Australian and International Journal of Rural Education
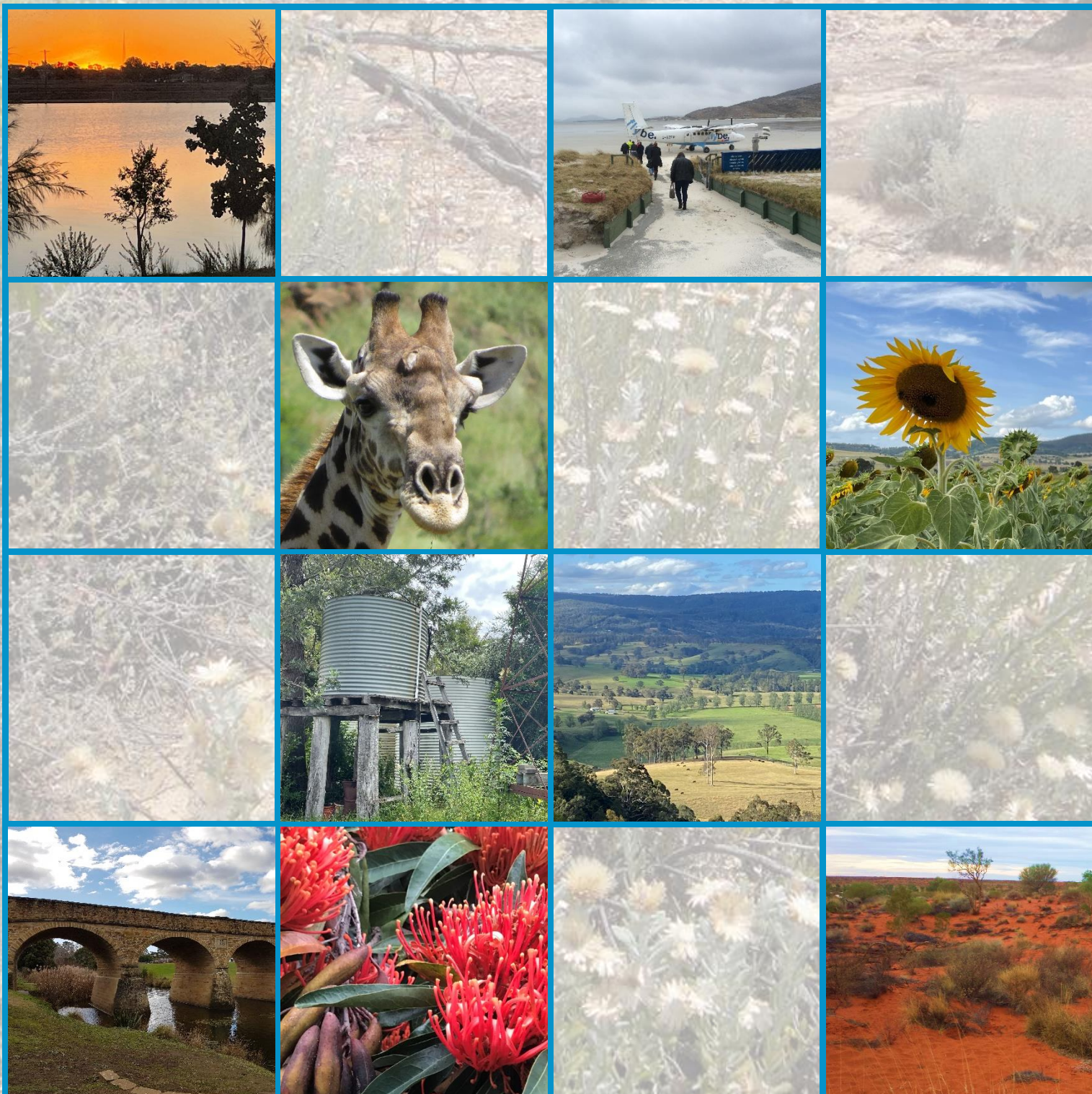
SPERA

Society for the Provision of
Education in Rural Australia

AUSTRALIAN AND INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RURAL EDUCATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SPERA
Society for the Provision of
Education in Rural Australia

Celebration, Attraction and Retention of a Regional and Rural Workforce

Hernan Cuervo
University of Melbourne
hicuervo@unimelb.edu.au

Serena Davie
Department of Education Western Australia
serena.davie@education.wa.edu.au

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 Instituto 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.

References

Cuervo, H., & Acquaro, D. (2018). Exploring metropolitan university pre-service teacher motivations and barriers to teaching in rural schools. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 46(4), 384-398. doi:10.1080/1359866X.2018.1438586

Guenther, J., & Ledger, S. (2022). Challenging Rural Stereotypes. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 31(2), i-ii. doi:10.47381/aijre.v31i2.311

Halsey, J. (2018). *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

Holst, J. (2020). Increasing rural recruitment and retention through rural exposure during undergraduate training: an integrative review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(17), 6423. doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17176423

Hudson, S., Young, K., Thiele, C., & Hudson, P. (2022). An Exploration of Preservice Teacher Readiness for Teaching in Rural and Remote Schools. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 30(3), 51–68. doi: 10.47381/aijre.v30i3.280

National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research. (2020). *Piccole scuole*. https://www.indire.it/en/progetto/small-schools

Roberts, P., & Cuervo, H. (2015). What next for rural education research? *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 25(3), 1-8. doi.org/10.47381/aijre.v25i3.99

Sharplin, E. (2014). Reconceptualising out-of-field teaching: Experiences of rural teachers in Western Australia. *Educational Research*, 56(1), 97–110. doi:10.1080/00131881.2013.874160

White, S. (2015). Extending the knowledge base for (rural) teacher educators. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 25(3), 50–61. doi:10.47381/aijre.v25i3.103

Place Consciousness and School Leaders' Intentionality as Partnership Imperatives: Supporting the Recruitment of Quality Graduates in Regional, Rural and Remote Schools

Catherine Thiele
University of the Sunshine Coast
cthiele@usc.edu.au

Joanne Casey
University of the Sunshine Coast
jcasey1@usc.edu.au

Susan Simon
University of the Sunshine Coast
ssimon@usc.edu.au

Shelley Dole
University of the Sunshine Coast
shelley.dole19@gmail.com

Abstract

Attracting high quality teachers to regional, rural, and remote locations has been an issue for school communities in Australia. Research has illustrated that innovative initiatives and experiences can change pre-service teachers' attitudes, perspectives and perceptions about regional, rural and remote schools. What is less understood is the contribution of school leaders foregrounding a place consciousness approach to spark pre-service teacher interest in undertaking professional experience placements and possible employment in their RRR schools. This paper shares research findings that identified how Far North Queensland school leaders showcased "their place" with key stakeholders and in particular with pre-service teachers. The findings affirmed notions that school leaders understand the valuable connections between rural, regional and remote pre-service professional experiences and the potentiality for high quality teachers for the long-term. Implications are drawn in relation to how school leaders create partnerships and promote their school place intentionally.

Keywords: *place consciousness, leader intentionality, regional rural remote education, RRR staffing challenges*

Introduction

Attracting high quality teachers to regional, rural, and remote (RRR) locations has been a long-standing priority for Australian school communities (Halsey, 2018). Families living in RRR locations are justified in their demands for equity of access to quality teaching for their children. Likewise, the wider community supports the notion of equity of educational access for all its citizens (Halsey, 2019). While geographical, contextual and cultural differences are inherently attributed to RRR areas of Australia (Kline et al., 2013), acknowledgement of the relationship between

educational performance and geographical location (Herbert, 2020; Roberts & Green, 2013) has seen Australian educational goals prioritise the mitigation of educational disadvantage (Department of Education, 2019; Halsey, 2018; Herbert, 2020). One recommended action outlined the need to encourage high quality teachers to RRR regions and to support them once they are there (Halsey, 2018). Despite such recommendations, RRR schools continue to face challenges in attracting and retaining high quality teachers to their communities.

Quality teaching in RRR schools begins with pre-service teacher education (Downes & Roberts, 2018) and there is a need for explicit links between pre-service teachers and RRR schools (Halsey, 2018). Research has illustrated that innovative RRR initiatives and placement experiences have changed pre-service teachers' attitudes, perspectives and perceptions about the quality of teachers and career opportunities in RRR schools (Hudson & Hudson, 2019; Young et al., 2018).

What is less understood is the role that school leadership plays in supporting pre-service teachers prior to, during and after their RRR experiences (Downes & Roberts, 2018). To investigate this aspect, our research explored the leadership approaches of a group of Far North Queensland high school leaders. More specifically, it looks at the interplay of the school leaders' sense of place consciousness and leadership intentionality as influences on attracting and retaining quality teachers.

The Far North Queensland region marks one of the more geographically dispersed regions of Queensland (and Australia), with the capital city Brisbane over 1500 kilometres away. As a metropolitan centre, Brisbane supports a large proportion of the pre-service initial teacher education population. While many regional areas of Australia can align to metropolitan universities and metropolitan areas in terms of travel distance, access to services, resources and staff (Herbert, 2020), the Far North Queensland region faces geographically-based challenges when addressing school recruitment needs. Attracting high quality teaching staff to RRR regions is a multifaceted recruitment task involving human resources' teams and often involving school leaders (principals and deputy principals) directly. As a response to the staffing needs of Far North Queensland, the high school leaders of this research project reported that their individual and collective contributions to pre-service teacher RRR initiatives, preparation programs and placement opportunities were fundamental. The leadership strategies adopted for their schools' recruitment needs, and more broadly for the Far North Queensland region, were intentionally aimed to successfully attract, support and retain high quality pre-service teachers.

RRR communities are often characterised by a strong sense of place where a school can "*act as an anchor point for community to build around*" (Morrison & Ledger, 2020, p. i). RRR school leaders understand this has implications for sustainable staffing processes that aim at good fit. A good fit based on each contextualised place has not always been a focus for staffing RRR schools. Rather, such an approach contrasts with historical processes for early career staffing, whereby there was a serving-time mentality for RRR appointments prior to being transferred to more desirable metropolitan locations (Hudson & Hudson, 2019).

As a shift away from more traditional staffing paradigms, the Far North Queensland school leaders fostered and strengthened innovative partnerships to share understandings of their place more directly with pre-service teachers. The school leaders explored and developed peer-supported and partnership-powered leadership approaches to attract pre-service teachers to teach in RRR schools (Fluckiger et al., 2014). This paper demonstrates the importance of RRR school leaders leading with intentionality and sharing their place consciousness, as key features of a multidimensional recruitment strategy aimed at attracting and retaining high quality teachers to RRR schools.

Literature Overview

Halsey's (2018) Independent Review into Regional Rural, and Remote Education emphasised that student outcomes are impacted by "*the magnitude of the challenges of achieving the overall lift given the demographics, geography and cultural diversity of RRR Australia*" (p. 11). Attracting, supporting and retaining high quality teachers to RRR locations is a national educational priority (Department of Education, 2019). Despite research identifying staffing challenges (Downes & Fuqua, 2018; Hudson & Hudson, 2019) and showing how innovative partnership initiatives among various stakeholder groups, including universities, can assist (Young et al., 2018), recruitment challenges persist (Downes & Roberts, 2018). These studies invite researchers to explore such challenges from the very foundations that set RRR education apart from its metropolitan counterparts.

Halsey (2019) reported that 47% of all schools in Australia are described as non-metropolitan; yet recruitment policies and practices attempt to replicate a one-size-fits-all approach. This approach has been viewed as problematic when understanding and responding to issues of RRR place, difference and diversity (Roberts & Downes, 2019). Attracting, supporting and retaining quality teachers for RRR schools can be consistently viewed in recurring and overarching themes within the literature, with the influence of school leaders being identified as a key factor (Roberts & Downes, 2019). Responding to RRR staffing opportunities and challenges has been described as a complex process that requires thinking and acting beyond scientific and quantifiable methods (Halsey, 2019). Explorations, however, cannot ignore these perpetual and persistent issues if there is to be an Australian education system that promotes and delivers excellence and equity (Department of Education, 2019).

Over time, research has seen the opportunities and challenges of staffing RRR schools move the recruitment paradigm from general acceptance of expected teacher shortages, transience and inexperience, towards more innovative explorations of stakeholder partnerships, particularly those that partner with universities as a means of forming connections with pre-service teachers, to build their conceptual understandings of RRR education (Hudson & Hudson, 2019). What is evident within the literature is that pre-service teachers who prepare for and experience a RRR teaching placement play an integral part of the flow of high quality teachers to RRR schools (Downes & Roberts, 2018; Young et al., 2018). Universities and education departments can effectively facilitate graduate teachers' readiness for classroom teaching in RRR schools (Hudson et al., 2020, 2021).Yet, what is relatively unknown is the specific role that school leaders play when they are supporting pre-service teachers in the school and community.

RRR school communities are characterised by a strong sense of place (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Being deliberately conscious of place entails knowing the context and culture of the school and community, with a focus on relationships with, and in, the school and community (Roberts & Downes, 2019). Gruenewald (2003) suggested that a conscious sense of place has several dimensions that intertwine to shape teachers' identities, experiences and possibilities and the challenges they may face. This sense of place has implications for the significant nature of fit, when it comes to quality staffing and the processes for ascertaining it (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). For school leaders, getting to know pre-service teachers while they are getting to know the school and its community is vitally important (Morrison & Ledger, 2020). Such a relationship allows both parties to share experiences, ask questions, get a sense of their place (inside and outside the school context), and debunk misconceptions about what it is like to live and teach in a RRR community (Downes & Roberts, 2018; Young et al., 2018).

However, the building of such relationships has not always been possible for school leaders who may rely on human resource departments to fulfil vacant teaching positions. Reliance solely on centralised and standardised human resources recruitment processes can, in effect, serve to create a placeless approach to staffing RRR schools (Downes & Roberts, 2018). Indeed, "*placeless*

education" was described by Herbert (2020, p. 73) as the decontextualised development and design of Australian education policies that are blind to the geographical, historical, political, cultural and social contextual factors that are inherent in the fabric of RRR schools.

Roberts and Downes (2019) cautioned against using the phrase "*rural schools are different,*" voicing concerns that researchers, policy makers and education system leaders have the potential to position all RRR schools as the same in being "*distinctly 'non-metropolitan'*" (p. 52). In other words, a one-size-fits-all approach to policy development and recruitment design is blind to the staffing challenges that each RRR community faces (Hardwick-Franco, 2019; Herbert, 2020). Additionally, the non-metropolitan positioning of RRR education lacks an active conscious placing of RRR school leaders' voices in recruitment processes as a means to ensure quality teachers for their schools.

A school leader's "*voice and visibility of contexts, relationships and positioning*" (Halsey, 2019, p. 8) make a significant difference to a RRR school community. Effective school leaders are attuned to the needs of their school and community and can deploy leadership approaches that adapt to changing situations (Hersey et al., 1996). In terms of supporting teachers (pre-service and in-service), effective school leaders are deliberate in making others aware of things outside their immediate school environment (Kiverstein & Rietveld, 2021). Providing a quality education for all students remains the central responsibility of school leaders, and yet their roles have seen increased functions and responsibilities around broader advocacy for their school place. This includes when they are supporting pre-service teacher placements, experiences, and recruitment processes (Halsey, 2019). Leaders' intentions are attributed to their actions (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002), whereby internal goals are expressed and made visible (Kiverstein & Reitveld, 2021). With this in mind, RRR principals and deputy principals are required to possess rich skillsets, leader behaviours and leadership approaches that incorporate intentional advocacy and actions for their school place and community.

Australian RRR schools have been described as inherently complex organisations (Da'as et al., 2018), particularly given their demographics, geography and cultural diversity (Halsey, 2018). In fact, the role of school leaders in RRR schools is complex and significant (Halsey, 2018). They are required to lead cognitively complex contexts, while balancing a range of diverse activities, people and resources (including pre-service teachers). Given that the literature has emphasised that management and leadership of teaching staff are only two of the myriad of complex tasks that RRR school principals and deputy principals undertake (Hardwick-Franco, 2019), it is reasonable to suggest that "*contexts, factors, relationships and resources that impact on learning and opportunities don't exist as discrete entities*" (Halsey, 2018, p. 4).

Leading a RRR school is distinctively reliant on strong school-community links and school cultural development (Hardwick-Franco, 2019; Roberts & Downes, 2019). RRR school leaders face institutional challenges (Gruenewald, 2003), as they function within centralised policy that has traditionally favoured the voice of the non-rural (Herbert, 2020). Therefore, it is critical to highlight and preference the views of school leaders, in particular their place consciousness, when they are addressing the staffing requirements of their schools (Hardwick-Franco, 2019). Considerable attention has been given to the pragmatic issues that surround staffing RRR schools (Downes & Roberts, 2018). However, RRR school leaders' skill development needs to be commensurate with the specialised skills necessary for their expanding job responsibilities (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018).

The complexity of the organisational structures of RRR schools, combined with the imperative to partner with universities and pre-service teachers, has diversified the role of school leaders. This complexity could attribute to why "*the approaches proven to work [are] not universally adopted by education jurisdictions*" (Downes & Fuqua, 2018, p. 45). It could be suggested that the complexity of the school organisation, including the role that leadership plays in the organisation,

may mean that recruitment process can never be universally adopted due to the inherent needs of each RRR school place.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks underpinning the research project focus on leadership approaches that identify the complexity of school organisations, while also aligning to Australian RRR school contexts. Hersey et al.'s (1996) situational leadership theory framed the interview research questions, which explored how the RRR leaders adapted their leadership approach to suit the context and people with whom they worked in the Far North Queensland region, particularly pre-service teachers who were visiting on placement. This theory provided a lens to consider leadership styles. To facilitate further investigation, contingency leadership theory (Fiedler, 1993) provided scope to understand whether RRR leaders' effectiveness was contingent on their leadership approach (task-orientated or relationships-oriented) as they supported pre-service teachers during placement experiences.

In addition to these two theoretical frameworks, the essential leadership criteria identified by Fluckiger et al. (2014), in particular partnerships-powered and peer-supported approaches to leadership, underpinned the research questions relating to the leadership approaches adopted by school principals and deputy principals to create partnerships within the Far North Queensland region, and with universities and pre-service teachers. Of particular interest was how the Far North Queensland leaders partnered to develop a repertoire of strategies and tools to problem-solve staffing issues related to their region or school context, and whether leadership peer-support transferred place knowledge into improved recruitment practices. Using these theoretical frameworks, the school leadership interview questions and pre-service teacher surveys were created and the data were analysed.

Research Context, Design and Method

This paper reports specifically on the partnership imperatives of a cluster of Far North Queensland high school leaders where leadership intentionality and understanding of place consciousness supported the development of pre-service teachers, while concurrently addressing the employment needs of the region. The research project in its entirety encompassed the perspectives of these Far North Queensland high school leaders (principals and deputy principals, n=9), as well as university placement leaders (n=2), a leader from a metropolitan school who was facilitating a RRR placement preparation program (n=1), and pre-service teachers who had completed a placement in the Far North Queensland region (n=7).

While we do not report specifically about the metropolitan-based RRR placement preparation program in this paper, we wish to acknowledge that it supported the context of the research and therefore the design and methods adopted. The RRR placement preparation program was based at a large metropolitan high school in Brisbane, Queensland, and the program centred on (a) attracting, developing and preparing pre-service teachers for placements in RRR Queensland schools, (b) developing high quality work-ready pre-service teachers, and (c) supporting the recruitment of high quality teachers to RRR locations. The preparation program was led by the leaders of the large metropolitan high school; however, it was developed and implemented within a tripartite partnership that included universities, RRR school leaders, and pre-service teachers.

A key feature of the research design involved aligning the theoretical framework and research questions with the context of the leadership partnerships that were already operating. Therefore, to build on the knowledge of those on-the-ground and participating in the research, constructivist inquiry informed the methodology (Mertens, 2019). The research questions were developed to reflect the theoretical frameworks, while being able to build in the school leaders'

knowledge of their context and circumstances (Fluckiger et al., 2014). The three research questions that focused on the school leadership approaches were:

- To what extent does a partnerships-powered and peer-supported approach to attracting, supporting and recruiting teachers to Far North Queensland support pre-service teachers' desires to work there?
- What are the contextual considerations for attracting and retaining pre-service teachers to the region?
- How can school principals' and deputy principals' leadership skills be developed to encourage future teachers to be employed in the region?

The research design and methodology were based on the premise that school leaders needed to continue to operate in their already complex roles with acute awareness of, and sensitives to, their school context. Likewise, the placement preparation program, the university partnerships, and the pre-service teachers' education (e.g., placements) were simultaneously operational. Therefore, mindful of these functions, data were collected in two phases (Semester 1 and Semester 2), using techniques suitable for the circumstances of the participants (e.g., face-to-face interviews for RRR school leaders and online surveys for pre-service teachers).

