

## THE EXPERIENCE IS IN THE JOURNEY: AN APPRECIATIVE CASE-STUDY INVESTIGATING EARLY CAREER TEACHERS' EMPLOYMENT IN RURAL SCHOOLS

---

Sarah Hazel<sup>1</sup> and Faye McCallum<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department for Education and Child Development, South Australia*

<sup>2</sup>*Southern Cross University*

### ABSTRACT

Rural communities play a vital role in the Australian economy; their viability can be determined by the school, located at the centre of most towns. Yet rural communities struggle to attract and retain professionals, including teachers, who are central to their livelihood. This study investigated the positive experiences of five early career teachers' attracted to teach in one rural school in South Australia. A case-study methodology collected data through surveys, digital representations, narrative inquiries, and semi-structured interviews. Early career teachers reported they faced: economic factors associated with relocation; social challenges in building relationships; having to learn about rural communities; and, dealing with personal preconceptions, expectations and possible anxieties as a result of being moved from one's comfort zone. However, a key factor that contributed to their sustained employment included their own personal approach or attitude to the change, as this helped them to participate in and be accepted by the rural community. Other contributing factors included: a focus on rurality in initial teacher education; and, personal and professional support that built a sense of belonging to the rural community. The positive experiences of these early career teachers in sustained employment is shared through their views on how to adjust to living and working in a rural area. These perspectives may be applicable to other communities and professional groups considering rural employment: how the change impacts on an individual's attraction to particular work in rural areas; the extent to which certain professionals are retained in rural towns; and, ultimately the long-term sustainability of rural communities.

**Keywords:** rural, early career teachers, community, belonging

### INTRODUCTION

Teacher employment patterns are reported typically to be more casualised and contractual than they were decades ago. For example, the profile of employment for graduate teachers in Queensland (QCT, 2014) illustrates that of the 80 per cent of graduates who actually find work teaching in a Queensland school in their first year after graduation, 52 per cent work on a supply or contract basis (see Queensland College of Teachers, 2014, *Graduates infographic*. [www.qct.edu.au](http://www.qct.edu.au)). The impact of this trend is evident on teacher labour shortages in urban and rural settings, thus influencing the quality of teaching. We already know that teachers are making a powerful impact on student learning, and that there is a potent and positive relationship between teacher education and teacher effectiveness (Bahr 2016, p.12). Thus, the attraction and

retention of teachers in the profession is of concern, particularly in hard-to-staff areas including rural spaces.

As a global issue, teacher attraction and retention (Clayton & Cuddapah, 2011; Cobbold, 2006; Hare & Heap, 2001; Tuthill, 2000) is predominant in Australia, (Dyson & Plunkett, 2011; Hudson & Hudson, 2008; McCallum & Price, 2010) and is somewhat intensified in rural areas (Boyd et al., 2012; Campbell & Yates, 2011; Dyson & Plunkett, 2011; Fry & Anderson, 2011; White, 2011; Beutel, Adie, & Hudson, 2011; McCallum & Price, 2016). This is because teachers in rural areas are generally more transient in their employment (Cooper, et al., 2008; Dyson & Plunkett, 2011; Gale & Mills, 2003; Jenkins, Reitano & Taylor, 2011) and many early career teachers leave the profession (Fry & Anderson, 2011; Stolpa Flatt, 2006) within a few short years to seek alternative pathways. However, some teachers are attracted to rural areas and deliberately choose to stay.

## TEACHING IN RURAL AREAS

Australian rural towns exhibit great diversity (Argent et al., 2012 p. 20) which encompasses both community and social structures that are industrial and economic in comparison to that of metropolitan areas (Baills, Bell, Greensill, & Wilcox 2002; Boylan, 2004). Rural communities are complex social systems which work as a whole rather than as individual parts. Australian rural towns, similar to rural areas globally, often exist due to agriculture, mining and marine culture. These industries make a valuable contribution to the existence and sustainability of rural communities (Cocklin & Alston, 2002). Local economy, community well-being, a sense of belonging, and the state of the local environment are all factors impacting on the resilience of rural communities (McManus, Walmsley, Argent, & Baum, 2012). The attraction and retention of early career teachers, like other professionals, to rural areas is a significant issue that requires further research and support from stakeholders (Dyson & Plunkett, 2011; Hudson & Hudson, 2008; Reid & White, 2008). Education contributes to the development and sustainability of rural communities (Cooper et al., 2008, 2011; Evans, 2003; Halsey, 2011a; Hudson & Hudson, 2008; Reid & White, 2008; Stevens, 2010), and in return, rural communities ensure the sustainability of a nation (Cooper et al., 2008; Halsey, 2011a).

