

EDITORIAL

This edition of the Education in Rural Australia journal brings together the work of three rural researchers across Australia and Canada. A common theme amongst the three is exploring the 'unknown' and opening eyes to another perspective. All three examine ways to disrupt the issue of exploring beyond the participants' own communities.

Two of the papers focus our attention on the preparation of teachers to work with the 'unknown' and 'beyond' in terms of learning about rural and remote communities and indigenous culture and history, while the third focuses on those students who are based in rural communities who may need to embark on their 'unknown' in terms of further learning that might be required in metropolitan based settings. All three papers examine the interesting dilemma of the work required in preparing for lives, understanding and possible careers in unknown places and with 'unknown' stories to those who are the focus of the study.

In *A Taste of Country: A PRE-SERVICE TEACHER rural field trip*, Dr Elaine Sharplin from the University of Western Australia provides us with a taste of her own work in preparing predominately metropolitan based pre-service teachers for rural careers through a rural field trip in central east Western Australia. The paper provides specific practical examples of the types of experiences offered as well as the insights from those who have participated. Sharplin concludes that the field trip offers an alternative opportunity for pre-service teachers to learn about rural communities to the traditional practicum experience. Sharplin states, "The trip provides them with an opportunity to become familiar with the unknown, allowing them to overcome anxieties and develop confidence in their skills and abilities as rural teachers. It provides an alternative opportunity for pre-service teachers who are unable to commit to an extended absence from work or family commitments. The trip represents opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage with rural and particularly indigenous students, developing their cultural awareness and understanding of rural and indigenous education issues in context."

In the paper, *'Ethical Positioning' a strategy in overcoming student resistance and fostering engagement in Teaching Aboriginal History as a compulsory subject to Pre service Primary Education Students*, Dr Mary O'Dowd from Charles Sturt University, School of Education, Wagga Wagga, NSW describes and analyses the issues that impacted on pre service Primary Education students' engagement with the subject 'Aboriginal culture and history' at a rural university. The paper explores the complexity of teaching the NSW mandatory area of study 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education' at a tertiary institution in a rural location and examines how ethical positioning can assist in engaging rural students. The paper identifies how particular rural experiences including exposure to particular 'conversations' may influence in a particular way understandings of what constitutes racism towards Aboriginal people and shape views of what it means to be racist. O'Dowd clearly takes the position that 'rural teachers often have significant social status in the community' and as such her argument is therefore their potential as educators means they may have a significant impact on future generations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Charged with this potential, the paper highlights that pre-service teachers through 'reflecting on locale' provides the opportunity for communication

about racist values and ethical values to occur so that students could think through ethical positioning and thus see themselves as transformative educators.

The third paper in this edition examines a different cohort; namely rural school students and explores the question of how students graduating from small schools in rural communities make educational and career decisions regarding non-local environments about which many have little first-hand experience, but to which they may re-locate for further education and work. The paper entitled, *From Closed to Open Classes – Repositioning Schools to Sustain Rural Communities* by Dr Ken Stevens in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada draws from both Australian and Canadian studies and makes the argument that to better prepare rural students for a wider career choice, rural schools need to work collaboratively through e-learning with other rural schools to broaden the learning opportunities. The paper documents the literature and research into the potential of rural schools to actively link through technology to other schools rather than taking a narrow one school only focus and policy approach. The paper concludes that, “by linking classrooms in and between schools within intranets it is possible to form open teaching and learning environments so that teachers can collaborate between sites and students, particularly those in small schools in rural communities, can access extended, virtual, learning opportunities”.

Editorial team:

Associate Professor Simone White

Dr Graeme Lock

Dr Wendy Hastings

Associate Professor Maxine Cooper