Revisiting the schoolhouse: A literature review on staffing rural, remote and isolated schools in Australia 2004-2016

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Abstract

The staffing of rural, remote and isolated schools remains a significant issue of concern in Australian education. In this paper we provide a comprehensive account of the Australian research related to the staffing of rural schools post 2004. The review identifies the overarching themes of the opportunities and challenges of staffing rural schools, pre-service teacher preparation, and leadership. Within these there are numerous sub-categories such as the policy setting, incentives, understanding place, mentoring, professional development, and teacher education. Overall the review identifies that the issues explored in the research literature between 2004 and 2016 are similar in character to those examined prior to 2004. As such we raise the question of, if we have such a well-developed knowledge of matters related to rural school staffing, why does it remain an ongoing issue? While this review does not seek to answer this question, it provides an opening for discussion by identifying and describing the research on issues, and approaches, in the staffing of rural, remote, and isolated schools to date.

Keywords: teacher attraction and retention; rural and remote school staffing; rural school leadership; rural teacher preparation.

Introduction

The staffing of rural, remote and isolated schools[1] remains a significant issue of concern in Australian education. As this paper will outline, there has been considerable academic attention to the issue of 'staffing' over the last decade - and indeed the decade prior. Notable though is that, while there has been considerable attention to the issue of staffing rural schools, the issue remains topical and the associated challenges perennial. Against that backdrop, the purpose of this review is to capture the main themes of this research for about the last decade so that we can identify what we know and what approaches have been explored, in order to lay the foundation for future rethinking of work in this space. That is, this paper is the first in a developing body of work that aims to revisit the staffing question, by acting as an orientation to the field for that further research.

For this review we have taken our starting point the year 2004. This year marks the publication of Roberts' 'Staffing an Empty Schoolhouse Report' (2004), whilst also being close to Sharplin's 'Rural Retreat or Outback Hell' paper (2002). Roberts (2004) and Sharplin's (2002) work are two of the most cited works in this space and both follow the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Report of 2000 which drew significant attention to the challenges of staffing rural schools. Together Roberts (2004) and Sharplin (2002) provide a summary of the work on rural school staffing in Australia up until 2004. This paper is then a review of the related literature for the subsequent twelve year period.

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[1] Hereafter 'rural' is used to refer to rural, remote and isolated schools.

Revisiting the works of Roberts (2004) and Sharplin (2002)

Both Roberts (2004) and Sharplin (2002) identify a number of the perennial issues facing rural schools. In particular both note the long history of research, and government reports, outlining the challenges around high staff turnover, younger/inexperienced staff, inexperienced leadership, and teachers working outside their area of expertise.

Although Roberts (2004) draws upon the experiences of teachers in schools and policy makers, and Sharplin (2002) focuses on the perceptions of pre-service teachers, they highlight very similar themes around rural teaching. Teachers & pre-service teachers identify professional challenges such as isolation, lack of access to PD, teaching outside their expertise, and teaching multi-age classes; as well as personal challenges such as social isolation, fitting in with their new community, and a lack of privacy. In addition to these challenges, Roberts (2004) further details issues around recruitment and retention of teachers including the role of teacher background, incentives, the staffing system, leadership, attracting Indigenous teachers, and induction and mentoring. Problematically, Sharplin (2002) identifies that pre-service teachers develop their views about rural teaching from idyllic or hellish images about rural life, a factor that influences the recruitment and retention of rural teachers.

Both reports outline possible strategies to address these staffing problems. One crucial factor they focus on is the lack of information available to pre-service teachers about rural teaching. Here they argue there is a need to focus on pre-service teacher training to prepare teachers for rural teaching positions. This includes exposing potential teachers to rural communities and preparing them for working in rural communities. Roberts (2004) further identifies a need to develop a model of rural staffing that focuses on professional factors that improve teaching conditions and staffing support, the provision of support for teachers to work with 'rural difference', the inclusion of economic benefits to overcome the high costs of living in rural locations, and ways to overcome the social isolation experienced by teachers. The aim of these strategies is to provide a satisfying work environment for teachers and to develop the skills teachers needs to work in a rural community. With these in place it is theorised that teachers will be more willing to come, and stay, in rural locations.

Studies of rural school staffing

In undertaking this review it became immediately apparent that many of the studies reviewed, and consequently the themes identified, reflected those identified by Sharplin (2002) and Roberts (2004). Indeed one, or both, of these studies is usually cited in the subsequent research reviewed for this paper. While the studies reviewed reflect approaches that are certainly more developed, current, advanced, and often more applied studies, they do not reflect any major change of thinking or radical new ideas. This may be a bold statement, however, we make this point to suggest that perhaps it is time for consolidation, new thinking and a radical departure from existing orthodoxies. Though, in order to do things differently we first need to know what we have done and where we have been.

Since 2004 there have been a number of major national research studies focusing on different aspects of rural staffing. These include the R[T]EP rural teacher education and rural schooling project (Green, 2008), the TERRANova project that explored teacher education for rural areas (Lock, Reid, Green, Hastings, Cooper, & White, 2009), the RRRTEC rural teacher preparation project (White, 2011; White & Kline, 2012b), the SiMERR study into the needs of science, ICT and mathematics teachers in rural areas (Lyons, Cooksey, Panizzon, Parnell, & Pegg, 2006), the Rural Education Forum Australia's (REFA) project exploring pre-service teacher practicums (Halsey,

2005), the Bush Tracks teaching transitions project (McConaghy et al., 2006; Graham & Miller, 2015), rural school leadership projects such as the various works of Drummond & Halsey, (2013; 2014; Halsey, 2015; 2013; Halsey & Drummond, 2014; Halsey, Drummond & Van Breda, 2011) and Clarke, Stevens, & Wildy (2006; Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Clarke & Stevens, 2006; 2009; Wildy & Clarke, 2005; 2009; 2011; 2012) and projects focusing on the quality of pre-service teacher education (Trinidad, Sharplin, Lock, Ledger, Boyd, & Terry, 2011). There have also been a number of small scale research projects in relation to the experiences of new graduates teaching in rural schools, the experiences of new rural teachers, rural practicums and rural visit programs, resources to better prepare teachers at a pre-service level, mentoring of new graduates & pre-service teachers, and rural school leadership. It is clear from the number of different projects exploring different aspects of rural staffing that the issue has remained an area of considerable concern and attention.