Teachers in rural areas can have a direct impact on determining long-term sustainability of rural communities as schools are central to the life and viability of rural towns, a view often expressed by Halsey (2011a, 2011b). Sustainability in this context refers to the how and why what happens now, in the present, impacts on the future (Green, 2015). So, in this paper, it is suggested that the attraction and retention of professionals, in this case teachers, to work in rural areas has a direct impact on sustainable communities. However, teaching in rural communities is not always presented in a positive light. In Australian society, myths about rurality are mixed (Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2009; Cooper et al., 2008; Danaher, Danaher, & Moriarty, 2003; Evans, 2003; Gale & Mills, 2003; Heldke, 2006; Jenkins, Reitano, & Taylor, 2011; Sharplin, 2002, 2010; Stevens, 2010). On the extreme end, Heldke found that rural people are one group in society who are sometimes defined as *stupid* (2006, p. 151), backward and unsophisticated (Evans, 2003; Heldke, 2006). The Australian rural population has been grappling with such misrepresentations since white settlement (Carter, 2006). In America too, Anderson (1994) explored a range of negative views towards rural education as well as positive uplifting stories of persistence and change that influenced successful futures.

In Australia, Sharplin (2002) explored pre-service teachers' expectations and preconceived ideas regarding rural education. The study raised awareness of their knowledge about rurality and the findings enabled universities to develop more effective techniques to encourage emerging teachers to transition to rural schools. Sharplin states that pre-service teachers are faced with *negative stereotypes and insidious unknowns* of rural schooling (2010, p. 17). Other negative perceptions consider that rural areas are disadvantaged and isolated, and as such, young professionals are discouraged from pursuing such a career (Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2009; Cooper

at el., 2008; Cuervo, 2012; Danaher, Danaher, & Moriarty, 2003; Gale & Mills, 2003; Jenkins, Reitano, & Taylor, 2011; Sharplin, 2002, 2010).

Cuervo (2012) highlights the attraction and retention of early career teachers to rural areas as a concern for rural communities but acknowledges that it is part of a broader agenda. He addressed the perceived inequalities of rural schooling from a social justice perspective (2012), arguing that the sustainability of rural communities was a national and global issue (McManus et al., 2012; Halsey, 2011a), a view also supported by Rennie and Somerville stating that disadvantage and inequality exists in Australian rural schools (2012). Many Australian farming based communities have been in existence since settlement (Higgins, 1994) and families living in these areas expect access to quality education (Baxter, Gray, & Hayes, 2011; Cooper et al., 2008; Evans, 2003; Halsey, 2011a; Higgins, 1994) despite the sometimes inhibiting influences of climate, economics and political threats on farming communities (McManus et al., 2012).

The preparation and induction of pre-service teachers for rural schooling has been well documented (Boylan, 2004; Carter, 2012; Green, 2008; Green & Reid, 2004; Halsey 2011a, 2011b, 2005; Hudson & Hudson, 2008; Roberts, 2004; Sharplin, 2010; White, 2011). These include, incentive schemes (Bastian, Henry, & Smith, 2012; Reid & White, 2008) for permanency, and employer scholarships have been trialled with some success. The importance of rural communities supporting early career teachers is stressed because it helps them to form a sense of belonging to the community (Bails, Bell, Greensill, & Wilcox, 2002; Cooper et al., 2011; Hudson & Hudson, 2008).

Evans outlines how a divide exists between rurality and that of a metropolitan lifestyle (2003) stating that the challenge in highlighting rural education as a positive choice is at a national level (Halsey, 2011b). The challenges of working and living in a rural area and the negativity that is espoused (Jenkins, Reitano, & Taylor, 2011; Sharplin, 2002) cannot be ignored, however, the current study aims to highlight the positive experiences of early career teachers who take up their first teaching post in a rural school. Little work has been conducted on the positive factors to living and working in a rural area, thus, this study takes an appreciative stance (Cooperrider, Stavros, & Whitney, 2008; Cram, 2010) which can be described by Basit as *a systematic enquiry made public* (2010, p. 3). This study will investigate the experiences of early career teachers, and identify the factors which contribute to their successful and positive employment in rural schools.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study being reported in this paper employed a case-study approach (Beckett & O'Toole, 2010, p. 55) with an appreciative lens (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) to investigate the positive experiences which shape early career teachers' employment in rural schools (Cooperrider, Stavros, & Whitney, 2008; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Qualitative methodologies within an interpretative paradigm, also known as a naturalist paradigm (Basit, 2010), were used to interpret and present the views and realities of the social world from the perspective of the participants, in this case, teachers (Basit, 2010; Beckett & O'Toole, 2010; Jurs & Wiersma, 2009). Appreciative inquiries support the idea that society's realities are socially constructed (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) so the stories and recollections in this study give meaning (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006; Stake, 2005) to each participant's position and sense of 'space' and 'place' (Down, McInerney, & Smyth, 2011) in both the school and community to explore their experiences as early career teachers in rural settings.

