupying a similar socio-institutional place (Thomson 2002, p. 183-4).
Drawing on the work of the Rural (Teacher) Education Project [R(T)EP] (Green 2009), we have found Thomson’s concept of ‘thisness’ in terms of rural schools helpful, in that it ‘offers possibilities for allowing school-by-school modifications to policy’ (p. 184) rather than the sorts of overgeneralisations that make rural schools a homogenous category. Following Thomson, R(T)EP took as a grounding principle, the notion that places matter – noting that all policies and practices are located within social, cultural, spatial and historical landscapes – each place having specific needs and priorities. R(T)EP’s situated pedagogies framework (McConaghy & Burnett, 2003) enabled that project to analyse target schools in rural NSW in terms of the specificities of particular places, as well as recognising the broader trends in rural and remote education. On this basis, Letts et al. (2005) argued for a disaggregated and differentiated view of rural education, claiming that:

… while it is necessary to a degree to generalise ‘rural’ for the purposes of policy and reform, the uniqueness of place also needs to be acknowledged. As such, a ‘one size fits all’ approach is inadequate for addressing the education issues of rural and remote schools in NSW (Letts et al. 2005, p. 1).

Space (like gender, race and class) is often treated as transparent – ignored by researchers and policy-makers, and accepted as neutral. If the ‘rural’ is addressed, it is often taken for granted as something that ‘just is’, homogenous and not needing to be questioned (Sherwood, 2001). This challenge to simplistic rural-urban binaries is found elsewhere as well. Drawing upon the work of Soja (1996), for instance, Danaher, Danaher and Moriarty (2003) illustrated how, by conceptualising space as multi-dimensional, fluid and unstable, individual teachers could challenge and disrupt boundaries to become pedagogical innovators.

We have also found accounts of rural teaching that challenge the idea that rurality is necessarily problematic (Comber, Nixon & Reid 2007), while acknowledging from the start the considerable difficulties and challenges that many city people do experience when they make a move to teach in a rural school. Any research about ‘rural’ education must come to terms with definitions of ‘rural’. However, as Sherwood (2001) noted, many educational researchers seem unable to recognise their own urban biases, and too often assess rural communities in terms of their inadequacy, rather than their assets. In describing and clarifying just what we mean when we talk about rural schools, a range of literature argues that understanding rural schools are not ‘all the same’ is the first step.

**Defining Rurality**

James et al. (1999) have noted that to define and measure rurality is ‘notoriously difficult’. Many rural education researchers make similar claims (see, for example Looker & Dwyer 1998, Henry 1998, Wyn, Stokes & Stafford 1998, Lockie & Bourke 2001, Cloke Marsden & Mooney 2006). Looker & Dwyer (1998) observed that in policy and research ‘there is surprisingly little attention paid to the conceptualisation of ‘rurality’’. In addition, Alloway et al. (2004) state that even when studies do address rural issues, the majority simply use ‘rural’ as a synonym for ‘non-metropolitan’. Arguing in terms of the US, but of equal significance for Australia, Sherwood (2001, p. 1) evocatively argued that rural areas have been declared the orphaned ‘stepchild’ of the national research program.
**Defining Rurality From Policy Perspectives**

We turn now to explore some particular definitions of rural and examine these in terms of the policy implications they have for teaching.

At times, the ‘rural’ is reduced to a geographical imperative in reports and policy. ABS Census Data measures ‘rural’ locations according to the distance from urban centres and as a list of postcodes. The Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) is one such scale developed by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care (2001) which ranks locations across the country in terms of their ‘remoteness’ and access to urban centres and establishes remoteness in terms of accessibility to service centres, and uses a slightly different classification:

1. Highly accessible;
2. Accessible;
3. Moderately accessible;
4. Remote;
5. Very remote.

Basically, the further the location from a regional/urban centre, the higher the rate of disadvantage. In Figure 2.2, below, we provide a map (ABS, 2003) that uses these classifications to represent the geographical and social phenomenon of non-metropolitan locations in a manner that allows us all to understand what a designation of ‘Outer Regional’ might mean in terms of the size and scope of people, schools, towns and landscapes it subsumes.

**Figure 2.2: ARIA Map of Australia, 2003**

While the scale is useful to particular projects such as this one, ARIA’s failure to consider the diversity of communities along socio-economic, cultural or urban/rural and population-size factors, arguably limits its potential usefulness. We have used this map both conceptually and methodologically – both to visualise the relationships with various places and the geographic locations, and, as described in Chapter Three, to assist us to differentiate between schools nominated as potential sites for study.
Many recent national and state reports reject a rural-urban distinction, placing at the centre of their inquiries issues of socio-economic status, not rurality. Vinson’s 2004 *Community Adversity and Resilience Report*, like ARIA, ranked locations according to ‘disadvantage’. However, Vinson and his team included 13 various indicators of ‘disadvantage’, including: unemployment, low birth-weight, child maltreatment, childhood injuries, education, psychiatric admissions, crime, income, mortality, sickness and disability support, imprisonment and early school leaving. Stimson and Baum (2001) use socio-economic factors to identify a series of clusters of communities that they distinguished as ‘at risk’.

Looking at communities only in terms of ‘disadvantage’ or ‘at risk’ is necessary in order to address particular concerns. However, such an approach can serve to further marginalise communities and certain individuals, while failing to acknowledge other important factors. Notions of ‘at risk’ can also serve to constitute certain individuals and groups, such as ‘rural youth’ as problematic. In this discourse, ‘rural youth’, for instance becomes synonymous with binge drinking, reckless behaviour, drug use and promiscuity (see: www.youthfacts.com.au).

Sherwood (2001) argues that when the ‘rural’ is paid attention to by education reformists and policy-makers, ‘it is more often for the sake of a representative sampling than for learning something more substantive about rural schools’. Green & Reid (2004) state that policy remains metrocentric.

To focus on disadvantage is an imperative for those concerned with social justice and education. However, to equate ‘the rural’ with disadvantage could potentially have negative consequences. For instance, new or beginning teachers’ perceptions on teaching in rural or remote schools have shown to impede attraction and retention to such schools and communities (Sharplin, 2001).

First of all, it is clear that there are many ways we can define ‘rural’. A quick online check will provide many simple definitions that immediately classify the ‘rural’ in terms of what it is not: e.g.: a “rural area is: any area that is not defined as urban” (US Dept of Health and Human Services, http://www.hhs.gov/ accessed 2011). In terms of defining the ‘rural’, we want to go beyond this sort of overly simple negative comparison with characteristics of metropolitan settings that the rural does not have. For instance, while the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics has defined rural as including “open country and small settlements of less than 2,500 persons that are not in the vicinity of the densely populated suburban areas known as urban clusters” (Barley & Beesley, 2007, p. 2), there is no equivalent general definition available for Australian educational researchers, and the size and diversity of educational jurisdictions means that a single definition may well be unhelpful. For other social services, there are a number of means of quantifying or establishing rurality and remoteness. For example the Australian 1994 Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas (RRMA) classification, remains in use today, classifying locations into 7 categories, as in Figure 2.3 below.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare discussed this classification in the following terms:

This index of remoteness was constructed for each non-metropolitan SLA using 'distance factors' related to urban centres containing a population of 10,000 persons or more, plus a factor called 'personal distance'. Personal distance relates to population density and indicates the 'remoteness' or average distance of residents from one another.

It is important to note that this method of allocating an SLA to a rural or remote zone is not perfect. Both the size of SLAs and the distribution of the population within SLAs
vary enormously. This can mean, for example, that within a remote SLA there can be pockets that are rural rather than remote, and vice versa (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012 http://www.aihw.gov.au/rural-health-rrma-classification/).

**Figure 2.3: Structure of the Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas (RRMA) Classification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan zone</td>
<td>M1 Capital cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural zone</td>
<td>M2 Other metropolitan centres (urban centre population &gt; 100,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R1 Large rural centres (urban centre population 25,000-99,999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R2 Small rural centres (urban centre population 10,000-24,999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R3 Other rural areas (urban centre population &lt; 10,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote zone</td>
<td>Rem1 Remote centres (urban centre population &gt; 4,999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rem2 Other remote areas (urban centre population &lt; 5,000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2012)

In addition, the Australian Bureau of Statistics uses a set of Australian Standard Geographic Classifications to determine "Remoteness Areas" The Remoteness Structure is based on the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) developed by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care. ARIA measures the remoteness of a point based on road distance to the nearest urban centre. ABS Remoteness Areas (RA) fall into one of the following remoteness categories:

1. Major Cities;
2. Inner Regional;
3. Outer Regional;
4. Remote;
5. Very Remote.

And as this road sign in Figure 2.4, which is what is seen when a driver is heading west from the city of Brisbane effectively below demonstrates, the distance from the metropolitan centre tells a symbolic story of further and further distance from the amenities and services that it provides.
In the light of these calculated classifications systems, devised in order for professional services to understand, and thus provide staff and services to rural and remote Australia, the definition of rural education used by Victoria’s Country Education Project to define educational leaders eligible for the Baillieu Myer Education Leadership Scholarship in 2010 seems relatively simple. Their definition of rural includes those communities that are located:

- at least one and a half hours car travel from Melbourne CBD;
- at least 25 kms from a regional population of at least 10,000 people;
- within a community population of less than 5,000 people. (CEP 2010).

At the very least, we need to acknowledge that a one size fits all approach is inadequate for addressing the education issues of rural and remote schools (Letts, Novak, Gottschall, Green & Meyenn, 2005; Moriarty, Danaher & Danaher, 2003). There are two distinct elements of the term rural as we use it here: one is the notion of rural as different from metropolitan; and the other is related to accessibility to services and remoteness. According to McGrail et al. “[t]here is no essential rural or metropolitan, but a concept of rural or metropolitan based on a continuum in regard to population numbers, accessibility of services, attitudes and values” (McGrail et al. 2005, p. 22).

It is useful here too, to compare the ‘degrees of remoteness’ ARIA map of Australia with the latest population density figures from the ABS (2012). In the map that follows, which provides census data of the actual numbers of people who lived in all Australian Statistical Local Areas [SLA] in 2011, the access to amenities and degree of distance from the coastline as determined by ARIA seems to have remained accurate as an indicator of population density across the continent.
Comparing the two maps, we can make an operational definition of ‘very remote’ areas as those with a population of less than one person per ten square kilometres. Schools in these areas, of course, are therefore understandably few, and their remoteness produces rural social spaces that are qualitatively different from those in the rural communities we have studied here (Pietsch & Williamson, 2008, 2009; Shaw, 2009).

Although governments agree that the future of regional Australia is dependent upon an educated and skilled population, there are significant barriers to the achievement of this goal which not only restrict access to education and training in rural areas but which also deprive rural people of their basic human rights (HREOC 1999). The graphs that follow indicate the Federal Government’s understanding of this issue in 2008 at the time of the national ‘2020 Summit’ that was called to direct planning and policy into the next decade.

Figure 2.6, for instance, depicts the number of people resident in the ARIA classified areas in terms of their access to a range of health workers deemed necessary to maintain physical health over the lifespan. The small number of health workers available for residents in rural and remote locations parallels the small number of teachers available for rural and remote schools. This can have immediate effects such as a reduced ability of rural schools to offer the same range of subjects available in metropolitan areas because they do not have the teaching staff available. The issue is made more difficult because of the complex nature of our understanding of the term ‘rural’ and the need for us not to generalise the ‘rural’ across the specificities of place and distance, and to acknowledge that “a ‘one size fits all’ approach is inadequate for addressing the education issues of rural and remote schools” (Letts et al. 2005, p. 11).
It is easy to see from such figures that health services for Australians are not equally distributed, and that although if you are a child growing up in a major city, you will have access to a GP who, on average, will have about 400 patients, if you live anywhere outside of a major city you will share your GP with about 1000 others, and if you live in a very remote area your GP will have an average of 2000 patients to deal with each year. Your chances of seeing a specialist are far worse. It is easy to see that teachers who decide to take up a position in a rural location might be better off, and find it easier to live successfully, if they are fit and well – though it seldom happens that pre-service teacher education courses explain this to students as part of their course.

While such information may in fact deter some people from applying to a rural or remote school, this might in fact be useful. It may well be better for both the individual teacher and the community if a new teacher who has particular health needs that cannot be met in the community is not appointed, rather than finding that s/he needs to constantly travel away, or is endangered by the lack of access.

As noted in Chapter One, a practical definition of rural schools and teaching includes those categorised as regional, rural and remote. In preparation for the 2008 National 2020 Summit, information provided to participants concerned with the future of rural Australia included the following graph that recorded Principals’ responses to the question: "How difficult is it to fill vacant science teaching positions at your school?" (Department of Education, Science and Training, SIMERR National Survey 2006). As this graph indicates, there are clear differences between the metropolitan, rural or provincial cities areas of Australia in relation to the ease with which Principals can fill places on their staff, with over 50% of schools in remote (and very remote) areas indicating that they find it either moderately or very difficult to fill vacant positions.
With ‘the rural teacher shortage’ being called a national crisis, it is useful to examine the situation from this sort of perspective, and note that while less than 40% of schools in rural areas, and less than 20% of schools in remote areas find it easy to fill vacancies when they arise – the issue is further complicated by the length of time teachers stay in these positions, as we have noted above.

On this basis we agree that there is an urgent need for schools, education departments and teacher education to focus attention on rural schooling, and consider alternative ways to generate interest among high quality potential, beginning and experienced teachers in a rural teaching career. Recent national reports (Halsey, 2005; MCEETYA Task Force on Rural Education, 2003; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000, NSW Teacher Education Review Taskforce, 2001; Australian Council of Deans of 1999) consistently claim a significant problem for national health, safety and economic sustainability in the crisis that has existed over time in attracting teachers to staff rural and remote schools (Roberts 2004). This is not unique to Australia, of course, as Green et al (2009) note – it is a global concern. They cite Canadian educator Jennifer Sumner (2005, p.4), who points out that while rural communities “are particularly vulnerable at the beginning of the twenty-first century”, nonetheless they “remain … a vital link between society and the natural environment.” As such, they are an important focus for all Australians, to be ignored at our own risk in some senses.

**Defining Rurality in Popular Consciousness**

Lockie and Bourke (2001, p.3) demonstrated how stereotypes and clichés about ‘the rural’ proliferate in popular culture and consciousness, and also in government policy and research, and claimed that “[t]he ways in which these issues are understood and acted upon are pervaded by myths. Many urban Australians see their rural neighbours as backward, ‘redneck’, homogenous, harmonious and conservative.” As they continued:

Ideological constructions of rural Australia tend to adopt one of two opposing perspectives: the first posits an idyllic quality of life, picturesque scenery and the
sunburnt stockman, while the second constructs rural residents as backward, simple and ignorant (Lockie and Bourke 2001, 8).

Since the 1980s, rural sociologists and those concerned with rural education have made deliberate efforts to represent and ‘speak for’ the ‘rural’ and focus on issues affecting rural Australia. As a result, Kapferer (1990) claimed that rural-urban distinctions are no longer appropriate because they are historically and culturally ingrained in ideological myths. Hoggart (1990) invited rural researchers to ‘do away’ with the ‘rural’ altogether as an ideological approach in order to dispense with the rural-urban divide. Cloke (2006) however, suggested that that may be impossible to do as we have become so invested and dependent upon such binaries. Furthermore, if we fail to address and highlight ‘place’ we fall into the trap of rendering it transparent once again.

In ‘Out There’: Space, Places and Border Crossings, Stehlik (2001, p. 1) attempted to reclaim the ‘rural’ from those analyses that positions rurality in terms of deficiency or ‘lack’. She argued that ‘the rural’ as something different from the urban, is a relevant distinction, one which is significant to (‘rural’) peoples’ identities. Rural researchers should challenge those who speak about the rural disparagingly or only in terms of despair. As various commentators have observed, rural education is commonly built upon negative definitions (for example, not urban), leaving rural education in a constant state of self-negation (Callejo Perez & Swidler 2004; Moriarty, Danaher & Danaher 2003) which essentially leads to policies promoting standardised responses to standardised problems as we discuss below.

The ‘uniqueness’ of Australia’s rural places is highlighted by Alloway et al. (2004) who state that the remote nature of many Australian rural communities, and their low density population, make them very different from rural communities in Europe, North America or almost any other industrialised country. They argue strongly that rural Australia’s uniqueness should be acknowledged and valued.

However Stehlik (2001) says that even while we speak about the ‘rural’ knowingly, we must not fall into the trap of thinking that if we know one rural place then we know them all. It is precisely the diversity of rural Australia that should be articulated. Kenyon et al. (2001) have noted that ‘Rural Australia’ can include farming areas, agricultural and pastoral service centre areas, mining towns, coastal resorts, remote Aboriginal communities and stations, isolated islands, alternative communities, wilderness and desert areas, and major regional centres.

Attention to such diversity is often overlooked, as researchers and policy-makers address the rural through various means and with different intents. Halfacree (2006) articulates this diversity by attention to the rural in terms of the range of its geographic, material, representative, imaginative, and everyday differences. Bartholomeus (2003) includes economical and political descriptors to characterise different rural locations in her rural/place project. Lockie and Bourke (2001) included occupational, sociocultural, ecological understandings to their use of the ‘rural’, and went further by problematising their own categories and by making us aware that all categories are arbitrary – that differentials such as ‘rural’, ‘regional’, ‘remote’, while more effective than merely ‘rural’, are still based upon imaginary measurements, borders and conceptualisations.

Clearly ‘rural’ means different things to different people, and at different times. Sherwood (2001) called for more effective and more open-ended definition(s) of the rural, while Cloke (2006) illustrated that our concepts and position to the rural is constantly changing. Drawing upon Foucault and Soja, Stehlik (2001) argued that rural space is not a backdrop for types of people, places and social relationships, rather:
...the spaces in which social practices occur affect the nature of those practices... there may be many conflicting discourses about the same issue... some discourses come to predominate and become the ones within which others are frames. Some discourses will support and promote the status quo, while others will offer resistance to it... dominant discourse/s will marginalise and dismiss alternative voices. The way in which discourses are structured also determines who is able to participate in them, and who is marginalised from them (Stehlik 2001, p. 38).

However educational researchers must ensure that the ‘rural’ should not be made to be so different, so strange or ‘alien’ as to render it ‘abnormal’. This approach could potentially be dangerous in terms of schooling in rural and remote areas as particular demands are marginalised as “too hard” or “too demanding” for the system to acknowledge and address as a part of its normal responsibility.

Clearly, defining ‘rurality’ is a complicated issue, and Cloke (2006) argues that defining and working with concepts of the ‘rural’ is becoming more complex and conflicting due to the current post-modern, globalised environment we are living in. While Wotherspoon (1998) noted that rural education will always have somewhat contradictory position in that it must be seen both locally and globally, Lingard et al. (2003, p. 2) claimed that it is only through: “mediating the pressures of the global within the specificities of the local’ will rural school reform be practical and beneficial to rural students”.

It is precisely the diversity of rural Australia that we have tried to articulate and highlight in the research that has informed this book, along with its corollary understanding of the impossibility of any single solution being satisfactory. It is important, too, to note that we should, and do not necessarily equate ‘rural’ with ‘disadvantage’.

**Rural Education and Disadvantage**

We found a study by Doecke, from some time ago (1987) that questioned the extent to which rural students were actually disadvantaged, arguing that many of the so-called notions of disadvantage were actually constructed from an urban perspective. People who live in rural communities might not define themselves in this way. Indeed, Lamb and Teese (2005, p. 110) noted that although both Federal and State governments provide additional ‘equity’ funding for rural and remote schools under the Country Areas Program (CAP), to supplement them because of their “disadvantage associated with rurality and isolation”, on its own this may not constitute disadvantage.

Rural and isolated schools, usually much smaller in size than those in metropolitan centres, often need more funding per student, all else equal, to provide a uniform standard of education. […] If the cost of providing an educational program is higher for rural, small schools, then, all else being equal, they will need additional assistance to provide the same quality of programs and ensure the same quality of outcomes as other schools (Lamb & Teese 2005, p. 110).

As we have found in our own research (White et al. 2008), there are many schools in rural communities where, in spite of needing support to address their inability to effect economies of scale, educational disadvantage is not a defining issue, and students have access to educational opportunities and teaching that is second to none. As Sher (1991, p.1), noted, too, rural schools are often places of educational innovation and improvement. Tytler, Symington, Kirkwood and Malcolm (2008) have reported on innovative science education work in rural schools, often
related to connections with the local community that are closer and stronger than in some metropolitan areas. We have also found significant openness to innovation among rural teachers exemplified in our own recent work (Reid, Comber & Nixon 2007, White et al, 2009). Our study has attempted to represent the potential of rural schools in this light, and our focus on quality teaching as well as longevity in rural teaching careers is designed to unsettle metro-centric assumptions and perceptions of rural communities as ‘old fashioned’ or backward. This is the type of misconception that has been shown to colour pre-service and beginning teachers’ attitudes to teaching in rural or remote schools and to impede attraction and retention to such schools and communities (Sharplin 2002).

But we are also concerned with what Green (2009) has called the ‘specificities of place’ and the understanding that not all rural schools are the same. Our focus on successful schools places into strong relief the diversity of rural communities in relation to education and schooling. It is significant that while the Federal Country Areas Project [CAP] money might well ameliorate for the additional costs that location means in terms of facilities, transportation, access to sales reps, technical assistance, and so on, no Australian State considers that the Federal CAP money alone is enough to guarantee ‘equity’ of what schools can offer to rural students. All states spend considerable amounts in addition to CAP funding in order to ensure that children in their rural and isolated schools have the same educational opportunities as children in metropolitan areas. The reason for this in many schools in rural, and especially remote communities, is that, as well as the geographical inequities of ‘rurality and isolation’ which can be compensated for by providing the extra money it costs to ensure that resources and opportunities are provided to students in these schools, there are other factors associated with educational disadvantage that impact on country schools.

While reporting in detail on NSW, Lamb & Teese (2005) provide comparative information across all states in their report on equity programs for government schools across the five equity categories that currently attract funding from state departments. These categories relate to students whose educational achievement appears over time to be consistently disadvantaged by their:

- socioeconomic status;
- Indigenous status;
- rurality and isolation;
- language backgrounds other than English;
- special needs integration into mainstream classrooms.

Their study suggests that rural and remote schools are strongly represented as having higher proportions of students in ALL of these equity categories except LBOTE than schools in other areas. And this means that many of them do qualify as ‘disadvantaged’ under broader equity definitions. In their summary, Lamb and Teese stress that:

There are systemic or structural factors that seriously limit the potential impact of all if the equity programs and need to be addressed in any future equity framework. The most pressing is the quality of teachers and stability in teaching staff. Staff turnover rates […] continue to work against the impact of all programs. High staff turnover means that the benefits of professional development and capacity building, particularly delivered through new and innovative programs designed for disadvantaged students, do not stay with the school (Lamb & Teese 2005, p. xii).
Teaching in Rural Communities

It is widely acknowledged that the nature and quality of the teachers who staff rural, regional, and remote schools impact the quality and equity of educational experiences for the people in these areas (Barley & Beesley, 2007; HREOC, 1998; Mills & Gale, 2003; Sharplin, 2002; Sher, 1991). A report by the NSW Public Education Council (2005) highlighted the link between staffing and quality outcomes, particularly in so-called hard to staff schools with a continuing history of staff turnover. This “staffing churn” has serious and debilitating results for rural schools.

We begin this discussion with an extract from an account by a first year teacher entering the rural school to which she has been appointed for two years for the first time.

I am nervous

The school is mainly demountable buildings, as if sometime in the future it might be lifted up and taken away. Or bulldozed. The grounds are bone-dry, wide and flat, like the rest of the land out here. A few spindly trees line the playground. Soon the tired buildings are alive with voices from small mousy whispers to the loud, raspy crackling of adolescent boys. The variety of a Central School.

There are questions everywhere. Who you is? Miss, ‘ow long ya ‘ere for? Miss, where you from? Is that your truck Miss? Miss, ’ow long ya ’ere for? What your name is? ‘Ow long you’ll be here, Miss? Ay Miss, have you got a man?

How long will you be here, Miss? The question rolls over in my mind. Two years, that’s how long my contract is. I bet they ask everyone the same thing. They see us come and they’ve seen us go. I tell myself that it is what we do in between that counts. I am ready to try and save the world in two years or less. I kid myself that it can be done.

But first, I’ve got to get used to this heat (Moss 2004, p. 94).

This extract is part of the story told by a beginning teacher, Lorina Moss about her first year of teaching, in Goodooga in the far north west of New South Wales. Lorina had graduated from a rural university with a Grad Dip Secondary, and was appointed to Goodooga Central School to teach English – as she says on a two year appointment. What strikes us about her words in this contribution to a collection of stories from beginning teachers, Into the Whirly Wind, Stories of First Year Out Teaching (Harrison et al. 2004), is the physicality of the experience for her. Lorina’s account shows her body as nervous, heightened to the situation, and to the particularities of this new place. She writes it through her nerves, and the picture she paints is highly sensual and charged with meaning – the sight of the sparse, impermanent buildings, the feeling of dryness, the rustle of voices, the immediate emotion of personal and vocational challenge, and the heat, the heat.
In Australia, in summer, it is hot. Everywhere. Eyes squint, legs tire easily, bodies sweat and smear. Unprotected they will redden and burn, and they smell. Teachers in schools all around the country, whether in the city, the bush or the beach, know the smell of a crowded classroom after lunch or after sport in summer: they know the smell at the end of the day, and the fresh new smell of warm photocopies in the morning. The heat is part of our national consciousness, and we have an ambiguous relationship with it - living both with it, and against it. In rural Australia, though, the heat is harder to ignore. There is simply more outdoor space, where the air cannot be conditioned. And heat is a factor that some school principals in rural towns cite as increasing the difficulty of staffing their schools with teachers. The school year starts in summer, and each school year sees the return of the annual ‘problem’ of staffing rural schools.

**Staffing Rural Schools – Is It Really A Problem?**

‘Staffing rural schools’ is also a ‘hot topic’ for every state education department in Australia. In essence, staffing rural schools is a matter of making sure that those schools located in rural and remote areas have teachers in place who are well prepared and well able to teach the local children. The staffing of rural, regional and remote Australian schools impacts on the quality and equity of educational experiences for the people in these areas (HREOC, 2000; Sher, 1981; Sharplin, 2002). It is a consistent and regular problem for state Departments all around Australia, and all round the world (Roberts 2004, Lamb & Teese, 2005, Solstad 2009). Roberts placed the responsibility for rural schooling outcomes squarely on the system and its (in)ability to place quality teachers in rural schools, noting that “the most significant factor in education quality is the provision of appropriate quality stable staff” (Roberts 2004, p. 4).

Much of the literature we surveyed argues that solutions to this problem must be placed on the Australian education agenda through a systemic approach which focuses on how best to prepare our teachers for rural and remote schools. Our review supports this link between staffing and
quality, particularly in the so-called ‘hard to staff’ schools with a ‘continued history’ of staff ‘turnover’. Wilkinson (2008) provided figures for teacher turnover rates for Priority Support Funding Program (PSPF) Schools in NSW, for instance, as measured by the number of new teachers as a percentage of all teachers. In 2004, for instance these are as depicted in Figure 2.9:

![Figure 2.9: Teacher Turnover in Priority ‘Hard to Staff Schools’](image)

To support his conclusion that “[r]esearchers have pointed to high staff turnover as a contributing factor to differences in performance, between country and city students” (Wilkinson 2008, p. 26) he continues:

Given that nearly half of all PSFP primary schools are in rural districts, and over one-third of PSFP secondary schools are likewise, the above figures suggest that a substantial number of rural students, in New South Wales, are affected by constant staff turnover. As Sue Helme and her colleagues [2007] have commented:

... staff turnover .... is very high in [PSFP] schools in outer regional and remote locations. Indeed, in these schools, on average, every second teacher moves on after one year. Such high staff turnover means that discontinuity is a constant feature of students’ schooling experience (Wilkinson 2008, p. 27).

Most commentators on rural and remote education reiterate the challenges associated with staffing the rural and remote school. For Skillbeck and Connell (2003), “staffing... rural and remote schools... has been a longstanding challenge for Australian authorities’ (p. i). Both in Australian and international literature, it is accepted that rural areas have more difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified staff (Ballou & Podgursky, 1998; Fishbaugh & Berkley, 1995; Gibson, 1994; Martin, 1994; McEwan, 1999; Sharplin, 2002; Roberts, 2004; Halsey, 2005; Green, 2009).

**Staffing and Equity**

The historical practice of ‘bonding’ beginning teachers to State Departments, which continued well past the first half of the twentieth century, ensured supply of staff to rural schools by providing scholarships and allowances to enable new teachers to complete their initial teacher education. If we think about this in terms of the point made by Lamb and Teese above, we can see that this would have allowed State Departments to be confident that new appointees to rural and other ‘hard-to –staff’ schools would be ‘guaranteed’ to stay a minimum amount of time, or else have to pay back their ‘bond’. This meant that there was a greater ‘guarantee’ that staff would serve a set amount of time in any one school, and that transferring out might mean a transfer to another rural location, thus allowing developing teacher expertise to be more systematically retained.

This practice ceased with the advent of mass higher education and the relocation of teacher education away from State Teachers Colleges and into Universities, in the 1970s and ’80s, such scholarships ceased, and all students were eligible for government financial support if their family income meant that they could not afford to study. This meant, and still means, that no
beginning teachers could be financially pressured to take up positions in rural schools, and unless they choose to do so, they could not be forced to remain in a position by the threat of both losing employment and having to repay a bond if they moved. Although new forms of bonded incentives schemes have been reintroduced in most states to attract preservice teachers to rural and other (geographic and curricular) hard to staff areas, the high turnover of teachers in many rural (and other ‘disadvantaged’ schools) remains problematic for both state systems and the communities that these schools serve.

It is this issue that contributes to seriously undermine the whole equity effort […]. Fundamental to any framework of change will be the need to promote continuity in teaching staff in disadvantaged schools and the recruitment of quality teachers. […] Addressing these issues alone may do more to reduce achievement gaps and raise levels of achievement in disadvantaged schools than any single equity program. Continuity and stability in staffing are essential ingredients to a robust equity funding framework (Lamb & Teese 2005, p. xii. Emphasis added).

In summary then, the issue of teaching in rural schools is complex. As Green (2009, p. 401) concluded, there are “good things happening in rural schools and other forms of rural educational provision […] and rural contexts do not necessarily compromise the practice of quality education.” At the same time, he also argues, there is “a persistent question of disadvantage” in relation to rural schooling. This links to what Welch, Helme and Lamb (2007) term “inequalities of place”, and what Green (2009, p. 402) called the “geographical overdetermination of social and educational disadvantage.” For Green and his co-researchers, in the Rural (Teacher) Education Project (Green 2009), the conclusion was reached that state departments, rural schools and rural communities cannot hope to ‘solve the problem’ of rural staffing without the direct involvement of initial teacher education.

... teacher education has an important role to play with regard to rural-regional sustainability, in providing appropriately trained and properly professional teachers for rural and remote schools and communities, with a contribution to make to both social capital and capacity building, and in shaping and supporting a professional and public culture of lifelong learning (Green 2009, p. 402).

Understanding rurality as an important aspect of social justice in relation to education and schooling is a matter of understanding Australian society more broadly, and thus why staffing – and the decision of individual teachers to take up the challenge and the opportunity that rural schools provide for them as teachers, is an issue worth addressing, in terms of both research and teacher education practice.

In particular, and as Lorina Moss noted in her memory of the initial impressions of her arrival in the small rural town of Goodooga, quoted above it results in a perceived lack of commitment by schools to the communities they serve. This often results in a ‘distancing’ of school staff from the community in which they live and serve – and it is told again and again in the comments ‘newcomers’ make about the difficulties they experience in being accepted as a ‘local’, even when they remain in the community many years.

An unwillingness of students and their families to commit strongly to education often follows. This kind of vicious circle of decline and disengagement is characterized by the cry of “See you when you don’t come back!” (White & Reid 2008) from a young child in a remote outback school in northern NSW saying farewell to a group of visiting students who had travelled to their
school for a pre-service orientation visit. Indeed, there has been a relatively long-term set of supply and demand projections for teachers and other professionals that suggest a continuing national shortfall in teachers for rural schools and communities (Australian Council of Deans of Education, 1999). If Australia is to increase its chances of primary, secondary, and tertiary rural industries competing in a global market, then an increased focus on improving the educational experiences and opportunities of rural communities and, further, on making rural teaching an attractive and long-term career option is vital.

Understanding Rural Teaching

What counts as or constitutes rural teaching? What is it that makes rural teaching different and distinct? Is it? This is something that is still to be properly worked through. Nonetheless we think there are some features of teaching that might well be seen as characteristic of teaching in rural-regional and rural-remote contexts. These in turn need to be addressed in teacher education. They include developing skills, knowledges and dispositions pertaining to multi-age/grade teaching (e.g. classroom management, programming and assessment – i.e. a ‘small schools’ pedagogy), school-community relationships (including the capacity for ‘reading’ context), Aboriginal education (and associated forms of culturally-sensitive pedagogy), and what might be place-awareness.

As cited in Hudson and Hudson (2008, p. 68) In addition, there is the diversity challenge in rural education that includes social and cultural diversity. Rural schools also have similar issues to address as their non-rural counterparts, such as students who are gifted and talented and/or those with disabilities (Rosenkoetter, Irwin, & Saceda, 2004).

A typical story that illustrates the prevailing attitude towards working in rural schools was provided to teachers on one state union website. We have excluded the names of people and place here, as this is a story that may well be recognisable to teachers all around the nation:

[This teacher] commenced permanent employment with the Department in 2004. When [she] made application to the Department to become a teacher during 2003, she selected a number of 4 and 6 point schools. She did so relying upon representations made by representatives of the Department and in Departmental documents about the benefits of working "hard-to-staff" schools, particularly the capacity to earn transfer points. As a result, [this teacher] took up a position at Narrabri High School at the commencement of 2004.

She gave evidence that she would never have left the area in which she grew up if working in Narrabri did not allow her to earn transfer points and increase her opportunity to transfer to a permanent position elsewhere in the state. She accepted the inducement offered by the Department to work at a "hard-to-staff" school ([www.nswtf.org.au.info_centre](http://www.nswtf.org.au.info_centre) [accessed 18.11.08]).

This account illustrates the way in which many teachers who take up positions in rural and remote schools around Australia see their appointments – as tickets to a ‘better place’, or as an encouragement of ‘out-migration’. The temporary or transient nature of this teacher’s commitment to the children and community of Narrabri is indicated by her statement that she only went there in order to get out; that she was aiming to transfer to a “permanent” position elsewhere. ‘Narrabri’ here assumes the same mythic connotations that ‘Norseman’, ‘Boggabilla’, ‘Xanthus’, ‘Cunnamulla’, ‘Balranald’ and ‘Lightning Ridge’ have achieved in teachers’ war stories over time, and in all States. Naming a particular, usually small and fairly isolated country town like these evokes all the history of ‘the rural problem’ in education. The name is enough: it
indicates the notoriety of the town, like the equally notorious place names in the inland suburbs of all metropolitan cities which are also, but differently, ‘hard to staff’. And just the naming of places as undesirable voices and reproduces the discursive truth that country postings are ‘normally’ impermanent, short-term, temporary, and second-rate. It is in this way that teachers entering rural social spaces such as ‘Narrabri’ do so either reluctantly, because they were given no choice of location in their offer of employment, or perhaps strategically, as in the example provided here, only to enhance their careers.

As noted above, it is important to note that we do not necessarily equate ‘rural’ with ‘disadvantaged’. Doecke’s (1987) study questioned the extent to which rural students were disadvantaged, arguing that many of the so-called notions of disadvantage were actually constructed from an urban perspective. As cited in Green, Letts, Novak & Reid (2008, p. 11):

Largely rural communities have seen an urban agenda … rolled out across the countryside, with issues of equity and access, rather than appropriateness, dominating the discourse. It is as if rural society is to be judged in terms of a deficit discourse (dominated by the desire to make them like us) rather than a diversity discourse (recognition and value of difference) (Atkin, 2003: 515).

Over a century later, the ‘problem’ of rural education continues. As Pat Thompson (2002, p. 10) stressed, ‘schools are historically and geographically positioned’. “Geography matters” (Connell et al. 1982, p. 68) for the outcomes of children’s schooling. In the city, a family’s resources, leisure activities, and access to education depend to a large extent on where they live, and neighbourhood schools generally reflect the class composition of their locality. In the country, the history, climate, land use and social demography of small townships can produce very different educational experiences that are far too often generalised and unified under the umbrella of ‘rural schools’. Rural schools are not ‘all the same’, and the education on offer within is similarly diverse and differentiated.

White-Davidson’s (1999) study of schooling in rural/remote communities highlighted their “complexities and diversities.” She noted the importance of continuing to question categories such as educational success and ‘development’ that are applied without differentiation or sensitivity to the rural experience:

The different approaches and debates about ‘defining rural’ must continue, and researchers must avoid promoting a uni-dimensional category of ‘rural’. […] Any centre-margin discourse must be scrutinised for its relevance and the feasibility of the assumptions on which it is based. Education policy developers, social researchers and rural policy planners need to re-evaluate the philosophical premises on which the current concept of success is based: success for the individual school student, success for education and schooling, and success in adult life (White-Davidson 1999, pp. ii/iii).

There have been more school closures over the past three decades than ever before in Australia, and communities that lose their schools struggle to survive (Alston, 1999). One rural leader from the study conducted by Starr and White (2008, p.7) cited the situation where a family left the district, taking several children out of the local school leaving only one girl remaining on the roll. Concerned about this occurrence, the girl’s parents decided to have her schooled in a neighbouring town. This concerned the boys’ parents since the co-educational school experience they expected was no longer available. The school community decided the school should be closed with extra resources provided for transportation arrangements to the neighbouring
school. Hence, if a rural school closes, it usually means that children are forced to travel long distances to alternative schools. This affects their time, energy levels, and educational ambitions (Alston, 1999). A significant issue in closures and amalgamations is that a school principal has to lose his/her job, making this very difficult option for principals to agree upon.

As Hudson and Hudson (2008) note, there are particular contexts for teaching and learning in rural schools that make it significantly different from non-rural teaching. Teachers in rural and remote schools can feel isolated and may require support through mentoring, modelling, and counselling. Yet, it is also important that the positive aspects of rural teaching placements are promoted, where many pre-service teachers appreciate gaining valuable experiences with diverse people in safe, quiet and aesthetically-appealing environments (Hudson and Hudson 2008, p.68).

Research Into Rural Education

In Australia, both the rural economy and rural education are in a precarious situation. After well over a decade of drought, many rural communities have found themselves in a sliding state of economic downturn (Alston & Kent, 2003, 2006) and as a result face a far more fragile existence than ever before.

Most of the literature on rural education in Australia centres on the notion that things are more challenging “out there”—that practicing their profession is more of a challenge for teachers placed in schools in rural and remote locations. The literature points to several related issues: rural schools often cater to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, have larger populations of Indigenous students, and are located in geographical and social landscapes of rural decline and drought. This results in populations that are often isolated, insular, with low academic expectations, lower test scores, and more social welfare issues. The rural student population, it seems, suffers a disproportionate level of disadvantage. The issue of ‘white flight’ from rural public schools (Patty, 2008) in towns with significant Indigenous population is a growing problem related to larger historical issues of social and racial inequity, and adds another dimension to the need for well-prepared teachers in these schools.

In both Australian and international literature, it is accepted that rural schools are essential for the sustainability of rural communities (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Moriarty, Danaher, & Danaher, 2003), and that schools in rural communities experience more difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified staff than schools in metropolitan, coastal and large regional inland cities (Ballou & Podgursky, 1998; Gibson, 1994; Halsey, 2005; Martin, 1994; McEwan, 1999; Roberts, 2004; Sharpin, 2002). Nearly a decade ago, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s Bush Talks Report (HREOC, 1999) highlighted the characteristics of the rural decline that continues as the status quo in many rural and remote towns: declining populations, decreasing incomes, decreasing services, and a declining quality of life, with towns progressively losing key services and government assistance. They noted that children in rural and remote Australia are less likely to complete their education than children in regional and urban centres; that agricultural workers are less likely than other Australians to have completed secondary education; and that even where distance education is available (and generally agreed to be adequate for primary students), it remains an unremituated burden on supervising parents and continues to be a poor substitute for an interactive secondary school.

Rural schools, whether they like it or not, are often at the very sharp end of economic downturn. In addition to the loss of teaching staff as school numbers decline, rural schools face daily an ever-increasing range of social and welfare issues with which many teachers find themselves ill
equipped to deal. Conversely, while the rural school is often the traditional heart of its community, it is also situated at the focal point of external economic and social influences, as well as political requirements for change and renewal, and therefore functions as the barometer of community well-being. When families in crisis are relocated to cheap rural housing, the school must adapt to the needs of the new children. When drought forces mothers to leave their properties and take up work in the town, the rural school must cope with the loss of parental support and perhaps even a loss of enrolments if the family has to leave its home. When decreasing numbers in rural communities mean that class sizes for some secondary subjects become unviable, then teachers must be relocated, and the options for the younger children in the community are reduced. Roberts (2004) illustrates the challenges of quality schooling in this environment of rural decline:

[In] the infrastructure and community of many rural, regional and remote towns gradually eroding and [faced with] escalation of decline due to drought … the provision of education has also contracted due to a limitation of the economic benefits of gaining education. When a town is in decline with the availability of employment reducing and social problems multiplying there is little motivation and support for students to endure these hardships and break the cycle (Roberts 2004, pp. 8-9).

Through all of this, however, the school remains there, in and for the community. As Halsey notes:

Schools are often the largest organization in a town or area. … [They] are strategically positioned to be a rallying agency when the town feels under pressure, providing a sense of connection to the past, with the present, and to the future (Halsey 2005, p. 6).

Teachers in rural and remote communities need to have the opportunity to enjoy a rewarding career and subsequently remain in the profession (Roberts, 2004, p. 90).

The rationale for improving the attraction and retention of staff in rural and remote schools is to enhance the quality of education received by students in these communities. Therefore, all measures to attract and retain teachers can be seen as measures to enhance quality teaching… The number one priority for this to occur is to have a teacher in the classroom, preferably one who wants to be there. Once in the classroom the teacher needs to be supported to perform their duties to the best of their ability and to ensure that all students are receiving the quality education they are entitled to regardless of geographic location (Roberts 2004, p. 106).

A country pre-service placement is something that has to be earned by first proving that you can satisfactorily teach in a city or urban context (Halsey 2005, p. 53).

… there is considerably more that teacher training institutions could do to encourage their students to consider teaching in rural areas, especially those students who show a predisposition towards an appointment to remote schools (Schooling in Rural Australia, Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988, p. 145).

‘Rural’ & ‘Remote’ ‘Challenges’?
Most of the literature on rural education in Australia centres around the notion that things are ‘tougher’ ‘out there’ – more of a challenge for the teachers placed in schools in rural and remote locations. The literature points to several related issues: students from low socio-economic
backgrounds; many Indigenous; geographical and social landscapes of rural decline and drought; isolation; insular communities with low academic expectations; lower test scores; and more social welfare issues. The rural student population, it seems, suffers a disproportionate amount of disadvantage.

Such a focus on rural educational disadvantage is important in order to overcome the disadvantage. However, as Apple points out, to be focused only on the disadvantage often breeds a certain fatalism - the idea that ‘it is impossible to change schools unless the social and economic relations of wider society are transformed first’ (Apple, 1996, p. 107) The way to help those struggling in schools is to ensure education opposes in practice those social inequalities while seriously considering what might be done to bring about substantial alterations to this (Apple, 1996, p. 108).

Furthermore, this idea of the ‘bush’ as being a ‘challenging’ place perpetuates the idea that ‘the rural’ is failing and that rural students are failing. This deficit approach to rural schooling is misleading in that it ignores the many successes at individual and school level. The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education (2004) highlights this in terms of Indigenous students, and the same could be said of rural students:

… there is something ‘not right’ about the unacceptable number of Aboriginal students who are ‘doing it tough’ or ‘not making it’ in schooling and training. One of the dangers of focusing on valid concerns about disadvantages and disappointments is that it may give the impression that all Aboriginal students are failing. Such an impression is false as it ignores the achievements of those Aboriginal students who succeed at school and in vocational education, who are among the high achievers, gifted and talented in academic, artistic or sporting pursuits… (Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education 2004, p. 7).

Beginning Teachers
“Rural and remote schools are often hard to staff at the best of times. They usually have high staff turnover, and a disproportionate share of inexperienced beginning teachers” (Preston 2000, p. 1).

While rural and remote schools in general have relatively high numbers of new teachers coming into the school, the majority of them are beginning teachers (Sharplin, 2002; McSwan & Duck, 1998; Green 2009). The higher percentages of young and inexperienced teachers appointed to rural areas are evident in several key reports (McIntosh, 1989; Helge & Marrs, 1981; Stone, 1990; Garman & Alkire, 1992; Luft, 1992; Lunn, 1997; Rural (Teacher) Education Project (R(T)EP), forthcoming).

Green & Novak for the R(T)EP (2006, forthcoming), evidenced a staffing profile with specific regard to inland rural NSW where, along with the large numbers of beginning teachers, the other large percentage group were on average 50 years of age and looking to retire. This highlights a real staffing crisis in rural and remote Australia.

Generally, the picture that emerges of rural and remote schools is having a, ‘disproportionate number of beginning teachers asked to teach some of the most demanding students but with few experienced teachers to advise them’ (Watson & Hatton, 2002, p.610).
Boylan & Green for the R(T)EP), indicated that 3% of schools in NSW were responsible for providing support for around 30% of the systems beginning teachers (NSW Public Education Council’s 2005; Boylan & Green, forthcoming, p. 6). Roberts notes:

… Rural and remote schools therefore bear a disproportionate burden of preparing teachers not just for their own contexts, but for the profession as a whole (2004, p. 28).

Teacher Education
Clearly teacher education is implicated in the provision of quality teachers for rural and remote schools. Since 1980, the literature on teacher education and the rural Australian context has been steadily produced. Below is a list of federal and state government reports, along with various studies and academic reports (in the UK, US, Canadian and Australian contexts. Boylan & Green (forthcoming) provide details about many of the reports below:

Federal inquiries into rural teacher education

- Isolated Schools: Teaching, Learning and Transition to Work (Turney, Sinclair & Cairnes, 1980);
- Schooling in Rural Australia (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987);
- Rural Schools plan (Metherell, 1989);
- National Inquiry into Rural & Remote Education (HREOC, 2000);
- Towards a national education and training strategy for rural Australia (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1991);
- Rural education and training plan (Chadwick, 1993);
- Preparing a Profession: Report of the national standards and guidelines for initial teacher education project (ADEY, 1998) and,

NSW inquiries into rural teacher education

- Listening and Responding: A Review of education in Rural NSW (Rawlinson, 1983);
- Quality Matters: Revitalising Teaching: Critical Times, Critical Choices (Ramsey, 2000);
- Beyond the Line (NSWDET, 2000);
- Inquiry into the provision of public education (Vinson, 2002)
- Departmental strategies supporting beginning teacher development (NSWDET, 2002);
- Building Strong Foundations (NSW Public Education Council (2005);
- Staffing the Empty Schoolhouse: Attracting and retaining teachers in rural remote and isolated communities (Roberts, 2005);
- The Rural Teacher Education Project (Green 2009).
Lake (1986) focused on the perceptions of 186 newly appointed teachers in rural Western Australian schools, finding that their pre-service training had been inadequate for the challenges they faced. These teachers reportedly felt ill-prepared and were dissatisfied with the lack of training on multi-grade classrooms, the rural community and expectations of the rural teacher.

McSwan and Duck (1988) reported on the outcomes of their research with teachers in rural western Queensland. Like Lake (1986), they found that their sample of teachers felt inadequately prepared for what they faced in these schools. Less than one in five teachers had completed any subjects, activities or experiences as part of their pre-service program that were relevant to these settings. Clarke (1990) confirmed both Lake’s and McSwan & Duck’s criticism of rural pre-service teacher education programs, arguing that:

… the lack of training and support (time and resources) for teachers in multi-age settings is significantly affecting the quality of education of many students in these contexts. (p.

Yarrow et al. (1999) argue that many pre-service programs have only recently begun to address what has been a ‘historically enduring and well-documented concern. Yarrow and colleagues quote these studies: Guerin & Roberts, 1987; Osbourne, 1993; Van Balkom et al., 1994; and Anglin & Piland, 1995, as highlighting the lack of effective preparation of teachers to teach in rural schools’ (p. 2):

… [in] the literature concerning the preparation of teachers for rural and remote teaching positions… there were no examples where the need for some sort of specialised training was not advocated. Indeed, there seems to be almost universal recognition that pre-service teachers require better preparation for their likely early teaching positions (p. 5).

Yarrow, Herschell & Millwater’s (1999) literature review covered research from the US, Canada and Australia, showing the complexities of pre-service preparation for rural and remote schools. They argue that in the Australian setting (as in other countries) there has been little in the way of a unified or cohesive response. More than three decades ago, US and Canadian researchers highlighted that while many teachers work in rural schools, very few universities offer rural teaching options (Barker & Beckner, 1987). King & Gibson (1998) found in their study, that 91% of Australian universities had ‘some rural focus’ in their pre-service teacher programs and 45% of all universities included ‘some form of compulsory involvement’ in rural issues. This shows a notable increase from Watson’s 1988 study which indicated that 88% and 84% of NSW and WA graduates, respectively, had no rural training.

Yarrow, Herschell & Millwater (1999) argued that while 91% of universities indicated a rural focus in their teacher education programs, it was in fact substantially less or what Boylan (2003) calls ‘piecemeal’ (p. 9). Roberts (2004), too, argued that even when there is a rural course offering, ‘it is a brief look at rural conditions rather than an in-depth analysis of rural dynamics and pedagogical processes’ (p. 32).
Boylan (2003) scrutinised eleven NSW university pre-service teacher education courses, showing that only two universities: Charles Sturt University in NSW and the University of South Queensland have compulsory rural education components in pre-service courses. Apart from this, the only other occurrence of a rural subject offering is an elective option for students finished their secondary program at Southern Cross University.

Miles et al. (2004) highlighted the fact that a city-centric preparatory model for professionals is not serving the country areas well. This concept stems from a well documented debate that the rural university prepares the rural teacher more effectively than the metropolitan university (Smith-Davis, 1989; Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Yarrow, Herschell & Millwater, 1999; Ralph, 2002; Archibald et al., 2002; Berry, 2004; and Roberts, 2004.)

Halsey (2005) undertakes a comparative analysis between regional and city universities, indicating that the regional university places two out of three students in rural areas, while at city based universities, the ratio is in the order of one to twenty-five (p. 44).

Yarrow, Herschell & Millwater (1999) based their study on public responses from a forum in Central Queensland. They argued that the rural community was ‘disillusioned’ with the extent to which metropolitan universities had promoted rural issues in their teacher education programs. Yarrow, Herschell & Millwater (1999) categorised this ‘disillusionment’ into five key areas:

1. A lack of development of effective teaching strategies for multi-age classrooms.
2. A poor understanding of cultural, social, political and religious beliefs and values dominant in rural and remote areas.
3. Little acknowledgement of the role of local community in the development of Curriculum.
4. Not enough practice teaching in rural and remote schools.
5. Almost non-existent communication between metro universities and the rural community (p. 2).

