

EDITORIAL

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Innovation and survival: Education in rural and regional communities

Welcome to the first issue of the *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education* for 2016. This release coincides with news that yet another university is considering closing a regional campus. The debate about the consequences of demand-driven funding for regional providers has been raging since 2012. It is now clear that this is playing a role in rendering regional campuses 'unsustainable'. The ramifications are significant for rural and regional students who are traditionally those most likely to be studying on regional campuses; many of whom are not in a position to study at city-based universities. While distance education has and will continue to become a viable alternative for many, retention rates for rural students studying in this mode suggest that for some it is not an adequate substitute for face-to-face learning. With this at the fore, it is with pleasure this issue of AIJRE showcases how teacher education programs in Nauru and New Zealand are working towards coupling distance learning with localised knowledge to enhance their programs, and how in the Labrador Straits researchers are working with communities to improve distance education experiences for school students. In this issue our authors also: share findings from a mid-scale quantitative study investigating impacts on schools students' financial literacy; examine how the subjects studies in secondary schools are associated with post-secondary study choices for rural students; examine the impact of fires in four Australian schools; and share an example of collaborative inquiry and collaborative reporting between a teacher researcher and university research about rural languages education.

Bill Ussher's article "Student teachers' placement experiences in a familiar school setting: Local community partnerships with a distance ITE program" adds to our understandings of pre-service teachers' becomings as teachers and the benefits gained through placement in local communities. Opportunities created through familiarity for distance education students and the ways in which schools can become for pre-service teachers a 'village' of learning are examined.

Penelope Serow, Neil Taylor, Terence Sullivan, Jodana Tarrant, Greg Burnett, Dianne Smardon, and Emily Angell report on the Nauru Teacher Education Project, administered by the University of New England to develop Pacific focused teacher education programs accessible to those studying teaching in the Republic of Nauru. It describes the use of Innovative models of teacher education that couple distance and intensive deliveries. It also provides a robust critique of the over-valuing of technological methods of learning and investigates how to best address local issues relating to teacher education, via the use of a combination of technology, and local knowledge. By discussing the ways in which some distance education models are incompatible with localized social and economic infrastructures the reader is granted insight both into teaching in Nauru and the ways in which an international partnership can contribute to positive education outcomes for Nauruan students. As with Ussher, Serow et al. consider the role of the on-site mentor as a way of facilitating learning via distance.

This theme is also reflected in Dennis Mulcahy, Michael K. Barbour and Minakshi Lahiri's article "The straight truth about online learning in the Straits: An investigation into the nature of education in a rural and remote region of Newfoundland and Labrador". Their research identifies some of the key issues associated with heavy reliance on distance education offerings, in this case for school aged children of the coastal rural communities of Labrador Straits. Challenges

associated with limited opportunities for teacher-student interactions in online delivery models are discussed as also is the trend for smaller schools in the region to be those most likely to utilise distance education programs in place of face-to-face learning opportunities; those who could not master the demands of distance learning were found to be left behind. The authors note that this reveals a shift from the original intent of providing supplementary programming to the only way for students to attain the academic credits required for graduation. Community informed recommendations for how to modify existing teaching and learning models are presented with their call for equal access to quality education in part addressed through increased on-site supports and supervision for students taking distance courses.

In a similar vein, Frances Quinn and Terry Lyons raise questions about the real subject choice opportunities for rural and regional secondary school students as a consequence of reduced access to appropriately qualified and experienced teachers in maths and physical sciences. They note that the STEM disciplines of engineering that are significantly more frequently selected by metropolitan students are more lucrative than Agriculture and Environmental Studies, appear to have more job openings and are easier to find employment. When read alongside the article by Mulcahy and colleagues, and the contribution from Ali and colleagues, these articles begin to paint a picture of how residential location can impact life choices in complex ways.

Prepared by Paul Ali, Malcolm Anderson, Cosima McRae and Ian Ramsay, the research underpinning “The financial literacy of young people: Socioeconomic status, language background, and the rural-urban chasm” found that, in general, the financial literacy of rural and regional students was lower than urban students. While this was not the only factor impacting financial literacy, nor was it the most potent, rurality was presented as ‘adverse’ in the analysis raising for the reader a number of critical questions about why this might be the case.

Jenny Evans and Anne-Marie Morgan’s article offers a fresh contribution to the teaching languages in rural settings by coupling teacher researcher and university researcher voice using a sonata form conversation. It heartening to read of the mutual benefit of the undertaking and to gain insight into the positives of rural languages education, insights which will do doubt be of great value to teacher educators, pre-service teachers and in-services teachers alike.

In the final article for the current issue, Adele Nye shifts our attention to community rebuilding in the face of school fires, looking to accounts of school fires in four NSW schools – two rural and two urban. This paper relies heavily upon textual sources, illustrating how the Media mediate crises.

We hope that you enjoy this issue of the *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, and the rural education research that it chronicles.

Jodie Kline, Aaron Drummond and the Editorial Team