Purposeful sampling was used against set criteria including geographical location from the CBD, and number of years teaching (less than five years teaching experience) to identify five teachers in one small area school (selected due to its commitment to the recruitment of university graduates) in South Australia (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Demographic Data**

Participant	Gender	Age	Rural Background	Degree Title	Year of Graduation	Number Years Teaching	Induction to Rural Education
<b>A</b>	M	25-29	Yes 16 years in a rural area, just outside a large service centre	Bachelor of Arts (Honours). Graduate Diploma in Education	2011	1	1 mandatory rural placement during preservice training
<b>B</b>	M	20 – 24	No	Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Education	2011	1	Applied for rural incentive scheme but was unsuccessful, no rural placement
<b>C</b>	F	25 – 29	Yes First 17 years in a small isolated rural community	Bachelor of Visual Arts and Applied Design. Master of Teaching	2009	3	Applied for rural incentive scheme & was unsuccessful, completed 3 voluntary rural placements
<b>D</b>	F	20 – 24	Yes First 18 years. Farming family. Inland country town	Bachelor of Early Childhood Education	2009	3	Applied for rural incentive scheme but was unsuccessful, 3 rural placements during preservice training
<b>E</b>	M	> 45	No Grew up on the outskirts of urban sprawl but attended school in the suburbs	Bachelor Arts (Library & Information Management) Graduate Diploma in Teaching	2010	2	2 rural placements during preservice training

Denzin and Lincoln's (2003) *quilt maker* analogy was used to describe the ways in which this qualitative research used multiple data collection methods to form a 'quilt' to explore the issues from a range of perspectives (pp. 5–9). Demographic data was collected using a survey tool: participants provided digital photographs that represented their connection and sense of belonging to a rural area; participants completed a narrative inquiry which required them to 'map' the occurrences and experiences that led them to working in rural schools; and, semi-structured interviews were undertaken to explore issues in further depth.

The use of digital-visual methods (Murthy, 2008) provides images that permit the participant to narrate their story as a form of 'digital storytelling'. Stanczak (2007) refers to photographs as a form of communication and the participants in this study completed a narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006,) to explore their experiences by way of a 'river journey' metaphor (McCallum & Prosser, 2009). Narrative inquiry recognises that people's lives are a series of 'stories' that give one's world personal meaning (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006) so the semi-structured interview explored each participant's experiences in further depth (Basit, 2010).

Data analysis encompassed three types of coding: descriptive, topic and analytic. Qualitative thematic analysis techniques were followed beginning with 'coding' and 'memoing' (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006, p.200) which enabled the participants' stories to identify key themes. Criteria to measure the trustworthiness of qualitative research, as proposed by Guba (1981), included: *credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability* (p.80).

In this study different participants perspectives were sought, and interview transcripts were sent to participants for verification, modification and accuracy. Data triangulation from multiple sources provided the reliability and validity of the data. Ethics approval was granted by the University of South Australia Divisional Human Research Ethics Committee and the Department of Education and Child Development in South Australia. Participants gave consent, participated voluntarily, could withdraw at any time, and were assigned a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. Limitations to this study identify that the sample is small (but the methodological approaches are in-depth) and suggest that a larger study be undertaken to build on the findings.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Early career teachers face a range of challenges during their first year of practice (Down et al., 2010, 2011; Ewing & Smith, 2003; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Johnson, Papatraianou, & Sullivan, 2009) which can be intensified for those transitioning to a rural teaching post (Boyd et al., 2012; Johnson, Papatraianou, & Sullivan, 2009).

### ***Personal Approach to Teaching in a Rural Area***

In the current study the early career teachers working in rural schools reported that they faced economic factors associated with relocation, social challenges with building new relationships, having to learn about rural communities, and dealing with personal preconceptions, expectations and possible anxieties of being moved from one's comfort zone. However, a key factor that contributed to their successful transition included their personal approach or attitude as this helped them to participate in and be accepted by the rural community.

**Table 2: Participant’s Highest (orange) and Lowest (blue) Rated Factors for Teaching in Rural Schools**

Participant	Original Home Town	Family and friends reside in the area	Lifestyle	Career Opportunities	Employment	Professional Development	To experience something out of personal comfort zone
A			Lowest (blue)	Highest (orange)	Highest (orange)	Lowest (blue)	
B					Highest (orange)		Lowest (blue)
C			Lowest (blue)		Highest (orange)		
D	Highest (orange)	Highest (orange)			Lowest (blue)		
E			Lowest (blue)	Lowest (blue)	Highest (orange)	Lowest (blue)	

Employment and career opportunities (see Table 2) were the most common factors given by these early career teachers that attracted them to work in a rural area, a view supported by Jenkins, Reitano and Taylor (2011) who state that opportunities to accelerate to leadership positions are greater in country schools. However, interview data highlighted that the participants desired to teach in the country due to prior experiences of living or going to school in a rural area, this reason also supported by Campbell and Yate’s (2011) study. One participant, targeted this particular rural area because she had family and friends close by, had grown up locally, and her partner owned a property. She stated that *I loved growing up in a rural area, the life-style it had and living in a close community and I always planned to return to the country to teach.*