Trends in rural school staffing reports

Many studies highlight that rural schools are harder to staff (Lyons et al., 2006; Lyons, 2009; McKenzie, Weldon, Rowley, Murphy, & McMillan, 2014), have higher staff turnover rates (Lyons, 2009; Panizzon & Pegg, 2007a; Panizzon & Pegg, 2007b), are staffed by newer, younger graduates (Green & Novak, 2008; Lyons et al., 2006; McConaghy, 2008; McKenzie et al., 2014; Panizzon, Westwell, & Elliott, 2009), staff teach outside their expertise (Panizzon et al., 2009; Panizzon & Pegg, 2007b), and that rural teachers are more transient than those in metropolitan schools (Green & Novak, 2008; McKenzie et al., 2014). All of these issues are more prevalent in schools that are located further away from metropolitan areas (Country Education Project, 2010; Green, 2008). With these issues, a key consideration in the research has therefore been their causes, the opportunities and challenges they create, and then exploring approaches to overcome them.

The opportunities of rural teaching

The literature suggests that there are a number of reasons teachers choose to work, and stay, in rural schools, many of which relate to rurality, rural experiences, and views about rurality. These reasons include having an interest in rural teaching (Lock, Budgen, Lunay, & Oakley, 2012b; Lyons, 2009), the lifestyle & community (Jenkins et al., 2011, Jenkins et al., 2015; Lassig et al., 2015; Lock et al., 2012b; Lyons, 2009; Plunkett & Dyson, 2011; White, Lock, Hastings, Reid, Green, & Cooper, 2009), opportunities for professional growth (Hazel & McCallum, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2011; Jenkins et al., 2015; Lock et al., 2012b), the perception of good support and good school leadership (White et al., 2009), the small class sizes (Lyons et al., 2006; Lyons, 2009), and protective factors (Sharplin, 2009b). Outside these reasons, teachers were also influenced by incentives (Lyons, 2009) and opportunistic reasons (Hazel & McCallum, 2016; Jenkins, Reitano & Taylor, 2011; Jenkins, Taylor & Reitano, 2015; Lassig, Doherty, & Moore, 2015; Lyons, 2009; Lyons et al., 2006; Plunkett & Dyson, 2011), as well as personal circumstances (Jenkins et al., 2011, Jenkins et al., 2015; Lassig et al., 2015; Lyons, 2009). As many authors suggest, these positive reasons need to be publicised and capitalised on to encourage teachers to take up a rural appointment (Jenkins et al., 2011, Jenkins et al., 2015; Hudson & Hudson 2008a; Hudson & Hudson, 2008b; Hudson & Millwater, 2009; Lyons et al., 2009).

Issues related to the personal biographies of pre-service teachers and their relationship to the rural are also considered to be influential in encouraging teachers to take up a rural appointment. To this end, how pre-service teachers rate their own metrocentricity (Campbell & Yates, 2011), if they felt a personal connection to rural communities (Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015), if they grew up in a rural location, or if they felt that being rural was part of their identity (Hazel & McCallum, 2016) influenced their choice to teach in a rural school. Furthermore, graduates were also more likely to teach in areas similar to where they were living while at university (Haynes & Miller, 2016;

Jenkins et al., 2011; Jenkins et al., 2015; Lyons, 2009; Lyons et al., 2006), a factor that suggests rural universities are an important consideration when thinking about rural staffing issues (Haynes & Miller, 2016). It is also argued that a teacher's perception of rural teaching influences their ability to adjust to rural teaching. If they have positive attitudes they are more likely to adapt successfully to a rural teaching position (Hazel & McCallum, 2016) with positive emotions such as happiness and enjoyment playing a key role in teachers' experiences. As such, Hardy (2015) argues that emotions also need to be considered in pre-service teacher courses to prepare teachers for their influence when teaching in rural communities.

The challenges of rural teaching

In a similar manner to the opportunities of rural teaching, the challenges faced by rural teachers have been extensively explored. This has been done with the aim of understanding more about what can be done to help keep teachers in rural areas. Interestingly, the challenges identified are argued to relate closely to the opportunities of rural teaching, something that needs to be considered when trying to overcome the challenges (Lock et al., 2012b).

Many of the challenges identified by rural teachers relate to understanding and adapting to rurality, both in a professional and personal context. In particular, teachers found it challenging to understand the rural context and community (Country Education Project, 2010; Handal et al., 2013; Haynes & Miller, 2016; Hazel & McCallum, 2016; Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015; Lassig et al., 2015, Lock et al., 2012b; Maxwell et al., 2006; Young & Kennedy, 2011), which compounded issues of adapting to a new personal and professional environment (Country Education Project, 2010; Haynes & Miller, 2016; Young & Kennedy, 2011). Teachers also experienced challenges with professional and personal relationships while living and working in rural communities. They described difficulties establishing new relationships (Country Education Project, 2010; Handal, Watson, Petocz, & Maher, 2013; Haynes & Miller, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2011; Jenkins et al., 2015; Hazel & McCallum, 2016; Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015; Lock et al., 2012b; Lyons, 2009; Lyons et al., 2006; Maxwell et al., 2006; Paninzzon, 2009; Sharplin, 2014; Young & Kennedy, 2011), feelings of professional and personal isolated (Country Education Project, 2010; Handal, Watson, Petocz, & Maher, 2013; Haynes & Miller, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2011; Jenkins et al., 2015; Hazel & McCallum, 2016; Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015; Lock et al., 2012b; Lyons, 2009; Lyons et al., 2006; Maxwell et al., 2006; Paninzzon, 2009; Sharplin, 2014; Young & Kennedy, 2011), difficulties managing their 'visibility' within the community (Country Education Project, 2010; Hayne & Miller, 2016; Young & Kennedy, 2011), and difficulties living so close to other staff members (Lock et al., 2012b; Lassig et al., 2015). Many of these challenges can be seen to relate to the nature of low population numbers in rural communities and the geographical spread of rural communities.

In the literature it was evident that teachers also faced challenges within their teaching that related to living in rural communities. In particular, they experienced challenges with instructional and curriculum factors such as the need to adapt the curriculum to make it relevant for their students (Country Education Project, 2010; Frid et al., 2008; Handal et al., 2013; Haynes & Miller, 2016; Lock et al., 2012b), and issues around a lack of resources (Haynes & Miller, 2016; Lock et al., 2012b, Frid et al., 2008). Teachers also faced difficulties with professional development such as the lack of available professional development in rural areas and the lack of relevant professional development for rural teachers (Frid, Smith, Sparrow, & Trinidad, 2008; Handal et al., 2013; Jenkins et al., 2011; Jenkins et al., 2015; Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015; Lock et al., 2012b; Lyons et al., 2006; Panizzon & Pegg, 2007a; Panizzon & Pegg, 2007b). It is likely that instructional and curriculum factors, and professional development, are linked, with the perceived lack of relevance of both for rural schools a continuing issue.

