

## EDITORIAL

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**November 2016**

This second edition of 2016 completes the Journal's transition to an online format, now housed in its new permanent home, on the new SPERA website. The Society for the Provision for Education in Rural Australia (SPERA) is the parent society that publishes *The Australian and International Journal of Rural Education* and together we have been working to achieve this exciting outcome. Of course we recognise there have been, and may well be, a few teething problems in this transition. For their patience we thank the readership.

This edition has a strong focus on the pre-service teacher to early career professional transition. At a time when more and more Australian universities are removing their units on rural education, the papers in this edition are a timely reminder of their importance. Just as the work in the early 1990's (Heffernan, Fogarty, & Sharplin provide a useful timeline of these issues) showed a limited number of specific pre-service preparation units, it would seem we are shifting back to that situation as the 'new-normal' following the peak of the early 2000's. This is curious given the number of very well-funded Australian research projects focussed on preparing rural teachers that all concluded the importance of pre-service professional experience and specific pre-service units on teaching in rural and remote contexts. It would seem the pervasiveness of the 'teachers matter' discourse, supported by the architecture of professional standards, is promoting a perspective that place does not matter. Instead all that seems to matter is a placeless form of teacher quality. We are sure this is something the readership will largely find laughable, but it would seem we all have work to do in ensuring that policy makers have the same reaction. In this edition we have a collection of papers that will advance such a discussion. Together they show that an explicit focus on the rural is critical for the future of these communities, and the development of the professionals who work in them.

The first paper in this edition by Watson, Wright, Hay, Beswick, Allen and Cranston reports on a Tasmanian study of rural and regional students perceptions of their schooling and factors that influence their aspirations. We certainly agree with the authors when they write that *understanding the factors that either enhance or mitigate against rural and regional students achieving positive educational attainment and aspirations is important for both policy makers and educators*. This paper highlights the value of looking deeply at issues impacting on students' aspirations as well as the utility of well-designed survey tools. Overall, this significant study highlights a range of influences on students' aspirations and interrelations between influences that researchers may wish to pursue. While the paper draws attention to the complex interplay of socio-cultural factors influencing students' aspirations, it also highlights the critical, and influential, role that teacher support exercises in increasing student aspiration; something all pre-service teacher preparation programs are sure to reinforce to prospective rural and remote teachers.

Watson, Wright, Hay, Beswick, Allen and Cranston's paper gives an insight into the work of a significant research cluster from the University of Tasmania examining issues pertinent to school completion and achievement in that island state. We can look forward to more deep and detailed work examining challenges and opportunities for education from that setting. Such work provides insights for other rural education researchers working on, and in, island settings.

The second paper in this edition, by Hazel and McCallum, shifts the focus on early career teachers' employment in rural schools. Taking what the authors refer to as a case study methodology, this

paper reports on the experiences of a group of teachers in their first three years of employment in rural schools. Perhaps not surprisingly, the respondents report the ‘usual’ challenges of economic costs, social challenges, learning to live in new communities and their own pre-conceptions as challenges to working in rural communities. The approach of this study, however, brings what may be described as statistical limitations into conversation with interview data to bring these issues to life.

On a related theme, the third paper by Haynes and Miller, examines pre-service teachers’ transitions to teaching in rural and remote schools. Drawing upon a survey eliciting responses regarding their comfort and readiness to teach in these schools, the paper shows how assisting students to engage positively with the rural benefits their future carer transition. Notably, this paper highlights the importance of regional universities in preparing teachers from rural areas who, largely, want to return to those areas. This is indeed a topical issue and one that the research community in Australia particularly needs to be vigilant of as changes to the entry requirements to pre-service teaching are implemented. For instance, changes in New South Wales, Australia, where from 2017 students will need three band 5 results (the second highest band) across their subjects studied at the end of high school to enter pre-service teacher education, will likely put rural students at a greater disadvantage in relation to accessing university.

Together, Haynes and Miller, and Hazel and McCallum, add to, and update, the genre of work related to the staffing of rural schools. Related to this Heffernan, Fogarty and Sharplin examine the learning experiences of students in an online course aimed at preparing teachers to teach in rural and remote schools. Using place-based pedagogy, and inquiry-based case-study approach, ideas from gaming, this paper looks at the development of a unit that simulates working in a rural school. Taking such a novel approach, this paper, and the course development it outlines, is a timely update to the work on the pre-service teacher education curriculum for the preparation of teachers for rural and remote schools.

