

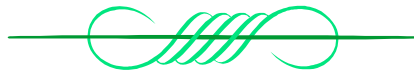
AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Graduate Teachers in Rural and Remote SA Schools - "A Year of Firsts"

A report on research conducted in 2001 by Dr Carolyn Mathews, Ms Leanne Carr and Ms Mary Hudson for the South Australian Chapter of the Australian College of Education.

This research was sponsored by:

- Shirley Jones, Associate member of the Australian College of Education,
- Catholic Education - SA, and
- The South Australian Department for Education, Training & Employment



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores the experiences of recent teaching graduates in rural and remote schools in South Australia, and identifies factors which facilitate or impede their transition and retention in rural areas. Whilst the intention of the study was to focus on both rural and remote settings, in reality only one teacher in the study is in a remote setting as defined by the Department for Education, Training & Employment (DETE). However the word 'remote' remains in the title because as the study demonstrates, remoteness reflects more than a physical location.

Data in the report were drawn from a study conducted with teacher graduates employed in rural Catholic Education and DETE schools in 2000 and 2001. 57 teachers were included in the study.

The study conducted a survey which included qualitative and quantitative data. The survey sought to identify factors relating to living and teaching in rural and remote communities. Data collected were analysed using propositional analysis and are reported as frequencies. A number of cross correlations were also conducted.

When respondents were asked about what attracted them to teach in rural areas, the most frequent responses were permanency of the position, availability of jobs and an attractive lifestyle. The major concern was isolation, in all its forms including distance from family and friends, professional isolation and lack of usual community services. Isolation was also a factor for professional development (PD). Many respondents commented that PD was generally available only in Adelaide, and that this was often impossible due to long travelling times and high travel costs.

With regards to living in a rural community, respondents commented on the relaxed environment, the opportunities for sporting and community involvement, closer relationships with people, smaller class sizes, and fewer behaviour management issues. In contrast, respondents remarked on the lack of privacy, loneliness and homesickness, and fewer teaching resources. Also, the costs involved in relocating to a country area and the difficulties in finding suitable accommodation had caused severe financial hardship for some of these new graduates.

The study concludes that a range of factors facilitate or impede the transition and retention of graduates in rural communities. The first of these is preparation for rural life; certainly those teachers who were unaware of the financial implications associated with relocating suffered severe financial hardship at the beginning of their rural experience, which impacted on their initial success. University teacher education programs can play a key role in preparing teachers for life and work in rural communities.

Induction programs varied across schools, from none to extensive. Some included teacher release, visits to other schools and classrooms, and the allocation of "buddy teachers". There is a clear indication from the responses of the collegiate nature of teaching, and that the respondents valued the input of other teachers.

It became clear from the responses that working in a rural school enabled these new teachers to experience success in their teaching very early in their career.

Respondents indicated the value of smaller classes and motivated students, and described their success in developing positive teacher/student relationships and effective behaviour management patterns.

In addition to their professional skills, the graduates in the study brought a wide range of other skills to the community. However, whilst the communities were generally described as friendly, it was evident that they often took the passive role of observer rather than actively supporting these newcomers. A more active involvement by community members could help to reduce the isolation and homesickness experienced by many of the teachers in the study.

The report makes ten recommendations. These are:

1. Promotion Rural teaching must be realistically promoted to student teachers. This should occur throughout their teaching course and not just at the end. Increased opportunities need to be made available to rural students who wish to enter teaching as a career.
2. Preparation Preparation programs play an important role in assisting the transition to rural settings. University programs which are specifically designed to prepare graduates for living and working in rural areas need to be strongly promoted to those teachers who have never lived in rural communities and who intend to apply to teach in rural and remote Australia. These programs need to include opportunities for extended rural practica and should involve a collaboration of universities, employers and members of rural communities. Preparation programs increase enthusiasm for teaching in rural locations.
3. Recruitment Appointments to rural schools must be made in a timely fashion. The timing of appointments plays a crucial role in enabling new teachers to prepare physically and psychologically for relocation to a different community. Wherever possible, graduates should be given a choice of rural school and employment opportunities need to be considered for partners.
4. Financial supports and incentives A range of financial supports and incentives need to be offered. They need to be perceived as assisting new teachers rather than compensating them. As well as salary incentives, consideration should be given to contributing to HECS liabilities.