Four of the five participants stated they had a familiarity with the rural area, which developed from childhood and past experiences. Participant D shared an early connection with the area:

*... it’s just you know my experiences from when I was a kid. All those farming experiences like headers, tractors, trucks, like when you’re a little kid like mum used to send me, I was 3, out with a pillow and a rug and I’d sleep on the header cab floor all day.*

She labelled herself a ‘country girl’ - with no ambition to live anywhere other than in a rural lifestyle similar to the one she experienced growing up. Her personal approach or attitude showed an appreciation of rurality and she advised that the best way to settle in was to ... *go in with an open-mind.*

Participant C explained that she was quite happy living in the city, but always planned to move back to the country. Participant A grew up in a rural area but attended school in a neighbouring regional town and had decided to teach in rural schools before graduating. He stated he was aware of the benefits presented in rural schools due to personal and family connections.

### **Representations of Rural Teaching**

Table 2 shows that participant’s choice to teach in this rural area was not entirely for lifestyle, professional development opportunities, or even career advancement. Interview data did highlight a strong personal connection related to one’s sense of identity, and later influenced by media and broader societal influences. One participant, who grew up in the country and then moved to the city for study, realised the degree to which his identity was shaped by place. He stated:

*During my compulsory education I didn't consider myself to be seen as all that 'different', just a farm-kid with an old-fashioned upbringing. Then I began university and things changed. Suddenly I began to realise just how much my identity was defined by this upbringing.*

Participants A and D experienced a range of negative expectations and stereotypes about rural schools from other university students while studying. Participant E felt that expectations of rurality were portrayed incorrectly by travel shows and the media, so his preconceived thoughts about his rural destination were:

*I had a feeling that the place would be a bit like some of those places in the UK where you get the nice cliff sides and a beach and nice cool things like that. I had that sort of picture in my mind what it would look like. I get here and it was completely different.*

Participant B stated that university portrayed student behaviour in rural schools as better than in metropolitan schools so he expected students would be well behaved, eager to learn, and more compliant. Participant E stated that society in general had misrepresented and stereotyped rural areas and they were partially to blame for the lack of metropolitan teachers being attracted to rural areas. He believed that television, both reality and drama, contribute, to the romanticizing and misrepresentation of rural lifestyle. While such representations exist, it is not surprising that pre-service teachers have fabricated, idealistic and misrepresented expectations and perspectives of what rurality entails (Sharplin, 2002). In acknowledging their newness to the rural environment, participants of this study agreed that stereotypes and expectations existed, yet they presented their own holistic and realistic views on rurality. These preconceived ideas determined how well the individual adjusted to the unfamiliar environment. The participants portrayed positive expectations of a friendly and supportive rural environment which highlighted rurality, rather than a deficit view of isolation and social challenge.

Strong personal connections contributed to the teachers in this study choosing to work in rural areas and the negative perspectives that challenged their decision to do so were overcome through their personal orientation to achieve their employment goals. Other contributing factors included: the focus on rurality in initial teacher preparation; and, personal and professional support that built a sense of belonging to the rural community.

### **A Focus on Rurality in Initial Teacher Education**

Some Australian universities address rurality through initial teacher preparation and can provide encouragement, support and funding (Boyd at el., 2012; Boylan, 2004; Carter, 2012; Hudson & Hudson, 2008; Green, 2008; Sharplin, 2010). However, teacher education institutions have also been criticised for failing to raise awareness of teaching in rural areas (Beutel, Adie, & Hudson, 2011, p.1).

Varied rural practicum experiences were undertaken by the participants (see Table 1) with participant C voluntarily organising three of her four placements in rural schools stating that she had to be *pretty keen*, proactive and self-sufficient in gaining transport and accommodation. Of the participants who completed rural placements, all said they were self-initiated, managed and funded. There was no expectation from the universities that students would opt for a rural placement. Although the option to undertake a rural placement exists in many Australian universities, they do raise a range of challenges (Reid & White, 2008). Participant A recalled that some of his university peers had hardly ever been outside the city and that a rural placement experience caused a sense of *culture shock* for some of them. He felt that a compulsory rural placement encouraged some graduates to consider employment options in a more informed way.

Teacher preparation programs that provide financial and mentor support for pre-service teachers to engage in a rural placement during their degree have found that graduates are more likely to apply for a rural teaching position (Reid & White, 2008; Tarrant & Woloschuk, 2002).