The first phase of data collection (Semester 1) focused on pre-service teachers who had completed a placement in Far North Queensland. The pre-service teachers were invited to respond to 10 questions using a five-point Likert scale (i.e., 'To what extent do you agree with the statement' – strongly agree to strongly disagree) and eight open-ended questions. The survey questions reflected the intent of the research design, particularly in terms of leadership support (e.g., 'I was supported and encouraged to immerse myself in the school cultural context'). Other questions included items about accommodation (e.g., 'There are living arrangement options available to suit pre-service teachers on placement and early career teachers'), financial grants (e.g., 'This placement was only possibly through the provision of a grant or bursary'), and prospective employment opportunities (e.g., 'I will pursue employment in Far North Queensland after graduation'). Demographic data about the pre-service teachers were not collected.

The second phase of data collection (Semester 2) mirrored the phase one pre-service teachers' surveys, and also included the university placement leaders and RRR school leaders. This paper focuses mostly on the data collection via interviews with the Far North Queensland school leaders. Their interviews were conducted individually and face-to-face in Far North Queensland. Considerations emanating from situational and contingency leadership theories (Fiedler, 1993; Hersey et al., 1996) informed the creation of semi-structured interview questions, with the aim of reflecting the characteristics of principals' and deputy principals' work which had impact in RRR contexts (e.g., 'For your school context, what support does a pre-service teacher require for their placement?').

The questions also aimed to interrogate a partnerships-powered and peer-supported approach (Fluckiger et al., 2014) to attracting teachers (e.g., 'Do you offer a pathway for employment across the Far North Queensland region or your school?'). Understandings about the partnerships fostered by school leaders, pre-service teachers, universities and the metropolitan placement preparation program leaders, and the degree to which the partners supported each other and the pre-service teachers, were essential to designing the interview questions.

The leadership theoretical frameworks (Fiedler, 1993; Hersey et al., 1996) and leadership criteria (Fluckiger et al., 2014) were used to identify and analyse the key themes of the school leadership interview qualitative data. The platform NVivo supported this process. The emergent themes were then descriptively analysed against the pre-service teachers' quantitative data to build a broad picture of participants' experiences. All data sets were analysed to inform findings and, taken as a whole, provide a portrayal of the existing recruitment approaches of a cluster of Far North Queensland school leaders.

Findings and Discussion

Three main themes emerged from the school leaders' interview data: (1) leadership place consciousness; (2) leadership intentional actions; and (3) leaders partnering with a shared philosophy. Within these three overarching themes, sub-themes provided additional insights into how each impacted and influenced pre-service teachers' experiences prior, during and after a RRR placement. The leaders possessed a rich understanding of the cultural and contextual uniqueness of their schools, and sharing this knowledge and supporting pre-service teachers wherever possible were seen as imperative parts of their role. The school leaders expressed their preparedness for deliberate action at both system and school levels. As one leader stated, "*We need to light the fire and fan the flames*" (Principal I) so that pre-service teachers see their place in RRR schools and communities and explore employment opportunities. The findings suggested a recruitment paradigm shift, where school leaders' actions were driving innovative partnerships and multidimensional strategies to attract and retain high quality teachers to Far North Queensland.

Place Consciousness: Sparking an Interest

The contextual and cultural factors of RRR schools make for varied employment opportunities and challenges; however, RRR schools should not be considered purely from a non-metropolitan viewpoint that positions them as "different" (Roberts & Downes, 2019, p. 52). Recruitment processes that are built on strong relationships and partnerships, while understanding the significance of place, are vital (Hardwick-Franco, 2019; Herbert, 2020). Centralised approaches that assume any-fit to recruitment can undermine attempts to use a place conscious approach that targets a best-fit. Establishing an understanding of place consciousness can prove challenging with many pre-service teachers studying at metropolitan-based universities geographically removed from a RRR context, and the leaders reinforced the importance of first creating partnerships with metropolitan schools and universities. These task-orientated and relationship-orientated leadership approaches (Fiedler, 1993) worked as a critical initial link when attracting pre-service teachers.

The vision and strategic action of the preparation program positively contributed to preparing pre-service teachers for RRR placements. The study's findings noted that initial interest in RRR often started when a pre-service teacher enquired about, or enrolled in, the RRR placement preparation program. Additionally, the leaders acknowledged that this interest was also supported by the rigorous screening process the pre-service teachers undertook before enrolling in the program. From there, it became evident that the program nurtured these initial sparks until the pre-service teachers were placed at RRR schools for their professional experience. In the program, pre-service teachers were developing their awareness of more individualised, RRR contextual understandings. A place consciousness was being established prior to commencing a placement, proving advantageous to enrichment when in the RRR community.

Our data revealed that, while the metropolitan-based RRR preparation programs helped spark an interest and develop pre-service teachers' expectations, it was through engaging in "*different type of experiences*" (Principal C) while on placement, that they could get a true sense of place and their part in the community. Relationship-orientated leadership approaches (Fiedler, 1993) adopted by the school leaders then served to be a contributing factor to placements being a positive experience. These included the leaders treating pre-service teachers as "*valued members of the education teaching program*" (Deputy Principal A) and using diverse strategies to inspire and encourage them to develop as teachers. The metropolitan partners were essential in the initial inspiration, and the school leaders noted that they had to "*sell our area a bit*" (Principal B).

Central to these leadership approaches were the relationships. The school leaders ensured that there were programs to "*buddy them [pre-service teachers] up*" (Deputy Principal D). One

principal outlined that there were "*some distinct advantages*" (Principal B) when they placed pre-service teachers in accommodation with their peers. This relationship-based approach to creating partnerships would see the pre-service teachers and early career teachers discuss the "*transition between university to career, and what's that going to look like for them*" (Deputy Principal D). Particularly, these leaders outlined that through these relationships, the pre-service teachers would come to know "*the big things that graduates need to be aware of—pitfalls and benefits*" (Deputy Principal A).

The school leaders enacted task-orientated leadership approaches to create partnerships with metropolitan schools, universities and pre-service teachers, so the pre-service teachers could leverage what their schools had to offer. The school leaders adopted more relationship-orientated leadership approaches once the pre-service teachers were at the schools on placement.

Both of these leadership approaches valued the development of pre-service teachers' place consciousness. These findings support the argument that school, university and pre-service teacher preparation programs that spark an interest in RRR school experiences for pre-service teachers are transformative (Young et al., 2018), while also illustrating the significant part that RRR school leaders were playing in these processes.

Place Consciousness: Cultural Contextual Dimensions

The school leaders' extraordinarily strong sense of place highlighted that they possessed a sensitivity to the cultural and contextual circumstances and needs of their schools (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). They knew their schools deeply. Place consciousness underpinned their everyday work and life. A strong theme that emerged from the data concerned how their place consciousness could be shared with pre-service teachers so that they could establish their place in the community (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). The leaders noted that an essential part of their role was to share knowledge of their RRR place wherever possible, particularly to support pre-service teachers. The leadership approaches valued the connecting of pre-service teachers with other people within the school and community, as a way to enrich their experiences (Hersey et al., 1996). Sometimes this involved connecting with the local council. For example, one deputy principal explained that:

> Our council has done a fabulous job in marketing tourism and they have made this handy little brochure about things to do around the Tablelands and a calendar of events. So, I'm able to just go there [and let the pre-service teacher know] this is what's on in our community when you happen to be here. (Deputy Principal F)

Place consciousness encompasses several contextual dimensions (Gruenewald, 2003) that extend far beyond being teachers within school grounds. The leaders shared how they would promote and support engagement opportunities for pre-service teachers while they were on placement. There was a sense that these experiences helped pre-service teachers shape their teacher identities within RRR contexts, while also considering the possibilities and challenges they might face. The school leaders identified the need "*to really show them all of the other attractions of an area and what it is to live in a community, because when pre-service teachers come to us, or beginning teachers come to us, it can be very isolating*" (Deputy Principal F).

The role of sharing information about the community was undertaken in various ways by different people, but it was often initiated by the principal or deputy principal. The school leaders requested that teachers connect with pre-service teachers to share what it is like living in a RRR community. For example, one deputy principal explained that "*I always go to the faculty beforehand, and say you need to show them [pre-service teachers] what it's like living in a community*" (Deputy Principal F).

Providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to establish their place consciousness was prioritised as a way for them to connect to the place, the community and the students they had to teach. As one school leader stated, when teachers engaged in community-based opportunities (e.g., sport, cultural activities), connections to the school students increased: *"Every one of our teachers knows our students beyond their name. They know something about them and connect with them"* (Deputy Principal E). The pre-service teachers' survey responses supported these findings, with all participants agreeing to being encouraged to experience the lifestyle of the community beyond the school environment, as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1: *Pre-Service Teachers' Levels of Agreement (%) to the Likert Scale item About Connecting with the Community*

Survey Item	Phase	SA	A	N	D	SD
I was encouraged to experience the lifestyle of this community beyond the school environment	1	66	34	0	0	0
	2	75	25	0	0	0

Legend: SA strongly agree, A agree, N neither agree or disagree, D disagree, SD strongly disagree

Data collated from all leaders demonstrated that *"if you [pre-service teachers] want an authentic experience for what life's going to be like when you finish"* (Deputy Principal D), then experiencing the lifestyle beyond the school community was necessary. The school leaders all reported that school leadership, key staff and the wider school community all played significant roles in helping pre-service teachers immerse themselves in life outside of school. Through their experiences, the pre-service teachers established their own sense of place in the RRR community, and this therefore helped to determine if and how they would fit (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). As the pre-service teachers were ultimately *"coming to know"* the place where they might become a teacher (Reid et al., 2010, p. 263), their personal understandings and connections to the school and community provided a *"platform that pre-service teachers can then launch from"* (Principal G).

While the school leaders reported the importance of providing pre-service teachers with information about the community, they also suggested that they noticed differences among some of the pre-service teachers according to their demographics. Some leaders reported differences in engaging with the community based on *"relationship status"* (i.e., singles, couples) and based on gender (i.e., single males, single females). Although the pre-service teachers in both Phase A and Phase B agreed that they were encouraged to experience the lifestyle of the community (Table 1), demographic data were not collected about them. This was a limitation of the research project. Future research could endeavour to understand and investigate further the differences reported by the school leaders.

Place Consciousness: Fanning the Flames for Good Fit

The school leaders used relationship-orientated leadership approaches (Fiedler, 1993) to encourage and support the pre-service teachers' experiences. There was a common view among the school leaders that the quality of experiences and relationships contributed to whether the RRR community was a good fit or not. The school leaders stated that pre-service teachers who were committed to trying *"something different"* (Deputy Principal A) or to having an *"adventure"* (Deputy Principal A) were more likely to establish their sense of place.

The school leaders provided examples of pre-service teachers who decided to stay within the region: *"Once people get here, they go, oh, this is pretty good"* (Deputy Principal D), due to the opportunities, connections and relationships created. This then contributed to a successful transition to employment. It was explained that graduate teachers who

> have just seamlessly come in … have settled, have strong social networks and have really embraced community, they are the ones who've done prac here. The ones that are

struggling are the ones who haven't done prac here and have come in completely green. (Deputy Principal E)

The leaders' peer-supported leadership approaches (Fluckiger et al., 2014) meant that they worked together to support pre-service teachers and promote a good fit for all involved. Keeping high quality teachers within the region was just as important, if not more important, than keeping them solely for their own school staff. The school leaders identified that working with peers to establish a "*good fit*" (Principal C) supported long-term retention of teachers within the Far North Queensland region. One principal noted that "*schools are more and more doing their own recruiting*" and therefore intentionally "*building up a network [of leaders]*" (Principal B) to support pre-service teachers and early career teachers.

The school leaders were aware that some of the pre-service teachers were "*career change people, and they've got families*" and "*not every undergrad teacher now is straight from school*" (Principal I). This had implications for their leadership approaches. Cognizant of the different needs of pre-service and early career teachers in terms of place and fit, the school leaders peer-supported each other across the cluster. This often meant that, "*long term, they [teachers] normally transfer to somewhere else within the region*" (Deputy Principal A). The peer-supported leadership strategies were seen to be central to the success of any proposed or enacted recruitment in the region.

The findings indicated that once a pre-service teacher was interested in teaching in a RRR location, professional connections and placement experiences had the potential to turn sparks into brighter flames. School leaders seem to play a significant role in this work, particularly as data from the pre-service teachers illustrated that they were either neutral or agreeing with the notion of pursuing employment in the Far North Queensland region (see Table 2).

Table 2: *Pre-Service Teachers' Levels of Agreement (%) to the Likert Scale Item About RRR Appointments*

Survey Item	Phase	SA	A	N	D	SD
I will pursue employment in Far North Queensland after graduation	1	34	0	66	0	0
	2	50	50	0	0	0

Legend: SA strongly agree, A agree, N neither agree or disagree, D disagree, SD strongly disagree

To address recruitment needs, the school leaders prioritised the need to create strong partnerships with peers and other leaders, while also supporting pre-service teachers. Both leadership approaches were seen to be fundamental when helping pre-service teachers establish their own place consciousness while ascertaining if the RRR school community would be a good fit.

Leaders' Intentional Actions: Interactions Influencing Positive RRR Placements

The school leaders' responses varied in the type and number of interactions they had with pre-service teachers, either through the RRR placement preparation program or upon allocation to their school. School leader interactions were dependent on their role, and those that were effective were intentional in their actions. For example, either the principal or deputy principal initiated contact with pre-service teachers because of their coordinating roles with universities and the human resource personnel in the region. One deputy principal stated that they invested time and energy into "*a very detailed process … [they] sit down and do a phone call with each of our pre-service teachers … What is it that you're [expecting], and let's have a look at your last prac report*" (Deputy Principal A). Based on the pre-service teachers' responses, the effect of providing specific contextual information about the RRR school supported the shaping of a positive placement experience. As one pre-service teacher said,

I was able to contact the Head of Department six weeks before I arrived. I received my timetable about three weeks beforehand along with a welcome letter. On arrival I was given a desk in the Maths staffroom. The principal welcomed me to the school in the staff meeting. (Pre-service Teacher 4)

Once the pre-service teachers were "*in the school*" (Deputy Principal A), the school leaders coordinated other staff members (e.g., pedagogical coach, early career mentor) to support them. While the pre-service teachers identified heads of department and supervising teachers as the leaders who provided the most support, the school leaders' actions (sometimes in the background) were intentionally building these connections. The pre-service teachers described leadership support in terms of their interest and degrees of encouragement, including providing them with their time and offering key information about the school or the profession. These discussions helped the pre-service teachers get "*to know who's who in the zoo, organisational structures, behaviour philosophy and pedagogy*" (Principal G). The school leaders suggested that pre-service teachers' willingness to observe, absorb information and ask questions about cultural and contextual differences and what they might encounter when or if they were to work at the school helped guide the support needed. However, the pre-service teacher surveys indicated mixed results when asked about leadership support (see Table 3).

Table 1: Pre-Service Teachers' Levels of Agreement (%) on the Likert Scale Item About Leadership Support

Survey Item	Phase	SA	A	N	D	SD
I felt supported by the leadership team (i.e., principal, deputy principal or site coordinator) to undertake this placement	1	34	66	0	0	0
	2	50	25	25	0	0

Legend: SA strongly agree, A agree, N neither agree or disagree, D disagree, SD strongly disagree

The school leaders explained that their actions to engage and support pre-service teachers were intentional; however, scope for improvement was identified. In contrast, the pre-service teachers expressed that "*it might have been nice to have the deputy or the site coordinator reach out to me a little bit more just to check in and make sure that everything was going ok*" (Pre-service Teacher 1). The support required by the pre-service teachers was contingent on many varying factors and therefore, based on this finding, it is recommended that clear expectations for support should be discussed in the initial interactions with pre-service teachers and reviewed throughout the placement experience.

Leaders' Intentional Actions: Teacher Career Aspirations

School leaders play a significant part when supporting the career aspirations of pre-service teachers (Hudson et al., 2020). One deputy principal noted that nurturing pre-service teachers' career aspirations was part of their role: "*Quality professional development is offered within and beyond the school*" (Deputy Principal F). Additionally, the school leaders ensured that the pre-service teachers were aware of the early career teacher and leadership programs available and which could be "*accessed and funded by schools*" (Deputy Principal A). As a means to fan the flames, the school leaders reported that they

try to treat them [pre-service teachers] like all our 40 staff and provide them with the same opportunities they have. So, for example, we have a leadership program here now, which is for aspirants … pre-service teachers are provided with those opportunities. (Principal B)

Career aspirations vary from being classroom ready, through to leadership opportunities within schools and across the region. Retaining quality graduates in RRR school communities is influenced by a myriad of factors (Hudson & Hudson, 2019; Young et al., 2018); however, the significance of the RRR placement for long-term career opportunities cannot be understated. More specifically, "*knowledgeable others*" (Sharratt, 2019, p. 16), such as a supportive leader or

supervising teacher, can help shape pre-service teachers' experiences in unimagined ways. Data from the study indicated the importance of placing pre-service teachers with experienced teachers as well as with early career teachers. The early career teachers provided practical transitional support, for instance, "*this is what I did for my portfolio ... this is how I found my first six months*" (Deputy Principal D), whereas experienced teachers outlined more aspirational career opportunities offered across the region.

Leaders' Intentional Actions: Leading Recruitment with Intentionality

Da'as and colleagues (2018) claimed that school leaders engage in high levels of cognitive complexity to manage recruitment needs, wants and processes. In our study, the school leaders adapted, adjusted and adopted a range of structures and processes to accommodate the staffing needs of their schools. They shared a variety of perspectives when talking about pre-service teachers' placements, their different situations, the problems faced, and the decisions made. This echoes the research of Da'as et al. (2018) and Woznyj et al. (2020). The school leaders shared stories about the complex nature of recruiting for their Far North Queensland contexts. There was also a shared viewed that they felt supported by the metropolitan placement preparation program, as indicated in the comments from two principals:

> There's a selection process, but we know there is a support process that occurs for the 12 months and we've seen that in action. (Principal B)

> They [pre-service teachers] have that opportunity to understand what each of these schools offer. (Principal C)

For RRR preparation programs, initiatives and innovations to work effectively and successfully, especially in terms of their aims, objectives and outputs, school leaders require intentionality in their leadership roles, approaches and skillsets. The premise for this intentionality was identified as genuine partnerships and relationships, which require dedicated and focused time, along with adequate and adaptable resourcing. The school leaders identified that they required time and resources to strategically plan and collaborate with other leaders. Bursaries and grants for pre-service teacher placements were still a priority (Downes & Roberts, 2018); however, they recommended centralised funding to support programs (e.g., the RRR preparation program), personnel (e.g., leaders at the school level) and resources (e.g., accommodation options across the region). As one principal explained: "*It's not my job to fund recruitment for our system. And this is the irony. Our [centralised] system doesn't get that*". (Principal I)

Intentional leadership approaches and partnerships occurred. However, the funding of these endeavours was absorbed at the school level. Funding in this way provided scope for the leaders to be flexible (e.g., schools could support accommodation options for their area). However, the sustainability of funding such approaches was an identified area of concern.

Leaders' Shared Philosophy: Light the Fire, then Fan the Flames

The school leaders all understood that a shared philosophy of nurturing and supporting the career development of pre-service through to early career teachers (and beyond) was fundamental. When referring to pre-service teachers' interest in teaching in a RRR location, one leader coined the phrase, "*We need to light the fire and then fan the flames*" (Principal I). A shared recruitment philosophy would not happen serendipitously, and the leaders noted that intentional leadership approaches and actions were essential. Leading with a shared philosophy was identified as a way to support the complexity of their collective staffing responsibilities. The school leaders pointed out the importance of creating and maintaining strong partnerships. The significance of these partnerships was seen as imperative because "*there's not large numbers of people that are interested in coming into the teaching profession anymore ... we need to really start targeting the universities about these opportunities we have in place*" (Deputy Principal F).

Teacher shortages are currently being felt throughout Australia, and pre-service teachers' pathways are viewed as one solution (O'Flaherty, 2021). Many RRR schools have a small pool of applicants (DeFeo & Tran, 2019), and while Roberts and Downes (2019) suggested that school leaders may not want to manage recruitment, their role in supporting those that do is fundamental. The school leaders reported that a significant amount of time was necessary to support pre-service teachers prior, during and after a placement. Specifically, one deputy principal reported that "*out of the 40 weeks of work time a year that I do as a deputy, I probably spend close to five to seven of those just on pre-service stuff*" (Deputy Principal A).

In their accounts, the school leaders shared examples of the types of activities that they underwent to prepare for the arrival of pre-service teachers (and newly appointed staff). These included communicating via emails and/or phone to discuss logistics in the weeks prior, sharing information about the context of the school and the community, meeting pre-service teachers on arrival, coordinating suitable mentors, organising accommodation, introducing them to mentors, working through any paperwork with each individual pre-service teacher, touring the school and providing an overview of the contextual and cultural heritage of the school, and touring the town to build up a sense of community and culture. The complexity of the RRR leaders' role can be underestimated and these examples further support research (e.g., Pendola & Fuller, 2018) that RRR school leaders are often balancing multiple roles, while faced with considerably less support than their metropolitan counterparts.