Professional and personal factors also contributed to the challenges teachers faced in rural schools. Professionally, some teachers were dissatisfied with their role (McKenzie et al., 2014), describing issues associated with staff conflict (Lock et al., 2012b), the staffing system (Handal et al., 2013), and a lack of support (Country Education Project, 2010; Frid et al., 2008; Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015; Lock et al., 2012b; Sharplin, 2014; Young & Kennedy, 2011). The personal challenges teachers dscribe relate to financial issues such as the expense of relocating (Hazel & McCallum, 2016), as well as family issues (Lassig et al., 2015; Lyons, 2009; Lyons et al., 2006). While some of these issues are not unique to rural schools, managing them may be more challenging due to the small staff numbers and geographical isolation.

The politics of teacher transience
In contrast to concerns about the high staff turnover rate in rural schools, McConaghy (2006a; 2006b) suggests that we need to consider teacher transience in new ways - as it may always be a part of rural schooling. To this end, we need to look beyond the question of how we can get teachers to stay in rural areas (McConaghy, 2006b) and consider the problem within the broader social and political contexts and external influences (McConaghy, 2006b) by drawing on possibilities from rural geography and sociology, and theories of spatiality, place, mobilities, and displacement (McConaghy, 2006a; McConaghy, 2006b). Adding to this perspective, while most arguments focus on the negatives of teacher transience, a positive to consider is the constant stream of new knowledge and approaches that can benefit rural schools (Green, 2008; McConaghy, 2006b). These arguments suggest that there are different ways of considering and understanding teacher transience that need to be explored to understand this issue and how it influences rural schools.

Another contributing factor to teacher transience is argued to be the high numbers of short-term appointments in rural areas (Lierich & O'Connor, 2009). Teachers in rural areas often want to stay long term (McKenzie et al., 2014; Plunkett & Dyson, 2011; Somerville, Plunkett & Dyson, 2010), however short-term contracts cause insecurity (Lierich & O'Connor, 2009) and affect how new teachers connect to their school and community (Plunkett & Dyson, 2011; Somerville et al., 2010). This is because school-community relations are strengthened by long staying teachers due to the time it takes to develop an understanding of the place they work in (Wallace, Boylan, Mitchell, & Strecklus, 2008). Furthermore, given the community is a source of learning (Somerville & Rennie, 2012) and support (Haynes & Miller, 2016), that short-term appointments do not encourage staff to develop these relationships is a limitation. With this in mind, the nature of employment contracts may need to be considered to help encourage staff to stay long-term and develop relationships with their community.

Overcoming the staffing challenges
To effectively attract and retain teachers in rural areas a national approach to rural staffing is needed (Lock, Green, Reid, Cooper, White & Hastings, 2008; Lyons et al., 2006; Trinidad, Sharplin, Ledger & Broadley, 2014) because staffing is an issue for all stakeholders (Green & Reid, 2004) including universities (White & Reid, 2008). Overall there have been many strategies tried, and recommendations made, by various stakeholders to improve the attraction and retention of more staff in rural areas, each of which will be outlined below. These include focusing on policy, creating incentives to get teachers to rural areas, improving pre-service teacher preparation, more support, and appropriate leadership for teachers already in rural schools.

Policy
Centralised, standardised policy is often argued to be an influential factor in the rural staffing problem because it does not meet the needs of rural schools (Miller & Graham, 2015). To change this, policy needs to use a 'rural lens', by beginning with the needs of rural schools and

communities, rather than rural communities having to work with policy developed in places that do not represent their needs (Boylan, 2011; Wallace & Boylan, 2009). Using this approach, centres for excellence in rural and regional pre-service teacher preparation need to be developed (Lyons et al., 2006) and adjustments made to the teacher professional standards so that they focus on meeting rural students' needs (Lyons et al., 2006). Systemic support structures also need to be improved to meet the needs of rural teachers, particularly by assisting teachers who are teaching outside their area of expertise (Sharplin, 2014; Sharplin, O'Neill & Chapman, 2011), and increasing the number of support workers in rural schools (Lyons et al., 2006). At a policy level these changes may help meet the needs of rural teachers and therefore positively influence the staffing challenges.

Continuing the focus on the unique needs of rural teachers, it has been argued that recruitment policy for rural schools needs to target teachers at different ages and stages of their career. Here Kelly & Fogarty (2015) argue that pre-service and early career teachers are those who need the most support, and therefore are where policy should be targeted. They propose a model that explains the barriers teachers face in taking up a rural teaching position that includes both 'internal' and 'external' factors. These internal factors include elements such as personality, values, and knowledge about rural teaching; while the external factors refer to systemic and school factors that are outside their control. They argue that these need to be considered in policy, as intrinsic factors alone are not enough to impact on staff retention (Kelly & Fogarty, 2015). Recruitment policy could also benefit from exploiting the potential of teachers looking to move to rural communities later in life (Boylan, 2011), and matching the needs of communities to the experience of staff (Sharplin, O'Neill & Chapman, 2009). Again, this suggests a need to focus on the needs of communities first, using a rural lens as suggested by Boylan (2011; Wallace & Boylan, 2009).

Incentives

Incentive schemes, including those that involve financial benefits (Lock et al., 2012b; Lyons et al., 2006), and improved housing (Lock et al., 2012b), are one way to attract teachers to rural areas. However, the research suggests that such schemes need to be tailored to the needs of teachers of different ages and stages (Lyons, 2009; Lyons et al., 2006). Younger staff are more influenced by financial incentives while older staff are more likely to be attracted to rural areas because of placements, bonds, promotions, and the transfer system (Lyons, 2009; Lyons et al., 2006). Differences such as these need to be considered because, while rural schools are generally staffed by younger staff (Green & Novak, 2008; Lyons et al., 2006; McConaghy, 2008; McKenzie et al., 2014; Panizzon et al., 2009), two studies in secondary schools identified that the majority of participants were older than the average school staffing profiles (Lierich & O'Connor, 2009; Lyons et al., 2006). Staffing profiles such as these suggest that older teachers also have an important role in filling the staffing gaps, something that needs to be considered when offering attraction and retention incentives.