Beutel, Adie and Hudson (2011) suggest that data collected from preservice teachers in their study, both before and after the rural teaching experience, revealed positive perceptions towards teaching and living in rural communities and that even a brief immersion experience can positively influence preservice teachers' attitudes towards seeking rural teaching placements (p. 1). One teacher in this study suggested that universities should rethink placement options for students, commenting as follows:

*It should be that half of your practical experience should be in a rural setting ... because the disparity between your experience is jaded, so you'll always go to the city because that's what you're used to. So what the university needs to be doing is saying that if half of your experience is in the country, at least you can say 'I've done a stint in the country and I didn't particularly like it for yada reason ... but if you went to the country and you had a fantastic experience then the likelihood of staying is much greater ... That's what I think should happen, then at least people can say I've tried the country, I've had a shot in the country, I like it or I don't.*

Participants in this study had little opportunity to undertake a placement unless it was self-initiated and they also commented that awareness was not raised in university content for the merits of rural experiences. To contribute to future employment targets the perspectives of rural communities need to be incorporated into initial teacher education along with an understanding of rural social space (Cooper et al., 2008, 2010, 2011).

### **Personal and Professional Support that Built a Sense of Belonging to the Rural Community**

Digital representations were used in this study as prompts for interviews and these provided an authentic medium in which to explore participant's sense of support and belonging. Successful transition to a rural school community as an early career teacher is influenced by collegial (Carter, 2012; Clayton & Cuddapah, 2011) and local support. Participant C concurs, commenting:

*The way I was accepted in by the staff and the school, it's made me feel really welcomed inside and warm and all the fuzzy lovey stuff like that.*

Support provided by peers, school leaders and community stakeholders are essential for beginning teachers in coping with the demands of their first year teaching in rural positions (Carter, 2012; Diment, Ellins, Haggarty, & Postlethwaite, 2011; Flanagan, Hunter, Macdonald, Rossi, & Tinning, 2011; Ussher, 2016). All participants in this study received various levels of support from staff during the beginning year and this was seen as a major factor in their successful transition and adjustment to teaching in a rural school. Participant A found that he formed close friendships with other staff members and was grateful to be working with like-minded people. Participant B felt welcomed to the whole community because on arrival, senior staff took him on a tour of the school, the town and wider area. This mentoring, he explained, continued throughout the transition. He stated:

*... the school, the staff, the students, the wider community and the people all played a part in making this placement what it was.*

Ravetz, Turkington and Turkington (1995) explain that one's sense of home stretches beyond a physical structural domain to that of a social paradigm and Somerville explored the ideas of symbolic and specific physical location as a lens to viewing one's sense of 'place' (2007). Digital representations used in this study explored the concept of one's sense of 'space' and 'place'. The participants' used the digital representations to show their sense of 'home' and 'belonging' by photographing special places they felt connected to, demonstrating both physical and symbolic



definitions of home. Participant C grew up in a country area but moved to the city to complete university. She recalled her sense of belonging to the area she returned to for work:

*Anyone (living in this region) could pick a picture of the (region) and you belong because once you're from (this region). You are the gang. Everyone knows each other and everyone looks out for each other.*

Participant D presented a 'mobile' view of home as his photograph was of a spectacular sunset taken of the land between his two houses as he travelled on the highway between his two 'homes'. The image represented the amount of time spent traveling along it. Participant C shared the first view of town when driving home as her connection to 'place':

*After that 8 hour drive it makes it all worth it and you just know after you see that view that if you roll up at the pub or the club or whatever, everyone will be there and will be so excited to see you and 'how have you been and how's everything going' so there is an actual connection that when you come over this hill that you're going to bump into everyone and everyone's happy to see you.*

Four participants photographed the environment with wide-open spaces, characteristic of rural areas depicting landscapes and the other photographed unique vegetation that represented a very special feature of 'space'. Two distinct categories were identified through this data collection: physical structures of buildings or a particular room; and, a sense of home through one's relationship with 'space' and 'place' in particular social or physical environments. The participants demonstrated both symbolic and physical connections of home and 'place', views also discussed by Amato (2002), Ravetz, Turkington and Turkington (1995), Somerville (2007) and Wiles (2008).

These early career teachers expressed little concern about their transition to the rural school due to the supportive nature of staff and the community. The transition to an unfamiliar rural community (Boyd at el., 2012; Sharplin, 2002) presented the greatest challenge but this was not seen as a major hurdle to connect and belong. The experiences shared through the early career teachers in this study highlight that the school context is very connected with the local community in rural areas. McCallum and Price (2016) argue that developing a *sense of community* in a regional location helps teachers to settle in; this assists greatly in enhancing their sense of belonging and initial feelings of wellbeing (p. 125).

## CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that the attraction and retention of professionals, in this case teachers, is a contributing factor to the sustainability of rural areas. This finding is based on the positive experiences of five early career teachers in South Australia, Australia. However, as the argument has posited, teachers like other professional groups, play a critical role in rural communities. Green (2015) argues that a 'regeneration' retains and indeed re-articulates the notion of *generation*. It is likely, however, that the most useful understanding of sustainability is one that accommodates and indeed, explicitly acknowledges, the obligations of regeneration, or reparation and renewal (p. 37). This notion is highly applicable to this case study and communities, employers and initial teacher preparation should support rural areas to provide quality teaching for their children and young people.