Transience was identified as an innate part of RRR schools' recruitment plans, and while there was general acceptance and support for teachers who take career aspirations to other schools or regions, a strong sense of place meant that beginning teachers were more likely to stay. The school leaders identified that nurturing a sense of place consciousness was part of their recruitment plan; however, this required time and effort. Their endeavours were supported by strategically partnering with other leaders of the region (peer-supported approaches) and with universities and metropolitan schools. One principal explained that the partnerships across the leaders and their schools was "*a strength of this region, in terms of a lot of collaboration and communication, which I think is really good. I actually think as a region, the high schools work very well together*" (Principal G).

These indications suggested that a shared philosophy supported an awareness of the details of each school's contextual needs, and this cannot be mirrored by a centralised human resources system. Therefore, it appears that the impact of school leaders across a region, incorporating the role of place consciousness and intentional action, cannot be underestimated.

Conclusion

The peer-supported and partnership-powered leadership approaches adopted by the cluster of Far North Queensland high school principals and deputy principals provided strategies to support the development of pre-service teachers, while concurrently addressing the employment needs of their region. The school leaders provided insights into how place consciousness, intentional actions and the region's shared philosophy impacted and influenced pre-service teachers' experiences prior, during and after a RRR placement. In this way, the school leaders offered pre-service teachers a way to shape their understandings of the distinct culture and context of particular schools and the region. This has implications for the significant nature of fit in obtaining quality staff. The findings of this study suggest a paradigm shift away from traditional human resources recruitment endeavours towards school leaders driving innovative partnerships and multidimensional strategies to attract and retain high quality teachers to Far North Queensland.

Acknowledgements

References

Da'as, R., Schechter, C., & Qadach, M. (2018). Switching cognitive gears: School leaders' cognitive complexity. *NASSP Bulletin*, *102*(3), 181–203. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636518794297

Dasborough, M. T., & Ashkanasy, N. M. (2002). Emotion and attribution of intentionality in leader–member relationships. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *13*(5), 615–634. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(02)00147-9

DeFeo, D. J., & Tran, T. C. (2019). Recruiting, hiring, and training Alaska's rural teachers: How superintendents practice place-conscious leadership. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *35*(2), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.26209/jrre3502

Department of Education. (2019). *The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) education declaration*. Education Services Australia. https://www.education.gov.au/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration/resources/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration

Downes, N., & Fuqua, M. (2018). Equity, access and quality education in rural Australia: A survey of SPERA members and supporters. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, *28*(1), 170–175. https://doi.org/10.47381/aijre.v28i1.212

Downes, N., & Roberts, P. (2018). Revisiting the schoolhouse: A literature review on staffing rural, remote and isolated schools in Australia 2004–2016. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, *28*(1), 31–54. https://doi.org/10.47381/aijre.v28i1.112

Fiedler, F. E. (1993). The contingency model: New directions for leadership utilization. In Matteson and Ivancevich (Ed.), *Management and organizational behavior classics* (pp. 333–344). McGraw-Hill Education.

Fluckiger, B., Lovett, S., & Dempster, N. (2014). Judging the quality of school leadership learning programmes: An international search. *Professional Development in Education*, *40*(4), 561–575. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2014.902861

Gruenewald, D. A. (2003). Foundations of place: A multidisciplinary framework for place-conscious education. *American Educational Research Journal*, *40*(3), 619–654.

Halsey, J. R. (2018). *Independent review into regional, rural and remote education: Final report*. Department of Education and Training. https://www.education.gov.au/quality-schools-package/resources/independent-review-regional-rural-and-remote-education-final-report

Halsey, J. R. (2019). Rural and remote education and the fundamentals of leading for all. *Australian Educational Leader*, *41*(4), 8–11.

Hardwick-Franco, K. (2019). Preferencing principals' views to inform educational reform in rural contexts: A study in discourse analysis. *Leading & Managing*, 25(2), 14–32.

Herbert, A. (2020). Contextualising policy enactment in regional, rural and remote Australian schools: A review of the literature. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 30(1), 64–81. https://doi.org/10.47381/aijre.v30i1.272

Hersey, P., Blanchard, K. H., & Johnson, D. E. (1996). *Management of organizational behavior: Utilizing human resources*. Prentice Hall.

Hudson, S., & Hudson, P. (2019). "Please help me find teachers for my rural and remote school": A model for teaching readiness. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 29(3), 24–38. https://doi.org/10.47381/aijre.v29i3.233

Hudson, S., Young, K., Thiele, C., & Hudson, P. (2020). An exploration of PSTs' readiness for teaching in rural and remote schools. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 30(3), 51–68. https://doi.org/10.47381/aijre.v30i3.280

Hudson, S., Young, K., Thiele, C., & Hudson, P. (2021). Preparing pre-service teachers for rural and remote schools: Is classroom readiness enough? *International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Science*, 2(9), 82–94. https://ijahss.net/assets/files/1631390722.pdf

Kiverstein, J., & Rietveld, E. (2021). Scaling-up skilled intentionality to linguistic thought. *Synthese*, 198, 175–194. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-020-02540-3

Kline, J., White, S., & Lock, G. (2013). The rural practicum: Preparing a quality teacher workforce for rural and regional Australia. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 28(3), 1–13.

Mertens, D. M. (2019). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods*. Sage.

Morrison, C., & Ledger, S. (2020). Community as an anchor, compass and map for thriving rural education. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 30(3), i–vi. https://doi.org/10.47381/aijre.v30i3.292

O'Flaherty, A. (2021, December 9). *Soaring numbers of university students, unregistered teachers fronting classrooms to plug shortages*. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-12-09/preservice-teachers-rushed-through-registration-to-meet-demand/100683334

Pendola, A., & Fuller, E. J. (2018). Principal stability and the rural divide. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 34(1), 1–20.

Reid, J., Green, B., Cooper, M., Hastings, W., Lock, G., & White, S. (2010). Regenerating rural social space?: Teacher education for rural-regional sustainability. *Australian Journal of Education*, 54(3), 262–276. https://doi.org/10.1177/000494411005400304

Roberts, P., & Downes, N. (2019). The rural difference trope: Leader perceptions on regional, rural and remote schooling difference. *Leading & Managing*, 25(2), 51–65.

Roberts, P., & Green, B. (2013). Researching rural place: On social justice and rural education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19(10), 765–774. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800413503795

Sharratt, L. (2019). *Clarity: What matters most in learning, teaching, and leading*. Corwin Press.

Wieczorek, D., & Manard, C. (2018). Instructional leadership challenges and practices of novice principals in rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *34*(2), 1–21.

Woznyj, H. M., Banks, G. C., Dunn, A. M., Berka, G., & Woehr, D. (2020). Re-introducing cognitive complexity: A meta-analysis and agenda for future research. *Human Performance*, *33*(1), 1–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/08959285.2019.1689396

Young, K. D., Grainger, P., & James, D. (2018). Attracting pre-service teachers to remote locations. *The Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *43*(2), 157–170. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2018v43n2.9

Education to Prepare Health Professionals for Rural Practice: A Scoping Review

Margaret Adams
Independent researcher
margieadams2204@gmail.com

Abstract

Rural and remote communities are challenged by an incongruous combination of poorer health and deficits of health professionals. Health professionals working in rural and remote practice contexts are largely educated with standardised curriculum content designed for urban-dominant systems, even though non-urban populations account for approximately half of the global population. Education is one strategy considered pivotal to recruitment and retention of health professionals in rural areas yet has received far less research attention than strategies such as rural background, incentive schemes and clinical placements.

Following key health database searches, peer reviewed literature published in English between 2011-2021 was examined and 189 relevant articles were retrieved, of which 26 articles met the inclusion criteria for final analysis using a scoping review framework (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) to examine how health professionals are currently being prepared for rural practice. Five themes were developed from the literature: Learning to Think Differently; Relationships; Health Leadership; Curriculum and Placement as Pedagogy. This scoping review identified a heavy reliance upon standardised curricula delivered via rural clinical and interprofessional placements with little evidence of specific rural curriculum content or pedagogic strategies that are tailored to rural and remote practice.

There is a paucity of theory, educational design and evaluation research to assess the value of education strategies that prepare health professionals specifically to work in rural places. Identifying key rural pedagogic strategies can support curriculum design and delivery, targeted experiences and assessment that provide health professionals with the competence, confidence and skills to sustain careers in rural and remote practice.

Keywords: *Curriculum, health professional, health professional education, pedagogy, rural, remote*

Introduction

Globally, rural health is characterised by shortages of health professionals that limit access to health services for approximately half of the world's population (World Health Organization, 2021), who experience higher than average health needs (International Labour Organization, 2015). The World Health Organization recommends revision of undergraduate and postgraduate curricula to include rural health topics, design of professional development programs that meet the needs of rural and remote health professionals and different roles and scopes of practice for rural health workers (World Health Organization, 2021). Globally, Registered Nurses form the largest proportion of health personnel in rural settings (International Labour Organization, 2015). However, only 38% of the nursing workforce and less than a quarter of medical workforce provide care to this significant population who have higher health needs than urban populations (World Health Organization, 2021). Other services (such as medical and allied health services) are

provided remotely via videoconferencing (Johansson et al., 2017), visiting services and contract staff to support workforce shortages (Carey et al., 2018). Deficits of health workers can occur due to professional practice/development and family reasons that drive health professionals back to urban areas (Reid et al., 2011). In many settings globally, nurses often take on tasks associated with other roles owing to their 24-hour presence (Hoskins, 2012; Muirhead & Birks, 2019) that may be magnified in rural practice contexts where health professional roles are affected by service rationing and constrained capacity (Adams et al., 2015).

Providing health care in rural practice contexts differs greatly from health care delivery in urban health systems due to the distinctive economic and social challenges associated with rural areas (Hauenstein et al., 2014). Rural residents experience earlier mortality and higher rates of injury than urban residents, with decreased access to scant health maintenance services linked to a higher incidence of chronic health conditions (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022). The context-specific conditions for rural practice including limited workforce, necessitate greater autonomy, broad or overlapping scopes of practice and role substitution (Hauenstein et al., 2014). However, rural health education is situated amid centralised, urban-focussed policy and standardisation (Roberts et al., 2021). Greater complexity and comorbidity (Vaughan & Edwards, 2020) are further complicated by this centralised approach that does not recognise the divergent physical, human resources and distinctive health care needs of rural and remote environments.

Limited literature exists that explores a relationship between rural health curriculum content, teaching methodologies and health professionals' feelings of competence and confidence to enter rural practice environments. A global independent commission on health professional education states that *"Professional education has not kept pace with these challenges, largely because of fragmented, outdated, and static curricula that produce ill-equipped graduates"* (Frenk et al., 2010, p. 5) with a paucity of theory available to guide development of health curriculum generally (Lee et al., 2013), and rural health specifically (Bourke et al., 2010; Farmer et al., 2012). Rural health is more than health care conducted in rural locations, therefore critical interaction with rural theory is necessary to shape provision of health services in rural 'places' (Farmer et al., 2012) by providing an approach to the way rural topics are studied (Bourke et al., 2010). Understanding the bio-psychosocial dimensions of rural places is needed if students are to understand the interaction of rural characteristics on the health of rural populations (Waller et al., 2021). Interprofessional Education to promote teamwork has been deemed essential for rural areas owing to the paucity of specialists, limited resources, increased costs and fragmentation of care (Stilp & Reynolds, 2019). Although there are multiple factors that influence decisions to work rurally (World Health Organization, 2021), education is stated to have a pivotal role in rural recruitment and retention strategies (Reid et al., 2011). Therefore, this review seeks to explore current international literature to understand how rural health is being taught to health professionals to inform further research regarding rural health pedagogy in Australian contexts.

Methods

Initial questions regarding the types of pedagogies used in preparing health professionals for rural practice elicited a paucity of literature. A title and abstract search using 'rural', 'health' and 'pedagogy' yielded a combined total of two articles. A subsequent search used separate terms 'health' and 'professional' in combination with terms related to 'education' and 'rural', however, this elicited many articles related to community health and patient education rather than health professional education. Likewise, there was a paucity of relevant grey literature. A broader question using 'health professional' in combination was utilised, using a scoping review methodology. Using a broad term rather than individual health professional titles was used owing to the variety of nomenclature for health professionals internationally. This review uses the five stages for conducting scoping reviews, described as useful for examining the extent and

type of research in an area and for identifying research gaps in the literature (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

Stage 1 - Identifying the Research Question

The aim of this review is to examine what international research exists regarding how health professionals are educationally prepared to practice in rural contexts. The key criteria for selecting articles were to ask of the literature – "*How* are health professionals prepared for practice in rural and remote practice settings?"

The limitation of this approach was that the term 'health professional' was used as a broad search term hoping to elicit health pedagogy relevant to all health professional disciplines and to avoid accidentally missing specific disciplinary titles relevant to international literature. This may have limited literature relevant to specific professional groups. Health disciplines such as medicine and nursing account for much of the broader literature on rural health practice so although every attempt was made to include literature from all disciplines, much of the background information and supporting literature was drawn from medicine and nursing.

For this research, health professionals/health workers are defined as any provider of health or social care and was limited only by the lack of available research from specific health disciplines. Throughout the review, terminology associated with the literature was adopted and no differentiation of health professional/health worker was undertaken. Although this review will mostly use 'rural' to encompass rural and remote practice, research supports significant differences between the two contexts (Wakerman et al., 2017).

Stage 2 - Identifying Relevant Studies

This review used PICo (Population, Interest, Context) – Population (health professionals), Interest (pedagogy) and Context (rural, regional, remote) as a starting point. Five electronic databases were searched: EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Informit, PubMed Central and Web of Science. The search was limited to peer reviewed articles published in English between 2011-2021. Search terms included truncations of 'health professional', clinical, interprofessional; rural/regional/remote/place; pedagogy, praxis, 'learning theory' and education. Database searches were undertaken in July 2021. Iterative changes were made to inclusion/exclusion criteria based on literature characteristics (see Table 1). As much of the literature did not deliver explicit information on rural pedagogy, literature regarding student placements in rural areas were included in the review as it was evident that the context provided students with learning relevant to rural concepts**.** Examining the literature revealed that descriptive accounts could not be ignored as many contained a wealth of information relevant to student learning about rural practice. This was also consistent with broad inclusion of literature to define the scope of existing evidence.

Table 1: *Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria*

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
• Original research, editorials and commentary that appear in peer-reviewed journals • Any articles relevant to rural health professionals/health workers such as doctors, nurses, paramedics and allied health workers/professionals who provide healthcare in rural, regional or remote areas of any country • Rural pedagogy, educating rural health professionals within rural contexts	• Articles that specifically relate to community or patient health education • Articles that are not specific to the rural environment or do not address rural concepts, outcomes and/or rural theory • Articles where the word 'remote' is used with reference to technology used at a distance, not in relation to 'remote' as a place • Articles where 'space' or 'place' are not related specifically to rural places

Stage 3 - Study Selection

Selection was based on PICo terms in the title and abstract. Articles where 'place' related to a room or other physical space were excluded. Figure 1 gives examples of reasons for exclusion. A total of 189 relevant articles were retrieved. Duplicates were removed, and articles not meeting the search criteria or had no full text were removed. The remaining 55 articles were submitted to full text review, of which 26 articles met the inclusion criteria for final analysis. 18 sources were original research articles and eight were descriptive accounts that were included in the scoping review (see Table 2).

Table 2: *Literature by Type of Publication*

Study type	Original Research	Non-Research Publications
Clinical Placement	4	1
Interprofessional Education	10	3
Health Professional Education	4	4

Search Outcomes

See Figure 1: *Prisma Flow Diagram as per* Moher et al. (2009) for search outcomes.

Stage 4 – Charting the Data

This stage recorded key information about selected studies and sorted data thematically. Information extracted was Author(s), year of publication, country, study type, health discipline, sample size/setting, outcomes and derived themes (see Table 3). Study findings and narrative data were placed into a table and read numerous times to gain a sense of the literature as a whole and for identification of key issues. Data were derived from research study findings and narrative reports and then coded manually. Codes were placed into another table, grouped into related areas and then into themes that answer the review question.
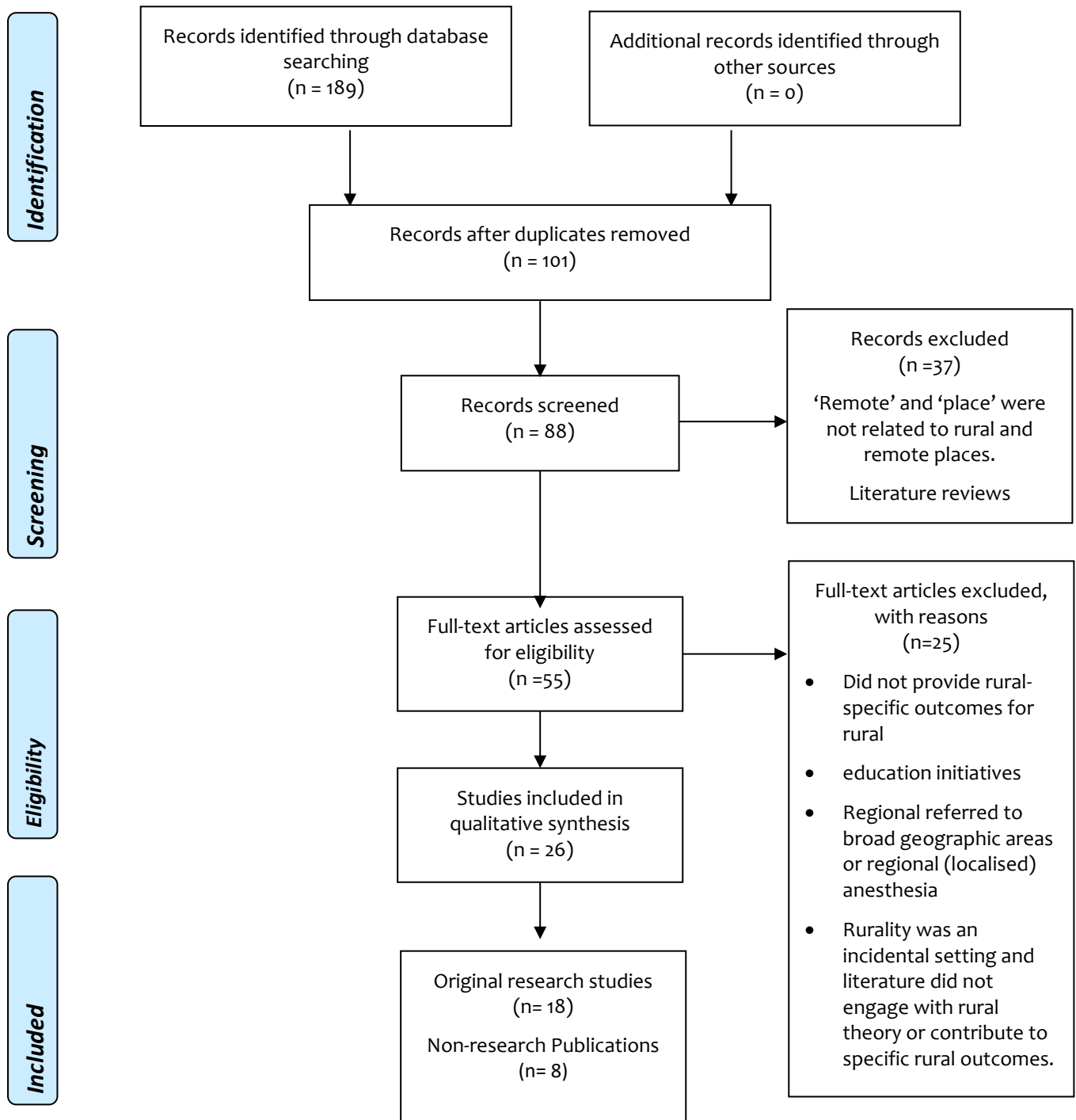
Figure 1: *Prisma Flow Diagram*

Table 3: *Literature Characteristics*

Author(s)	Methods	Discipline	Sample size/ Setting	Findings	Theme 1 Learning to Think Differently	Theme 2 Relation-ships	Theme 3 Health Leadership	Theme 4 Curriculum	Theme 5 Placement as Pedagogy
Clinical placement									
Greenhill et al., (2015)	Interviews	Medicine	Programme directors or key informants from 16 universities, Australia	Positive impacts of rural and regional communities, curriculum innovation in medical education and community engagement activities.		√	√	√	√
Hanson et al., (2020)	Interviews	Medicine	9 trainees prevocational generalist experience in rural and regional Queensland, Australia	Enjoyable and valued experience that promoted rural engagement. Not a substitute for but compliments regional hospital experience.	√	√	√	√	√
Mak & Miflin (2012)	Curriculum documents, questionnaires, interviews, debriefings.	Medicine	198 Medical Students Both Rural and Remote Western Australia, Australia	Students experience rural and remote living and cross-cultural thinking. Improved understanding of rural and remote life and its impact on health.	√	√		√	√
Morgan (2018)	Interviews, observation, questionnaire	Medicine	61 third year and 13 fourth-year students, Ethiopia	Poorly resourced facilities and lack of specialists provided a challenging environment in which to learn.	√	√	√	√	√