A counter argument to the benefits of incentives, however is that, while they help attract teachers to rural positions, they may not actually assist with the retention of teachers (Handal et al., 2013; Lyons, 2009). Instead it may be the rural lifestyle that assists with retention (Lyons, 2009). As such there is a need to look at ways other than incentives to promote rural teaching (Halsey, 2012). Furthermore, incentive schemes are unlikely to succeed because teachers need to be prepared for teaching in rural locations (White et al., 2008) through pre-service training that focuses on rural pedagogy (McConaghy, 2008), an approach that will be discussed in the next section.

Preparing Teachers For Rural Settings

Much of the research outlined above has indicated that rural teaching is different to teaching in metropolitan locations, and that understandings of rurality, rural experiences, and views about rurality influence teachers' experiences in a rural school. With this in mind, there has been a focus in the research on preparing teachers for rural settings by encouraging pre-service teachers to experience rural teaching and including specific preparation in their teaching degrees. For teachers already in rural schools, support, professional development, and leadership have also been focused on.

Experiencing rural teaching

Many Universities, in partnership with jurisdictional education departments, have trialled programs where students are encouraged to complete a rural practicum or rural visit programs to enable them to experience rural teaching. Programs such as these are a way for students to increase their understanding of rural places (Beutel, Adie & Hudson, 2011; Hudson & Hudson, 2008a; Hudson & Hudson, 2008b; Hudson & Millwater, 2009; Sharplin, 2009a; Sharplin, 2010; Trinidad et al., 2014), and may also increase the likelihood of students accepting a job in a rural school (Halsey, 2009b; Hudson & Hudson, 2008a; Hudson & Hudson, 2008b; Hudson & Millwater, 2009; Lock, 2008; Richards, 2012; Sharplin 2010; Trinidad et al., 2013; White & Kline, 2012a). This is because rural practicums and visits to rural locations provide students with an opportunity to challenge their preconceptions about living and working in a rural place (Adie & Barton, 2012; Beutel et al., 2011; Hudson & Millwater, 2009; Hudson & Hudson, 2008a; Hudson & Hudson, 2008b; Kline et al., 2013; Lock, 2008; Sharplin 2009a; Sharplin, 2010; Trinidad et al., 2014) and reinforce the positives of rural teaching (Beutel et al., 2011; Halsey, 2009b; Hudson & Hudson, 2008a; Hudson & Hudson, 2008b; Jenkins et al., 2011; Jenkins et al., 2015; Trinidad et al., 2014). Through these visits students also develop an appreciation of rural communities (Halsey, 2009b), and the community benefits of rural teaching (Halsey, 2005). Furthermore, rural visits also help when participants start teaching in rural locations as they have already experienced, and therefore increased, their understanding of rural places (Halsey, 2009b; Kline et al., 2013; Lock 2008). However, although rural practicums are beneficial, they are usually optional (Halsey, 2005; Kline, White, & Lock, 2013) with less than 23% of practicums undertaken in rural locations, and most undertaken by students at non- metropolitan universities (Halsey, 2005), or by students with rural backgrounds (Kline et al., 2013). Given the advantages these experiences provide, there is a need to encourage non-rural universities to facilitate rural visits and rural practicums.

Rural practicums or rural school visits also have disadvantages that influence their effectiveness. However, the perceived benefits described above outweigh the disadvantages (Halsey, 2005). The disadvantages include the cost (Halsey, 2005; Halsey, 2009b), personal isolation (Adie & Barton, 2012; Halsey, 2009b; Hudson & Millwater, 2009; Lock, 2008), a lack of privacy (Adie & Barton, 2012), travel distances (Adie & Barton, 2012; Halsey, 2009b), and organisational issues (Sharplin et al., 2011). To overcome the isolation, group placements have been suggested (Kline et al., 2013; Halsey, 2009b) and trialled (Trinidad et al., 2014), with students also feeling less isolated when they corresponded with community members prior to visiting the area (White, 2006). This is particularly important given the influence of community in rural practicums and rural teaching (Adie & Barton 2012; Beutel et al., 2011; Halsey, 2009b; Kline et al., 2013; White, 2006).

In addition to understanding the role of schools in communities (Halsey, 2009b), pre-service teachers need to develop place-consciousness (Kline et al., 2013), and understand rural knowledges (Adie & Barton, 2012). However, it is unlikely that a four-week practicum entails

enough time to enable this (Adie & Barton, 2012). Instead, extended practicums are recommended (Page, 2006) as they allow students more time to develop as a teacher, build relationships, and increase confidence (Halsey, 2011; Halsey, 2012). Unfortunately, the additional time and resources that are needed for extended practicums present a challenge to allowing them to go ahead (Halsey, 2011). Funding, and costs, are particularly an issue with extended practicums (Halsey, 2009b; Halsey, 2012) so financial incentives are needed to encourage students to take up rural practicums (Halsey, 2009b; Lock, 2008; Trinidad et al., 2012; Trinidad et al., 2013), similar to funding models used in rural health (Trinidad et al., 2012). Another way to overcome resourcing barriers is to encourage partnerships between universities so they can share the supervision responsibilities of students on rural practicums (Ryan, Jones & Walta, 2012). Options such as these need to be explored to provide avenues for pre-service teachers to develop understandings of the communities they may work in.

Teacher education courses

Numerous studies have argued that quality teaching in rural schools begins with pre-service teacher education (Green & Novak, 2008), and as such it needs to be considered as an element of rural staffing. This argument suggests that teacher education needs to involve preparing pre-service teachers for rural appointments (Miller & Graham, 2015). However, few universities have this focus (Green, 2008; Trinidad et al., 2014; White, Green, Reid, Lock, Hastings, & Cooper, 2008), with the majority of universities that do located in regional areas (White et al., 2008). Problematically, teacher education has a metrocentric approach (Green & Reid, 2004; White & Reid, 2008) and teachers feel they are not prepared for contextual factors that influence rural teaching (Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015). In response to this it is argued that teacher education needs to take a more place-conscious approach (McConaghy, 2008; Miller & Graham, 2015; Noone, 2015; Page, 2006; White & Reid, 2008) because rural context is important (Green, 2008; Green & Reid, 2004). Furthermore it appears that a focus on rurality in teacher education courses influences a teacher's success in a rural teaching appointment (Hazel & McCallum, 2016).