This appreciative study highlighted the positive factors that contributed to these early career teachers' experiences in rural schools. Participants acknowledged that the first year in a rural teaching position was challenging and sometimes complex, a finding common to many teachers' experiences in their first post. However, these participants found that becoming involved in the school and community, and having an open mind meant they were welcomed.

Key findings of this study make a contribution to the wider literature and the preparation of professionals for employment in rural areas. Firstly, professionals embarking on their post to a rural environment adapt more effectively if they approach the appointment openly and make attempts to become familiar with the rural environment. Secondly, university programs should support students to have placements in rural areas, enrol a greater proportion of pre-service teachers from rural backgrounds, and provide scholarships for rural placements. Thirdly, various stakeholders have a role to play in the attraction, retention and sustainability of professionals to rural areas. And finally, adopting an understanding of 'place' is an important adjustment factor when transitioning to a new environment.

While this study has reported on the positive experiences of only five early career teachers who chose to seek initial employment in a rural area, it highlights the need for a larger study to ascertain whether teachers' own personal approach helped them to participate in and be accepted by the rural community, and whether this contributes to sustained employment in rural communities.

### **Acknowledgements**

This study is part of a broader *Australian Research Council* linkage grant project between Victoria University, the University of South Australia, and a number of community partners, titled *Renewing the teaching profession in regional areas through community partnerships*<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> The 'Renewing the teaching profession in regional areas through community partnerships' project is undertaken in conjunction with the Australia Research Council (ARC) under the linkage project scheme (ARC Project: LP100200499). The project tracks specific pre-service teacher cohorts to analyse the effectiveness of encouraging, employing and retaining early career teachers through partnership projects in regional education.

## REFERENCES

- Alloway, N., & Dalley-Trim, L. (2009). 'High and Dry' in rural Australia: Obstacles to students' aspirations and expectations. *Rural Society*, 19(1), 49–59.
- Amato, J. A. (2002). *Rethinking home: A case for writing local history*. Ewing, USA: University of California Press.
- Anderson, M. (1994). A literary collage of rural life. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, (10)2, 122–125.
- Argent, N., Baum, S., Bourke, L., Martin, J., McManus, P., Pritchard, B., Sorensen, T., & Walmsley, J. (2012). Rural community and rural resilience: What is important to farmers in keeping their country towns alive? *Journal of Rural Studies*, 28, 20– 29.
- Bahr, N. (2016). *Building quality in teaching and teacher education*. Victoria: Australian Council for Educational Research Press.
- Baills, L., Bell, S., Greensill, B., & Wilcox, L. (2002). Bridging the gap between beginning teachers and isolated/rural communities. *Education in Rural Australia*, Vol. 12, 55– 62.
- Basit, T. (2010). *Conducting research in educational contexts*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Bastian, K., Henry, G., & Smith, A. (2012). Scholarships to recruit the 'best and brightest' into teaching: Who is recruited, where do they teach, how effective are they, and how long do they stay? *Educational Researcher*, 41(3), 83–92.
- Baxter, J., Gray, M., & Hayes, A. (2011). *Families in regional, rural and remote Australia: Fact sheet*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Beckett, D., & O'Toole, J. (2010). *Educational research: Creative thinking and doing*. South Melbourne, Victoria, Australia: Oxford University Press.
- Boyd, D., Broadley, T., Byrne, M., Ledger, S., Lock, G., Sharplin, E., Terry, E., & Trinidad, S. (2012). Going bush: Preparing pre-service teachers to teach in regional Western Australia. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 22(1), 39–55.
- Boylan, C. (2004). *Putting rural into pre-service teacher education*. Melbourne: Rural pre-service teacher education, AARA, 1-9.
- Beutel, D., Adie, L., & Hudson, S. (2011) Promoting rural and remote teacher education in Australia through the Over the Hill project. *The International Journal of Learning*, 18(2), 377–388.
- Campbell, A. M., & Yates, G. (2011). 'Want to be a country teacher? No, I am too metrocentric.' *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 26(4), 1–2. Retrieved 15.7.14 from <http://jrre.psu.edu/articles/26-4.pdf>
- Carter, B. (2012). Facilitating preservice teacher induction through learning in partnership. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(2), 99–113.
- Carter, D. (2006). *Dispossession, dreams and diversity: Issues in Australian Studies*. Frenchs Forest, New South Wales: Pearson Education Australia.
- Clandinin, J., & Connelly, M. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In G. Camilli, P. B. Elmore, E. Grace, J.L. Green, & A. Skukauskaite (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research*, (pp. 477–489). Washington D.C: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Clayton, C., & Cuddapah, J. (2011). Using Wenger's communities of practice to explore a new teacher cohort. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 62(1), 62–75.