Author(s)	Methods	Discipline	Sample size/ Setting	Findings	Theme 1 Learning to Think Differently	Theme 2 Relation-ships	Theme 3 Health Leadership	Theme 4 Curriculum	Theme 5 Placement as Pedagogy
Pillay et al. (2016)	Documented reflections, focus groups.	Allied Health	44 final year students, 8 educators Ukwanda, South Africa	Positive experience. "*Positioned 'rural' as… developing learners' emerging identities as policy brokers.*" (p.169) Develop blended/multiple professional identities, sense of professional obligation.	√	√	√	√	√
Non-Research Article –									
Baral et al., (2016)	Commentary	Medicine	N/A Nepal	Need to ruralise the academy through community engagement in health professional education, curriculum design/evaluation.		√	√	√	√
Interprofessional Education									
Jackman et al., (2016)	Interviews, focus groups	Medicine and Nursing	3 Nursing students, 4 Medical students in 76-bed acute care setting in semi-rural western Canada	Clinical interprofessional education rotations are an alternative/adjunct to classroom Interprofessional Education owing to acute, holistic, community focus.	√		√		√

Author(s)	Methods	Discipline	Sample size/ Setting	Findings	Theme 1 Learning to Think Differently	Theme 2 Relation-ships	Theme 3 Health Leadership	Theme 4 Curriculum	Theme 5 Placement as Pedagogy
Leshabari et al., (2012)	Programme evaluation	Medical, Pharmacy, Nursing, Dentistry and Environmental Sciences	16 students, Bagamoyo, Tanzania	Programme raised awareness of health needs, paucity of resources in rural areas and exposure to conditions that students would not otherwise see. Collaborative practice needs to be modelled to students.			√	√	√
Martin et al. (2021)	Survey and 25 interviews	Medicine, Nursing and Allied Health	5 teams of health service workers in 4 public health settings in regional and rural Queensland, Australia	Lack of understanding of what interprofessional education is. Need for drivers at a system level - leadership, facilitation of collaboration and understanding the impact of rurality.		√			√
Mpofu et al., (2014)	Questionnaire, focus group	Physiotherapy, Nursing and Natural Medicine	17 students Western Cape, South Africa	Desire to 'give back' to rural communities and to influence positive change. Reported lack of structured student placement/limited supervision.	√	√	√	√	√
Pelham et al., (2016)	Template analysis using a priori themes	Dentistry, Dietetics, Medicine, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Pharmacy and Physiotherapy	16 health professionals from 7 disciplines working in rural areas with a high Māori population, New Zealand	Greater workplace interprofessional collaboration. Positive outcomes from Indigenous community projects involving students.	√		√	√	√

Author(s)	Methods	Discipline	Sample size/ Setting	Findings	Theme 1 Learning to Think Differently	Theme 2 Relation-ships	Theme 3 Health Leadership	Theme 4 Curriculum	Theme 5 Placement as Pedagogy
Puskar et al., (2016)	Quasi-experimental design using validated questionnaires	Behavioural Health Counsellors, Public Health Workers and Nursing	106 health professionals from rural areas in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia, USA	Challenges - Competing priorities, leadership support, technology, rural culture and fiscal consequences.		√		√	√
Reed et al., (2021)	Questionnaires, focus groups	Paramedicine, Nursing, Medicine, Allied Health, and Radiography	120 students. Community settings, working farms and rural hospitals in New South Wales, Australia	Understanding of other health care professions. Importance of effective communication.	√	√			√
Stilp & Reynolds (2019)	Descriptive and values coding of student reflection journals	Medicine, Physician Assistants, Nursing, Dentistry and Pharmacy	30 students in Northwest USA	Knowledge created through social and cultural interactions. Develop knowledge, connectivity and experience to practice rurally. Understanding rural interprofessional education can inform policy and curriculum for rural interprofessional education.	√	√	√	√	√
Woodroffe et al., (2012)	Questionnaires, interviews	Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing and Midwifery	90 undergraduate students and facilitators Tasmania, Australia	Exposure to interprofessional education can affect perceptions of collaboration, patient care and teamwork.		√		√	√

Author(s)	Methods	Discipline	Sample size/ Setting	Findings	Theme 1 Learning to Think Differently	Theme 2 Relation- ships	Theme 3 Health Leadership	Theme 4 Curriculum	Theme 5 Placement as Pedagogy
Non-Research Articles - interprofessional education									
Doolan-Noble et al. (2020)	Commentary	Health Science	N/A New Zealand	Develop professional/interprofessional competencies and sociocultural understanding within supportive rural teams. Trust between tertiary education providers and rural health care providers (Valuing rural expertise).		√	√	√	√
Poulin & Skinner (2020)	Commentary	Multi-disciplinary	N/A Canada	Argues for new rural-centric interprofessional education models that value unique rural contexts within core competencies. Need models of interprofessional education that do not focus of deficit models. Need to acknowledge community connection, local knowledge and utilise champions. Most models fail to adapt to rural contexts.		√		√	√

Author(s)	Methods	Discipline	Sample size/ Setting	Findings	Theme 1 Learning to Think Differently	Theme 2 Relation- ships	Theme 3 Health Leadership	Theme 4 Curriculum	Theme 5 Placement as Pedagogy
Waller et al., (2021)	Commentary	Occupational Therapy, Social Work, Physiotherapy, Nursing, Allied Health and Medicine	5 case studies in Modified Monash Model areas 3-6. Hospitals, community health centres, schools and educational facilities across Australia	*"Interprofessional learning requires constructive alignment and positive contact conditions to ensure a quality and sustained experience."* (p. 294)				√	√
Health Practitioner Education									
Hu & Yi (2016)	Cross-sectional survey	Postgraduate Medicine, Nursing and other health workers	570 participants Guangxi region, China	Confirmed feasibility of delivering decentralised Continuing Medical Education program in a rural area to upgrade health workers' level of education and improve their clinical competency.					√

Author(s)	Methods	Discipline	Sample size/ Setting	Findings	Theme 1 Learning to Think Differently	Theme 2 Relation-ships	Theme 3 Health Leadership	Theme 4 Curriculum	Theme 5 Placement as Pedagogy
Reid et al., (2011)	Case control study comparing education experiences of medical practitioners in rural public practice with those from urban public practice using a questionnaire	Medicine	174 rural cases and 142 urban control cases using a structured questionnaire, South Africa	Educational factors influencing practice location - Undergraduate curriculum; exposure to rural situation; exposure to meaningful and enjoyable rural experiences; increased sense of social accountability.	√	√	√	√	√
Van Schalkwyk et al.,(2012)	Portfolios, interviews	Medicine	Ukwanda Centre for Rural Health South Africa	"*Relevance of the curriculum to the community needs and related … teaching and learning; development of graduate attributes; aligned, appropriate assessment. Evaluation… to determine the effectiveness of the process in relation to the rural environment.*" (p. 1068)		√	√	√	√
Yi et al. (2015)	Document review, interviews, questionnaire	Postgraduate Medical, Nursing and other health workers	669 completed questionnaires, Interviews with multiple stakeholders Guangxi region, China	Insufficient budget/time for training medical professionals. Widespread ignorance of rural health needs.	√			√	√

Author(s)	Methods	Discipline	Sample size/ Setting	Findings	Theme 1 Learning to Think Differently	Theme 2 Relation-ships	Theme 3 Health Leadership	Theme 4 Curriculum	Theme 5 Placement as Pedagogy
Non-Research Articles – Health Practitioner Education									
Kitchener (2013)	Commentary	Medicine	N/A Australia	Needs teaching resources, telemedicine and telemedical education, provision of clinical supervisors. Difficulties gaining and maintaining appropriate skills, placement, and supervision.	√			√	√
London & Burton (2018)	Commentary	Medicine	N/A New Zealand	Rural communities as active partners in advocating for change. Need rural health policy, infrastructure, human resources and information technology services.	√		√	√	√
Lyle & Greenhill (2018)	Commentary	Medicine	N/A Australia	National network of rural academic units that enrich clinical education and training for medical, nursing and allied health students. Focussed on community engagement.		√		√	√
Sen Gupta & Murray (2011)	Commentary	Medicine	N/A Australia	Asks if it is valid to apply non-rural assessments to rurally based students. Cites advocacy for remote health as a separate discipline.				√	√

Stage 5 – Results: Broad Description of the Literature

Of the 26 published articles selected for review, six pertained to clinical placements, 12 to interprofessional education and eight related more broadly to rural health professional education (see Table 3). EThree colour-coded areas in the table reflect these groups, with each section commencesing with original research articles and is followed by non-research commentary. 18 articles reported on original research and eight were commentary (see Table 2). With the obvious exception of multidisciplinary, interprofessional education literature, all literature was derived from medicine except one article pertaining to allied health (Pillay et al., 2016).

Most research articles related to qualitative or mixed methods studies with a wide variety of interviews, documented reflections, focus groups, document analysis, questionnaires and observation. Many studies do not indicate the size of rural locations although some indicated that they are probably large regional hospitals rather than rural or remote sites, and interprofessional education studies were mostly community-based. Themes were derived from study findings of original research and narrative reports (see Table 3).

Literature largely reports delivery of standardised curriculum in rural places, with no explicit indication as to how rural concepts are being taught or constructed by students as a result of curriculum content, pedagogy and learning assessment. Much of the interprofessional education literature seems to focus on students' understanding of rural environments rather than understanding concepts relevant to interprofessional working. It is not clear whether they are meeting learning objectives relevant to rural practice, interprofessional education or both. The literature identifies rural areas as needing interprofessional education due to fragmented care and limited resources, yet also advocates for interprofessional education to be conducted in rural areas owing to *less* fragmentation of care. Identity flows across place identity, multiple identities and professional identities related to practice differences and rural as 'place'. Much of the literature mentions the need for students to understand socially accountable health care. However, there is little exploration of how this is taught to students with many placements requiring students to initiate projects, in many cases without guidance, in rural contexts. Therefore, their teaching seems to come predominately from the context rather than from educational factors.

Literature most-closely meeting criteria for examining education processes and specific pedagogy for rural health professionals came from South Africa (van Schalkwyk et al., 2012; Reid et al., 2011; Pillay et al., 2016). Australian literature was dominated by discourse regarding rural clinical schools and clinical placements for medicine. However, one placement focussed on the impact of rural and remote living on health (Mak & Miflin, 2012). One Australian article reported on educational elements of a constructively aligned interprofessional education program (Waller et al., 2021). For data extraction, see Table 3.

Findings

Five themes were derived from the literature, consisting of 'Learning to Think Differently', 'Relationships', 'Health Leadership', 'Curriculum' and 'Placement as Pedagogy'. The first three themes relate to learning from rural contexts and highlight systems, social and practice differences. Curriculum and pedagogy relate to educational aspects such as teaching infrastructure, resources and planning with clinical and interprofessional placements appearing as the key pedagogies for providing rural education.

Learning to Think Differently

Students need to 'hit the ground running' and take responsibility independently owing to limitations of health, human and teaching resources however they mostly feel rewarded by the

challenge. Community proximity allows for a more holistic understanding of the interface between health and social factors. Health professional students and facilitators acknowledge that rural health is predicated upon different systems, structures, regulations (Jackman et al., 2016; Pillay et al., 2016; Yi et al., 2015), economic (Reid et al., 2011), education (Yi et al., 2015) and policy differences (Kitchener, 2013; London & Burton, 2018) that require students to think and understand health differently due to the distinctive health needs, different types of facilities and limited resources (Pillay et al., 2016; Stilp & Reynolds, 2019). The generalist (Jackman et al., 2016), transdisciplinary nature of rural health roles (Pillay et al., 2016) is characterised by overlapping of roles and responsibilities owing to the decreased number and diversity of health roles in rural areas. Students refer to the need to develop "*multiple identities*" (p. 173) due to missing or overlapping roles that oblige them to take initiative in rural practice contexts (Pillay et al., 2016).

Many students enjoy a sense of autonomy describing opportunities to take initiative and be innovative (Hanson et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2018; Mpofu et al., 2014; Pillay et al., 2016; Stilp & Reynolds, 2019). Particularly where resources, including human resources are low, students are valued by health professionals (Hanson et al., 2020; Pillay et al., 2016; Stilp & Reynolds, 2019) and the community (Pelham et al., 2016; Pillay et al., 2016) as part of the clinical team. Communities value student presence for providing services that the community would not otherwise receive (Pelham et al., 2016; Pillay et al., 2016; Stilp & Reynolds, 2019). Many students feel that the greater autonomy in rural contexts is an excellent opportunity to learn (Hanson et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2018; Mpofu et al., 2014; Pillay et al., 2016; Stilp & Reynolds, 2019) however some students found early responsibility and autonomy overwhelming. This was however, also equated with a sense that they are being prepared for the realities of rural practice (Morgan et al., 2018).

Contextual experiences allow students to better understand challenges for rural patients relevant to their living environment (London & Burton, 2018; Mak & Miflin, 2012; Pillay et al., 2016) and dislocation from family and community (Reed et al., 2021). A Western Australian study placed students with families in both rural and remote settings (Mak & Miflin, 2012) prior to clinical placements. This led some students to acknowledge an increased understanding of links between psycho-social aspects of rurality and the health of rural residents, however some students failed to make to make connections between their experience and the placement objectives.

Relationships

Educating health professionals for practice in rural areas is heavily dependent upon good relationships with the community, educators/facilitators and health staff. Relationships with the community are described as pivotal to students feeling welcome and supported (Doolan-Noble et al., 2021; Poulin & Skinner, 2020). Support from health professionals is valued by students (Hanson et al., 2020; Mak & Miflin, 2012; Martin et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2018; Mpofu et al., 2014; Puskar et al., 2016; Stilp & Reynolds, 2019; Woodroffe et al., 2012) as were passionate (Morgan et al., 2018; Pillay et al., 2016; Stilp & Reynolds, 2019) and inspirational educators (Morgan et al., 2018; Reid et al., 2011) who are highly influential regarding positive attitudes to rural health, positive placement experiences and a desire to work rurally.

Community support for students is vital (Baral et al., 2016; Doolan-Noble et al., 2021; Greenhill et al., 2015; Lyle & Greenhill, 2018; Mak & Miflin, 2012; Mpofu et al., 2014) and strong community relationships are also necessary to facilitate education/curriculum (Baral et al., 2016; Lyle & Greenhill, 2018; van Schalkwyk et al., 2012), assessment (Baral et al., 2016; van Schalkwyk et al., 2012), social support for students (Baral et al., 2016; Lyle & Greenhill, 2018; Mak & Miflin, 2012; van Schalkwyk et al., 2012) and to allow students to understand rural individuals as part of their community and in the context of their home environment (Pillay et al., 2016; Reed et al., 2021).

Students who feel 'out of their depth' (Pillay et al., 2016), who did not feel supported, feel like outsiders and feel isolated (Stilp & Reynolds, 2019) are less inclined to regard rural experiences positively.

Health Leadership

Although it is envisaged that health professionals will act as agents of change in improving equity of health outcomes, there is little explicit reference to preparation for advocacy and influencing policy. Learning these leadership skills appears to be largely dependent upon contextual experience of disadvantage, personal initiative and a strong sense of social justice accompanied by personal qualities such as self-reliance, creativity and self-motivation. Social accountability framed discussion across education, clinical placements and interprofessional education literature generally, and specifically regarding Baral et al. (2016), Doolan-Noble et al. (2021), van Schalkwyk et al. (2012) and Reid et al. (2011). Particularly in developing countries, students were positioned to take responsibility for providing services that would otherwise be unavailable, as well as advocating for additional services (Pillay et al., 2016). Placement experiences afford students an authentic understanding of systemic issues and policy influence (Greenhill et al., 2015; Pillay et al., 2016) that position them, particularly in developing countries, as advocates for rural policy (Baral et al., 2016; Greenhill et al., 2015; Pillay et al., 2016), additional resources (Leshabari et al., 2012; Pillay et al., 2016), equity and social justice (Baral et al., 2016; Pillay et al., 2016). Many students play a role in researching health needs (Baral et al., 2016; Greenhill et al., 2015), providing reports on health services (Baral et al., 2016) and implementing health programs (Baral et al., 2016; Doolan-Noble et al., 2021; Mpofu et al., 2014; Pelham et al., 2016; Pillay et al., 2016; Stilp & Reynolds, 2019). Students describe a need to take initiative as there is no-one else to provide services and are critical of short community programs synonymous with poor continuity, sustainability and supervision that has led to a lack of trust from local communities (Mpofu et al., 2014) and missed teaching opportunities (Hanson et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2018).

Professional identities are tied to a sense of obligation and development of multiple identities due to resource constraints and a need for self-sufficiency (Baral et al., 2016; Jackman et al., 2016; Leshabari et al., 2012; Morgan et al., 2018; Pelham et al., 2016; Pillay et al., 2016; Stilp & Reynolds, 2019). Students take on autonomous roles in health promotion, provision of primary health care and referral of patients (Baral et al., 2016). Other useful rural-specific attributes described by students and facilitators are the capacity to be self-motivated, independent and proactive with a willingness to think creatively (Jackman et al., 2016; Pelham et al., 2016; Pillay et al., 2016; Stilp & Reynolds, 2019).

The extent to which students are exposed to rural communities and able to work independently, be proactive, innovative and have empathy with rural communities is predictive of their 'fit' within rural communities and health teams. Rural practitioners have a higher sense of social accountability than urban practitioners with social accountability, personal values and a sense of social justice being more important when recruiting medical students than previously thought (Reid et al., 2011). This position is supported by this review with calls for communities and health professionals to identify potential health professionals early, based on their aptitude and attitude to rural health (Baral et al., 2016; London & Burton, 2018; Pelham et al., 2016), communication skills, sensitivity and compassion towards rural practice (Baral et al., 2016) and empathy for under-resourcing in rural communities (Baral et al., 2016; Mpofu et al., 2014; Stilp & Reynolds, 2019). The chance to observe community values and health needs, drives intention to return and work in rural communities where their care could make meaningful difference (Mpofu et al., 2014; Stilp & Reynolds, 2019; Waller et al., 2021). One student observed, "Here it seems to matter more" (Stilp & Reynolds, 2019, p. 9). Exposure to rural practice is frequently cited to change attitudes to rural health (Baral et al., 2016; London & Burton, 2018; Pelham et al., 2016; Poulin & Skinner, 2020; Stilp & Reynolds, 2019) however, the sentiment towards rural work may be eroded

over time due to exposure to other prospects and the 'hidden curriculum' that may preference other opportunities (Reid et al., 2011).

Curriculum

Specific rural curriculum content and assessment are frequently called for in the literature owing to the different knowledge and skills required in rural practice. Specific rural curriculum is hindered by urban-centric development of curriculum (Greenhill et al., 2015; Poulin & Skinner, 2020), ignorance regarding the health needs of rural populations (Yi et al., 2015) and in some countries such as New Zealand, by the lack of specific rural health policy and a lack of medical schools specifically focussed on primary health care and rurality (London & Burton, 2018). The literature highlights a disparate inclusion of rural health content within medical programs (Greenhill et al., 2015) and a need to ruralise curricula for cultural competence (Baral et al., 2016; Greenhill et al., 2015; Pelham et al., 2016; Sen Gupta & Murray, 2011), teaching social determinants of health (Baral et al., 2016; Doolan-Noble et al., 2021; London & Burton, 2018; Poulin & Skinner, 2020), context-specific education (Baral et al., 2016; Hanson et al., 2020; Kitchener, 2013; Lyle & Greenhill, 2018; Mak & Miflin, 2012; Pillay et al., 2016; Poulin & Skinner, 2020; Reid et al., 2011; Sen Gupta & Murray, 2011; Waller et al., 2021) and rural-specific assessment (Baral et al., 2016; Sen Gupta & Murray, 2011) that reflects the complexity of rural and remote contexts. Likewise, assessments should be linked to learning experiences and social determinants of health (Doolan-Noble et al., 2021) and health professional education should reflect the psycho-social, cultural and economic factors that affect rural-dwellers perceptions of health in order for students to be effective rural health practitioners (Poulin & Skinner, 2020).