5. Relocation support
Funds need to be provided upfront to assist with relocation expenses and to enable visits to the rural location to select suitable accommodation. The rural school and community need to collaborate to develop a database of accommodation options which can be made available, preferably online, to assist new teachers to select suitable accommodation.
6. Career incentives
Career pathways need to be developed to assist teachers to assess promotion opportunities available through a commitment to rural teaching. Consideration should be given to the length of terms of employment.
7. Induction
Induction practices need to occur on a number of fronts and should be ongoing rather than single events. Induction practices need to contain organisational, school, personal and community elements.
8. Professional support
Beginning teachers need access to professional development, collegiate support, leadership support, and teaching resources including IT resources.
9. Personal support
Pastoral care programs need to be organised by schools in collaboration with the community to ensure that graduate teachers who may be away from home for the first time are supported. This could include personal access to the internet and email, as well as the establishment of "buddy teachers".
10. Community involvement
The community needs to be a responsible partner in all aspects of preparation for rural teaching, including assisting with securing accommodation for teachers in rural areas, introducing new teachers to rural communities, and offering personal support and encouragement to live and work in rural communities.

INTRODUCTION

In March 2001, the South Australian Chapter of the Australian College of Education presented the biennial AW Jones Lecture. Mr Chris Sidoti who was Australian Human Rights Commissioner from 1995 to 2000 presented the lecture. His paper, titled *Another Chance for Rural Education? A Human Rights Perspective*, laid down a challenge to educators to take up the issue of education in rural and remote Australia. He emphasised particularly the crucial role that teachers play in rural communities and suggested that there is a need to develop more deeply an understanding of the needs of teachers in rural Australia.

The South Australian Chapter of the Australian College of Education (ACE: SA) took up the challenge presented by Chris Sidoti, and in April 2001 initiated a research project specifically focusing on the experience of early career teachers appointed to rural and remote schools in South Australia. ACE: SA was supported with funds from Catholic Education and the Department for Education, Training & Employment (DETE) to conduct this research. This reflects an increasing desire on the part of teacher employers to attract and retain teachers in rural areas. Teacher employers agree that if employment and recruiting prospects in South Australian rural schools are to improve, there needs to be an increased understanding of the range of issues facing new graduates who accept positions in rural and remote schools.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This research aims to provide a snapshot of recent teacher graduates' experiences in rural and remote locations of South Australia, with a view to identifying the factors which facilitate or impede the transition and retention of recent graduates in these locations.

Catholic Education SA currently has 21 country schools in South Australia. During 2001, 14 country schools employed 51 teachers (17 secondary, 34 primary) with 0 to 2 years teaching experience. Of these, 29 teachers were first year graduates (8 secondary, 21 primary).

DETE in 2001 appointed 47 graduates to permanent positions in rural schools, 43 to temporary contracts of at least 1 year, and 139 to temporary contracts of less than 1 year. The graduates who were appointed in term 1, 2001 are included in this research.

An outcome of the research is a series of recommendations to the key stakeholders.

OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Information that relates specifically to graduate teachers in rural and remote Australia is mainly integrated into a range of general literature relating to rural education. This includes publications addressing a range of issues associated with indigenous education (Unicorn Dec 1999 & March 2001) as well as literature reporting the experience of practitioners from other professions who live and work in rural Australia (Lonne & Cheers 1999). Comprehensive material relating to rural education is contained in the conference proceedings of the Country Education Project (1998). These references address a range of themes associated with rural education and cover many issues relevant to beginning teachers in rural schools. Of particular interest regarding the role of information technologies, is the paper by Dellit (1998) who states that lack of access to IT resources and a lack of confidence to utilise IT resources are major issues for rural Australia.