Boylan et al. (1994) indicated that specialised pre-service courses are important for teacher recruitment in rural schools. Boylan and colleagues argue (as do others including Watson, et al. 1986; Smith-Davis, 1989; Cross & Murphy, 1990; Luft, 1992) that components such as the examination of issues about rural lifestyles, community participation, provision of opportunity for multi-grade and rural practice teaching should be mandatory in rural teacher education programs.

Yarrow et al. (1999) state that only a few of these above components have become the core of specialist courses, while for the most part they remain on the fringe of the more ‘mainstream’ generic courses (Yarrow et al., p. 3). Boylan indicated that a preparedness to seek and/or accept rural appointment is enhanced when the pre-service teacher has adequate training (1993, p. 23).

Indigenous (Teacher) Education

Statements about equity are numerous in departmental policies dealing with Indigenous education – but rarely put into practice in schools (Sanderson & Thomson, 2003) Difficulties implementing such goals have been associated with the low profile given to Indigenous training in teacher education (Burke, 2000; Purdie; 2000; Sanderson & Thomson, 2003); content of the curriculum (Burke, 2000) and teaching methodology (Christie, 1994).
The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER, 2003) argued that effective teaching and learning for Aboriginal students is considered to be dependent on:

- Pre-service teacher training in Aboriginal history, Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal students.
- On-going professional development of teachers in Aboriginal education.
- Teachers’ understanding of Aboriginal students, Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal history and culture.
- Teachers’ deep knowledge of curriculum and syllabuses.
- A whole school focus on the achievement of syllabus outcomes.
- Quality teaching in all classrooms.
- Professional conversations that identify and critique strategic and innovative approaches.
- Authentic partnerships with Aboriginal communities.

The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education (2004) called for an investigation into the area of “Aboriginal learning styles” which acknowledged that Aboriginal students may learn through different methods from non-Aboriginal students or have a preferred way for acquiring new knowledge (p. 91). Bidialectal language approaches were cited as important for teachers of Indigenous children (p. 41). Clearly, considering many rural students are Aboriginal, these issues become paramount for the rural teacher – but most importantly, for rural teacher education programs.

Yarrow, Herschell & Millwater (1999) indicate that research into pre-service preparation should be undertaken urgently and should include:

- Identification of the major activities pre-service teachers should engage in during their rural field experience.
- Schools (and by implication, teachers) and their role in the regeneration and sustainability of rural communities.
- City-country cultural and social difference.
- Understanding and fitting in with rural communities and dealing with country myths.
- Reconstructing understandings of rural disadvantage – the review cited research that concluded many of the understandings held about rurality were actually derived from urban standpoints.

**Teacher Attraction To Rural Schools and Internships**

A successful practicum does not always guarantee the attraction and retention of teachers to rural and remote schools. Yarrow et al. (1999) argues that notions of rural and remote schools as being disadvantaged and ‘challenging’, does not appeal to beginning teachers.

Roberts (2004) argues that the education department needs to have a more effective advertising campaign to promote rural teaching. Furthermore, he states that there appears to be no specific selection policies or practices in place to match rural teaching experience, expertise or personality traits to applicants for rural or remote teaching positions. Roberts argues that this represents a ‘direct lack of commitment to rural education from education departments in Australia’ (Roberts, 2004, p. 62).
There are several studies which highlight the issue of attracting beginning teachers to rural schools. Yarrow et al. (1999) note that there have been several successful programs targeting the preparation of teachers to rural schools. They note studies by Perry and Rog (1989) termed professional ‘prep teams’, for instance, where the university and school carefully orchestrated the transition of the pre-service teacher into the rural school system. This reportedly bolstered the pre-service teachers’ emotional, physical and intellectual well-being. Perry & Rog (1989) and Spuhler (1989) both discovered that such programs quickly became ‘dynamic’ co-operations ‘developed by students, college instructors and teacher/administrators in the field’ (Spuhler, 1989, p. 4).

**Rural Economy and Rural Education Link**

Share, Lawrence & Boylan (1994) argued that the Australian rural economy and rural educational policies are inextricably linked in that rural restructuring, notably significant demographic change, exert pressure on the availability and quality of education and training. Educational researcher McSwan (2003) has analysed data on rural economic change, arguing that in terms of rural schooling, a ‘depth of resource in human, social, cultural and economic capital is crucial to sustainable community development’ (p. 22).

The HREOC ‘Bush Talks’ (1998) highlights what has been accepted as the status quo in many rural and remote towns, that is, rural decline – ‘declining populations, declining incomes, declining services and a declining quality of life’ - towns progressively losing key services and government assistance. Roberts (2004) illustrates the challenges of quality schooling in this environment of rural decline:

> … in the infrastructure and community of many rural, regional and remote towns gradually eroding and escalation of decline due to drought… the provision of education has also contracted due to a limited of the economic benefits of gaining education. When a town is in decline with the availability of employment reducing and social problems multiplying there is little motivation and support for students to endure these hardships and break the cycle (p. 8-9).

Advocating a ‘21st Century equivalent’ of “Australia rides the sheep’s back”, Halsey (2005) argues that more could be made of primary industries to improve the health of the national economy and, therefore, the health and welfare of all Australian citizens:

> … [reform] on rural and remote schools needs to include not only professional, pedagogical and community relations insights and knowledge, but also a grounding in rural economies (p. 32).

McSwan & Stevens (1995) point out that schools are central to the regenerative process in rural towns and as such play a key role in their long-term sustainability.

The Business Council of Australia’s report states that, ‘Australia’s economic and social future depends on a well-educated and well-trained community, as education and training are key drivers to economic growth,’ (2003, p. 2). Roberts argues that the government must ensure that all people have a good education otherwise they will not be able to contribute (2004, p. 93).
Positioning the Rural

At times, the ‘rural’ is reduced to a geographical imperative in reports and policy. ABS Census Data measures ‘rural’ locations according to the distance from urban centres and as a list of postcodes. The Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) is one such scale developed by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care (2001) which ranks locations across the country in terms of their ‘remoteness’ and access to urban centres. Basically, the further the location from a regional/urban centre, the higher the rate of disadvantage. While the scale is useful to particular projects, ARIA’s failure to consider the diversity of communities along socio-economic, cultural or urban/rural and population-size factors, arguably limits its potential findings.

Many recent national and state reports reject a rural-urban distinction, placing at the centre of their inquiries issues of socio-economic status, not rurality. Vinson’s 2004 Community Adversity and Resilience Report, like ARIA, ranked locations according to ‘disadvantage’. However, Vinson and his team included 13 various indicators of ‘disadvantage’, including: unemployment, low birth-weight, child maltreatment, childhood injuries, education, psychiatric admissions, crime, income, mortality, sickness and disability support, imprisonment and early school leaving. Stimson and Baum (2001) use socio-economic factors to identify a series of clusters of communities that they distinguished as ‘at risk’.

Looking at communities only in terms of ‘disadvantage’ or ‘at risk’ is necessary in order to address particular concerns. However, such an approach can serve to further marginalise communities and certain individuals, while failing to acknowledge other important factors. Notions of ‘at risk’ can also serve to constitute certain individuals and groups, such as ‘rural youth’ as problematic. In this discourse, ‘rural youth’, for instance becomes synonymous with binge drinking, reckless behaviour, drug use and promiscuity (see: www.youthfacts.com.au).

Sherwood (2001) argues that when the ‘rural’ is paid attention to by education reformists and policy-makers, ‘it is more often for the sake of a representative sampling than for learning something more substantive about rural schools’. Green & Reid (2004) state that policy remains metrocentric.

To focus on disadvantage is an imperative for those concerned with social justice and education. However, to equate ‘the rural’ with disadvantage could potentially have negative consequences. For instance, new or beginning teachers’ perceptions on teaching in rural or remote schools have shown to impede attraction and retention to such schools and communities (Sharplin, 2001).

Doecke’s (1987) study questioned the extent to which rural students were disadvantaged, arguing that many of the so-called notions of disadvantage were actually constructed from an urban perspective. Sher (1991) highlights that rural schools are places of educational innovation and improvement (p. 1). Yarrow et al. (1999) state that the act of education departments targeting rural and remote areas for special assistance has been met with something of a backlash from some rural communities (p. 8). Bessant (1978), Doecke (1987) and Boylan (1993) all found that to a certain extent there was a mistrust of urban-based initiatives which, arguably, did not take into account the ‘actual nature’ of rural life (Yarrow et al., 1999). Moreover, as Golding argues, “contrary to some stereotypes, the strongest desire and need for learning is in the smallest and remotest places” (2001, p. 14).
Implications for Teacher Education

Green & Reid (2004) argued that ‘teacher education like education research and schooling itself – should always be understood a situated practice’ (p. 1) Green & Reid’s framework is one of education and rural-regional sustainability and they argue that ensuring equitable education for students in rural and remote Australia is ‘as pressing as it ever has been’ (p. 1) The researchers provide several key insights in terms of teacher education, summarised succinctly by Halsey:

- Teacher education must be understood as part of a national agenda of maintenance and renewal – culture, identity and economic vitality. (See Green & Reid, 2004, p. 2)
- Teacher education has to have an understanding of teacher-stewardship of the natural environment and teacher knowledge and skills to contribute to an ecologically sustained environment (see Green & Reid, 2004, p. 3).
- Curriculum and experiences must adequately equip teachers for the reality of rural-remote places, for the intense blame they may receive when the certain social and economic developments fail to meet government expectations (See Green & Reid, 2004, p. 6) and ‘how to deal with [this blame] and turn towards addressing the root causes of economic and social failure, rather than allowing the surface symptoms to gain attention’ (Halsey, 2005, p. 42).
- Teacher education should be critical of ‘metro-centric’ nature of much education reform discourse which positions the needs of rural schools and communities as of marginal or minor interest and significance (see Green & Reid, 2004, p. 8).
- Rural-remote pre-service teacher preparation programs must be a part of productive partnerships (government, university, schools, communities etc), ‘by working collaboratively with others… the impact of the teachers and their work is multiplied,’ (Halsey 2005, p. 43).

McConaghy (2006) views the need for a situated approach to teaching as a challenge for teacher education programs:

… how to teach the skills by which pedagogical knowledge could be recontextualised for new places and contexts, that is, how [can] teachers… learn to situate their pedagogies within their particular contexts. Here complex skills in socio-spatial analysis and the interpretation of social dynamics for teaching [are] envisaged as core competencies… (p. 12).

Conclusion

We employ the concept of ‘the rural’ for all different reasons – cultural, historical, political, for critique and reform. Clearly, the way in which we do this has consequences (Lockie & Bourke 2001). We must therefore be critical in the choices we make for our research (and policies). The way in which we position the rural, including our biases, our methodologies and approaches - all must be done so in a position of critical (self) reflexivity.

We must question and be critically engaged in what it is to be ‘rural’ within the bounds of our own research, within the research of others, in representations within popular/media culture and consciousness et cetera. What we find here has significance for education in rural, regional and remote schools. Our perceptions and attitudes to ‘the rural’ have effects on the teaching & learning practices which occur there.
Chapter Three

TERRAnova: Conceptualisation and Design of the Study

Jo-Anne Reid

This chapter has two sections. In Section One, we present the background to the study and the context for the development of the conceptual framework that informed the design and implementation of the research and which is outlined in more detail in Chapter Four. Section Two describes and provides detail of our procedures and processes in the three aligned stages or projects that together constituted the scope of this inquiry. We have left discussion of some of the issues in design, ethics and implementation of the project as a mixed-method approach to data collection and analysis till Chapter Ten, where we provide a summary and overview of the Case Studies, in Volume 2.

Section One: Background and Conceptual Framework: ‘The Rural Problem’ in Teacher Education

After over a century of public education and state provision of teacher education in all Australian states, there is still a continuing range of government and media reports on the recurrent difficulties of staffing rural schools. This report was generated in response to what is known as ‘the rural problem’ in Australian education. The study reported here was undertaken by a team of teacher education researchers working in institutions that directly connect with inland regions, where a large part of our institutional commitment is to the success of our regions (Charles Sturt, Deakin, Ballarat and Edith Cowan University). Our institutions aim to produce graduates who will want to teach – and have been prepared to teach well – in (and for) rural and remote places. This is essential if strong schools are able to play a part in enabling those places to sustain themselves as healthy communities into the future. When we began the study, we represented institutions across four states, though a career move during the time of the study for one of our team members, who relocated to Victoria, meant that our home bases were located in three – NSW, Victoria and Western Australia. The study, though, has retained its national focus, fed by our individual commitments to and knowledge of systemic and policy implications in the local.

The Field of Rural Education

We began this research from a position of what we felt was some expertise in the area, given the broad scope of research that has prefigured and informed the work, as outlined in Chapter Two. We see our project explicitly following, and building on, the results of a number of earlier studies that had highlighted the need for what we named – in our 2007 application to the Australian Research Council – Renewing Rural Teacher Education – Sustaining Schooling for Sustainable Futures. At that time the ‘problem’ of rural schooling was particularly important in the context of over a decade of drought and environmental concerns affecting inland Australia, and an escalating agenda for the reform and renewal of teacher education in the light of national concerns about the outcomes of schooling (for example, Adey 1998; Ramsey 2000; Hartsuyker 2007). As we

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3 This chapter was prepared by Jo-Anne Reid. The assistance and input of Bill Green, Wendy Hastings, Jodie Kline and Kylie Press is gratefully acknowledged.
have noted in Chapter Two the provision of high quality education for rural and remote communities is a global concern. The Australian context, however, although unique, can also be seen as an exemplary case of the interrelation of the problem of distance and isolation for the staffing of rural schools. Most important of the earlier studies, for us, has been the Rural (Teacher) Education Project R(T)EP led by Bill Green in partnership with the large NSW Department of Education and Training [NSWDET]. This project had been designed in response to Ramsey’s (2000) Review of teacher education in NSW, to explicitly address the connections between rural universities and the NSWDET as the largest state employer in the nation.

Other important recent inquiry related to our concern with teacher education was performed by John Halsey (Halsey, 2005, 2006) under the auspices of the Rural Education Forum of Australia [REFA], and by Graeme Lock (2006) reporting on the Western Australian Student Teacher Rural Experience Program [STREP]. These studies had focussed on the provision and costing of rural practicum placements for pre-service teachers and on the nature and benefits of that experience, respectively. Halsey (2005) for instance, reported on the size and scope of issues affecting country teaching placement programs in teacher education in Australia. This report noted that to make a difference, new and better ways of preparing for country teaching preparation are needed. Two key policy recommendations from this study, directed at teacher education programs, were:

- That universities with teacher education programs be strongly encouraged to develop policies to increase significantly the number of pre-service country teaching placements;
- That metropolitan universities and key stakeholders be strongly encouraged and provided with incentives to progressively and significantly increase the proportion of their teacher education cohort that participates in a country pre-service placement.

The findings of the R(T)EP study (Green 2008), however, suggested that there is a need for research to go beyond a focus just on rural practicum as a means of attracting teachers to rural schools. The TERRAnova study worked from these recommendations to investigate the success of teacher education programs that are designed as models to actively increase country teaching recruitment. It has sought to investigate a range of models currently in operation across States, to allow us to address the question of what recruitment models and teacher education curriculum seem to be successful in promoting country teaching to pre-service teachers.

Our task was to plan and design a study that would allow us to collect evidence, analyse and report on practices that assist in the successful preparation, attraction, induction and retention of teachers in rural schools. Our aim was to find new knowledge that might assist universities, schools, systems and communities in all jurisdictions to think more clearly about what is involved in Renewing Rural Teacher Education and Sustaining Schooling for Sustainable Futures. As a Discovery Project funded by the Australian Research Council [ARC] for the years 2008-2010, our work has been informed from the beginning by understandings of rurality and schooling developed in R(T)EP, though it has also been refined through a more specific engagement with ideas of sustainability and place developed with other colleagues in an overlapping study, the River Literacies project. This ARC Linkage project was a school-based study of environmental action based in the Murray-Darling Basin, in partnership with a professional association, the

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NSW Primary English Teaching Association [PETA] in conjunction with the Murray-Darling Basin Commission. It worked closely with rural teachers committed to the long term sustainability of their communities and the larger regional eco-system. We also brought to the project an historical awareness of the close connection between teacher education and public schooling as important matters of governance for a large nation state, which was developed in previous research into *Schooling Australia* (Green, Cormack & Reid 2001-2003). This awareness of the longstanding national need for sustainable communities across the vast inland areas of the nation was particularly important in designing the study, as it spurred us to focus on the interconnectivity and relational aspects of location as producing what people can do and say and think in particular educational places.

These explicit links to a larger programmatic research focus on teacher education and rural sustainability have fed into our methodological concern to develop and refine a generative conceptual basis for understanding ‘the rural’ as much more than just a ‘setting’ for education. We see this as an important outcome of this project. Our developing philosophical and conceptual framework has been elaborated considerably though its application to this new research problem, and has informed the selection and work of this particular team of researchers based on their interest, expertise and commitment to teacher education in and for rural locations. In particular, this has led to an explicit methodological focus on and concern for place and location as always informing and producing the situation of practice (Reid, Green, White, Cooper, Lock & Hastings 2010).

**Understanding the Research Field: Education For Rural Sustainability**

The complex interconnection of the issues and concerns that impact on rural-regional sustainability requires an equally complex program of research designed to support, understand, and direct the work of school systems, pre-service and in-service teacher education, and local communities, all of whom, the literature shows, are collectively involved in the attraction and retention of high-quality teachers for rural schools (Boylan et al. 1993, Boylan & McSwan 1998, Green 2008). Our explicit focus on sustainability does require a new grounding, even though sustainability itself is not a new concept. We understand sustainability as the ability “to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, p. 43). We also take from Owens (2001, p. xi; cited by Donehower et al. 2007) the idea sustainability is “an intergenerational concept that means adjusting our current behaviour so that it causes the least amount of harm to future generations.” The work of educating the young for the needs of the future is precisely the work that society assigns to its schools and teachers, and it is clearly crucial work to our survival as a species. In a changing global economy where the prosperity of rural Australia is increasingly dependent on new forms of industry and social organisations in a delicate environmental context, the role of education in supporting sustainable communities through inevitable change in all these dimensions is clear.

Conceptualising the study with reference to a theoretical construct of rural social space (Reid et al. 2010) has taken us to a position that attempts to go beyond received definitions and understandings of the rural. This approach as involved a combination of quantitative measurement and attendant definitions of rurality based on demographic and other social data, with constructions of ‘rurality’ in both geographic and cultural terms. In framing the study, we

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have sought definitions of the rural that account for this, and that highlight the complexity of the issue:

We define ‘rural’ as a quantitative measure, involving *statistics* on population and region as described by the U.S. Census; as a *geographic* term, denoting particular regions and areas or spaces and places; and as a *cultural* term, one that involves the interaction of people in groups and communities (Donehower, Hogg & Schell, 2007, p. 2; italics added).

This is a useful formulation because it brings together a quantitative, statistical perspective with that of cultural geography. In so doing, it allows us to work with a particular notion of *space*, one that combines the empirical and the metaphorical, and to foreground socio-spatial considerations in thinking about the challenges associated with rural teaching and rural (teacher) education.

As noted earlier, we have shown, in Chapters One and Two, that ‘the rural problem’ in education is in fact an international concern and a serious problem for educational systems globally, this inquiry has responded to the way this is playing out in our own states and regions, locations and systems. Our institutions are all in states where few teachers seek to begin teaching in rural and remote towns and communities, and even fewer choose to remain in these communities for substantial periods of time. Yet each member of the team works with *some* pre-service teachers who *do* want to ‘return to community’ to begin their careers, who actively seek a rural school for their first appointment – and who are happy to remain in locations where they already feel ‘at home’. Other research we have undertaken has shown that Indigenous teachers in particular report a commitment to their home communities and the education of Indigenous children (Reid & Santoro, 2006), for instance, and that this often frames their approach to teacher education as a whole.

But our concern is not predominantly with these groups, who make up the minority of Australian pre-service teachers and who already understand rural life and living. They already have knowledge, abilities and what Bourdieu (1978) calls a bodily *habitus*, a set of embodied dispositions, attitude and knowledge of social and material practices that will allow them to feel at home and powerful in their rural or remote settings. This group of pre-service teachers already have some understanding of what it is like to ‘perform’ teaching, and ‘be’ a teacher in a rural school, on the basis of a long ‘apprenticeship of observation’ (Lortie, 1975) in at least one rural place. They have been taught in rural classrooms, and have lived in rural communities as children and young people, and they have connections and relationships that can support them in their transition to their new professional status in these locations, or others like them, with less of the culture shock that reportedly fuels much of the desire that many newly appointed teachers feel to return to more familiar settings. Our focus, rather, is on producing knowledge that can be used for re-thinking teacher education that can better prepare those whose habitus is different. Such knowledge of course will add to the capacities of people who are ‘already rural’, and add to the general awareness of the problems of over-generalising the concept of rurality as an imaginary ‘other’.

This is the basis of the conceptual framework for this inquiry. We have needed to develop a theoretical approach that recognises the specificities of practice and relationships, place and time as impacting on and shaping the nature of the professional that can result from any teacher
education program. It is this that allows us to engage with the question of what would be needed to shape a professional well prepared for rural teaching. This is a complex issue. As we have argued elsewhere (Green & Reid, 2008) teacher education can be understood as ‘a practice producing subjects.’ In this sense it is a process concerned with the continuing formation of teachers as capable and knowledgeable educational agents. In this study we have attempted to engage with the issue of teacher education practice that will produce subjects who will begin and continue to become agentic teachers who can support and sustain education in rural places.

Methodology

Within this study, teacher subjectivity is understood in post-structuralist terms (Foucault, 1982; Butler, 1997), as a dynamic ensemble of qualities and attributes that are performed in the practice of the human agent at any particular time. This post-structuralist position is useful in drawing in and subsuming – going beyond – more conventionally humanist notions of the individual marked by inherent traits such as character, personality, 'self', and social identity. We have needed a more complex philosophy of ‘the teacher’ as a discursive subject, capable of being produced differently in different circumstances if we are to assume that teacher education can make a difference in the subjectification of a ‘teacher’. We understand teacher education, therefore, as a process, a set of discourses and practices in and through which (new) teacher-subjects engage and are supported to bring together, in what is always an emerging ‘settlement’, the knowledge, understandings, skills and dispositions in particular that are recognisable as ‘teaching’ ( and as ‘rural’ teaching). “Teacher education constitutes the provision of, and taking up of, a purpose-built ensemble, in short, of ‘knowing how’, 'knowing what' and 'knowing why', within a distinct professional-industrial framework of (self-)understanding and social practice” (Green & Reid, 2008).

Our aim here has been to provide a theoretical and conceptual space that can enable us to rethink, in particular, the discourse(s) and practice(s) of what has come, in recent years, to be the conventional methods of pre-service teacher education around rural education. In this way, our concern is with professional practice more generally. All too often, and conventionally, such courses are seen as more or less instrumentalist, and as necessarily requiring so-called 'practical' experience, demonstration and expertise. What we want to suggest is that, while this might be desirable, it is by no means sufficient as a criterion for achieving the desired outcome of a teaching population prepared for teaching in rural schools.

But at the same time, what we see as missing in the Foucaultian perspective, in its denial of a coherent and stable ‘inner’ self, is a sense of the complex interweaving of the 'inner' and 'outer' dimensions of social subjectivity and social practice. Any notion of interiority is rigorously denied in such work, and that would, therefore, include matters of affect and emotionality, desire and investment – all of which, we hypothesised at the beginning of this study, are intricately related in the decision to take up and sustain a commitment to schooling in rural Australia. Our aim has been to allow such an analysis of affect, of emotional investment and its manifestations in the speech and actions of our research subjects, as a distinct methodological contribution that we hope will provide a means to complement and extend the programmatic work already begun in relation to notions of professional practice more generally (Green & Reid, 2008; Carson & Johnson, 2002; McConaghy, 2002).

7 The Renewing Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum [RRRTEC] project, led by team members Simone White, Wendy Hastings and Graeme Lock, undertaken over 2009-2011 for the Australian Learning & Teaching Council [ALTC] has taken up this challenge to teacher education by helping prepare teachers not just for the school and classroom but also for life in rural and regional communities through the development of a website an and resource collection at www.rrrtec.net.au.
Methodologically, then, we sought to bring together a quantitative, statistical perspective with that of cultural geography, and highlighting a particular notion of space that combined both empirical and metaphorical dimensions. With a particular interest in continuing the explicit attention to cartographic, pictorial and photographic representations of place and space that characterised the *Spaces and Places* report (Green, 2008), we are aiming to foreground socio-spatial considerations in thinking about the challenges associated with rural teaching and rural (teacher) education. As will be discussed later in this chapter, such attention to place, space and representation is unusual for conventional understandings of educational research in large systems, and as a research approach has brought with it certain difficulties, challenges and tensions in relation to both ethical and procedural issues for management of the project.

With this in mind, consideration of research methods that would allow us to gain access to the thoughts and feelings of people who have experienced the transition between pre-service teacher education and beginning teaching in a rural school, who have managed to ‘be’ successful enough as teachers living out their new careers and life choices to have stayed in a rural place for a significant period of time, seemed to be the most useful way for us to approach our study. With our larger aim of producing knowledge that will help *renew* *Rural Teacher Education* and inform the nation about effective ways of *sustaining schooling for sustainable futures*, we would first of all need to understand what works in places where schools do appear to be acting in ways that sustain their rural communities.

We would need to see what happens to teachers in those particular schools that helps keep them there as teachers and community members, and what has caused other teachers to leave, and to inquire into what the community itself feels is most desirable in its teaching force to sustain the health of their place. We would need to find out what attracts teachers to take up rural positions, and gain information that would allow us to evaluate the sorts of incentives that State systems and other jurisdictions offer teachers to do this. We would also need to find ways to access the hopes and fears of pre-service teachers while they were still students, to gather accounts of what happened to them if and when they did take up a rural teaching position, and in this way to gain access to their lived knowledge about what helped or deterred them from taking up or staying in a rural school. These were all considerations in developing the research design for the study, in reporting here, we aim to describe and theorise successful teacher education strategies and incentives (pre-service and in-service) that appear to make rural teaching attractive as a long-term career option for Australian teachers.

**Section Two: Research Design, Procedures and Processes**

As noted above, we wanted to be able to gain access to the affective as well as the cognitive and material dimensions of the experience of becoming a rural teacher. For this reason, a longitudinal study using both qualitative and quantitative methods seemed the most appropriate means to achieve these research goals. We framed three instrumental research questions that would structure and chunk the project into manageable stages or studies, and direct our research methods in different directions, to maximise the potential for ‘surprise’ in the findings.

**The Research Questions**

1. What teacher education ‘interventions’, aimed at promoting rural teaching, are the most successful in encouraging and sustaining new teachers to take up positions in rural schools? Why?
2. What state-based financial ‘incentive’ programmes, aimed at promoting rural teaching, are the most successful in encouraging and sustaining new teachers to take up positions in rural schools? Why?

3. What are the key indicators for success in retaining rural primary and secondary teachers in rural schools and communities?

To access the information needed to frame answers to these questions we sought to obtain and compare data from three identified groups of participants: Student teachers who participate in a University-based rural incentive program; beginning teachers who take up a State-based financial incentive to move to a rural school; and rural school communities with a high (more than 3 years) rate of rural teacher retention and quality student outcomes. These groups were accessed in different ways. We discuss these in turn here, to provide a full outline of the design, process and procedures of the study, as it was carried out with each group.

**Research Design**

**Attracting Student Teachers to Undertake Rural Practicum and Rural Teaching Positions**

To discover information to help us answer the first two research questions, which focused on ways in which teacher education can best help to familiarise pre-service teachers with rural teaching, and prepare them for their interactions in particular forms of rural social space, we began by a survey/scan of the key strategies that State departments and some university courses were currently using to educate and expose student teachers to rural schools. As we reported at the time (White & Reid, 2008), a key mechanism used to achieve this is through educational field trips and visits. These trips, such as *Beyond the Line* in NSW (McConaghy and Bloomfield 2004) *Over the Hill* in Queensland (Hudson and Millwater 2009) are run by State Education Departments and Universities, are designed to take students out and show them what it is like, in the hope that they will see beyond the stereotype, through experiencing life in a rural school first hand (Sharplin 2009). These programs have for some time been seen as successful in exposing city people to a taste of country life, although there is no clear evidence that they translate into successful (longer-staying) appointments to rural schools, and they are currently under review in some places. While there is always a danger that such forms of educational tourism may only consolidate and affirm existing prejudices, such attempts to provide real experiential interaction with rural places seems to us worthwhile. As Bourdieu notes, however, “to break with accepted ideas and ordinary discourse, it is not enough, as we would sometimes like to think, to ‘go see’ what it’s all about.” He cautions:

> In effect, the empiricist illusion is doubtless never so strong as in cases like this, where direct confrontation with reality entails some difficulty, even risk, and for that reason deserves some credit, yet there are compelling reasons to believe that the essential principle of what is lived and seen on the ground – the most striking testimony and the most dramatic experiences – is elsewhere. Nothing demonstrates this better than the American ghettos, those abandoned sites that are fundamentally defined by an absence – basically that of the state and of everything that comes with it, police, schools, health care institutions, associations, etc. (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 123).
While Bourdieu uses the image of the American ghettos to illustrate his point here, the parallels between this example and that of symbolically disadvantaged Australian rural communities is clear. Importantly, as Gibbs (2008) has illustrated, these absences and links to ‘elsewhere’ are the result of policy and government funding decisions that are out of the control, often, of the community itself. Our study has found that one of the key factors that appear to affect the capacity of a school to retain staff is the fact that the amenities staff need to live satisfying and healthy lives ‘on the ground’ are located in the community it serves – or at least close enough to that place – not somewhere else. As we show in Chapter Six, Place and space in the attraction and retention of teachers, however, location is not everything, and the effects of location of basic amenities elsewhere can be dealt with, or at least understood and accommodated. Teachers who take up appointments in rural schools are often negatively impacted upon by the effects of ‘elsewhere’, and without the opportunity to spend enough time in a community to come to know what amenities it may have adapted, hybridised or fabricated to suit where it is, are not able to escape the myth of deficit. But this highlights, more importantly, that, ‘going to see’ is not the same thing as ‘coming to know’.

As clearly indicated in Chapter Two though, getting pre service teachers even to ‘go and see’ is a difficult process, with significant studies (Halsey 2005, 2006) indicating that the cost of taking up a rural practicum is prohibitive for many student teachers. For this reason we were keen to understand what motivates and might best support student teachers to take up either a university-based rural incentive program or one of the range of state-based financial incentives that are offered to incite them to undertake a rural practicum placement. Our target groups were:

**Group 1: Student teachers who participate in University-based rural incentive programs.**
Student teachers who had participated in any one or more of the range of different University-based rural incentive programs around the nation were identified through their decision to participate in a national survey.

**Group 2: Final year student teachers who take up State-based financial incentives to support rural practicum**
Student teachers in their final year of a program who had taken up a State or systems-based financial incentive to undertake a rural practicum placement were identified in the same survey.

The Survey content and design was assisted by a consultant from the Rural Education Forum of Australia [REFA], John Halsey, who had recently completed two related national surveys in this area (Halsey, 2005, 2006). It was also informed by the structure of a survey of West Australian preservice teachers that had been used in the evaluation of the Student Teacher Rural Experience Program (STREP) carried out by a member of the research team at ECU (Lock 2006). The new, TERRAnova survey (See Appendix 1) was distributed annually for three years to every Australian University. With the support of the Australian Council of Deans of Education [ACDE], whose mailing list was used for distribution, we hoped that it would reach every pre-service teacher in the nation. While it is impossible to know whether all surveys were actually distributed to all pre-service teachers in all programs each year, responses to a request in the survey for volunteers to indicate that they were willing to be followed up and interviewed by telephone indicate that the survey did reach pre-service teachers in all states. The follow-up interviews were designed to discuss in more depth the comments they had made in their survey responses, and their perceptions of the effectiveness of the incentive in promoting rural teaching as a career, and preparing them for what it would entail, at points later in time.
We chose to use an online survey of student teachers prior to service, in order to allow all those who had participated and who were interested to participate, and to ensure that their consent was not forced. Only respondents who indicated their willingness to continue being interviewed were followed up over the duration of the study.

In Table 3.1 below, the range and scope of interviews on which we have based our findings is presented.

### Table 3.1: Modes of Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Participation Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Student teachers around Australia who had completed a rural practicum</td>
<td>2008, 2009, 2010</td>
<td>Volunteers complete annual survey online in their own time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
<td>Beginning teachers who have taken up a rural teaching position after graduation</td>
<td>2009, 2010</td>
<td>Telephone interviews organised individually from volunteers indicating interest in online survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
<td>Principals of all schools nominated by communities, peak bodies or individuals as successful in attracting and retaining good teachers.</td>
<td>2008, 2009</td>
<td>Telephone interviews held at convenient times for Principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On site Individual interviews</td>
<td>Principal, volunteer teachers, local community members/parents</td>
<td>2008, 2009, 2010</td>
<td>On site interviews held at convenient times for Principal, parents and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Visits</td>
<td>Ethnographic observation in 20 communities selected from nominated schools and confirmed as ‘successful’ by State Education Departments or other jurisdictions.</td>
<td>2008, 2009, 2010</td>
<td>Researcher field notes, and photography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also noted in Table 3.1 are details of the site visits that were undertaken to answer the third research question, and help clarify our understanding of what works in rural schools that successfully attract and retain teachers to address the third research question.

**Understanding What Works in Rural Schools That Successfully Attract and Retain Teachers**

In order to address the final research question, we designed a procedure for the identification of key indicators for success in retaining rural primary and secondary teachers in rural schools and communities. This qualitative design was based on Stake’s (1995) definition of a case, which captures our intent and circumstances in this inquiry:

> We study a case when it itself is of very special interest. We look for the detail of interaction with its contexts. Case study is the study of the complexity and particularity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances. (Stake 1995, p. xi)

Our benchmark for success in retaining teachers in a school was a high rate of teacher retention above the anecdotal ‘norm’ of the ‘three year stay’ that has historically allowed teachers to successfully request a transfer to another location. The standard was elaborates somewhat by the requirement for the community served by the school to be satisfied by the achievements of their children at the school. For Stake, the educational interest of case studies lies in people and programs, though for us this extends to place. And while we also are interested in delineating the commonalities across the set of case studies we have produced in Volume 2 of this Report.
(Reid, White, Lock, Hastings and Cooper 2012), our aim in this phase of the study was to understand the uniqueness of places.

We were interested to discover whether there are factors that are not common across all the cases, and that might therefore allow us to argue for intervention or changes that appear to assist in the attraction and retention of teachers in places which do not share all the generalisable characteristics of ‘successful’ rural schools.

**Identifying Successful Schools**

Rural schools, with a high teacher retention rate, functioning successfully in their communities, were identified by a process of triangulation of nominations from parent and community networks cross-referenced by systems confirmation in each State in addition to school self-acceptance of the nomination as appropriate. This process can be represented as in Figure 3.1 below:

![Figure 3.1: Triangulation Process For Nominated Schools](image)

We aimed to invite three or four school communities in each state to participate as case study sites to illuminate the practices and conditions which might appear to have led to their reputation as successful rural schools and to provide comparison with other successful schools in the same jurisdiction. As will be discussed later, this did not occur in the smaller states. When schools were contacted to inform them of their nomination, and confirm that the perception of the school as successfully retaining teachers was in fact accurate, they were informed that acceptance of Case Study status would involve a site visit and the willingness of a number of people in the school and community to participate in interviews and/or focus group discussions about the attraction and retention of teachers. This would need to include staff in positions of leadership, beginning as well as longer-serving teachers, parents and local community leaders. The discussion would aim to identify the aspects of school/community life and conscious support strategies that participants believe contribute to the successful rate of teacher retention in that place.

No students were involved as informants in the study. As a means of addressing issues of sustainability in communities, the Principal in each Case Study site would also need to agree to participate in a follow-up interview to be conducted in the last term of 2010 – in some cases up to two years after the site visit. They were also informed that ultimate selection would rely on ‘ethics approval’ from their jurisdictional or regional research directorates.

With this design mapped out, ethical approval was sought and gained from all participating universities so that the nomination process could begin. Approval was not sought from state systems and jurisdictions in the first instance, as we had been informed that we would need to identify schools we sought permission to approach, before we could submit these applications. A period of three months was set as the limit for the process of gathering nominations – during which time we wrote to members of rural education networks around Australia, such as the Australian Council for State School Organisations [ACCSO], the NSW Aboriginal Education...
Consultative Group [NSWAEC] and REFA, inviting them to include information about the project and a nomination form in their newsletters.

We also issued press releases for local, regional and national news media and professional journals. As Figure 3.2, below, indicates, the initial press release attempted to generate interest in the idea of the project, and was designed to elicit invitations from public radio and print media to discuss and draw attention to it. This strategy generated several NSW invitations, and was then replicated in each of the other universities with similar results. A second press release was sent out in early April from CSU only, indicating the project team’s ‘surprise’ at the number of schools that had been nominated, and extending the date for further nominations till May. This strategy was very successful in attracting media attention at the national level, and an additional eighteen nominations were received following a second syndicated radio interview for the ABC.

Figure 3.2: First Press Release March 2008

Press Release: For Immediate Release
Bathurst, NSW
Friday, 7 March 2008

Researchers seeking to study towns which keep their teachers

Staffing rural, remote and regional schools is an increasing concern for education departments around Australia and teacher education researchers are trying to do something to help. A new ARC-funded project - which sees a research collaboration between Charles Sturt University, Edith Cowan University, the University of Ballarat and Deakin University - will study and report on successful strategies for preparing, attracting and retaining high-quality teachers for ‘hard-to-staff’ rural schools.

The new research project, TERRAnova (‘new ground’) will include rural communities in its search to collect evidence of successful strategies that help to attract and retain high-quality teachers for rural and remote schools. Focus on the communities in which new teachers come to live and work is important, and is generally overlooked in studies of this kind. The recent downturn in rural economies has served to add to the difficulties associated with the provision of quality, stable education within rural communities. This translates into a reduction of qualified teachers who are willing to relocate to rural, regional and remote areas to teach.

The TERRAnova project will examine current incentive schemes that attempt to ‘lure’ teachers into the bush, but will also examine measures within universities to equip beginning teachers with skills which will enable them to address the specific needs and circumstances of rural areas as well as having quality professional education skills.

In addition to attracting teachers to rural areas, retaining quality teachers in rural areas is also vital.

We are seeking to identify rural schools which have successful recruitment and retention strategies and we hope community members and parents will nominate schools where they feel the teachers are staying long enough to really engage with students and achieve successful outcomes. We will then study these communities in order to determine both individual and general characteristics of these places that make for good educational and social health.

These were well received by radio stations around the country, and talk-back interviews were conducted by team members in NSW (4), North Queensland, Southern Queensland, Victoria (3), and Western Australia, several of which were syndicated through regional ABC Radio. Our
criteria for nomination were deliberately vague here: *we hope community members and parents will nominate schools where they feel the teachers are staying long enough to really engage with students and achieve successful outcomes*. This was to allow parents and community members to use their own understanding of what ‘successful outcomes’ were in their context, for their children and their communities, rather than impose strict, de-contextualised or pre-conceived academic or economic definitions of ‘success’. The role of the second step in the process – system confirmation – was to validate the nomination in more narrow terms, mainly by confirming the within-system ‘reputation’ of the school as successful, including its reputation for defying the general rural ‘hard to staff’ label, rather than in terms of its academic outcomes only.

**Selecting Successful Schools**
Within the three month period, a total of 72 initial nominations were received, from every state, and from Government, Independent and Catholic systems around the country. The vast majority of nominations were government schools, reflecting the proportions of these schools in rural and remote areas (Green 2008). The map below indicates the location of towns in which these nominated schools are situated. In two states, Tasmania and Queensland, two schools in the same town were separately nominated by different people, and they are indicated by only one dot.

![Figure 3.3: Nominated Schools](image)

As we discuss in our summary report of the Case Studies in Chapter Ten, the use of even simple cartographic representations of simple data such as these, allows us to interpret and draw some conclusions about our methodology and some preliminary hypotheses about rural communities which are successful at retaining teachers.
With regard to our selection method, for instance, the plotting of the final total of 72 nominations on the political state outline map in Figure 3.3 suggests that the coverage of territory we have achieved in seeking nominations was fit for purpose. Although we can consider that there may be an under-representation of Tasmanian and Northern Territory schools in the sample from which we were able to triangulate with other (system and self) assessments of their ‘success’, the spread of nominations suggests that we are unlikely to have missed out on nominations of outstandingly successful schools in any state. Certainly, our interaction with central and regional systems personnel in each jurisdiction at the second point of triangulation meant that in confirming some nominations, school systems would have been able to supplement those we had received with others that were also known to them as achieving satisfactory student outcomes and good teacher retention. This in fact occurred in Western Australia where four additional nominations were actually made by State Department Officers who were familiar with the schools.

However by cross mapping the spread of these schools with other spatial data, such as the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia [ARIA] (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 2001), described in Chapter Two, we are able to deduce some important information and hypothesise the relationship between successful schools and where they are located. ARIA represented the very first attempt by government agencies to understand and classify remoteness in terms of access to human services as a separate dimension of a location, aside from other variables such as population, population characteristics or population density (CDHAC, 2001, p. 23). ARIA classifies locations around Australia on a scale of 1-5, according to the services that can be accessed by people living there, measuring the remoteness of a point based on the physical road distance to the nearest Urban Centre in each of five size classes.

1. **Highly Accessible** - relatively unrestricted accessibility to a wide range of goods and services and opportunities for social interaction.
2. **Accessible** - some restrictions to accessibility of some goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.
3. **Moderately Accessible** - significantly restricted accessibility of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.
4. **Remote** - very restricted accessibility of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.
5. **Very Remote** - very little accessibility of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.

Using ARIA, the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] classifies the Australian population into groups living in what it terms Remoteness Areas, using slightly different terminology (and including off shore islands), but keeping the same mapping profile. When the location of the nominated schools for this study is plotted against a map of remoteness areas, as in Figure 3.4, below, we are able to use this representation to make more significant hypotheses about the meaning of this for understanding the issue of rural and remote staffing.
This mapping makes very clear that schools and communities which have been able to successfully retain teachers are to be found across all these areas. There is no evidence here that location alone, and distance from the services provided in metropolitan centres, necessarily leads to high teacher turnover. If this were the case we would expect to find few if any nominated schools in ‘Very Remote Australia’, where there is ‘very little accessibility of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.’ In every state which has areas classified by ARIA as remote, however, there were schools nominated from these areas. This is significant. It points most significantly to the difficulty of relying on absolute categorisations, even of ‘remoteness’, which of course is always implicitly taken to mean remoteness from the metropolis – and, therefore, is a metro-centric construction par excellence. Remoteness, and ‘rurality’, is always relative. The nomination of schools which appear on this map to be remarkably close to large urban centres, and certainly defined as ‘inner Regional’ on this classification system indicates this to us – and it is important to attend to it in relation to both staffing policy and teacher education.

This is not to ignore the overwhelming statistical evidence that establishes clear differences in educational attainment, achievement, and transitions to post-school destinations between rural, remote and metropolitan students (Welch, Helme & Lamb, 2007 p. 273). However, this map suggests the importance of not totalising the ‘rural’ as always-already disadvantaged in this way. Evidence of rural disadvantage is certainly compelling, but while ‘often’ true, it is not always, in every case, or in the same ways.

Living in rural and isolated areas is often associated with educational disadvantage. Challenges posed by size, declining enrolments and geographical location put rural schools at an economic and educational disadvantage, making it difficult to generate funding, recruit and retain teachers, offer an extensive range of programs in the post-compulsory years and maintain school facilities (Lamb & Teese, 2005 p.16).
As Green (2008) noted “the further inland one goes, relatively speaking, the more there are younger, less experienced teachers” and the same is true of school executive and educational leaders. Yet there are clearly some places for which this is not always the case – or perhaps where this might not be seen in only deficit terms. This is what is important for teacher education: rural schools are very different from each other; there are positive experiences to be had in rural schools, and we have much to learn from a study of those schools where teachers are known to have had positive experiences, and have chosen to remain in the community as active and developing professionals.

It is for these reasons that this ARIA mapping of our nominated schools was used to assist in the final selection of case study sites. We wanted to ensure that the final selection of these sites would be representative of the range of nominated schools across all degrees and definitions of ‘rural’, including ‘remote’. As we describe in the Case Study overview (Chapter Ten), the selections were made on the basis of ARIA location as well as size, level, jurisdiction and system. On this basis our selection has not resulted in a full coverage of either states or systems. No independent schools were included in the final 20 research sites, and only one school from the Catholic sector. Neither of the nominated schools in the Northern Territory was selected for study. This is because one of them, though clearly feeling to the nominators that it met their definition of ‘rural’, was actually located in a suburb of Darwin. The other, a remote one-teacher school, was deemed inappropriate because although the teacher had been there for thirty years, no new teachers had been recruited to teach there in that time. Only one of the two towns (one in Tasmania, and one in Queensland) where both the primary and secondary schools had been nominated, was selected – the remote town of Smithton, in Tasmania, which was the only nomination from that state.

**Initial Contacts, Site Visits and Interviews**

Each selected school was contacted immediately by the Project Officer, and the willingness of the school Principal, staff and community to be involved in the study was confirmed before ethical approval was obtained and permission to study the schools was gained from each relevant State system or CEO. Once this was obtained, Principals were invited to participate in a pre-visit telephone interview, to provide relevant information about the school and community, and to arrange a suitable time for a member of the research team to visit the school.

**Initial Contacts**

Prior to the site visit, the school was asked to identify long-staying teachers, community members, and new arrivals to the staff, both early career teachers and more experienced teachers who had recently transferred in to the community. The Principal was asked to inform staff and parents of the selection of the school in the study, and to distribute the Project Information Sheet (see Appendix 2) to all members of the school community. Volunteers for interview were invited to nominate themselves at the school level, and told that the researcher would provide a consent form for confirmation and signing prior to the interview. Site visits lasted from one to three days, depending on the size of the school and its location.

As noted above, Volume 2 of this Report (Reid et al. 2012) contains the full set of twenty Case Studies, all completed in this way, although as we discuss in Section 3 of this chapter, they were not all completed in the second year of the project, as we had anticipated and as we needed to comply with our timeline. Prior to each visit, the Project Officer compiled a set of data about each community. This included the history of the town, including what could be found in public sources about the original custodians of the land on which the town had been built; data from ABS statistics over time to enable any trends in population to be noted; maps of the local area
and information from the local council and shire about amenities in the town, tourist attractions and local features. As well as this information about the geography, environment, economy, demography and history, a transcript of the interview with the Principal was also included in the preliminary information. Team members prepared for the site visit by reading and organising this information - some of which can be found in the individual Case Studies in order to begin to gain a sense of the specificities of each particular location and the sort of rural social space that we might anticipate being produced there.

Site Visits

One important aspect of the site visit was our research effort to capture an affective sense of place as we entered the community as research site. We were always a newcomer to the place, even if we had passed through before, on our way somewhere else. This time, like every new teacher, police officer, rural nurse, doctor, banker who had ever entered the town for the first time, our end point on this trip was the place itself. This does, of course, produce a different reading from the impression we might take as a tourist, a traveller or a consultant, whose purpose in the town is always to travel on after a quick stop. Arriving with only an imperfect, academic understanding and expectation of what we might encounter we actively sought to make meaning of what we were seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling in terms of its affect on our senses, our spirits and our emotions.

We collected these impressions of place as written reflections, or notes from our verbal commentaries, our notes to self, audio recorded in the car as we entered each new place. We have included some of these in the Case Study reports as an attempt to capture a little of how this has impacted on our interpretation how place has impacted on the success of the school to retain teachers.

Driving around town – wealth evident in the houses on this side of the highway, Federation style bungalows and large family houses (‘Einfamiliehauser’ comes to mind, unbidden, from where? Perhaps because I drove along Deutscher Street this morning, close to the school, and winner of the Temora Best Street competition in 2000, as the sign says!). These houses are on the hill, like the high school, looking down to the town and out to the flat land all around (Field notes, Site Visit) (Volume 2, Reid et al., 2012, p. 48).

We also took photographs in each place, to record the landmarks, industry or street and landscapes that attracted our attention as newcomers to the town. We did not seek to use a protocol for photographic recordings or for the personal impressions of the places where the site study schools were located.

The images below are markers of location, of history, and of connectedness to place. In the Temora, NSW study, for instance, the image of this road sign (left), pointing to the next towns along the highway was significant to the researcher, attracting all through-drivers’ attention in the main street of town, and yet simultaneously seeming to situate the town at the centre of these other places. The sandstone museum in Jamestown, South Australia (right) with its carefully mown lawn in the midst of a decade long drought, and its ceremonial flagpole, evoked a different feeling. It attracted the researcher’s attention as a newcomer to town, suggesting the pride of the community in its heritage, and perhaps a strong tie to the colonial past.
What is immediately significant when collecting data though photographing places is that questions of anonymity become moot. This has been important to us, methodologically. Following the work of Nespor (2000) we argue that anonymization of place in qualitative research ‘washes’ out the specificities of geography, environment, history and social relations that have produced the particular form of rural social space that forms the actual object of our inquiry. In this way, we see it as inappropriate to erase from a report the things that create what Thompson (2002) calls ‘thisness’ in relation to place, and which are directly associated with the thing we want to know: how does this school successfully retain its teachers?. As Nespor writes:

If one knows exactly where and what its setting was, for example, one could ask if the processes described in the [setting] studied would play out in the same way in a suburb with a different political economy, with students of different ethnicities, at some other period in history, at a larger or smaller school, at a school with a different curriculum, and so on (Nespor 2000, p. 552).

The taken for granted ethics of anonymization in qualitative research, and the almost de rigueur ‘disclaimer’ about generalisability that must therefore accompany a representation of ‘someplace’ fails to acknowledge that the material and affective dimensions of place cannot be factored out of any understanding of it. As Nespor (2000, p. 561) notes in relation to his point above, “[a]nother reason there are relatively few identifications of anonymised qualitative studies may be that researchers and other readers prefer to have these pseudogeneral accounts; we do not want to deal with the spatial and temporal situatedness of the events and processes described” (my emphases). Certainly attention to real places in research is complex and difficult. It is harder, requires perhaps more overtly rigorous member checking and confirmation of researcher interpretation – not as fact but as available as a legitimate interpretation of the provided – and this is one of the ethical issues that will be discussed in the final section of this chapter, along with others that arose for the research team as we carried out interviews during the site visits.

**Interviews**

In most sites, interviews with school personnel took place during the school day, in free periods for staff, or over lunch time. Community members were often interviewed after school, either in the school staff room, or at other locations in the town, as most convenient for the participants. Some interviews took place in people’s homes or work places, some in parks, under trees, or in coffee shops or restaurants over dinner. In every site, perhaps because of the nature of the research, volunteers were plentiful. People were happy to speak about the things that helped make their school an attractive workplace, or their town an attractive place to live. The interview
schedule (Appendix 3) was distributed prior to the site visit, so that all interviewees were fully apprised of the nature of the questions that would be asked.