The need for curriculum informed by, and aligned with, community needs is frequently advocated (Baral et al., 2016; Greenhill et al., 2015; van Schalkwyk et al., 2012; Waller et al., 2021) and inclusion of community in curriculum design (Baral et al., 2016) and research (Baral et al., 2016; Greenhill et al., 2015; London & Burton, 2018) are also noted, though rarely explored. Increased inclusion of community-based and rural concepts in medical curricula is described by Reid et al. (2011) with Baral et al., (2016) noting that community and population health constitute 25% of the curriculum within Nepal.

Rigorous education is needed to provide students with the self-confidence and proficiency to work with greater autonomy in challenging environments (London & Burton, 2018). This is supported in this review by the volume of references to students needing to quickly accept responsibility (often independently) for management and transfer of patients (Baral et al., 2016; Morgan et al., 2018), management of minor procedures, prescribing medications, delivering babies (Morgan et al., 2018) and early adoption of health leadership roles through advocacy (Baral et al., 2016; Greenhill et al., 2015; London & Burton, 2018; Pillay et al., 2016) and research (Baral et al., 2016; Greenhill et al., 2015; London & Burton, 2018). However, there is scant mention of these concepts being included in curricula to allow students to employ these skills during rural placements. Lack of supervision due to facilitator workload and too few facilitators with designated teaching and supervision time is problematic (Leshabari et al., 2012; Morgan et al., 2018; Mpofu et al., 2014; Puskar et al., 2016; Woodroffe et al., 2012) and contributes to students feeling overwhelmed and failing to gain the most from learning opportunities (Hanson et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2018). Multiple references to the need for contextualised assessment of student learning relevant to rural health (Kitchener, 2013; London & Burton, 2018; Poulin & Skinner, 2020; Sen Gupta & Murray, 2011; van Schalkwyk et al., 2012; Waller et al., 2021) are made within the literature.

Placement as Pedagogy

The most dominant means of teaching students about rural practice is to situate students in rural areas, mostly for clinical experience via clinical placements and interprofessional education

placements. There is rarely evidence of specifically designed pedagogy that recognises the differences in rural practice environments. Most articles related to rural clinical placements focus on the provision of undergraduate experience of practice in rural settings to afford contextual familiarity and encourage students to return to rural practice (Greenhill et al., 2015; Lyle & Greenhill, 2018; Reid et al., 2011; Sen Gupta & Murray, 2011). Most articles related to clinical placements are descriptions of placement programs or program achievements and do not explicitly state or evaluate links between rural placements and rural health curricula. Interprofessional education literature is focussed on student experience. However, students note differences between placement aims and actual experience that occurs due to lack of equipment and dedicated teaching time (Morgan et al., 2018). Others found it difficult to achieve curricular objectives owing to inter-disciplinary scheduling difficulties (Stilp & Reynolds, 2019). Negative placement experiences result from lack of preparation to manage language, culture, poverty and limited resources (Leshabari et al., 2012; Mpofu et al., 2014; Pillay et al., 2016). Discrepancies exist between training and health service application and between curricula and health system awards and policy (Hu & Yi, 2016; Kitchener, 2013; Yi et al., 2015). Further impinging upon the way rural health is taught is a lack of infrastructure, funding, quarantined teaching time, preparation to provide education (Kitchener, 2013; Morgan et al., 2018; Pillay et al., 2016; Yi et al., 2015) and a need for adequate teaching resources (Kitchener, 2013; London & Burton, 2018; Morgan et al., 2018; Pillay et al., 2016; Puskar et al., 2016; Yi et al., 2015). One study reports greater learning about each other's roles occurring socially rather than in the workplace (Stilp & Reynolds, 2019). Co-located teams are associated with greater collaboration (Martin et al., 2021) and student initiative was found to be the most significant indicator of successful interprofessional education experiences (Jackman et al., 2016) and essential where interprofessional education activities were not planned (Mpofu et al., 2014).

Rural sites are presented as advantageous for learning clinical and interprofessional skills owing to the holistic, cohesive, patient-centred nature of smaller, more integrated systems (Baral et al., 2016; Pillay et al., 2016; Poulin & Skinner, 2020). Smaller rural teams allow for a better experience of interprofessional work due to the limited resources (Martin et al., 2021; Pelham et al., 2016; Pillay et al., 2016; Woodroffe et al., 2012), role blurring and enhanced communication (Poulin & Skinner, 2020). However, professional silos (Martin et al., 2021; Stilp & Reynolds, 2019) and different systems and organisations (Puskar et al., 2016) constituted barriers to communication. Smaller services are valued as "*pathology-rich*" (London & Burton, 2018, p. 326) with fewer students and health professionals to compete for skill development (Greenhill et al., 2015; Hanson et al., 2020). Increased opportunities to observe holistic care or enhanced continuity where care is less fragmented (Greenhill et al., 2015; Jackman et al., 2016; Poulin & Skinner, 2020; Stilp & Reynolds, 2019) are considered to contribute to student learning.

Although many students describe an improvement in understanding population health issues and each other's roles, there were few linkages to how interprofessional education might need to occur differently in rural contexts. Interprofessional education initiatives must suit the context and the community and have a clearly articulated purpose (Doolan-Noble et al., 2021; Poulin & Skinner, 2020), relevance (Waller et al., 2021), reflect the complexity of rural contexts (Poulin & Skinner, 2020) and be linked to specific competencies (Poulin & Skinner, 2020), social determinants of health (Baral et al., 2016; Doolan-Noble et al., 2021; London & Burton, 2018; Poulin & Skinner, 2020) and rural theory (Poulin & Skinner, 2020). Examples of pedagogy such as simulation (Jackman et al., 2016; Mak & Miflin, 2012; Reed et al., 2021; Woodroffe et al., 2012), online education (Puskar et al., 2016), written and oral reflection or debriefings are used to facilitate student connections between interprofessional collaboration and the provision of care in rural settings (Doolan-Noble et al., 2021; Leshabari et al., 2012; Poulin & Skinner, 2020; Stilp & Reynolds, 2019; Waller et al., 2021; Woodroffe et al., 2012).

Discussion

There is heavy reliance upon clinical placement and interprofessional education as strategies for familiarising students with rural practice, with little evidence of teaching students *about* rurality and interprofessional education. Hoskins (2012) argues that there is a difference between interprofessional learning via structured activities and interprofessional work that could become synonymous with task and role substitution that was evident in this review. The available literature did refer in places to rural curricula and assessment which suggests that the paucity of health education research may not properly reflect efforts to include rural curricula in health professional education. Therefore, an audit of accreditation documents and subject outlines relevant to rural curriculum content would be useful to properly reflect what rural curriculum content exists.

Advocacy, research, early autonomy and health leadership were significantly represented in the literature. However, there was little evidence of alignment with specific curricula or pedagogies to support these outcomes. The role of distinctive place-based, networked leadership in addressing equity concerns is poorly recognised and often informal leadership roles shoulder responsibility without formal power (Collinge & Gibney, 2010). Rural place-based leadership would strengthen communities in the face of global influence (Horlings et al., 2018). This can be supported by the using critical pedagogies embedded in curricula (Reid, 2011) that prepare students for complexity and responsiveness to the needs of particular 'places' (Ross, 2015).

This review supports a lack of underpinning theory relevant to rural and remote health practice in standardised health curricula (Bourke et al., 2010; Farmer et al., 2012). The relevance of place-based theory is supported by the value attributed to rural background or time spent in rural environments, deemed pivotal to recruitment of health professionals for rural areas. The opportunity to develop a sense of connection consciously and subconsciously between people and places is developed through their lived experience of those places (Bates et al., 2019).

There is a paucity of studies that report educational strategies specific to rural (as distinct from regional) areas, and differentiated strategies specific to remote areas (Reeve et al., 2020). Although differences in rural practice were noted in the literature, there were few connections to variance in teaching methodologies in response to practice differences in rural environments. For example, the increasing prevalence of telehealth in rural health services means that there is a need for more advanced communication skills that requires teaching such as specific methodologies that can compensate for a lack of visual cues (Morony et al., 2018). The current focus on clinical skills has largely replaced knowledge competencies (Hanson et al., 2020) that have a role to play in producing well-rounded graduates who can think holistically and understand the ethical, social, cultural and practice differences relevant to rural practice (Bell et al., 2010).

Conclusions

This review indicates that there is a heavy reliance upon clinical placement and interprofessional education experiences as a means of delivering rural health 'curriculum'. There is a significant gap evident in research regarding educational design that demonstrates *how* rural health should be taught to best meet the needs of rural health professionals. The review highlights a need for cohesive, foundational educational strategies, rural theory, research and evaluation that provide direction for rural curriculum content, pedagogy and assessment for transformative learning in rural health practice. Although not the only strategy needed, education-based strategies may contribute to health professionals feeling competent, confident and more prepared for rural practice.

Ethics Approval

This study utilised published data, therefore ethical review was not required.

References

Adams, R., Jones, A., Lefmann, S., & Sheppard, L. (2015). Rationing is a reality in rural physiotherapy: A qualitative exploration of service level decision-making. *BMC Health Serv Res, 15*(1), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-015-0786-3

Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: Towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2022). *Rural and remote health*. AIHW. https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/population-groups/rural-remote-australians/overview

Baral, K., Allison, J., Upadhyay, S., Bhandary, S., Shrestha, S., & Renouf, T. (2016). Rural community as context and teacher for health professions education. *Cureus, 8*(11), 1. https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.866

Bates, K., Teudt, M., & Collier, J. (2019). Mapping points for a place-based pedagogy of practice. *Curriculum Perspectives, 39*, 91-96. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41297-019-00071-7

Bell, E., Walker, J., Allen, R., MacCarrick, G., & Albert, E. (2010). Non clinical rural and remote competencies: Can they be defined? *Focus on Health Professional Education, 11*(2), 28-41. https://doi.org/10.22605/RRH420

Bourke, L., Humphreys, J., Wakerman, J., & Taylor, J. (2010). Charting the future course of rural health and remote health in Australia: Why we need theory. *Australian Journal of Rural Health, 18*(2), 54-58. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1440-1584.2010.01125.x

Carey, T., Sirett, D., Wakerman, J., Russell, D., & Humphreys, J. (2018). What principles should guide visiting primary health care services in rural and remote communities? Lessons from a systematic review. *Australian Journal of Rural Health, 26*. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12425

Collinge, C., & Gibney, J. (2010). Connecting place, policy and leadership. *Policy Studies, 31*(4), 379-391. https://doi.org/10.1080/01442871003723259

Doolan-Noble, F., Pullon, S., & Symes, A. (2021). Trusting me, trusting you: Creating conditions for successful pre-registration interprofessional education in rural New Zealand workplace settings. *Australian Journal of Rural Health, 29*(2), 291-293. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12704

Farmer, J., Munoz, S.-A., & Threlkeld, G. (2012). Theory in rural health. *Australian Journal of Rural Health, 20*(4), 185-189. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1440-1584.2012.01286.x

Frenk, J., Chen, L., Bhutta, Z., A., Cohen, J., Crisp, N., Evans, T., Fineberg, H., Garcia, P., Ke, Y., Kelley, P., Kistnasamy, B., Meleis, A., Naylor, D., Pablos-Mendez, A., Reddy, S., Scrimshaw, S., Sepulveda, J., Serwadda, D., & Zurayk, H. (2010). Health professionals for a new century: Transforming education to strengthen health systems in an interdependent world. *The Lancet, 376*(9756), 1923-1958. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(10)61854-5

Greenhill, J. A., Walker, J., & Playford, D. (2015). Outcomes of Australian rural clinical schools: A decade of success building the rural medical workforce through the education and training continuum. *Rural & Remote Health, 15*(3), 2991-3004. https://doi.org/10.22605/RRH2991

Hanson, D., Carey, E., Harte, J., Bond, D., Manahan, D., & O'Connor, P. (2020). Prevocational Integrated Extended Rural Clinical Experience (PIERCE): Cutting through the barriers to prevocational rural medical education. *Rural & Remote Health, 20*(1), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.22605/RRH5437

Hauenstein, E., Glick, D. F., Kane, C., Kulbok, P., Barbero, E., & Cox, K. (2014). A model to develop nurse leaders for rural practice. *Journal of Professional Nursing, 30*(6), 463f-473. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2014.04.001

Horlings, L. G., Roep, D., & Wellbrock, W. (2018). The role of leadership in place-based development and building institutional arrangements. *Local Economy, 33*(3), 245-268. https://doi.org/10.1177/0269094218763050

Hoskins, R. (2012). Interprofessional working or role substitution? A discussion of the emerging roles in emergency care. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 68*(8), 1894-1903. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2011.05867.x

Hu, G., & Yi, Y. (2016). Is a decentralized continuing medical education program feasible for Chinese rural health professionals? *Journal of Educational Evaluation for Health Professions, 13.* https://doi.org/10.3352/jeehp.2016.13.18

International Labour Organization. (2015). *Global evidence on inequities in rural health protection: New data on rural deficits in health coverage for 174 countries* (47). International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/secsoc/information-resources/publications-and-tools/Workingpapers/WCMS_383890/lang--en/index.htm

Jackman, D., Yonge, O., Myrick, F., Janke, F., & Konkin, J. (2016). A Rural Interprofessional Educational Initiative: What Success Looks Like. *Online Journal of Rural Nursing & Health Care, 16*(2), 5-26. https://doi.org/10.14574/ojrnhc.v16i2.417

Johansson, A. M., Lindberg, I., & Söderberg, S. (2017). Healthcare personnel's experiences using video consultation in primary healthcare in rural areas. *Primary health care research & development, 18*(1), 73-83. https://doi.org/ https://doi.org/10.1017/S1463423616000347

Kitchener, S. (2013). Rural Generalism and the Queensland Health pathway: Implications for rural clinical supervisors, placements and rural medical education providers. *Rural & Remote Health, 13*(2), 1-7. https://doi.org/10.22605/RRH2359

Lee, A., Steketee, C., Rogers, G., & Moran, M. (2013). Towards a theoretical framework for curriculum development in health professional education. *Focus on Health Professional Education, 14*(3), 64-77. http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/health_article/83/

Leshabari, S., Lubbock, L. A., Kaijage, H., Kalala, W., Koehler, G., Massawe, S., Muganyizi, P., Macfarlane, S. B., & O'Sullivan, P. S. (2012). First steps towards interprofessional health practice in Tanzania: An educational experiment in rural Bagamoyo district. *Journal of Public Health Policy, 33,* S138-S149. https://doi.org/10.1057/jphp.2012.49

London, M. T., & Burton, J. G. (2018). Grasping the Ongaonga: When will New Zealand really integrate rural clinical education?. *Australian Journal of Rural Health, 26*(5), 323-328. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12474

Lyle, D., & Greenhill, J. (2018). Two decades of building capacity in rural health education, training and research in Australia: University Departments of Rural Health and Rural Clinical Schools. *Australian Journal of Rural Health, 26*(5), 314-322. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12470

Mak, D. B., & Miflin, B. (2012). Living and working with the people of 'the bush': A foundation for rural and remote clinical placements in undergraduate medical education . *Medical Teacher, 34*(9), e603-e610. https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159X.2012.670326

Martin, P., Pighills, A., Burge, V., Argus, G., & Sinclair, L. (2021). Promoting interprofessional education and collaborative practice in rural health settings: Learnings from a state-wide multi-methods study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(10), 5162. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18105162

Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., & Altman, D. (2009). Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: The PRISMA statement. *PLoS Medicine, 6*(7). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000097

Morgan, C., Teshome, M., Crocker-Buque, T., Bhudia, R., & Singh, K. (2018). Medical education in difficult circumstances: Analysis of the experience of clinical medical students following the new innovative medical curriculum in Aksum, rural Ethiopia. *BMC Medical Education, 18*. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-018-1199-x

Morony, S., Weir, K., Duncan, G., Biggs, J., Nutbeam, D., & Mccaffery, K. J. (2018). Enhancing communication for telehealth: Development and implementation of a Teach-Back intervention for a nation maternal and child health helpline in Australia. *BMC Health Services Research, 18*(1), 162. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-018-2956-6

Mpofu, R., Daniels, P. S., Adonis, T. A., & Karuguti, W. M. (2014). Impact of an interprofessional education program on developing skilled graduates well-equipped to practise in rural and underserved areas. *Rural & Remote Health, 14*(3), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.22605/RRH2671

Muirhead, S., & Birks, M. (2019). Roles of rural and remote registered nurses in Australia: An integrative review. *Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing, 37*(1), 21-33. https://doi.org/10.37464/2020.371.5

Pelham, K., Skinner, M. A., McHugh, P., & Pullon, S. (2016). Interprofessional education in a rural community: The perspectives of the clinical workplace providers. *Journal of Primary Health Care, 8*(3), 210-219. https://doi.org/10.1071/HC16010

Pillay, M., Bester, J., Blaauw, R., Harper, A., Msindwana, A., Muller, J., & Philips, L. (2016). Allied health professional rural education: Stellenbosch University learners' experiences. *African Journal of Health Professions Education, 8*(2), 169. https://doi.org/10.7196/AJHPE.2016.v8i2.578

Poulin, L. I. L., & Skinner, M. W. (2020). Leveraging a contextually sensitive approach to rural geriatric interprofessional education. *Healthcare Management Forum, 33*(2), 70-74. https://doi.org/10.1177/0840470419879456

Puskar, K. R., Heeyoung, L., Mitchell, A. M., Kane, I., Albrecht, S. A., Frank, L. R., Hagle, H., Lindsay, D. L., & Houze, M. P. (2016). Interprofessional collaborative education for substance use screening: Rural areas and challenges. *Online Journal of Rural Nursing & Health Care, 16*(1), 76-96. https://doi.org/10.14574/ojrnhc.v16i1.385

Reed, K., Reed, B., Bailey, J., Beattie, K., Lynch, E., Thompson, J., Vines, R., Wong, K. C., McCrossin, T., & Wilson, R. (2021). Interprofessional education in the rural environment to enhance multidisciplinary care in future practice: Breaking down silos in tertiary health education. *Australian Journal of Rural Health, 29*(2), 127-136. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12733

Reeve, C., Johnston, K., & Young, L. (2020). Health profession education in remote or geographically isolated settings: A scoping review. *Journal of Medical Education & Curricular Development, 7*, 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1177/2382120520943595

Reid, S. J. (2011). Pedagogy for rural health. *Education for Health: Change in Learning & Practice, 24*(1), 1-10. https://educationforhealth.net//text.asp?2011/24/1/536/101453

Reid, S. J., Couper, I. D., & Volmink, J. (2011). Educational factors that influence the urban-rural distribution of health professionals in South Africa: A case-control study. *South African Medical Journal = Suid-Afrikaanse tydskrif vir geneeskunde, 101*(1), 29-33. http://www.samj.org.za/index.php/samj/article/view/4342

Roberts, P., Cosgrave, C., Gillespie, J., Malatzky, C., Hyde, S., Hu, W. C. Y., Bailey, J., Yassine, T., & Downes, N. (2021). 'Re-placing' professional practice. *Australian Journal of Rural Health, 29*(2), 301-305. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12717

Ross, B. M. (2015). Critical pedagogy as a means to achieving social accountability in medical education. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, 6*. http://libjournal.uncg.edu/ijcp/article/view/859

Sen Gupta, T., & Murray, R. (2011). Assessment in rural health professional education. *Australian Journal of Rural Health, 19*(6), 277-278. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1440-1584.2011.01240.x

Stilp, C. C., & Reynolds, C. (2019). What works in rural interprofessional practice and education? A study of student reflections. *Journal of Research in Interprofessional Practice & Education, 9*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.22230/jripe.2019v9n1a281

van Schalkwyk, S., Bezuidenhout, J., Burch, V. C., Clarke, M., Conradie, H., van Heerden, B., & De Villiers, M. (2012). Developing an educational research framework for evaluating rural training of health professionals: A case for innovation. *Medical Teacher, 34*(12), 1064-1069. https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159X.2012.719652

Vaughan, L., & Edwards, N. (2020). The problem of smaller, rural and remote hospitals: Separating fact from fiction. *Future Healthcare Journal, 7*(1), 38-45. https://doi.org/10.7861/fhj.2019-0066

Wakerman, J., Bourke, L., Humphreys, J., & Taylor, J. (2017). Is remote health different to rural health? *Rural and Remote Health, 17*(3832). https://doi.org/10.22605/RRH3832

Waller, S., Walker, L., Farthing, A., Brown, L., & Moran, M. (2021). Understanding the elements of a quality rural/remote interprofessional education activity: A rough guide. *Australian Journal of Rural Health, 29*(2), 294-300. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12700

Woodroffe, J., Spencer, J., Rooney, K., Quynh, L., & Allen, P. (2012). The RIPPER Experience: A three-year evaluation of an Australian interprofessional rural health education pilot. *Journal of Research in Interprofessional Practice & Education, 2*(2), 231-247. https://doi.org/10.22230/jripe.2012v2n2a51

World Health Organization. (2021). *WHO guideline on health workforce development, attraction, recruitment and retention in rural and remote areas* (Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO). https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240024229

Yi, Y., Chongsuvivatwong, V., Sriplung, H., Hu, G., McNeil, E., Feng, Q., Zhou, H., & Wei, B. (2015). Unmet needs in continuing medical education programs for rural Chinese township health professionals. *Journal of Educational Evaluation for Health Professions, 12*, 25. https://doi.org/10.3352/jeehp.2015.12.25

Exploring the Idea of a Community Embedded University in Regional and Rural Australia

Mollie Dollinger
Deakin University
mollie.dollinger@deakin.edu.au

Darci Taylor
Deakin University
d.taylor@deakin.edu.au

Lea Piskiewicz
Deakin University
l.piskiewicz@deakin.edu.au

Abstract

A persistent issue in Australia, and globally, is how to improve participation rates in higher education for students from regional and rural areas. In this paper, we tackle this challenge by exploring the idea of a Community Embedded University (CEU). We draw on empirical data from three participatory co-design workshops with university students (*n* = 15) and staff (*n* = 6), to provoke discussion on what a CEU model might look like, the activities it might engage in, and how it would collaborate with local communities to create stronger partnerships and support student engagement. Through our study, we identify key value propositions to a CEU, including fostering students' sense of belongingness and opportunities to engage in relationship-rich pedagogy through community-university collaborative teaching. However, we also identify several challenges to enacting a CEU, such as complexities relating to distributed power-sharing and decision-making, and how to situate learning experiences in place while maintaining flexible learning spaces. We propose that, while the idea of a CEU may remain an idealised model, our outlined principles to creating a CEU may be a useful framework for universities to reflect upon and consider how they engage with their local communities.

