



Australian and International Journal of Rural Education

Rural Professional Learning: Systemic and Student Perspectives

John Guenther

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

john.guenther@batchelor.edu.au

Laurence Lasselle

University of St Andrews

laurence.lasselle@st-andrews.ac.uk

Abstract

In this issue of the Australian and International Journal of Rural Education, our authors present a series of perspectives about rural professional learning. These perspectives relate to teacher education, rural clinical placements, rural pathways to university, and credentialing of remote education tutors. Each paper demonstrates how important context is, highlighting the challenges and solutions to real-world rural education issues.

Editorial

In this first issue of the Australian and International Journal of Rural Education for 2022 we are pleased to have two international research articles, three Australian research articles, a Rural Connections paper from West Arnhem Land and a book review. The articles bring together themes of professional learning from systemic and student perspectives.

Catherine Gao and colleagues' paper discusses an issue that just won't go away—increasing participation of regional, rural, and remote (RRR) students in universities. They explore it from interviews with RRR principals in Queensland and Victoria. Their participants highlight the need to develop positive aspirations for higher education thanks to creative, context-specific strategies and programmes aligning with RRR communities' values and ways of life. These principals' perspectives on career education for RRR students have an important take-home message to all of us: it is time to “*dispel the myth that students needed to leave their communities to achieve their goals or find career success*” (p. 1).

Gilbert Arinaitwe and Michael Corbett's paper on rural teacher shortages in Uganda, picks up similar themes. They provide a much-needed positive message on possible remedies to these (chronic?) shortages by examining how teaching capacity can be built locally through teacher education. From a careful study of the lived experiences of teachers in two districts, they are able to show why home-grown and culturally-similar teachers in these communities are more likely to remain in these districts and how they integrate more successfully the communities they serve.

In another African context, the paper by Moses Anlimachie and colleagues provides a systematic analysis of a whole of community response to sustainable education aiming at tackling educational inequality and poverty. Resting on a unique community-based participatory action research engaging with municipal officials, the (rural) community and school participants, they

detail the local-based mechanisms and initiatives implemented by the community to ensure education and their positive impact on educational outcomes and poverty reduction.

The paper by Brad McLennan and colleagues highlights a seldom discussed issue related to students enrolled in distance education. The problem the authors raise, and then go on to address, is the occupational invisibility of Remote Education Tutors (RETs). Following the findings of a survey of 575 current and former RETs, the authors propose a process of credentialling in partnership with universities, and so recognise the contribution of this important part of the rural education workforce.

The issue of attracting staff to rural and remote locations is reported around the globe. The Ugandan case study presented in this issue shows this for teachers in the context of rural schools. The article by Keith McNaught and Colette Rhoding on rural clinical placements sheds light on the factors that support or inhibit medical students to engage in rural Western Australia. In this article it is the student voices that stand out. McNaught and Rhoding's findings complement earlier work reported in the Journal last year, from a Victorian perspective by Lisa Hall (Hall, 2021). While Hall's article focused on disruptions caused by COVID-19, McNaught and Rhoding report a different set of barriers and motivators. Of course, rural placement in Western Australia presents arguably more challenges than those in Victoria often due to long distances from Perth to the rural location. One interesting finding that the authors offer is that a barrier appears to be a lack of self-confidence in being able to live independently a long way from the supports of family and 'home'. They also suggest that the lack of government financial support for young people on placements does not help.

The article offered by Michelle Bangarr, who is an assistant teacher from the West Arnhem homeland of Manmoyi, provides us with a narrative of the education journey she has undertaken. Her story is important and relates the challenges associated with living, working and studying in a remote homeland setting. Homeland education has been largely forgotten in the academic literature in recent years, with some exceptions (Van Gelderen & Guthadjaka, 2019). Public education has largely failed Northern Territory homeland with successive governments content to offer one or two days a week of schooling. Independent schools like the Nawarddeken Academy, who Michelle works for, are offering models of education that allow for full-time education, community control, and first language learning. Bininj educators like Michelle act as role models for other aspiring Aboriginal educators, though as Michelle's story tells us, the pathway to becoming a teacher is a hard and long road to travel.

Our book review in this issue from Bronwyn Relf, shares her thoughts on a rural education research book titled *Ruraling Education Research*, edited by Philip Roberts and Melyssa Fuqua.

On a final note, the Journal is progressively undergoing changes designed to improve its reach and quality. We expect the AIJRE to be Scopus listed soon, which will make it more accessible and allow us to obtain an impact score. You will also see that from this issue, DOIs are added to each article. And behind the scenes we are establishing a team of Consulting Editors who will form an International Editorial Advisory Board. Consulting Editors will assist with reviewing, provide advice to the Editorial Team and be strong advocates for our Journal.

References

- Hall, L. (2021). Navigating the rural clinical education pathway in the time of a pandemic: Opportunities and challenges. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 31(1), 76-92. <https://journal.spera.asn.au/index.php/AIJRE/article/view/294>
- Van Gelderen, B., & Guthadjaka, K. (2019). School is home, home as school: Yolngu 'On Country' and 'Through Country' place-based education from Gäwa homeland. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 29(3), 56-75. <https://journal.spera.asn.au/index.php/AIJRE/article/view/235/248>