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed immediately after the site visit was completed. Full transcripts of each interview were returned to the school in individual sealed envelopes for distribution to participants, and changes made wherever requested. Draft case studies were also returned to each school for comment so that participants could see the way their responses had been read and interpreted in the analysis of the data collected. Schools were sent final version print copies of their own individual Case Study and the set of cases from their own State, prior to publication. This was necessary because of delays in publication of this report and the Case Studies due to issues discussed later, arising in NSW, around permission to publish the Cases as studies of particular places.

Data Analysis

A mixed-method approach to data analysis was used as appropriate for the qualitative and quantitative approaches. The original design of the study submitted for funding aimed for this to be a sequential approach in which one method would be used to further explore and expand the findings of the other (Cresswell, 2003), as dialogue between the summative survey data and the interview data would suggest further questions for the following year’s iteration of the survey. The decision to use both the format and the results of the STREP survey (Lock 2006) and the REFA surveys (Halsey 2005, 2006) to inform the design of the TERRAnova online survey (Appendix 1) meant that the need to make content changes to the survey from year on the basis of analysis of annual results was removed. No additional information or issues were raised in participants’ qualitative responses that needed to be included in later surveys for confirmation or refutation.

As discussed in Chapter Eight the response rate to the surveys was much lower than anticipated, with the total number of responses after three years reaching only 268 overall. While these numbers are still susceptible of useful descriptive analysis, we have also had to consider whether the lower-than-expected numbers of students who indicated that they had undertaken a rural practicum placement over this time may also be indicative of the relatively small numbers of students, around Australia, who actually do take up this opportunity as student teachers. In the cross-cohort comparison analysis from year to year, we have been able to identify and compare the effectiveness of the different approaches in preparing and recruiting teachers for rural settings. Respondents to the online survey completed a Likert scale assessment of their preparedness and success in undertaking a rural practicum placement in their final years of pres-service teacher education, and were asked to describe and expand their responses with comments and evaluative judgements. These were analysed in two ways.

Constant comparison and analytic induction were used to examine the qualitative data. Both approaches required comparisons to be made between cases and allow for the identification of relationships between concepts. This enabled theory to develop from the data, rather than being assumed and then tested for accuracy (Glaser 1965). The analysis involved development of conceptual categories reflecting the primary patterns in the data. This was then cross-referenced with the simple descriptive statistics derived from the quantitative data. Through the research process we sought to develop hypotheses that would account for all the information collected (Oka & Shaw, 2000; Ratcliff, 2002). NVivo8 was used to support qualitative analysis and SPSS17 to support quantitative analysis. Twenty-seven categories with 43 sub-sets were identified. The cohort demographics are provided in Chapter Eight. Questions that were asked include
questions about pre-service teachers, pre and post professional experience support in their
teacher education programs as well as their responses to the unique features and characteristics
of living and working in rural places.

First, responses and comments related to particular university and state-sponsored programs and
interventions were grouped together and thematically analysed around key evaluative words and
topics. Summary statements about each question were framed to address the aspects of ‘before,
during and after’ the placement to which the respondent was referring, enabling us to bring the
three years of responses together for this purpose. Individual state incentive schemes for pre-
service teachers, designed to encourage students to visit rural schools and taste the experience of
rural teaching and living were infrequently referred to by these respondents—providing us with
little data that could be used to definitively answer our first research question. As noted above,
this sought to understand which particular teacher education ‘interventions’, aimed at promoting
rural teaching, are the most successful in encouraging and sustaining new teachers to take up
positions in rural schools and why.

After this first analysis, the qualitative comments submitted in the survey responses were
cleansed for insertion into the Leximancer (Smith, 2000) program, in an attempt to determine
qualitative relationships between key items discussed by respondents. According to Penn-
Edwards (2010) and Smith and Humphreys (2006) the use of Leximancer software offers
qualitative researchers a digital analytic tool that “employs two stages of co-occurrence
information extraction—semantic and relational”, allowing the analyst access to a visual
representation of ‘relative context and significance of concepts’ (Smith & Humphreys, p. 262).
Although the texts that are run through Leximancer must be scanned and ‘cleaned’ to remove
items such as the names of the Interviewer and respondent, in transcripts for example, the
objective mechanism of the software counting uses of lexical items is claimed “to help avoid
fixation on particular anecdotal evidence, which may be atypical or erroneous” (Smith &
Humphreys, p. 262). In this way, as Penn-Edwards (2010, p. 253) claims, “the results of analysis
may contain ‘unexpected relationships’.

154 interview transcripts were collected from participants in the Case Study sites and 32
interviews with beginning teachers were collected both from follow up from the surveys and
from within these sites. Analysis of these involved a three-stage process. First, reading the
transcribed interview data from each site visit though the lens of our theoretical model of Rural
Social Space outlined in Chapter Four (Reid et al, 2010), individual members of the research
team used the interviews they had collected to locate comments, references and allusions to the
influence of elements of rural social space in the construction by of an individual Case Study of
each site (see Volume 2). This involves account of the economic, environmental and social
history of each site, and the particular effects of policy and practice in focus school.

Once the Case Studies were completed, the interviews with local teachers and community
members were also re-read thematically, across the twenty cases, in order to gain an aggregate
insight into the degree to which practices and attitudes and relationships that produced the
‘success’ that was in focus in each site was identifiable across several sites. This rereading of the
data produced the thematic analyses which serve as the focus for chapters of this report, which
were constructed from transcript data across a range of sites. This data has been de-identified for
reporting purposes in all cases except where the content of the extract is identifiable from the
Case Studies in Volume 2. The thematic analysis was therefore able to produce a more complex
rendering of the issues without reference to particular places, and points to issues and
relationships that can be more generally substantiated as exemplary of practice in more than one
setting.
Finally, the large corpus of 186 transcripts was then also run through Leximancer software to identify the sorts of relationships and concepts that our participants pointed to in their interview responses as a collective group of people who live and work in communities where schools successfully attract and retain their teachers. Statements attributed to members of the community by their position in the school (parent, Principal, beginning teacher, experienced teacher, community member etc) were included in the Case Report for their power to illustrate or confirm a particular observation made by the researcher. However not all the interview data was suitable for this purpose, and there were several idiosyncratic or complicating perspectives that seemed to have the potential to lead to identification of the participant in the research setting. These were excluded from the analytic chapters unless they pointed to important complexities that had bearing on the particular focus of the analysis.

Conclusion

In designing this study we were aiming to understand the role and significance of education in and for rural-regional sustainability, within larger eco-social dynamics of sustainability and change. A socio-ecological approach to sustainability assumes a multiple perspective, and required us to attend to people and place, time and space, culture and nature, discourse and practice, reality and hope. Using notions of ecosocial change and sustainability (Lemke, 1995), we have drawn from an overall conceptual framework within which sustainability is expressly understood in terms of the integration of social, economic and environmental (or ecological) imperatives (McKenzie, 2004; Cocklin & Dibden, 2005) to formulate the model of Rural Social Space (Reid et al. 2010) that has informed our analysis and interpretation of the data we have collected. Within a general focus on rural schooling, we have been particularly concerned with the issue of rural (teacher) education and the practice of sustainable educational (school) communities for rural-regional sustainability more generally. While interim findings from the study have been reported in conference and academic journals over this time, the present volumes provide a comprehensive account of the work.

The longitudinal nature of the study provides a valuable set of data and findings from the student teachers undertaking pre-service education with a particular ‘rural’ focus into their early-career experience as teachers who take up appointments in rural schools. The ethnographic studies draw from a broad range of views – from student teachers, parents, teachers, community and school leaders, policy makers and teacher educators at local levels, and combine these between states, for a national analysis, review and consensus.
Producing the Rural as Problematic

In his discussion of the power of naming, in *Language and Symbolic Power*, Bourdieu (1992) discusses power of language to define and construct relationships of power, where questions of quality, class and distinction are produced when some natural and social products (certain art-forms and accents, practices and physical capacities, suburbs and shoes, motor vehicles and movies, and so on) are coded symbolically as superior to others. Bourdieu claimed that:

> the symbolic strategies through which agents aim to impose their vision of the divisions of the social worlds and of their position in that world can be located between two extremes: the *insult* [...] and the *official naming*, a symbolic act of imposition which has on its side all the strength of the collective, of the consensus, of common sense, because it is performed by a delegated agent of the state, that is, the holder of the *monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence*” (p. 239 original italics).

In this chapter we discuss how the social world of education and schooling, rural schools and communities are clearly both ‘insulted’ and ‘officially named’ by the metropolitan majority as deficient, backward, and socially undesirable: denigrated by the reluctance of teachers to work there, and officially classified as ‘hard to staff’ by the state apparatus. The recent statement by Chris Sarra, who has achieved national prominence though his leadership in turning around a rural school with a high Indigenous population, publicly insulting those teachers and other professionals who stay committed to rural and remote schools with high Aboriginal populations as ‘white trash’ unable to meet the standards required anywhere else but in the country (*The Australian*, 15/11/08), is an extreme example of this sort of symbolic violence that ‘insults’ professionals in rural locations, and (re)produces the idea that those who work in city schools and professions are somehow ‘better’ than those who ‘can’t’.

The violence done to these schools and their communities, while clearly symbolic in linguistic-political terms, nevertheless shapes the social field, in Bourdieu’s sense, and is realised in the habitus of students who attend rural schools. When the greeting that new teachers arriving in rural schools more often than not receive from their students is: “How long will you be here for, Miss?”, they are encountering student retaliation against the symbolic violence they have experienced again and again as their teachers depart. Yet this student challenge paradoxically reinforces their lack of symbolic capital – it positions them as the supplicants, and the losers in discourses of rural poverty and failure. They are the ones who can’t escape – and who ‘won’t, don’t and can’t learn’ from the teachers sent to bring them the educational and cultural capital that the metro-centre holds valuable. The regularity of reports of this experience in the present day, aligned with the concern voiced by the NSW state government in 1904 that “the hope of

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8 This chapter was prepared by Bill Green. It is based on the early publication form the project Reid, J., Green, B., Cooper, M., Hastings, W., Lock, G. and White, S. (2010). ‘Regenerating Rural Social Space? Teacher Education for rural-regional Sustainability’ *Australian Journal of Education*, Vol 54, No. 3, pp. 262-276. The input and assistance of Jo-Anne Reid is gratefully acknowledged.
ultimate appointment to a city school, tend[s] to lessen the teacher’s interest in the education of the rural child,” as noted above, clearly explicates how this situation has reproduced itself over time.

The generalised expectation that many rural children and their families have developed from the typically rapid turnover of staff in (many) rural schools, that there is a lack of teacherly interest in their education, was again recently reported in an account of an event that took place during the implementation of a new incentive scheme to attract teachers rural schools. As Aboriginal children in a town even further west than Narrabri lined up to farewell a group of visiting student-teachers taking part in a scheme that encourages pre-service teachers to visit rural schools as part of their undergraduate programs, a child called: “See you when you don’t come back” (White & Reid, 2008). Her words provide a clear and cynical challenge to the student-teachers’ espoused sense of commitment to schools and their new profession: they demonstrate what we see as reactive symbolic violence, evidence of a history of a dialogic dance of disinterest in rural schooling that does not commit to the particularities of place. From this child’s point of view, teachers have never been interested in teaching in her town, and she has in turn become disheartened, discouraged and disinterested in learning from them. The issue for the sustainability of her community, of course, is that, without the capacities that education can provide her, she will be unable to support its continued health and success.

This is a deficit model of rural schooling, and it is promoted in the public consciousness through the official naming of the rural as problematic, both by itinerant teachers stopping over to advance their own careers and the official naming of rural schools as difficult-to-staff (Roberts, 2005). The fear of the ‘Outback’, the myth of the loneliness of rural living, of the slow-talking, slow-witted redneck, of snakes and dirt roads and dust – the fear of the ‘wide brown land’ beyond the mountains – is real in the Australian consciousness. Australians safe in the comfort of the city have learnt to wake in fright through our songs and stories, our movies and media accounts. These paint pictures of drought and decline, of the failure of rural schools to achieve educational outcomes comparable to those of city schools, of Aboriginal students failing to thrive in the schools we have provided, and of low achievement, poor attendance, inadequate subject offerings, and Indigenous communities ravaged by alcoholism and abuse. Yet, as we argue here, these are representations. They are not ‘truth’, and they are most certainly not the whole truth.

While we work with the pragmatic assumption that many of our graduates will decide to teach in country schools because they are country people, and know that the myths and rumours are not the whole story, we also know that this is insufficient and inadequate as a means of ensuring teacher supply and commitment to rural schools. As Atkin (2003, p. 515) argues, “[i]t is as if rural society is judged in terms of a deficit discourse (dominated by the desire to make them like us) rather than a diversity discourse (recognition and value of difference)”. We argue, similarly, that rural social space is richly complex and contradictory – and that many rural communities are characterised by extremes of wealth, age, health and capacity, as well as racial and cultural diversity. They are not all the same, and they are not all difficult to staff or work in. Moving beyond the stereotypes symbolically evoked in descriptions of the rural ‘problem’ in education is essential for sustaining and enhancing the diversity of rural communities. As Bourdieu has argued, in relation to social space:

[R]eferring to a “problem suburb” or “ghetto” almost automatically brings to mind, not “realities” – largely unknown in any case to the people who rush to talk about them – but phantasms, which feed on emotional experiences stimulated by more or less controlled
words and images, such as those conveyed in the tabloids and by political propaganda or rumour (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 123).

Moving beyond the symbolic violence directed toward rural education is essential for the social and economic sustainability of inland Australia, and therefore for the coherence and security of the nation as a whole. The complex interconnection of the issues and concerns that impact on rural-regional sustainability requires an equally complex program of research designed to support, understand, and direct the work of school systems, pre-service and in-service teacher education, and local communities, all of whom are collectively involved in the attraction and retention of high-quality teachers for rural schools. It does require a new grounding, even though sustainability itself is not a new concept. We have long understood sustainability as the ability “to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43). For Owens (2001, p. xi; cited Donehower et al., 2007), sustainability is “an intergenerational concept that means adjusting our current behavior so that it causes the least amount of harm to future generations.” The work of educating the young for the needs of the future is precisely the work that society assigns to its schools and teachers, and it is clearly crucial work to our survival as a species.

Rethinking the Rural
Conceptualising the TERRAnova study in this way has taken us to a framework that attempts to go beyond received definitions and understandings of the rural, by combining quantitative measurement and attendant definitions of rural space based on demographic and other social data, with constructions of rurality in both geographic and cultural terms. We work from the following:

We define ‘rural’ as a quantitative measure, involving statistics on population and region as described by the U.S. Census; as a geographic term, denoting particular regions and areas or spaces and places; and as a cultural term, one that involves the interaction of people in groups and communities (Donehower, Hogg & Schell, 2007, p. 2; italics added).

This is a useful formulation because it brings together a quantitative, statistical perspective with that of cultural geography. In so doing, it allows us to work with a particular notion of space, one that combines the empirical and the metaphorical, and to foreground socio-spatial considerations in thinking about the challenges associated with rural teaching and rural (teacher) education. We are asking about the sorts of attributes and capacities that teachers need to have if they are to contribute in this way, as more often than not ‘newcomers’ to rural places – about the forms of capital they need to be able to invest to produce a return on their teaching in a rural place. We are working with the hypothesis that teacher education needs to produce a teacher with certain forms of social capital, as well as the symbolic educational and cultural capital that is their warrant to be there. As Bourdieu writes, about the importance of social capital:

At the risk of feeling themselves out of place, individuals who move into a new space must fulfil the conditions that that space tacitly requires of its occupants. This may be the possession of a certain cultural capital, the lack of which can prevent the real appropriation of supposedly public goods or even the intention of appropriating them. […] One has the Paris that goes with one’s economic capital, and also with one’s cultural and social capital […] . Certain spaces, and in particular the most closed and most
“select”, require not only economic and cultural capital, but social capital as well (Bourdieu 1999, pp. 128-9).

His evocative notion of “having the Paris that goes with one’s capital” is significant for our work here. While this might be simplistically and obviously understood as ‘You get what you pay for’, or ‘You don’t know what you don’t know’, the evocation of a classed distinction as applied to place, here, brings the notion of social capital out of the cities and into the Bush. The experience of rural life and teaching that is available to an eco-socially aware teacher, one with an ingrained (i.e. learned) sense of rural places and people, their history and complexity, their problems and their potential, the activities and industry that exist in them, and of the issues of sustainability with which they are dealing, are all forms of knowledge on which teachers can capitalise. Our responsibility, as teacher educators, and teacher education researchers in this regard, is to be effective as a force for rural sustainability by providing student teachers with access to the capital that can provide a successful return for investment in rural social space.

Rural Social Space
As we strive to understand what keeps people in rural communities, and the nature of the strongest forms of knowledge that can serve as capital for rural teaching, we are developing a theoretical argument for understanding rurality today – and for coming to know and prepare for teaching in rural communities. As we have noted above, this is emerging for us in terms of the interrelation of three key factors: Industry, Environment and Indigeneity, which we see as connected both in practice and in place. It is the practice of place that provides and produces social space. The way in which these factors interact and interrelate suggests that there may be ways for rural social space to be rethought and represented so that we do not produce symbolic deficit and cultural cringe. This is the ‘new ground’ we are theorising, in terms of our project. In this section we present three scenarios that illustrate the nature of relationships between and among these factors, in order to demonstrate how these constitute rural social space in ways that can be understood, and demystified, for teachers and students moving into it for the first time. The case studies are used to exemplify the complex inter-relationship of environment, industry and Indigenous matters in helping us to understand rural social space as it is produced, again and again, across Australia.

As Painter (2000, p. 257) notes, “[i]f society and space are understood as co-constituting then fields are socio-spatial (and socio-temporal) phenomena, opening up the potential of a more thoroughly spatialized theory of practice”. It is this notion of rural social space as ‘practiced place’ that we have attempted to represent in the model below. Here, we postulate rural social space as the set of relationships, actions and meanings that are produced in and through the daily practice of rural people in a particular place and time. As modelled here, rural social space is situated within and encompassed by a network of government policy relating to and governing the practice of each of these elements in place. Systematic governmental policy actions aimed to strategically manage rural ‘problems’ related to rural environments, economies and industries, and Indigenous issues can be understood as an indication of the significance of the rural to the sustainability of the nation as a whole.

It is important to note that, as a theoretical model rather than a description of empirical reality, the depiction of rural social space here is a normative one, aimed to indicate what is arguably desirable in constituting rural social space. We argue that for concepts of rural social space to be adequately realised, issues of place (of the environment and its health as a sustainable grounding for social activity) need to be connected to issues of the economy (of rural industry and its effects on the environment and social relationships). And, if social sustainability is to be achieved, these
both need to be related to issues of Indigeneity, of Indigenous histories of dispossession tied to both industry and environment, and Indigenous presence in the social practice of rural communities.

Figure 4.1: Rural Social Space

Rural social space, by definition, then, is not a generalised or universal concept – it is an event, a performance, a practice, precisely in the Bourdieuan sense of an interaction of field and habitus, which produces and reproduces itself in accordance with the capitals that define it. Just as we have used Bourdieu’s description of ‘the Paris that one might have’ as different from that which might be had by another, at the same time and in the same place, the rural social space ‘had’ by participants with some forms of capital is quite different from that which can be had by others. Society and space, in Atkins’ formulation, interact, so that it is not just location and landmarks that define a community, but the people one meets and interacts with, and the things one does together in their environs.

Indigeneity-Environment-Industry

Part of the understanding necessary for this rethinking may have been impossible, historically, until the present time, when Australia is finally able to look at itself as a ‘sorry nation’ in relation to social space in general, and rural social space in particular. In reminding us that we “must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us”, Soja (1989, p. 6) notes that “relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life”, and further, that “human geographies become filled with politics and ideology”. This is particularly the case in rural areas in relation to Indigenous people and place, and their interrelationships with non-Indigenous people, industry and the environment as key aspects of rural social space. Traditional Indigenous cultures have a strong social, symbolic and spiritual relationship to land, which means that a (post)colonial history of settlement and industry has effected far more than symbolic violence to their culture and capital as original inhabitants of the
country. For many years in our history, this was both unseen and unspoken – the ‘unsayable’ in discourses of colonial power, rights, and Terra Nullius.

To illustrate this point, we have used cartographic representations to show how the geographic narratives that are involved in mapping a place (de Certeau, 1984) help it become a particular kind of social space. A map of the Australian population distribution in recent times, for instance, indicates that the nation’s population is concentrated around the coastline, with the vast majority of Australians located in the urban capital regions and satellite towns.

**Figure 4.2: Population Distribution 2007**

![Population Distribution 2007](ABS 2012)

Such a representation of space can be seen to ‘hide’ much of the social consequences of that space, in Soja’s terms. These consequences are much more obvious in demographic maps of Australia eighty years earlier, read from the ‘sorry’ social positions of Australians today.
While this map of population distribution in 1921 tells a very similar story to that told by the current map, with the vast majority of the ‘pioneer’ population (over 4 million) concentrated in the coastal south east and hinterland, and only about 200,000 in the whole of the rest of the continent, its meanings are different. What is significant, in this map, is the labelling of the vast area of central west Australia as “No Man’s Land” – with no recorded population at all. This indicates that, while these maps are of the same place, they tell the story of two very different social spaces, simply because of the social and discursive norms of that time that positioned Indigenous Australians as ‘fauna’ rather than people.

In contrast, the Tindale Map (Tindale 1974) of Aboriginal languages of Australia, was created in response to the idea of Terra Nullius to demonstrate the breadth and complexity of the Aboriginal cultures and language system that predated white settlement.
The consequences of this, of course, though unseen at that time, remain strongly embedded in the social and cultural practice of rural places today. When people grow up in towns where the Mission is still ‘home’ to Indigenous Australians, out beyond the dump and the highway, where signs proclaim alcohol bans in the green-grassed streets around the centre of town, where the few big stone and brick houses have paint, and lawns and sprinklers, and quickly give way to the tussocks and dusty red earth of the wooden homes in less wealthy streets, social relations are practised in those places in particular ways. And when the shops in town are shuttered and grilled, with no windows to invite breaking, and no display of goods and wares for sale to stir the possibility of something other than what is provided, the symbolic meanings of these social practices produce these towns as places which form the habitus of the children and adults who live there, as unconscious, embedded dispositions and attitudes, in Bourdieu’s (1978) sense.

Environment-Industry-Indigeneity

Yet as we depict in the model above, such aspects of rural social space are not definitive; rather, they are relational. In our focus on Indigeneity above, for instance, we have highlighted the results of a history that emerged simultaneously with the development of industry in rural places – as settlers entered rural places to farm, or herd sheep and cattle for wool and meat, and Australians benefited from all the accrued value that primary industry had for the wealth of the nation. And as they claimed, tamed, mined and managed the land to the best of their ability – their capacities produced in from the habitus of other land, other climates, other conditions – they did not draw on what were, to them, alien knowledge and practices of custodianship of country that the Indigenous peoples had successfully practised for centuries. There was all too often disrespect for Indigenous ways of living from the land shown by the original settlers, and subsequent generations of farmers in response to the inadequacy of subsistence methods to deal with the demands of development and modernity. The temptation to over-graze, over-fertilise, over-irrigate, over-use and undermine the land for profit and progress, though, has resulted in huge problems of land salination, water shortage and the degradation of vast areas of inland Australia.
These, coupled with the global effects of the chemical outputs and residues from industry, itself powered by the products of the mining industry, make the links between concerns for rural environmental, Indigeneity and rural industry very clear in this sense – although these links are far more subtly made in terms of the social space that is produced in their interrelation.

**Industry-Indigenity-Environment**

Within a focus on industry in rural places, we include both established industrial endeavours such as farming, mining, fishing, and the railway, and new forms of these industries as well as others that are newly emerging, such as eco-tourism. For those young Australians who have recently relocated to Tom Price or Shay Gap or Mt Isa, or wherever, in order to earn big money working in the mining industry, something that is currently bringing great wealth to the owners of the land and infrastructure in these places, the social space produced in these communities is quite different from that which existed before the most recent boom. With industry providing salaries and conditions that allow mine workers to fly back to the city each weekend, and which have encouraged huge increases in the costs of housing, food and entertainment in these towns during the rest of the week, social change has been rapid. The wealth from these mines and other industry does not stay in town, any more than the workers do – and this is quite different from the older, established mines and industries, and also from the civic development that came with the wheat and the railway and the gold and silver mines in rural locations over the last two centuries. Recommendations from mining town councillors nowadays to import labour from Indonesia and other parts of south-east Asia, in order to provide the lower paid services that the towns need to sustain themselves as habitable, have been met by resistance from Indigenous groups, who represent members of these communities who remain unemployed in spite of the boom – the wealth around them producing their poverty and disadvantage far more extremely than previously. Similar stories are told in the orchards where farmers cannot find seasonal workers to pick their fruit, and call for guest workers to enter the country for these jobs, while local Aborigines remain unemployed (The Australian August 19 2008). In some places there is little chance that Indigenous workers will be employed in the mines, or in the orchards alongside other workers, because of the nature of the social space that has been produced there, over time, and through social practice. In other places it is quite different.

**Knowing One’s Place in Rural Social Space**

‘Knowing one’s place’ in rural social space is far more possible and probable than in the larger population centres. When everyone knows you and how and where you are situated, spatially and socially, in the community, it is difficult to mistake or to misrepresent one’s position.

Perhaps one key characteristic of rurality – or rather its influence in human capital development – is the notion of shared social space. If members of small rural communities share the same social space, the potential risks in stepping outside that space are considerably higher than that of their urban counterparts (Atkin, 2003, p. 512-3).

In relation to this, it is important to remember that, while for many years teachers in the mining towns of rural WA and Queensland and New South Wales have worked with (and against) the effects of full employment for young males on the attitude and interest in academic programs on offer in the schools, where the sons of the miners and carriers and repairmen know there is little benefit for them in book learning, these teachers have never taught the children of the owners and managers. They are educated elsewhere, in other places. This distinction in relation to the
The rural social space of this community – that it is appropriate for the education needs of some but not others, that it is a work space for some but a life space for others – is rarely questioned. For the children of the mining engineers and managers, like those of the property owners and farmers in other places, there is significant symbolic capital accruing to this educational difference. For some, the capital accumulated by going away to school is understood as worth far more than what can be accumulated by attending in the local state high school – and, as we have argued above, when this sort of capital is introduced to the field of rural social space it represents a form of symbolic violence against local, ‘lesser’ forms of education.

To move this argument forward, and to explicate the work that we see TERRAnova doing in relation to the idea of preparing student teachers for participation in rural social space, we turn now to briefly outline the research itself. We are seeking to describe and theorise successful teacher education strategies that appear to assist in making rural teaching an attractive, long-term career option for Australian teachers. There are three stages to the study. Firstly, we want to understand what student teachers who participate in University-based and State/system-based rural incentive programmes see as the costs and benefits they received from these experiences. This focuses on planned attention to rural teaching through pre-service curriculum and practicum experience in a range of forms. Secondly, we want to understand what works to sustain those student teachers who take up an employer’s financial incentive to undertake a rural practicum placement or internship, and convinces them to apply for and remain in rural schools – or not. Volunteer students will be interviewed over their first three years after graduation to allow us longitudinal access to their experiences and their reflections. Finally, we want to speak back, symbolically, to the violence that is done to rural schools in popular images of them as ‘hard to staff’ and ‘easy to leave’.

We have referred above to the words of Bourdieu (1999, p. 123), describing the ways in which desirable places are constructed in social practice. To reiterate, he says that “… referring to a ‘problem suburb’ or ‘ghetto’ almost automatically brings to mind, not ‘realities’ […] but phantasms, which feed on emotional experiences stimulated by more or less controlled words and images, such as those conveyed in the tabloid and by political propaganda or rumour.” By studying a number of schools which do not fit the popular stereotype of the ‘rural school’, schools which have a high (>3 years) teacher retention rate and quality student outcomes in the view of their local communities, we hope to develop counter-stories, con-tradictions that provide accounts of successful teachers working and living in rural social space, and thereby contributing to rural-regional sustainability, not just as individuals, but as whole school staffs, and as a profession in general.

Through the first two stages of the Project, we are focusing on ways in which teacher education can best help to familiarise pre-service teachers with rural social space. One of the key strategies that State departments and some university courses (White & Reid 2008) are currently using to educate and expose student teachers to rural schools is through educational field trips and visits – taking them out and showing them what it is like, in the hope that they will see beyond the stereotype, through experiencing life in a rural school first hand. These programs have for some time been seen as successful in exposing city people to a taste of country life, although there is no clear evidence that they translate into successful (longer-staying) appointments to rural schools, and they are currently under review in some places. While there is always a danger that such forms of educational tourism may only consolidate and affirm existing prejudices, such attempts to provide real experiential interaction with rural places seems to us worthwhile. As Bourdieu notes, however, “to break with accepted ideas and ordinary discourse, it is not enough, as we would sometimes like to think, to ‘go see’ what it’s all about.” He cautions:
In effect, the empiricist illusion is doubtless never so strong as in cases like this, where direct confrontation with reality entails some difficulty, even risk, and for that reason deserves some credit, yet there are compelling reasons to believe that the essential principle of what is lived and seen on the ground – the most striking testimony and the most dramatic experiences – is elsewhere. Nothing demonstrates this better than the American ghettos, those abandoned sites that are fundamentally defined by an absence – basically that of the state and of everything that comes with it, police, schools, health care institutions, associations, etc. (Bourdieu 1999, p. 123).

While Bourdieu uses the image of the American ghettos to illustrate his point here, the parallels between this example and that of symbolically disadvantaged Australian rural communities is clear. Importantly, as Gibbs (2008) has illustrated, these absences and links to elsewhere are the result of policy and government funding decisions that are out of the control, often, of the community itself. On the ground, the effects of these references to elsewhere can be dealt with, or at least understood and accommodated. More importantly, however, ‘going to see’ is not the same thing as ‘coming to know’.

**Coming to Know One’s Place**

For this reason, it is essential that pre-service teacher education does more than help student teachers to ‘go and see’. As Bourdieu reminds us, “[b]reaking with misleading appearances and with the errors inscribed in substantialist thought about place” can only be achieved “through a rigorous analysis of the relations between the structures of social space and those of physical space” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 123). This is what we see as a key role for teacher education, one that recognises and works with an assumption of diversity and difference within and across rural social space (Green et al., 2008).

For student teachers, ‘coming to know’ about particular places, and about ways of researching and finding out about the place where one is appointed as a teacher, is essential both in terms of ensuring the relevance and connectedness of the curriculum that will be designed and for the pedagogy that teachers plan to use with their students. We have noted elsewhere (Green et al., 2008; White & Reid, 2008) the importance of understandings and activities that are ‘place based’ in this regard and we acknowledge the importance of ‘place-based education’ in teacher education more generally (Miles, 2008). But the accumulation of educational capital that will assist new teachers to ‘come to know’ a place goes beyond this professional academic interest. It is also a key part of ensuring that they can gain access to knowledge and understanding that will enable them to find a place in the social geography of the place, and find their commitment to their professional participation as workers and residents sustainable. It is this other, the reference to the reality of the everyday life that is ‘there’ rather than ‘elsewhere’, that we believe is missing from the teacher education in general, as a result of our failure, to date, to conceive of notions such as rural social space as important, and to work with them as necessary for rural-regional sustainability as an intergenerational concept.

Coming to know a place means valuing the forms of social and symbolic capital that exist there, rather than elsewhere. It means using the resources of the people who know. For instance, when a student teacher interviewed as part of the TERRAnova project discussed how she was able to use her knowledge of one rural town, where she had grown up, to help her come to know and find a place in another, to which she was appointed for her final internship, she highlighted situated knowledge which resides in her as habitus, but that can be analysed in terms of physical
and social space. She drew on her embodied knowledge that the teachers in her town were transient, and that the people in her town only very rarely socialised and interacted with them. She reasoned that the teachers in the new town, therefore, were not likely to be the people most useful for her to connect with if she wanted to know the community beyond the school. She had learned that the teachers only knew themselves, effectively, and she wanted more than that. She noted that, as she was going to be spending five weeks in the town, she wanted to enjoy herself while she was there. She decided to use a strategy of ‘phoning ahead’ to the Post Office, local church or supermarket to see if they could put some feelers out to find a place for her to board.

As she explained to the researcher, her mother had told her stories about doing just this to save herself from loneliness and boredom when she had worked as a young single woman travelling around the country towns of Victoria, providing support services to rural banks. She had developed the practice of always phoning ahead to find board, rather than staying in the pub or a motel. That way, she knew she would meet people, and moreover the people that her hosts knew, and found easy connection into social activities in the community. It seems to us that this student teacher is acting as a ‘consumer’ of rural social space, in de Certeau’s (1984) sense, and her use of this particular ground-level ‘tactic’ in to achieve her goal highlights what might be some of the limitation of policy-level ‘strategies’ that rural teaching incentive schemes located ‘elsewhere’ might produce. This is not new knowledge, clearly, but it is not something that those who are symbolically devalued as ‘rural’ have believed important to formalise beyond the vernacular.

Conclusion

While the work of TERRAnova is to formulate and renew the knowledge base upon which systems and preservice teacher education grounds its preparation for teaching in rural schools, student-teachers who have completed our survey and who have volunteered to talk with us about their experiences in rural schools overwhelming share a commitment to the intergenerational aspects of sustainability. As one wrote:

Since looking at the survey I have remembered my experience working for the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE) in the western regions of NSW particularly, and how I witnessed the sacrifices and commitment remote families endure to ensure their children get a quality education. Indeed it was this experience which made me realise that I had taken education for granted and became interested in this aspect of society which resulted in my interest in a career in this area. I am interested in remote education and am curious to know who is principally responsible for addressing the plight of remote Australians in ensuring children get equitable access to education? I would be interested in becoming involved with this topic.

Taking education for granted is the prerogative of those with the social and economic capital that few in rural places can accumulate. Our socio-ecological approach to sustainability assumes a multiple perspective that does not privilege the knowledge and symbolic capital of the metropolitan centre. Instead, it allows us to voice and privilege, and in turn learn from, systematic attention to the people and places that produce alternate and different forms of (rural) social space.
REFERENCES


Chapter Five

Leadership For Rural Teacher Retention

Graeme Lock

This chapter reports our findings about the importance of good leadership in sustaining schools, staff, students and communities in the school sites we studied. Two significant and related issues for rural and remote Australian schools are firstly their ability to attract staff, and secondly, their ability to retain staff beyond their initial contract period. These issues are not peculiar to any one State or Territory, but are experienced to a greater or lesser degree by each educational authority. While staffing of rural and remote schools is not a new problem, it is exacerbated by fewer teaching graduates entering the workforce and with projected Australia-wide teacher shortages by 2015 (Australian Council for Education & Training, 2010). It is anticipated that this shortage will be most acutely felt in non-metropolitan area schools which are traditionally difficult to staff.

Past and current research (for example, MCEETYA, 2001; Vinson, 2002; Roberts, 2004; Green & Reid, 2004; Halsey, 2005) and education authority projections (NSW DEC, 2012 indicate that the difficulties remote and rural schools face in attracting and retaining staff include: distance from family and friends; limited access to health and family services; difficulty accessing professional learning; difficulty separating public and private life; and frequently for younger teachers, a lack of entertainment and nightlife activities.

These factors can also be attributed to the well-known reluctance of a majority of pre-service teachers to undertake practical experience in schools outside metropolitan areas:

Then you’ve got some people who’ve said I’d prefer to be unemployed for 30 years than to ever do my prac in the country. (Beginning Teacher)

When we were at uni we said we’d never go to the country. I want to stay in the city because that’s where my friends and my family are. (2nd year Teacher)

I never desired to move to the country. I think I always wanted to go to the city. (4th year Teacher)

You talk to people from the city, the perception’s there that if you go to the country, don’t have this, you don’t have that. They don’t know because they’ve never experienced it. (Parent)

Just as there are a number of reasons why staff indicate reluctance to enter into remote or rural service, for some, the attraction of such service is contingent upon gaining permanency with their State or Territory Department, a financial incentive, or the opportunities presented for rapid career advancement.

Because at uni, it was all the rave to go out into the country and you’d get a permanent job and then you can move back to the city. (Experienced Teacher)

But I look at my quality of life, and if I sold my house here, I’d have to downgrade my quality of life. I’d have a much bigger bank mortgage to buy real estate in Melbourne. So, although teachers get the

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9 This chapter was prepared by Graeme Lock. The assistance and input of Bill Green, Simone White and Kim Booby is gratefully acknowledged.
same across the state in theory, in practice, my dollar here is more valuable. (Experienced Teacher, Victoria)

[Something that draws me… professionally, you could be taking on a few different roles way earlier than you would ever get in a city school. (Pre-service Teacher)

For others, the attraction is related to residing close to family or in order to pursue a lifestyle that is characteristic of smaller communities and which is not found in larger population centres.

In the city you don’t know your neighbours… in the country you know nearly everyone that’s around. (Teacher)

I certainly like the things that the country offers you versus the city and that’s just a personal choice. (Principal)

[Country life is sometimes better than the city life, especially like when I drive… here it’s quite easy for me to drive and the life is very easy. (4th year Teacher)

The TERRAnova research was undertaken at a time when not only educational jurisdictions were finding it difficult to attract and retain teachers in non-metropolitan locations, but also Principals (O’Keefe, 2011); a phenomenon previously discussed by Letts, Novak, Gottschall, Green and Meyenn (2005) and Miller, Paterson and Graham (2005).

This paper will review examples of distributed leadership from twenty schools in rural and remote Australia that were studied in the TERRAnova Project. In broad terms, consideration will be given to specific examples where a school’s formal positional leaders, (Principal, deputy Principal, curriculum and instructional leaders and so on), teachers and members of staff, students, and members of the school’s community interact and engage in distributed leadership with the aim of improving the educational outcomes for students, assisting in the recruitment and retaining of staff, and creating a learning community. Mention will be made of those schools that have entered into formal partnerships with external agencies with similar aims. Also included will be those situations where, through a school’s internal operations and through internal and external relationships, distributed leadership is implied rather than explicit.

Initially, a review of the current literature on distributed leadership theory and practice will be undertaken as a means of conceptually grounding the TERRAnova Project in theoretical and practical terms. Consideration will be given to international examples of studies into distributed leadership.

**Distributing Leadership For School Success**

The decision to concentrate on the distributed leadership literature was based on interview data that revealed the existence of distributed leadership patterns in the case study schools, no doubt influenced by the experienced and established Principals having the confidence to implement such models. In addition, Kilpatrick, Johns, Mulford, Falk and Prescott (2002) refer to the work of Barker (1997), in discussing how collective leadership facilitates school-community partnerships (a contributing factor to teacher attraction and retention), whilst Sergiovanni (1994) advocates that schools should become a “community of leaders” (Kilpatrick et al., 2002, p. 12).
The concept of “distributed leadership” has become an increasingly popular term in the educational literature during the past decade, as a widening number of theorists and practitioners have begun to question the validity of, a previously held belief, that a single leader can be the sole instructional leader of a school without significant leadership input from others, both formally and informally (for example, Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2003; Lambert, 2002; Robinson, 2008; Spillane, 2004; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004). This literature indicates that through research, theory and practice, there is a widespread disenchantment with the traditional leader-follower dualism where the sole responsibility for leadership rests with a positional leader and where the follower is reduced to a compliant and typically subordinate role.

While distributed leadership has been described as a “new kid on the block” (Gronn, 2006, p. 1), and “in vogue” (Harris, 2005, p. 3) in the field of leadership studies, there is a significant body of evidence (for example, Gronn, 2000, 2006; Kayrooz, 2008) that suggests that as early as 1948, theorists were considering that multiple leaders are an inevitable part of organisational dynamics, and that situation plays a key role in the emergence of multiple leaders, with Bolden (2007) noting that leadership was “probably best conceived as a group quality; as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group” (p. 2), and expanded by Gronn, (leadership may be seen as) “a set of functions which must be carried out by the group and that it could either be concentrated, monopolized or focused, on the one hand, or dispersed, shared and distributed on the other” (Gronn, 2000, p. 324).

Since the late 1990s, leading educational researchers and theorists (for example, Bolden, 2007; Gronn, 2000, 2002, 2006; Harris, 2003, 2004, 2005; Spillane 2004, 2005; Spillane, Diamond & Jita, 2003; Spillane & Healy, 2010; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004) have attempted to provide both a definition and model for distributed leadership, and empirical evidence that supports claims that such a model provides for school improvement and enhanced student outcomes.

Prior to the current debate on the nature of distributed leadership in schools, the literature provided an extensive commentary on the pre-conditions necessary to implement instructional change and improvement, but prior to the late 1990s, very little discussion was provided as to how school leaders might enact the requisite changes. Leading the discussion on school leadership as an activity in theoretical terms were Spillane, Harris and Gronn, with Spillane noting two main challenges for researchers; the first challenge “involves making the ‘black box’ of school-leadership practice more transparent through in-depth investigations of how leaders enact those tasks thought critical for instructional innovation.”; and the second challenge “involves moving beyond the pre-occupation with the work of those in formal leadership positions” (Spillane et al., 2003, p. 524). Spillane goes on to say that “school leadership is best understood as a distributed practice, stretched over the school’s social and situational contexts. It is not simply a function of what a school principal, or any other individual leader, does.” (p. 535).

For Spillane, leadership is a function of the social interactions between individuals; their interactions with various tools and artefacts, and their interactions with the situation or the context in which the school finds itself that can afford or constrain leadership practice. He states that in order to understand leadership in schools it is necessary to investigate leadership practice within a conceptual framework with a perspective based around four central aspects; “leadership tasks and functions, task-enactment, social distribution of task-enactment, and the situational distribution of task-enactment” (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 5). From this point of view, an understanding of school leadership activity can be developed through the consideration of school leaders, followers and situation; with each being a pre-requisite for the others. Spillane’s perspective of school leadership makes two clear assumptions;
• School leadership is best understood through considering leadership tasks (for example, the practice of leadership); and
• Leadership practice is distributed over leaders (positional or otherwise), followers, and the school’s situation or context (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 11).

Gronn (2000) argues that there has always been an element of distributed leadership in evidence in schools and organizations and points to ubiquitous school curriculum teams and committees as obvious collaborative decision-making forums where at different points in time, different members will exert influence and leadership of the unit which “may or may not accord with the overall status relations of the members” (Gronn, 2000, p. 332).

Gronn draws heavily on the “activity theory” model as developed by Engestrom (cited in Gronn, 2000, p. 327) as a means of explaining distributed leadership. While supportive of Spillane and others, Gronn suggests that the “key component in the activity system which accounts for organizational leadership taking a distributed form, is the division of labour despite the appearance of concentration. The division of labour is the principal driver or generative mechanism for the structuring of work and workplace relations. This is because it defines the overall amount of work originating in the task environment to be performed, and the nature and extent of the specialization into which the totality of that work is subdivided” (Gronn, 2000, p. 333).

Jackson (2005) commented, “leadership as we have come to understand it, does not exist in a literal sense. It is an enacted variable, dependent upon interactions between leader, follower and context” (p. 3). For these theorists, distributed leadership is leadership practice that results from the interdependent interactions of people and their situation (including context, tools, routines and artefacts) rather than the actions of an individual leader. If we are to accept that schools and organizations have multiple individuals who display leadership in both predictable and unpredictable situations, and often independently of positional responsibilities, then theories related to individual leaders have clear limitations. Of note, Spillane (2004) identifies two forms of distributed leadership:

• **Coordinated distribution**, where leaders work separately or together on different leadership tasks that are arranged sequentially. An example might be an assessment cycle where students test data is analysed prior to the identification of instructional needs and priorities. In the completion of this action, leadership practice is “stretched” over the different activities in a particular sequence;
• **Collective distribution**, where the leadership practice of two or more leaders is “stretched” over activities where the leaders work separately, but independently. An example might be classroom observations where two or more leaders would independently observe the instructional practices of a teacher and later meet to form a collaborative evaluation.

Gronn (2002, p. 427) identifies three types of concertive action related to distributed leadership: spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relations and institutionalized working practices, each of which explains itself through its terminology. Four leadership terminologies identified by Oduro (2004) that are related to distributed leadership include dispersed, collaborative, democratic and shared leadership. Through these, he suggests that in the post-heroic-leader era, the common thread is that leadership “is not the monopoly of one person” and that “it is not only the head teacher’s (principal’s) leadership that counts but also the leadership roles performed by the deputy heads, substantive teachers, support teachers, members of school councils, boards, governing bodies and students.” (p. 5). Oduro also distinguishes between formal
and informal distribution of leadership and acknowledges that the former blurs the line between a distribution of leadership and a simple delegation of tasks.

MacBeath (2005; cited in Bolden, 2007), in adding to the difficulties of defining distributed leadership, has noted that no fewer than six forms of distributed leadership can be identified: formal, pragmatic, strategic, incremental, opportunistic and cultural, but makes a salient point when he adds that the implementation of a particular leadership form depends upon the situation, which dovetails neatly with the thoughts of Spillane and Gronn.

MacBeath (2005) goes on to suggest that distributed leadership is grounded in collegial trust, which further implies a mutual acceptance of each participating individual’s potential to lead. Inherent in this description is the empowerment of individuals and groups, the requirement that formal, positional leaders delegate some degree of their authority and power, and a favouring of consultation and consensus over control and command.

Elmore (2000, p. 15; cited in Harris, 2005, p. 4) takes a more straightforward view and suggests that the basic idea of distributed leadership is not very complicated and notes, “In any organized system, competency varies considerably among people in similar roles. Organizing these diverse competencies into a coherent whole requires understanding how individuals vary, and how their competencies might be shared with others.”

Harris and Spillane (2008, p. 33) provide a further perspective on defining distributed leadership when they observe: “(Distributed leadership) galvanizes attention towards leadership as practice rather than as a role; it focuses attention on the complex interactions and nuances of leadership in action. It offers an alternative and potentially illuminating way of tracking, analysing and describing complex patterns of interactions, influence and agency.” They go on to suggest: “Flattening the hierarchy or delegation of leadership does not necessarily equate with distributed leadership, nor does it automatically improve performance. It is the nature and the quality of leadership practice that matters.”

It is clear that the consensus would have us acknowledge that in the majority of circumstances, and with due respect given to situational context, leadership practice as demonstrated by a collaborative team is frequently superior to that of an individual leader, or as O’Donoghue and Clarke (2010, p. 62) state, “It is the individual differences of the team members that becomes the collective strength.” However, Spillane (2005; cited in O’Donoghue & Clarke, p. 65) warns that distributed leadership is “a conceptual or diagnostic tool for thinking about school leadership and… not a blueprint for effective leadership, nor a prescription for how school leadership should be practiced.”

In keeping with this reservation, there are a number of opinions that question the implications of the term “distributed leadership” and its real-world relevance to the improvement of outcomes for students. For example, Leithwood (cited in Kayrooz & Fleming, 2008) comments that simple distribution of leadership does not reduce the demand for leadership from those in formal leadership positions, but rather creates a greater demand through the coordination of who performs what leadership roles, the building of leadership capacity in others, and the monitoring of the leadership activities of others.

Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) further add that there is some confusion related to the concept of distributed leadership and its implications for improving student outcomes. They suggest that much of the literature describes teacher leadership in terms of activities one might expect a group of professionals to undertake as a matter of course, and that
while such activities are highly valued, they should not be confused with leadership. They go on to question, “[i]f everyone is a leader, who are the followers?” and raise the salient point, “A followerless organization is the same as a leaderless organization.” (p. 11)

In a more practical sense, Harris (2005) notes that distributed leadership requires those in formal leadership positions to relinquish influence, which, apart from a potential impact upon authority and ego, also runs contrary to the established convention that positional leadership carries with it additional salary increments and entitlements. Harris further suggests that the traditional top-down leadership patterns and hierarchical internal school leadership structures offer “significant impediments to the development of distributed leadership” (p. 5). In an earlier article, Harris (2003) asks, “distributed leadership poses the challenge of how to distribute responsibility and authority, and more importantly, who distributes responsibility and authority? If it remains the case that the head distributes leadership responsibilities to teachers, then distributed leadership becomes nothing more than informed delegation” (p. 319).

Timperley (2005) also warns against adopting distributed practices without due caution and believes that it is the quality of the interactions resulting from the distribution of leadership within the unique context of the school, rather than the extent of the distribution that is important. As she comments, “Distributing leadership over more people is a risky business and may result in a greater distribution of incompetence.” and further suggests that “increasing the distribution of leadership is only desirable if the quality of the leadership activities contributes to assisting teachers provide more effective instruction to their students” (p. 417).

Despite these misgivings, the general agreement evidenced from the literature is that distributed leadership constitutes a desirable leadership practice in schools. However, as recently as 2008, researchers (for example, Harris and Spillane, 2008; Robinson, 2008; Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons & Hopkins, 2007; Harris, 2005; Timperley, 2005; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004; Harris, 2004; Storey, 2004; Harris, 2003) noted a lack of empirical evidence that qualitatively or quantitatively demonstrated that distributed leadership practices impacted positively on instructional practices and student outcomes.

In an attempt at a partial redress of this situation, Timperley (cited in Leithwood, Mascall & Strauss, 2009) undertook a four-year, seven-school study to determine what forms of distributed leadership impacted on overall school improvement and the improvement of student outcomes. In particular, Timperley considered “leadership activities and how they were distributed, the social distribution of task enactment, and the place of artefacts in those interactions” (cited in Leithwood et al., 2006, p. 197, based on Spillane et al’s., 2004 descriptive framework.)

It is understood that an increase in the distribution of leadership is only desirable where the quality of the leadership practice results in enhanced teaching and learning, and while some improvement in student learning was apparent in this study (Leithwood et al., 2006, p. 220), the gains were neither significant or, in the opinion of Timperley, sustainable. In a wide-ranging study commented on by Harris (cited in Leithwood et al., 2006), 376 Development and Research (D & R) schools formed part of a network of schools in England, committed to the creation of new professional practice and system-wide transformation. ‘Deep leadership’ was included, which is defined by Hargreaves (2006) as “re-designing education so that, through a culture of personalization and co-construction with shared leadership, the school secures deep experience, deep support and deep learning for all its students” (p. 257). Harris draws distinctions between the ways that the D & R schools might distribute their leadership practice (p. 259):
• Ad hoc distribution; flexible, loose, uncoordinated and random;
• Autocratic distribution; participation in leadership is encouraged but is restricted by the existing structures;
• Additive distribution; opportunities deliberately created and the impact is additive rather than transformative; and
• Autonomous distribution; leadership is coordinated and disseminated in ways that impact positively upon the organization, with emphasis upon a commitment to co-construction and transformational processes.

Based on an autonomous distribution of leadership, Harris (cited in Leithwood et al., 2006) notes that the impact for the case study D & R schools variously included: students and staff involved in decision-making; a shift towards a professional learning culture; closer working relationships; enhanced professional practice; improved accountability; greater responsibility taken; greater willingness to share; wide-ranging recognition as an innovative network of schools; enhanced knowledge creation; and a more collaborative approach to improve learning outcomes for students.

In another recent study across eight schools in Ontario investigating the impact of distributed leadership on student outcomes, conducted and reported on by Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon & Yashkina (2009), the authors noted that the extent of the successful distribution of leadership depended upon a number of factors including “the culture and structures of the school(s), the opportunities for capacity building, the nature of principal-teacher relations, and the active encouragement and support for distributed forms of leadership by principals.” (p. 234). The authors believe that the schools represented in this study may well be an example of “best practice” (p. 247) in that there is school and district office support for distributed leadership; that coordinated patterns of distributed leadership were afforded to areas of high priority; that the schools’ cultures and structures embraced distributed leadership; that staff attributed leadership to their peers; and central district office leaders “created a district culture which modelled distributed leadership” (p. 248).