Keywords: *widening participation, higher education, community-university partnerships, regional and rural students, regional university centres, participatory design*

Introduction

When scholars and policymakers imagine future models of higher education, they often do so through the language of scale or breadth. They write, or speak, about the internationalisation of higher education or global universities that can traverse borders and cultures (e.g., Altbach et al., 2019; de Wit & Altbach, 2021; Mittelmeier et al., 2019). Increasingly, the discussion is mediated by the potential of technology, to create "hyper-hybrid" learning experiences for students (Nørgård & Hilli, 2022, p. 26; Skulmowski & Rey, 2020), where students can study from anywhere, at anytime, to suit their preferences.

However, to date, the many iterations of the modern university have largely failed to improve the rates of higher education participation for regional and rural students. In Australia, for example, sustained research finds that regional and rural students continue to participate less in higher education than their metropolitan-based peers (Cardak et al., 2017; Michalski et al., 2017; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). People from regional and rural areas comprise approximately 28% of the population, but only 20.6% of the university cohort (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018; Koshy, 2019). This indicates that the access ratio (the ratio of students from regional and rural areas to students from the overall Australian population) is 73%. This disparity persists in Australia, even after 2012 when the cap on undergraduate enrolments was lifted through the introduction of the demand-driven system (Burnheim & Harvey, 2016).

In this paper, we purposefully provide an alternative to the outwardly global, far-reaching university, and explore the idea of a university that is strongly connected to the local places upon which it is situated and the identities of its local communities. We pursue the exploration of this university model, coined here as the Community Embedded University (CEU), to provoke ideas and discussion on how universities could improve the participation of equity-deserving cohorts in higher education and yield stronger, more reciprocally beneficial relationships with local communities. Influencing our study is continued research that finds wide-ranging barriers to the participation and/or completion of university for regional and rural students, including logistical, geographical, financial and emotional barriers (Burke et al., 2017; Halsey, 2019). Recent studies exploring the impact of COVID-19 on regional and rural students found heightened equity issues during this time, such as limited internet connectivity and a lack of wellbeing and practical support (Cook et al., 2022; O'Shea et al., 2021).

Our study also seeks to address the ongoing awareness from scholars that solutions to improve regional and rural student participation in higher education need to run deeper than modifying entry pathways or providing one-off moving expenses; instead it would seem important to explore how universities could reposition themselves as valuable partners with their local communities (Carrillo-Higueras & Walton, 2020; Dollinger et al., 2021; Gore et al., 2017; Napthine et al., 2019; O'Shea et al., 2021).

Our paper begins with an introduction to the context of Australian regional and rural student participation in higher education. We then present our approach to exploring the idea of a CEU through a series of three participatory, co-design workshops with students and staff. We used a framework to help workshop participants consider political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal aspects (the PESTLE framework; see Aguilar, 1967), thus exploring trends in local communities that might drive a CEU model. Our findings indicate that the enactment of a CEU is challenging, although not without merit.

Regional and Rural Student Participation in Australian Higher Education

In Australia, approximately 7 million people (28% of the population) live in regional or rural communities, many of which exhibit geographical dispersion and isolation (Bradley et al., 2020; Partridge et al., 2021). Barriers to higher education for those living in these locations are multi-faceted and often interrelated, and span financial, personal and logistical challenges which may be further compounded by low socioeconomic status (Chesters & Cuervo, 2022; Cook et al., 2022; Fleming & Grace, 2017). As many researchers have noted, these circumstances and experiences may influence students' subsequent aspirations or (un)imaged futures (Fleming & Grace, 2017; Fray et al., 2020; Watson et al., 2016). Because of their school experiences and sociocultural environments, as well as personal factors (Gemici et al., 2014; Zipin et al., 2015), regional and rural students may hold different educational preferences from their metropolitan peers and find that access to opportunities and educational resources is challenging (Akos et al., 2007; Birks et al., 2010; Yates et al., 2017). While aspirations for higher education may be influenced by university visits and other outreach programs (Walton & Carrillo-Higueras, 2019), aspirations for young

people often start at a younger age than when career-specific guidance begins (Gore et al., 2015, 2017; Mahat et al., 2022).

Unfortunately, even when regional and rural students do participate in higher education, barriers may persist, most significantly through a perception that they do not belong. As Crawford and McKenzie (2022) argued, the logistical challenges to higher education, such as fees and long-driving times to reach a campus, often manifest within students as a lack of belongingness at university (i.e., non-belonging). When students do overcome the barriers to enrol and feel included in the university community, it ultimately feels like university is not for them (Crawford & McKenzie, 2022). Regional and rural students may also feel anxiety due to separation from their family (King et al., 2015), and have the perception that their family may not be supportive of their decision to study at university (Devlin & McKay, 2017; James, 2001), particularly if they have had to leave their local community to do so.

In Australia, a relatively new approach to better include regional and rural students in higher education has been through the creation of Regional University Centres (RUCs). First established in the 2018–2019 Australian Government budget after a national review (Napthine et al., 2019), RUCs provide a physically closer site of learning for many regional and rural students and include a range of services such as study support, as well as study spaces and high-speed internet (Australian Government Department of Education, 2023). Emerging evidence suggests that RUCs may be a key mechanism for improving regional and rural student participation in higher education, with King et al. (2022) finding that high school students were more likely to consider studying online with the help of a RUC. Stone et al. (2022) also reviewed the impact of RUCs, with their findings indicating students' improved sense of belonging to a learning community and greater access to academic skills support.

However, as recently discussed by Professor Robert Brown who served as CQUniversity's National Director of RUCs, relatively few universities currently offer study through RUCs and they often do so at a loss. CQUniversity, for example, has the largest RUC-enrolled cohort of any university, with approximately 420 students in 2021 across six partner RUC campuses, making up only 1.3% of CQUniversity's total student population (Brown, 2022).

In this study, we build on the existing research on how universities can strengthen partnerships with local communities by exploring the idea of a CEU. We draw on sustained research, including Crawford and McKenzie (2022) and the recent positive findings from RUC evaluations (King et al., 2022; Stone et al., 2022), to suggest that a place-based university model, where study offerings are situated within the local community, is a key mechanism to improving regional and rural student participation.

The Context of Study and the Methods

In this study, we wanted to explore the idea of a CEU with university students and staff. The empirical data collection took place in May 2022 in Victoria, Australia, at a university in the Australian Technology Network. This was part of a broader project funded by Advance HE (a member-based organisation that supports higher education) to explore the future student experience. The university has several campuses across the state of Victoria, with 21% of students studying regionally and a significant proportion of online students (32%).

The research team came to this study with a shared interest in student equity in higher education. Their varied interests in student pathways, constraints and enablers in relation to students' personal goals, and how pathways might be improved for students in regional and rural locations underpin this research.

Following institutional human ethics clearance (HEA-22-014), data collection took place during three participatory co-design workshops, using the CoLabs method (Dollinger & Vanderlelie,

2021). The participants were 15 students and six staff (N = 21). Students were recruited via the university student blog and a university students-as-partners program. They were asked how they identified: metropolitan, regional, or rural or remote. The participants represented a mixture of metropolitan (*n* = 9) and regional (*n* = 6) students. No participants identified as rural or remote. Originally, we aimed to recruit only regional and rural/remote students, but students who self-reported as metropolitan also signed up for the study. It is unclear if they were originally from regional or rural areas and now lived in metropolitan areas, and therefore selected that choice on the pre-survey. Staff were invited to participate through their faculty leadership, again with representation from staff who identified as from a metropolitan area (*n* = 2) and regional areas (*n* = 4). We were mindful that some participants may have relocated as a result of the COVID-19 lockdowns. Because this time was difficult for many, we decided not to interrogate the details of the locations stated by the participants.

Data were collected during the workshops, which were of 90 minutes duration and were hosted by authors Dollinger and Piskiewicz. The workshops were hosted online on Zoom in conjunction with an online collaborative whiteboard platform called Miro (see Miro, 2023). Students were reimbursed for their time, whereas staff were not. Students and staff selected a workshop time to attend. Each workshop followed the same protocol of activities (see Table 1), guiding the participants through a scaffolded set of exercises. In particular, the workshops aimed to spur reflection on a CEU model and consider the benefits or challenges of enacting such a model.

Table 1: *Overview of Workshop Protocol*

Activity	Description
Activity 1: Defining a community embedded university	In this activity we asked participants to share their conceptualisations of a Community Embedded University. Question prompts: • What values/words underpin your community? • What values/words underpin a university? • How would you define a Community Embedded University (CEU)?
Activity 2: Fast forward to 2035	Using the PESTLE framework, participants were asked to reflect on what problem(s) were facing their local communities, from now until 2035 (e.g., climate change, new train line).
Activity 3: Imagining the role of a CEU	Reflecting on the issues raised in Activity 2, participants discussed and brainstormed: How could/would a CEU address these various problems?
Activity 4: Benefits and challenges	Looking at the activities that have been suggested in Activity 3, what would be the benefits and challenges of achieving this/creating a CEU?
Activity 5: Reflecting on defining a CEU	Participants reflected on their original definitions of a CEU at the beginning of the workshop: Has this definition changed?

To begin each workshop, we asked participants to conceptualise a CEU. To help scaffold this activity, we first asked participants to reflect on community versus university values and to submit their responses via Miroboard post-it notes. As can be seen in Table 1, the PESTLE framework (first developed by Aguilar, 1967) was used to guide the participants' responses to Activity 2. The workshop activities enabled us to get the participants thinking and talking about the notion of a CEU and to post responses using the Miroboard post-it-notes functionality. The workshops were audio-recorded and transcribed to provide data relating to the discussions that the participants engaged in.

Following data collection, all data were organised by the activity. Each researcher then independently analysed the data thematically, using Bazeley's (2009) three-step coding process of describe, compare, and relate. This coding was done using Excel, and we shared our coding with each other afterwards. Alongside the Excel spreadsheets, we also created a word document to accompany us as we independently coded. This had questions such as *"What are your key reflections from the data collected from Activity 1?"*

We then met as a research team, to go through each activity and the themes we had identified, until consensus was achieved and linked back to scholarly literature. Please note that, in the discussion of our findings, we do not prescribe pseudonyms to participants, as data were collected both orally and through anonymous Miroboard submissions. This meant that we could not attribute each piece of data to a specific participant.

Findings

In this section, we will discuss the key themes that were developed from the workshops with participants. We will discuss the findings across three dimensions: 1) participants' definitions of a CEU, including key values or principles, 2) the practices that participants suggested a CEU would embed, both in and outside the classroom, and 3) participants' perceived challenges and benefits of enacting a CEU.

Participants' Initial Definitions of a CEU

In Activity 1, the participants were asked to reflect on community versus university values. While a few values overlapped for both community and university (e.g., collaboration and respect), other values were markedly different with many participants seeing communities, rather than universities, as networks of relationships. To illustrate, of the 55 community values that were submitted by participants across three workshops, over half (31 of 55, 56%) related to relationships with others. Submissions included *"loyalty," "love," "trust"* and *"being there."* A further 20 of the community value submissions related to inclusion, such as *"diversity," "welcoming"* and *"sharing resources,"* while only four submissions related to learning or growing, such as *"development," "creativity"* and *"questioning."*

In contrast, the values submitted for universities were centred on knowledge creation or learning, with almost half (27 of 58, 47%) related to this theme, including *"love of learning," "learning how to think,"* and *"source of new knowledge."* The second most common theme for community values was around respectful environments, including *"cultural understanding"* and *"equal opportunity"* with 18 (of 58) submissions (31%). Finally, the third theme with 13 (of 58) submissions (22%) related to innovation or change, such as *"new ideas frontier"* and *"transformation."* When comparing the difference in themes, participants' predominantly saw universities as places where you learn independently, albeit in inclusive and innovative ways, and communities as places where you connect with others and as sources of communal support.

Translating these values to definitions, participants conceptualised a CEU as a collaborative, safe space that would bring together diverse expertise. As one participant submitted, a CEU was *"an organisation focused on building respectful relationships amongst members and the environment, fostering connections to share knowledge and learning."* Another participant conceptualised the merging of a university with community as *"a group of people sharing a common goal to achieve together."* Participants in the activity also emphasised through their responses that a CEU would be a university that adapted to local contexts; for example, *"staff create connections with regions where courses are in need."* Another submission described such a university as *"one where our research and teaching is linked to various communities."* A third theme identified from participants' conceptualisations, probably heightened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, was also around a CEU as being a blended online and physical space, that traverses boundaries. As one

participant submitted: *"a university that comes to me (a university without walls)."* Another stated: *"a shared space for formal learning outside of a traditional campus."*

Situating the CEU model in the Context of Community

In the workshops, we also sought to collect participants' ideas on what issues their local communities faced, and how a CEU model might help address, or even alleviate, these issues within communities. We began Activity 2 by first asking participants to submit challenges their local communities currently faced or may face by 2035. We asked participants to organise their submissions using the PESTLE framework. Because the participants were from a range of backgrounds (metropolitan and regional), their ideas of *local* varied. This resulted in 84 submissions spread across economic (31, 37%), technological (24, 29%), environmental (16, 19%) and other, including political, legal and social (13, 15%).

As the findings indicated, economic issues were often top of mind for participants, including *"less certainty around job security,"* *"increase in freelance,"* and *"the great resignation."* However, many economic issues also blended with the theme of technology, highlighting the intersectionality between these two spheres; for example, *"personalised and flexible learning opportunities to respond to students who work shifts and multiple jobs"* and *"less focus on soft skills and talking to people, due to a greater reliance on technology."* Other issues for local communities that arose included responses around emergency response applications, linking to the 2020 Australian bushfires and *"the centralisation of physical services compounding access issues for regional and remote communities."* Submissions related to the environment also included *"less farmers, less food"* and a *"growing consciousness of an individual's footprint on the environment."* Other issues from participants across political, legal and social dimensions also included the desire for the corporate sector to be more ethical, reduce the growing class divide between rich and poor, and improve the family violence system.

In the second part of the activity, we prompted participants to reflect on what a CEU might do to support communities facing these challenges. Participants submitted an array of suggestions, ranging from more placement opportunities for students to the sharing of resources across universities and communities (e.g., shared loaning libraries). Other suggestions included *"offering digital literacy courses to community members,"* *"co-teaching between academics and professionals,"* and providing equipment (e.g., *"drones during large bushfires to enable more people to assess the fire"*).

A central thread running through these suggestions was also the emphasis on partnership and collaboration between the community and the CEU. To illustrate, participants touched on a need for university and community members to engage in reciprocal learning. One participant submitted: *"two-way learning approaches,"* and another: *"not just a top down (ivory tower) approach but to grow knowledge from the ground up."* Responses also included practical suggestions to build connections between a CEU and community, such as *"use local newspapers to share more about what the universities are like,"* *"more pathways from vocational or training providers,"* and *"regular consultation and co-design with diverse communities to better improve teaching and services."*

Challenges and Benefits of Enacting a CEU

In the final activity of the workshop, we asked participants to consider the ideas they generated about how a CEU would work with communities, to reflect on the challenges and benefits. In Table 2, we highlight a selection of the actions for a CEU that were discussed, as well as participants' reflections on the benefits and challenges.

Table 2: *Participants' Reflections on the Benefits and Challenges of Enacting a CEU*

Action for a CEU	Potential Benefits	Potential Challenges
Increase opportunities for work and placements in regional and/or rural areas	• Using student accommodation to host internships/placements. • Expands world view and may even encourage more motivation to work regionally or rurally upon graduation. • Supports regional and rural communities. • Enhances employability skills in young community members.	• Need to be supported in a new community. Are they completely on their own with little-known relationships? • Placements are usually unpaid. Could they be paid? • For metro students, this may mean complete loss of income if they have to live elsewhere for a semester and cannot attend normal jobs.
Student-driven solutions for local case studies e.g., agriculture students solving a local problem	• Students gain context and understanding about different communities and are required to perform in-depth research. • Students could bring new ways of thinking that utilise modern methods.	• Local communities are not without agency and are not damsels-in-distress. They need to be treated with respect for their ability to solve problems. • Making sure this work is properly documented and can be used for future job applications.
Important to begin with the experience of participants in the local context	• Ensures what is taught is actually helpful and relevant to learners. • Not just a top-down (ivory tower) approach but to grow knowledge from the ground up. • Learning together as a group. • No forms of discrimination and inequity from Indigenous communities.	• Too many opinions. • Could be issues around diversity and experience.

Note: The table is made up of direct submissions on Miroboard from participants using the post-it function.

As can be seen in Table 2, participants identified a wide range of benefits and challenges to actions that could be undertaken through a CEU model. For example, while participants saw the value in offering more local placements to students, including in regional or rural areas, they also saw challenges; for example: How would students be supported, both socially and financially, in regional or rural areas? And how would regional or rural placements (i.e., work-integrated learning placements) affect students' potentially metropolitan-based commitments around other study, part-time work, or accommodation? Similarly, participants also stressed the importance of maintaining a positive narrative about the value of local communities (see also Mahat et al., 2022), and that actions undertaken by a CEU should be seen as collaborative. As one participant submitted, "*local communities are not without agency and are not damsels-in-distress.*" Further, while participants saw the value of integrating local communities' expertise and perspectives

within a CEU model, they also noted concerns over too many opinions and potential issues around diversity or various experiences.

Other challenges for enacting a CEU that were discussed related to reconceptualising the role of the teacher. For example, participants suggested that actions undertaken by a CEU could be dismantling the traditional roles of teacher versus student and creating a learning environment where everyone is seen as a learner. Yet, while participants saw value in this idea and how a greater number of people could contribute expertise, one participant submitted a note that it would "*disrupt the power relationships and practices.*" Another participant similarly added that there would be "*challenges in ensuring mutual respect between students and staff.*" Participants also reflected on the challenges that would arise from a CEU that dually delivered online and face-to-face learning experiences. While participants saw value in flexible study options, such as greater opportunities for people to engage in university if they had work or carer responsibilities or did not want to relocate to a city campus, submissions also reflected on the "*need to ensure student outcomes are still delivered,*" and "*less connection to the university experience if it's through a screen.*"

To end the workshop, we invited participants to share how their initial conceptualisations and definitions of a CEU might have changed as a result of the workshop discussions. While most participants indicated no change, a few took the opportunity to once again emphasise that people and relationships would be at the heart of a CEU model. To illustrate, one submission was "*value who and what is around you, provide an inclusive learning opportunity for all,*" and another said "*with not for – about a community,*" highlighting the importance of authentic partnerships in enacting a CEU model.

Defining a CEU

Through the analysis of our data, we defined a CEU as striving to create an ecosystem that builds and maintains strong relationships between local communities and industries, to collaborate and engage in joint decision-making towards innovative solutions and a shared purpose. Emphasised in this definition is the importance of co-creating value for, and of, the university across students, staff, and local communities and industry partners. This could involve collaborating across stakeholder groups to consider what research priorities the university would take or how course offerings could align to local communities' needs and/or gaps in the labour market.

The data suggested that a CEU should be guided by five key principles:

1. Sharing resources and knowledge(s) across local communities and universities;
2. Leveraging local knowledges, including Indigenous knowledges, as a vehicle to enrich the curriculum and research;
3. Situating education as actionable for local issues and trends;
4. Creating healthy relationships and environments through honesty, open communication, and authenticity;
5. Flexible and seamless digital design to enable access across geo-dispersed communities for lifelong learning.