- Cobbold, C. (2006). Attracting and retaining rural teachers in Ghana: The premise and promise of a district sponsorship scheme. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 32(4), 453–469.
- Cocklin, C., & Alston, M. (Eds.). (2002). *Community sustainability in rural Australia: A question of capital?* New South Wales: Centre for Rural Social Science, Charles Sturt University.
- Cooper, M., Green, B., Hastings, W., Lock, G., Reid, J., & White, S. (2008). 'New Ground' in teacher education for rural and regional Australia: Regenerating rural social space. Paper presented at Education and Rural-Regional Sustainability: A Symposium, AARE, December, Brisbane.
- Cooper, M., Green, B., Hastings, W., Lock, G., Reid, J., & White, S. (2010). Regenerating rural social space? Teacher education for rural-regional sustainability. *Australian Journal of Education*, 54(3), 262–276.
- Cooper, M., Green, B., Hastings, W., Lock, G., Reid, J., & White, S. (2011). Investing in sustainable and resilient rural social space: Lessons for teacher education. *Education in Rural Australia*, 21(1), 67–78.
- Cooperrider, D., Stavros, J., & Whitney, D. (2008). *Appreciative inquiry handbook: For leaders of change* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Brunswick, Ohio: Crown Custom Publishing.
- Cooperrider, D., & Whitney, D. (2005). *Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Cram, F. (2010). Appreciative Inquiry. *MAI Review*, 3, 1.
- Cuervo, H. (2012). Enlarging the social justice agenda in education: An analysis of rural teachers' narratives beyond the distributive dimension. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(2), 83–95.
- Danaher, G., Danaher, P., & Moriarty, B. (2003). Situating and interrogating contemporary Australian rural schooling research. *Journal of Research in Rural schooling*, 18(3), 133–138.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2003). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues*, Second Edition (pp. 1–45). California: SAGE Publications.
- Diment, K., Ellins, J., Haggarty, L., & Postlethwaite, K. (2011). Improving the learning of newly qualified teachers in the induction year. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(6), 935–954
- Down, B., Hunter, J., Johnson, B., Le Cornu, R., Pearce, J., Peters, J., & Sullivan, A. (2010). *Conditions that support early career teacher resilience*. Paper presented at the Australian Teacher Education Association Conference, July, Townsville, Queensland.
- Down, B., McInerney, P., & Smyth, J. (2011). 'Coming to a place near you'? The politics and possibilities of a critical pedagogy of place-based education. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(1), 3–16.
- Dyson, M., & Plunkett, M. (2011). Becoming a teacher and staying one: Examining the complex ecologies associated with educating and retaining new teachers in rural Australia? *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(1), 32–47.
- Evans, T. (2003). Beating around the bush: Reflections on the theme. *Journal of Research in Rural schooling*, 18(3), 170–172.
- Ewing, R., & Smith, D. (2003). Retaining quality beginning teachers in the profession. *English teaching: Practice and critique*, 2(1), 15–32.
- Flanagan, E., Hunter, L., Macdonald, D., Rossi, T., & Tinning, R. (2011). Professional learning places and spaces: The staffroom as a site of beginning teacher induction and transition. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(1), 33–46.

- Fry, S., & Anderson, H. (2011). Career changers as first-year teachers in rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 26(12), 1–15. Retrieved 14.7.14 from <http://jrre.psu.edu/articles/26-12.pdf>
- Gale, T., & Mills, C. (2003). Transient teachers: Mixed messages of schooling in regional Australia. *Journal of Research in Rural schooling*, 18(3), 145–151.
- Green, B. (2015). Australian education and rural-regional sustainability. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, Vol. 25 (3), 36–49.
- Green, B. (2008). *Spaces and places: The NSW Rural (Teacher) Education Project*. New South Wales: Centre for Information Studies, Charles Sturt University.
- Green, B., & Reid, J. (2004). Teacher education for rural-regional sustainability: Changing agendas, challenging futures, chasing chimeras? *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 32(3), 255–273.
- Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquires. *Educational Communication Technology*, 29(2), 75–91.
- Halsey, J. (2005). *Pre-service country teaching in Australia, What's happening – What needs to happen? A report on the size, scope and issues of pre-service country teaching placement programs in teacher education in Australia*. Pre-service Country Teaching Mapping Project Report: Rural schooling Forum Australia.
- Halsey, J. (2011a). Farm fair voices, space, history, the middle ground and ‘the future’ of rural communities. *Education in Rural Australia*, 21(1), 39–66.
- Halsey, J. (2011b). Small schools, big future. *Australian Journal of Education*, 55(1), 5–13.
- Hare, D., & Heap, J. (2001). *Effective teacher recruitment and retention strategies in the midwest: Who is making use of them?* Naperville: Educational Policy Publications, North Central Regional Educational Lab.
- Heldke, L. (2006). Farming made her stupid. *Hypatia*, 21(3), 151–165.
- Higgins, A. (1994). A background to rural schooling in Australia. *Journal of Research in Rural schooling*, 10(1), 48–57.
- Howard, S., & Johnson, B. (2004). Resilient teachers: Resisting stress and burnout. *Social Psychology of Education*, 7(4), 399–420.
- Hudson, P., & Hudson, S. (2008). Changing preservice teachers' attitudes for teaching in rural schools. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 33(4), 67–75.
- Jenkins, K., Reitano, R., & Taylor, N. (2011). Teachers in the bush: Supports, challenges and professional learning. *Education in Rural Australia*, 21(2), 71–85.
- Johnson, B., Papatraianou, L., & Sullivan, A. (2009). *Re-defining resilience: Moving towards some conceptual clarification*. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education International Education Research Conference, December, Canberra, ACT.
- Jurs, S., & Wiersma, W. (2009). *Research methods in education: An introduction* (9<sup>th</sup> ed.). United States of America: Pearson Education.
- Lofland, J., Snow, D., Anderson, L., & Lofland, L. (2006). *Analysing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- McCallum, F., & Price, D. (2016) *Nurturing wellbeing development in education: From little things, big things grow*. Routledge: NY.