Pre-service teacher preparation also needs to focus on preparing teachers for life in rural communities (Frid et al., 2008; White, 2011; White & Kline, 2012a) and include a focus on how communities interact with the students' education (Noone, 2015). Resources such as those developed by the RRRTEC project focusing on school, classroom and community readiness (White, 2011; White & Kline, 2012a; White & Kline, 2012b) and those developed by the TERRR network (Trinidad et al., 2013) are also useful here. Indeed students who have participated in units of work to prepare them for rural teaching felt these had positive outcomes (Heffernan, Fogarty & Sharplin, 2016; Jenkins & Cornish, 2015). This was particularly the case in a gamified, case-based unit of work, that enabled students to imagine themselves teaching in a rural school, which reduced their concerns about teaching in a rural school (Heffernan et al., 2016). The approach also increased student engagement in the course, and collaboration between students (Heffernan et al., 2016). Teachers also need to learn to balance their professional and personal lives (Miller & Graham, 2015) and emotions (Hardy, 2015; Miller & Graham, 2015) when living in small rural communities. Here Halsey (2006) proposes a spatial self-help map to assist teachers to navigate their relationship dynamics professionally, personally and publically, while teaching and living in rural areas. These approaches all indicate that teachers, and pre-service teachers, need access to resources to assist them to develop an understanding of living and working in rural communities.

Pre-service teacher training also needs to help teachers gain the skills to recognise and value the social and symbolic capitals of the place they are in, and utilize the communities' resources, rather than privilege metropolitan knowledge (Reid, Green, Cooper, Hastings, Lock, & White, 2010). To enable this, a number of theoretical models have been proposed. Reid et al. (2010)

propose a model of rural social space, a theoretical model for understanding rurality that brings together three factors, the economy, geography, and demography, that are interrelated with policy. Considering rural social space is important for schools when trying to solve their staffing issues as it helps present the community as a more appealing as a place to live and work and therefore more sustainable (White et al., 2011). Drawing on the rural social space model, students' funds of knowledge, and a place conscious approach to teaching, are also argued to increase a pre-service teachers' understanding of teaching in a rural community. Such considerations add the rural to professional learning and prevent thinking in terms of binaries between the rural and urban (White, 2015). Similarly, a 'pedagogy of the rural' (Walker-Gibbs, Ludecke, Kline, 2015) is proposed as a way of flipping conversations from what teachers bring to the rural, to what the rural can bring to education, while also looking at influences at a meso and macro level. While each model is distinct, together they focus upon the unique features of the rural to be engaged with in pre-service teacher education and a successful rural teaching career.

Teacher Support & Professional Development
Programs tailored to meeting the needs of practicing teachers in rural areas, in order to encourage retention, have also been the focus of research. Here the main factors have been support networks and professional development.

An important factor in the success of new teachers in rural locations is the support networks they have available that help build their sense of community (Hazel & McCallum, 2016). To help with the transition period between being a pre-service and in-service teacher, professional associations and school leadership programs are needed (Lyons et al., 2006). To meet the varying needs of new teachers, support needs to be targeted to their unique needs and offered at different periods within their first year of teaching (Sharplin, 2014). In particular, new teachers need targeted support in the first three months of their job (Country Education Project, 2010) and (better) induction and mentoring programs (Green, 2008) focusing on rural issues (Lyons et al., 2006). Such approaches are argued to be needed at a more local level as, for example, teachers in Victoria felt that school level and cluster activities were more useful than Institute of Teacher activities. This was due to barriers in accessing them such as time, distance, availability, and registration issues (Country Education Project, 2010). Notably, these were similar barriers to those mid and late career teachers identify in accessing professional development (Jenkins et al., 2011; Jenkins et al., 2015).

With access to, and the availability of, appropriate professional development a continuing problem for teachers in rural areas, it was not surprising that teachers felt their professional development needs were not being met (Country Education Project, 2010; Lyons et al., 2006). Consequently, much research calls for more professional development in leadership, pedagogy, behaviour management (Jenkins et al., 2011; Jenkins et al., 2015), information and communications technology (ICT), and literacy (Country Education Project, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2011; Jenkins et al., 2015). Professional development focusing on personal skills is also needed to improve teachers' awareness of mental health issues, improve their resilience (Sharplin et al., 2011) and to help them develop self-efficacy and networks (Sharplin et al., 2009). Given the argument that place and context shape the experiences of new teachers (Green, Noone & Nolan, 2013), all professional development needs to be specific to the needs of rural schools and communities, (Country Education Project, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2011; Jenkins et al., 2015; Lock et al., 2012b; McConaghy, 2008).

To address the barriers of accessing professional development, rural teachers need access to a rostered casual system (Jenkins et al., 2011; Jenkins et al., 2015) so they can travel to attend professional development, as well as access to online professional development and mentoring

(Country Education Project, 2010; Kelly, Reushle, Chakrabarty, & Kinnane, 2014; Lyons et al., 2006; Maxwell et al., 2006; Miller & Graham, 2015) that starts at a pre-service teacher level (Kelly, 2013). At a pre-service level, online forums have proved to be beneficial for students because they can share resources and ideas, and build relationships (Ryan et al., 2012). They enable the creation of a virtual 'community of practice' and reduce the isolation teachers experience (Redmond 2015a; Redmond 2015b). At both a pre-service and in-service level online programs also increase knowledge, enable an easier transition into teaching, improve communication skills, increase teaching knowledge and understanding (Redmond, 2015a; Redmond 2015b), and provide professional benefits (Maxwell et al., 2006). Community based mentoring programs also have similar benefits and help teachers improve their relationships with the community (Young & Kennedy, 2011). With these factors in mind, it is evident that online professional development and mentoring is crucial, however, face-to-face programs can not be replaced so access to these needs to be considered.