It is beyond the scope of this report to review this wide-ranging literature. Rather, this overview provides a brief review of Australian studies that have specifically focused on teaching graduates appointed to rural and remote Australia.

An evaluation of the Rural Professional Education Program -(RPEP) (Lloyd & Mathews 1998) clearly identified the need to further understand factors which teaching professionals face in rural and remote environments. In this research, teacher education students, whilst expressing enthusiasm for future employment in rural areas, indicated a number of concerns associated with living and working in rural locations.

The RPEP (Lloyd & Mathews 1998) proposed a model that addresses the professional development needs of teachers in rural communities whilst providing opportunities for student teachers to experience teaching and living in rural locations. Community involvement is also emphasised in this report which offers a number of conclusions pertinent to teacher educators preparing teachers for careers in rural settings.

The National Inquiry into Rural & Remote Education (Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Report May 2000) stated that there was a need to “enhance the desirability of country postings.” It also noted that staffing schools, especially with experienced educators, proved difficult and “that rural and remote school postings can exact substantial personal, professional and financial costs.” These were related to poor housing, isolation from family and friends and the inaccessibility of professional development (PD) opportunities. The HREOC Report (2000) clearly identified difficulties associated with access to PD and the provision of funding for PD that reflects real costs.

Higgins (1995) has provided specific direction for this research. The report titled *Rural Difference: A Challenge for Beginning Teachers* provides an extensive study of beginning teachers appointed to rural schools in Queensland and New South Wales. These teachers identify a range of problems associated with isolation, housing and access to professional development. In addition, they identify increased opportunities to develop teaching skills in rural schools and for career enhancement.

RESEARCH PLAN

Research design

Individual interviews were conducted with four recent teacher graduates focusing on their experiences during their first year of teaching in a rural school. This information shaped the development of a questionnaire. The questionnaire was trialled with a small sample of teachers prior to wider distribution. Their responses assisted in the development of the final questionnaire which includes quantitative and qualitative data (see Appendix 1).

Data collection

Teachers included in the survey consisted of those who graduated in 1999 or 2000 and had been employed by either Catholic Education or DETE in rural and remote schools in year 2000 or in term 1, 2001.

A questionnaire was posted to 150 recent teacher graduates assigned to rural and remote schools. Of these, 47 were teachers employed in Catholic Education and 103 were teachers employed by DETE. Questionnaires were anonymous.

Data collation & analysis

57 responses were returned from the teachers who were surveyed indicating a response rate of 38%.

Data were collated under the following headings:

- demographics
- teaching in a rural community
- living in a rural community
- suggestions to further enhance living and teaching in a rural community
- further comments

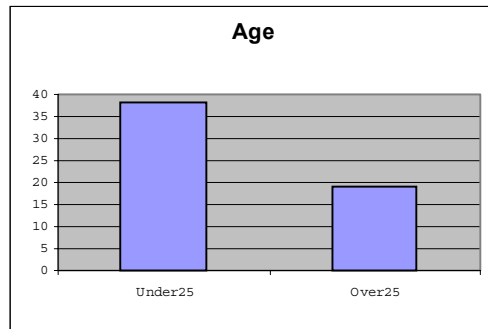
Data were analysed using propositional analysis reporting propositions as they arise from the data. Propositions are reported as frequencies.

Where data have allowed, raw data are reported as percentages. All responses are reported.