In the Ontario case study (Leithwood et al., 2009), the Principals maintained their role of enacting the critical directional functions of leadership, as well as the increased demands imposed by decisions related to the coordination of distributed leadership, the building of leadership capacity in others, the monitoring of the leadership work of others, and the provision of constructive feedback. While this study has not as yet provided evidence of the impact of this educational environment on student learning, the authors hypothesize that the creation of a district-wide culture of leadership capacity-building, empowerment, innovation, reflection, professional learning, alignment with school and district goals, and collaboration, will have positive benefits for the learning outcomes of staff and students.

Another larger study conducted by Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009), on behalf of the New Zealand Ministry of Education, gives considerable emphasis to the impact of school leadership on student outcomes, transformational leadership was seen to have a significantly smaller impact on staff and student learning than pedagogical leadership roles engaged in by the Principal (Robinson et al., 2009). While it may be argued that this disparity might be attributed to transformational leadership theory not being exclusively educational, the authors’ research would indicate that the leadership activities most directly linked to teaching and learning, included establishing and maintaining academic mission, monitoring and advising staff on pedagogical practice, providing opportunities and being supportive of professional development, and establishing and maintaining a climate of high expectation, as the areas that impact most significantly.
Robinson et al. (2009) establish five broad leadership dimensions that they believe impact on student outcomes, and three that are closest in direct relevance to teaching and learning are recognized as having the greatest impact (p. 94):

• promoting and participating in teacher learning and development planning;
• coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; and
• establishing goals and expectations.

With this extensive study on schools and school leadership, Robinson et al. (2009) recognize that leadership needs to be distributed in schools “because the reality is that the required expertise is far greater than could be acquired by any one head of faculty, assistant or deputy principal, or principal” (p. 173). Also recognized, however, is that theories on distributed leadership are adult-centric, and quantifiable evidence on the benefits of a combination of positional and non-positional leadership to student outcomes remains lacking. This being said, and as a reiteration of the supposition by Leithwood et al. (2009), it would be expected that in an educational environment where positional leaders focused on the tasks and modelled the positive attitudes and behaviours illustrated by Robinson et al. (2009), it would be more likely that student outcomes would be enhanced.

In a comprehensive study of rural and remote schools in New South Wales, designated as the “New South Wales Rural (Teacher) Education Project” or “R(T)EP”, Green (2008) devotes considerable time to the role of school leadership and its impact on teaching and learning outcomes. Within the scope of this project, Novak, Green & Gottschall (2008) provide insight into leadership practices observed and reported in rural and remote settings. In a broad, but probably accurate generalization, the authors refer to the difficulties encountered by both staff and students in rural and remote schools. Significantly, they suggest that rural and remote schools, in general, and their students are often “socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged” (p. 340) largely as a result of distance from larger population centres, local demographics, and difficulty in attracting high quality staff. As a consequence of location and situation, the leadership of rural and remote schools tends to be idiosyncratic and reflective of the situation or context in which the school finds itself, the personalities of the Principals and district superintendents, and influenced by the culture of the local community. The recognized ‘situated-ness’ of rural and remote schools and the activities of positional and non-positional leaders within the schools’ communities provided this project with a “Situated Practices” model which is represented by a combination of both situated leadership and situated pedagogy, each of which is afforded equal importance (Novak et al., 2008, p. 342–3). Novak et al. (2008) recognize the importance of the school’s relationship with the community and the role that the community can play through a positive leadership contribution to the school’s teaching and learning outcomes. In the face of typical issues faced by remote and rural schools, including inexperienced leaders, high teaching and executive staff turnover, a lack of suitable staff for succession planning, professional isolation, and a frequently male-centric environment, participants in the Project believed that the “key to the success of any rural leader was the community [and] being able to understand and relate to the unique demands of people and place” (Novak et al., 2008, p. 347).

To illustrate this point, Novak et al. describe the strong relationship between a school and its community in a literacy programme, which was initiated by a member of the school’s staff, embraced and supported by members of the local business community, and which has now become part of the school and the community culture. As noted by Novak et al. (2008), “This programme provided R(T)EP with an excellent example of how, through the local knowledge and dedication of vital key (school and community) leaders, learning outcomes for whole school-
communities could potentially be improved” (p. 350). In closing, Novak et al., point to five traits that typify effective rural and remote school leaders:

- Student and people-centred with values of social justice and equity underpinning the academic programmes, and forming the basis for decision making, strategic planning, and policy development and implementation;
- the ability to empower rural and Indigenous youth;
- an ability to “read” and understand the place and situation in which the school is located;
- an ability to establish and maintain a positive school-community relationship, and an ability to “stimulate and empower” community members in working towards the achievement of improved educational and social outcomes for the students; and
- the backing of teachers as pedagogical leaders through support, professional learning and empowerment (pp. 357–9).

Summary
It could well be argued that in the post-autocratic leadership era there has always been an element of distributed leadership evident in schools through the interactions and combined activities of formal positional leaders and informal leaders who adopt a temporary leadership role due to expertise, opportunity, intent or circumstance. As suggested by Harris (2008, p. 32), “[a]ll leadership is inevitably distributed in some way.” It is not, however, simply a matter of being aware that hierarchies are being flattened by the distribution of leadership tasks, but rather an understanding of how it is being distributed and what impacts such a distribution has on the teaching and learning processes and the outcomes for students.

Spillane et al., (2003), Gronn (2000), Harris (2008) and others have all agreed that it is the practice of distributing leadership, and the social and professional interactions of individuals, tools, artefacts and situation or context that is significant, rather than a levelling of a school’s leadership hierarchy, which may also be achieved by simple delegation of tasks. The literature also supports the notion that the distribution of leadership contributes to the establishment of a learning community where the teachers, students and community may adopt leadership roles in support of the school’s culture, situation and goals. There is less support for the degree to which distributed leadership actually contributes to the improvement of learning outcomes for students. Harris and Spillane (2008), Robinson (2008), Harris et al., (2007) and others point to the current lack of empirical data that provides positive affirmation that the practices associated with distributed leadership are linked to an improvement in teaching and learning. While a number of projects and studies, (for example, Timperley, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2009; Robinson et al., 2009; Green, 2008) are providing significant data for analysis, hard evidence remains elusive at this time.

The TERRAnova Case Studies
Within each of the school communities that make up the TERRAnova Project, there would appear to be three groups in which evidence of the function of leadership can be identified: the schools’ Principals and other school positional leaders; members of the teaching and support staff; and members of the schools’ parent bodies and the general community. While in some cases, the function of leadership is formalized through position and delegated authority, in many
other cases it is less formalized and results from individual or group interactions, expertise and opportunity, and in general by a desire from all to improve the educational outcomes for the students.

For the twenty locations included in the TERRAnova Project, it is evident that the school is a significant focus for the local community’s activities.

The best thing about a country town is the community involvement in the school. We had a dad/grandad day and every student had someone come in even if dad had to leave work early, or an uncle came, or granddads, but someone came to show their support. (Pre-service Teacher)

Each of the communities is proactive in ensuring that newly appointed staff are welcomed through both formal and informal gatherings, made aware of the facilities that are available in the community, and provided with opportunities to sample aspects of the region. Typically, new staff members are invited to organized social events aimed at acquainting them with members of the community, inducting them into the community, and introducing them to the various social, sporting and cultural pursuits that are available. One school not only provides a mentor teacher for newly-arrived staff, but also has established an informal partnership with the local community where, as noted by one parent, “they have a mentor in the school which is the academic support, and now we have a parent club (with a) parent to be a town buddy who supplies the answers as to what’s available in town.” Essentially, these activities are generally conducted by the school’s parent representatives, although in many cases, the local government Council is also involved and assists with new residents. While induction and orientation activities are the norm, a number of communities and Councils have formed partnerships with the local school, often in association with outside agencies, to further learning in the region. Examples of this include:

• The “Circular Head Education and Training Consultative Committee”, which is a consortium of Council, UTAS, TAFE, Department of Education and the Department of Economic Development, with the specific aims, among others, of “establishing recognizable and sustainable programs with young people” and “promoting local learners”.
• The “Manjimup Education Visions Committee”, with members drawn from local schools, Council, the local Chamber of Commerce, TAFE, and the Department of Education and Training with the aim of promoting education in the region through a multi-purpose, multi-age education precinct. The Senior High School has also established a strong relationship with Edith Cowan University through the development of an on-site technology facility.
• The “Morawa Education Alliance” is an association between the Council, the District High School and the WA College of Agriculture with the specific goal to “revitalize the community through an innovative and dynamic approach to education,” through harnessing the expertise and energy of the community and school to improve learning outcomes for students, and attract and retain teachers.
• The “Alvie Consolidated School Wetlands Project” is a joint school–community wetlands rehabilitation project supported by funding from the Department of Education and Training.
• The “Lake Cowal Conservation Centre”, which sees the school working closely with a multi-national mining company in the conservation and rehabilitation of mining areas.
Further educational initiatives that may be attributed to community and/or Council leadership include the provision of volunteers to assist in the school in a wide range of semi or non-academic roles. In one school, a teacher was moved to comment “If it wasn’t for the volunteers, the literacy program would not get done”, and in the same school, a local chef conducts food handling classes for parents. In another school with a large Indigenous student population, cultural exchanges focused on tolerance and understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students are conducted by community volunteers.

A number of teachers and Principals commented that the community provides local discount vouchers, finds accommodation, and at times, offers host families to new teachers and pre-service teachers to ensure that they settle into the town quickly. In one community, the Mayor annually offers a local resident a $5,000 bursary for further education, with the only proviso being that the study undertaken is relevant to the community.

In each community, evidence can be seen where individuals, groups and agencies take on leadership roles in support of their school(s). Consequently, each community speaks passionately about contributing to provide a high standard of education for their student populations. In those communities that provided details of strategic directions for their town, improving the quality of education is a focus. As an illustration, in one town’s strategic plan, the second of the targeted “Four Pillars for Change” is nominated as “Quality Education”.

It is interesting to note some evidence of the members of the community being involved, albeit often indirectly in the appointment of teachers to the school, either as experienced teachers or as new graduates who had completed a teaching practice in the school previously. In one case, this influence may have extended to the appointment of the school Principal with one community member stating, “The principal’s an interesting one. He was head of mathematics and we took him straight from there to principal.”

The communities generally spoke positively about the involvement of teachers in a wide range of activities and events outside the school that they believed was instrumental in retaining teachers in their towns. Comment was made that the initial induction to the community for new residents, the introduction to various clubs and groups, and the on-going support and involvement by the community was a significant factor in the reduction of feelings of isolation which is seen as a primary reason for low staff retention rates. Typically, one community member commented; “Every time a new teacher comes into the town, every organization in the town is interested in seeing if they can patch them in.”

This feeling of community inclusivity is expressed by a number of longer-term staff as a key reason for remaining with a rural or remote school with “lifestyle” and “personal wellbeing” being typical expressions. Also evident is the attraction for some, to living in a smaller community and teaching in a smaller school,

I love a sense of community which I think rural places give you. I have done lots of sort of teaching in Melbourne and I found that I did not know all the staff. There were maybe four staff rooms and maybe over one thousand students; it’s just so impersonal. (Experienced Teacher)

This attraction for living and teaching in small communities was also exhibited by beginning teachers and pre-service teachers experiencing rural life for the first time:

I love the sense that you belong. There’s a big sense of belongingness. I lived in Perth for ten years before now and when I returned there was absolutely no sense of belongingness, of belonging, whereas here you
really are part of the community and people know that you are part of that community. (Pre-service Teacher)

[I]t helps a lot being a very small school because you get to know people quickly. I mean this school’s great. You have a meeting every morning, just a 5 minute morning meeting with all the staff, so you feel like you’re in the loop with stuff… I’ve found very quickly that I was part of the place and able to contribute and knew what I was meant to be doing. (Beginning Teacher)

The community — school relationship in each of the Project study schools is very strong, with all involved in collaboratively building a better learning environment for their students. As reported in one school’s newsletter, “The working bee on Saturday was an eleven-hour marathon of productivity, laughter and most importantly, a celebration of community. Parents (and teachers) worked tirelessly throughout the day to ensure the school environment is a safe and tidy place to be.” Parental involvement in the daily teaching in the schools is often evident through daily reading classes, attendance on excursions, assisting in the library, through the P&C, and similar activities. While it is noted by teachers and Principals that these contributions are of great assistance, there is also the down-side with one Principal noting “the over-involvement of parents in the curriculum.”

This mutually-shared and aligned relationship between community and school is balanced by a sense of reciprocity with members of the community having an expectation that staff of the school will involve themselves in the life of the town. It is evident that communities value those new residents who respond positively to gestures of hospitality and take a different view of those who exclude themselves or who return to the metropolitan area or larger towns at every opportunity. As one experienced teacher notes, “It’s a two-way thing and it will depend on the person themselves and their own personality as to whether they fit in. You can’t make a community accept somebody; that community has to get to know the person.” This is further reinforced by a parent who, when commenting about teachers who do not involve themselves in the life of the community, notes, “Anyone who is a passenger is quietly dropped off the back.”

From the review of the distributed leadership literature, it could be surmised that leadership in schools is frequently non-delegated and often spontaneous with individuals and groups taking a leadership role pursuant with opportunity, expertise and situation. Further to this, teachers frequently speak of “being valued”, “being listened to” and “being supported by the Principal” as reasons for maintaining loyalty or for seeking an appointment to the school. With this in mind, it is important to note that in most cases the Principal and possibly other members of the school’s executive staff create the culture and opportunities for distributed leadership to occur.

I think retaining comes back to the culture of the school, providing people with opportunities to up skill, providing them with you know leadership opportunities, providing them with opportunities to develop programs around their interests. (Principal)

For some schools, the introduction of supplementary literacy and numeracy programs are seen as one of the solutions to improving school national benchmarking standards such as NAPLAN scores, or in many cases, as a means to enrich the educational experiences of the students. Regardless of motivation, the range of programs supportive of the curriculum offered to students within this study is broad, with examples including Birth to Four, Kids Out And About, Raising the Bar, Getting It Right, Closing The Gap, Count Me In Too, Mental Computation, Launch Into Learning, WRAP literacy program and Failsafe (Flexible Assisted and Independent Living SAFE).
The opportunities for teachers to assume leadership roles in the implementation, administration and evaluation of these programs are significant, with the formal curriculum leaders remaining in their traditional roles. Four of the schools, included in this study, commented that they had appointed additional literacy and numeracy specialists to implement a variety of the above programs, and another school had appointed a Learning Support Coordinator to improve the educational outcomes for the students. A further school had assigned a teacher to the role of “Literacy Coach”; a role which had been expanded to develop a number of school-community initiatives including adult classes in topics including budgeting, cooking, family relationships, and computing.

In addition to many of the aforementioned programs, which are largely focused on literacy and numeracy, the schools reported offering a broad range of co-curricular programs including cultural pursuits, sports, a gifted and talented program, and special interest activities. In one case, an innovative LOTE program featuring the Japanese language was offered, in another, horsemanship, and in another, an elite sports academy. The context in which the school finds itself is also responsible for many of the more specialized support programs provided by individual schools. Examples of this include one school establishing a Clontarf Junior Academy aimed at ensuring participation and engagement of Indigenous boys in Years 5 – 7 in preparation for high school, and another school providing an Indigenous Education Officer whose responsibilities include closing the social and cultural gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Six of the case study schools also indicate that they utilize outside agencies in order to provide their students with more relevant and authentic learning experiences in the form of TAFE Certificate I units of competency, and developing a school-to-work program through a trade training centre.

One school has a distinctive ‘international flavour with partner schools in China and Indonesia, and regularly hosts international students in the school, and in their attached boarding house. Additionally, another school has employed a careers and guidance counsellor with obvious benefits, “School counsellors are in strong demand (and) this school has been able to provide a careers and counselling service that many rural students are not able to receive, again adding value to the community and adding to the capacity of the school to sustain its reputation.”

While not extraordinary when compared to the majority of metropolitan and larger rural schools that also offer similar activities in support of the academic curriculum, the case study schools are in the main, small rural and remote schools with low numbers of students and staff, which would suggest that all staff members would need to take a leadership role for such activities to be successful.

The teachers also demonstrate their leadership role through the mentoring of newly appointed staff and pre-service teachers.

“We have head teachers who have a real commitment to our young staff, and so there’s an incredible amount of support for our staff, and particularly in their first year of teaching, so they know that if they have a problem, tell someone and we’ll step in or we’ll help. (Experienced Teacher)

All schools have a mentoring program in place, although only two indicate that it is a formalized program, whilst the others, as examples, comment that it is “ad hoc” and “We help out with pre-service teachers and new teachers wherever we can.” In those schools where the mentoring program is informal, the mentor teachers are often volunteers, and while due consideration is given to those mentor teachers who are experienced practitioners or who are highly skilled, at least one school places
pre-service teachers with a mentor of similar age and gender. As explained by a young teacher at this school, “I think that in some ways it’s better to have a young, female pre-service teacher for example (mentored by a teacher of similar age, outlook and gender) that’s going to have similar behaviour management strategies and problems, and to show her what I’d do rather than have her going to someone who has been at the school for twenty years and male, and often a dominant male, which isn’t always the best example”.

Clearly there are benefits in the above example to both the pre-service teacher, to the mentor, and to the school, in that the pre-service teacher is mentored by a professional to whom they can relate more closely; there is mutual professional learning for both the mentor and the pre-service teacher; and there is a positive outcome for the school in terms of a constructive experience for the teachers and their students; and a teacher has been given the opportunity to demonstrate professional leadership, despite relative inexperience.

Central to the ability of the case study schools to attract staff is the proactive stance taken by Principals in their willingness to host pre-service teachers and in their relationships with university pre-service teacher programs.

“We are extensively working with the colleges to get students to come here and we actually believe if they come out and have a good teaching practicum experience, it’s more likely that they will actually consider going back to a rural school. (Principal)

“We don’t just rely on the system to provide teachers for us, we will actually go out and find the people that we want, certainly in our school here… a group of us have spent a lot of time working with Flinders University who have been looking at programs and projects around this retaining and recruiting teachers into rural communities. (Principal)

In numerous instances, the Principals of the schools have either: supported a pre-service students candidacy for a rural teaching position; or made direct contact with pre-service teachers that have either fulfilled a practicum commitment in their school, or who have indicated a desire to work in a particular school or region, with generally positive results.

I had applied for a permanent position at a school in far west NSW, and the supervising teacher, deputy and principal took it upon themselves to phone that school supporting my candidacy. (Pre-service teacher)

With regard to all of the schools, with perhaps only one exception, the teachers and the Principals spoke very positively about the collaborative sense of teamwork that characterizes their school. As noted by one Principal, “We work as a team and have a very close working relationship with each other. Often classes are combined and all teachers know all of the students, so that is one thing that helps to establish more of a team feeling because there is a collective responsibility that all of us share”.

A recurring theme throughout the case study schools is the teachers’ commitment to sharing expertise and being supportive of fellow staff members in all aspects of their professional duties. This is reflective of living and working in a relatively small community where, as one teacher observes, “You are working with people that you have a lot more interconnecting [social and professional] links to, so you’re not just talking to a staff member, you’re talking to someone who has become a part of your life.”

This sense of intimacy, collegiality, sharing and a clear sense of responsibility to develop skills is also reflected in teachers’ comments in relation to professional learning opportunities. And is highlighted in one pre-services teacher’s favourable comments regarding a practicum experience:
The way in which the Principal and staff encouraged me to get involved in the use of technology in the classroom. This was a first for working with IWB and I found this challenging and yet assisted me with engaging student interest in classes.

In general terms, Principals and teachers alike are committed to a program of skills and capacity-building, but frequently find that isolation, staff commitments and time required for travelling are frequently barriers to accessing high-quality professional learning. Such circumstances do, however, provide further opportunities for teachers to demonstrate pedagogical leadership through the sharing and interchange of skills and ideas with their school colleagues after attending professional development.

Interestingly, in those rural centres where there is more than one school, Principals and teachers from the case studies schools speak of high levels of inter-school collegiality and of the sharing of resources, skills and strategies. Such an approach suggests in many instances that there is a collaborative rather than a competitive attitude towards district-wide education provision.

In contrast to the positive professional environments described previously, where experienced and inexperienced teachers contribute and share on an equal footing, two teachers from one school spoke disparagingly about the entrenched mindset of their more experienced colleagues:

I don’t feel [that when] I do suggest things that it’s taken seriously or a lot of the time I just don’t contribute because I don’t feel like its going to get me anywhere, because the people who have been here a lot longer and it’s a quote, they’ve said it, ‘That’s not the way we do things here.’ So why would you want to contribute and change things when I thought schooling was all about change when you are shot down like that to say, ‘That’s not the way we do things here’.

This reluctance to change is supported by another teacher from the same school who comments:

They have this low literacy level and we’ve been doing the same things for years and years and years. Half the things we are still doing the same, not changing, and the newer teachers can see things; they can see how it’s not working, but the people who have done it for years can’t.

While there is a danger of taking such comments out of the context in which they were intended, they do also serve as a useful reference point in gauging a staff’s willingness to embrace leadership roles and be confident in the support of their colleagues. There is a clear distinction between the school atmosphere that inspires comments such as those above and that which provides an atmosphere of collegiality, support, risk-taking and sharing described previously.

Surprisingly, while there is clear evidence of a distribution of leadership in the case study schools through program implementation, co-curricular activities, community-school enterprises, strategic initiatives and a wide-spread collegiality regardless of experience, only one school indicated that they considered succession planning as a priority. While such a process may be implicit in the schools’ future planning, it is not overtly obvious within the case studies.

One of the key factors in the success of the case study schools, aside from the contributions of the staff and community, is the role of the Principals and other positional leaders.

If the school leadership wasn’t appropriate here, I wouldn’t stay no matter how much I liked the place. (Beginning Teacher)
It is through them that the opportunities, confidence and support for staff to take on leadership roles are generated. Described variously as "committed", "supportive" and "entrepreneurial" by their staff members, it is most frequently the Principal who creates the environment and culture whereby leadership is distributed to others. Their willingness to expand their school's repertoire of programs and activities, with the aim of further engaging their students, provides abundant opportunities for the expertise and talents of positional and non-positional members of staff to engage in leadership. Indeed, this willingness is an example of situated leadership in action, which, as stated by Letts et al., (2005), when discussing the work of Lingard, Hayes, Mills and Christie (2003), should be viewed in pedagogical terms, focusing on boosting student attainment of “high academic and social outcomes” (Letts et al., 2005, p. 1) through ensuring the practices of productive pedagogies and assessment.
Chapter Six

Space and Place in the Attraction and Retention of Teachers

Maxine Cooper

I have really high needs for freedom so I like the vastness and the Riverland really suits me because of the expansiveness of the terrain and the harshness of it and the way, against the harshness, there's life, and so, for me that's my comfort zone. That's the space I'm really comfortable in. (Experienced Teacher, South Australia)

Interconnections of place, space, emotions, meaning, identity, social relationships, freedom and power are all closely implicated in the ways we position ourselves, and in the ways in which we are positioned, in the vast Australian landscape. Who we are and what we do, who we relate to and how we interact within the social and cultural contexts of rural Australia is an integral part of our biographical past, the history of the places in which we live, our present life and constrains our potential futures. Our relationships with people and place are embedded with stories of drought and floods, life and death, beauty and decay, landscapes and lightscapes at dusk and dawn. They are all a part of the changing landscape, the changing land use and ownership of places and spaces in rural Australia.10

Place is a fundamental concept in human geography and Cresswell (2004) has written that:

Space, landscape and place are highly contested terms... Place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world. Place... is space invested with meaning in the context of power. This process of investing space with meaning happens across the globe at all scales and has done throughout human history (Cresswell 2004, p. 12).

These ideas lead to questions such as: who defines the meaning of a particular place? How do particular sites affect the ways people relate to places and spaces in their everyday world? What is happening with the erosion of space/place through globalisation and time-space compression?

For the purposes of this chapter we will analyse the case study data to see what ways the ideas of place and space have been understood by participants in the TERRA nova study. The idea of some teachers working in rural and regional settings being somehow ‘out of place’ is pervasive in narratives of teaching and staff retention. How such teachers have conceived of a ‘sense of place’, a ‘sense of space’, and a ‘sense of community’ is very important for teacher education to convey to beginning teachers to help them understand the potential factors that make teaching in rural areas an attractive career prospect. Attracting and retaining quality teachers in rural and regional Australia is the focus of this project. As explained in Chapters Four and Seven, we are using the idea of social capital to explore the ways that teachers are attracted and retained in rural communities.

The case studies show that there exists a great diversity in the rural sector and that the diversity of social networks that can be accessed for the benefit of the community plays a crucial role in

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10 This chapter was prepared by Maxine Cooper. The assistance and input of Simone White, Wendy Hastings and Jo-Anne Reid is gratefully acknowledged.
sustaining and refreshing small communities that may have previously been experiencing a
decline in population. The social landscape has been changing and continues to change in many
parts of regional Australia. This can be a catalyst for challenges and tensions, opportunities and
changes in regional and rural landscapes.

As we have argued previously ‘rural social space is richly complex and contradictory – and that
many rural communities are characterised by extremes of wealth, age, health and capacity, as well
as racial and cultural diversity. They are not all the same, and they are not all difficult to staff or
work in. Moving beyond the stereotypes symbolically evoked in descriptions of the rural
‘problem’ in education is essential for sustaining and enhancing the diversity of rural
communities’ (Reid 2008).

Moving away from a deficit model of rurality therefore allows us to work with a particular notion
of space, one that combines the empirical and the metaphorical, and foregrounds socio-spatial
considerations in thinking about the challenges associated with rural teaching and rural (teacher)
education. As outlined in Chapter 4, we are working with the hypothesis that teacher education
needs to produce a teacher with certain forms of social capital, as well as the symbolic educational
and cultural capital that is their warrant to be there. As Bourdieu writes, about the importance of
social capital:

At the risk of feeling themselves out of place, individuals who move into a new space
must fulfil the conditions that that space tacitly requires of its occupants (Bourdieu 1999,
p. 128).

This brings the notion of social capital out of the cities and into the rural areas. It is then, in this
practice of place that social space is produced. The way in which the situation and contexts
interact and interrelate suggests that there may be ways for rural social space to be rethought and
represented so that we do not (re)produce symbolic deficit and cultural cringe. As discussed in
Chapter 4 we see rural social space as the set of relationships, actions and meanings that are
produced in and through the daily practice of rural people in a particular place and time.
Therefore coming to know a place means valuing the forms of social and symbolic capital that
exist there, rather than elsewhere. Rural social space, by definition, is not a generalised or
universal concept – it is the particular set of events, or practices, performed in a particular place
over time, that have produced the ‘place’ that we experience in the present. Society and space
interact, so that it is not just location and landmarks that define a community, but the people one
meets and interacts with, and the things one does together in their environs. We are therefore
giving voice to the people and places that produce alternative forms of knowledge and practice
of (rural) social space.

‘Knowing One’s Place’ in Rural Social Space

‘Knowing one’s place’ in rural social space is potentially more possible and probable than in
knowing one’s place in the larger population centres. When everyone knows you and how and
where you are situated, spatially and socially, in the community, it is difficult to mistake or to
misrepresent one’s position (Reid et al 2010 p. 271).

Perhaps one key characteristic of rurality – or rather its influence in human capital
development – is the notion of shared social space. If members of small rural
communities share the same social space, the potential risks in stepping outside that
space are considerably higher than that of their urban counterparts (Atkin, 2003, p. 512-3).

Teachers and community members in rural areas can quickly learn the difficulties of stepping outside their space in the rural social space. Let us now look at the voices of the participants in rural social spaces of the communities involved in our case studies.

**Rural Social Space is Constructed in Social Practices and Community Relationships**

**Being Situated By Distance To and From Others**
Many participants had a sense of being close and being centrally located to everything. For example:

* [The town] has got a lot going for it and it's growing all the time. It's very central and you don't actually have to go out of the town to do hardly anything so it's good in that way because people shift here knowing that they've got a doctor and a hospital, a supermarket, most of shops that you need. (Teacher, South Australia)

Other participants think of the measure of distance in hours of travel to large population centres and also focus on the idea of 'centrality'

* When I saw where it was, how close to Melbourne it was and centrally located to everything around with Albury close to it, Wagga two hours north, you've got Wangaratta half an hour south so there's a lot of major centres around so it's not completely isolated. (Teacher, New South Wales)

* We're an hour to Mt Gambier, we're an hour to Warrnambool on the coast or Port Fairy or we're an hour to the Grampians, we're an hour to Goonawarra for the wines. There's actually plenty locally, it may well be a lot of that is more for people of perhaps late 20's onwards rather than early 20's. I don't know. Certainly not too many night clubs and places like that around. (Executive Teacher, Victoria)

* It's very handy, it's very central, eight hours to everywhere. (Community member, New South Wales)

Some made it clear they do not want to be too far away from big city life or they may feel trapped or stuck.

* Also this particular area, I do not feel stuck here in Manjimup there is, well it's not far to Bunbury or [Perth] so you now I like the area. Not having ever been here before, I quite like it. (Beginning teacher, Western Australia)

Others made it clear that distance was important but it was a relative closeness to metropolitan life that was important:

* Where we live here, you can get to Perth. If you lived in Port Headland it would be different. (Teacher, Western Australia)
…Perth, well it’s about three, three and a half hours to Perth to the main capital city so you know where we are we are situated in a pretty nice … beautiful spot. We are not far from the oceans at all so yeah we are situated in a good little area here. (Community member, Western Australia)

The reason I’m so happy with this place is because it’s a hub but also because I can get home easily if I suddenly needed to go. (Teacher, Western Australia)

… With the area in which we are situated down here in the south, it a very unique new area, and the surroundings of its environments, it’s absolutely brilliant. It’s an attractive little environment to work in. (Community member, Western Australia)

Some participants felt that location in respect to distance to large regional centres and/or ability/convenience to return to the city or large metropolitan areas is seen as important for teachers who grew up in or had family in large metropolitan areas. There was generally a sense of wanting to be connected to the local, to be central to everything (even thought hours away) and not wanting to be totally isolated. There was also linked to the idea of the beauty and uniqueness of the place and spaces around.

A ‘Picturesque’ Location

The beauty of the place was mentioned frequently, for example:

… It’s an attractive little environment to work in…and the forests and that we have down here, you know it’s absolutely, it’s picturesque. (Community member, Western Australia)

Another participant expressed their reasons for staying so long in the rural community.

I really like the fact that there’s always somebody who you can say ‘hey, let’s go and sit down the river’ or go out camping. Environment here is huge, it’s beautiful, and so that’s probably one reason why I’ve stayed so long. There are lots to see and do. You can never say I’ve done it all here. (Teacher, Western Australia).

The sense of space and a location with water was also mentioned as a factor in making a community and attractive place to live. Water and rivers are a part of the landscape that attracts a sense of space where one can be cool, calm and feel a sense of belonging.

There’s fishing on the river, just travelling on the river. (Experienced Teacher, Tasmania)

I think, as I’ve seen the town it’s even improved in a lot of things it has here even while I’ve been here. They’ve put a lake in out there. They can’t do that now. I know Cootamundra wanted to do a lake, they can’t do it because of water restrictions on their catchment. They can’t dam them now. So they’ve got this lake out here which is about a 60 acre lake. I kayak out there, I’m going to go out there fishing. It’s great. We go out there for staff dos. We’ve got a school set of canoes we take out there. [...] It’s pretty popular if you’re into water skiing and that. I’m not now but that’s an asset for the town. Very big asset. (Experienced Teacher, New South Wales)

And that, yeah everything is, it’s a really nice location like on the river and everything as well, so yeah we have found that we have had everything that we need. (Beginning Teacher, Tasmania)
In one case study community, the man-made lake provided a place for various recreational activities such as fishing, boating, water-skiing, walking and swimming. This was possible because sub-artesian, artesian water and bores supply the town and surrounding areas with water for domestic and agricultural use. As well as the lake there is a magnificent waterfall as the centre piece of a Bush Tucker Garden designed to maintain the traditional indigenous cultures and teachings. The man-made lake is the recreational heart of the community during the day and the garden is an open space for people to sit in solitude, to reflect and to meet with others and share the harmony of the space.

In this particular case the sense of place and space has been actively constructed by the local municipal stakeholders and such actions have encouraged other community groups to become more involved in enhancing the rural space and amenity of the area. As one council employee explained:

Yes, that's a vision of the council, to provide a quality lifestyle and the lake is a classic example of that. It is a wonderful recreational facility, it gives people plenty to do and without that it would make it a lot harder to live in a small community like this. (Parent, Queensland)

Another community member also commented:

I think you've seen a very active council, in seeking funding to improve, you've seen the lake, the football oval that's been improved. Other facilities, just the landscaping, the beautification of the lake, the fish stocking group that's got going. The council has put a lot more money into the centre, then other groups that have come in and helped. (Community member, Queensland)

A long-staying teacher in another town commented on the way that the town had worked to construct a place that is good to live in for him and his family:

I think things like they've even done, like doing up the street, the theatre is new only this year, things like that. The golf course is out there at 18 holes, grass greens. The stadium here would be one of the best stadiums and I've got a lot of connection with volleyball, stuff like that. So we've run comps for years. We do kids away in state terms from here because it's the best stadium down here. Best floor, best everything. So it's really, really good. [...] It was bought in conjunction of town and state grants and federal grant I think too. But it was basically town. I was involved in that I was a contributor. We also went down and worked on parts of it. Yeah, things like that. So yeah, we have a bit of pride and ownership in that. (Experienced Teacher, New South Wales)

How this rural social space is then used by the community members including the teachers at the local schools adds to the positive sense of belonging and having everything that is needed for a safe, supportive, active and healthy community lifestyle.

The importance of such aspects can be measured when the feature disappears. In communities that had enjoyed such rural vistas, but they no longer exist because of drought, there is a palpable sense of loss.

The images of death… when you drive around and there's whole groves of dead orange trees, that's a really tragic image of death. A dying orange tree is a particularly sad tree… That's images of death in the community makes it quite challenging. (Principal, South Australia)
As Wendy Hastings noted in her Case Study of Barmera, South Australia, for instance (see Volume 2):

Signs of the drought are evident in the gardens of many of the homes – non-existent or lawns dead, few flowers but a preponderance of cacti of all shapes and sizes. Depression is an issue – not just for parents who cannot work their ‘blocks’ (because of their inability to purchase water), and the Principal indicated that many of the children are aware of the dire situation that their family is in and their behaviour reflects the difficulties at home; consequently there are a number of students diagnosed with depression. This is not an isolated issue and the community has one of the highest levels of mental health issues in the state.

Social Practices and Community Relationships

When new teachers arrive in rural areas, many schools and communities invite them to social occasions to meet their members. For example, in the community of Richmond where there is the man-made lake, new teachers are usually invited to the lake to meet other members of the local community. As a community member stated

The parents are very good in a sense, that they will introduce themselves and invite them [new teachers] out to places like having a bar-b-que or going to the lake. The staff are already part of the community so they also will invite them out for a bar-b-que or again to the lake, like they will say we’re going do you want to come? So it’s good, then they meet other people outside. Most of the staff here have different groups of people that they’re involved with so it gets you a broad spectrum of county people, town people, and different kinds of things, yes they get to see a whole variety of country life. (Community member, Queensland)

Once a new teacher arrives in the community and starts to meet the local people then it is then that they begin to get to know one’s potential to take up the practice and their place in ‘rural social space’.

Some new teachers were already aware of the type of community to which they wanted to become a member before they even arrived in the rural setting. For example:

I wanted to go to a place where it was a nice, solid, stable community that obviously takes a bit of pride in the town and that’s what [this town] provided. (Beginning Teacher, South Australia)

Whereas other participants noted how the community can change and had changed over the time they had lived in that location.

The demographics has certainly changed from being a very traditional, stable type community to an in/out type transit community. (Parent, South Australia)

These two quotes are from the same community but show quite different perspectives even in one location. The sense of place and changes to the spaces are quite differently interpreted by different members of the community but this also may be related to the length of time they have lived in the community. Perhaps the parent is referring to the increased mobility of professionals
such as teachers when they comment on the ‘in/out type transit community’ or it could be related to the transit nature of local industry such as the wind farm.

The economy and the demography of the rural areas can change quite quickly in terms of changing workforce conditions and employment possibilities. There was one town in the study where there was a sign in front of a house with a plea for employment so the householder could work to support his children. It was clear that the community relationships and social practices were not working well for all the community in this instance.

Additionally when new industries are developed in rural settings there are big changes to the economy and the demography of the rural social space. As one participant expressed it:

… It used to be a purely sort of rural community when I first came here, but they have now got a couple of big industries. They have got the major piggery up the road and Uncle Toby’s in Woogunya and so there’s a couple of major industries in the area which has bought a different mix of people in. (Experienced Teacher, New South Wales)

There were also participants who could see the historic, economic and social changes over time that had affected the sense of rural space.

For some participants the sense of history of the place was important.

And there’s an historical connection with Federation, one of the Federation meetings being held in Corowa, so there are sort of historical connections there as well. (Experienced Teacher, New South Wales)

For other participants it was the economic changes to industry that were important to note.

10 years ago this school was in dire straits, Hamilton was in dire straits. You’d walk down Grey Street, the main street, and every second shop would be empty, major businesses going broke and the wool market, the bottom falling out of that, this area relied so much on that industry. And with new businesses coming into the area, I think it’s really built it up again. We owe a lot to the wind farms, the blue gums, the pulp mills, have bought a new sort of life source into the town because it was looking very sad 10 and 15 years ago, and the school was looking very sad. But education facilities in this area have always been outstanding regardless of the climate. (Experienced Teacher, Victoria)

… we’ve got a couple of thriving businesses, the Mineral Sands down the road, and The Blue Gums, they’re in trouble now, but certainly they brought lots of people to town. (Experienced Teacher, Queensland)

Community facilities, variety of possibilities for tourism were also points of interest.

Look what we have down here, look you know between the recreation side of and to the sporting facilities, the town itself, it’s not a big town but it caters for quite a bit, and you know when you look around and look at what we have the tourism side you know, the tourism side is absolutely brilliant. You never ever stop site-seeing and seeing what is around understanding how the south west operates and the forests and that we have down here, you know it’s absolutely, it’s picturesque. (Principal, New South Wales)

Another participant talked of the geographic points of interest including the river as a way to attract tourists and others to the area.
... The river sort of brings its sort of the tourism factor as well. (Experienced Teacher, New South Wales)

Other participants expressed the uniqueness of their community, place, ethnicity and economy.

*It is quite a unique community you know. A gentleman made this quote a long, long time ago and I always remember it, you know, because we have got such a multicultural community here, you know, 58 or 68 different nationalities here. And he said you know, “It’s not the colour of your skin that matters here, it’s the colours that you get in your opals.” (Teacher, New South Wales)*

Here the teacher indicates it is the wealth or capital you get from your labour and work in opal mining that is valuable in this community. Your wealth or capital is not based on the race or ethnicity of the individual.

Coming to know a place means analysing ‘the relations between the structures of social space and those of physical space’ (Bourdieu 1999, p 123) and valuing the forms of social and symbolic capital that exist there, rather than elsewhere. It means building on and using the resources of the people who live and the community in its broadest sense. It means being and feeling a part of the community, it means feeling cared for by the community members and this was expressed by a number of participants. The sense of being a part of, belonging to, and contributing to, the community is important for many of the participants in this study.

For example:

*I like being part of the community. I like being someone — that sounds a bit up myself, but it’s not what I mean — it’s being part of a bigger picture than just the school. That has its drawbacks too but as I get older, I think I can wear them better than I did as a young person.* (Experienced Teacher, South Australia)

Caring for community and knowing others are genuinely cared for in the community was also a strong sentiment.

*Some of the really positive good parts of it are the strong community. People really care about each other. There’s that genuine care. .... So those sorts of things have been really precious. I really delight in children being able to be children without the complexity, and children just being fit and able. They’re very fit and very active, well-coordinated. There’s a sense of not being afraid of getting out there and sucking the marrow out of life.* (Teacher, New South Wales)

For many participants it was important to be able to be yourself and to feel accepted for who you are in rural places/spaces:

*You’ve got to have a strong sense of self and just be yourself and the people will accept you for that. I mean again we’re getting back to this whole ‘be proactive’. (Teacher, Victoria)*

*I do, yes. I do actually enjoy [living here]. I like not having too many distractions. I think it’s nice to get away from all those things to do and things to buy and places to go and people to see. I feel a lot calmer being here.* (Teacher, Western Australia)
However, being always known as a teacher, a professional in the community brings other concerns. You have to be proficient and respectable at all times. Respect and responsibility come with being known as a teacher around town:

*People knowing your own business, people enquiring ... I guess it's caring in a way but country people are a little bit different to city people. Like you walk down a street in the city and nobody says hello or anything but you walk down the street here and people generally know you and say hello or approach you and ask a question if they have a question.... If you work in a school in the country it's virtually 24 hours seven days a week. You mightn't have to do anything in that time but you're a person from school still. A certain amount of respect and responsibility comes with that.* (Experienced Teacher, South Australia)

The importance of rural communities being welcoming and accepting of people is crucial.

*Smaller communities like... – they're open communities because there are not very many people and people have to be accepting of people and welcoming. Usually they grab hold of people – goody a new person, a new lot of skills, a new piece of vibrancy for our community.* (Principal, South Australia)

However, the idea that teachers have to bring a ‘new lot of skills, a new piece of vibrancy for our community’ is a high expectation. Some community members make it very clear that newcomers need to ‘put in’ when they want to be accepted into the community.

*... a newcomer into the town, is not going to be led around by the hand and nurtured; they're going to be expected to join in and provide their knowledge, ability, skills and so forth to the benefit of the town, the benefit of the community. You see that in any club, any organization, that they are looking for people to get on board and to deliver. Anyone who's a passenger is quietly dropped off the back of the Ute.* (Principal, New South Wales)

As this parent indicates, somewhat indignantly, if newcomers to town don’t fit in, don’t offer their skills and abilities and are not eager to take responsibility then they will be dumped, dropped off the back of the ute or the truck which is an interesting metaphor and a threat for those who come to town and don’t offer the skills the locals want or expect.

High expectations consequently meant that some teachers who were not so comfortable in their new rural settings, who came to realise they did not fit easily into the places and spaces that were expected of them.

*Retaining teachers in country areas was about fitting in and finding their place but as I left the meeting last night I said to Helen that I’m probably the exception. I don’t think I probably do fit here. I don’t have a real place because I’m probably so work-oriented that I don’t find the time to do anything else but work. I’ve built a house here but that doesn’t really mean that I have to stay but to me that is some sort of permanency.* (Principal, South Australia)

This is an insight about ‘finding your place’ and whether this teacher would want to ‘fit in’ or is quite comfortable and accepted for ‘being work-oriented’. Some teachers may find it too stressful to have to find the necessary time and space for community activities. However, is this position acceptable to the various community members who have high expectations of teachers’ professionalism and community involvement as an integral part of that? This is not necessarily
the expectation of teachers who work in metropolitan areas where teachers after hour’s activities are not so public and as closely observed as in small rural communities. As the above quote indicates, learning to live in rural spaces means that teachers need to recognize the local expectations and to develop strategies to negotiate and work on their ‘fit’ in the spaces available. Some teachers in the case studies chose to live outside of the community geographically, which enabled them more ‘space’ – both physically and metaphorically – to live and grow in their respective communities. One teacher spoke of coming to realise over time that she was wanting to live her out of school life in the community rather than returning to the city every weekend:

*When I first moved down I was still playing in Adelaide so I was travelling up and that was just not going to work so I settled in and played down here, more for social reasons whereas I was playing for more competitive reasons in Adelaide. I guess your values change a little bit, some for the better, some maybe not for the better. (Teacher, South Australia)*

Limits and boundaries are possible to build and negotiate but add to the tensions when issues arise that are not able to be worked through in a transparent way.

Nevertheless it was clear that teachers understood it was important to ‘be yourself’ and to ‘be willing’ to put in an effort to make what they could of the experience and to be proactive in a new community.

*Umm...look I would recommend it to anybody and it’s only what you make of it yourself. Like you can’t expect to go out to a place and have everybody to love you first go. You have to be willing to give it your best shot as well... And do your part and being yourself forward to the community, so they can accept you as well. (Experienced Teacher, New South Wales)*

Some experienced teachers noted also that as well as new teachers being proactive, that graduate teachers sometimes have unrealistic expectations of what the community will accept of their behaviours. They suggested that pre-service teacher education programs need to build better rural education aspects into their programs.

*It is partly their training, as sometimes they’ve got unrealistic expectations: they come to a small community and then they sort of think well, well we’ll go out and you know socialise on the weekend and they don’t realise the community is really very watchful of what you do. And I think they find it you know, you’re a little bit like in a fish bowl with people looking in and some of the younger ones just can’t cope with that. But I think that they are possibly people that have never been to the country, have never lived in a small town. (Experienced Teacher, Victoria)*

Another comment from a beginning teacher expressed the negativity she felt about living up to the expectations of the community.

*... Whatever we do we are constantly ‘caned’ for our community relationships. Yes, whatever we do, they constantly ‘knock’ us for it! I find it very difficult to live up to what they expect! I don’t mean this as a negative or a positive, but I think you would get more down time in the city. (Beginning Teacher, Survey interview follow-up)*

Simultaneously, there was the attitude expressed by some community members that ‘if the teacher isn’t what the community expects, this town will make their lives very, very hard’ (Parent and Community development officer).
‘Expectations’ are obviously a tension for teachers, parents and community members and it is a delicate balance of productive public life with an enjoyable private life for young teachers new to rural areas to get this sense of equilibrium between their own and the community’s needs so they are accepted and supported by the community as a whole. It is also a complex part of the role of principals in small rural communities to enable this process. Other researchers, (Halsey, 2006; Halsey, 2011) have noted the need to build capacity and to support principals and teachers in rural community contexts. Halsey writes about the complex and ‘politically charged challenge of navigating and negotiating priorities and opportunities in contexts where there is high surveillance of performance and low autonomy from ‘errors of judgement’” (Halsey 2011, p. 10). Living and working in rural social spaces means significant school/community/parent/student partnerships and all groups working closely together in multifaceted situations that play an essential role in sustaining the productive life of Australian rural communities.

Diverse Spaces

Diverse spaces, where people are friendly, safe and secure means a lot to teachers and local community members. The idea of a safe community where diversity is respected and people can work together to help each other out was spoken about in the study.

Well I like the fact that … you can go down the street and there’ll be different people all the time different I really like the multicultural aspect of it and I like the fact that it’s a mining town but everybody sort of just gets together and helps each other out a lot. (Teacher, New South Wales)

Some participants referred to the specific differences they perceive between country and city life styles and mentioned the friendliness, safety and security they felt in smaller rural communities which they didn't find in larger metropolitan communities.

So I mean lifestyle’s great; we got a huge block of land, plenty of room to run around and have kids play in the backyard. Still surprised when you see kids of an afternoon running around outside, riding bikes outside because that doesn’t happen in Wollongong anymore. (Experienced Teacher, New South Wales)

The friendliness, just everyone looks out for everyone else. It’s a beautiful little place. The area, the wineries, the snow’s an hour down the road. Melbourne’s three hours away. It’s just good. No pressure. Relaxing. (Experienced Teacher, Victoria)

Safe and comfortable spaces for children to grow up in and with smaller, more relaxed places to play and explore, was a constant juxtaposition in many of the participant’s comments.

But for here it’s about being on the marina, it’s about the smaller, the size of the town and the ability to help your kids to be able to grow up in a safe area and close enough to being to the services that we might need. (Deputy Principal, Tasmania)

… So things I like, I think in terms of safety and comfort, the children are safe, I feel very safe here. My 11 year old can catch the bus to the senior school and I know he can walk to have his hair cut and I can be at work and then I can come and pick him up and I am not fretful for his safety. (Parent, Victoria)

The people, relaxed lifestyle … being a parent you know where your kids are and if you don’t, you can soon find out. It’s not rushed. Everybody knows you, like if you go to the shop and you have no money
The quality of life and absence of stress and strain was also mentioned.

I don’t know about you, but locking the door is an after-thought when you go to work. It’s just the quality of life, the lack of stress and strain. The only disadvantage would be if you were into ballet, drama and stuff like that, which you can’t get out here, but that doesn’t faze me at all. (Teacher, New South Wales)

I know a lot of people like the fast paced life of the cities and things like that. But cities are accessible to you [here]. You just got to drive down the road a bit or get in a train and you’re there. (Teacher, Victoria)

Distance to metropolitan lifestyles and the culture of large cities was not a real attraction for these last two respondents. Some participants did talk about the limitations and constraints of rural living and rural lifestyle choices.

I also feel there are limitations and that’s because I am from Melbourne that I feel that there are other limitations in these towns and school communities with subject choices and other opportunities whether it be something like swimming lessons. We had to drive to Portland for swimming lessons when our children were young and tennis lessons we can’t, you can’t get them anymore in Hamilton and just things like that. (Community member, Victoria)

The school is sort of central because when you don’t have a school – it’s a base for the community, … we’re in the middle of a community that’s struggling and even on our staff, lots of people are married to farmers who are lucky to get paid at all. If it’s not farmers, it’s all the allied industries. I feel the pressure that we’re supposed to fix all the community’s ills. (Experience Teacher, South Australia)

This remark leads us back to a consideration of the idea discussed earlier where new teachers in rural communities are being expected to bring in new skills and contribute whole heartedly to the communities and to add a new vibrancy to the rural social space.

Comparing Country and City Contexts As Satisfying Places To Live In

I think the kids are all very different, which sometimes makes it difficult, but they do have a different story than what kids in Perth have. I like that there’s lots of great teachers and it makes you step up and really want to be a good teacher. There are lots of good teachers. I like the challenge – it is quite challenging. It’s a beautiful school – like the actual buildings and the scenery. (Experienced Teacher, Western Australia)

The community feel. It’s a very close knit community. It’s just not; you go to school and go home. Basically you leave school, you go down town to the shops and the teachers and kids still intermingle. That family based group. If you’re in a city you go down town you might never run into one of your students. Here you’re guaranteed if you go down town you’re going to run into at least one of your students. You go out of a night time, you’re guaranteed you’re going to see some of your students. Your sporting events – it’s always going to be a mixture of students and teachers. (Teacher, New South Wales)
The aspects that are showing specific patterns in terms of attracting and retaining teachers in these rural social spaces are therefore the close knit sense of community, working closely with great teachers, the diversity of the students, and the constant mix of students and teachers in community.

**Working Around the Seasons and the Rhythms Of Life Is An Important Element Of Rural Social Space**

You’ve also got to work around the farming seasons as well. Seeding times are April/May. In May you can’t program a lot of things. Now it’s coming to reaping so you’ve got to think when you programme things and not exclude anyone, particularly the fathers. And the other factor is the drought factor and I think that’s a bigger factor than people realise. There are stresses in families. They’re forward sold grain and they haven’t got the grain to fill orders and they’re under huge financial stress and that’s going to tell more in the next 12 months because this season is not marvellous. No rain for 2 or 3 months and that creates huge stresses and kids come along and they’re frazzled. But anyway…you’ve got to work around that. (Experienced Teacher, Queensland)

Family life and school work is affected by the seasons of the harvest and the stresses on families and lack of income affects the community including the children and their schools. The economic strains and pressures of agricultural change, the landscape of the country and the sense of life and death in the terrain are part of the metaphors and images and of country life.