School Leadership

School leadership has been argued to strongly influence the staffing of rural and remote schools (Green, 2008; Lock et al., 2009; McConaghy, 2008; White et al., 2009; White, Lock, Hastings, Cooper, Reid, & Green, 2011), particularly when considered with school-community relations (Anderson & White, 2011; Cornish & Jenkins, 2015; Starr, 2016; White et al., 2011). In one case study for example, the school was able to attract and retain staff because the principal focused on developing school-community partnerships, and found different ways to use existing resources to develop opportunities for the school and community, which in turn, developed social capital in the community (Anderson & White, 2011). Schools also need to work with community development agencies and local services, create university partnerships, and collaborate with other local schools because this helps build a school's capacity (Starr, 2016). Partnerships such as these increase teachers' sense of belonging, enable teachers to feel like they are contributing in a meaningful way, and position teachers in a way that means they are able to actively contribute rather than feeling like a novice (White et al., 2009). Initiatives such as these, and broader social investment in enhancing rural social space is also important because it helps make the community attractive as a place to live for staff, and therefore a more sustainable place (White et al., 2011). All these approaches and examples indicate that school leaders need to consider community relationships, and understandings of community, when overcoming the staffing issues they face in their schools.

Staffing leadership positions in rural areas
Given the interrelationship between staffing rural schools and leadership in rural areas, attracting and retaining teachers in leadership positions is another important concern. Notably, we use leadership here to refer to both formal and informal leadership positions in schools. In our review of the literature we found that school leadership positions were no exception to the overall staffing trends in rural schools, with similar trends and issues identified. This includes experiencing difficulties in attracting and retaining leaders, staff taking up leadership positions earlier in their career (Cornish & Jenkins, 2015; Ewington, Mulford, Kendall, Edmunds, Kendall, & Silins, 2008; Graham, Miller & Paterson, 2009; Graham, Miller & Paterson, 2015; Lock, Budgen, Lunay, & Oakley, 2012a; McConaghy, 2008; McKenzie et al., 2014; Miller et al., 2006; Novak, Green & Gottschall, 2008) and high staff turnover in leadership positions (Lock et al 2012a; Miller, Graham & Paterson, 2006; Novak et al., 2008; Sayce &Lavery, 2013).

School leaders that were working in locations they considered to be more desirable, or who were on their first rural appointment, were more likely to stay for longer periods of time, with remote schools considered less desirable (Halsey, Drummond & Van Brenda, 2011). Despite this, leaders in

remote areas intended to stay in their schools longer than metropolitan school leaders (McKenzie et al., 2014) however, most school leaders in rural schools also intended on moving to a metropolitan location (Ewington et al., 2008). With this in mind, short-term positions are problematic as they influence how principals feel about their school (Ewington et al., 2008) and prevent sustainable leadership (Clarke & Stevens, 2009; Wildy & Clarke, 2005). Consequently principals are less likely to implement change and invest in their school and community, making it more difficult to develop relationships with community members (Clarke & Stevens, 2009) and principals who only stay for a short period of time are viewed negatively by the community (Clarke, Stevens & Wilde, 2006). Given the importance of school-community relationships in successful rural school leadership these factors are problematic (Clarke & Stevens, 2006; Clarke et al., 2006; Halsey, 2015; Jenkins & Reitano, 2015; Wildy & Clarke, 2005; Sayce & Lavery, 2013).

The opportunities of rural school leadership

Like rural teaching positions, there were opportunities associated with taking up rural leadership roles. In terms of getting staff to take up leadership positions, the main reasons for applying for rural leadership positions relate to professional, personal, and place-related reasons, with staff also being motivated by pragmatism, opportunism, and idealism, rather than just money (Halsey & Drummond, 2014). Other reasons include being encouraged to apply, wanting a challenge, wanting to contribute (Lock et al., 2012a), having a passion for rural teaching (Halsey et al., 2011; Lock et al., 2012a), and recognising the professional and personal opportunities involved (Halsey et al., 2011). The benefits and opportunities of rural leadership positions and reasons for staying in rural leadership roles include the community, environment, relationships (Graham et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2015; Lock et al., 2012; Miller,et al., 2006), family benefits, liking their home and the lifestyle, autonomy (Lock et al., 2012a), and the professional benefits a rural appointment provides (Graham et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2015; Lock et al., 2012a). Despite isolation often being perceived as a negative factor in rural leadership roles, it also provides benefits because leaders have to think about ways to overcome challenges and support their students (Cornish & Jenkins, 2015). With these benefits in mind, rural leadership positions need to be promoted as part of a good career path, to disrupt the current trend of leaders starting in rural schools and then moving on to metropolitan locations (Halsey, 2015).

Professional challenges of rural school leadership positions

The professional challenges leaders faced related to their teaching, workload issues, systemic issues, and relationships. Many of the challenges were very similar to those faced by rural teachers, and all relate to the small numbers of students and staff in rural schools.

Within their teaching, school leaders struggled with the need to teach outside their area of expertise (Miller et al., 2006; Starr, 2016; Starr & White, 2008; Wildy & Clarke, 2011), teach multi-age groups (Jenkins & Reitano, 2015), and to meet the needs of students with specific needs (Haley, 2015; Sayce & Lavery, 2013; Starr, 2016). These issues were compounded by the smaller number of staff members, which meant teachers and leaders also felt challenged by the higher workload (Cornish & Jenkins, 2015; Ewington et al., 2008; McCurdy & McConnell, 2009; Miller et al., 2006; Novak et al., 2008; Starr, 2016; Starr & White, 2008; Wildy & Clarke, 2011). On top of this, many struggled with managing the high administrative requirements (Sayce & Lavery, 2013; McCurdy & McConnell, 2009). Issues around workload and administrative requirements were also added to by the need to manage systemic challenges such as school staffing (Halsey, 2013; Halsey, 2015; Halsey et al., 2011; Sayce & Lavery, 2013), school viability, policy, equity, and social justice matters (Halsey, 2015; McCurdy & McConnell, 2009; Starr, 2016; Starr & White, 2008).

Relationships were also a key issue faced by school leaders, both in their school and in the community. With the distance between schools in rural areas, and the small number of staff

members, many leaders felt professionally isolated (Graham et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2015; Cornish & Jenkins, 2015; McCurdy & McConnell, 2009; Novak et al., 2008; Sayce & Lavery, 2013; Starr, 2016). Some leaders also found it difficult to manage their relationships with other staff, which was made more difficult by the small number of staff within the school (Sayce & Lavery, 2013; Lock et al., 2012a). Some new school leaders also found it difficult to learn about the school and community they found themselves in (Wildy & Clarke, 2011) which was made more difficult given the importance of school and community relationships in rural communities.