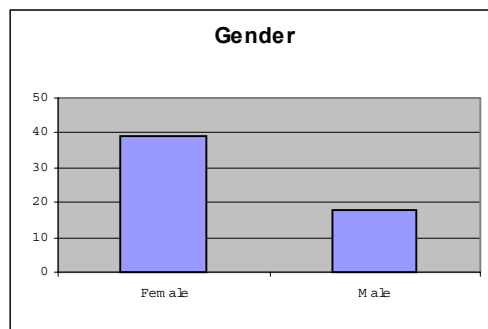
OUTCOMES OF THE RESEARCH

Demographics

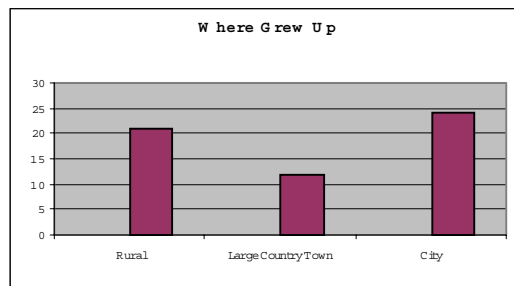
Age:
 Under 25 38
 Over 25 19
 57



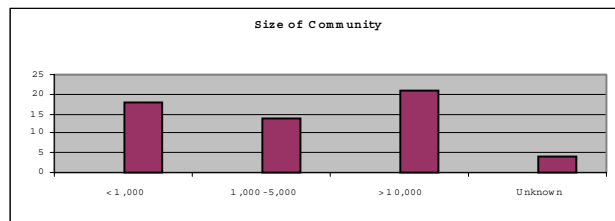
Gender:
 Female 39
 Male 18
 57



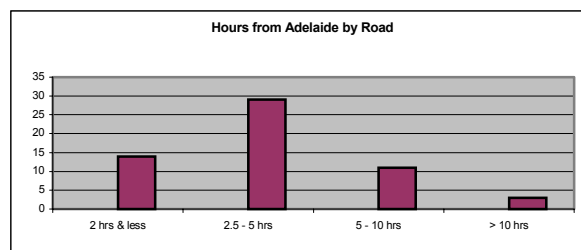
Where grew up:
 Rural 21
 Large country town 12
 City 24
 57



Size of community:
 < 1 000 18
 1 000 - 5 000 14
 > 10 000 21
 Unknown 4
 57



Hours from Adelaide
 by road:
 2 hours or less 14
 2½ - 5 hours 29
 5 - 10 hours 11
 > 10 hours 3
 57



Respondents were asked to indicate any community/sporting/church involvement that they had had in the past 5 years.

81% of respondents indicated that they were currently or had recently been involved as players in sports teams. These included local sports clubs and church sports teams. 19% indicated involvement in a range of community activities including Rotoract, life-saving, scouting, musical and theatre groups, martial arts and gymnastics. 14% indicated church involvement including church youth groups and liturgy activities. Only 5% of respondents indicated that they had had no community, sporting or church involvement.

Respondents were asked to indicate awards other than academic awards that they had completed.

81% of respondents indicated that they had completed a first-aid certificate. 39% indicated awards associated with sport, especially coaching awards. 11% indicated mandatory reporting. 3.5% indicated awards associated with employment including mechanics training, and a bar and waiting course. Only 7% of respondents indicated that they had completed no other awards.

Respondents were asked to describe any preparation that they had undertaken for rural teaching whilst at university.

56% of respondents indicated that they had undertaken no preparation at university. 44% indicated that they had been involved in some form of preparation for rural teaching.

There were 2 subjects identified that students could have undertaken. These were **Teaching in Rural and Remote Communities** and **Cross Cultural Perspectives**. Both these subjects included practicum components of between 2 and 8 weeks. One subject offered students an opportunity of a practicum in Anangu and Pitjantjatjara settings. A number of respondents indicated practicum involvement not related to a specific subject. One respondent indicated one school visit as preparation and another indicated one session at Careers Week as her preparation. A number of comments were received from those who received no preparation indicating that they had requested rural practica but that their requests were not supported due to lack of staff for supervision.

Respondents were asked to indicate the major community enterprise in their location.

54% of responses indicated that primary industries associated with agriculture and fishing were the main enterprises associated with their community. 5% indicated mining activity, with 19% indicating industries associated with smelting, timber mills and meat works. Whilst only 10% indicated tourism as the major community enterprise, a number of responses indicated that tourism is increasing as an enterprise in the community. One response identified the community as an Aboriginal community reliant upon arts and craft as the major community enterprise.

Teaching in a rural community

Respondents indicated the length of time that they had been in their current position, with 58% in their current position for 6 months or less, 12% in their current position for 1 year, 14% for 18 months and 16% for up to 2 years.