Harvest time here is the middle of term one and I had to bring in another 105 counsellors, actually, to just help to deal with some of the behaviour – behaviour at this school’s really good. One of the joys of being here is the high level of engagement – students are very engaged in learning – so we’re not dealing with a lot of inappropriate behaviour which is fantastic. … It just came out of the wood work and I think it was all related to stress at home because that’s their annual income and each year it’s a bit less. The images of death as well when you drive around and there’s whole groves of dead orange trees, that’s a really tragic image of death. A dying orange tree is a particularly sad tree. … The indigenous community up here say that as the lake recedes, the lake reveals its treasures, which is a beautiful image so we try to focus on that positive. (Experienced Teacher, South Australia)

So focusing on the positive aspects of the cycles of life, living and learning at the same time as confronting the difficult issues of poverty and despair and the metaphors of death and decay are as much an important aspects of teachers’ everyday lives, as the ‘locals’ in many rural areas.

There are reminders here also of the poetry of Dorothea Mackellar, (1904) as her words, ‘Core of my heart, my country!’ reinforces the importance of place and its purpose to our lives. Her words ‘An opal-hearted country, A wilful, lavish land –’ and ‘Her beauty and her terror – The wide brown land for me’ (My Country by Dorothea Mackellar 1904) reverberate. There are the evocative images of the Australian terrain, the earth and the landscape including desert, wilderness and forest. This links closely with Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of *habitus* and field and how our identity is central to our being and our personal and professional lives. Again we are reminded of the crucial element of our study about how we can work with teacher education students to understand the complex and subtle ideas of diversity and difference and the ideas of people, place and economy that make up rural social space.
We will now discuss the data concerned with the spaces inside school and classrooms and to see how the complexities of rural social spaces play out in the microcosm of the classroom, the curriculum and the school.

**In School and Classroom Spaces**

In the previous section, we examined rural social spaces and the wider community and now we will look more closely at rural spaces focusing within schools and classrooms. As Hirst and Cooper (2008) wrote:

> Schools are sites, locations and spaces – both real and imaginary, where multiple and diverse communities of practice are constituted. Through their participation in the spatial practices of the community, individuals learn which ways of participating are privileged, and which are not. It is through these ‘normalising’ practices that power is constituted, and boundaries constructed…and certain ‘kinds of people’ are represented and constituted, others are not (Hirst & Cooper 2008, p. 432).

What is it that the school and classroom space tacitly requires of its occupants (Bourdieu, 1999) in this study of rural social spaces?

The idea of safe and supportive learning environment in the school and the classroom is an important aspect that teachers and community members have commented upon. The sense of belonging and respect for others is also apparent in the previous discussions about community but similarly this aspect is crucial in schools and classrooms. Being respected and having a sense of belonging to the school and the classroom is important for the teachers as well as for the students. This is essential to attracting and retaining teachers in these rural communities. For example, ‘behaviour at this school’s really good. One of the joys of being here is the high level of engagement’ (Experienced teacher, South Australia).

> I think the lack of behaviour problems, the getting to know children, families, seeing that, that’s really good. Being able to visit classrooms, knowing about, 75% of the children’s names I think is really good… The teachers are really, they are really either very committed or they are okay, so I don’t have any slack teachers who are just biding time as well. (Principal, Queensland)

Another teacher explained why she enjoyed teaching in the school as ‘Probably the close knit community, it’s a safe environment....And with this school, the behaviour is just excellent.

A parent who also works as a community development officer stated how she was very fortunate this year because her child had a ‘really good teacher’.

> I am very fortunate this year I’ve got one out of three really good ones [teachers] and she is so dedicated to these children. You walk into that classroom and you just know she’s there to help my little boy get through the year. (Parent, Western Australia)

In general, the schools in the case studies had exciting and innovative programs to support student learning and strong student-teacher relationships as well as positive student, family and community learning opportunities.
Attention To Place in Curriculum Is Seen As A Means Of Increasing Rural Student’s Interest and Involvement In Learning

Place-based education and the teaching curriculum is different because of a natural connection to place, landscape, land usage and terrain. As one principal explained when asked about whether living and working in rural areas makes a difference to how you teach?

Does it mean anything for how you teach? I think it does. I think so because I try and relate what I’m teaching to the environment, so I’ve had to change, instead of sheep grazing or horses or that, I’ve had to change to opals, you know, and mining and what affects that, so I had to do a bit of background knowledge. Like, the kids, I had to bring in scraps of rocks and say, “Right, sort them. How do you sort them?” and then they would do that and show me how they saw. (Head Teacher, New South Wales)

Place-based education, studying the history, geography, archaeology, economy and demography of the area, and utilising the new initiatives in the national curriculum are elements of tension and challenge for teachers in rural social spaces. Teachers in rural communities are able to initiate new learning challenges by working with local community knowledge of space and place and with the possibilities of local and global connectedness through the internet and other social and professional networks. Knowledge can be both conserved and also transformed by students and teachers working together in these arenas.

Although we found few teachers in our site visits who spoke with excitement about using the affordances of the particular place where they were teaching in their curriculum planning, we believe that these challenges add to the excitement and innovation possible in rural learning communities, and see this as an area for further research and development.

Indigenous Spaces

Extracts from the interview with the ‘parent support partnership coordinator’ (mainly employed to support Indigenous students and to encourage Indigenous parents to come to the school and participate in activities).

It is very difficult, because even though I’m a coordinator, my role was a little bit of everything. ...because I wasn’t too sure of what I can and what I couldn’t do…. Simply because this is not my traditional land. So I’m not in my own country, so there’s certain things I don’t know I can do and things I can’t... So I’m treading very lightly …The challenge I guess was my position, like being an Indigenous person from somewhere else… So even some of the Indigenous families who may come from here choose not to be recognized as Aboriginals....And I guess small town mentality....It’s easier to be not recognized as an Aboriginal in some small places like this... (Indigenous Teacher Aide, Queensland)

Identity and indigeneity, culture and connection to land and tradition in Australian Indigenous culture are important in understanding Australian history and constitute an essential element in many of the case studies of community. The different ways of learning was emphasised by one Indigenous participant.

A lot of the parents are actually members of the Land Council as well so I’ve got to know a fair few from there. [And so] I don’t include the parents. I deal with the child and the child only. It’s a confidential thing. What the child and I do together or speak about doesn’t go back to the parent or
anywhere else. I find that pushing is basically you're pushing them away. Encouraging is a better way I think. Encouragement and praise for when they do – like we've got one young girl I work with now – she's actually got to - this is her third week – with three and a half weeks, [...] , we haven't had a day off. [...]Yes. For her to be there in the classroom and the teacher concentrating on her in front of her friends is a real shame thing. But she accepts me sitting there and helping her, I mean that's great. She thinks that's terrific. (Indigenous Teacher Aide, New South Wales)

Aboriginal students are...Well they're not encouraged, I don't think. Somehow Aboriginal kids they, like it's hands on stuff that's how they learn, whereas like modern day teaching isn't so hands on, is it? You know like they don't have a sense of where they are... (Indigenous Teacher Aide, Queensland)

This also was related to some ideas that were spaces of hurt from the past:

But I think the schools relationship with the ...like I'm talking from an indigenous family's point of view, like I work in that area...They have a very big hurt there and that needs to be dealt with and nobody wants to go there... Like it's an issue, and what people have said to me has gone a long way back... (Indigenous Teacher Aide, Queensland)

No, no, we find it very hard, don't we, for the Aboriginal families to come to the school because it's government. A school is white government, hospital is white government, council is white government. How many Aboriginals do you see going into those schools and places like that? Very few, very few. (Indigenous Teacher Aide, New South Wales)

Uncomfortable spaces were also talked about,

...Well I've invited parents to come to this meeting, but none of the parents have come, because it's on the school grounds...I've expected to take you to their homes but I figured that this is something that needs to be put into it because... (Indigenous Teacher Aide, Queensland)

The thing is, I don't know if there's funding or anything for me to be here next year but the thing that worries me is that when they come out of there they've got six weeks of holidays in which they can run off the rails but they need – had it been only two weeks like normal in between term – that follow up. They need that follow up and I ring every week and get an update on how they're going. (Indigenous Teacher Aide, New South Wales)

..Because I believe that the parents don't come because they don't...like it's not that they're not welcome, it's because, it's a very invisible line...it's something that people don't talk about I mean everyone gets accused of being racist... (Indigenous Teacher Aide, Queensland)

...And this community doesn't come out and say that it's racist and nobody does any more, but it is there and nobody likes to admit it. (Indigenous Teacher Aide, Queensland)

Spaces of Silence and Resistance

...Well I find it hard, very hard, you have to be real careful who you talk to and what you say...Sometimes you think you're in on the joke ra ra but then they look at you ...what are you doing here? ... I keep very much to myself... (Indigenous Teacher Aide, New South Wales)
Keeping to oneself is not easy for some people and it was hard for these people to talk about. Some respondents indicated that they felt unable to do aspects of the work that they had been asked to do by their employers, which was a difficult dilemma in which they were placed.

... And then some things that they’ve asked me to do, I’ve refused. ... Yes, point blank, like...no way in the world...My life is more important than that, like I can walk away from this job, but I would not go and tell an indigenous parent how to care for her child...It’s something I can’t do and I won’t do ... Like some of the issues too, are like some of our kids come to school without eating, like a couple of days before payday. ... Like they say you should say something, but I’m not going to get hit over the head for no one...But it’s sort of like, I haven’t pushed them to that limit and they have always shown respect for me. Like there are certain things I will not say or do, like I can but ... (Indigenous Teacher Aide, Queensland)

This particular person was employed for one year as a parent support partnership initiative person and her role was mainly to support indigenous students and to get the indigenous parents to participate in activities at the school. She was finding this a difficult task, in particular because of the past hurts and the tensions between the diverse families in the school and wider community.

There was one indigenous family at this school who met me under the shade of the trees after school one afternoon as I walked out of the school. I spoke with them and walked with them. They invited me walk with them to their home. Then we sat in the shade of a large tree outside their house. They offered me a soft drink and talked about their children and the issues they had with their children and the school not being supportive enough when one of their sons had punched a hole in the wall of the school. The older family members were not happy with the way he was being excluded from school social activities as a form of punishment because they had not paid for repairs to the damaged wall. We talked about the possible alternative ways of communicating with the school and the difficulties of further education for the children in the family. Situations such as this reverberate around the community, often with lose-lose outcomes for all involved.

**Spaces of Hope and Courage**

Another community in this study, with a significant indigenous presence, was described as encouraging to all people who are a part of the town. It was mentioned that this is a town where “there is not a lot of racial tension”. In fact, the narrative of the staff member who explained ‘I had no education myself, I was home schooled by my mother’ began to work as a cleaner at the school for three years. She was encouraged to become a teacher’s aide and then went on to study to become an Indigenous teacher. Her story was inspiring and one that showed the ways that community members had worked together on a number of levels to encourage and support her. She clearly showed a great strength of commitment to the community and to actively working to change the school over time. For example, she had lobbied the government in the past to develop the high school program “because we had up to 22 kids here at one stage sitting on a veranda, doing distance education, waiting for someone to come by just to help them out, you know, no support.” More recently she talked about working to change the ways that people viewed NAIDOC Week and other Indigenous events. She had suggested and organised other innovative ways of working together in the community and in the wider society. She has been “Focusing on bringing the community together and celebrating and understanding each other”. When commenting on her encouragement to become a teacher she admitted that she had “support, not just from within the school, but there was also, I suppose a bit of a push from community people as well.”
It is this sense of the broad community working together, celebrating together and teaching and learning together that makes this community a stimulating and challenging one for new teachers who want to work in rural and remote areas.

This teacher was well aware of the issues to be confronted by both indigenous and non-indigenous in the community.

Yes and I see problems, not just with, I mean I know there is a big problem with our people, but I see from my being in the school, I see also problems with other children who are not of Aboriginal descent who have the same disadvantages I suppose. Or similar disadvantages, I mean I don't think anyone can have the same disadvantages as Aboriginal people have, but there are disadvantages. So in a community like this, for me, it's not looking at one group, it's looking at everybody and I also felt that there was a split and one of my most recent projects is focussing on bringing the community together and celebrating and understanding each other. I think there's a big push on making Aboriginal people bow down to non-indigenous ways, but I do think there's a need for non-indigenous people to understand where the Aboriginal people are coming from and the battles that they have and that's my biggest thing now as a teacher is to make people aware of that. (Indigenous Beginning Teacher, Queensland)

This beginning teacher had had a long and steady relationship with this school, the parents and the community. She understood a lot of the problems of the families and was doing what she could to speak about the issues and to take an active part in changing the situation.

And I just think I'm in a position where Education Queensland talks about building relationships you know, but teachers will not go outside that gate. They won't even go and talk to, and I've had arguments and I've said to them, well you need to get off your backside. We're forever telling parents, come into the school, come into the school and they're complaining that they don't, but the gate opens both ways. And I guess for me, I'm in a position where I'm comfortable or more comfortable than the main stream teachers. Like yesterday I had some spare time, so I went and visited one of our Aboriginal elder people because I want her to come and talk, her father was actually one of the soldiers during the war. And I want her, she's got medals and she's got his papers and you know, so I want her to come in to school. Whereas other teachers won't do that. (Indigenous Beginning Teacher, Queensland)

Her attitude to both the teachers and the parents was one of ‘the gate opens both ways’ meaning teachers and parents, indigenous or not, poor and disadvantaged and well off families should all be interacting with each other to make the school and the community a better place for all people.

As she expressed it I think because everybody deep down respects and understands people, because they know them so well. That's my excuse for living in the bush.

But she feels they should still be able to communicate and understand each other better.

Yeah see the bigger picture and to look at, for so long people have lived by, non-indigenous perspectives. There's a big push now for Education Queensland is embedding, they talk about embedding indigenous perspectives and it's really I guess one of my challenges to get people to change their mentality. And to analyse and for the kids as well. And that's one of the things that have fallen right into my lap this year... cultural identity and I suppose a lot of it revolves around the policies that affected Aboriginal people... so I guess my reason for being a teacher is to try and educate, not just children, but society. (Indigenous Beginning Teacher, Queensland)
Therefore her role is an exciting and innovative one of working to create a space for indigenous knowledge in education globally and locally. It is new teachers like her, who have a strong commitment to community action and revitalisation that can make a difference to the life of a community.

Curriculum innovation, cultural awareness celebrations and school community activities that encourage all community members to become involved in collaborations and partnerships add life and vitality, sustainability and vigour to such communities. These are the types of communities that can attract and retain teachers in a constantly changing local and global world.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the responses from participants in relation to what they think about the spaces and places in the sense of ‘rural social spaces’ and what it is about rural social space that can attract and retain teachers to rural areas. It is clear that it is important for teachers to extend themselves to act to know and understand their place in the rural social spaces where they live and work. As we have argued, knowing one’s place in rural social space is critical to being and becoming a teacher who feels connected and respected and has a sense of place and belonging in the rural space. The sense of the physical distance from major populations centres is seen as important to some participants and the perception of assets such as the physical and environmental attractiveness, of the place is important, the casual, relaxed, safe and supportive lifestyle are seen by many as attraction and retention factors. The Australian countryside, the bush and the environment have been an inspiration to poets and songwriters over many years. People who live in rural spaces are often reminded of why place matters, how it feels to love a place, connect with space and the light, and to have some idea of the spirit of a place. Living in rural places allows a heightened social and ecological consciousness that is grieved by the destruction of place. We are reminded of Gruenwald’s work and a discussion of a ‘critical pedagogy of place’ that the crucial questions to be answered are ‘What needs to be conserved? What needs to be transformed?’

Rural social spaces affect community sustainability and the attraction and retention of teachers to rural areas. Society and space interact, so that it is not just location and landmarks that define a community, but the people one meets and interacts with, and the things one does together in transforming the surrounds. Teachers, parents, students and quality schools are crucial to sustaining and transforming the social and educational life of rural communities in a global world.
Chapter Seven

Community Capital and Teacher Retention

Simone White

Introduction

As outlined in Chapter Three, one of the major aims of the study was to look closely at what works in places where schools do appear to be acting in ways that sustain their rural communities. This chapter focuses on the link that can be made between rural schools and their communities in terms of what they can do together to improve teacher retention and recruitment. In particular, this chapter focuses on the ways in which the TERRAnova case studies illustrated successful community-based approaches and strategies to induct, mentor and build community awareness of beginning teachers. These findings have direct implications for the ways in which school communities, school leaders and (preservice) teacher education can partner together to form strong social networks that will make an impact beyond the classroom and also provide a new knowledge base for teachers to be prepared to work in community based networks.

While education systems often tend to focus on teacher recruitment and retention incentives, the case studies highlight how schools and their communities worked at multiple levels via ‘school community based recruitment and attraction strategies’ at the initial attraction to the school and town and then on the continuing attraction of the teacher via building a community sense of belonging, career opportunities and positive induction and mentoring practices. Across all the case studies there was strong evidence of the schools and their community working together actively and constantly to keep effective teachers for longer periods of time. The data highlighted complex layers of interaction between the system, the school and its broader community.

Although our focus was on teacher recruitment and retention in these ‘successful schools’, an important outcome of the study was the identification of the key role and influencing factor that the broader community plays in this regard. While some rural communities react suspiciously to any ‘new’ stranger, as the above quote indicates, viewing them with feelings of scepticism that ‘they won’t last long’, others, like those in our study, are welcoming and supportive. The negative view only appears to perpetuate a feeling for the new teacher that they are not truly welcome and predictably works to produce the self fulfilled prophecy of a speedy turnaround, while the welcoming one appears to serve to extend the period of stay. This study went beyond a rather simplistic notion of either being welcomed or not, (while this should not be underplayed by communities seeking to recruit new professionals) and uncovered particular community features which, across the case studies as a whole, appeared to be more likely to retain teachers. These findings have direct implications for communities, school leaders and for teacher education in ways in which they can: form strong social networks beyond the classroom; build resilience; and take up the work of preparing teachers to work in and with the communities in which their schools are situated. As Keane (1990) outlined, it is important to place:

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11 This chapter was prepared by Simone White. The assistance and input of Jo-Anne Reid, Maxine Cooper, Wendy Hastings and Kylie Press is gratefully acknowledged.
… emphasis on the need to bond rural partnerships and projects together around shared 'visions' and collective 'missions' in order to encourage the mobilization of collective effort, and to unify disparate aims and interests. Like the organization, the rural community can internalize risks and uncertainties and mobilize resources that are not available to individuals (p. 295).

Schools and teachers are important resources on which communities can draw to strengthen community projects, cultures and futures.

### Community, Networks and Resilience

Knowing that the community has a major role to play in positively influencing and supporting graduate teachers is a major theme from the study, and has contributed in turn to the need for teacher education programs to better prepare teachers to be not only classroom and school ‘ready’ but also ‘community’ ready (White, 2010; White & Kline, 2012).

In the analysis of the case studies, the broader community was consistently identified as a key factor contributing to both the successful recruitment and retention of both novice and experienced teachers in regional, rural and remote communities, and there emerged an interesting correlation between the case studies of successful schools and the success and resilient ‘attitude’ of the broader community. It is significant that a number of the case studies were in communities, no matter how small or how isolated, that had their own success stories of 'going against the trend' of rural decline to work against such issues of drought (geography), unemployment (demography) and loss of industry (economy) in ways that enabled whole community renewal and growth. This renewal was often through the strategic work of key individuals connecting together or through the mobilisation and collective strategic efforts through an organisation such as sporting clubs, not-for-profit associations or local government.

Further, the analysis identified the important relationship that the School, as a central and rallying place, as well as the Principal and teachers within the school, had in serving as key to the renewal process. The linked network threads between school leaders, teachers and the broader community and the ways in which the strong relationships between these groups worked, created a symbiotic network of support for all.

The findings in the case studies of successful strong networks in rural places is consistent with reports from rural sociologists (Castells, 1989; Clegg, 1990; Mingione, 1991; Sayer & Walker, 1992) who have paid attention to the strength of social networks as a cornerstone of rural community. The description by Day (1995) of rural Wales for example, as a 'community of communities', rests on the character of its interconnected social networks.

The way in which economic relationships within the rural population can interweave with ties of kinship, neighbourhood, religious worship, and formal and informal association to produce powerful, multi-dimensional, social bonds among individuals and families (Day 1995, p. 98).
These sociologists and others like them (Buller & Wright, 1990; Walsh, 1995) insist that the manner in which people act ‘economically’, and therefore, the extent to which they can undertake expansive or ‘developmental’ action, is wrapped up with the kinds of social relationships to which they belong, and that this in turn is connected intimately to the way in which they understand the world. Hence, cultural meanings and social bonds are part-and-parcel of economic action. Applied to the rural setting, this conclusion underlines the contention that approaches to rural development and renewal need to be ‘integrated’ or ‘holistic’.

The school functions, in any community, as the site where hopes and aspirations for the future are personified in the youth who are educated there. The health, and certainly the social desirability of a community can often be judged by its school, and as researchers we were struck by indicators of success in our case study schools that related, for community members, to issues of the attractive nature of the school to townspeople and nearby landowners. Historically, the rural rich in Australia have sent their children to the city to be educated, and where particular schools in our study appear to have reversed this trend, parents talk about this proudly. Whether this trend is as a result of straitened economic resources because of drought or not is immaterial … where members of ‘the squattocracy’ are seen to send their children to the local school, the status of both the school and the community as a whole appears to be enhanced.

One thing we have never had to worry about is in a lot of schools people send their children away to boarding school. The private schools … they just don’t send them away here, to boarding school. They send them to their state high school. Now, and for that reason, that’s important to understand that the smartest and the brightest have been sent away from a lot of towns. Smartest and the brightest don’t get sent away… (Principal, New South Wales)

As noted in Volume 2 (p. 57), this is an important factor in understanding why this community is able to attract and retain its teachers. It reflects the fact that the school described here has become what Teese et al. (2008) call a ‘fortified’ school site, one that is “rich in financial and cultural resources of students and the expertise and experience of teachers” (Teese, Lamb & Helme 2008, p. 18). They contrast schools like this with what they call “‘exposed’ sites, poor in many ways and taxed with competing academic and social demands”- a description that can be applied to many rural schools in less supportive spaces.

Discussion Of the Main Findings
The analysis of the interview transcripts across the sites, as well as the exploration of the artefacts, uncovered five main themes related to community, networks and resilience: community involvement, community renewal, community activism, school community partnerships and Principal-led community initiatives. Each of these themes is explored in detail below with illustrative quotes and examples taken from the case studies.

Community Involvement
One of the main findings of the study was that often the broader community took an active role in the recruitment and retention strategies of teachers, actually creating and remaining involved in community initiatives designed to retain teachers. These included initiatives such as community mentor programs, where a local business person, sporting organiser or parent undertook the role of supporting new teachers through the initial period of their stay in a
community, making sure they were introduced to others, invited to events and included in social gatherings. We also found official community-led welcome events such as in the Hamilton case of a formal Mayoral welcome dinner. We saw many examples where the community had participated in the induction process with community members offering to assist in settling new graduates in.

These ranged from community members walking new teachers through the town to familiarise them with their new place, hosting social events such as BBQ welcomes, to providing subsidised rent for beginning teachers. In one case, the community itself had rallied to build shared housing accommodation in the form of a duplex design, acknowledging the need for safe, affordable quality housing as a key factor in teachers settling into a new place (see the South Australian Case Studies, Vol 2, for more details of this).

Many case studies demonstrated how the broader community took an active role in the recruitment and retention strategies of teachers actually creating and being involved in community initiatives designed to retain teachers. Projects such as a community mentor program or a community-led welcome event, such as in the Hamilton case of a formal mayoral welcome dinner. In other examples, the community had developed and implemented an induction process with community members offering to assist in settling new graduates in their first year. Other initiatives ranged from community members walking new teachers through the town to familiarise them to their new place; hosting home-based social events such as BBQ welcomes and to families/business providing subsidised rent for beginning teachers. Below are three different examples of the voices of those participating in the study on community-based initiatives.

And the great initiative we've just started with is that if a teacher is actually new to town, they have a mentor in the school, which is the academic support for them to supply all the answers on the little things like where's the sticky tape and how much is morning tea, and now we've brought in the parent club – putting a parent up to be a town buddy who supplies the answers as to what's available in town. (Principal, Victoria)

When we have young teachers come in, they are normally quickly gathered up into the group of youngies in the school and they have a wonderful support network. They go out to dinner, out to the pub, once a week and they have BBQs. So quickly their social lives are developed for them, which is great for young teachers. If they can be in a group, they feel welcome and they feel ‘this is where I want to be’. (Principal, New South Wales)

…..but the community sort of steps up, so they find out – someone will say ‘do you play this sport, whatever’ and they found out that I played hockey at that stage, so I got a phone call from a guy in Berri ‘hi, I heard you played hockey so come down to training’, so I got straight into hockey – they chased you down which was good. Then the treasurer here invited me out to golf one weekend and now we do social golf all the time so we sort of in the community that way. (Beginning Teacher, New South Wales)

Community Renewal
The level of the community’s involvement in a number of the Case Study schools moved beyond welcome strategies. Several of the communities we studied were involved in more organised, whole community attempts to revitalise their town and showed acknowledgement of the need to market the assets and strengths of their place, and renew their economic and social resources, in order to be more attractive to new teachers and other professionals. The extract below highlights
the ways in which one community resourced its own renewal and in turn provided attractive places for new teachers to be welcomed and feel they had equal opportunities for lifestyle choices. The quotes also highlight the active approach the community adopted for their own sustainability:

For a town our size we’ve got huge facilities. We’ve probably got facilities that a town twice the size wouldn’t have. In terms of sporting facilities - I’ve been involved and so have my brothers in establishing these things. We’ve got a forty bed home for the aged. We’ve got thirty+ hospital beds. We’ve got really good medical services. The perception of the community here is the community needs something, the community will get up and raise the money. (Teacher, Queensland)

It’s important to look out for friends and neighbours – and this happens now. Our local people shop locally, supporting our own businesses. The council has spent millions on upgrades to the main street ... all this is a feature of our new start. The Strategic Plan outlines the Shire’s intense commitment to new people – community to welcome newcomers – and of course we need new professionals, with their families. And we are inviting these. (Community member, New South Wales)

It’s cultural things that the community gets involved in and you don’t just come here now for sport because you can go to Adelaide to get to your highlighted social things like your balls and your races and your cultural weekends. That stuff is now here and that’s very much supported by the community. We keep bringing that stuff and keeping that stuff in the community. There were people who were, perhaps, rural kids, who have been to Adelaide to uni or work and they might work back in the rural area and they miss Adelaide but don’t want to go to Adelaide anymore. They just change a bit. They’re having a good time here. They’re the ones that are getting the likes of the Ram and Ewe ball... they’re the ones that are bringing the city back here ... It all gets back to the facilities. It’s just a draw card, and if you bring those people in, they attract others and it just comes to a hub and it’s a good place to be. (Parent, South Australia)

Likewise, the need to invest in the school and the teachers was often viewed as a key strategy by local industry. The quote below highlights this thinking:

And business people are starting to realise – in the chamber and the shire realise – that if we have a good school, we attract people to the town so they’re starting to see – well, ones with a bit of foresight and vision can see that if you have a school when they move or shift towns or the sort of tree changes –there’s more and more of those people coming to a place like. (Experienced Teacher, Western Australia)

Other local shires understood the importance of providing employment for their post-compulsory school students in order to keep younger community members productive, and so strived to provide flexible work environments and work opportunities with the schools. While this strategy may not initially appear related to addressing teacher workforce issues, a deeper analysis shows that the teachers at this school identified high youth employment as a positive social and outcome because it resulted in less behaviour management issues related to students feeling disengaged.

Other local shires understood the importance of providing employment for their post-compulsory school students as one strategy to keep younger community members active and productive and so strived to provide flexible work environments and work opportunities in partnership with the schools. The following quote is illustrative of both the community attitude to skilling and keeping younger workers, as well as maintaining a strong sense of community pride and commitment.
It is because we have so many partnerships with work and enterprise… We’ve got a lot of businesses in the district that take on school-based apprenticeships. We have school based apprenticeships. We’ve got a lot of kids working in the street after school in the supermarkets. They’ve got retail apprenticeships – or traineeships I think. And we’re involved in lots of things like tree planting around the place and Clean up Australia days and things like that for example, the sporting. It’s sort of as if we’re all integrated. (Experienced Teacher, South Australia)

Teacher Involvement In Community Activism

It is notable that the Leximancer analysis described in Chapter 3 has demonstrated that, across the corpus of teacher, parent and community interviews, comments indicating an increased investment by the community in the wellbeing of the teachers were paralleled by the greater likelihood that the teachers also spoke about ‘giving back’ to and ‘being involved’ in the community. This relationship appeared satisfying to both and overall, seems to have contributed to teachers staying in the community because they had developed a sense of involvement and support. The two examples below provide different perspectives on community involvement from the teachers themselves:

Well I suppose they have different things on... they have their Race Day out at the racecourse, and that’s like a whole town day, a lot of community members go to that. Quite a lot of our teachers volunteer to help out with that, and other events like Rodeos etc....That’s right and that’s another way of getting to know the community. Getting yourself known in the community too. (Experienced Teacher, Western Australia)

I got involved in a few activities locally, like I joined the local drama group, I played some sport, I probably did much more of those sort of things than I would ever have dreamed of doing in [the city]. And so that got me involved in activities and groups and I think that’s probably the biggest difference between being in the city where you’ve probably already got your groups and coming to a country area where perhaps you have to get involved to be a part of things. And I think as soon as you get involved you’re accepted very quickly. (Beginning Teacher, Victoria)

The rural principals and teachers of the successful case studies appeared to understand this theory and actively sought to apply it in their daily working lives. They worked to connect their beginning teachers into the community fabric and they were keen to uncover the networks and strengths that the beginning teachers carried with them into the community. In many ways, the Principals mined the social and economic resources of staff in ways that would support further school and community renewal. Likewise, members of the community connected and tapped into the school families’ resources, both current and past, to again support new teachers and other professionals, new families and new business. In the following extract, an experienced teacher reflecting of her roles and work in her community.

I’ve done a lot of community work as well. I had a position called facilitator and community capacity building so I did a lot of collecting ideas from the community, what they want to focus on, where they were at, and their past, what they stand for, all the stuff that you were doing, so I worked a year or so in that. I did some research work on child care and then we established child care centres. I’ve done quite a bit of that community style work. (Experienced Teacher, Victoria)
Three case studies are particularly interesting as a set: Hamilton, St Arnaud and West Wyalong. We discuss these here in terms of the three dimensions of the model of rural social space that has driven our analysis, allowing us to notice particular aspects about the economic, social and environmental dimensions of our study in each site, and highlight the involvement of the school in each setting.

**Hamilton (Economy)**

For example, with regard to the Hamilton economy, the following quote highlights that although Hamilton was a leading wool economy, the town, like many others, more recently had suffered considerably in the drought:

> Well when we came back here 15 years ago, Hamilton was really struggling, really struggling with the rural recession and there wasn’t a great feeling around the town. A lot of the shops down the street had closed, you know numbers in the schools were low, those sorts of things. (Experienced Teacher, Hamilton)

The town, through the local shire, identified education as a key ‘selling’ point to attract new families and in turn professionals into the community. The town shire developed a marketing plan to attract new professionals and families into the community. They created a series of locally-based television advertisements using local members to market the strengths of living in Hamilton. The local shire then also worked with the Australian Independent Schools Association and a person was employed two days a week to support all pre-service teachers who came to work at the town through a form of mentoring. All pre-service teachers were provided free accommodation at one of the schools, in the form of shared housing, and free food in return for tutoring and coaching after school.

> So the community has always seen education as pretty central to the town and I guess that brings in teachers who bring in families, who all keep it all going as well. (Deputy Principal, Hamilton)

**St Arnaud (Demography)**

St Arnaud is located in a low socio-economic area with high unemployment and social issues that accompany this. Through the collective efforts of a number of community members and co-ordinated by the primary school Principal, the school and the town have been successful in a number of nationally-funded grants to better support families in order for the students to learn.

> It’s critical they have an understanding of how a small community works and the value of volunteerism and how that is the strength and the connectives in the community because of all those things that you heard listed before. If it wasn’t for volunteerism that wouldn’t happen. It’s like the glue … and it depends on how strong your volunteerism is as to how long your glue is [going to last] in your community and how fragmented and haw united they are. Also, it’s probably critical for your local government to have a collective vision in that the people know which way they’re heading, otherwise you get this ‘pulling apart’ stuff. The school, communities, everyone, needs to be connected and there has to be that communication between your primary and your secondary and the connections between all your different services. (Principal, St Arnaud)
West Wyalong (Geography)

After the closure of the gold mine that brought prospectors and the initial settlers to the town in the nineteenth century, the central NSW town of West Wyalong had relied on pastoral industry for many years until the re-emergence of mining close to the town began to exploit its natural resources and geographical location at the crossroad of the major inland road links. The school has played a major role in the construction of an environmental space that enhances the land impacted on by the mine – and thereby has influenced the sustainability of the town as a whole.

*With our environmental programs, again I don't know if the old 'Triple C's' been mentioned to you – the Lake Cowal Conservation Centre – that again was a [Principal] thing. We had the mine out there and [Principal] said, ‘This is crazy that we’ve got this huge enterprise happening out there and there must be some links that we can make’. So not only do we have links with careers and they’re offering to come in and assist us or talk to our kids, what eventuated was we are looking at our environment and all these climate warming issues, all these sorts of stuff is increasing in scope.

So what we established out there was the Lake Cowal Conservation Centre and it’s a partnership between a multi-national company, the Lake Cowal Foundation which is a not-for-profit community organisation, solely aimed at doing environmental works out there, the Lachlan Catchment Management Authority and the DET through our school. (Experienced Teacher, West Wyalong)*

It is clear from this example too how geographical, economic and social factors impact on the social spaces in this particular rural community, and how the school can positively influence the sustainability of the place through its actions.

School Community Partnerships

Many of the case studies highlighted that school leaders could successfully partner with their parent body and local community members to provide greater flexibility to resource their schools. For example, in a Victorian school, the Principal, working with staff who resided in the community, agreed to ensure that no teacher would lose their position, even though the student numbers within the school had declined. There were other examples where schools connected with others in their region to provide greater levels of curriculum provision for their secondary students.

The following illustration describes a cross-school relationship in which a number of small schools worked together to the greater social and academic benefit of their students:

*There was a [parent] council established and the council was two groups from each school plus principals and the department didn’t know what to do with us. They’ve never had a ‘cross schools’ one. It was originally 5 schools and we fought very hard at that stage for our kids’ rights to [a broad curriculum]. I mean drought has made the need more essential because kids can’t go away somewhere to get access to some subjects for their careers and it’s worked. We worked really hard in those early days to get electronic white boards, all those sorts of things… The creation of the amalgamated school education in Jamestown is a very serious business. (Experienced Teacher, South Australia)*

Superficially, CCB presents as a useful way of approaching school and community reform in contexts of disadvantage, but closer analysis reveals it to be pre-disposed to deployment as a cover under which to blame schools and communities, while handing over responsibility. What is posited as an alternative is a ‘community organizing’ approach that is more political, activist, and attuned to providing forms of analysis and leadership skills with which communities and schools...
can begin to tackle some of the underlying conditions producing the debilitating inequities. (Smyth 2009)

**Principal-led Resourcing Of Community Initiatives**

In several of the examples above, we have already highlighted the role of the Principal in being able to attract resources to secure equitable provision of access and experience for students. In another example, below, the Principal recounts how the school meets the needs of its students by tapping into the local community resources and sharing teachers across the region.

> I think there’s three music teachers. And they teach to schools, and I think the number of students doing music in the last three or four years has probably multiplied ten times, so we pay people to come in. Our guitar teacher has just been nominated for a golden award at Tamworth, so there are certainly skills out there with our community and it’s a matter of when we can’t get a regular music teacher, we outsource it. (Principal, Tasmania)

In the second example, the Principal explains how he and the school have accessed support and resources for the families who were struggling financially due to unemployment. Both are interesting examples of the ways in which through the linking of the school and the community, teachers wanted to be connected and stay at the school.

In a Victorian site, the effects of the drought was substantial on the people of the community, in terms of the effects on business, and the stress that families faced in terms of both income and loss of services. As the Principal in this Case Study school said:

> If they lose their job, do they stay in the community and try and find something or do they leave? So we see all that through their kids. We see the pressures and we do a lot of work here in connecting with family relationships. It’s not accepted here to notice that a kid’s not happy and something’s going on and not to follow through as much as we can. That’s been very successful but it can only get better because at the end of the day, it doesn’t matter what we do here, if they go back to pretty crappy surroundings it’s a bit hard. We’re all going to struggle. We’ve been actually able to support a lot of families ourselves with our connections through St Vinnies and the Salvo’s. The school even now has a trailer with a water tank on it and a deal where we can get water for emergency water for families and deliver it. Anything like that we spend a lot of time looking at it making sure we don’t step on the toes of local businesses but in this case there isn’t anyone. So I guess that’s a challenge being able to support the families who are suffering hardships in rural areas. And from a staffing perspective, we’ve only got half our staff who live here in this community, so as far as doing things together and even trying to organise social things, people seem to have their own lives. They’re quite happy with that a lot of the time. (Principal, Victoria)

In one site, where the local community supports a daily Breakfast Program for children who travel in to school on early morning buses, the Principal has led the close community relationship not by his own action, but by his support to enable what he saw as a good idea by a new staff member some years ago to be given official approval. The program involves staff, students, the local Red Cross and community business people every day – and is supported by the wider community through fund raising, where the whole school participates and can raise the funds to support the program for a year, in a single afternoon.

> We’re a rural community and we need to realise that some of our kids, even though as the crow flies it’s only a 15 minute or 20 minute journey to school, but when they’re got to catch a bus that zig zags all over the place, sometimes in the middle of winter when you’re leaving home at 7:30 in the morning and
spending an hour on a bus that’s not heated, a hot chocolate when you get to school goes a long way. It doesn’t mean that the child is needy or that they come from a needy home, but it’s about looking at the welfare of our kids from all angles and saying let’s provide a really safe happy community. (Experienced Teacher, New South Wales)

In summarising the effect that such partnerships have for the school, the teacher, cited above, who spoke about the role of his Principal in bringing a significant conservation centre to the community also noted the beneficial effects of such close community connections for students:

Sometimes I feel the need to make the point that we are not a backwater in education: we’re the opposite. We have some of the greatest initiatives in education programs available anywhere. (Experienced Teacher, New South Wales)

**New Teachers Changing Community**

The case studies predominantly highlighted positive approaches to teacher recruitment and retention. However, it is also important to note that for some teachers the towns did not feel welcoming or supportive. These stories are important to tell as the issues can be used as examples of what not to do. For a few of the teachers interviewed, the rural communities in our study appeared to react suspiciously to any ‘new’ teacher entering their town. As the excerpt below illustrates, this teacher’s feelings of scepticism about the reality of the welcome to newcomers has clouded his arrival in the community:

We go to pubs every Friday night and the questions we’re asked is “You here for 3 years or off at the end of the year”? So we’re seen as ‘transients’... always. (Beginning teacher, Queensland)

Negative reaction to new people by some members in the community appeared to perpetuate feelings for the new teacher that they were not truly welcome and predictably worked to produce the self-fulfilling prophecy of a speedy turnaround, whereas a welcoming attitude appeared to contribute in some measure to extend the period of stay. These findings, echoing those of other researchers who have found similar situation over decades, suggest that this distrust of outsiders is significantly entrenched in some rural communities Boylan et al (1993), who investigated the degree of community appreciation of teachers’ work and the accuracy of teachers’ perceptions of community commitment to education. A major factor in how well teachers coped with rural and remote teaching positions was the level at which they saw the community valuing them and their work (Boylan et al, 1993; Yarrow et al 1999). Boylan and colleagues also noted that approximately half of the teachers interviewed in their study felt that it was important that they were treated as locals by the community.

A number of examples were also provided of teachers who identified that they did not initially identify or agree with the values or attitudes of the community, or display its ‘normed behaviours’. And in these cases, with the support of the Principal or with like minded individual members in the local community, were able to ‘push against the stereotypes’ that often exist for new teachers in a rural place, and forge new teacher identities that came to be accepted over time. In this way the sorts of social difference that teachers can bring to communities, is welcomed by many people in the schools we studied as adding to the education of the students. As one teacher said:
It’s almost political. I think that any system that doesn’t allow for diversity, in terms of the staff, of any school or any community is dangerous [...] I think that’s a threat where you’ve got no guy walking into the town like [well-known educational figure] who was Principal of Yanco Agricultural College who walked into this town in a kaftan and people saw a man in a dress - this is going back 30 years. They saw the diversity like guys who were all surfies – a couple of guys who would rather be surfing – who have that different cultural thing to share with the kids.... One thing we don’t get - we have very people from Central Asian backgrounds come into the school. I’d like to see that. (Experienced Teacher, New South Wales)

Issues raised by new teachers also included facing difficulties in being a newcomer. This issue was raised across sites, and both community members and school staff offered recommendations to assist new teachers, particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, into rural communities. The Principal at Alvie Consolidated School, in Victoria, for instance, shared his own experience to support a new teacher from China who had been appointed to the school:

I really dislike racism, and that was another issue, and I knew that by Lei coming here he may face some racism, especially in rural and regional areas it’s entrenched and is hard for people to break out of that, and that’s something Lei’s got a concern with personally so I really didn’t want to see that happen... Because I’m from a European background myself and I could feel a similarity there, I didn’t come from overseas myself but my parents are Polish and I’ve had elements of that … but I could understand that that could happen, so I wanted to support him as much as I could. So when he started I made him aware that this could happen. (Principal, Victoria)

In many of the cases, new teachers provided examples were they did not feel particularly welcomed by the community or feared that because they did not want to adopt the particular culture that they would not be accepted or want to stay. Examples were provided of teachers not wanting to fit into the stereotypical drinking culture or sporting roles of ‘boys play football’ and ‘girls play netball’.

I distinctly remember my 1st year here and one of the male teachers who had been here 2 years, saying but “you have to go down the pub and drink with parents”, like or you won’t fit in. Now I don’t drink, I’m not against it or anything, it’s just that I can’t drink, I’m allergic to it and I remember thinking to myself, ‘well it won’t be me’. And it hasn’t happened like that at all, so I still have a chuckle about that... Whereas I think I have demonstrated that the children are my priority. (Experienced Teacher, Victoria)

One of our participants, a beginning teacher who had entered the profession after retraining from industry, told a story of one of his colleagues who had moved to a smaller town, further west. Here, the effects of extended drought and economic hardship in the community made his capacity to settle there very uncertain:

I know from just one case in particular, they moved to a place out in the Midwest and his wife’s very skilled at Primary School aged kids, three kids and she had a lot of management skills like with computers and software and she got a job in the school for two or three days a week. Anyway that caused all kinds of issues in the town, where it was kind of like, jobs for the boys. You know the teacher’s wife gets a job in the school, but she was just really well qualified. So that created a real rift and then a whole lot of other issues basically about fitting into a small community where you come in as
an outsider and the focus, this is a really small community, I won't mention it but, the focus is on you and … (Beginning Teacher, New South Wales)

Other examples were provided, although it is notable that these were always stories of ‘elsewhere’ than the case study sites themselves. It is predictable, given our selection methods, that our analysis would show very few instances of communities that were divided, and none that was antagonistic to the school and its teachers. In one New South Wales community, located close enough to a large population centre for the wealthy out-of-town farmers to send their children to school there, or to follow traditional family patterns of sending them to boarding schools in Sydney, the local school was proud of its long tradition as the State School for the less well-off. The most data that related to negative experiences communities was that collected from the pre-serviced teacher surveys.

**Communities Supporting Pre-service Teacher Education**

It is significant that comments related to negative or difficult experience in rural communities were particularly prevalent in the survey data and interviews with preservice teachers. Further, the data indicates that most of these were made by students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, talking about their practicum placements. There were several who felt that their needs were not always understood by the community and that the strengths they brought to the town were not celebrated and utilised. One student commented that her city dress was an issue for her when she arrived in the town:

> People knew you were different in the way you dressed. Being a female, it was uncomfortable when some of the local farmers were rude... It was hard to break into the social groups within the staff but it didn't take long when you persisted. (Pre-service Teacher, Survey)

Others noted that, having chosen to do a rural placement, they found the reality somewhat different from how they had imagined it:

> I guess I had a very idealistic view of what it would be like with my children getting to see a country school in action and me being outside in the huge grounds implementing experiential and active learning experiences. However, I felt my assoc teacher (who was very young) was immediately defensive, did not meet regularly meet with me and given the efforts I had gone to in choosing the placement seemed markedly disinterested! Having said that the staff occasionally surprised me with offers of help - it was just very difficult to 'read' the situation. There were no 'overt' welcomes, introductions etc. Upon reflection with my Mum who sent us to the school 25 years ago after immigrating from South Africa the culture seemed to have been the same. [...] Basically it put me off moving to the country. (Pre-service Teacher, Interview)

This extract speaks to a common issue for rural schools where staff are young and inexperienced, and often not well-positioned or resourced to support pre-service teachers. Although there are many who reported that their experience as a pre-service teacher in a rural school had been extremely beneficial, there were others who found similar situations neither pleasant nor edifying, as the following two comments from survey respondents indicate.

> Not at all. Although it was great to have the shoe on the other foot and being the odd one out and people staring. Something us white folk never get to feel. More people should be forced to have these experiences and it might make them a little less ignorant!! (Pre-service Teacher, Survey)
Being called a 'snob' for asking to purchase the Weekend Australian. Hearing locals loudly express their hatred of tourists or city folk when in supermarkets or post offices. Having my house broken into. (Pre-service Teacher, Survey).

Fitting in to rural communities and schools can be difficult for some, and where the school and community leadership does not make strong efforts to include and welcome teachers who are racially, culturally or socially different, teachers might understandably find it difficult to remain there long. The following extracts from teachers interviewed at two different Case Study sites, however, show them as able to reflect on their own induction to the community and school, which, although difficult at times, has been offset by a sense of enjoyment and success in the classroom that caused them to want to stay teaching there:

There's a real culture in country towns which I found a problem that you meet people through church or through sport. I'm not sporty and I'm not Christian, so I found it very difficult and I'm quite sure that the Chinese teachers do too. (Experienced Teacher, Victoria)

There tends to be like a stereotype, you know I teach Chinese, therefore, I should be in charge of table tennis because that's an Asian thing. There's a lot of stereotyping and a lack of understanding. (Experienced Teacher, Victoria)

As highlighted in Chapter Two, this issue for the retention of staff in rural schools is longstanding. Mathes & Carlson (1986), McIntosh (1989) and Lunn (1997) argued that, unlike those in urban settings, rural teachers need support from fellow teachers and community members. Lunn (1997) found that the problems associated with some teachers' integration into the community arose because of socio-cultural dislocation – that is, teachers from urban areas have difficulty in learning or displaying the types of behaviours expected of them in the rural setting. This notion of rural difference in terms of socio-cultural, political values and attitudes is consistently cited throughout the literature (Williams & Cross, 1987; Woolman, 1990; Garman & Alkire, 1992; Carlson, 1992; Luft, 1992; Boylan, 1993; Boylan et al, 1993; Pesek, 1993). It is particularly difficult for pre-service teachers entering a community for only a short period of time, and this highlights the need for teacher education to address the issues of cultural fit and the need for an understanding of rural social space to be included in pres-service teacher education.

Conclusion
It is important to note in closing, that the stereotypes of rural communities and what it means to be a local is also shifting, in particular, with increased fly in and fly out workers and transient workers. This is realised differently in different locations, although it always has an effect on the school.

The population is probably more transient in the last five years – five to ten years maybe – with the likes of the wind farm and the likes of the mining industry where there's a lot of fly in, fly out type work. The town has definitely grown in the last 10 to 15 years. Prior to that, people could have walked up and down the street and they would have known everybody, now they don't. It's noticeable in the supermarket, every second person is a stranger because we have the wind farm and the mining, and its noticeable how many strangers there are. The demographics has certainly changed from being a very traditional, stable type community to an in/out type transit community. (Parent, New South Wales)
In a Queensland mining community, a local community member explained that the mining company does not see investment in this particular townsite as economical, and this has begun to create major problems for the school.

... and when we've had town meetings, like [the Principal] goes quite often and she says all the time, you know, ‘our school does not benefit from the mine because you’re not encouraging families to come here.’ And they just fob it off and say well, there’s nothing we can do about that. [...] It really destroys that sense of community. [Workers are bussed in from another town] start work here at like 6:00, then they finish at something like 6:00 at night and then have to go back two hours in the bus.

That’s it, but the mine does not help out really, like they had an agreement to give us $1,500 I think it is every year, which is nothing. Like that’s fuel in one machine for a day you know and we’ve only just (a couple of months ago) gotten last year’s money, so they give no help whatsoever. Every two years we send our kids, Grade Six and Seven on a camp to either Canberra or Brisbane, so that they get that you know, wider view of the world. and our fundraising that goes for two years. We raise $20,000 to $30,000 to send them. No, so it’s two years of fundraising to get that money.

It is and I wrote a letter to one of the, the liaison officer who works in the community from the mine, to you know ask for them to sponsor our rides for the school fete, so it’d be you know like $1,500 or something like that and I wrote a few letters and had a meeting with them and all these things and nothing, no response. Not even sorry we’ve decided not to give you the money. ... but nothing. My mother-in-law used to live in Mt Isa and she said that whatever the kids wanted at school, like the mine got. You know they would bring in, they’d have concerts every year and all these things and the mine would pay for the lot. (Community member, Queensland)

The sorts of commitment that Principals and staff members need to make in order to sustain successful school-community relations in any rural site are significant. When the forms of rural social space that support a community with a strong belief in the value of education, and a commitment to the aspirations of young people, we have seen that communities can make a real difference in the attraction and retention of teachers. We have also seen that where they work with schools to respond to an ethic of care for the local environment, and, through investment by local council and enterprise, build community capital that will be strong enough to ensure access to goods and services that sustain the community as a whole, teachers will also be sustained (Barmera, West Wyalong, Kununurra). Sometimes, geographical assets can serve as strong community capital, and attract teachers to remain in a place because of the lifestyle affordances of natural or ‘enhanced’ environmental features (Manjimup, Richmond; Temora) or the location of the place close enough to a large centre to attract because of its contrast (Alvie, Yass). As the geography, people and economy of places interact to allow the continuing production of community capital – either building on a strong history or through meeting the challenge of adaptability and capacity for change –leaders in schools can play a major role in connecting in and strengthening the culture of the community for both their students and teachers.