Personal challenges of rural school leadership positions
As was the case with the professional challenges, many of the personal challenges leaders faced were very similar to those faced by rural teachers, and they relate to the small numbers of students and staff in rural schools. Working in a small geographical isolated community meant teachers struggled with personal & social isolation (Cornish & Jenkins, 2015; Lock et al., 2012a; McCurdy & McConnell, 2009; Sayce & Lavery, 2013; Wildy & Clarke, 2005), while at the same time they felt they lacked privacy (Clarke et al., 2006; Cornish & Jenkins, 2015; Graham et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2015; Halsey, 2015; Jenkins & Reitano, 2015; Lock et al., 2012a; Miller et al., 2006). For some, the rural environment and community was also difficult to adapt to (Lock et al., 2012a; Wildy & Clarke, 2009) and they experienced conflicts relating to decisions about their own children's schooling (Graham et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2015). Problematically, the high workload and challenges of rural school leadership caused exhaustion, stress and health issues (Cornish & Jenkins, 2015; Graham et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2015; Lock et al., 2012a) which made the decision to stay a difficult one. With leaders facing challenges such as these, approaches to overcome these challenges, and achieve successful, sustainable leadership have also been researched and will be discussed in a later section of this review.

The influence of experience and workload on the challenges of school leaders
Experience and demands faced by rural school leaders were two factors that were influential in the challenges faced by rural school leaders. Years of experience in rural schools and schools generally did not influence how long leaders intended to stay in rural schools (Halsey et al., 2011), however, less experienced staff were able to observe others in leadership positions and decide if they felt a leadership position was appropriate for them due to the way staff work closely together (Miller et al., 2006). Some felt it was appropriate while others felt the responsibilities and stress were too much (Miller et al., 2006). More experience in rural schools reduced the difficulty leaders experienced attracting and retaining staff (Drummond & Halsey, 2013; Halsey et al., 2011; Sayce & Lavery, 2013), their difficulty with school-community leadership (Drummond & Halsey, 2014), and correlated with an increase in enrolments (Halsey et al., 2011). In terms of demand, leaders in more remote schools experienced more demands on their time, while leaders with higher qualifications, leaders with more years of experience, and more years of experience in a rural school, experienced less demands in their role (Drummond & Halsey, 2013). With these factors in mind, school leaders need to be better prepared for the demands they will face (Drummond & Halsey, 2013) and qualifications and location need to be considered when preparing staff for leadership positions (Halsey et al., 2011).

Woman in leadership positions
In addition to the challenges identified in the previous sections, women in leadership roles in rural schools felt they experienced more challenges than men (Wildy & Clarke, 2005). This includes feeling as though they received less leadership opportunities than men. Women felt opportunities for leadership resulted from experience and qualifications after a longer timeframe than men who received earlier leadership opportunities (Miller et al., 2014; Nye, 2014). Those in leadership roles were also more likely to have followed their parents in a career in rural teaching and then stay in rural areas (Nye, 2014). Women also felt their positions were more difficult

compared to men, and struggled in what seemed to be a male dominated culture and the gendered expectations of the community (Clarke & Stevens, 2006; Clarke et al., 2006). In a similar manner to men however, women also struggled with their ability to fit in a new community and school, and with the young age of teachers (Nye, 2014).

There were also gendered differences in the nature and approach to leadership in rural schools. Women had a more collaborative approach to leadership than men (Miller, Graham & Al-Awiwe, 2014; Miller, Graham & Al-Awiwe, 2015; Nye 2014) and felt it was important to mentor new, younger staff informally, particularly focusing on issues with being a young female teacher (Nye, 2014). Women in leadership roles also recognised that having good relationships with the community and communicating with them, being a good teacher and leader, having administrative skills such as time management, and being able to manage their work and personal lives, were all important qualities to have in leadership roles, and were skills that were expected of them by the community (Gilbert, Skinner & Dempster, 2008). The differences faced by men and women identified here suggest that different approaches are needed to manage the specific challenges faced by women to encourage women to take up, and stay in, leadership positions.

Successful rural leadership

Successful rural school leadership can be broadly seen to relate to three main factors within the literature, that of considering rural context, preparation and support for leadership positions, and considering school-community relationships. These factors have also been highlighted in a model of successful principalship developed by Lester (2011), further indicating their importance in successful and sustainable rural school leadership.

The role of context

A crucial point in successful rural leadership is considering the specificity of rural principalships and the influence of contextual factors (Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Clarke & Stevens, 2006; Clarke et al., 2006; Halsey, 2009a; Halsey, 2015; Lester, 2011; Starr & White, 2008; Wildy & Clarke, 2009; Wildy & Clarke, 2012; Wildy, Siguroudottir & Faulkner, 2014). Considering rural principalships from 'the inside' (Clarke & Wildy, 2004) and looking at student learning to understand and respond to contextual factors is important (Wildy & Clarke, 2012), along with an approach of situated leadership (McConaghy, 2008; Novak et al., 2008) that is place conscious, student focused, and involves an awareness of social issues and community (Novak et al., 2008; McConaghy, 2008). An awareness of context also helps the principal change the culture of their school, which in turn influences school improvement (Wildy & Clarke, 2012). In these approaches it is evident that a 'one size fits all' approach does not work (Halsey et al., 2011; Jenkins & Reitano, 2015), disadvantages rural schools (Starr & White, 2008), and affects opportunities for sustainable leadership (Clarke & Wildy, 2004).

Concepts of spatiality are also important in rural principalships, both in understanding the principal's role (Clarke & Stevens, 2006) and engaging with issues faced by rural schools (Halsey, 2009a; Halsey, 2013). Spatiality influences a principal's implementation of change (Halsey, 2009a; Halsey, 2013) because it helps challenge traditional ways of thinking and doing things (Halsey, 2009a). In local contexts for example, principals feel empowered and overcome challenges by responding in creative ways, involving the community, collaborating with other schools, and using ICT, even though in the bigger picture they feel marginalised (Starr & White, 2008). In situations such as these it is important to look at the challenges and opportunities specific to the

local place, respond to them (Wildy & Clarke, 2009), and see them as opportunities instead of challenges (Starr, 2016).