Respondents were asked to indicate teaching positions that they had held since graduating.

47% indicated that this was their first appointment. 16% had undertaken TRT before their current position. 10% had had a 1 term contract prior to this position and those remaining had undertaken 1 year contracts, with two teaching in London before taking up their current positions.

A large number of responses were received when respondents were asked to indicate what it was that attracted them initially to teach in a rural school.

Responses, in order of frequency, indicated that permanency of the position was the predominant attraction. This was followed by the fact that a job was available, in contrast to the city where there were no available teaching positions. Lifestyle was indicated as just slightly less attractive than job availability, with fishing, fresh air, community involvement and space identified as lifestyle issues. A lesser number of respondents identified that full-time teaching, as opposed to part-time, was offered in the country as well as opportunities to teach preferred subject areas and to advance in their career. A small number of responses indicated that they had grown up in the country and/or still lived in a country town and were pleased to be "back home". A very small number of respondents indicated that they were seeking adventure and that teaching in the country offered them this opportunity.

Many responses were received in relation to the question asking respondents to indicate concerns that they had in taking up their current position.

By far the largest number of responses indicated that their greatest concern was related to the distance from family and friends. Approximately half of the teachers were leaving home for the first time. They indicated concern about physical isolation including isolation from community resources such as banks, doctors and vets. A significant number indicated problems associated with relocation costs as well as lack of suitable housing, with one teacher travelling 75km each way each day due to lack of housing.

A few responses indicated initial concerns associated with actual teaching. For example, there were concerns about professional isolation, caused by being the only teacher in the school with a particular subject specialisation, and with lack of resources and professional support.

Married teachers expressed concern that there was no work available for their partners in rural areas. A small number of respondents indicated that their initial concern related to the fact that they had never visited the town and knew nothing about the community before their arrival. A smaller number indicated that they had no initial concerns associated with their appointment.

Respondents were asked to describe their induction experiences.

91% of responses described a wide range of approaches to induction from extensive induction processes to what could be considered as minimal induction. 19% of responses reported a school induction which focused on school policies, especially occupational health and safety. 10% of responses indicated an induction consisting of a “welcome day” before the start of teaching, and a similar number described a series of after-school meetings including tours, information and introduction to resources. In addition a similar number of respondents received only a school handbook for induction. 9% of respondents indicated that they did not have any induction at all. A small number of respondents described comprehensive induction practices, including pairing with “buddy teachers”, prior visits due to early notification of placements, extensive tours of the school and community, regular meetings with the principal, and organised teacher seminars prior to placement, of at least 1 week duration.

When asked who provided the most support, respondents predominantly nominated other teachers as providing their greatest support. In particular they mentioned “buddy teachers” as well as the support of other new teachers. Principals and deputy principals were nominated as providing support and “all staff” were generally identified. A brief mention was given to family members who provided support.

Respondents were asked to indicate what was currently going well in their teaching.

The responses predominantly indicated an enthusiasm for teaching and a clear majority indicated that student/teacher relationships were going well. A significant number of responses indicated that “everything” was going well and slightly less indicated that behaviour management was going well. A similar number indicated that planning, teaching, student motivation and enthusiasm, as well as student progress, were going well assisted by small class sizes. There was significant mention of increases in personal confidence and satisfaction as well as enjoyment of teaching. Respondents also indicated to a lesser degree that parent and community relations were going well. In addition, there were individual examples of the success in identifying team teaching with Aboriginal teachers and the successful integration of a child with special needs.

Respondents also identified difficulties that they were currently experiencing in their teaching.

Time management was indicated more often than any other issue (16%). In addition, behaviour management was identified, specifically focusing on yrs 6/7 and yr 11 boys whom respondents said lacked commitment and were difficult to motivate.

Many responses indicated a lack of resources as creating problems. These included difficulty in finding resources suitable to the context in which they were teaching, lack of funding to purchase much needed resources, and lack of knowledge in knowing what texts to order for the following year and in dealing with students with special needs, including transient students. A few responses focused on the professional isolation of being the only teacher in a faculty. Many individual responses were received indicating problems associated with personal organisation including time management, marking of students’ work (“I’m always taking work

home”) as well as one’s own high expectations. 7% of responses indicated that they were having no difficulties at all.