- McCallum, F., & Prosser, B. (2009). River journeys: Narrative accounts of South Australian preservice teachers during professional experiences. In A. Mattos (Ed.), *Narratives on teaching and teacher education* (pp. 91–106). United States: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McCallum, F., & Price, D. (2010). Well teachers, well students. *Journal of Student Wellbeing*, 4(1), 19–34.
- McManus, P., Walmsley, J., Argent, N., Baum, S. (2012). Rural community and rural resilience: What is important to farmers in keeping their country towns alive? *Journal of Rural Studies*, 28(1), 20–29.
- Murthy, D. (2008). Digital ethnography: An examination of the use of new technologies for social research. *Sociology*, 45(5), 837–855.
- Queensland College of Teachers (2014). *Graduates infographic*. Retrieved 31.7.16 from [www.qct.edu.au/PDF/Research/QLD%20Grads%20Infographic.pdf](http://www.qct.edu.au/PDF/Research/QLD%20Grads%20Infographic.pdf)
- Ravetz, A., Turkington, A., & Turkington, R. (1995). *The place of home: English domestic environments, 1914 – 2000*. London: Chapman and Hall.
- Reid, J., & White, S. (2008). Placing teachers? Sustaining rural schooling through place-consciousness in teacher education. *Journal of Research in Rural schooling*, 23(7), 1–11.
- Rennie, J., & Somerville, M. (2012). Mobilising community? Place, identity formation and new teachers' learning. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 33(2), 193–206.
- Roberts, P. (2004). *Staffing an empty schoolhouse: Attracting and retaining teachers in rural, remote and isolated communities*. Eric Pearson Study Grant Report. Retrieved 14.8.14 from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED507343>.
- Sharplin, E. (2002). Rural retreat or outback hell: Expectations of rural and remote teaching. *Issues in Educational Research*, 12(1), 49–63.
- Sharplin, E. (2010). A taste of country: A pre-service teacher rural field trip. *Education in Rural Australia*, 20(1), 17–27.
- Somerville, M. (2007). A place pedagogy for 'Global Contemporaneity'. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 42(3), 326–344.
- Stake, R. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp. 443–466). California: SAGE Publications.
- Stanczak, G. (2007). Introduction: Images, methodologies, and generating social knowledge. In G. Stanczak (Ed.), *Visual research methods: Image, society and representation* (pp. 1–21). California: SAGE Publications.
- Stevens, K. (2010). From closed to open classes – repositioning schools to sustain rural communities. *Education in Rural Australia*, 20(1), 3–16.
- Stolpa Flatt, J. M. (2006). Teacher retention. *Phi Kappa Phi Forum*, 86(3), 3–5.
- Tarrant, M., & Woloschuk, W. (2002). Does a rural schooling experience influence students' likelihood of rural practice? Impact of student's background and gender. *Medical Education*, 36(3), 241–247.
- Tuthill, S. (2000). *Innovative approaches in rural schooling*. Rural Information Center: Rural Information Center Publication Series, No. 72. Retrieved 14.8.14 from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED448988>.

- Ussher, B. (2016). Student teachers' placement experiences in a familiar school setting: Local community partnerships with a distance ITE program. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, Vol. 26 (1), 3–16.
- White, S. (2011). Preparing teachers for rural and regional settings: The RRRTEC project. *Curriculum Leadership*, 9(20). Retrieved 14.8.14 from [http://www.curriculum.edu.au/leader/the\\_rrrtec\\_project,33881.html?issueID=12471](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/leader/the_rrrtec_project,33881.html?issueID=12471).
- Wiles, J. (2008). Sense of home in a transnational social space: New Zealanders in London. *Global Networks*, 8(1), 116–137.