Leadership preparation & support

Preparation for, and support during, leadership positions have been focused on in the literature as these factors are said to influence the sustainability of rural school leadership. One of the reasons for this is that principal preparation programs are linked to higher job satisfaction, a factor that may influence principals to stay for longer periods in rural schools (Drummond & Halsey, 2014). Such principal preparation programs need to pay close attention to rural specific issues (Halsey, 2015; Sayce & Lavery, 2013; Wildy & Clarke, 2005), by using a 'rural lens' to prepare and support principals (Clarke & Stevens, 2009). This includes considering contextual factors (Clarke et al., 2006), school-community relations (Clarke et al., 2006, Wildy & Clarke, 2005), and information about the social, economic and geographic features of a school and community (Wildy & Clarke, 2012) because principals in rural areas are influenced by macro and meso influences and challenges specific to these (Starr & White, 2008). A compatibility index is also recommended as one way to identify if applicants are emotionally and psychologically ready for rural positions, particularly for how visible they will be in their community (Halsey et al., 2011). Measures such as these to prepare principals for their roles are necessary because training for the role of principal, while already in the role, is not adequate (Jenkins & Reitano, 2015).

Mentoring and collegiality are also important for principals in rural schools, and are said to benefit principals (Gregory & Crossley, 2009; Nye, 2014; Starr, 2009) because they have more power together (Gregory & Crossley, 2009), they receive peer feedback (Moore & Watty, 2009), it increases their involvement in their students' learning, they have the ability to achieve bigger goals and they are able to market the school (Holleran & Newman, 2009). Successful mentoring programs involve working collaboratively across schools and within schools, building on strengths within groups, strong communication skills, using technology to overcome barriers of access, and seeing participants as learners throughout the programs (White, 2009). Mentoring was also more effective when the mentor and mentee already had a relationship prior to the mentoring program (Starr, 2009). However, one of the barriers to networking is the long distances between schools, with technology considered a useful way to overcome this issue (Gregory & Crossley, 2009). In a similar manner to its role in supporting rural teachers, these approaches highlight the importance of both personal, and online networking for rural school leaders to achieve successful leadership.

Consideration has also been given to ways to make leadership positions more attractive and to reduce the challenges rural school leaders face. Approaches that are considered to make leadership positions more attractive include having better mental health services (Cornish & Jenkins, 2015; Ewington et al., 2008; Halsey et al., 2011), higher salaries, (Halsey et al., 2011) financial compensation (Drummond & Halsey, 2013), and viewing rural school leadership in a positive manner, rather than as a challenge (Green & Novak, 2008). Adding to these arguments, to help overcome the challenges better handovers are needed (Lock et al., 2012a) as well as a principals' consultant for rural principals (Lock et al., 2012a) and a principals' network to reduce professional isolation (Lock et al., 2012a; Sayce & Lavery, 2013). Housing needs to be monitored (Lock et al., 2012a), more rural specific professional development is needed (Lock et al., 2012a; Miller & Graham, 2015; Starr, 2016) with a particular focus on financial issues (Miller & Graham, 2015), more resources are needed, and more research and action at a policy level is needed (Starr, 2016). It is evident here that it is a combination of factors that need to improve to make rural school leadership positions more attractive and less challenging.

Leadership & school-community relations in rural areas

Successful school leadership involves good school-community relationships, as well as an understanding the community (Clarke & Stevens, 2006; Clarke et al., 2006; Halsey, 2015; Jenkins & Reitano, 2015; Wildy & Clarke, 2005; Sayce, & Lavery, 2013). In this respect principals need to fit in with their community, something that is easier for those who have previously lived in rural communities (Clarke & Stevens, 2006). This is because by living in a place a sense of it can be gained (Clarke & Stevens, 2006), however this also means they have local knowledge of the community, something that influences their relationship with the community (Clarke & Stevens, 2006). Extended placements for principals are also important as they allow time to learn about the local context (Halsey, 2015).

Further strategies that have been identified as successful in maintaining good school-community relations include focusing on engaging the community, using distributed leadership practices (Starr & White, 2008; Wildy, Sigurourdottir & Faulkner, 2014), focusing on resource allocation (Starr & White, 2008), having a positive view of the school and community, understanding the demands on teachers, developing a 'culture of inquiry' (Wildy et al., 2014), balancing professional and personal roles, and managing conflicts appropriately (Cornish & Jenkins, 2015). Dialogue with community members is also needed (Jenkins & Reitano, 2015; Sayce, & Lavery, 2013) as well as collaboration with, and learning from, community members (Lester, 2011). However, high workloads mean this is difficult to achieve and leadership suffers as a result (Wildy & Clarke, 2012). Focusing on leadership, working with a range of different allied professions, and the ability to attract resources are also important (White et al., 2011). Unfortunately these factors are not focused on in pre-service teacher preparation (White et al., 2011), which is problematic as staffing schools is about relationships between leadership and teacher education (Green & Novak, 2008). Without knowledge of factors that influence successful school leadership, leaders need training and support to make these things happen in their schools (Wildy et al., 2014).

Conclusion

We have approached this review with the intention of providing a comprehensive account of the Australian research related to the staffing of rural schools post 2004. We have done this to provide our subsequent work, and that of other researchers in the field, a comprehensive survey upon which to build. However, in undertaking this review it became apparent that the themes that emerged are very closely aligned with those identified by the benchmark works of Roberts (2004) and Sharplin (2002). Rural schools are still hard to staff and teachers still face the same professional and personal challenges that relate to the geographical isolation and small size of the communities these schools service, and the specificities of rural context. However, it is important to note that since the time of these earlier reports, the depth of our understanding of these issues has increased. Importantly, there has been an increased focus on preparing teachers for rural settings, rather than providing incentives to encourage teachers to take up a rural teaching position. Here there is recognition that rural context is important, and living in rural communities is different to living and teaching in a metropolitan location. Leadership has also emerged as a more distinct focus of much research, with the overarching issues and challenges of leadership being similar to staffing rural schools more generally.

The continuity upon a theme within the staffing studies over the past twelve years, we suggest, presents the rural education field with an interesting challenge: if we have such a well developed understanding of the issues, challenges, and successful approaches, why then are rural schools still hard to staff and why are the approaches proven to work not universally adopted by education jurisdictions? While we would argue that many of the key elements of any answers to

these questions exist in the public policy environment, we do feel it suggests a need to develop new ways to address the intractable dilemma of rural school staffing on a broader scale. This does not, of course, negate the need for ongoing detailed work on each element of the staffing jigsaw as reported in the papers cited herein. But, as the adage goes, 'if we keep doing what we have always done, we will continue to get what we have always got'. Given that these issues have been perennial and intractable since the advent of mass education, it would seem that it is about time we try something different. For to keep doing what we have always done is to condemn kids to the tyranny of the repetition of the outcomes we can very well foresee.

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