Respondents were asked to comment on their access to professional development (PD).

26% of responses stated that they did not have adequate PD and 19% indicated that they did have adequate PD. The remaining responses were inconclusive. The responses that indicated inadequate PD focused on Adelaide as the centre of PD provision and expressed extreme frustration at not being able to access PD programs due to travelling time and cost.

“How can we be expected to constantly go to Adelaide for night courses!”

“Most courses are expensive and require upward of 8 hours travel.”

The responses that indicated adequate PD focused on PD provision within the school or in local hub groups.

“I am involved with the technology teachers association and the local hub group of other tech teachers in the area.”

These responses indicated that PD can be provided by other teachers in the school or in nearby schools. One example described a PD program in the South East/Murray Lands which was extensive and ongoing, and met the needs of teachers in that broad area.

Other responses covered a range of problems associated with whole-school PD which did not meet the needs of individual teachers, of professional isolation relating to specific subject areas, “maths development is hard to get” and of the need for class relief and financial support to attend PD offered in Adelaide.

Respondents were asked what could enhance their PD.

There was a general appeal from all respondents, with one exception, for more PD especially in specific subject areas. Many responses focused on the need for more time and funding, with the aim of enabling teachers to attend PD programs in Adelaide. A similar number of responses suggested that PD should be held in the local area with regional conferences and workshops. Every region was identified as requesting PD in their region.

“How about having presentations in the bush and having others travel!”

A number of interesting suggestions were received regarding PD. These included the request for time to be made available for visits to other schools to observe more experienced teachers in specific subject areas or year levels. In addition, it was suggested that the universities continue to work with new teachers in their first year of teaching, in a mentoring/PD capacity. As well, there was a clear indication that technology could assist in meeting teachers’ PD needs. It was suggested that if all teachers received training in the use of internet technologies and if equipment in schools were upgraded, then online PD could be provided and internet chat rooms could support the needs of new teachers. One response indicated that video

technology was useful but that it often did not work and this served to increase teachers' frustration.

Living in a rural community

The accommodation arrangements for the teachers in the study were as follows:

- 36 were living independently
- 18 were living in share situations
- 3 were boarding

Respondents were asked what they enjoyed about living in a rural community.

The most frequent response by far indicated that what they most enjoyed were the friendly and caring people, including the kids. The lifestyle was also a key factor, with respondents commenting that the lifestyle was relaxed and that everything was nearby.

“There is a closeness and sense of being – people genuinely care about you.”

Closely related were a number of responses indicating that rural life offers a stress-free and peaceful environment where peace and quiet are valued. A series of responses acknowledged opportunities for involvement in sport and the socialisation associated with sport. A similar number of responses identified the value of community spirit and community activities. Many responses indicated the benefits of little pollution and reduced traffic, and acknowledged the beauty of rural environments. Three responses stated that there was nothing to enjoy about rural environments because they were too claustrophobic.

Respondents were asked what they enjoyed about teaching in a rural community.

By far the most frequent responses focused on the students, who were described as friendly, respectful and willing to learn. In addition most responses indicated that compared with previous teaching experiences in urban schools, respondents found it easier to develop good relationships with students in rural schools; smaller class sizes provided better opportunities to get to know students and to minimise behaviour management problems.

“The children seem well rounded and more aware of life than city kids – they have a broader picture of the world and are a joy to teach.”

A large number of responses indicated the benefits of closer relationships with staff, students, parents and the community due to smaller, more intimate schools with significant parent involvement. A few responses identified younger staff as an asset, and a guaranteed permanent position assisted them to feel secure in their teaching.

Respondents were asked to describe the difficulties of living in a rural community.

The most frequent response focused on issues associated with lack of privacy. Respondents referred to the difficulties caused by no clear differentiation between personal and professional life.