In the majority of the case studies there was strong evidence that positive investment in people, place and (social-personal) profit led to teachers wanting to stay in rural schools and a culture of success further breeding success. Induction at all levels of the system, school and community appeared important. Interestingly and importantly in almost all the successful school case studies there were also examples of effective teachers who themselves went against the trend of fitting into particular rural community stereotypes. These teachers challenged the status quo of the induction culture of the community in various ways. Further, there were many positive examples
where these teachers were then supported by either school or community leaders, who established new ‘accepted’ ways of teachers working and living in the community. Stories of teachers successfully ‘going against the grain’ are important, as they provide all graduate teachers with evidence that it is possible for them to take up a rural career and will also provide information for all communities to better equip themselves with supportive ways to diversify their teaching workforce.
Chapter Eight

_Pre-service Teacher Education For Rural Schools?_

Jo-Anne Reid, Wendy Hastings and Jodie Kline

Introduction

How can initial teacher education better prepare beginning teachers for the kinds of teaching and social environments that characterise rural and remote schools in the Australian context? In this chapter, we present a detailed account of one subset of the findings from three years of survey data collected as part of the _Renewing Rural Teacher Education: Sustaining Schooling for Sustainable Futures_ research project (‘TERRAnova’) funded by the Australian Research Council over the years 2008-2011. These results strongly suggest that initial teacher education programs need to do more to prepare and support new teachers to understand the nature of rural social space (Reid et al., 2010) and to prepare themselves for, and anticipate success in, rural and remote schools. TERRAnova sought to address what was and remains a national crisis in attracting and retaining teachers and other professionals to rural areas.

Background

In spite of a general oversupply of teachers, allied with continued criticism of poorly-funded teacher education programs as failing to produce high quality graduates, and the introduction of schemes such as _Teach for Australia_, and _Teach Next_ that aim to attract a different sort of teacher candidate to the profession, there remains an acute shortage of teachers in rural communities in all Australian states. This is particularly the case in key areas such as Mathematics, Science and English. Teacher shortages result in reduced curriculum offerings in some areas, and impoverished curriculum practices in others — often due to lack of expertise and experience among those teachers who are willing to take up positions in rural areas. Rural and remote schools are seen as less desirable and unattractive because of their location, climate and/or lack of social amenities and infrastructure. Most Australian states are offering increasingly attractive incentive programs to lure teachers to such schools in order to deal with projections of future shortfall in overall teacher numbers, as a large proportion of the current teacher workforce reaches retirement age over the next five years. This shortfall will be felt most acutely in rural schools and communities, as traditionally these are the schools identified as ‘hard to staff’ (Roberts, 2004). Early indications (Patty, 2011) suggest some governments may resort to school closures, while all systems are working to increase the effectiveness and capability of information communication technologies to maintain curriculum offerings, deliver instruction and support student learning in locations where appropriately skilled teachers cannot be attracted or retained.

We have argued elsewhere in this report that students in remote and rural areas have as much right to high quality forms of compulsory education as those in metropolitan areas. Further, although we believe that an equity agenda in this area should not imply that all students must have, or need the same educational experience, and that situated, place-based recognition of difference (White & Reid, 2008) needs to form the foundation of state educational provision

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12 This chapter was prepared by Jo-Anne Reid, Wendy Hastings and Jodie Kline. The content of the chapter was presented at the 2011 AERA Annual meeting in New Orleans. The assistance and input of Graeme Lock is gratefully acknowledged.

13 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBXuc86d45Q&feature=player_embedded)
(Green et al., 2008), we support the use of distance learning for rural students to access curriculum opportunities beyond what can be provided in their home community. But we also argue that well-prepared and experienced teachers are urgently needed in rural schools and communities to ensure their sustainability as communities. A recent study that mapped levels of social disadvantage across Australia underlines the need and urgency of social infrastructure in rural and remote locations. *Dropping off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia* (Vinson, 2007) reported that despite recent strong economic growth across the country, “some communities remain caught in a spiral of low school attainment, high unemployment, poor health, high imprisonment rates and child abuse”, and that “pockets of concentrated and severe social disadvantage have become entrenched across rural and remote as well as suburban Australia.” This is reported as particularly the case for Aboriginal Australians (Sutton, 2009; Kenway et al., 2006; Cowlishaw, 2004), and as the population of Aboriginal school age children continues to increase in rural and remote locations, with a major national focus on ‘Closing the Gap’ (DEEWR, 2009) between the attainment of these children and others across the country, there is increasing need for schools and teachers to be better prepared to deal with the history, politics and educational needs of Aboriginal children prior to beginning teaching (NSWAECG, 2011).

The literature on rural teacher education programs advocates extensive and rich experiences in rural settings in terms of an official practicum (Matthew, Carr & Hudson’s (2001) report on South Australian first-year teachers; the Tomlinson Report on Western Australian teachers (1994); the Queensland Lumm Report (1997); Boylan & Hemmings (1992); Yarrow, Herschell & Millwater (1999); the National inquiry into rural and remote education (HREOC, 2000); and Ralph (2002). Murphy & Cross (1990) indicated in their Canadian study that teachers in the rural setting needed:

1. a realistic understanding of the rural school community; and
2. more field experience.

Murphy and Cross (1990) illustrated that their study’s third and fourth year pre-service teachers were required to participate in rural school practicums which included several key points:

- Teach in multi-grade classrooms.
- Teach at both primary and intermediate levels.
- Participate in community activities.
- Assist with extra-curricula activities.
- Assist with extra-curricular activities offered in their schools.
- Teach in at least two rural schools.

Taking these studies into account, Roberts (2004) recommended that rural teaching experiences should provide the pre-service teacher trainees with:

- experiential learning about living and working in rural places;
- real-world knowledge about rurality, place and community which provided a knowledge-based foundation, upon which prospective teachers can choose the type of rural place and school they wish to work and live in;
- an appreciation of the social dynamics and cultural awareness and sensitivity that exists in rural communities; and
- a demystification of rural as ‘their place’ in the minds and hearts of the predominant city-trained pre-service teacher education student.
Murphy & Cross (1990), Roberts (2004) and Halsey (2005) concluded that the teachers experiencing a rural practicum were better prepared for the particular needs of future rural postings and furthermore, positive experiences of ‘rural community life’ were experienced. Each study also saw that beginning teachers were more likely to remain teaching in rural and remote areas as a result.

Halsey (2005) argues that most respondents in his report indicated few downsides to their country placements, stating that myths they had were dispelled, that their experiences were broadened, that they had an improved understanding of communities and new skills and knowledges. Furthermore, rural practicums often resulted in recruitment. Clearly, benefits for the pre-service teacher, the school, students and community were seen:

Schools value an influx of new ideas and the availability of extra talents in sport and the performing arts, for example. As well, communities gain from the additional temporary talent pool. (Halsey, 2005, p. 51)

Pre-service teachers did raise concerns with their rural placements with issues related to: students ‘at risk’; dislocation in different places; distance from their supervisor; and concerns with their own teaching competence. (Halsey, 2005)

Boylan & Hemmings (1992) along with Yarrow et al. (1999), Yarrow, Herschell & Millwater (1999), Ralph (2002) and Roberts (2004) reported on the positive attitudinal changes towards a rural appointment resulting from pre-service students completing a rural or remote practical teaching experience:

… participating students found that the opportunity to experience living and teaching in a rural or remote school and its community promoted a great understanding and appreciation of the conditions existing in these schools, as well as reducing misconceptions about ‘outback’ teaching (Boylan & Green, forthcoming, p. 6).

Vance & Sullivan (1993) & Meiklejohn & Barrett (1994) also emphasised positive experiences gained by pre-service teachers participating in rural teaching programs. Both studies report on the Queensland ‘Isolated Schools Project’, where for a three week period, pre-service teachers were sent to areas in rural and remote Queensland. These teachers were able to participate in the ‘full range of teaching and community activities’. Both reports also argue that any pre-service teachers’ misunderstandings in regards to the school and community were usually addressed during practicum.

Boylan et al. (1994) reported that a Rural Education and Training Unit had been established at Charles Sturt University within the Faculty of Education (p. 23). The unit develops pre-service courses which comprised various rural teaching concerns including the rural and school communities, roles and expectations of rural teachers, multigrade classes and practice teaching in small rural schools.

The NSWDET Beyond the Line program (2000) offers pre-service teachers the opportunity to spend a week looking at schools in some of the rural districts in NSW:

The aim is to expose these prospective teachers to the people, communities and students in rural communities in the hope that they will see rural teaching as a viable future
Some evidence that the program is having some positive impact on recruiting teachers to rural areas has been reported. (Boylan & Wallace, 2002; McConaghy & Bloomfield, 2004). Boylan & Wallace (2002) indicate that the program is beginning to show positive rural recruitment benefits for the NSWDET.

Roberts argues, however, that the Beyond the Line program only amounts to a ‘promotional tour’ rather than any practical experience, and the NSW DET’s ‘sudden appropriation’ of the program devastated the, ‘personal aspects of the program, instead making it a mass-program imposed on schools with a bit of sight-seeing thrown in’ (p. 37). He states that the evidence of recruitment as a direct result of pre-service teacher participation with the program was pre- NSW DET involvement and the expansion of the program.

The argument that all teacher education courses should have compulsory rural components quickly becomes an ideal when the practical costs are exposed (Roberts, 2004; and Halsey, 2005). Halsey’s Pre-service Country Teaching in Australia: What’s Happening – What Needs to Happen (2005) report for The Rural Education Forum in Australia (REFA) analyses qualitative and quantitative data gathered from 23 teacher education programs around Australia. The report found that for pre-service teachers, the main concerns were: the cost pressure of placements, accommodation and maintenance of their rent commitments back ‘home’; travel to and from a place; loss of income from part-time work (as well as the possibility of losing their job or missing out on wage increments); and the extra costs associated with rural living (p. 2). The main pressures for universities were seen to be the costs of: administering placement programs and providing supervision; the hidden costs of personal time; and time associated with travel to country placements (usually not calculated as part of workloads) (p. 2). Halsey argues as a result that universities are very reluctant to place anyone in a school that is a long distance from their home base, and this appears to be greater for placements in remote indigenous communities (p. 53).

Clearly, if the system wants teachers to be enriched by rural practicum experiences they will need to find ways to overcome these concerns. Halsey argues that in terms of pre-service preparation, teacher education programs need to make the pre-service teacher feel as though they belong to a profession that is universal in character while at the same time working with them in defined location(s) (Halsey, 2005, p. 41).

From this perspective, we argue that it is imperative for education stakeholders, including teacher education providers, to ensure that they attend to and act on the ‘problem’ of staffing the rural school (Roberts, 2004). A main objective of the research has been to identify the nature of successful teacher education and recruitment strategies aimed at making rural teaching an attractive and long-term career option at both primary and secondary levels. Three main goals were targeted, using different research strategies to gather information about:

1. successful teacher education strategies aimed specifically at student teachers and graduate teachers that encourage them to move to and subsequently remain in rural areas;
2. recruitment strategies that attract, and retain, quality teachers to schools in rural areas;
3. determining whether final year student teachers, who receive an incentive to undertake a rural-based practicum, intend to teach in a rural school once they graduate.

In this chapter we focus on just the first of these, in order to identify ways that teacher education might better prepare new members of the profession to teach all our children — including those in rural and remote communities. We begin with a brief overview of the conceptual framework for our inquiry, before describing and analysing the particular research results that have substantiated our argument for teacher education reform in this regard.

Building on previous work of research team members (Green & Reid, 2004; Green & Letts, 2007; Comber, Nixon & Reid, 2007; Green, 2008), and a strong national rural teacher education research literature (Hatton et al., 1991; Yarrow et al., 1999; Boylan & Wallace, 2002; Vinson, 2002; McConaghy & Bloomfield, 2004; Roberts, 2004; Cocklin & Dibden, 2005; Halsey, 2005, 2006) we articulated and substantiated the need for an approach to teacher education that would prepare teachers for the contingencies of the places in which they would live and work as rural teachers, as well as preparing them for the profession in which they would take these places.

Drawing on the work of sociologists (Bourdieu, 1978, 1991; Alston & Kent, 2003; Brett, 2007), we sought to foreground understandings about the impact and effect of place and space on the human subject. From theorists of place, space and social-geography (Soja, 1996; Atkin, 2003; Gruenewald, 2003; Thrift, 2004; Kenway et al., 2006) as well as rural educators in the US and elsewhere (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995; Johnson & Strange, 2005; Donehower, Hogg & Schell, 2007) we sought to identify the forms of habitus and capital that teachers need to be able to draw on and invest in their teaching in a rural place. We are working with the hypothesis that teacher education needs to produce a teacher with certain forms of social capital, as well as the attitudes, dispositions and embodied understandings that will allow them to use the educational and cultural capital that is their professional warrant to be there. We argue that teacher education can and must actively seek to become a force for rural sustainability by ensuring student teachers are given access to the capitals and dispositions that can provide a successful return for investment in the forms of rural social space (Reid et al., 2010) that have been produced in the different histories and geographies of particular rural and remote locations.

Preparation of any outsiders, to become ready to understand and adapt to any particular form of rural social space, is thus richly complex and contradictory (Reid et al., 2010). Rural communities are characterised by their diversity, as realised in extremes of wealth, age, health and capacity, as well as particular histories of racial and cultural politics. Sustaining and enhancing the diversity of rural communities is essential for economic sustainability and, therefore, for the security of the nation as a whole. The complex interconnection of the issues and concerns that impact on rural-regional sustainability requires teachers who come to work in these communities to have developed an equally complex understanding of the ‘volatility’ of non-metropolitan places (Kenway et al., 2006, p. 4) — of how the economic, geographic and demographic histories of any place have interacted over time to produce that place as particular, specifically, to what it is, as ‘this place’, here and now. Preparing new teachers to be aware of and ready to deal with ‘thisness’ (Thompson, 2000) is important in understanding what keeps people in rural communities and the work of schools and teachers in communities.

Even these understandings help clarify somewhat the nature of the challenge for pre-service teacher education. As Hoggart (1990, p. 245) noted: “undifferentiated use of ‘rural’ […] is detrimental to the advancement of social theory... The broad category ‘rural’ is obfuscatory... since intra-rural differences can be enormous and rural-urban similarities can be sharp.” Preparing teachers for rural places requires the development of strong forms of propositional
and embodied knowledge that can serve as capital for rural teaching and for living in a rural community. While we may start with a notion of rural teacher education, we are aiming from the beginning, for a more complex and particular attention to place-based teacher education (Gruenewald 2003) that will both deconstruct ‘rurality’ as a generic ‘imaginary’ (Green, 2008) and develop approaches to understanding and getting to know place as a more useful and supportive construct for rural teacher education.

Method
Within this context, determining the sorts of pre-service teacher education strategies that do appear to have been successful in convincing and supporting new teachers to feel at ease in, stay, or to move to rural and remote locations to begin their teaching careers is a crucial starting point to inform curriculum reform and renewal. As described earlier this longitudinal study utilised both qualitative and quantitative methods including three annual (2008, 2009, 2010) online surveys of final year student teachers in all Australian universities who had undertaken a rural teaching practicum during their teacher education course. Invitations directed to students were included in an email sent to all Deans and Heads of Schools of Education in all 37 universities with teacher education courses, through the Australian Council of Deans of Education. A request was made to Deans to pass the invitation on to students if they agreed to allow their institution to participate, through the coordinator of Professional Experience.

The invitation was then distributed to students via their own ‘Prac Office’. It asked them to volunteer to complete the online survey, and to make any additional comments they believed were relevant in the drop-down boxes available at several points in the questionnaire. The letter of invitation also indicated that all submissions would be anonymous prior to analysis, and that results would not be returned to their institution. Students who wished to participate then activated a link to the TERRAnova website to complete the survey. Results were harvested annually, with a total of 260 fully-completed surveys available for analysis at the end of 2010.

Section two of the questionnaire asked a range of questions related to any support that was provided by the university and the type of practicum undertaken. The questions of interest to this particular analysis included:

- Were you provided with a briefing session prior to undertaking the rural practicum/experience? Was the briefing session valuable?
- Were you provided with a debriefing session after undertaking the rural practicum/experience? Was this debriefing session valuable?

While respondents were asked to answer these questions using a Likert scale, additional comments related to any of these questions were invited at the end of the section.

The research team also conducted follow-up phone interviews with those who indicated they had applied, or intended to apply, to work in a rural school, particularly those who had taken up a state-based financial incentive to teach in the bush. While we received fewer than expected (<40) direct responses for the follow-up interviews, we were also able to interview beginning teachers who had only just taken up their appointments within the previous year in each of the 20 ethnographic site studies we conducted of rural schools nominated by their communities (and confirmed by educational jurisdictions) as having a high teacher retention rate. Both forms of interview were semi-structured and operated as free-flowing conversations about their work and lives, with participants having received list of focus questions for discussion before the interview. These are provided in Appendix Four.
Responses were transcribed and thematically coded by individual members of the research team, to identify participants’ understandings of, experiences in, and dispositions toward the places, the schools and the profession that they had entered as novices. Excerpts from the interviews were then tabulated and taken to the larger team for cross checking and validation against the larger dimensions of the rural social space model in order to highlight successful teacher education strategies aimed specifically at student teachers and graduate teachers which make them want to stay in, or move to, a rural area.

Constant comparison and analytic induction were used to examine the qualitative data. Both approaches required comparisons to be made between cases and allow for the identification of relationships between concepts (Glaser 1965). This enabled theory to develop from the data, rather than being assumed and then tested for accuracy. The analysis involved development of conceptual categories reflecting the primary patterns in the data. This was then cross-referenced with the simple descriptive statistics derived from the quantitative data.

Through the research process we sought to develop hypotheses that would account for all the information collected (Oka & Shaw, 2000; Ratcliff, 2002). NVivo8 was used to support qualitative analysis and SPSS17 to support quantitative analysis. Twenty-seven categories with 43 sub-sets were identified. The cohort demographics are provided in table 1. Questions that were asked include questions about pre-service teachers, pre and post professional experience support in their teacher education programs as well as their responses to the unique features and characteristics of living and working in rural places.

Table 8.1: Pre-service Teacher Demographics (n=260

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>66.2 percent aged 21-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.0 percent aged 26-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23.8 percent aged above 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>76.9 percent female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23.1 percent male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural background</td>
<td>50 percent had a rural or regional background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.1 percent undertook practicum in their hometown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance travelled</td>
<td>26.2 percent were located within 200 km of their practicum school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.1 percent travelled between 201 and 500 km to attend their practicum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.9 percent travelled more than 2000 km to attend their practicum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These demographics are consistent with national trends showing that Australian students entering teacher education courses are increasingly mature age (Hastings, 2010, p. 208). National data also show that most pre-service teachers are drawn from urban areas and attend city-based universities (Boylan & Wallace, 2007). Though we do not have the exact figures for the cohort, this is assumed to be sizable as exactly half of the participants had a metropolitan background, just over half were living in a metropolitan area at the time of completing the survey, and 81.9 percent undertook practicum in a place other than their hometown. This data speaks to the importance that rural teacher education curriculum should not just be a feature adopted by regionally based universities and that this should be taken up by all universities.

The interconnection between schools and communities and the value of community-based relationships were two main key themes in the TERRAnova survey data. Universities were

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14 Only completed surveys were included in the quantitative analysis. For the qualitative analysis all surveys with at least one qualitative response were considered.
15 The response option for less than 21 years-of-age was not selected by any of the participants.
regarded as playing a critical role in assisting pre-service teachers preparing, undertaking and reflecting on professional experience, and consistent with findings from Boylan (2004) which highlighted that rural professional experience was identified as a pathway to future rural appointments. Exploration of these themes highlights the potential for collaborative school-community-university production of programs that will build a quality teacher workforce for rural and regional Australia.

Survey respondents undertook professional experience in a range of remote, rural and regional settings, and were themselves from a range of backgrounds. Notwithstanding differences in respondent demographics, commonalities emerged in their reflections on professional experience. Common advantages in completing a rural professional experience or practicum identified by pre-service teachers included:

- exposure to a breadth of professional development opportunities;
- the opportunity to teach across a wider range of subjects and age groups, and take on additional responsibilities;
- acquisition of first-hand knowledge about teaching and learning in non-metropolitan settings;
- ‘testing the waters’ before committing to a regional/rural/remote appointment;
- experiencing a more ‘relaxed lifestyle’.

Challenges were also identified, the main two being isolation from family and friends and the costs associated with practicum which are consistent with all previous studies as outlined earlier. Others included a lack of privacy and access to facilities including shops and Internet.

The advantages and challenges cited are not unique to this cohort. Indeed the work of Sharplin (2002), Page (2006), and Hudson and Hudson (2008) have revealed similar patterns. What was distinctive about the free text responses was that regardless of the questions asked, pre-service teachers commented extensively on the role of both local communities and universities in supporting rural and regional professional experiences, with the extent to which pre-service teachers were able to realise their full potential in rural and regional settings seeming to be strongly influenced by access to community and university supports.

What Do the Undergraduates and New Graduates Have To Say?

a) Pre-service Teachers

Overall, the pre-service teachers responding to the survey considered that undertaking a rural practicum is both personally and professionally advantageous to them. Over 150 respondents took the time to write about their ‘most memorable experience’ in the survey form, and many of these responses speak to their personal growth and the formation of relationships in the unfamiliar situation of practice. They indicated that these relationships were not only with students and staff, but also with the broader community.

Results strongly indicate, however, that there is considerable need for universities to engage pre-service teachers in a more structured and elaborated consideration of what issues and

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16 Financial considerations regarding practicum also emerged, however given the extensive work in this area this is not explored in this paper (see Halsey 2005; Flinders University Public Affairs and Alumni Office 2006).
experiences they may encounter when they decide to take up a pre-service placement in a rural or remote location. Knowing what to take on practicum was also a challenge identified.

Access to resources would be the main thing. You can’t take much of your own resource collection with you, and there aren’t as many shops to buy things from if you need to. We were lucky because our school was well-resourced but you don’t know this until you get there.

The biggest disadvantage was reliable access to internet services and classroom resources. I often felt at a loss that I did not have access to resources I have at home. This required a lot of thought and planning with what to take with me.

...not having all of your resources with you (or not knowing where to go to get resources).

These comments imply that the pre-service teachers were in some ways ill-prepared, because they did not know what to expect in terms of resource availability. At the very basic level, further information about what to take and tips about accessing resources while on practicum might have been valuable, as well as further opportunities for personal planning, prior research about the host community, and knowledge of community resources and contacts.

While some responses mentioned that there had been some generic discussion of the nature and characteristics of rural and remote schools, even this sort of over-generalised attention was missing from the experience of almost half of the people who volunteered to do a rural placement.

In response to the first of the focus questions on the survey, for instance, only half of respondents (51.5%) indicated that their university had provided them with a briefing of any kind before they left to undertake a rural placement, and less than 40% of these indicated that this briefing had been of considerable value. A further 56% said that the University briefing had been of ‘some’ value, with only 7% of those who had experienced a briefing session finding that his had been of no value at all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Briefing</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No briefing session provided</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briefing session provided</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>260</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Briefing Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No briefing session provided</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>49.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all valuable</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of some (limited) value</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very valuable</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>260</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In relation to a debriefing session after returning from a rural placement, 70% of respondents indicated that there had been no debriefing at all, and of the 30% (no. 78) who had an opportunity to share and reflect on what they had experienced, less than half again (no. 30) suggested that this was a very valuable event.
Table 8.3: Post-placement Briefings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Debriefing</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No debriefing session provided</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debriefing session provided</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Debriefing Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No debriefing session provided</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all valuable</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of some (limited) value</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very valuable</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These responses indicate that support offered by the universities, was very important to students. Placement visits were highly valued, and those who commented on missing out, indicated that they were disappointed by the lack of opportunity to engage in a personal exploration of their response to a rural placement. Unless compensated for by a very welcoming placement community and a supportive associate teacher, however, isolation from the support offered by university staff and peers appeared to be one of the key barriers to a successful practicum.

In the space for extended responses, pre-service teachers said very little about the nature and quality of the university’s interaction with them around their rural placement — with only 40 of the 260 making any comment at all about this, and most of these (27) were about support while on practicum. Seven (7) comments were made about support following practicum, and 16 on support available prior to practicum. These responses were split17. Pre-service teachers noted that any information provided about the particular sorts of teaching situation they were likely to find in non-metropolitan areas was advantageous:

During the course, information was provided regarding teaching multi-grade classes and the philosophy behind it.

My interest was increased by completing a subject within my degree on teaching in remote locations.

These later remarks indicate that development units and unit content that helps prepare students for rural experiences had been beneficial. Multi-age classrooms, for instance, are a common feature of small rural schools, but do not feature commonly in metropolitan teaching situations. It may be assumed that this sort of preparatory ‘support’ would have been welcomed by those other pre-service teachers who commented on the lack of support and preparation prior to practicum. One pre-service teacher, for example, noted that ‘students are not equipped with the right knowledge and understandings to deal with the experience’. While this was not elaborated further, it can be argued that the ‘right knowledge’ might well include reference to the sorts of teaching situations that characterise rural as well as metropolitan schools. As Reid and Martin (2003) noted, such a lack of attention to the materiality of place in relation to rural schools has been a historic failure even in teacher education programs initiated to prepare rural teachers.

A large number of respondents indicated that they did not feel supported by their home institution, either before, during or after their practicum experience.

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17 Initial analysis of these responses was completed by Dr Jodie Kline, Deakin University, as part of the Australian Learning and Teaching Commission funded RRRTEC [Renewing Rural and Remote Teacher Education Curriculum] project that worked in parallel with the latter years of TERRAnova.
I dearly want to work in a small rural school and can't understand why this is not explored, embraced or encouraged by the Uni or State Authorities.

The biggest disadvantage to doing a rural/remote practicum (and I have done so on more than one occasion) is that the university provides less support, rather than more. In a situation where students are often far from home for the very first time, it should be EXPECTED that we have a university representative to VISIT us. A phone call is not enough, and often takes place in a situation where the associate is listening.

For all three of my placements, I have attempted to challenge myself by going away to a different area to what I am familiar with, and have found the support appalling. For a university that prides itself on providing services for rural NSW, it does little to help the students along the way. As I said above, not once did I get a uni representative to visit me for support, or to watch me teach. Disappointing at the very least.

I felt incredibly lonely as my prac placement was difficult and I had no support network because I was away from home. I also had no contact from my uni so I felt stranded.

The uni was not supportive and did not provide enough information or feedback regarding rural experiences.

You feel a little isolated from university support.

Multi-age learning was an experience that I found hard, as university didn't cover this aspect in any of their units.

The uni was not supportive and did not provide enough information or feedback regarding rural experiences.

University at no time, had any interest in placement or costings. Did not ask about practicums for those of us who went remote. Experiences were just word of mouth between students.

Implications of this setting were very rarely discussed in detail during the course.

I would have dearly valued a debriefing session regarding my rural prac but when I returned from prac, I had no uni classes so there was no contact with my peers or lecturers.

These comments seem to reveal that pre-service teachers feel the lack of interest and capacity in their university courses to support them in this situation, and that they want information about teaching in non-metropolitan settings embedded in teaching courses. Opportunities to participate in briefing sessions appeared to be highly valued. Pre-service teachers were particularly keen to see that these incorporate material relevant to rural and regional placements. Unfortunately, this was not the case for many:

The briefing and debriefing sessions were not directly related to rural placements, but more about teaching placements in general. It may have been helpful for other pre-service teachers, who were not from rural areas taking rural placements, to have those sorts of briefing and debriefing sessions.

The briefing sessions about prac applied to everyone in my course, of which the majority of people completed their prac in a metro school. It would have been more valuable to have a specific briefing session for those doing a prac in a rural school, especially before the commencement of the prac.

It was not compulsory for the country students to attend [briefing] as it was on a Friday and meant missing a few days of school.
There was no briefing re: rural prac — instead, the university has a meeting with the whole year level about prac and another half way through to see how we are coping.

Some sort of briefing as to what to expect in closed community such as [text removed] would have helped.

An analysis of Australian teacher education programs (White et al., 2008) indicated, there are very few universities that provide a compulsory or even elective subject for pre-service teachers to undertake as part of their initial teacher education. However, these comments attest to the value of institutions looking beyond the metropolis in their preparation of students for professional placements. There is also a clear need for briefing and debriefing sessions, and these responses indicate that for pre-service teachers these are regarded as a significant part of the program.

b) Beginning Teachers
In our follow-up interviews with beginning teachers in their first years of teaching in rural and remote schools, it was immediately apparent that their pre-service teacher education courses had not provided them with useful preparation for teaching in rural schools. As noted elsewhere, most employer groups across Australia, offer financial incentives for beginning teachers to take up appointments in rural and remote schools. We also noted the phenomenon that some rural communities themselves have begun to offer scholarships to pre-service teachers that commit them to teaching in their community after graduation. Similarly, several employers offer financial support for pre-service teachers to undertake pre-service teaching placements, of varying durations, in these locations. Some of this support is in the form of rural teaching scholarships, which provide funding for tuition and expenses during the teacher education program, and a guaranteed appointment to a school on graduation, in return for a commitment that the teacher will stay in that school for a minimum of three years. Above all of the incentives that were discussed in these follow-up interviews, however, the greatest “attraction” of a rural appointment to many of the participants in this study (both beginning and pre-service) was the opportunity that accepting an appointment in the rural/remote location would provide them with ‘permanent’ status as an employee. The teachers were fully aware that with “permanence” came further career opportunities and a sense of stability. As one beginning teacher noted:

So yeah… the stability, so I can be in the one area. And particularly straight out of university, I just want a stable working environment where I can learn my trade. Also this particular area, I do not feel stuck here in… so I like the area. Not having ever been here before, I am quite liking it. (Beginning Teacher, Western Australia)

Feeling ‘stuck’ in a rural or remote location is a key indication that a teacher is looking to leave. The opportunities that James had to physically move to, live in and engage with the people in rural places where he had undertaken a practicum placement, prepared him appropriately for the sorts of social and geographic space to which he has been posted. The need for this type of preparation for employment (similar to the need for preparation for a pre-service experience) was raised by almost all participants, who spoke of the need for pre-service teacher education programs to authentically embed issues of rurality in the courses. Some suggested the focus should be across the whole program, rather than an “add on”, single-subject approach. Typically, however, university staff paid limited, if any attention to meaningful preparation for rural placement or appointment.
Even just have a subject on it or something that, I mean we talk about Indigenous, we have like an Indigenous subject where we talk about Indigenous cultures and a little bit about rural teaching there, but not much. Whereas I think if there was a subject on rural teaching, especially like at [regional unis] or something, where, you know, we’re in regional areas anywhere, or promoting, having someone at the uni who promotes, in the prac office or something, who promotes rural prac, or that knows more about them. Because every time I’ve been to see them or a couple of my friends want to do some Indigenous placements somewhere in Australia, whenever we go to speak to them they kind of say you’ve got to do your own research kind of thing. And I mean we don’t even know where to start. So having someone who’s more knowledgeable about that sort of thing would definitely help... Maybe things like how to communicate with small communities and families and building strong relationships. (Beginning Teacher, New South Wales)

What this new teacher is pointing to here, is the scope of reform that is needed in teacher education practice if teachers are to be better prepared to teach in rural and Indigenous settings. A lack of, or only a ‘mythic’ knowledge about rural communities is characteristic of Australian metropolitan culture (Kenway et al., 2006). Further, as many teacher educators have themselves never experienced rural teaching, they do not understand the importance of an approach that acknowledges the complexities of rural social space, and there are not currently support resources available to provide this. As she and others explained, there is a significant need for this:

*Just mainly, probably having more people at university, more lecturers or something that can encourage us to or help us find out more information if we do want to do rural. I mean, every now and then they say how important it is and things like that, we should consider it, but that’s all they can give us. They don’t have any more information.* (Beginning Teacher, New South Wales)

*The only sort of encouragement you get [from uni/department] is the negative side. If you want a job you have to go to the country. But it is quite nice, once I came in and started to get to know the town. It’s got a nice feel. It’s not all that bad, so I’m changing my view of going into the country now.* (Beginning Teacher, Western Australia)

As well as preparation for a rural appointment, we have noted above how pre-service teachers described the importance of debriefing with peers and staff after a rural placement had concluded. One recent graduate teacher noted the sense of isolation and confusion this “absence” caused for her:

*But there was no follow up either, they never rang to see if I enjoyed it, what I thought of it or anything. I never did a survey or anything afterwards, so I don’t know if they wanted feedback or anything... Where you are the only one, or there is only one or two of you, and you either both had a really bad experience or a really good one, or if you are there on your own, it can be kind of isolating... Because you think, ‘Did I do something wrong?’, or ‘Was it something I did?’ But that debriefing, sometimes if you talk to people you can find out that they had a similar experience.... So it can be kind of isolating not to have the debriefing I think.* (Beginning Teacher, ACT)

Likewise, it was suggested that genuine preparation for a rural appointment should be seen as an incentive for attracting as well as retaining teachers to rural communities. A teacher who had taken up a rural appointment, and who had found the situation conducive to her staying on, was able to reflect on the issue from the point of view of colleagues whom she had already seen
come — and go — from the school, having had what was for them, both personally and professionally, a ‘failing’ experience:

If you could have a couple of weeks out there before you said yes, that might not be so great in terms of attracting the teachers to begin with, because some teachers might say, actually, it's not for me. But long term, that's more likely to retain the teachers that do accept the job offers in the beginning. (Beginning Teacher, Tasmania)

And another young teacher, struggling with the place and the people in which she found herself beginning her teaching career, noted the difficulties that beset many new teachers who arrive at their first teaching position with no preparation for the place that they will find themselves in, and the social space in which they agree to inhabit:

It would have been great if I could have come here and met the Principal before I started. In my case it wasn’t possible but it would have been great. (Beginning Teacher, Western Australia)

When we listen to the voices of the pre-service and beginning teachers who are or have recently experienced working and studying in a rural community, we access a different kind of knowing about rurality. These new educators speak openly of the opportunities and tensions associated with the experiences. It is from this clarity and freshness that we are attempting to set directions for teacher education programs and employers who genuinely want to attract fully qualified and committed teachers to rural and remote schools.

**Discussion**

In this section we draw on our analysis of the survey comments and interview responses to begin to identify the sorts of changes in understanding and practice that are needed for teacher education programs to ensure they will more appropriately prepare new teachers for the forms of social space that they will find in rural locations across Australia. We argue that while financial incentives will need to remain in place at the present time, in order to ensure that rural schools across Australian educational jurisdictions are staffed each term, there is nonetheless nothing in financial incentives to ensure that they are staffed well. More work needs to be done within professional preparation to acknowledge the differences, difficulties and diversity of constructs of rural social space that characterise rural and remote locations. This can take several forms, although simply complexifying the stereotype of the rural ‘backwater’ may be an important first step. One key way that several state departments have approached this is through short term visits, ‘Beyond the Line’, for pre-service teachers to physically experience the sorts of social space that teachers work in, in rural communities. But as we have noted elsewhere (Reid, 2011):

There is need for more adequate preparation, follow up and extension within the pre-service teacher education curriculum. The ‘tourism’ approach works to sensitise and raise awareness of the nature of teaching in rural communities, but it clearly does not (and cannot in its conception and design) attend to the important complexities of rural social space, and the differences this produces between rural and remote communities.

It is an understanding of the place and the nature of rural teaching that marks the difference in successfully ‘acclimatising’ to what makes teaching more difficult the further away from a metropolitan centre the school is located. The out-of-school exposure for teachers is not easy to grow used to, and it is important that pre-service teachers are at least informed about the way that this operates:
Sometimes they’ve got unrealistic expectations: they come to a small community and then they sort of think well, well, we’ll go out and you know socialise on the weekend and they don’t realise the community is really very watchful of what you do. And I think they find it you know, you’re a little bit like in a fish bowl with people looking in and some of the younger one’s just can’t cope with that. But I think that they are possibly people that have never been to the country, have never lived in a small town. (Reid, 2011, p. 28)

While it is important that people who are positively disposed to the sorts of social spaces that are described here are extended in their pre-service teacher education to experience different places and values, so that they are able to identify and move beyond parochialism in their own teaching, it is similarly important to highlight and build on the attractions of rural places rather than just focussing on their limitations.

Attending to the need for incentives is currently the major driver for employment or even professional placement in rural and remote schools, whereas, accentuating the positive aspects of teaching and living in these communities would potentially increase the attraction. Our respondents spoke readily of the positive nature of the schools and their communities — independent of the money et cetera. While financial incentives are important, it is clear that for those who have experienced many rural communities, the ‘attraction’ has come more from the relationships and the social space offered by the school and communities, than the money that is provided to get them there. Many of the ‘memorable incidents’ that survey respondents recorded, have to do with their recognition of difference — and the opportunity their presence provided to engage with and extend the experience of their students. One respondent wrote that their most memorable incident was:

Being asked what sized station I lived on in Victoria and the grade 4 student coming to an abrupt halt in the walk in goggle-eyed astonishment when I described a quarter acre block in suburbia. Response: "no Sh^* Miss!, you dinkum?" and his hat being pushed to the back of his head as he declared, "I don't think I'd fancy that much Miss. Like you could hear people and stuff". Even though this student goes to Darwin a couple of times a year it had never dawned on him that people live close together all the time. It was fantastic!!! (Survey response)

Not all schools are the same and certainly not all communities — rural or otherwise — are the same. It is clear from the pre-service and newly appointed teachers that teacher education courses have a significant role to play in the provision of teachers for these communities. Students identified the importance of specific subjects within their programs that focus on knowledge and understanding of rurality as well as Indigeneity. Further they note the value — career, personal and professional — of undertaking a rural placement during their studies in order to gain richer insight into the benefits that are on offer in rural schools and communities. Similarly, teachers who had spent many years in these areas indicated that it was essential that teacher education programs foreground the value of rural placements to pre-service teachers.

Halsey (2005) argued that student teachers need to be exposed to the opportunities that are afforded by a rural experience earlier rather than later in their courses, as a means of “embedding” rurality in their understanding of teaching and learning as very much context bound. This is a view that is supported by this study, as teacher education could study “location” much more explicitly than it currently does. As a direct result of the work of TERRAnova, the RRRTEC ALTC-funded project (citation) is building the kinds of resources and support structures to enable teacher education programs ‘requested’ by the participants in this research.
We were struck in the survey analysis by the degree to which respondents reported a lack of support from their home institutions while undertaking a rural placement. It was as if they had literally moved ‘beyond a line’ which their university lecturers could not cross to mentor and support them. Teacher education and the profession have a relationship in that pre-service teachers are placed in schools for their professional learning. But there seems to have been little effort by teacher education institutions to engage with and involve these rural school-based teacher educators in the process of supporting the students. According to our survey respondents, they often mostly returned to their home campus with limited opportunity to share their experiences, irrespective of where they had undertaken their placement. The lack of such an opportunity to share, discuss and learn from re-telling their positive and problematic experiences in rural schools and communities is a significant shortcoming in the teacher education process. We would argue that it is more important for students who have undertaken a rural placement, particularly for the first time, to have some sort of ‘debriefing’ experience, as there is greater potential for ‘difference’ than if the school was more familiar.

On-site mentoring is an important aspect for all new learners and particularly so for newly appointed teachers. In one state, where there is a strong mentoring program, beginning teachers spoke of the value of mentoring support — both personally and professionally. If we consider the teaching profession to be a ‘community of learners’ then both universities and employers will need to genuinely consider the importance of structured support at the pre-service (and in-service) level. In that same vein, we must consider opportunities for professional development and the importance of robust support networks — connecting rural teachers with experienced colleagues in other centres/schools using interactive technologies. Whether pre-service, in-service or experienced, teachers value the opportunity for learning as well as teaching. We argue that teacher educators too, will find much of value in moving toward an openness for learning about the sorts of educational and social difference that characterises rural places and their schools.

Conclusion

As we have noted above, a key aim of the TERRAnova project has been to investigate the role that initial teacher education might play in preparing beginning teachers for the kinds of teaching and social environments that characterise rural and remote schools in the Australian context. Our findings, from the three years of survey data, relating to the sorts of associated university preparation for and reflection on rural teaching placements prior to graduation, have clearly indicated a need for reform of initial teacher education curriculum away from a dominant metro-centric perspective, and increased support for pre-service teachers while on a rural placement. Our follow up interviews with student teachers and beginning teachers who accepted state-based incentives to undertake a rural practicum and/or who have accepted a position in a rural or remote location on graduation, indicate the need for more attention to the nature and diversity of rural and Indigenous education in the pre-service curriculum.

The notion of rural social space as a framework for teacher education curriculum, designed to build knowledge and experience through personal and professional practice in initial teacher education curriculum, may well help to ensure that beginning teachers are well prepared to teach ‘all’ of the children in our schools — including those who are educationally and socially marginalised because of their geographical location in rural and remote areas.
Chapter Nine

What Will it Take? Teacher Incentives

Wendy Hastings

Introduction
This chapter will explore the range and types of incentives that were offered to both pre-service and in-service teachers to take up professional experience placements or teaching positions, respectively, in traditionally rural schools, including “hard to staff” schools. Further, the chapter will elaborate with analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data from the case study schools and survey data in relation to pre-service and in-service teachers’ perceptions of such incentive schemes. Finally, the chapter will outline the analysis of the types of incentives, both extrinsic and intrinsic, that facilitate the retention of teachers in these schools & communities, with recommendations to major stakeholders of possible strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of incentive programs.

State/employer-based information was gathered from the various education department websites across the nation, while TERRAnova researchers also examined each Australian university’s teacher education website for easily accessible information about rural education incentives and opportunities as a means of determining some sense of all universities’ commitment to rural “experiences”.

Background
As indicated in earlier chapters, there has been previous exploration of the kinds of incentives that are intended as a means to attract quality teachers to rural and remote communities in Australia. For some time, researchers have found that such strategies were failing to achieve their intended goals. For example, in 1995, Watson and Hatton published their findings that incentive schemes were not the only solution to staffing rural and remote schools. They noted that incentives and compensatory programs, while initially attracting teachers may also aid in their leaving. This is a view shared by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2000) which argued that ‘the current incentive scheme may attract people to rural areas but once they are there the incentive is to leave rather than remain.’ More recently, Roberts (2004) reported that departments were offering incentives that attracted undesirable candidates (‘neophyte missionaries’) or those who only wanted to get the incentives, asserting that this did not resolve long terms issues of staffing.

However, research is yet to show, how the provision of incentives play out in schools that have successfully attracted, retained and sustained their teaching force.

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18 This chapter was prepared by Wendy Hastings. The assistance of Simone White, Kim Booby and Jo-Anne Reid is gratefully acknowledged.
Incentives For Attracting Beginning Teachers

Each state/jurisdiction offers slightly different incentives to attract beginning teachers to accept an appointment to a non-metropolitan school. There are layers of incentive depending, it appears, on the degree to which the school/community is deemed to be “hard-to-staff”, which is typically associated with the level of remoteness. These employment incentives include items such as:

- increased financial allowances in terms of salary bonuses;
- funded travel to and from the location;
- increased access to professional development funding for travel, accommodation and casual relief days\(^{19}\);
- extended annual holidays;
- extended paid maternity leave;
- hot/cold climate allowances;
- status as a “permanent” member of staff after 2-3 years “country” service;
- slight reduction in face-to-face teaching load, typically \(\frac{1}{2}\) day per week;
- housing subsidies – 100% subsidy in NT, but slightly less in other states;
- automatic (“priority”) transfer to a “more favourable” location of teacher’s choice;
- study leave - periods of up to 6 months on full pay for study opportunities (SA/NT/WA);
- bonus payments for remaining in the school beyond the minimum period, usually \(>3\) years.

These types of incentives that states have been offering teachers, to take up positions in rural schools, were created for a generation of teachers who began working over a century ago. They are out of date, and also support a discourse that reproduces the discursive truth that country postings are normally “impermanent, short-term, temporary, and second-rate”. It is in this way that teachers entering rural social spaces and “hard to staff” schools do so either reluctantly, because they were given no choice of location in their offer of employment, or perhaps strategically, only to enhance their careers.

This is a deficit model of rural schooling, and it is promoted in the public consciousness through the official naming of the rural as problematic, both by itinerant teachers stopping over to advance their own careers and the official naming of rural schools as difficult-to-staff (Roberts, 2004). While we work with the pragmatic assumption that many of our graduates will decide to teach in country schools because they are country people, and know that the myths and rumours are not the whole story, we also know that this is insufficient and inadequate as a means of ensuring teacher supply and commitment to rural schools. It is apparent from interviews with new teachers, in the case study schools, that a rural appointment is often touted by employers (and teacher educators) as “the only option” so that it is seen as deficit when it could well be sold as a positive. The following quote by a beginning teacher in Queensland suggests a more positive approach that could be adopted:

\[
\text{Make a strong point with the students to go out and do a rural placement, I really enjoyed my rural placement, having the incentives there obviously like (P-Cap) to provide the transport and that and}\]

\(^{19}\) Casual relief money enables the school to employ casual staff to replace teachers on out-of-school activities as well as sick leave, etc.
A typical story, that illustrates the prevailing attitude towards working in rural schools, was provided in Chapter Two. As we noted there, it was published by the NSW Teachers Federation on their website as publicity for strike action:

[This teacher] commenced permanent employment with the Department in 2004. When she made application to the Department to become a teacher during 2003, she selected a number of 4 and 6 point schools. She did so relying upon representations made by representatives of the Department and in Departmental documents about the benefits of working "hard-to-staff" schools, particularly the capacity to earn transfer points. As a result, [the teacher] took up a position at Narrabri High School at the commencement of 2004.

She gave evidence that she would never have left the area in which she grew up if working in Narrabri did not allow her to earn transfer points and increase her opportunity to transfer to a permanent position elsewhere in the state. She accepted the inducement offered by the Department to work at a “hard-to-staff” school (www.nswtf.org.au.info_centre [retrieved 18.11.08]).

However, it is clear from the responses of teachers in case study schools, that the incentive is the catalyst that brings the teacher to the school, though in many instances it is the inherent “more intrinsic” aspects of the school and community that are the “retaining” attraction. Lyons, Cooksey, Panizzon, Parnell, & Pegg (2006) also found that teachers’ motivations for going to a rural school were very different from the reasons for staying. While opportunity for employment and appointment by the department was their initial reason, the teachers remained because of quality of life, relationships and community spirit.

In the following three very typical examples, the young teachers went to a school to get a permanent appointment, but chose to stay beyond the minimum time.

I want to get full time work somehow… So I saw the Department and there was a fella there that was really good. He said there’s a full time job in Lightning Ridge, so that’s where I was about four or five days later. [Teacher, New South Wales]

The Country Teaching Program is where, if you are committed to working in a country teaching school, you earn your permanency after two years but not necessarily permanency for that position. So next year, I’m a permanent teacher but I’m a referred teacher because I’m not – because this is not a career vacancy. That’s what really concerns me and frustrates me because I really want to stay and this has happened to a friend of mine in the last four years. [Teacher, Western Australia]

You really don’t get a good feel when you – you don’t get encouraged in a positive way to go to the country. The only sort of encouragement you get is the negative side. If you want a job, you have to go to the country. But it is quite nice, once I came in and started to get to know the town. It’s got a nice feel. It’s not all that bad, so I’m changing my view of going into the country now. [Beginning Teacher, Western Australia]
Incentives For Retention/Support of Employed Teachers

As part of our analysis, we explored the types of extrinsic incentives offered by employers (both government and non-government) to support increased retention – to avoid “the churn” - of teachers in country schools. As indicated previously, those incentives to attract teachers are “ongoing” and all employers’ offer teachers, who remain in rural/remote schools, annual bonus payments along with the “original” attractions. This next section explores other kinds of incentives designed to retain teachers.

NSW DEC has a very effective Teacher Mentor Program that provides ongoing support for new scheme teachers in rural/remote and “hard-to-staff” metropolitan schools. It has proved particularly effective in reducing the number of new teachers who leave DEC schools in the first 3 years. This state also has a formal induction program in all DEC schools. It was evident from the NSW case study schools, that the importance of induction is a serious consideration, as staff, interviewed at these schools, spoke very positively of its importance:

*Keeping in mind that our induction processes have improved immensely since I came out… They're a thousand percent on what they were, but they're still, I think there's still a lack of preparation in terms of what they do in their training to sort of prepare them for that massive cultural change that they hit when they come out west. And we sort of try to correct that on a school level, but it's, I think there's still room for improvement.* [Executive Teacher, New South Wales]

*I think because we have such a diverse range of teachers coming out, we have fresh new people just out of uni and we have others who have been out of the workforce and then have come back in and I think it’s just interesting just meeting these different people and helping them along the road. Because I have been here for such a long time I know a lot of the kids and I, you know, if a teacher’s having problems with a particular child I’ll go well how about we try ‘yada, yada, yada’, and that, that’s really helpful.* [Experienced Teacher, New South Wales]

*I had one [...] new teacher last year [...]. She was very much, “Can I do this?” and some of her ideas were great. “Go ahead. Try it. You’ll learn by the experience.” She was also incredibly willing for me to come into her room and she use to come into my room, because I – she was actually, great teacher, was teaching in chunks, whereas I could actually integrate all the chunks together and she said that’s what she couldn’t do, so now she’s looking at the bigger picture... And she’s starting and I can see it in her development that she is integrating, locking them together instead of just isolated chunks of mathematics, so she’s been a delight. The other person I have in mathematics, he’s not even high school trained and he certainly takes on board anything that – he’s primary trained...* [Mentor Teacher, New South Wales]

It was evident from the interviews in all states other than NSW, that while the employers indicate that induction of beginning teachers is an important issue, in other states, the schools did not offer systematic induction programs. Beginning teachers, who were interviewed, indicated “induction” was typically either teaming the new teacher with a colleague and/or providing administrative information related to “stores” and school procedures. There was almost no support through provision of a planned and responsive school-based induction program and typically these new teachers were not provided with support by a trained teacher mentor, as is the espoused policy position of the employers. This comment by a new teacher in South Australia is typical of responses to questions related to the presence/absence of systematic induction:

*[Induction was] for a couple of days we just ‘team talked’, then we split them. It was a bit of sink or swim.* [Beginning Teacher, South Australia]
One finding of the TERRAnova study has been the importance of school leadership (see Chapter Five) in the successful attraction and retention of teachers. Many employers advertise “early” leadership opportunities as an incentive for remaining in rural/remote schools. For example, the Townsville Catholic Diocese states on their handout for the Remote Area Teaching Incentive Scheme,

It should be remembered that while these schools are in isolated or remote areas, the experiences they offer teachers are immense. Teachers in these areas have the opportunity to become respected members of the community and will often have the chance to take on a leadership role much earlier in their careers than their counterparts in less remote areas. (Townsville Catholic Diocese 2008, p.2)

However, in recent research published by Halsey (2011), it was noted that 46% of school leaders indicated that they had no preparation for leadership. Further, the 683 school leader respondents gave almost equal weighting to increased financial incentives and to public acknowledgement of the value of their work by their employing authorities, but nominated ‘better financial incentives as the single most important factor’ likely to improve career pathways in the rural sector.

Since the commencement of this study, NSW Dept of Education and Communities (formerly Education & Training) has initiated a program for aspiring school executive and school leaders, based on the program it conducts for pre-service teachers in the Explore your Future program. “Beyond the Line – School Executive” provides teachers with the opportunity to visit rural schools for a three day program and meet with departmental staff, school executive, teachers and community leaders, to broaden their knowledge about opportunities for executive and promotional positions, as well as financial incentives, benefits and allowances available for teachers in these areas. According to the website, teachers will: “experience country hospitality, see for yourself the central role of the school in country communities, and learn about the benefits of living and working in country NSW.”