We suggest that the five principles may be a useful lens for universities to consider their current state-of-play and how they might partner with local communities and support regional and/or rural students. As discussed through our research, we also stress the potential value propositions that may arise from a CEU model or approach, including supporting a positive narrative about the community, strengthening local industry networks, and providing students with the opportunity to learn about local knowledges and engage with curriculum that aligns to local identities. We also suggest the benefits of a CEU for academics and the university, such as a chance to enact a relationship-rich pedagogy through collaborative teaching and improved reputational status among local communities. Finally, the benefits for local communities could include a pathway

towards shared decision-making and authentic partnerships, and a greater ability to apply the various benefits of a close university partner, such as targeted research, skill development and job pathways.

Limitations and Future Research

We note here, however, the limitations of our findings: that this is a pilot study and, despite the rich data provided by our participants, it nonetheless represents a small sample taken from a single institution in Australia. Further, we were unable to attract any student participants who identified as rural. Although they make up a relatively small proportion of the students at the institution where the study took place, their insights would have been a valuable contribution to how a CEU would manifest in rural contexts.

We encourage future research to build on the findings presented here through greater sample sizes and engagement with participants from industry and community. With a larger sample size, we would also encourage future researchers to explore how specific student cohorts (e.g., regional versus rural, or student differences across year-level or gender) may conceptualise engagement with the university differently and how that might impact their desires and ideal support.

We also highlight that our sample was from the state of Victoria and, therefore, offers a very different context from locations such as Western Australia or the Northern Territory. These states are larger and have fewer towns and cities, many areas that would be defined as rural and/or remote, and a greater number of Indigenous communities. Such contextual differences raise questions about how a CEU model might be perceived in different locations.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our study has prompted several important considerations for universities seeking to improve or develop their local community engagement, or for researchers reflecting on the value of higher education. The first is a question of image, where universities, as described by our participants, are not seen to be places of support or relationships. Instead, our participants saw universities as transactional places, where students evidence their learning and gain qualifications, and where their roles are defined in the traditional teacher-student dyad. In other words, students learn, teachers teach. Further, while participants spoke of encouragement to be creative and to analyse critically, the university community itself was not thought to encourage values like loyalty, trust, or comfort.

There are two ways to interpret this finding. On the one hand, the fundamental mission and responsibility of universities is undoubtedly to help people learn and provide credentials that certify evidence of their learning to others. Yet, on the other hand, the modern university, as discussed by Barnett (2000, 2011) and more recently by Nørgård and Bengtsen (2021), is increasingly posited to have a remit far beyond learning minimum standards and credentialing. Rather, it is seen as an experience, one that shapes a person's life and, therefore, one that should support relationship-rich education (Felten & Lambert, 2020; Fjelkner-Pihl, 2022; Goodyear, 2022).

In this light, the university, at least in the context of our study, has a significant way to go to promote this image to its staff and students, and arguably to the general population. These findings also link to several recent studies that highlight the importance of creating a sense of belongingness for equity-deserving cohorts (Crawford & McKenzie, 2022; de Bie et al., 2021). If universities want to attract and retain regional and/or rural students, there likely needs to be a greater focus on how to explicitly help them develop a sense of belongingness to the university and identification with the university community.

Another commentary to arise from our findings, and one that is increasingly pertinent in today's context, is that of place. On a superficial read of the data it seems that students want it all. They idealise a CEU to be a university that is strongly linked to local communities, even sharing physical resources with the local community (as previously suggested by Gore et al., 2019), but also one that allows them to study in a blended format, or even wholly online, should that be necessary for their current circumstances. To be everything at once is, of course, a challenge for any university. However, an alternative interpretation of the data is that our participants are more likely reflecting on the differences between place and space. Drawing on Tuan's (1977) notion that space is abstract, without value or meaning, and place is imbued with significance and embodiment, to our participants a CEU would be both a space and place. For example, they would experience the ease of access to a physical location, such as the Australian RUC model, where campuses are in regional and rural areas and staffed by members of the local community who understand their lived experiences and sense of self. But a CEU would also offer almost limitless potential in space; for example, connecting them to teachers and peers from across the globe, and offering a multitude of study options that align to their preferences.

In essence, students would have two mechanisms to support their belongingness: a physical place located in their local community, and an online space that connects them with a greater world. This finding links to Nørgård and Bengtsen's (2016) conceptualisation of a "*placeful university*" (p. 5) that goes beyond the physical spatiality of the campus to refocus on human experiences and connection as place. Therefore, the challenge for universities wanting to align to a CEU model is how to support purposeful learning sites that foster a deep sense of connection to the local place, while continuing to offer numerous online and/or blended learning opportunities that allow them to occupy a diversity of spaces.

Another reflection from the data is the tension between how a CEU model would distribute responsibility and, consequentially, power and decision-making across university and community stakeholder groups (see also Garlick & Langworthy, 2008). To illustrate, many participants remarked that an authentic CEU would be a partnership between the local community and the university, and yet details on how this partnership would be enacted were vague; for example, would local community members sit on a university council or academic board? How would their opinions or perspectives be incorporated into the formal governance and decision-making of the university? Further, as the participants themselves pointed out, who from the community would represent on behalf of the community? Would it be local officials, or community advocates, or alumni? And what would happen if in fact their perspective was not representative of the community, or at odds with that of the university's values?

As first posited by Kindred and Petrescu (2015), all of these questions, and others, debate whether it is truly possible to create an authentic and just partnership between a university and a local community. It seems more likely that consultation with a community is achievable, albeit a less embedded approach than our idealised model. However, our research still offers several tangible recommendations to improve partnerships between communities and universities. These include expanding opportunities for qualified community experts to co-teach or co-create curriculum, and the promotion and support of community-based placements that would encourage more dialogue between universities and communities. Participants in our research also shared the importance for universities to maintain positive narratives about their local communities, and not only promote work opportunities for metropolitan and global organisations.

Our findings also have relevance for universities and staff who are currently engaged in Australia's RUC model. As discussed earlier, students' desire for a physical site of learning, such as that provided by the RUC model, is a meaningful start to supporting regional and rural students. However, emerging research on RUCs, that highlights the limitations of course offerings and the relatively small take-up from universities to engage (Brown, 2022), indicates that the RUC model

has a considerable way to go in offering students spaces of learning. The principles we outlined earlier, which underpin a CEU, also raise questions for the RUC model; namely, how the RUC model can continue to explore how to share university resources across communities (principle 1), and how to leverage local knowledge and expertise to inform and advance regional and rural-specific curriculum and pedagogy (principle 2).

Specifically, RUCs may want to consider how to modify or adapt the university curriculum for the local context, rather than simply replicating units or subjects that are predominantly taught in metropolitan contexts (principle 3). And while research has already evidenced the RUC model as a mechanism to improve heathy relationships with universities and communities (King et al., 2022; Stone et al., 2022), the rapidly evolving nature of digital design in education underscores the importance for RUCs to continue to harness technological innovations and solutions to enable access across geo-dispersed communities for lifelong learning (principle 4). Future research would benefit from further exploration on how a CEU aligns to the RUC model, and what value propositions would continue to drive participation and engagement in RUCs from both universities and students.

Finally, our findings stress that the idea of a CEU is somewhat flawed, as it implies that there is one community in which universities are to embed themselves. There are in fact numerous communities for universities to engage with, including communities in the nearby physical proximity to that of their multiple campuses (i.e., local), but also communities where university scholars may conduct their research, or areas where industry partnerships may exist. Within these communities are also micro-communities, or smaller groups of people who gather around shared values or goals, be that shared political views, religions, or hobbies. In essence, there is no single voice within a community, and as such, there is no monopoly on what specific issues a university and community could collaborate on, or on which exclusive principles they might base an alliance on.

Again, this necessitates consideration for universities moving forward on which community they aim to partner with, and who this *in*cludes and *ex*cludes. This finding links to previous research from Barnett (2021) that describes the complexities intertwined with that of an activist university, where ideas, interpretations and attitudes clash. As Barnett reflected, through this lens, universities find consensus in their own value systems only when challenged through epistemic injustices, or at specific intersections where transgressions meet the core mission of the university. Grau (2016) reflected on universities balancing global and local missions: "*universities need to understand that they are fundamental to the process of creating knowledge but that they do not have the monopoly*" (p. 8). By respecting and collaborating with other forms of knowledge production, including other institutions or local communities, universities can break down "*the barriers that prevent scholarly knowledge from reaching the community*" (p. 8).

As we found through our study, however, there is still a great deal of work for universities to consider how they can respect and partner with local communities and see these stakeholders as core members of the university community, with equal ability to contribute. While the true enactment of a CEU model, as discussed here, may be unlikely to appear in the Australian higher education landscape in the near future, we hope that by providing a commentary on an idealised model, as described by our participants, we can provoke further discussion and reflection into how universities can continue to strengthen partnerships with local communities.

Funding

References

Aguilar, F. J. (1967). *Scanning the business environment*. Macmillan.

Akos, P., Lambie, G. W., Milsom, A., & Gilbert, K. (2007). Early adolescents' aspirations and academic tracking: An exploratory investigation. *Professional School Counseling, 11*(1), 57–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X0701100108

Altbach, P. G., Reisberg, L., & Rumbley, L. E. (2019). *Trends in global higher education: Tracking an academic revolution*. Brill.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2018). *6227.0 – Education and work, Australia, May 2018*. https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6227.0May%202018?OpenDocument

Australian Government Department of Education. (2021). *Regional university centres*. https://www.education.gov.au/regional-university-centres

Barnett, R. (2011). The coming of the ecological university. *Oxford Review of Education, 37*(4), 439–455. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2011.595550

Barnett, R. (2000). University knowledge in an age of supercomplexity. *Higher Education, 40*(4), 409–422. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1004159513741

Barnett, R. (2021). The activist university: Identities, profiles, conditions. *Policy Futures in Education, 19*(5), 513–526. https://doi.org/10.1177/14782103211003444

Bazeley, P. (2009). Analysing qualitative data: More than "identifying themes." *Malaysian Journal of Qualitative Research, 2*(2), 6–22. http://www.researchsupport.com.au/bazeley_mjqr_2009.pdf

Birks, M., Al-Motlaq, M., & Mills, J. (2010). Pre-registration nursing degree students in rural Victoria: Characteristics and career aspirations. *Collegian, 17*(1), 23–29. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.colegn.2009.07.001

Bradley, D. M., Bourke, L., & Cosgrave, C. (2020). Experiences of nursing and allied health students undertaking a rural placement: Barriers and enablers to satisfaction and wellbeing. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education, 30*(1), 51–63. https://doi.org/10.47381/aijre.v30i1.239

Brown, R. (2022, October 12–14). *A CQUniversity view of the RUC landscape: Emerging trends and prospective futures* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Regional, Rural and Remote Education, Barossa Valley, SA, Australia.

Burke, P. J., Bennett, A., Bunn, M., Stevenson, J., & Clegg, S. (2017). *It's about time: Working towards more equitable understandings of the impact of time for students in higher education*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Curtin University. https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/its-about-time-working-towards-more-equitable-understandings-of-the-impact-of-time-for-students-in-higher-education/

Burnheim, C., & Harvey, A. (2016). Far from the studying crowd? Regional and remote students in higher education. In A. Harvey, C. Burnheim, & M. Brett (Eds.), *Student equity in Australian higher education: Twenty-five years of a fair chance for all* (pp. 143–162). Springer.

Cardak, B., Brett, M., Barry, P., McAllister, R., Bowden, M., Bahtsevanoglou, J., & Vecci, J. (2017). *Regional student participation and migration: Analysis of factors influencing regional student participation and internal migration in Australian higher education*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Curtin University. https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/regional-student-participation-and-migration-analysis-of-factors-influencing-regional-student-participation-and-internal-migration-in-australian-higher-education/

Carrillo-Higueras, F., & Walton, T. R. (2020). Perceptions and intentions of secondary students in rural Australia to progress to university. *Higher Education Research and Development*, *39*(4), 627–642. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1685942

Chesters, J., & Cuervo, H. (2022). (In)equality of opportunity: Educational attainments of young people from rural, regional and urban Australia. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, *49*(1), 43–61. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-021-00432-0

Cook, J., Burke, P. J., Bunn, M., & Cuervo, H. (2022). Should I stay or should I go? The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on regional, rural and remote undergraduate students at an Australian University. *Educational Review*, *74*(3), 630–644. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2021.1958756

Crawford, N., & McKenzie, L. (2022). Localised learning: Mobilising belonging among mature-aged students in low socio-economic status regional and remote areas. *Higher Education*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00877-x

de Bie, A., Marquis, E., Cook-Sather, A., & Luqueño, L. (2021). *Promoting equity and justice through pedagogical partnership*. Stylus.

Devlin, M., & Mckay, J. (2017). *Facilitating the success of students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds at regional universities: Research report*. Federation University Australia. http://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/55_Federation_MarciaDevlin_Accessible_PDF.pdf

De Wit, H., & Altbach, P. G. (2021). Internationalization in higher education: Global trends and recommendations for its future. *Policy Reviews in Higher Education*, *5*(1), 28–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/23322969.2020.1820898

Dollinger, M., D'Angelo, B., Naylor, R., Harvey, A., & Mahat, M. (2021). Participatory design for community-based research: A study on regional student higher education pathways. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, *48*(4), 739–755. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-020-00417-5

Dollinger, M., & Vanderlelie, J. (2021). Closing the loop: Co-designing with students for greater market orientation. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, *31*(1), 41–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2020.1757557

Felten, P., & Lambert, L. M. (2020). *Relationship-rich education: How human connections drive success in college*. John Hopkins University Press.

Fjelkner-Pihl, A. (2022). The constructive overlap: A study of multiplex ties in students' study-related networks and academic performance. *Innovative Higher Education*, *47*(2), 273–295. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-021-09576-4

Fleming, M. J., & Grace, D. M. (2017). Beyond aspirations: Addressing the unique barriers faced by rural Australian students contemplating university. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 41*(3), 351–363. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2015.1100718

Fray, L., Gore, J., Harris, J., & North, B. (2020). Key influences on aspirations for higher education of Australian school students in regional and remote locations: A scoping review of empirical research, 1991–2016. *The Australian Educational Researcher, 47*(1), 61–93. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-019-00332-4

Garlick, S., & Langworthy, A. (2008). Benchmarking university community engagement: Developing a national approach in Australia. *Higher Education Management and Policy, 20*(2), 153–164. https://doi.org/10.1787/hemp-v20-art17-en

Gemici, S., Bednarz, A., Karmel, T., & Lim, P. (2014). *The factors affecting the educational and occupational aspirations of young Australians.* National Centre for Vocational Education Research. https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/the-factors-affecting-the-educational-and-occupational-aspirations-of-young-australians

Goodyear, P. (2022). Realising the good university: Social innovation, care, design justice and educational infrastructure. *Postdigital Science and Education, 4*(1), 33–56. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-021-00253-5

Gore, J., Fray, L., Patfield, S., & Harris, J. (2019). *Community influence on university aspirations: Does it take a village …?* National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Curtin University. https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/community-influence-university-aspirations/

Gore, J., Holmes, K., Smith, M., Fray, L., McElduff, P., Weaver, N., & Wallington, C. (2017). Unpacking the career aspirations of Australian school students: Towards an evidence base for university equity initiatives in schools. *Higher Education Research and Development, 36*(7), 1383–1400. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2017.1325847

Gore, J., Holmes, K., Smith, M., Lyell, A., Ellis, H., & Fray, L. (2015). *Choosing university: The impact of schools and schooling.* National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Curtin University. https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/choosing-university-the-impact-of-schools-and-schooling/

Grau, F. X. (2016). A short communication on glocal universities. *International Journal of Knowledge-Based Development, 7*(1), 63–74. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJKBD.2016.075442

Halsey, J. (2019). Rural and remote education and the fundamentals of leading for all. *The Australian Educational Leader, 41*(4), 8–11. https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/ielapa.989136983592472

James, R. (2001). Participation disadvantage in Australian higher education: An analysis of some effects of geographical location and socioeconomic status. *Higher Education, 42*(4), 455–472. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1012264010667

Kindred, J., & Petrescu, C. (2015). Expectations versus reality in a university–community partnership: A case study. *International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 26*, 823–845. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-014-9471-0

King, S., Luzeckyj, A., McCann, B., & Graham, C. (2015). *Exploring the experience of being first in family at university.* National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Curtin University. https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/exploring-the-experience-of-being-first-in-family-at-university/

King, S., Stone, C., & Ronan, C. (2022). *Investigating transitions to university from regional South Australian high schools*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Curtin University. https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/transitions-university-regional-south-australian-high-schools/

Koshy, P. (2019). *Equity student participation in Australian higher education: 2013–2018*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Curtin University. http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/527810

Mahat, M., Dollinger, M., D'Angelo, B., Naylor, R., & Harvey, A. (2022). Co-designing a curriculum model for career education: Perspectives from regional communities in Australia. *The Australian Educational Researcher*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-021-00505-0

Michalski, J. H., Cunningham, T., & Henry, J. (2017). The diversity challenge for higher education in Canada: The prospects and challenges of increased access and student success. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations, 39*, 66–89. https://www.jstor.org/stable/90007872

Miro. (2023). *Miro as your whiteboard* tool. https://miro.com/whiteboard

Mittelmeier, J., Rienties, B., Rogaten, J., Gunter, A., & Raghuram, P. (2019). Internationalisation at a distance and at home: Academic and social adjustment in a South African distance learning context. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 72*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2019.06.001

Napthine, D., Graham, C., Lee, P., & Wills, M. (2019). *National regional, rural and remote tertiary education strategy: Final report*. Commonwealth of Australia. https://www.education.gov.au/access-and-participation/resources/national-regional-rural-and-remote-tertiary-education-strategy-final-report

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2019). High school benchmarks – 2019. https://nscresearchcenter.org/high-school-benchmarks-2019/

Nørgård, R. T., & Bengtsen, S. S. E. (2016). Academic citizenship beyond the campus: A call for the placeful university. *Higher Education Research & Development, 35*(1), 4–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2015.1131669

Nørgård, R. T., & Bengtsen, S. S.E. (2021). The activist university and university activism: An editorial. *Policy Futures in Education, 19*(5), 507–512. https://doi.org/10.1177/14782103211026584

Nørgård, R. T., & Hilli, C. (2022). Hyper-hybrid learning spaces in higher education. In E. Gil, Y. Mor, Y. Dimitriadis, & C. Köppe (Eds.), *Hybrid learning spaces* (pp. 25–41). Springer.

O'Shea, S., Koshy, P., & Drane, C. (2021). The implications of COVID-19 for student equity in Australian higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 43*(6), 576-591. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2021.1933305

Partridge, H., Power, E., Ostini, J., Owen, S., & Pizzani, B. (2021). A framework for Australian universities and public libraries supporting regional, rural and remote students. *Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association*, *70*(4), 391–404. https://doi.org/10.1080/24750158.2021.1959842

Skulmowski, A., & Rey, G. D. (2020). COVID-19 as an accelerator for digitalization at a German university: Establishing hybrid campuses in times of crisis. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, *2*(3), 212–216. https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.201

Stone, C., Crawford, N., Ronan, C., & Davis, M. (2022). Improving the online regional student experience: Findings from the Country Universities Centre (CUC) student evaluation. *Student Success*, *13*(2), 32–41. https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.2313

Tuan, Y.-F. (1977). *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. University of Minnesota Press.

Walton, T. R., & Carrillo-Higueras, F. (2019). Evaluating the effectiveness of university widening participation activities in rural Australia. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *44*(5), 799–819. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2018.1538446

Watson, J., Wright, S., Hay, I., Beswick, K., Allen, J., & Cranston, N. (2016). Rural and regional students' perceptions of schooling and factors that influence their aspirations. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, *26*(2), 4–18. https://doi.org/10.47381/aijre.v26i2.64

Yates, J., Hooley, T., & Bagri, K. K. (2017). Good looks and good practice: The attitudes of career practitioners to attractiveness and appearance. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, *45*(5), 547–561. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2016.1237615

Zipin, L., Sellar, S., Brennan, M., & Gale, T. (2015). Educating for futures in marginalized regions: A sociological framework for rethinking and researching aspirations. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *47*(3), 227–246. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2013.839376

Regional Partnerships: Building a Future Regional Workforce in Western Australia

Serena Davie
Department of Education, Western Australia
serena.davie@education.wa.edu.au

Lisa Ledger
Baynton West Primary School
lisa.ledger@education.wa.edu.au

Susan Grylls
Pilbara Universities Centre
susang@puc.edu.au

Abstract

Following the success of a pre-service teacher hub in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, a decision was made to establish a second hub within the same region in another town. The second hub will be a collaboration between the Pilbara Universities Centre (PUC) and the Western Australian Department of Education. Although the PUC does not currently train teachers, it does, however, provide administrative, academic and pastoral support to a range of local education students studying at both bachelor and post-graduate levels in the field of education. The PUC also has students from many other disciplines who can add to the depth of the pre-service teacher hub. The PUC has the potential to grow, and it makes sense for the Department of Education's pre-service teacher hub to work in collaboration with the PUC to develop regional employees. The hub provides a way to connect and upskill not just pre-service teachers, but also students from other disciplines.