In the last paper in this edition Manwa, Mukeredzi and Manwa write about the experiences of beginning teachers in Zimbabwe. With a focus on induction and mentoring, this paper illustrates how structured mentoring and induction programs helped the smooth transition from student to teacher. However, sadly such programs are limited and as such many teachers are ‘thrown in the deep end’ and struggle to find their feet in both the classroom and in the community. This paper adds to our understanding of the experience of rural teachers and communities in the international context. In so doing we see that, sadly, the experiences of teachers, and the challenges facing rural education more generally, are similar in many different regions of the world. Clearly there is still much work for us to do, as an international community, to enhance the education of rural students and communities. Forthcoming editions will include perspectives from a number of international contexts, with an exciting range of papers presently undergoing the peer review and/or pre-publication processes.

Finally, the editorial team is happy to announce that from 2017 the Journal will be moving to continual publication. This means that we will be able to publish papers online as soon as the pre-publication processes are complete. This will allow authors to have timely publication turnarounds. This is just another benefit of the transition to an online platform.

### **A note on ethics**

In 2012 the *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education* was launched. This ‘new’ Journal reflected an evolution from its previous form, *Education in Rural Australia*. This change reflected both a growing trend in publications and a deliberate move to represent a broad international community. As the range of authors and topics published in the journal increasingly reflects the addition of ‘international’ in its title, the editorial team is increasingly confronted with considerations of research ethics. Specifically, research from countries/regions without institutional and/or national arrangements for the governance of research ethics.

As the instructions to authors, and the revised submission form, notes, *Where appropriate, the submitted article should indicate whether the research has undergone an ethics approval process within the author's institution. All research must adhere to the [NHMRC National Statement on Ethics](#) and the Australian Association for Research in Education [statement of Ethics](#). Any instances of research malpractice will be considered in relation to these guidelines.*

All submissions are asked to note on the submission the status of the ethics approval and authors are asked to explicitly refer to this status in the manuscript. The main potential categories of response in relation to this are:

- Ethics approval was not necessary as no human subjects were involved – this would be clear in the manuscript;
- Ethics approval was sought and granted – this should be noted in the manuscript (but de-identified for peer review); or
- No institutional arrangements exist in the country/region where the work was conducted.

In relation to the last point, 'No institutional arrangements exist in the country/region where the work was conducted', we do not regard it as our role to explicitly police ethics and are mindful about imposing the values from more developed countries on more developing nations. However, we also note we have an ethical responsibility to support research from these countries/regions, and that equally we have an obligation to research subjects in said countries/regions. Thus, the decision regarding publication of work without a formal ethical review board oversight must be weighed against the opportunity of the author to do so, and the ethical treatment of the research subjects.

Furthermore, we must give consideration to not do violence to rural peoples and places. Consequently, our preference is to look at issues from the perspective that 'rural people and communities really matter' and generally discourage work that falls into the rural deficit trope. While we recognise that disadvantage often needs to be established, identified and accounted for, reinforcing any said deficit may be seen to be questionable in terms of ethics. By the deficit trope we mean here work that only reinforces deficit without a framing of positive affect.

In both situations we aim to weigh these considerations with reference to the Australian [NHMRC National Statement on Ethics](#) general principles of: research merit and integrity, justice, beneficence, and respect.

Finally in considering issues pertaining to research ethics in relation to educational research we would also refer authors to Singh, Reid, Mayer & Santoro (2011), which we regard as an extensive exploration of the related issues in educational research and endorse its sentiments.

*Phil Roberts*

NB: Where appropriate, researchers may also wish to consider the [Australian Council for International Development Code of Conduct](#).

References:

Australian Association for Research in Education Code of Ethics. <http://www.aare.edu.au/pages/aare-code-of-ethics.html>

Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (Updated 2015)  
<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/e72?>

Sher, J. P., & Sher, K. R. (1994). Beyond the conventional wisdom: Rural development as if Australia's rural people and communities really mattered. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 10(1), 2–43.

Singh, M., Reid, J., Mayer, D. & Santoro, N. (2011). Forming, informing and transforming teacher education researchers as ethical subjects. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*. 39 (4), 281–291.