The Western Australian education department encourages experienced teachers to seek appointments in the country, in a rural or remote school, asserting that they offer great opportunities for both experienced and graduate teachers. The Department’s website argues it can provide a very rewarding lifestyle, particularly if teachers choose to become involved in the wider local community, making a positive contribution to the lives of young people while developing their professional skills. Many teachers say their careers have progressed much faster as a result of working in the country.

Tasmania has instigated the Beginning Teacher Time Release (BeTTR) program to provide support for permanent/fixed-term teachers in their first year of employment as part of its “retention” strategy. Under the BeTTR scheme, beginning teachers access a minimum release of two hours per week, with funding made available to the schools to cover relief for this time. BeTTR is essentially an induction program, so release time will vary according to the needs of the individual. Possible programs include: induction programs; ongoing feedback meetings with senior staff and/or other experienced teachers; attendance at PD programs at department offices or other schools; observation of experienced teachers in the classroom; additional ‘time out’ for lesson preparation; and attendance at meetings with other beginning teachers.

Education Queensland supports the Beginning Establishing Teachers’ Association by sponsoring the annual conference and providing a toolkit for newly appointed teachers. It asserts that induction
is a “school–based responsibility” and provides access to resources to support that process through the Curriculum Exchange. The website asserts that:

(DET) is committed to ensuring that all newly appointed employees receive a timely induction that provides clear expectations for their new role, together with information and resources that enable them to work in accordance with public service principles ... Local induction provides information about the workplace including systems, policies, procedures, protocols, teams, equipment and facilities that employees need to know to function in their new role. It is helpful [my emphasis] to provide a support person to help induct new starters into the local work environment. (Beginning Establishing Teachers’ Association 2009, Emphasis added.)

While these incentives are formally structured by the employers, it is often the leadership of the schools – local and regional - that can impact the teacher’s decision to remain in a rural community. For example, teachers appreciate the opportunity to use the full extent of their professional knowledge in their work. However, often small rural schools have a limited number of senior students, so teachers miss the chance to work in their field of expertise. In Jamestown, teachers were able to work with combined across-school cohorts through initiatives that saw the development of clusters such as MNSEC, which ensured that vital student numbers were maintained to guarantee curriculum delivery to senior students. Past experience has shown that teachers of senior classes leave rural schools if it is not possible for them to teach in their professional area.

It is important to note that it is not only the employers that provide extrinsic incentives for teachers to remain in the community. In one case study school, the community lobbied for improved affordable teacher housing as a means of retaining staff that could not afford, or were not willing to stay in poor quality, over priced housing, resulting from a boom in the mining sector in their area. Similarly, a community in Queensland maintained housing for teachers, as indicated by this quote:

*In the future, the teachers may demand to have a new kitchen or bathroom, or a newer house. There will have to be moves by the department to consider amenities like that; the council have been doing that ourselves, renewing housing stock and building houses and that will attract the type of staff we are looking for.* (Parent and council worker, Queensland)

Members of the community work to make teachers lives richer:

*If we’re going camping, we also ask if anyone wants to come camping for the weekend and a couple of the teachers come with us. We have other families who have boats and swimming pools and they invite the teachers around for a barbie or a swim or if they are going down the river for skiing they invite the teachers for lunch and skiing.* (Parent, South Australia)

*When they come to town, and the classic example is the first week or so they are here, the shire and the community have a new residents function where they’re invited and all the sporting clubs are there, all the community clubs are there, so if they’re a hockey player, the hockey club is there and they can talk to them about when the season starts, what happens and where they go to play their hockey. They are introduced into the community straight away. They don’t have to fight their way into clubs or anything. It’s just ‘here’s an opportunity, if you want to be involved, go for it’, and that’s across the board. I think that’s a really key one because they meet new residents as well. They’re not the only new residents so...*
they’re meeting other new people and they’re meeting existing people involved in the clubs and that’s a really important one. (P&C President, Western Australia)

There are many sporting groups and they are a lot more welcoming and I know that there are several teachers here at this school that are heavily involved in sport locally. But there are quite a number of other clubs and associations that welcome new people to town so I guess if you are the sort of person that is a bit outgoing and sort of wants to be involved in the community there are plenty of opportunities. (Parent, Western Australia)

Similarly, participants in this study indicated other, more intrinsic incentives that function to retain teachers in these school and communities. The following section reports on those aspects of rural/remote work that aren’t/can’t always be planned for. Issues such as lifestyle, relationships, professional integrity are considered intrinsic incentives.

The following quotes reflect the views of many teachers who, for whatever reason, took up an appointment in a rural school and community, and it is now the combined lifestyle that both of these bring, which sustains the teacher:

The method is; hang onto the good teachers by finding out what they like, what they’re good at, what they’ve got to offer. Give them opportunities to develop new programs, new ideas that suit their interests. Give them some professional license. (Teacher, Western Australia)

Professional gratification can be its own reward:

I think that if you were a young teacher or any teacher for that matter, you might be looking at where you might locate to or transfer to in the country, and a school that has a high reputation for ability would be I think one of your first choices. (Principal, Western Australia)

The quality of life offered by the school & community:

[I]t is a great place to learn your trade so to speak. I mean you’re under the gaze of the community like I said and you know there are issues that are specific to rural teaching but, there are also things like a lot less pressure and you know all of the social problems you are faced with or the students are faced with aren’t quite as bad as what you might find in the city. To that end yes it is a good life. (Beginning Teacher, Victoria)

I love the sense that you belong. There’s a big sense of belongingness. I lived in Perth for ten years before now and when I returned there was absolutely no sense of belongingness, of belonging, whereas here you really are part of the community and people know that you are part of that community, so that sense of belonging. I also love the more laid back approach of parents towards education. I found that, in private schools, I had a real sense that it was consumer based business and I didn’t like the way the parents were placated to, I guess, in some senses. I’m happy to involve parents but I didn’t like that consumer attitude about schools. I like more of the community. (Experienced Teacher, Western Australia)

Leadership opportunities:

And I do know that a lot of them come also for the opportunity of leadership roles and being team leaders. Like I mentioned before, some teachers have been out in their fourth and fifth year, they are looking at our behaviour management policy in school and they are reviewing it themselves and they
reckon that would be an opportunity they’d rarely get if they were in a large, city school. So they’ve taken on real leadership roles, they’ve been acting as deputies in that time, they’re highly competent. (Principal, Western Australia)

Professionally you can learn so much. In a rural school, I mean, just the other day I got the chance to actually, the primary Deputy Principal was away, and I actually got a chance to be her for the day which a fourth year teacher in the city that would never happen. So that was really good in itself. You get lots of experience with those sort of senior jobs that would ordinarily go to other teachers and you get them early. (Teacher, Western Australia)

This school has given me huge opportunities to try different things. Being in an R to 12 school – I’m a junior primary trained person – and I teach year 8, 9 and 10 English now, so it’s given me a world of opportunities that I wouldn’t have had if I was in a [straight] primary school system. (Teacher, South Australia)

Relationships with students, families and the wider community:

Well they [the students] are very easy to get along with. They are very well behaved students. Between the students and the teachers they have a very good relationship there and they are a very good bunch of kids that come from the south west from down this part of the woods. (Community member, Western Australia)

Some kids I’ve taught for four years. I’ve seen them through Year 8, Year 9, Year 10, you know, they’re in Year 11 now and you know them so well, they know you, you come in at the beginning of the year and you don’t waste six months, or a term, trying to get your kids under control they come in and that’s it. They know you, they know the way things are and the parents too, you know, if I have a problem with a kid, most parents I see down at the IGA or at the bowls club and you say, “Oh, by the way, such and such, your child”. (Teacher, Western Australia)

The relationships; like the relationships you have with the kids, like I see every kid in the school. I have contact with a lot of the kids every day because of my range of being the PE. I have to see all the kids. I just think, at the big schools the numbers are big, you have a bigger range of kids, at least here you can create better relationships with the kids, I do like the smaller class sizes because it gives you a chance to work more closely with them. (Teacher, New South Wales)

Also P & C are very fabulous. They are good at asking how you are going in classroom. Is there anything that you would like? What are you finding that you don’t have in your classroom that you need? Write me a ‘wish list’. It’s great. I wrote a ‘wish list’ and sent it off to them and the P & C said ‘we can fund this’. I’m sure they discussed it but they funded me drawers, because I didn’t have enough drawers, I got a new teachers desk, a heap of new pencils that weren’t covered in the budget. It makes your life ten times easier and to have a P & C that supports the teachers, one on one – because what I need in my classroom might not be what the year 2/3 teacher needs in their classroom or the year 4/5 teacher needs in their classroom – so they really personalise it for you and your class. I think that’s great. (Teacher, Western Australia)

Incentives For Pre-service Teachers

We found a range of incentives for pre-service teachers across the states, and as we describe in this section, these are differently organised either by the University or the employer. The large range of employer incentives speak both to the continuous need of systems to maintain staffing
levels in their rural schools, but also to their continuous endeavours to find incentives that they feel will be attractive to teachers at varying stages of their careers and lives.

**University Initiated Incentives**

One of the key strategies that state departments and some university courses are currently using to educate and expose pre-service teachers to rural schools, is via educational field trips and visits – taking them out and showing them what it is like, in the hope that they will see beyond the stereotype, through experiencing life in a rural school first hand. These programs have for some time been seen as successful in exposing city people to a taste of country life, although there is no clear evidence that they translate into successful (longer-staying) appointments to rural schools, and they are currently under review in some places. While there is always a danger that such forms of educational tourism may only consolidate and affirm existing prejudices, such attempts do provide real experiential interaction with rural places and to us they appear worthwhile. As Bourdieu notes, however, ‘to break with accepted ideas and ordinary discourse, it is not enough, as we would sometimes like to think, to “go see what it’s all about” (Bourdieu, 1999).

Although many universities claim to prioritise rural and regional education and community development as part of their vision statements, in reality, relatively few education providers reflect this rhetoric in their practice and only a handful have made direct links to such state-based schemes in pre-service teacher education, or initiated their own rural incentives. A preliminary “sweep” of all Australian universities offering pre-service teacher education courses indicated that, nationally, the majority of Faculties and Schools of Education have no easily accessible or advertised incentive programs to encourage students to undertake a rural practicum.

Our analysis indicated that it is the regional universities which are more likely to address rural education needs, and on this basis we question the metro-centricity of teacher education practice more broadly and suggest ways of expanding the options of teachers in their initial teaching appointments.

The intent of the website analysis was to identify those incentives that are made available and visible to pre-service teachers by entering the websites of Australian universities from the “outside” to see if any links were made between university-based and State-based rural teaching incentives, and if the universities themselves had fore-grounded opportunities for country service to their teacher education students. The researchers concede that there may be more information available to pre-service teachers inside their home universities than they were able to access. However, the relative (in)accessibility of information about rural teacher practicums and incentives, from the public portals of most of Australia’s universities, indicated that universities were not yet clearly promoting themselves as institutions that foreground rural/remote country placements. The research suggests that we need to more actively engage with the ways in which teacher education students’ access and synthesise information if we are to make a significant impact in shifting pre-service teachers’ awareness of rural incentive programs.

We have categorised the “visibility” of incentives into six different levels of active and explicit involvement by the university with rural education. These levels ranged from ‘no obvious or easily accessible information about rural incentives at all’ for pre-service teachers to ‘university-based initiated and designed rural electives or units.’ A brief description of the various levels is provided in Table 9.1.
### Table 9.1: Levels of University Based Rural Incentives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of University Based Incentive</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No explicit link or mention of rural practicum incentives evident on website.</td>
<td>Majority (12) of these universities are all metropolitan based universities, only 1 regional based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link provided to a state-based rural practicum financial incentive (usually through the Professional Experience Link).</td>
<td>These sites (5) make some mention of, or provide the link for students themselves to seek further information about state-based incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link and further describe the benefits of the State based rural practicum financial incentive.</td>
<td>These sites (4) tend to make some value judgement encouraging pre-service teachers to participate in a rural practicum. For example, “[We] actively encourage all students to complete one or more of their field experiences in a school away from the south east corner of Queensland”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University funded scholarship to participate in rural practicum advertised on website.</td>
<td>These sites (7) advertise a university-based financial incentive, (scholarship) to be used to support a pre-service teacher whilst on a rural practicum. There is usually a stipulation of criteria. For example, sometimes the scholarship is only to students from rural communities. Sometimes only for students going to an indigenous placement. The financial incentive varies from a lump payment to weekly payments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University initiated rural practicum advertised on website.</td>
<td>One University offered the Bachelor of Education (Primary to Middle Years) course which requires students to spend a substantial period of time observing and teaching in schools/centre/community programs as part of a co-ordinated program of practice teaching. Their workplace learning includes one or more placements in rural, regional and remote areas. Some universities (4) offered a ‘rural practicum’ as part of a larger suite of global experiences. Some were broadly rural, others more specifically indigenous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University initiated unit/course focus on rural education advertised on the website.</td>
<td>No such units were clearly advertised, although ongoing investigations have uncovered university-based units at the time of the first round of analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beginning teachers commented on their experiences:

> We also had a couple of the schools come and speak to us. Some of the Kalgoorlie schools came and spoke to us and one of the schools from Narrogin came as well. They actually came and spoke to us as a uni cohort about jobs that may possibly be there and the benefits of being rural. (Beginning Teacher, Western Australia)

Other universities organised for teams of pre-service teachers to go together to rural clusters:

> There were five of us from uni who went [on prac]. We were all at different schools but we were all living in Port Vincent together and going to different schools. It was great. That was a really positive experience, I feel. It was really supporting... the staff there, so we kind of went 'actually we could do that when we finish’… Because we all went together and the experience was really nice and it was not as bad as we thought, so that was really positive thing to have done. … so prac was a great thing for me to have done because it opened up my eyes and it wasn’t such a shock when I got there, went back, so coming from Adelaide to the country, I think that’s a big step. (Beginning Teacher, South Australia)

> The thing that we do have exposure to, is we have a lot of practicum teachers come through this school. We’ve had a very good relationship with [local university] for a number of years. We’ve got two teachers at the moment as part of the Beyond the Line Program and they come for six weeks. We actually organise teacher housing for them, for the both of them, for the whole six weeks. Well they call it part of their Beyond the Line program. But it’s from [coastal] University. And it’s quite an extensive program. Goes for six weeks. But one of the things we did is if somebody’s coming in for six weeks, and teaching
in two different faculties, we want to make them comfortable. So we organise, there were two, when we were able to do it because there were two vacant teaching houses. (Principal, New South Wales)

**Employer Initiated Incentives**

The initial sweep of State based incentives identified a variety of different schemes. A state by state summary indicates that there are two distinct types of state-based incentives - those that provide support for pre-service teachers to undertake a professional experience opportunity/placement in a rural school and those that target graduating/beginning teachers to facilitate employment in a rural school.

The **NSW Department of Education and Community** (formerly Education & Training) offers a Teacher Education Scholarship Program designed to recruit quality teachers for hard to staff rural and metropolitan schools. Each year, up to 230 scholarships are offered to support secondary pre-service teachers in mathematics, science, technological and applied studies or English. Scholarships can be for up to 5 years and cover the cost of HECS fees and provide an allowance of up to $1,500 for each year. Scholarship holders are guaranteed permanent employment in a NSW public school in Sydney's western or south-western suburbs or in a non-coastal rural area of the state.

For professional experience opportunities, DEC has a program entitled *Explore Your Future* of which, *Beyond the Line* is a part, this program is designed to provide a snapshot of a rural teacher's life, firsthand experience of country hospitality and the chance to discover more about country areas that hold the greatest number of employment opportunities during a short stay (3-4 day program). DEC also offers the usual scholarship incentives for pre-service teachers to take up a rural practicum, as it covers the costs of travel and accommodation.

The **Northern Territory Department of Education** & Training takes a different approach through its website which offers NT stories from teachers discussing their experiences. This resource for pre-service teachers provides insights into teaching in rural and remote locations. However, in 2011, the NT commenced a funded placement program for pre-service teachers. The pre-service teacher Remote School Experience (RSE) provides 30 fully funded practicum placements in very remote NT Government schools for pre-service teachers in their final years of study. The DET RSE prepares pre-service teachers for remote teaching by providing them with a fully-funded opportunity to teach and live in a remote Indigenous school and community, working with another pre-service teacher.

The **Victorian Department of Education & Early Childhood Development** (DEECD) offers a Student Teacher Practicum Scheme which is advertised as an initiative that provides financial incentives to eligible pre-service teachers to undertake practicum placements in Victorian government rural and outer metropolitan schools. The scheme provides schools with an opportunity to participate in the training of pre-service teachers and, in turn, enables pre-service teachers to experience a rural or outer metropolitan placement. Under the Scheme, students who meet the eligibility criteria can claim a one off Living Away from Home allowance or a Travel allowance for placements of three weeks or longer.

**South Australia** offers a targeted financial incentive entitled Country Teaching Scholarships designed to attract quality pre-service teacher education students to the Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS). Students who are accepted into the program receive financial support with scholarships valued at $10,000 or $20 000 (for more remote schools) while studying a teacher education program full time, and permanent employment with DECS upon
completing their course. Scholarship holders are expected to successfully complete their teacher education program in the minimum time and commence teaching in a DECS country school the year following their graduation. Further, DECs now offers a country professional experience scholarship providing up to $1,250 financial support to pre-service teacher education students undertaking a professional experience in a DECS country school.

*Tasmania’s Department of Education* offers the Professional Experience in Isolated and Rural Schools (PEIRS) program, which is designed to encourage pre-service teachers to undertake school experience in participating rural and isolated schools by providing financial support for accommodation and travel.

In Western Australia, a number of different financial incentives are available from the WA Department of Education. A Rural Teaching Practice offers pre-service teachers the opportunity to undertake their final year practicum in a public school in a rural area and receive financial support to cover the cost of travel to and from the school, and a stipend towards living costs for the period of the practicum. The amount of the stipend is related to the actual location, with harder to staff schools attracting a greater allowance. Upon graduation, employment offers in rural schools are made first to those people who have participated in the program.

Also available is specific information about rural school placements. At the time of the analysis the site indicated that “Working in rural schools offers opportunities for promotion and leadership roles before they may be available in the metropolitan area. And all our schools have access to the internet and a range of communications technologies so you are not isolated from family and friends”. WA also advertises information for pre-service teachers to consider remote locations, naming 41 schools classified as remote schools and part of what is called the Remote Teaching Service, advertising also includes comments from teachers indicating how much they enjoyed the experience. However, the current site is very clear in outlining many of the “difficulties” as well as positives associated with employment in remote locations.

The following table (Table 9.2) outlines the range of pre-service programs that are currently operating out of state departments to facilitate pre-service teachers’ involvement in country teaching programs. Alternatively, the departments outline the range of incentives that encourage the new graduate to apply for a rural appointment upon completion of their studies.

**Table 9.2: State Department Pre-service Teacher Programs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Employer-Sponsored Incentive</th>
<th>Brief Description (see appendix for details)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship support</td>
<td>Competitive scholarships to pre-service teachers, covering HECs expenses plus some additional financial support, with the requirement of the student to accept an appointment in a “hard-to-staff” school. Usually limited to particular areas of need, which include subjects such as Technology &amp; Applied Studies, LOTE, Sciences (Physics/Chemistry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel grants</td>
<td>Provide financial support for pre-service teachers to undertake placements in rural/remote schools. Funding varies from state to state (and location depending on remoteness) but includes travel and living-away-from-home allowances. These grants are typically “untied” so that the student is not committed to employment with the provider. In some states, participation in these programs gives the participant priority of appointment, if they so choose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural trips</td>
<td><em>Beyond the Line</em>, type programs, where potential employers organise and fund short term visits to rural schools and communities so that pre-service teachers can get a feel for the demands of such a “place” and meet with teachers and community members in these locations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road shows/presentations/website</td>
<td>Employers visit university campuses to talk with pre-service teachers about the attractions of a rural experience/appointment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The information available to pre-service teachers, browsing the internet in search of available scholarship or support for their studies, does appear to highlight and strongly support the employers’ imperative to staff schools in rural and remote locations. While not all states offer the same incentives, it is clear that any student who begins teacher education with an interest in teaching in a rural or remote school, or who develops such an interest along the way, will be able to find financial and informational support to encourage and sustain that interest. The value of these opportunities was noted in our Case Studies:

I find that the staff here are so professional in their mentoring of you as a prac teacher that you feel, I feel more than ready. I mean I’ve only been here two and a half weeks but I’m already applying for jobs and feel comfortable applying. Like I’m not nervous about the prospect of being in a full time teacher role [...]. And also something that draws me and is the added responsibility you take on in a country school and that professionally you could be taking on a few different roles way earlier than you would ever get in a city school. (Preservice Teacher, New South Wales)

It is evident from qualitative data that financial incentives are not all that is needed but they are clearly important. Responses such as this, give a holistic student-perspective of the situation:

Far more [money] than what is on offer. Out of pocket expenses stop a large percentage of students who would like to do a remote placement, from doing so, as many still have to support a household or (rent commitments) whilst away. Cannot access normal paid employment whilst on prac, so no income. (Pre-service Teacher, Survey)

One of the survey respondents explained that his placement:

[W]as in the Pilbara and I successfully applied for the Rural Teaching Program, I received $240 per week. While this would usually be a great help, the town in which I was placed has limited housing due to mining, and the going rate for a shoddy 3 bed 1 bath house was $1,300 a fortnight. I was lucky enough to get in contact with a man who had been a family acquaintance 30 years ago and was willing to put me up in his house for ten weeks. Without that, the prac would not have been possible for me. I believe that if housing were provided for prac, more pre-service teachers would be able to go rural. (Pre-service Teacher, Survey)

While numerous other students suggested that costs in different communities need to be considered when determining allowances – an obvious issue in the example above. Similarly, others commented:

I was very lucky to gain accommodation at the Benalla Hospital in the doctors housing. This made it affordable for me to live, however, if I was to pay for a motel there would be no chance of me being able to afford this. (Pre-service Teacher, Survey)

Loss of capacity to earn an income is a disincentive for students to take up a rural placement:

At least covering of all costs associated with the placement. Some consideration needs to be given to those who are taking time off of paid employment in order to complete the practicum. (Pre-service Teacher, Survey)
The extra financial strain coupled with loss of income appeared to constitute significant burden. Petrol vouchers, accommodation supplements and weekly allowances were suggested by numerous respondents. This noted, participants were generally very grateful for assistance that was offered, but identified that there were costs that this did not cover:

*The rural scholarship really helped me out - I wouldn't have been able to survive without it.* (Pre-service Teacher, Survey)

*A fairly reasonable amount! I was leaving a job in the city so I was not able to earn any money for 2.5 months and did not qualify for any Centrelink Payments. Probably approx. $200 a week, depending on how far away from home the pre-service teacher is.* (Pre-service Teacher, Survey)

*It depends vastly on their own circumstances, before I began my internship I had to work to save money in order to facilitate my placement in a rural area as I was paying rent both where I was staying whilst on my placement as well as my residential address which I found difficult, especially when as a result of undertaking a rural placement you are basically leaving a part-time or casual job in order to complete your prac.* (Pre-service Teacher, Survey)

A small number of students indicated that they would have liked to undertake an additional rural/regional placement, or would have preferred to undertake placements in an alternative rural location, but could not do so because of financial considerations. Recent research related to the financial plight of university students suggests that almost 40 per cent of full-time students and 54 per cent of part-time students said work commitments impacted negatively on their studies (Bexley, Devlin & Marginson, 2007). One-third of all students said they were forced to regularly skip class because of work responsibilities. It would appear that loss of income from paid work while undertaking professional experience in distant rural communities would be a strong disincentive for students to participate in a rural practicum – findings supported by this study.

### Selling Rural Education: Whose Responsibility?

As displayed in the chart above, few Australian universities highlight, or draw attention to either a state-based incentive program or a self-initiated program of attracting pre-service teachers to rural teaching. The majority of universities whose websites indicated no explicit links or mention of rural teaching were metropolitan universities. This analysis raises questions in relation to where the responsibility for promoting rural education and employment resides. Should the responsibility for rural teacher education be left to rural universities alone? It is clear that the lack of any explicit or obvious information about rural schools effectively renders them invisible to metropolitan-based pre-service teachers coming to understand the boundaries of their course and new profession, and highlights why Halsey’s (2005) report indicated that, for all practicum placements in Australian universities, only 22.7% were in a non-metropolitan school; with the majority of these placements taken up by pre-service teachers who already attend a regional campus or live in a rural area.

Our survey of universities, in the second category, indicated that some metropolitan-based universities acknowledged that there were state-based incentives and provided a clear link for pre-service teachers to find this information. The fact that some universities had done this, but provided no indication of any university-based incentives or further information about rural education, once again illustrates the point that responsibility for ensuring the provision of quality education in rural schools appears to rest mainly with rural universities, or outside the realm of university responsibility altogether. These universities, while providing demonstrable support for
the state employing authority in its need to staff rural schools, still appear to regard rural teaching as something separate from their own concerns, and as an external, state-based responsibility. As we interviewed students from programs around the nation in the second part of our research, we sought to determine whether this strategy was sufficient; if it was the only strategy offered by the university and whether enough students would take the initiative without further information and advocacy.

The data highlighted that, over the range of universities, there were indeed a number of different incentives including scholarships, rural-based practicum experiences, and units designed to build pre-service teacher understanding and awareness of rural schooling. In the small number of cases where there was evidence of university-based rural incentives, it appeared that the responsibility for this often fell to the ‘lone academic’ or a small team, rather than a Faculty or School-wide focus.

Conclusion

Our initial data gathering is consistent with Halsey’s (2005) findings that to make a real difference to the way teachers are prepared as pre-service professionals, new and better ways of preparing for country teaching are needed. Two key policy recommendations from this study, directed at teacher education programs are:

- that universities with teacher education programs be strongly encouraged to develop policies to significantly increase the number of pre-service country teaching placements;
- that metropolitan universities and key stakeholders be strongly encouraged and provided with incentives to progressively and significantly increase the proportion of their teacher education cohort that participates in a country pre-service placement, and that beginning teachers’ perceptions on teaching in rural or remote schools are studied.

Questions that TERRAnova has not been able to address are associated with those few Australian universities that do promote and demonstrate commitment to rural teaching as a career opportunity for their students and have initiated rural teaching experiences for their students. We do not yet know:

- In what ways were they supported to do so?
- Why has university staff decided to do this?
- What changes have staff needed, to facilitate this career opportunity?
- Where this opportunity is mandatory, are there any significant differences in the number of students who take up a rural career in comparison to those universities that do not offer such experiences?
Chapter Ten

The Case Studies: Researching Schools in Rural Places
Wendy Hastings and Jo-Anne Reid

As has been outlined in Chapter Three, the schools we studied were chosen because they were nominated either by their communities or their Department (state or non-government) as schools that have successfully attracted and retained teachers beyond the typical three year appointment period. The project design had each of these schools and associated communities was involved in the project for a full school year (longer in New South Wales, where permission to visit schools who had indicated their willingness to participate was withheld by the Department of Education and training after media attention on proposed staffing reforms) – from an initial contact by telephone, an interview with the Principal early in the year, a site visit during the year, and a follow up end-of-year interview with the Principal to project changes in the following year. Site visits were conducted by a member of the research team, who spent several days in each location attempting to identify the features of the school and/or community – the rural social space – that influences the capacity of these locations to operate against the grain.

This chapter provides the reader with a snapshot of what the researchers felt were the most enduring and memorable features of these schools and their communities. It is organised into two sections – first, a summary of each Case Study site is presented alphabetically, as an introduction to the Case Study reports, in Volume 2, which are organised in groups according to their home State. After these introductory descriptions, which highlight the rationale for the choice of each site and the salient features about the community and school, we then move to a discussion of a key ethical concern for us in the conduct of this research – founded as it is on attention to the particular affordances and achievements of people, schools and communities in particular locations – the issue of naming of place.

The second section of the chapter discusses this issue, and then presents our strategy to deal with this during the two and a half years that we were unable to gain permission from the NSW government to name the schools in public reports. We argue here that new conceptions of ethical practice may need to be considered and developed wherever research that appropriately attends to place and location as factors inherent in and germane to inquiry is conducted.

The Case Study Schools

We have outlined in Chapter Three how the following twenty sites were chosen for study. Each is different in terms of its geography, demography and economy, and each affords a unique and particular account of how success has been achieved in these particular places, at this particular time, and with these particular people. None provides a recipe for guaranteed success in other times and places, yet each provides good information and evidence for approaches to the attraction and retention of staff in rural schools that have worked, and can be used by others.

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20 This chapter has been prepared by Wendy Hastings and Jo-Anne Reid. The mapping work of Steven Gibbs, and the input and assistance from Simone White and Kylie Press is gratefully acknowledged.
Alvie Consolidated Primary School, Victoria

The township of Alvie lies approximately 18 km northwest of Colac in central South West Victoria. The town itself has a population of less than 100, but the population of the surrounding Colac community is approximately 10,000. Alvie Consolidated Primary School is a small school with a student population of 40, a teaching staff of three, and a teaching Principal. Despite the small school size, it has long held a reputation for recruiting and retaining beginning teachers, and was nominated by university staff who have long-standing relationships with the school.

Although visually rich and picturesque, Alvie, according to Australian Bureau Statistics (ABS) is relatively economically poor. The majority of families living in the area are either third generation small scale dairy or sheep farmers, or work in the local dairy processing factory, Bonlac, or in small business employment.

Although small, Alvie Consolidated Primary School has been strategic in the ways in which the staff has worked flexibly and across each other’s classrooms. Teachers have adopted the attitude that all of the children in the school are their responsibility and as such, while students are grouped in particular ways, the staff remain more flexible and able to teach across the levels. Each year, the staff meet to discuss collectively the best way to resource and staff the school and staffing loads have remained flexible to adjust to the local changes – particularly due to changing numbers of students. It is the collaborative and supportive nature of the staff, through effective leadership, that has assisted the sustainability of the staff and the school as a whole.

The most significant and constant threat that the school faces is that of closure due to declining numbers.

Bruce Rock District High School, Western Australia

From the 51 nominated schools, Bruce Rock District High School was nominated by the Rural & Regional Educational Advisory Committee in WA, as a case study of a school in a small community with a medium to strong economic and social base. The school caters for years K-10 and has 12.1 full time equivalent teaching staff, 153 students (13% Indigenous) of whom 85 are
male and 68 are female. The school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates that the school has 68% of its students in the bottom and lower middle quadrants of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA), compared with a 50% national distribution. Students who complete years 11 and 12 do so either at Merredin Senior High School, about 50 kilometres away, or at independent schools in Perth.

The Shire of Bruce Rock, in the central wheat belt of Western Australia, is 240 kilometres east of Perth and has a population of approximately 1300 people, with about 700 living in the town. Industries include pastures of wheat, barley, lupin, peas and livestock - sheep, pigs, goats, as well as machinery production. Light industry includes cabinet making, motor body building and light engineering, together with a full range of service industries.

The residents of Bruce Rock have access to quality facilities including a 33 metre heated swimming pool, a recreation centre, a fully serviced function centre and gymnasium. There is a 500 seat Federation Amphitheatre and the sports’ teams are provided with very good playing areas, particularly at the Recreation Centre.

New staff members receive considerable support, both formal and informal, from the Principal and experienced staff. Mentoring and professional development are valued by teachers and access to PD is not seen as being a problem. Outside of school hours, staff members meet socially once a term and gather for a coffee day once a week; activities such as these are seen as vital for new teachers as they adjust to life in a new school and community. While the school welcomes pre-service teachers, typically very few, usually only one or two, complete a practicum each year.

Teacher noted advantages of living and working in Bruce Rock, include smaller class sizes and staff numbers, good quality leadership and close connection with parents and children. Living in a small and friendly community was appreciated and people were observed to be more relaxed than those living in metropolitan communities.
Corowa High School, New South Wales

The community of Corowa, with a population of approximately 10,000, is located near the banks of the Murray River on the New South Wales edge of the Victorian border. The town, geographically, is situated three hours drive from Melbourne, four hours from Canberra and six hours from Sydney. The town has great historic significance and is known as the ‘Birthplace of Federation’, while the region itself has begun to establish itself as a tourist destination due to its growing reputation for quality wines and food. Corowa High School is the only public secondary school in the town and was nominated by staff and confirmed by the Department of Education & Training because it has a high number of beginning teachers who typically stay at the school for more than three years. Many of the teachers had accepted a rural school placement on completion of their studies and believed that Corowa High School was an excellent place to work with strong mentoring and support mechanisms.

Many of the interviews, in the case study, highlighted another reason that attracted, and more importantly, retained staff in the area - that it was well placed geographically to access other locations and amenities. Corowa (and its surrounding district) was also identified as an attractive place to work because of access to sport and other recreational opportunities.

The community, although predominantly low to middle income earners, has almost 44% of its population with a post-school qualification. The community attitude of valuing education and learning was also reflected in the teaching qualifications and attitude of staff at the Corowa High School, with many of the teachers well supported to take up further studies in education or the creative arts more broadly.

The school has been able to recruit and retain teachers apparently as a result of a combination of high staff morale, staff leadership opportunities and a culture of high student expectations and achievement. Interviews indicated that these issues were key to teachers enjoying their work at Corowa High School.

A major challenge the school faces, tied in many ways to student recruitment, is the constant need to highlight ‘positive’ stories about learning in rural schools. Selling positive stories to
parents about rural schools, who often believe ‘bigger is therefore better’ or ‘private is better than public’ when it comes to providing educational choices for students, is a constant battle.

**Hamilton and Alexandra College, Victoria**

Hamilton community was selected, in particular, due to its *geography* and *economy*: the town has a population of approximately 9,500 people and is situated in the South Grampian Shire in Victoria. The town of Hamilton is located close to the New South Wales/South Australian border and is a four hour drive from Melbourne and a six hour drive from Adelaide. The larger regional centre of Warrnambool is approximately an hour’s drive away. The Southern Grampian Shire Council has strategically recognised its unique ‘place’ in terms of geography, demography and economy and maximised the wealth of the various landscapes to invest significantly in the marketing of the Hamilton region’s position. The town’s logo, or brand is known as ‘naturally rich’.

![Map of Victoria showing Hamilton](image)

While many towns in Victoria and NSW were built on gold, Hamilton was built on wool and the gathering of industries to support the wool industry. It was once known as the ‘wool capital of the world.’ While the town might owe its wealth to pastoralists, it is a community sense of ‘innovation, creativity and entrepreneurialism’ that appears to sustain the community now and to place it in a strong position for growth in the future.

The case study school, Hamilton and Alexandra College, was nominated by the school and community, because of its historical ability to attract and retain teachers. The school has a student population of 471 students, 47 full time equivalent teaching staff, all of whom are well supported by the local council (as are the other schools in the town) which has developed and documented a strategic plan to sustain the community and attract and retain rural professionals such as teachers, doctors, nurses, lawyers.

The case study revealed a number of strategies to attract and retain teachers. Examples of pre-service partnerships, subsidised accommodation and extended professional experience programs as well as dedicated staffing to support pre-service and in-service teachers was evident. While the
community has worked hard to strengthen its position in order to face the challenges for the future, the constant challenge faced by Hamilton is a decreasing population; loss of industry; an aging population; and a decreasing number new families into the area. The strategic whole community approach is a specific and significant factor recognised as distinctive to this case study.

**Jamestown Community School, South Australia**

Jamestown is located 209 kilometres north of Adelaide - about 3 hours drive away - in lush wheat belt country on the banks of the Belalie River. The school and community offer much more than that which is typical of small towns similar in size – approximately 1410 people. It is a rural community that is very proud of its achievements and assets, particularly the “community” school. There are very substantial community resources such as the indoor sporting complex, numerous grass tennis courts, very green playing fields (significant in a time of drought), a hydrotherapy pool, and a railway museum.

The townspeople are proud of what the community offers because much of what is there is the result of significant lobbying and work by local community members. Many of the town’s people are employed in the rural sector and related industries, which appear to be the main employer, while a number commute to Roxby Downs for work. In particular, their lobbying resulted in the creation of the R-12 Community School (and associated buildings) when it became obvious that the town could not sustain two separate entities. The school, which was nominated by the state department of education, offers a very broad curriculum and works collaboratively with other schools in the region to ensure ongoing delivery of this curriculum. The school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates that the school has 90% of its students in the middle quadrants and 10% of its students in the top quadrant of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) and 2% Indigenous students. It has 22.3 full time equivalent teaching staff, 287 students, of whom 152 are male and 135 are female.

Staff and community members believe that working and living in a community such as Jamestown has many benefits, both personal and professional, and that there exists satisfactory access to professional development and leadership opportunities. The staff speak very positively
of the student population and they are very attentive to the demands that farming life can have on the educational opportunities and welfare needs of their students, particularly in times of hardship as the result of drought. The school is highly supportive of professional experience placements but typically, the only pre-service teachers that choose Jamestown for a placement, have family connections in the local area.

**Kununurra District High School, Western Australia**

From the 51 nominated schools, Kununurra District High School was nominated by the Rural & Regional Educational Advisory committee in WA, as a case study of a school in a medium sized community with a medium to strong economic and social base. The school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates that the school has 51% of its K-12 students in the bottom and lower middle quadrants of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) compared with a 50% national distribution. It has 63 full time equivalent teaching staff, 790 students (46% Indigenous) of whom 407 are male and 383 female.

The town of Kununurra, established in 1960, has a population of about 4000 and is located in Western Australia’s Kimberley region. By road, Kununurra is located 3,100 kilometres from Perth and is 37 kilometres west of the Western Australia/Northern Territory border. Residents have access to government and private services, including retail outlets, medical services, a police station, schools, an airport, an aquatic centre, child care facilities and banks.

Kununurra's industries include agriculture, tourism and mining. Agricultural activities include melons, dry culinary beans, chick peas, bananas, mangoes, lemon, lime, red grapefruit and sandalwood. Mining activities include the Argyle Diamond Mine, lead, copper, zinc and gold.

The remote and untouched landscape includes deserts, ranges, gorges, cliffs, escarpments, open plains, sandy beaches, rainforests and a wide variety of wildlife. The area has an abundance of water; but is under threat from cane toads advancing from the Northern Territory.
Some teachers are attracted to the school because of the opportunity to teach Indigenous students, while personal reasons for remaining include the relaxed lifestyle, affordability of home ownership and a high regard for the school, which teachers indicate is important for their own children’s education. Social and sporting activities, community facilities and the close-knit community atmosphere were other “attractive” features commented upon.

Teachers indicated the main professional reasons for remaining in the community included collegiality and socially active staff, the professional challenge of teaching students with a very wide range of abilities, support from school leadership, the close relationship with parents and children, very good access to resources, and the importance of being a role model for children.

**Lightning Ridge Central School, New South Wales**

This school/community was nominated by a community member and ex-teacher, and corroborated by a DET Country Area Program consultant as a school for this study because of the nature of its demography and geography: it is a small town of less than 3000 people, with a high Indigenous and multi-cultural population (over 40% of the children in the school identify as Indigenous, and a further 11% come from language backgrounds other than English. Lightning Ridge is situated in a remote location in north western NSW, and although previously served by air transport, can currently be accessed only by road – 720 km from Sydney and 380 km north of Dubbo.

Situated among large grazing properties, the economy of Lightning Ridge is built on opal mining and tourist industries, which results in the population figures being variable, and often reflecting changes in the broader economy. Lightning Ridge Central High School provides comprehensive education, from K-12, for the children of the town and surrounding districts. Some students travel long distances by bus to school each day, and for all educational and sporting interactions with other schools.

Due to several indicators of disadvantage, the school is very well resourced in physical and human terms, with a diverse staff including several Aboriginal Education Workers, learning
support staff and dedicated mentoring support for new staff. While historically, the school has received regular postings of beginning teachers to its staff, there are strong incentive schemes instituted by the State Department of Education and these, along with a strong sense of ‘frontier’ community here, has meant that many of these teachers have stayed longer than the minimum three-year term, using their position to save and prepare for future relocation to the coastal area. Teachers seeking career advancement have also used the school as an opportunity to achieve relatively ‘easier’ promotional positions than schools in more attractive locations, though these teachers do not seem to have stayed as long.

Professional support and development is seen as a priority for teachers in the school, and interaction with discipline-based staff in other schools is encouraged both in face-to-face contexts, necessitating staff travel, and via digital communications networks. The school is a regular participant in the State Department of Education & Training’s Beyond the Line rural teaching incentive scheme, and is regularly allocated beginning teachers who have taken Teach NSW scholarships. It welcomes pre-service teachers on placement and although it does not receive large numbers of these, offers strong support in terms of residential and professional resource provision. Social difficulties associated with remoteness, although real, have been played down by participants in the study who see the ‘laid back’ lifestyle and educational needs of the students to be attractive to them as personal and professional incentives to remain in school.

Manjimup Senior High School, Western Australia

The town of Manjimup includes three primary schools, two senior high schools (to Year 12), a TAFE Centre, and an Education support unit. It is well provided with sporting facilities, including a Regional AquaCentre, with tourist accommodation in plentiful supply, including several small working farm-stays, which provide family friendly self-catering accommodation. A Manjimup Education Visions Committee, comprising members drawn from the local schools, the local Chamber of Commerce, TAFE and the Department of Education, aims to promote education in the region through a multi-purpose and multi-age precinct.

The town of Manjimup is located about 300 kilometres south of Perth, with a population of approximately 4000. The economy of the area has strong links with the timber industry while other industries include horticulture, agriculture, viticulture, dairying, aquaculture and tourism. Agriculture includes dairy, vegetables (onions, cauliflower, peas and potatoes) fruit growing (cherries and apples) and beef and sheep farming. Manjimup is also fast becoming the truffle capital of Australia.

From the 51 nominated schools, Manjimup Senior High School was nominated by the Rural & Regional Educational Advisory committee as a case study of a school in a medium sized community with a medium strong economic and social base. National data indicates that 77% of the students in the schools are in the bottom and lower middle quadrants of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA), compared to the national average of 50%. The school caters for years 8-12, has 49.6 full time equivalent teaching staff, 568 students (5% Indigenous) of whom 302 are male and 266 are female. Slightly more than half of the students travel to and from school by bus. Students regularly perform well in the Year 12 university entrance examinations, with their preparation aided by Saturday study camps that are conducted by teachers on a voluntary basis.
The Principal has served the school for a long period of time and teaching staff is deemed to be “local select” which means potential members of the teaching staff have to apply for positions specifically at the school. The school typically welcomes pre-service teachers, with several current staff members having been recruited after completing their final 10-week practicum at the school. Teachers commented positively on the career development opportunities provided by the school, expressed appreciation for the quality of the school leadership and commented on their enjoyable lifestyle.

**Morawa District High School, Western Australia**

Morawa is located approximately 370 km north of Perth and is quite typical of northern wheat belt towns. The town comprises a small shopping centre, hotel, caravan park, a bulk loading facility and wheat silos, as well as a railway line, and clearly provides services to the surrounding farms and associated families.

The main industries in Morawa include wheat, grains, legumes, sheep, pastoral, agriculture support industries, an agricultural college, and mineral exploration. In recent years, tourism has become important, particularly during the wildflower season (spring). The Morawa Education Alliance, an association between the District High School, the Shire Council and the WA Agricultural College, has a goal to revitalise the community through an innovative and dynamic approach to education.

Morawa District High School was also nominated by the Western Australian Regional & Rural Educational advisory committee, for this study, because of its ability to retain teachers. The school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates that the school has 86% of its K-12 students in the bottom and lower middle quadrants of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) compared to a national distribution of 50%. It has 20 full time equivalent teaching staff, 191 students (21% Indigenous) of whom 107 are male and 84 are female.
Newly-appointed teachers are allocated to a mentor, who is not their immediate supervisor. Support is also available from supervisors and other teachers, with curriculum planning receiving particular mention. Teachers commented on the usefulness of professional development, which is supported through funding made available by the Priority Country Areas Program. PD is available both on- and off-site. Staff meetings were identified as important in relation to developing school-specific knowledge.

The high quality of the school leadership was noted for its clear vision, recognition of the importance of working with the community, personal capabilities and stability. Early career teachers are given leadership opportunities and these teachers expressed appreciation in terms of the challenge leadership provides, associated long-term promotional opportunities, and personal professional growth. In addition, teachers welcomed the opportunity to teach in different curriculum areas, outside their specialisation, as it enhanced their interest in working at the school.

Mount Garnet State School, Queensland
Mount Garnet is a mining town, of less than 500 people, located on the edge of the Atherton Tablelands in far north Queensland. It was selected for study because it is a small remote community with a low to medium economic and social base, as well as its capacity to attract & retain teaching staff. The area supports the development of: potato, corn, peanuts, sorghum, milk, tobacco and maize crops; beef cattle production; and mining. Kagara Zinc and Mount Garnet Lime and tin mines are currently operating.

The Mount Garnet State School caters for students from Mount Garnet and outlying settlements. The school currently has 6 FTE teaching staff, 4.4 FTE non-teaching staff and 83 students, of whom 60% are Indigenous. The school focuses on quality teaching and learning that is relevant to all students, such that they can become active, informed citizens, aware of Indigenous cultures and able to operate and engage with a literate and numerate society. The
Principal gives strong leadership and has built up quality mentoring and induction programs for new teachers. However, due to teaching commitments, the Principal has limited time to perform the role of leadership, management and mentoring.

The culture of the school is that everyone on staff is treated like close family members. The staff are enthusiastic, skilled and committed to the wellbeing of all students, and a number of Indigenous teacher aides work closely with teachers to communicate directly with families and carers. The staff report that they are satisfied with the school morale and their access to PD. Some pre-service teachers returned to teach here after graduation; these teachers indicated they had fantastic learning experiences at the school, as undergraduate teachers. The incentive to undertake rural teaching experience in order to get permanency of employment was an important factor and many of the teachers did their mandatory country service to gain a permanent teaching position rather than be employed in a contract position with uncertainty of employment.

The Mount Garnet community view the school as central to town life and their children’s life chances. New teachers are invited to attend community activities and participate in school fund raising events. The community also contributes to the retention of teachers by encouraging them to apply for promotion when positions become available at the school. In the context of the community, this school is working exceptionally well.

Many challenges exist in sustaining effective recruitment and retention of teachers in a small town affected by the changing economy of the mining industry, work practice changes and technological advances. The mines bus in workers for their long and arduous shifts and this does not help to sustain the school and local community life. Another challenge is ensuring that the children all attend school on a regular basis.
Quilpie State College, Queensland

Quilpie, a town of around 700 people, is located 980 kilometres west of Brisbane. It was selected for study because it is a small community, with a low to medium economic and social base, which has a unique demography and geography as well as its capacity to attract & retain teaching staff. Industry surrounding Quilpie includes large sheep and cattle grazing enterprises, opal fields and oil and gas production.

Quilpie State College is a P-10 school in a small community with a low to medium economic and social base. It has 10 teaching staff, 9 non-teaching staff, and 53 students, of whom 26% are Indigenous. The school community has developed positive school-wide expectations which include: Be Ready to Learn; Be part of a Safe, Happy and Caring environment, Be Respectful. In the 2009 NAPLAN assessment, the school was among the top 60 most improved schools in Queensland. The school participates in community life and is affiliated with the ‘Dare to Lead’ project, resulting in Indigenous students achieving at a level equivalent to their non-Indigenous peers.

Although isolated geographically, the school provides a challenging and exciting learning program with a vast range of secondary curriculum offerings. The school has a balance of experienced and new staff who share ideas, experiences, skills, and teaching innovations. Some staff have been at the school for a long time and indicate that they do not want to live in large cities. Experienced teachers gave a variety of different motivations for teaching at Quilpie, including loving country life, positive community relationships, and because they were offered ongoing work with a permanent teaching position. Reasons for choosing to stay in the community were: small classes; supportive colleagues; and a friendly and welcoming community.

For various financial and geographic reasons, not many pre-service teacher education students apply for such remote settings as Quilpie. For the few who have, they report it as being a very positive learning experience. The relationships and professional networks established within the school are based on respect, trust and caring for one another. The ethos and values of the whole
school reinforce positive collegial support, with a focus on respect for local knowledge and community engagement.

The narrative of the staff member who began as a cleaner at the school, went on to become a teacher’s aide and then became a qualified teacher, was inspiring and one that showed the ways that the community had worked together at all levels to encourage and support her. She showed a great strength of commitment to the community. It is this sense of the broad community working, celebrating and learning together that makes this community a stimulating and challenging one for new teachers who want to work in rural areas.

More difficult challenges include the aspect of privacy for one’s personal life. However, overall, good school leadership, supportive professional colleagues and excellent community school partnerships, contributed to a strong sense of place and community in Quilpie.

**Richmond State School, Queensland**

This community was selected for study because of the nature of its *demography* and *geography* as well as its capacity to attract & retain teaching staff: Richmond is a small town with a population of less than 1000 people situated in a remote location in outback Queensland. There are large pastoral holdings in the area and the economy is built mostly around beef cattle, goats, camels and grain farming. The area is rich in marine fossils dating back around 100 million years and, therefore, attracts local and international tourists who explore the local historic dinosaur trails and museum. Water is plentiful because Richmond is situated over the Great Artesian Basin. Bores supply water for domestic and agricultural use, and have facilitated the construction of the artificial Lake Fred Tritton for recreational use.

Richmond State School is a multi-grade state school catering for students from P-10. The school has 11 FTE and 3 PTE teachers, and 130 students, of whom, about 9% are Indigenous. The school incorporates a wide range of: specialist teachers, including one Indigenous community support teacher; diverse subjects, including an innovative Japanese LOTE program; an excellent sports program; and up-to-date resources and facilities. Good leadership within the school
means that staff mentor and support each other so there is a strong sense of belonging to the school and the community. There are a few experienced teachers who have taught at the school for a number of years and this adds stability and continuity to the school. The school has received regular postings of a few beginning teachers to its staff, and strong incentive schemes, instituted by the State Department of Education, attract teachers initially, and many of these beginning teachers stay longer than the minimum three-year term.

The school is eager for and encouraging of pre-service teacher education students who choose to undertake professional experience placements at the school. The school does not receive large numbers of teacher education students, but staff work hard to welcome and support those who do choose to go there. A strong partnership with community exists, with the school and shire working together to plan and organise activities such as the fossil festival. Teachers at Richmond speak about their sense of developing as professionals and their deep sense of togetherness.

Overall, good school leadership, supportive professional colleagues and excellent community-school partnerships, make Richmond an exceptional place for graduate teachers to get their sense of identity as a successful and engaging teacher.

St Arnaud Primary School, Victoria
St Arnaud Primary School is located in St Arnaud, which has a population of 2272 people and is located at the south-eastern edge of the Mallee plains, between the towns of Donald and Avoca on the Sunraysia Highway, 235km north-west of Melbourne. St Arnaud is a former rich gold mining town but today is pre-dominantly a service town with major highways linking the city to the broader western farming districts. St Arnaud is located in a relatively low socio-economic area and the community has suffered from over a decade of drought, and resultant high unemployment. In 2006, ABS figures showed 8.5% of the town were unemployed, a figure well above the State and national average.
support student learning. The Principal was particularly active in resourcing the school for positive student, family and community learning opportunities. The belief in the importance of working with parents and community to support the learning of all students underpinned all of the curriculum and co-curriculum programs and appeared as a key feature of the school’s success in recruiting and retaining teachers. The school has won a number of awards for its ‘Right Choices’ program and it is the sense of community spirit and support that makes this school both unique and an interesting case study to contribute to the knowledge base of the key features of a ‘successful’ rural school.