“It’s hard to get away from people you know, especially the kids – you go to the pub – there are kids there – you go to the movies – there are kids there. The kids you teach are everywhere!”

“Everyone knows your business. It’s sometimes hard to get away from the students because you see them down the street. You are a teacher all the time, even out of school. You need to watch what you do and say.”

An equally frequent response focused on issues associated with isolation. Many responses indicated loneliness and homesickness with respondents stating that it was difficult being away from the support of family and friends. Closely associated with this was a sense of being unable to discuss problems due to a lack of close friends. This was perceived as causing stress.

“I can’t just go out and have a coffee and talk things over.”

A number of responses dealt with lack of availability of teaching resources, and lack of community resources that support teaching eg lack of FAYS and special supports for students with special needs and lack of medical services. Also referred to were the lack of usual community services including lack of shopping facilities, medical services and ATMs. Many responses referred to additional expenses incurred through living in a rural community. These included fuel costs, telephone costs, high rents and high costs associated with setting up a house. There were continual references to a lack of opportunity to have fun, to find recreational activities outside sport or to go somewhere ‘just for a break.’

“Being young, it is hard to still ‘have a good time’ without creating the wrong impression.”

A few comments referred to the difficulty of travelling to Adelaide every weekend to maintain relationships. In addition a couple of comments identified a lack of cultural diversity and lateral thinking in “very set communities”.

Respondents commented on whether they were well prepared for living in a rural community.

34 responses (59%) stated that they were well prepared for living in a rural community. Of these responses, 8 provided no explanation, 2 said that the country was their choice and 22 (39%) explained that they were from the country. However of these 22 responses, 4 responses indicated that their current rural experience was different from their previous rural experience.

“I grew up in a very small country town so I was prepared for the closeness, but not for the attitudes of a mining town – a rural agricultural and a mining town are very different.”

“I grew up in a rural community so I believed I was well prepared. But living in a remote and isolated area is different – you can’t really prepare for this.”

12 responses (21%) indicated that they were reasonably well prepared for living in a rural community. There were a range of reasons with some stating that they “knew it would be tough”, that they were well prepared with household items, and that the induction courses and field trips “helped a lot”.

11 responses (19%) indicated that they were not well prepared. Some indicated that they had no experience of rural communities and others indicated that they were not financially prepared.

“I was not very prepared. It is scary especially moving away from home and being a beginning teacher.”

“I slept in a swag for the first week of school!! - due to delayed removal organisation.”

When asked about issues faced when relocating, the most frequent responses related to accommodation and financial difficulties.

With regards to accommodation, most comments were associated with difficulty in finding suitable accommodation, or in fact finding any at all. There were difficulties associated with not seeing accommodation until the last minute, and with not knowing what was provided as part of the accommodation.

Financial issues were severe; in some cases there was a significant period of time where respondents dealt with no income, payment of two leases and relocation costs.

“Youth Allowance stopped at end of November when university finished but I couldn’t receive any other assistance because I had a job (which didn’t start until February!). No money for 2 months when paying rent in advance, bond, moving - nightmare!! Didn’t eat for the first week I was teaching, just lived off a loaf of bread.”

“Had no money coming straight from university - once back rent was taken from my first pay, I was left with \$23 for 2 weeks until my next pay.”

“I had no money after 4 years of university - reimbursements are great but where do you get the money in the first place??”

A number of comments indicated that the short notice of the appointment created a very stressful time, also associated with lack of funds.

“(There was) very little time between notification of position and relocation - had to pay for cancelling a lease and paying rent in 2 places until new tenant moved in.”

One comment raised issues associated with contract appointment in rural areas and the additional upheaval associated with relocation after one year or less. A few comments were related to personal issues associated with leaving family and friends, concerns about making new friends and issues associated with lack of childcare.

Respondents were asked to describe financial liabilities incurred as a result of living in a rural location.

The majority of responses identified costs associated with travel, especially petrol, as their greatest financial liability. These costs were related to returning to Adelaide to visit family and to attend professional development activities. Travel costs were also associated with shopping and attending sporting activities.