Keywords: *building regional communities, community education, cross-sector collaboration, pre-service teacher, regional professional experience, regional student, regional university, regional workforce*

Introduction

This article is about a partnership between the Department of Education and the Pilbara Universities Centre (PUC), with the purpose of building a work-ready regional workforce for a growing Pilbara town in the Northwest of Western Australia. The partnership builds upon an existing Department of Education pre-service teacher hub in the same region. The new student hub reaches beyond pre-service teachers and the future teaching workforce. The new student hub is inclusive of all students who are potential future employees for a regional community.

Pre-Service Teacher Hubs

The Western Australian Department of Education established 12 pre-service teacher hubs in 2020. The purpose of these hubs was to build work readiness in graduates in areas of workforce

demand. Regional schools are areas of workforce demand, so eight hubs were established in regional locations. Each hub has a coordinator who is responsible for coordinating professional learning and networking opportunities for pre-service teachers undertaking a regional professional experience in that location. The Department of Education provides funding to support eligible pre-service teachers to undertake a regional professional experience. The Department also provides funding to run each hub. Networking and professional learning events occur during the professional experience and bring pre-service teachers from different schools together, so that they can form a community, support each other, and gain a deeper understanding of working and living in a regional location.

Eligible pre-service teachers who are undertaking a regional professional experience can access support through the pre-service development program. This support is financial, professional and holistic. Prior to the start of each school term, pre-service teachers are invited to attend a full day induction. The induction provides an opportunity for pre-service teachers from different universities to network and it provides professional learning to assist with their professional experience.

The themes of the professional learning are around the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership's (AITSL) *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*:

- 1.1: Physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of learners;
- 1.3: Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds;
- 1.4: Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- 1.5: Differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities;
- 1.6: Strategies to support full participation of students with disability;
- 2.4: Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians;
- 4.3: Manage challenging behaviour. (AITSL, 2022)

These standards focus on cultural responsiveness, trauma-informed practice, English as a second language or dialect, classroom management, catering for diversity and inclusivity.

Pilbara Pre-Service Teacher Hub

The largest towns in the Pilbara are Karratha and Port Hedland. Port Hedland was chosen for the Pilbara pre-service teacher hub in 2020 because there was available and affordable accommodation and many schools were willing to mentor pre-service teachers. These factors meant that more pre-service teachers went to Port Hedland than to any other regional town in Western Australia.

Karratha Student Hub

Karratha is one of Western Australia's most remote regional towns and is located some 1535 kilometres north of Perth. The City of Karratha is home to four industrial ports and contributes approximately $8.76 billion to the national economy each year, predominantly from mineral exports generated from the vast mining, oil and gas industries located in the Pilbara. Characterised by the juxtaposition of this modern industry and an ancient natural landscape steeped in culture, the City of Karratha has national economic significance, and the rich history of Australia's Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi people is of global heritage value.

The City of Karratha consists of five towns: Karratha, Dampier, Wickham, Roebourne and Point Sampson, and is home to over 10 primary and secondary school. The growth in student numbers in many of these schools has resulted in an ever-increasing demand for teachers.

Due to limited accommodation available in Karratha, few pre-service teachers were able to undertake a professional experience there. To address the accommodation issue that affected Karratha and many other regional towns, the Department of Education established an accommodation register, which allowed teachers in Government housing to host a pre-service teacher in their house whilst on a professional experience.

In 2023, an additional hub was established in Karratha in partnership with the PUC. The PUC, established in 2020 with some three students, has grown rapidly over the past three years to now, providing academic, pastoral and administrative support to over 300 students (from a range of disciplines) based in the Pilbara (including over 200 based in the City of Karratha). The expansion of the pre-service teacher hub into the City of Karratha has occurred because Karratha is starting to attract more pre-service teachers than any other town, and key stakeholders were engaged and keen to broaden the reach of the pre-service teacher hub to a student hub including students of other disciplines.

Baynton West Primary School, along with the other Karratha Network schools, worked closely to promote a program of shared accommodation, providing school staff in Government Regional Officer Housing with an allowance of $125 per week to provide accommodation to a pre-service teacher or school psychologist participating in the Department of Education's pre-service teacher program. This suddenly opened up previously untapped options of accommodation in the City of Karratha, where accommodation is expensive and availability is limited. Previously, pre-service teacher placement demands could not be met, due to a lack of accommodation.

Since this option has become available, Baynton West Primary School alone has hosted more than 20 pre-service teachers in their third or final year of initial teacher education. Some of the third-year student teachers returned to complete a final placement the following year. All of these teachers have commenced employment in the regions, alleviating pressures caused by the national teacher shortage. This had previously impacted the Pilbara negatively, with positions remaining unfilled for extended periods of time.

Pre-service teachers report the camaraderie and acceptance of their host schools. Along with the cohesiveness of the staff, this has made them enthusiastic about a career in regional areas. The professional learning opportunities provided through the hub, including working with students from other disciplines, has enabled the pre-service teachers to be workforce ready, as they are able to engage in targeted professional learning in literacy, numeracy, cultural responsiveness, English as an additional language or dialect, and trauma-informed practice. Lisa Ledger, Principal of Baynton West Primary School, states that it is a *"win/win situation, the schools now employ graduate teachers who are well prepared for the complexities of the regions and are equipped to begin their teaching careers with high degrees of pedagogical knowledge and resilience."*

Evidence-Based Practice

Evidence will be collected to ensure that the program is meeting the goals of preparing work-ready graduates for regional schools. The program also needs to meet the current and future directions of the Department of Education. The Department of Education's (2022) *Focus 2023* document prioritises the strengthening of partnerships with local Technical and Further Education Colleges, registered training organisations, and industry, to maximise student pathways. A partnership with the PUC is an example of a partnership which will maximise student outcomes.

Data from pre-service teachers will be collected pre- and post- professional experience to determine self-perceived knowledge in cultural responsiveness, trauma-informed practice and English as an additional language or dialect. These themes have been chosen as key measures of regional work readiness.

Regional principals will be surveyed to determine if pre-service teachers who have undertaken a supported regional professional experience are more prepared and more likely to be retained longer than graduates who have not been part of the pre-service development program.

Currently, 86% of final year pre-service teachers who undertake a regional professional experience as part of the pre-service development program convert to employees upon graduation. The vast majority take employment in regional settings. This figure becomes a benchmark. The impact of the partnership between the Department of Education and the PUC in Karratha for building a regional workforce will be measured to determine the value of the partnership.

References

Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership. (2022). *Australian professional standards for teachers*. https://www.aitsl.edu.au/standards

Department of Education, Western Australia. (2022). *Focus 2023*. https://www.education.wa.edu.au/dl/14g2mqp

A Manifesto for Small Schools: The Story of an Intersectional Research, Practice, and Politics Project

Cath Gristy

University of Plymouth, UK

cath.gristy@plymouth.ac.uk

Abstract

As in many parts of the world, there is concern for small schools in the United Kingdom (UK). Motivated by this concern, a group, which included researchers and educators amongst others, came together to compile a manifesto, a set of statements about the importance of small schools and their value to education and wider society. Inspired by a manifesto produced in Italy, the manifesto for small schools and associated briefing notes for the UK were published in 2022, following a year-long collaborative process informed by research, practice, and politics.

Keywords: *small school, manifesto, community, rural research, politics*

A Manifesto for Small Schools

A manifesto makes manifest – makes public – a series of intentions and beliefs. The manifesto for small schools developed in the United Kingdom (UK) recently does just this. It makes a series of statements about the importance of small schools and their value to education and wider society. The manifesto speaks to all who may have an interest in small schools (and those who do not) and calls for acknowledgement, recognition, and support for these schools and their communities. It is, however, primarily a joyous celebration of these places and people, explicitly avoiding doom-mongering and deficit talk.

The manifesto for small schools was published in the United Kingdom in 2022 (see Figure 1), following a year-long collaborative process which formally began at a British Educational Research Association (BERA) event in June 2021 (see BERA, 2021). Led by Dr Cath Gristy and Neil Short (Chair of the National Association of Small Schools [NASS]; see NASS, 2023), development of the manifesto moved through a series of teacher, schools, and union consultations organised by NASS. It appeared in the spring of 2022, in print and online, with an associated set of briefing notes (Gristy, 2022). The briefing notes are designed to be useful to anyone wanting information for debates, media, and so on, and include key international research publications and reports.

Small Schools MANIFESTO

Small schools are ASSETS, CENTRES FOR INNOVATION *in* EDUCATION *and* COMMUNITIES *and* TREASURIES *for their* LOCALITIES.

Small schools are

ideal places for research, innovation *and* development; *in* teaching *and* learning, curriculum development, leadership *and for* developing quality practice *in* education *through* collaboration *and* partnership.

This manifesto calls for:

- ☑ Acknowledgement of and support for small schools as centres for research, innovation and development in teaching and learning and in their communities and localities.
- ☑ The recognition and celebration of and support for collaborative practices amongst schools; collaboration by choice, not through force or coercion.

Small schools are

connected with, central to *and* assets for communities *through their* influential relationships with pupils, parents *and* extended families *and as such* provide opportunities *for* adult learning, developments in technology *and* sustainability.

This manifesto calls for:

- ☑ The recognition of the importance of schools to the communities and places they serve and the importance of communities to schools: Schools do not exist in isolation, this fact calls for acknowledgement of situated contextual factors which interact with the school and its locality such as housing, employment and provisions of services.
- ☑ Acknowledgement and celebration of and support for a commitment to building a wide range of relationships in education settings as an integral part of the UK's Levelling Up agenda.

Small schools must be funded fairly.

This manifesto calls for:

- ☑ a fair funding system for all schools. It calls particularly for a system that acknowledges and funds small schools and other schools that challenge standard financial efficiency models.

Contacts: Dr Cath Gristy, Plymouth Institute of Education, University of Plymouth ● cath.gristy@plymouth.ac.uk
Neil Short, National Association of Small Schools ● uep@btinternet.com

This document was published in April 2022

UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

NASS — National Association for Small Schools

Figure 1: The Small Schools Manifesto, as of May 2022

The manifesto has been inspired in part by the manifesto for small schools developed by the Instituto Nazionale Documentazione Innovazione Ricerca Educativa (National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research [INDIRE], 2020a) in Italy. Their manifesto (INDIRE, 2020b) began through work documenting experiences of distance learning in geographically isolated schools which were seeing falling numbers of pupils. The INDIRE's work on small schools aims to support the permanence of schools in geographically disadvantaged territories and to build networks of people and resources. The manifesto developed by INDIRE, now available in several different translations, was an important step, documenting explicitly, publicly and politically the state, status, and potential for small schools in a nation.

As in Italy, there is concern for small schools in the contemporary schooling environment of the UK for similar and different reasons. Education in the four nations of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) is a devolved matter, so there are differences in the way education and school policy operates. The socio-economic and policy contexts for schools in England (which will be familiar to a greater or lesser extent in other countries) have been documented in the manifesto briefing notes:

> Changes in government policy since 2010 has [sic] impacted negatively on small schools. In 2010 government supported rapid and extensive policy reform to establish a school-led system underpinned by academisation (Academies Bill, 2010).
>
> These reforms focused on creating large, efficient, effective schools with leaders that work directly with the government. (Gristy, 2022, p. 2)

In 2016, the white paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (Department for Education, 2016) was clear that small schools must come together in formal collaborations, preferably multi-academy trusts (MATs), in order to survive. Small schools appeared to have little choice but to enter formal collaborations (Church of England, 2018) like MATs that *"bring together leadership, autonomy, funding and accountability across a group of academies"* (Department for Education, 2016, p. 57). However, the financial challenges of small rural schools can make them unattractive for academy groups (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019; 2020). Small schools (in England) are twice as likely to close as the national average (O'Brien, 2019). The reduction in the number of small schools is located primarily in rural and peripheral areas.

As I hope the briefing notes (Gristy, 2022) will prove to be a useful go-to source of information for anyone with an interest in small schools, they will need regular updates as research and policy change. For example, a new threat for small schools in England is the recent changes to the national schools' inspection framework (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, [OFSTED], 2022), which appears to be mismatched to small school operations. The Times Educational Supplement (Roberts, 2022) declared in a headline: *"Small primaries five times more likely to be 'inadequate' than larger schools."*

The manifesto for small schools itself will perhaps prove more stable over time and resilient to changes than the briefing notes. It looks to state a series of long-standing key beliefs about small schools, their benefits to their pupils, local and wider communities. This has been done in a way that can be interpreted for local and political purposes, as well as for professional and academic research. In the development phase, it was decided that this document should be as universal as possible, speaking to, and useful for, anyone with an interest in small schools. For example, definitions of small schools are many and various; the manifesto takes an inclusive approach: *"Acknowledging the diversity of definitions, this manifesto includes all schools (including nurseries and pre-schools) defined as or who define themselves as 'small'"* (Gristy, 2022, p. 1).

The manifesto appears to be having an impact already, although the evidence is anecdotal at the moment. It has appeared in informal professional spaces (teachers exchanging resources online), at a meeting of a headteacher union (The National Association of Head Teachers), in local

government publications (Rural Services Network, 2022), at the centre of a new research agenda (at the BERA conference, 2022; BERA, 2021), and as the precursor for manifestos to be used in other UK nations (BERA workshop planned for 2023). We wish it good speed and a fair wind as its travels through education places and spaces, and we will observe carefully as and when it is used, and the differences it makes.

Notes

The latest version of the *Small Schools Manifesto*, along with the *Briefing Notes,* the *Small School Research Agenda* and other associated documents is fully accessible. The documents can be accessed here: https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/education/university-practice-partnerships/research-in-practice/small-schools-manifesto

These documents are also accessible through ResearchGate via the project, "*Small schools – big issues? A research collective*": https://www.researchgate.net/project/Small-schools-big-issues-A-research-collective. All researchers and teachers with an interest in small schools are welcome to join this collective.

References

British Educational Research Association. (2021, June 15). *Past event: Small schools, big issue? Exploring the future for small schools in rural and coastal England.* https://www.bera.ac.uk/event/small-schools-big-issue-exploring-the-future-for-small-schools-in-rural-and-coastal-england

Church of England. (2018). *Embracing change: Rural and small schools*. Church of England Education Office.

Department for Education. (2016). *Educational excellence everywhere.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/508447/Educational_Excellence_Everywhere.pdf

Gristy, C. (2022). *Small schools manifesto briefing notes.* https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/22/22371/Briefing_notes._Small_Schools_Manifesto_June_2022.pdf

National Association of Small Schools. (2023). *Welcome to the National Association of Small Schools.* https://www.smallschools.org.uk

National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research. (2020a). *Piccole scuole.* https://www.indire.it/en/progetto/small-schools

National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research. (2020b). *Piccole scuole: The manifesto.* https://piccolescuole.indire.it/en/the-movement-what-it-is/the-manifesto/

O'Brien, N. (2019, July). *The decline of small schools and village schools* [Research note]. Onward. https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Primary-schools.pdf

Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. (2022). *Guidance: Education inspection framework.* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework/education-inspection-framework

Ovenden-Hope, T., & Passy, R. (2019). *Educational Isolation: A challenge for schools in England*. Plymouth Marjon University and University of Plymouth. https://www.marjon.ac.uk/educational-isolation

Ovenden-Hope, T., & Passy, R. (Eds.). (2020). *Exploring teacher recruitment and retention: Contextual challenges from international perspectives*. Routledge.

Roberts, J. (2022, September 23). Ofsted: Small primaries five times more likely to be "inadequate". *Times Educational Supplement*. https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/primary/ofsted-small-primaries-five-times-more-likely-be-inadequate

Rural Services Network. (2022, July 27). *A manifesto for small schools*. https://rsnonline.org.uk/a-manifesto-for-small-schools

Book Review

Donnelley, S. (2020) Big Things Grow. A memoir of teaching on Country in Wilcannia. Allen & Unwin

John Halsey
Flinders University
john.halsey@flinders.edu.au

Big Things Grow

Big Things Grow is Sarah Donnelley's detailed and very personal account of her journey as an Eastern Sydney suburbs teacher to Wilcannia in New South Wales for a two term 'outback adventure' contract. It is very readable, engaging and highly relevant in terms of the opportunities and challenges of being a teacher in the country and on Country.

Donnelley's preface to her memoir frames and signals the values and fundamentals that motivate her and shape how she unfolds her journey as a teacher, as a member of a community, as a friend and mentor to young and old, and most importantly, as a listener and a learner… 'what I do want to share are the extraordinary learning opportunities I have had in this environment…. The connection to people, to Country and to place… so I am a guest in Wilcannia… those of us who come and go… have to respect how lucky we are to be here… we have a duty to speak up for and give a platform to people who often feel unseen and unheard'.

It is well known and widely documented that attracting and retaining teachers to schools in rural, regional and remote locations continues to be one of the main issues, if not the main issue, for education systems in Australia and many other countries around the world. At the heart of this challenge is an overriding mindset which basically likens teaching and living in these kinds of locations as something less than what it is in cities and very large population centres. And like all global type assertions, there are of course exceptions that need to be acknowledged.

Big Things Grow commences with confirmation of the Wilcannia posting and the task of closing down a comfortable and familiar inner city life and lifestyle. This is followed by getting together all that will be needed to make the journey out to Wilcannia and what the author thinks she will need for her time there. Very fortunately for Donnelley, she has the support of her parents and wider family as well as a circle of friends including one who had worked in Wilcannia and was 'honest and upfront about the fact that I was a city kid who had grown up by the ocean and I was going to feel a long way from home'.

Donnelley shares her transition from inner city Sydney replete with favourite cafes to outback Wilcannia, with candour and humour. Included are very practical details such as where to pick up the keys for her new house and setting up your new home. Her experiences resonated with mine of more than 50 years ago when I arrived in a country town on a blistering hot day. Some things apparently never change!

Transitioning from a location where you are basically just a face among thousands- perhaps millions- of others, to a place where you quickly become known by most if not all as the new teacher in town, is a major formative experience. One of the very real strengths of Donnelley's

memoir is revealing how she comes to terms with this new high visibility/low anonymity situation. She turns what for some is quite burdensome into a source of strength and reward for herself, her students and others. At least three things seem to be central to achieving this.

First, prior to moving to Wilcannia Donnelley 'did her homework'. She prepared herself as best she could and yes, she had strong and reliable support doing this. As well, she made the decision to give Wilcannia a go so personal agency and choice were in the mix from the start of her journey.

Second, she entered into the community with a sense of expectation that things would likely be very different from home- put another way, she was open (though at times apprehensive) to change. Linked with this was a determination not to be drawn into a deficit headset about education in rural and remote areas. New sights, sounds, experiences- including an encounter with a very big kangaroo in her back yard- helped her to begin to make sense of where she was and why she had come- to try something very different; to discover what it might mean to be a teacher on Country far from the supports of the familiar and the taken for granted.

Third, the primacy and importance of relationships- with students, parents, families, colleagues, the community as well as the natural world beauty of Wilcannia and surrounds- are key to making a success of the transition. And so too is the preparedness, indeed embrace by Donnelley of the culture and heritage of the many traditional owners of the land and the places and practices they cherish and nurture. 'Wilcannia is full of opportunities to learn if your heart is open to listening… The remoteness and context of our school open(s) the doorway… *This is why I moved here*, I thought to myself….*You can't have this experience in the city*'. 'Time is currency in relationships… We learn through stories. If you don't stop to listen to people, you'll miss out on the most amazing opportunities'.

Donnelley relates that critical to her becoming and then being a teacher in Wilcannia was understanding in a visceral way some of the seminal events and experiences that make a place the place it is. A visit to the local cemetery advised and encouraged by a highly respected and much loved Elder proved to be an important milestone for her. It provided insights that otherwise would have remained hidden. For all teachers and especially country teachers, what has happened outside the school gate prior to their arrival as well as what continues to happen are powerful resources to shape teaching and learning, to locate one in place while also maintaining sufficient distancing to bring a professional perspective to bear on issues and relationships.

While the overall message and voice of Donnelley's memoir is optimistic and hope-*full,* the message is also firmly grounded in the day to pragmatics and realities of teaching and being a teacher in a context where the boundary between being on duty and off duty is often blurred. As she writes, 'I have no doubt my endless positivity must be frustrating for some people… I don't ignore the dark parts, but I refuse to allow them to take over'.

The memoir is an important first hand account of one teacher's transition from an inner city comfortable life and career to an outback town where challenges abounded (still do) and because of them, opened genuinely new, exciting and hugely rewarding personal and professional experiences.

The memoir needs to be on all undergraduate teaching degree reading lists.