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Celebration, Attraction and Retention of a Regional and Rural Workforce

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Abstract

In this issue of the Australian and International Journal of Rural Education, the contributing authors explore the impact of partnerships and purposeful engagement in attracting and retaining professionals to regional and rural communities. Attracting and retaining a well-prepared workforce for regional and rural communities is developed through a range of partnerships and strategies and through a range of institutions – such as schools and universities. Small schools play a pivotal role in regional and rural communities and need to be proactive in maintaining their important status. Equally, universities also have a role to play in the development of a professional workforce outside the metropolis. Providing undergraduates with regional experience is a widely used regional recruitment strategy. Overall, these articles provide a fresh outlook and ideas to strengthen regional and rural schools and communities.

Keywords: *regional partnerships, small schools, pre-service teachers, regional graduate recruitment, workforce, regional university centres, community engagement*

Editorial

In this first issue of the Australian and International Journal of Rural Education for 2023 we have six research articles with authors from Australia, and the United Kingdom who share perspectives about school recruitment strategies in regional and rural communities for teacher and healthcare professionals. There are challenges associated with a regional and rural workforce and a role for universities, local communities, and policy makers. The contributing authors describe how some strong partnerships and collaboration can provide solutions that enable those living and working outside the metropolis with better opportunities in their pathways through life.

Catherine Thiele and colleagues' article discusses how pre-service teachers are impacted by sense of community during regional and rural professional placements. In this way, the authors analyse a significant issue in regional and rural education: the role of community (see Halsey, 2018; Hudson et al., 2022). Principals who ensure that pre-service teachers are provided with a rich professional experience that exceeds the school gate can enhance graduate teachers' understanding of the part they can play in a community. The research looks at collaboration between Far North Queensland school leaders working with universities and pre-service teachers to attract graduates to their region who understand the context and can see their place.

In her article, Margaret Adams examines a similar problematic affecting rural and remote communities: the recruitment and retention of health professionals. In this article, she carries out

a scoping literature review focusing on the type of education and training received by health professionals that are willing to take a rural post. Similar to what happens in the schooling teaching space (see White, 2015), Adams finds that there is a lack of specific rural curriculum content and of pedagogic practices tailored to rural and remote practice. Ultimately, beyond arguments for better financial incentives to attract professionals to rural areas, Adams argues for a recognition of the need for rural curriculum content through the development of specific rural pedagogical tools and strategies that can better support health professionals in non-metropolitan places.

Dollinger and colleagues also place their research emphasis on the relevance of community in rural places. The authors, however, focus on the role of community to increase the participation of regional and rural youth in higher education institutions. Against discourses that emphasise the idea of global and large-scale tertiary institutions, Dollinger and colleagues explore the idea of a Community Embedded University. Drawing on empirical data from workshops with university students and staff, they put local communities at the centre of the struggle to provide meaningful pathways to higher education for regional and rural students. Ultimately, the authors encourage readers to flip the idea of university from a global institution to one that strongly and purposefully engages with their local communities.

Serena Davie and colleagues examine broadening regional partnerships to build regional communities. The Department of Education in Western Australia uses a range of strategies including regional pre-service teacher hubs to support pre-service teachers on regional professional experiences. Partnering with a regional university centre to include students from other disciplines builds the student community and provides a rich community and sense of belonging. This sense of place and belonging will potentially encourage more graduate teachers to consider regional employment.

One article offers a manifesto for small schools. Inspired by the manifesto for small schools developed by the Istituto Nazionale Documentazione Innovazione Ricerca Educativa (National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research [INDIRE], 2020), Cath Gristy discusses the unique context of small schools in the United Kingdom and how they are impacted by research, practice, and politics. As small, geographically isolated schools have to compete with larger schools and in order to survive they have formed multi-academy trusts; the development of a small school manifesto documents the important role of small schools

John Halsey reviews Sarah Donnelley's memoir of teaching in outback New South Wales. Previously a teacher in an inner suburb in Sydney, in her book Donnelly strives to make visible the lives of others in rural Australia through her teaching experience. Halsey examines this transition and fleshes out some of the main issues that metro teachers face when going rural: the blurring of private and public life, the almost intimate relationship between a teacher and the community, and the joys and challenges of teaching in a new and beautiful space. Most importantly, Halsey renders visible the need for those interested in taking a rural teaching post to learn about and see the community as a source of support (White, 2015) and to recognise the importance of undertaking a first-hand working and living experience in rural areas (Cuervo & Acquaro, 2018; Sharplin, 2014) in the process of becoming and being a teacher outside the metropolis.

The eclectic collection of articles offered in this issue point towards some interconnected issues that are at the core of studying, teaching and living in regional, rural and remote areas. There is a strong synergy in the articles' thematic towards the role of institutions (e.g. schools, universities) and regional and rural communities in offering students and teachers the best opportunities to thrive in their respective endeavours. Closer to the rural education research literature, the contributing authors explicitly delineate potential partnerships and strategies to solve the perennial problem of attracting and retaining regional, rural and remote professionals (Holst,

2020; Sharplin 2014; White, 2015). However, implicitly, the contributing authors also challenge deficit views towards living and working outside the metropolis (Guenther & Ledger, 2022; Roberts & Cuervo, 2015). Often these deficit views emanate from places alien and remote to the communities to which they impose these negative perspectives. Ultimately, these contributions offer fresh perspectives on what the potential pathways are to build a regional, rural and remote professional workforce that can benefit their communities. This is valuable work that moves beyond critique to offer new views on how to solve a perennial problem for communities in regional, rural and remote areas.

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