The most significant and constant threat that the school faces is that of declining numbers due to drought and unemployment. Further, St Arnaud, like many rural schools, continues to face the challenges of providing professional development opportunities for their staff. Even though the school has put in place successful strategies to enable staff flexibility and mobility, the reality for the school is that it is difficult to allow staff to participate in professional learning activities. Staff at St Arnaud’s perceive that they are more likely to be required to travel greater distances to participate in professional learning programs than in some other schools and this can be physically taxing on staff resources. Teachers and the school leadership believe this is a factor that negatively impacts on other retention strategies.

**St Joseph’s School, Barmera, South Australia**

Barmera is located about 216 km north east of Adelaide – in the river country – and it sits on the shore of Lake Bonney. Barmera is a strong community with a focus on working together, according to much of the documentation available from the Tourist Office. Barmera, with a population just under 2000, boasts a range of community facilities besides sporting fields. It has a rich historical infrastructure which adds to the very strong geographical attractions of the community, for example, the lake.

St Joseph’s was nominated by the local community. The school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates that the school has 95% of its students in the bottom and lower middle quadrants of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) and 11%
Indigenous students. It has 7.4 full time equivalent teaching staff, 107 students, of whom 65 are male and 42 are female.

The school was nominated because of its stable and growing staff. The student population has exploded in the last few years so there have been a number of new buildings and demountables added to the site. Parents and friends provide the labour to upgrade gardens and grounds. Concomitant, according to the Principal, is the very hands-on approach that many parents want to play in their child’s learning – the school is seen as the centre of the lives of many families, for staff, this can have both positive and negative implications for their teaching.

Teaching in a rural community offers a faster path to permanency but it is also a site where teachers get to know the children and there is great support from the staff. This knowledge includes understanding the demands of a rural lifestyle and the impact of the often harsh environment on the children in the school. The “fish bowl situation” in this small community, like many others, is an issue for experienced teachers and that appears to be daunting at times. The insular nature of this small community can influence teachers’ decisions in relation to their need to change schools, as the staff suggested that the community/school closeness can, at times, become constraining. It was evident from a number of teachers that their choice to come to Barmera was very closely aligned to the need for a permanent appointment, rather than an intrinsic desire to work in a small rural community. However, once in the town, there is much that teachers find attractive, and this makes it a desirable place to live, work and raise children.

**Smithton High School, Tasmania**

There were only two rural/remote schools in Tasmania that were nominated as successfully retaining teachers beyond the usual minimum three years. Smithton High was one of them. The nomination was received from the state Department of Education.

Smithton is a close knit community that is very proud of its facilities and community spirit, located 400km and 4.5 hours by road from Hobart. The area offers spectacularly beautiful scenery and many facilities and services, such as hospitals, TAFE and a large range of sporting endeavours. However, some experienced staff and community members did feel somewhat isolated from the main larger urban areas and the services they provide, such as paediatrics, gynaecology and speech therapy.

The school profile presented on the national *MySchool* website indicates that 93% of its students are in the lower and middle quadrants of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) and 17% are Indigenous students. It has 28.7 full time equivalent teaching staff, and 303 students, of whom 154 are male and 149 are female. The school has recently received a strong boost with the appointment of future-thinking senior staff and a teaching force receptive to new ideas. The Department of Education data indicated that there had been a very positive change in staff morale as well as student learning outcomes, indicating the important role that leadership plays in any successful school. The Principal has adopted a very proactive stance in attracting and retaining pre-service as well as beginning teachers, by attending to staff needs and a constructive use of his budget to provide quality mentoring support to new appointments, ensuring that they remain in the school for an extended period of time.

The school, though small and isolated to a degree, has embraced links with local schools in the non-government sector as well as larger schools in neighbouring communities. These initiatives have supported the expansion of the school curriculum and provided increased opportunities for student learning. For some period of time student numbers were declining as parents chose
alternatives to this school. However, in recent times, the school numbers have increased due to community confidence in the leadership and the school’s direction.

Staff identify the ongoing need for professional development and substantive leadership opportunities as very important for themselves and their students. The school community is hopeful that the establishment of a university campus, only 50 kilometres away, will have a positive influence on student retention and staff development.

Smithton Primary School, Tasmania
There were only two rural/remote schools in Tasmania that were nominated as successfully retaining teachers beyond the usual minimum three years. Smithton Primary school was one of them. The nomination was also submitted by the Tasmanian Department of Education.

Smithton Primary School’s profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates 97% of its students are in the lower and middle quadrants of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) and 23% are Indigenous students. The school has 23.7 full time equivalent teaching staff, and 345 students, of whom 192 are male and 153 are female.

What was distinctive about this school was the difference between the primary school and the high school in the same community. While both schools had experienced recent changes in school leadership, the high school was very much forward-looking while the long serving primary staff seemed more intent in remaining with what was familiar. There were significant numbers of newly appointed teachers – almost equal in number to those that had been at the school and community for a significant period of time. The newly appointed staff were keen to bring on board new ideas. The early career teachers were attracted to the area particularly because of the generous incentives associated with remote schools – low rents and the opportunity for permanency. However, almost all that did not have “partners” attached to the local area, indicated that they would be seeking appointments in larger urban areas when the chance arose. The staff were welcoming of pre-service teachers and were keen to establish stronger working relationships with the university staff at the new Burnie campus, both for pre-service programs as well as professional development.
However, consistent with the views of the staff at the high school, was the belief that a very positive aspect of the school was the nature of the children and how important that was to them personally and professionally. All teachers noted the importance of developing strong relationships with the families, and the community, and being accessible and involved in community activities.

**Temora High School, New South Wales**

Temora High School was nominated by the Community Public Relations Officer and confirmed by the Director of Schools as a case study of a school in a small community with a medium to strong economic and social base. Temora has a rural location in the middle of New South Wales's lush Riverina agricultural belt. Located on the Burley Griffin Way, linking Canberra with Griffith, Temora is 90 km north of Wagga Wagga, 450 km south-west of Sydney, 220 km north-west of Canberra and 300 km west of Wollongong. The town was initially established as a gold field in the 1880s, however, German settlers as early as the 1850s, established a farming community.

With a population of 4,000, Temora comprises mostly Australian born (>90%) and English first language (>95%) inhabitants, of whom only 0.9% are Aboriginal people. The town enjoys a sense of stability as a successful and viable community. Temora’s economy is boosted by its location and tourist attractions; however, it is dominated by agriculture, mainly wheat and sheep. Temora council employs a Youth Worker and actively promotes the town as a great place to live and work via a large media campaign. Temora fully supports (financially and physically) the education of its youth, which appears central to the life of the community and its well-being.

The High School, recently selected as a ‘Centre for Excellence’ by the NSW DEC, caters for 368 students from Years 7-12. 91% of its students are in the lower/ middle quadrants of socio-educational advantage and 2% are Indigenous. Traditionally, local families send their children to Temora High School rather than away to boarding schools. The school provides a range of high quality teaching and extra-curricular activities to suit students’ interests and abilities, including a
Flexible Assisted and/or Independent Learning SAFE (Failsafe) program for all students in Years 11 & 12.

The positive community interactions and ties with school members, has resulted in a strong core of teachers remaining either at the school for many years or for their entire careers. Whilst staff turnover is very low, as are the number of new teacher appointments, both the school and the community welcome and support a large number of practicum teachers from the NSW DEC’s ‘Beyond the Line’ program. The retention of teachers is also significantly influenced by the nature and pleasant lifestyle of the community of Temora.

Temora’s success in retaining teachers is due to a strong historical reciprocity of shared intent, respect and communication between the school and the community. Geographical and environmental disadvantage becomes less of a problem in such a strongly united community. Teachers are aware of Temora’s problems, that it is not a ‘perfect’ place, but that it has produced a social space that community members consider is worth working to sustain.

**Tieri State School**

Tieri, a mining town of less than 1000 people, is located in Central Queensland. It was selected for study because of its economy, demography and geography. Most farming in the region is broadacre farming or mixed farming with crops and beef cattle.

The town was established during the 1980s, by Mount Isa Mines (MIM) Holdings Pty Ltd, to provide housing for the employees and the families of the Oaky Creek Mine situated 14km east of the town. The history of the town and its strong relationship with the economy of the mining industry means that the demography of the area is predominantly made up of miners. All of the families who live in Tieri have at least one family member in paid employment with a reasonably high disposable income.

The Tieri School is an attractive school in a relatively new community setting which contains excellent housing and leisure facilities. Many of the younger teachers mentioned that they had
only been employed previously on short term contracts. Similarly, the majority of experienced teachers were only 4 or 5 years into their teaching careers and stated they came to Tieri to obtain permanent employment positions. The new teachers mentioned the strong mentoring support they received from the principal and experienced staff. Teachers commented on the close knit community, safe environment and the good behaviour of the children. Another aspect that was clearly attractive to some teachers was the possibility of flexible employment conditions including part-time work and sharing classroom teaching responsibilities. The mines provided work for the partners of teachers, therefore, the availability of jobs for spouses was a positive factor for some teachers to come and stay in the town.

The school is generally supportive of teacher education students, however not many students apply for professional experience in Tieri. Some local pre-service teachers do request to undertake experience at the school. Some of these students are the wives of miners who are quite influential in the community. Sometimes it is considered a challenge when local people want to undertake professional experience at the school and no teacher is able or willing to supervise them.

Another challenge for this community is to look at further ways of working together to facilitate and enhance the recruitment and retention of teachers and to make newcomers feel welcome and have a sense of belonging. The mining community has set up a well planned town with good facilities, and the school community works in partnership with the wider community to make this a caring and pleasant place to live. However, mining industry restructures, work practice changes and technological advances may impact the demography, economy and the geography of the region as well as the children and teachers in the school. The long term sustainability of the area is dependent on the mining industry and the need to attract and retain quality teachers, who choose to live and work in partnership with the broader community.

West Wyalong High School, New South Wales

West Wyalong High School was nominated by staff and verified by the Regional Director of schools, as a case study of a school in a medium sized community (population just over 3,000 in 2006) with a medium to strong economic and social base. West Wyalong is located in south-central NSW, in the fertile Riverina district, in the centre of the South West slopes bioregion. It is about 500 km from Sydney, 600 km from Melbourne, at a mid-way crossroad of highways between Melbourne and Brisbane, and Sydney and Adelaide. It is a significant hub for the local region, and caters for children from eight ‘local’ primary schools within a 60 km radius. As the service hub for the Bland Shire, West Wyalong’s community is involved in agricultural production of wheat, wool, pigs, and eucalyptus oil. In recent years, gold mining has recommenced as a local industry, along with secondary industries of sawmilling, and farm machinery sales. There is also a growing tourism and service sector. Most of the people in the community were born in Australia, though there are very few Indigenous people in West Wyalong.

The school profile presented on the national MySchool website indicates that at the time of the study, the school had 84% of its students in the bottom and lower middle quadrants of the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) and 5% Indigenous students. It had 32.6 full time equivalent teaching staff, and 332 students, of whom 152 were male and 180 female. We see this case study as an example of the benefits of long staying leadership when the leader has a strong, personal commitment to the value of education, and a charismatic leadership style.
While it may not provide an exact template for other schools to emulate because of this, it provides an illustrative account of a school where the leadership is committed to a place, a community and the school, and it suggests that it is highly likely that this triple commitment has played a key part in the ongoing success of the school over an extended period of time.

West Wyalong High School is noted for a very successful and innovative Middle School program that involves students from all of the local and surrounding primary schools, and attracts many students to continue their secondary education locally. The school also runs a community-supported Vocational Education program that uses and supports changing community workforce needs. A key factor in the successful retention of teaching staff has been a clear vision and commitment to the pastoral care of staff, characterised by a strong ‘family-like’ atmosphere, in terms of their personal and professional welfare.

**Yass High School, New South Wales**

Yass High School was nominated by community members and verified by the Director of Schools as a case study of a school in a small community with a medium to strong economic and social base. Located just off the Hume Highway in the Yass River Valley, Yass is 60 km northwest of Canberra, 280 km south-west of Sydney, 220 km south-west of Wollongong and 180 km east of Wagga Wagga. The town has a population of 5,000, whilst the Yass Valley Local Government Area has a total population of 13,000. The economy of Yass is dominated by farming, wool and sheep farming in particular, and also beef and cereal crops. Significant future growth is projected for the area based on the attractiveness of the location for a ‘tree-change’ exchange of people from Canberra and Sydney metropolitan areas.

The High School is fed by primary schools in Yass and the surrounding communities of Binalong, Murrumbateman, Bowning, Dalton, Ryan Park, Wee Jasper, Bookham, Sutton, Gundaroo and Wallaroo. The school provides secondary education for more than 450 students from Year 7-12. Students occupy mostly the lower/middle quadrants of socio-educational advantage (89%). Only 5% of students identify as Aboriginal and 3% report that English is not
their first language. Middle-class families, in the area, tend to send their children to Sydney or Canberra for secondary school education.

The proximity of Canberra, the coast, ski-fields, Sydney, cultural and medical services, higher education amenities and the social space that has developed in Yass, are reported as having increased teacher retention rates. According to locals, Yass does not feel country, rural or isolated. Many teachers are locally born, or have stayed in the town because of the location and cost benefits, and the satisfaction that they have found working with the students. Another possible motivation to stay in Yass has been the prospect of career promotion as more senior teachers retire. Neither the school nor the community formally welcomes new teachers. This has not been an issue in retaining staff, as many are locals. Yass regularly receives pre-service teachers, from local and regional universities, for practicum experience.

At Yass High School, staff members work to maintain their reputation as a good school and the students are reported as having maturity and a general respect for life itself. Whilst not conventionally wealthy, teachers report that students enjoy a sense of wealth due to a healthy well-being and community strength.

Summary
As a collection of accounts of rural schooling in Australia at the start of the twenty-first century, the twenty Case Studies that comprise Volume Two of this Report are unique both in themselves as a collection, and in the work they do to counter monolithic discourses of rural deficiency.

They were, of course, always a selection that was chosen in order to bring about this sort of advocacy through careful research evidence. As such, they do a particular kind of descriptive work, different from the more critical analysis that has produced the thematic chapters in this Volume, and they must be read in that light.

Our decision to provide the descriptive Case Studies of success in particular, identifiable places, however, has caused considerable delay to the publication of the Report overall, and led to a
number of significant ethical issues for the conduct of the research which we discuss here, as a roadmap for those who follow our journey of inquiry into the difficult area of rural education.

**Issues in Design, Ethics and Implementation**

Towards the end of the first year of the project, when we had decided on the Case Study sites, and confirmed the willingness of the schools and communities to participate in the study, we submitted ethics applications to local CEOs and research directorates of state Education Departments in NSW, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia. In five of these states, permission to begin was immediately forthcoming, and welcomed. Just at this time, as the country moved into its second decade of drought in some areas, newspapers around the nation were announcing the pumping of $300 million into local infrastructure projects, so as to “breathe new life into regional cities and country towns” (*The Age*, 18/11/08). This was designed to convince people to remain in their rural locations by ensuring federal government funding for approved projects for improving the social and community health of rural communities. But at this time, newspapers were also reporting that state-school teachers in the largest State system (NSW) had begun a series of strike actions on a number of grounds (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 19/11/08), including that the system of ‘transfer points’ formerly accruing to appointments in ‘hard to staff’ city and rural schools would no longer be prioritised in staffing decisions.

It was on this same day, when political pressure was obviously an issue in NSW, we received advice from the Acting Director of Strategic Services in that system, that the conduct of research into the sustainability of rural education was “not in the interests of public education at this time”, and refused us permission to talk to teachers working in rural schools.

This directive produced a significant problem for the timely completion of the NSW Case Study visits. Schools where Principals had been expecting a site visit were contacted and informed that this would be put on hold until the state Education Department provided approval. Progress in the other States and in the other two stages of the research plan was unimpeded. It took another full year for the NSW DET to allow access to the nominated sites, in order to study what was happening in schools that were working successfully to attract and retain staff.

Importantly, in both aim and focus, the study seeks to position rural teaching in a positive light and unsettle the perceived ‘deficit’ view of working in rural communities. This is the significance captured in our title, and we seek to showcase those communities whose schools have successful programs involving committed teachers whose country teaching experience is of high quality, rather than simply increased length of ‘country service’. In this way, the project aims to identify success indicators in building a ‘stable’ rural workforce – without the assumption that stability can only be measured by the length of time a teacher spends in a particular school. For the sustainability of rural education, increasing the time served by a teacher in a rural school may no longer be an adequate or useful indication of quality teaching or learning.

Techniques of obscuring identities are commonly employed in qualitative accounts but rarely discussed in texts on methodology or representation; their methodological, political, and theoretical implications go largely unexamined […] Even pseudonyms, the most common anonymizing tools, are usually considered only as devices for protecting participants, not as strategic tools that play important roles in constituting objects of inquiry (Nespor, 2000, p. 546.)
In the years since that time, political sensitivity has rendered the study of staffing rural schools more and more difficult to speak authoritatively about from outside the system. Rural communities are constantly changing – ‘the mining boom’ has replaced ‘the drought’ as the defining characteristic of rural economies in recent years, and some of the schools we have studied are located in mining communities where the economic dimensions of rural social space have shaped them in ways that could not have been foreseen by the Indigenous communities who retain moral custody of the land, or by the graziers or farmers who settled in these areas in colonial times.

Methodologically, working to develop the concept of rural social space within this study of successful school and communities, implies certain constraints on both our data collection and analysis. From the beginning, recognition of the specificity of place, derived from the constructs of industry, environment and Indigeneity in rural social space has meant that our attention to the sites selected for study must attend first of all to this. What does it feel like to be in this place, in this space – both sensually and socially. In what follows we present the range of accounts that were produced by the research team in each of the sites we visited in 2009.

Beforehand, though, we need to provide a brief comment on a key issue that has arisen for us in balancing the ethical issues that arise about the politics of naming in place-focused inquiry. As we have noted elsewhere (Reid et al, 2008), there is a politics of naming in teacher professional communities in relation to rural schools.

Teachers’ vernacular ways of knowing – the ‘war stories’ they tell of the difficult schools they have worked at – where schools are characterised by ‘remoteness’ and ‘disadvantage’ as markers of ‘doing it hard’. Mining towns are ‘harder’ than farming communities to teach in (so that the name ‘Paraburdoo’ may signify harder teaching than ‘Manjimup’ in WA); prosperous viticultural communities are more desirable and ‘easier’ than drought-blighted locations (‘Mudgee’ may be preferable to ‘Collarenabri’ in NSW), and schools with high Indigenous populations are more difficult than those without (teaching in ‘Goondiwindi’ may be harder than in ‘Allora’, in Queensland, for instance) at particular times. Names of places that mean something to teachers in this regard, are part of the mythology of the profession, and add to the difficulties State departments and communities have in changing public perceptions of their place, and overcoming prejudicial attitudes against it.

In the large scale Rural Teacher Education Project [R(T)EP] (Green et al. 2009) for instance, delicate political negotiations around protocols for naming schools, for which the NSWDET is responsible, occupied a great deal of researcher energy and were felt to compromise the development of theoretical understandings about place. This study, begun some years after R(T)EP sought to tackle the issue of naming as one of method. Methodologically, we sought to give final approval for the case studies we produced to each school community – who then made the decision about public naming of their place on the basis of full understanding of what would be published. Until this approval was received, and before the final Case Studies had been approved by NSWDEC, we decided to use pseudonyms for the schools and communities we visited. This also meant that we needed to anonymise the places as far as possible when discussing the material and social specificities that comprise each of them as particular places that produce particular forms of rural social space. Table 11.1, below, demonstrates the analysis of place that we made after the first six Case Studies were completed. In the absence of approval to name the places we had visited
The accounts presented in the following section are reflective notes written by the members of the research team who visited each of the schools. What is significant here is their difference – both stylistically and in terms of the experience of the place that is in focus. These are individual initial responses, unmediated by the analytical grid of the results of our systematic factual inquiry into each research site, as presented above. They record our entry into the research site as outsiders, seeing it as an outsider trying to come to know it. The different gazes and perceptions recorded here reflect the intersubjective interaction between ourselves as already positioned social subjects and the embodied experience of rural place and social space, through ways of looking and writing about schools, spaces, communities.
Apple

Apple is a place that is both beautiful and fragile. It is a place on the boundaries of old country and new ideas. Apple is full of classic country images enough to bring out the romantic and yet the people wear the years of hard financial times and bloody hard work. The working lives of dairy farmers is timeless and the difficulty to take a holiday, silently weathered. Early morning sunlight dances on the spiderwebs spun across the wrought iron fences. Driving into Apple is a country vision of rolling green pastures, windmills and slow grazing cattle. My only dangers are the corrugated dirt roads and the risk ahead of cattle crossing. Apple is technically a hamlet; a town that has only a small number of houses, a community hall, tennis court and church. Against the wisdom of the local farmers - who said why take good dairy country for vines - sits a winery. The vineyards represent the new ideas - a sign of how the area is diversifying to ensure its survival.

Although visually rich and picturesque, the area is in fact economically poor. The majority of families are either third generation small scale dairy or cattle farmers or small business in the likes of the local general store or ubiquitous country pub. There is a growing population of families moving into the surrounding areas looking for cheaper housing. Against all odds in the town of Apple is Apple school. Although many might think the school should close, this school has been able to creatively maintain its teachers, including newly qualified teachers and represents what it means to truly value and respect staff and students. The school grounds, like the surrounding area is beautiful and lovingly cared for. A thriving rose garden symbolic of the philosophy of nurture it and it will grow.

Two Mile

Driving in – golden wheat, flat, wide spaces, remembering the drive between Midway and Two Mile, wondering why Two Mile has flourished so much more than the mother town... the age of the buildings is striking, 1890s, big, brick Catholic church and convent – the town looks prosperous. There’s a new look bakery with lots of glass and cappuccino machine, and there are a lot of shops; the ubiquitous Target and Harvey Norman signs looking strangely misaligned with the old buildings and shop front size of the store.

The motel strip between Midway and town – it’s a stopover place, rest and go, one green Rotary Park on the highway indicating civic pride and successful business opportunities to passing truckies and travellers. I remember visiting the TAFE last time I was here, and I find it again easily, and the school, from memory – out on the Munandie Road and near the hospital... I've looked for schools in enough country towns now to be able to find them... chances are that the government services will be located together, out on the cheaper land, not on the Catholic side of town.

The Primary school looks prosperous – sporting fields at the back are well lit for night games, and well maintained, sited beside a huge oval, with the high school across the paddock – it has brown, clumpy grass, and it looks like it will be dusty and brittle in summer, but now, early November, not yet.

White roses everywhere, in every street – lush, top heavy with blooms, so like but so unlike the white roses of Adelaide, even though they are planted the same way in - in rows beside pathways, in lines along house fronts, long elegant trunks with pruned bushy tops.

I take a walk on Wednesday morning, around the back of town, north of the highway – “Boundary Street” – the line between Midway and Two Mile. I’m struck by the large dam up towards the edge of town, high embankment screening the water from view, and a high fence all around, and no entry signs prominently placed. What is this for, I wonder. There are several dams around town – they’re all large – on a street block square, and there’s one behind the school, a little smaller. They are brown and full of water. The one at the west of town is leaking, or overflowing, I find out later, but this morning I cross a bike path with a stream flowing down its centre, east, towards Midway – like a wide, flat, cement drain.
I wonder whether this is a particular country thrift: a bike-path-drain, though there is a cyclist, in the distance, but he is on the road. I choose to follow him rather than the bike-path-drain toward town, and keep walking the peripheral streets.

There are lawns suddenly— one, then two together, and another one, lush, further up the street. A woman bringing in her empty rubbish bin smiles good morning, and we say good-day. These lawns stand out, these houses are painted, schmick, their white roses perfectly round on top. Most of the yard, though, are like the school paddock, red dirt with clumps of tufty grass. Hoses lie like snakes curled across the dirt— their nozzles pointing to wet patches, each of which houses a tree or a bush that has been lovingly, sparingly watered during the early morning, before the heat of the day can waste the moisture. They are little domestic oases in the dirt.

No footpaths on these streets, like my childhood, but nearer to town, out of broad land and along past a tennis court a large white house, lush lawns and roses again, two expensive cars in the carport— there are wealthy people with footpaths, people we would not have known in my town. Does the banker live here, or the new Mine Manager? I turn off, along Monash Street, and turn again into Park Street and here is the primary school again, and back into town. Main Street, the White Tank hotel, run down, I remember this place last time I was here, with Tony, the pub with the poster 'BEER: Helping ugly people have sex for over 100 years.'

Later that morning I drive past the high school, wishing I could enter, and go to meet the first interview of the day.

Forest
The town of Forest is located about a 3.5 hour drive from Perth. The final 100 kilometres of the drive is mainly through agriculture country, including vineyards and tree plantations, a couple of small towns and a few hamlets, before entering state forests, which provide quite spectacular scenery.

One of its most lucrative industries in the past was tobacco, but now, arguably, Forest is the centre of the forestry industry, with plantation timber becoming increasingly important. Other sources of income and employment include potatoes, fruit and vegetable farms, dairy farms, wool, grain and vineyards. Research is also being conducted on green tea production by the Department of Agriculture and Food, and the town is the leading Australian mainland producer of black truffles with research on truffle-growing being conducted in collaboration with WA universities. The area also exports spring water to Saudi Arabia, Singapore and India.

Over the past 50 years Forest Senior High School has established a strong sense of tradition together with a positive and supportive learning environment. The school facilities have been modernised in the past decade through building programmes, while in 2005 two new schools, Forest Primary School and Forest Education Support Centre were built on the high school site. In addition, the local shire completed an indoor heated aqua-centre in 2006 adjoining the schools, thereby creating a kindergarten to adult education precinct on the one site.

The school has strong relationships with its community, as evidenced by an active Parents and Citizens Committee and School Council. Furthermore it has formed an Education Visions Committee, a unique lobby group, which promotes future development of the multi-purpose campus and the provision of education within the region. Members of this group include the principals of local schools and representatives from the shire, the Department of Education and Training, the Chamber of Commerce, local government agencies and TAFE. The school has also established a strong partnership relationship with the regional campus of Edith Cowan University, with a 2002 joint project resulting in the development of an on-site technology facility, and in 2006 and 2007 a total of over 30 students gained
entry to courses at this campus by participating in a university preparation course, which was delivered at
the school.

Forest Senior High School, and its staff members, is well regarded by the people in the town and
surrounding districts. The school is quite unique in that student numbers do not decrease noticeably in
years 11 and 12 as students from neighbouring government K-10 district high schools complete the final
two years of their schooling at Forest. The academic achievements of its students are well-known
throughout the state as the school performs particularly well in the “league tables” developed and
published by the sole state-wide newspaper. The school is also noted for the targeted education programs
it has developed for students from diverse backgrounds. An interesting characteristic of the student
population (approximately 700) is that 56 - 58% travel to school on sixteen school buses. The most
distant students travel more than 80kms, each way, per day.

Newly appointed teachers to the school are contacted by the principal when their appointment has been
confirmed. While no formal mentoring program is apparent, comments from newly appointed staff
members indicate that their well-being is a priority for the senior administrative team.

The school has a calm yet purpotive atmosphere, sets high expectations for both teachers and students,
and has well-maintained buildings and grounds. Staff motivation is high, with the principal encouraging
and supporting them to pursue curriculum-related initiatives. Teachers conduct well-attended Saturday
“study camps” for years 11 and 12 students, and staff, students and the general population take great
pride in the school’s academic, cultural and sporting achievements. School staff members also have a high
rate of participation in community activities.

Given the general perception that the quality of education provided in rural schools is lower than that in
metropolitan schools, and rural schools tend to have a high level of staff transience, Forest Senior High
School is unusual in that its students achieve consistently high levels of learning outcomes and there is a
low annual turnover of staff.

Lakeside

The vast flat landscape is glary and the harsh sunlight shines on the dry brown earth and the sparse
gidgee trees that grow alongside the highway. The light changes at sunset, to softer flows of light and
shade, but in the early morning it is harsh again after the heat starts to set in.

The train line runs parallels to the road for most of the journey. The large, three sectioned trucks or road
trains traverse the highway with their loads of valuable iron ore from the mines much further inland.

Local industries include large pastoral holdings that run beef cattle. In the past sheep were also
important but it is no longer profitable here so beef is by far the main industry. Goats, camels, fossils
and dinosaur trails are also part of the industries in and around the town. The area is watered by sub-
artesian and artesian water. The man-made lake is the recreational heart of the community in the
daylight and the pubs one of the few public places open after dark.

The life in the streets ebb and flows with intermittent activity. Few people walk in the streets in the
middle of the hot days. The indigenous children and families are part of the life of the small town. I
notice mothers and children shopping and a small boy sleeping on a stretcher in the street and the mother,
who works in the small chemist shop (without a pharmacist) tells a customer, ‘He is too sick to go to
school but I can’t get a baby sitter, do you want to look after him?’

The school is on a side street off the main highway. The gardens surrounding the school are well kept
and full of native trees and shrubs. The school buildings are old but well cared for.
Next door to the school I observe the old Queenslander house on stilts that is the home of the school Principal.

I enter the school up the front staircase and turn right to go further upstairs to the office of the Principal. She greets me warmly.

Wheat

I have never seen such an expanse of golden fields that seem to roll on forever (even though I have spent 50 years of my life in non-metropolitan communities. I follow the road north from Adelaide (guided by my Navman which is superfluous). My progress is interrupted by extensive road works but the many small communities I pass through appear to be unaffected by any march of progress. I stop for lunch in a classic old world bakery – shelves replete with custard slices, lamingtons and cream filled apple-turnovers.

I am “expected” at the school and the staff are celebrating a birthday and I am included in the feast. The Principal has organised a roster of teachers, administrators and parents. All seem willing to talk with me and a number of staff members who are not on the roster request an interview. Principal provides me with a very tasty lunch, and while we share the meal, we have a chance to discuss the research.

I am given a guided tour of the school – a community K-12 complex – that was developed at the insistence of the community when it became obvious that the town could not sustain two separate entities. The entrance of the school is new, with many examples of a positive school life – photos, trophies and samples of student work. The staff room is big and comfortable with large glass windows that provide a very pleasant outlook onto the school garden. The downside of that is that when staff stays behind for “drinks” on a Friday night, community members can also see in.

The teaching spaces are a mix of old world and new, incorporating parts of the old with new corrugated iron constructions. There is a “memorial” rose garden celebrating the uniting of the two schools. The whole community is particularly proud of the “community” library, which is an integral part of the school as well as the township and remains open after school hours and during school holidays.

After my first day, the Principal drives me around the dusty street in his well-worn 4 wheel drive, to share the attractions of Wheat. There are very substantial community resources such as the indoor sporting complex, numerous grass tennis courts, very green playing fields, hydrotherapy pool. The town folk are proud of what the community offers because much of what is there is the result of significant lobbying and work by local community members.

Many of the town’s people are employed in the rural sector and related industries, which appears to be the main employer while a number commute to Roxbury Downs for work. When the substantial wind farms were being constructed, they provided employment. The downside of that was the elevated cost of accommodation for newly appointed teachers (and others). There is a new light manufacturing park being built in town and it is hoped that it will provide increased employment opportunities as well as places for students/trainees emerging from the new Trade Training School initiatives.

The Principal lives in a new home in an expanding housing estate on the edge of the town – indicating optimism for the town and the school. Quite recently SA Department of Education built a number of units for housing local teachers. The commercial section of the town is centred on a wide main street but there is new development occurring in side streets – Franklins.

The only accommodation available is two local pubs or a cabin complex. I choose the cabins but am surprised to find that there is no provision for breakfast of any kind. There are few people about at 7.30am and the only place to get something that resembles breakfast is at the bakery, which does a very good bacon and egg roll and cappuccino.
River

I leave one small rural community and head west south west to the “Riverland” country. I have driven through harsh red desert before but it was such a shock to come across the enormous rich green orchards that seem to spring from the red rock. On my drive I have the delightful experience of crossing the on a punt – a vast cry from the punts of my childhood that allowed my family to cross the rivers of northern NSW. The slick shiny craft made for a very smooth crossing. The red dirt banks rose up from the dusty green waters – levels clearly below those of days gone by.

I stop on the plains to drop my apples in the fruit fly bins – not sure who else ever stops as they were pretty empty. As I get closer to my destination I am amazed by the beautiful jacarandas rising out of the orchards and lining the streets. I am also surprised at the overloaded orange trees that look to be well past harvesting

River is a very pretty town beside a lake that is under stress. Tourist signs hark back to a time when the lake must have attracted many locals and many more tourists for the view, as well as the activities – skiing, canoeing, swimming – all a thing of the past as the drought has made the lake so toxic that fish are dying and it is closed to swimming. I see little sign of industry, others than those that would be related to farming – heavy machinery, car yards, etc. There are many closed businesses - only one supermarket remains open; shop windows with “For Lease” signs but there are also signs of prosperity – green playing fields, clubs, and new sections of housing with beautifully manicured streetscapes. Signs of the drought are evident in the gardens of many of the homes –non-existent or lawns dead, few flowers but a preponderance of cacti of all shapes and sizes.

The school is located on the top of the hill, near to the local parish church. The Principal greets me warmly and I am immediately taken to the very small staffroom to meet the staff. The student population has exploded in the last few years so there has been a number of new buildings and demountables added to the site. Parents and friends provide the labour to upgrade gardens and grounds. Concomitant, according to the Principal, is the very hands-on approach that many parents want to play in their child’s learning – the school is seen as the centre of the lives of many families.

Depression is an issue – not just for parents who cannot work their “blocks”21 (because of their inability to purchase water), but the Principal informed me that many of the children are aware of the dire situation that their family is in and their behaviour reflects the difficulties at home.

Any research project must attend to the emotional and human dimension of the participants and the researchers. At times in this study researchers were bought to tears, in response to the very emotional tales of the research participants – both as first and second hand ‘recounts’. As Anderson and Smith (2001. p. 8) note, school and departmental policies, community programs, social events, teaching and learning ‘are embedded in context [and] enacted through bodies’.

To suppress affect, and write out the emotions as a researcher will produce incomplete understanding of how the world we ‘study’ works. If we are to consider rurality as a particular form of social space, then it is appropriate to consider how this social space is mediated by feelings and sensibilities. Researching in these communities, even for just a few days, generated strongly embodied emotions for the project team – emotions that may have been similarly experienced by the participants, upon their arrival in these same towns and regions. To grasp an authentic sense of the ‘place’, of any place, we need to attend to the emotions we experience in that place and space. Time spent in these communities brings forth language of belonging, (dis)location, strangeness, hurt, strength etc. Attending to our felt emotions enables us, as

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21 Small acreages of oranges, grapes, etc.
researchers, to more accurately capture the emotions of the individuals living in and loving these places enough to stay there and teach.

Conclusion
This chapter has presented a summary of the 20 rural schools, Australia-wide, that were ultimately selected from the 51 that were nominated. While all schools are different, there are distinct similarities between many of the schools in terms of leadership, community culture, and access to resources including professional/personal, as well as community. These 20 rural schools’, provide model examples of how a school community can enable teachers, at all stages, with the ability to inspire and promote both each other and their students, as well as provide an excellent work place, capable of retaining and enriching the lives of all staff and students.

The case study observations and interviews, conducted with school and community members, have allowed insight into the workings of rural schools that cohesively achieve great outcomes for students and, therefore, unity and support amongst staff. It is evident that in an environment where everyone is valued, staff will want to stay, work together and strive for better student outcomes. As identified by Maxine Cooper in Volume 2, (p. 186), overall, “good school leadership, supportive professional colleagues and excellent community school partnerships, both formal and informal, make a strong sense of place and community” which enable “new graduate teachers to develop their sense of identity as a successful and engaging teacher in a vibrant and caring community.

Just as ‘it takes a community to raise a child’ in the words of the Nigerian proverb, it takes a community to keep a teacher. Teaching is not an isolated profession; it works with and for the community.
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APPENDICES
Appendix One

Online Survey
Pre-service teachers participating in a State-Based or University initiative to support a rural practicum or rural teaching

Section 1: Socio-Biographical Characteristics

Q1. What was the nature of the incentive scheme or practicum you participated in?
- University-based
- State Department-based
- Both

If you have never completed a rural practicum or received an incentive to consider rural teaching we are still VERY interested in hearing from you. If you would like to provide comment please contact Jo-Anne Reid by email joreid@csu.edu.au.

Q2. What year did you complete your incentive scheme or practicum experience?

Q3. What was the nature of the incentive and/or experience?
- Rural practicum (3 weeks or less)
- Rural practicum (more than 3 weeks)
- Visit to rural school
- Subject/unit on rural education
- Course strand or module on rural education
- Departmental website
- State department financial assistance or scholarship
- University financial assistance or scholarship
- WA Internship
- NSW Beyond the Line
- Victorian Practicum Scheme
- Queensland Rural Practicum Scheme
- Corporate sponsorship or scholarship
- None of the above

Other Please describe
Q4. If it was not named above, What was the name of the scheme/s and/or incentives that you participated in?

Q5. For what level(s) of schooling and subjects are you being prepared to teach?

Q6. What subject areas and year levels did you teach or observe on your rural practicum experience?

Q7. Name of degree(s) or graduate diploma you are completing to become a teacher. If a double degree, please specify the content major.

Q8. Your Gender
   - Male
   - Female

Q9. Your Age
   - less than 20

Q10. Area in which you mostly lived prior to commencing preservice teacher education:
    - Metropolitan
    - Rural
Q11. Do you have any dependents?
- Yes
- No

Q12. Did you undertake your rural teaching experience in your hometown?
- Yes
- No

Q13. How long were your country placement(s) in school days?

Q14. Did you have a paid job when you undertook your rural practicum/experience?
- Yes
- No

Q15. Where do you currently live?
- Metropolitan
- Regional/Rural
- Remote

Q16. In which town did you undertake your rural practicum?

Q17. Please add any further comments about any of the items in this section:
Section 2: About the Incentive Scheme

Q18. Would you have applied for a rural practicum without the assistance provided by the incentive scheme?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Q19. What was the nature of the incentive provided by the University?
☐ Practicum
☐ Visit to rural school(s)
☐ Unit(s)
☐ Course

Q20. Were you provided with a briefing session prior to undertaking the rural practicum/experience?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Q21. Was the briefing session valuable?
☐ Very valuable
☐ Of some value
☐ Of no value
☐ Not Applicable

Q22. Were you provided with a de-briefing session after undertaking the rural practicum/experience?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Q23. Was this de-briefing session valuable?
☐ Very valuable
☐ Of some value
☐ Of no value
☐ Not Applicable
Q24. Did participation in the incentive scheme encourage you to apply for a rural/remote teaching appointment?
- Yes
- No

Q25. How far did you travel (one-way) from your university for your country practicum/experience?

Please select one

Q26. How did you travel to your country placement?
- Own Car
- Own motor cycle
- Traveled in a friend's car
- Bus
- Train
- By Air
- Boat/Barge
- Other .. Please specify

Q27. Where did you stay while doing your country placement?
- Motel
- Hotel
- Shared a flat or house
- Stayed in my family home
- Teacher Housing Accommodation
- Boarded
- Other .. Please specify

Q28. Did you have to pay for accommodation in the location in which you undertook the rural placement incentive scheme?
- Yes
- No
Q29. Did you have to pay for accommodation in your home base (where you reside when attending university) while participating in the rural placement incentive scheme?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Q30. Did you receive any support to take a country placement?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Q31. If you answered Yes to question 30 briefly describe what kind/amount and from whom.

Q32. Please add any further comments about any of the items in this section.
Section 3: Impact of the Incentive Scheme

Instructions:

This section contains a number of items that describe possible knowledge and skills that you might have acquired as a result of participating in the rural placement incentive scheme. When responding to each item, please do so within the context of your participation in the scheme.

The numbers on the following scale should be interpreted as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N/A (1)</th>
<th>SD (2)</th>
<th>D (3)</th>
<th>N (4)</th>
<th>A (5)</th>
<th>SA (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q33. Participation in the rural placement incentive scheme allowed me to develop knowledge and skills about...

Please respond to the following questions by selecting the option that best measures the extent to which you agree with Question 33 above:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The development of appropriate teaching/learning strategies

Characteristics of Students in rural/remote schools.

Managing student behavior.

Teaching in multi-age classrooms.

Support provided for teachers in rural/remote locations: e.g. District Office.

Staff-student relationships in school

Staff-student relationships outside school.

Community expectations of the school.

The role of the school in the community.

General operation of rural/remote schools.
Staff-staff relationships in school.

Staff-staff relationships outside school.

Parent-student relationships.

School expectations of teachers

Staff-parent relationships in school.

Staff-parent relationships outside school.

School resources.

Community expectations of teachers outside school hours.

Acceptance by the community.

Participation in community activities (sport, clubs, etc).

Attitudes and values of people who live in rural/remote communities.

Rural/remote lifestyle.

Development of own living skills.

Q34. Please include any comments below, if applicable, about student learning experiences in multi-age classrooms.

Q35. Please include any comments below about student learning experiences in rural schools.

Q36. Please add any further comments below about any of the items in this section.
Section 4: Comments on your pre-service country experience or placement

Q37. What encouraged and inspired you to take up a country experience or practicum?

Q38. What amount of financial support do you think is needed to encourage pre-service teachers to take a country experience or placement?

Q39. What do you see as the advantages of a country pre-service experience or placement?

Q40. What do you see as the disadvantages of a country pre-service experience or placement?

Q41. Is there any other information or comment you would like to provide about the cost of a pre-service country teaching experience or placement?

Q42. In what way did people in the town where you undertook your experience make you feel welcome?
Q43. Were there any ways in which you felt uncomfortable, unwelcome or marginalised? Please explain.

Q44. Please describe a memorable incident about participating in the country experience or practicum placement.

Thank you for your participation

If you would be interested in us contacting you for a follow-up interview, please email Jo-Anne Reid and she will reply with a request for information about how to contact you.
Appendix Two

*Invitations to Participate*
RETHINKING RURAL TEACHER EDUCATION: SUSTAINING SCHOOLING FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

Professor Jo-Anne Reid, Dr Simone White, Professor Bill Green, Associate Professor Maxine Cooper, Dr Graham Lock, Ms Wendy Hastings
[Charles Sturt University, Deakin University, University of Ballarat, Edith Cowan University]

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A NATIONAL RESEARCH PROJECT

The Principal

We are a group of teacher education researchers from around Australia, who are seeking to identify the nature of successful teacher education and recruitment strategies that make rural teaching an attractive and long-term career option for new teachers. We aim to do this through a national study of pre-service preparation and rural incentive schemes offered by both University and State teacher recruitment programs, and a study of communities where teacher retention has been successfully accomplished. We are currently undertaking a survey of pre-service teachers to gain this information.

Simultaneously, we have contacted Education Departments, Catholic and Independent Schools Offices in each state as well as state and national and rural community groups to gain recommendations about any rural schools that appear to have achieved a high teacher retention rate and to be functioning successfully in their communities. Your school has been nominated as one of a small number of schools in your state which fits the criteria of this sort of successful rural school.

We would therefore like to investigate your school and community further, and we are writing to ask if you would discuss this invitation with your staff members who are in positions of leadership, who are beginning and longer-serving teachers, and with parents, students and your local community leaders. If they are willing for you to respond to us indicating your consent, we would like to visit your school and invite them to participate in an interview or group discussion to identify the aspects of school/community life and conscious support strategies that they believe contribute to your successful teacher retention rate. We would also like to conduct follow-up interviews with yourself, as Principal, and with any interested teachers in your school.

The interviews would involve volunteers for about one hour, and would be held in a location convenient for your school and community. Neither you nor your school will be identified in any publication from this study unless permission has been granted at community, school and system levels. All participants are free to withdraw from participation in the project at any time, and do not need to provide reasons for this.

We will be very happy to answer any questions about the study, and can communicate with you by email (please contact Professor Jo-Anne Reid on joreid@csu.edu.au if you would like to talk about this invitation more, or to be put in contact with any of the other team members), or telephone 02 6338 6150.

NOTE: Charles Sturt University’s Ethics in Human Research Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Executive Officer:

Ethics in Human Research Committee  Project ID: 2008/012.
Academic Secretariat  
Charles Sturt University Private Mail Bag 29
Bathurst NSW 2795
Tel: (02) 6338 4628 Fax: (02) 6338 4194

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Professor Jo-Anne Reid
Associate Dean (Teacher Education)
Faculty of Education
RETHINKING RURAL TEACHER EDUCATION: SUSTAINING SCHOOLING FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

Professor Jo-Anne Reid, Dr Simone White, Professor Bill Green, Associate Professor Maxine Cooper, Dr Graham Lock, Ms Wendy Hastings
[Charles Sturt University, Deakin University, University of Ballarat, Edith Cowan University]

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A NATIONAL RESEARCH PROJECT

We are a collective group of teacher education researchers from around Australia, who are seeking to identify the nature of successful teacher education and recruitment strategies that make rural teaching an attractive and long-term career option for new teachers. We aim to do this through a national study of pre-service preparation and rural incentive schemes offered by both University and State teacher recruitment programs, and a study of communities where teacher retention has been successfully accomplished. The attached survey is our effort to gain this information through a survey of pre-service teachers.

We invite you to complete this survey, and to make any comments that you would like to with regard to pre-service teacher education for rural schooling, in the space provided. It should take you no more than 10 minutes to complete the survey, and we thank you for your time.

On the survey, we ask if you are interested in participating further in the study, either through a follow-up interview by telephone, or by participation in a focus group discussion with other teachers in your state. If you are willing to do this, please include your email and phone details so that we can contact you.

The focus group discussion would involve volunteers for about one hour, and would be held in a location convenient for you. At that time you will be asked if you are willing for us to continue to follow-up your views about rural teaching through the end of your teacher education and into the initial years of your teaching career. If you change your mind about involvement in this study at any time, you will be free to withdraw without explanation or penalty. Neither you nor your school will be identified in any publication from this study unless permission has been granted at community, school and system levels.

We will be very happy to answer any questions about the study, and can communicate with you by email (please contact Professor Jo-Anne Reid on joreid@csu.edu.au if you would like to talk about this invitation more, or to be put in contact with any of the other team members), or telephone 02 6338 6150.

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Appendix Three

Principal's Pre-case Study Questions
TERRA nova
renewing Teacher Education for Rural and Regional Australia

PRINCIPAL’S PRE-CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. On average how many graduate teachers are employed at your school each year?
2. In general, for how long do graduate teachers remain at your school?
3. When did the last new teacher arrive?
4. When did the last teacher leave? What was the reason for them deciding to leave?
5. What do you enjoy about being a principal in a your school?
6. What challenges have you found in being a principal in a rural/regional school?
7. What strategies do you believe are in place to retain and recruit teachers in your school community?
8. What do you believe are the key factors that have contributed to your school being nominated as a successful school for staff recruitment and retention?
9. Do you have any support or mentoring programmes in the school?
10. Do your teachers receive any financial or other incentives for working at the school?
11. Are there any support or mentoring programmes in the community for new teachers?
12. Which support or mentoring strategies do you believe are most effective?
13. In what ways are new teachers encouraged to participate in community life?
14. In what ways do you see teachers take up the opportunities to participate in community life?
15. What do you believe the perceptions are of parents and other community members regarding your school’s ability to attract and retain quality teachers?

16. Do you know of any other people in your community: parents, P & C representatives, or council members, for example, who might be willing to take part in a short interview to gauge their understanding of the success of your school, the school’s unique characteristics and any strategies they are aware of to recruit and retain teachers?
Appendix Four

Case Study Interview Questions
Questions for Pre-service teacher experiences*

*only if there are prac teachers in the school at the time of your visit

1. What strategies do your school and community use to facilitate pre-service teachers having an authentic country teaching experience including relationships with communities?

2. In your view, what are the benefits and downsides for schools and communities that participate in country teaching programs for pre-service teachers?

3. Please rate the importance assigned by your school and community to country pre-service programs for pre-service teachers on a 1(no importance) to 6(indispensable to the preparation of teachers) scale.
   
4. What barriers do you see that inhibit pre-service teachers undertaking practicums in this location?

5. What advice would you give to Universities to prepare students before (and reflect with them after) country teaching program?

Questions for Graduate

1. Why did you apply for a position at this school? How much longer do you think you will be a teacher at this school? Why?

2. Have you lived mainly in rural/regional or metropolitan locations?

3. Describe the support with which you have been provided since commencing teaching at this school?

4. What do you enjoy about being a teacher in a rural/regional school?

5. What challenges have you found in being a teacher in a rural/regional school?

6. What advice would you give to Universities to prepare students before (and reflect with them after) country teaching program?
Questions for Newly Appointed Teachers

1. On average how many graduate teachers are employed at your school each year?

2. In general for how long do graduate teachers remain at your schools?

3. What reasons do graduate teachers give for seeking transfers to metropolitan schools?

4. What support/mentoring programs are put in place by the school and community for both graduate teachers and newly appointed experienced (>3 years) teachers?

5. In what ways do you feel encouraged to participate in the community?

Questions for Principals

1. In your school how are the cooperating/mentor teachers for pre-service teachers determined?

2. Are the teachers in your school who accept pre-service teachers given any special preparation by your institution? Please provide details.

3. Please rate the importance assigned by you to country pre-service programs for pre-service teachers on a 1(no importance) to 6(indispensable to the preparation of teachers) scale.

   1   2   3   4   5   6

4. What is the level of support given by the university attended by the pre-service teachers during their practicums?

5. Why did you apply for a rural/regional principal appointment? How long have you been a principal? How long have you been a principal at this school? How much longer do you think you will be a principal at this school? Why?

6. What do you enjoy about being a principal in this school?

7. What challenges have you found in being a principal in a rural/regional school?
8. What do you perceive to be the reasons why the following apply for positions at this school:
   - Classroom teachers?
   - Heads of learning areas?
   - Deputy principals?

Questions for Experienced Teachers

1. In your school how are the cooperating/mentor teachers for pre-service teachers determined?

2. Are the teachers in your school who accept pre-service teachers given any special preparation by your institution? Please provide details.

3. Please rate the importance assigned by you to country pre-service programs for pre-service teachers on a 1 (no importance) to 6 (indispensable to the preparation of teachers) scale.

4. What is the level of support given by the university attended by the pre-service teachers during their practicums?

5. Why did you apply for a rural/regional teaching appointment? How long have you been a teacher? How long have you been a teacher at this school? How much longer do you think you will be a teacher at this school? Why?

6. What do you enjoy about being a teacher in a rural/regional school?

7. What challenges have you found in being a teacher in a rural/regional school?
Questions for Community Members

1. What do you enjoy about living in a rural/regional community?

2. What challenges have you found living here in terms of education for your children?

3. When pre-service teachers are appointed at the school, are there any strategies that the community uses to facilitate them having an authentic country teaching experience including relationships with communities?

4. Please rate the importance assigned by you to country pre-service programs for pre-service teachers on a 1(no importance) to 6(indispensable to the preparation of teachers) scale. Should we include the scale here??:

   1  2  3  4  5  6

5. What advice would you give to Universities to prepare students before (and reflect with them after) country teaching program?

6. In what ways are graduate and newly appointed teachers encouraged to participate in community life?

7. What do you think are the particular features of your local school, and community, that have led to teachers wanting to stay teaching here rather than moving on?