“Petrol is \$1.25 - \$1.46/litre and with a 400km trip to do the shopping, that hurts.”

High costs also applied to food, telephone and removal expenses. Accommodation costs were reported as high, with rents considered to be unreasonable in many cases. Many respondents had taken loans, particularly for the purchase of a reliable car, but also to cover removal expenses and costs associated with setting up house for the first time.

A number of respondents suggested that the location allowance and the isolation allowance were not sufficient, and Catholic teachers complained that they do not receive the allowances that DETE teachers receive.

“The location allowance of \$112.00 per fortnight did not even cover the travel to and from school (let alone wear and tear): 50 km to school from town = 100km/day x 10 days = 1,000km/fortnight.”

Respondents were then asked what would enhance their preparation for living and working in a rural community.

By far the most frequent response focused on university preparation, with prac teaching receiving the most attention. Most respondents suggested that a country prac teaching requirement of at least 8 weeks would enable students to experience teaching and living in a rural community. Some suggested that country teaching should be compulsory for all students as many students do not realise the benefits of country life. A number of respondents indicated that there are difficulties for students in undertaking prac teaching in rural settings since they have jobs in the city on which they rely for support. They suggested that students would need to be paid to undertake prac teaching in rural areas.

Many respondents said that it would be beneficial to have teachers and school leaders from rural areas visit the university and talk realistically about rural life.

A large number of responses indicated that appointments should be made early enough to enable visits prior to the start of teaching, preferably by December. A similar number of responses indicated that accommodation is far from satisfactory and that schools should not offer appointments if accommodation is not available. There were suggestions that schools should develop inventories of suitable accommodation, as it is very hard to make decisions from Adelaide about accommodation, sight unseen.

A few comments indicated that a particular social skills are necessary for successful rural life. These include self-sufficiency and social skills relating to a life centred on sport and drinking.

Suggestions to further enhance living and teaching in a rural community

Respondents were asked to identify what needs to be done to attract and retain graduating teachers in rural schools.

By far the most frequent responses noted that higher salary and permanent positions are very attractive incentives. There were many comments relating to accommodation with respondents requesting “decent housing” and “realistic rents”.

Respondents suggested a range of subsidies including subsidised removal expenses, subsidies for petrol (especially when required to travel long distances from accommodation to school), and subsidies for travel to professional development activities. Catholic teachers stated clearly that they should be entitled to the same benefits as DETE teachers in terms of salary incentives and service points.

“Need more incentives in the Catholic system – DETE gives an extra \$6,000 a year - we get nothing extra.”

A further suggestion from a number of respondents was the payment of HECS fees as an incentive for graduates to teach in the country.

There were a number of responses which suggested that a “realistic” promotion of country teaching is needed. This included promoting the positives of small classes and a great lifestyle as well as career benefits.

“I think we need to have country recruiters – teachers who come to university and tell people how great it is.”

“Get over the myth that the country is the end of the earth and there is no one living there and nothing to do. Tell them that it is a great experience.”

In addition, it was stated that potential teachers should be told of the difficulties associated with rural living. In particular it was suggested that there should be a recognition that teachers who are appointed to very isolated areas will not want to stay forever. It was suggested that their contracts should be no more than 3 years and that this should be considered to be a valuable contribution and should be rewarded with a city school of choice at the end of this period.

A number of comments suggested that there should be extra encouragement for country people to become teachers.

“Students who come from the country and who enjoy living in the country should be encouraged to become teachers. Teachers from the city tend to find it boring in the country.”

A suggestion was also made that a university teaching program should be run in the country.

“Whyalla should run a teaching degree – educate country people who will stay because family is here.”

Early notification of rural teaching positions was seen as a specific incentive. A number of comments from DETE teachers suggested that rural positions are notified far too late and that others would apply if there were earlier notification of the specific schools that have vacancies.

“Graduates are offered private school jobs in June, July and August and take them just for security.”

Not all respondents saw permanency as a strong incentive. A couple of respondents saw flexibility of appointments as assisting new teachers who come to the country.

“Start with one year contracts with easy transitions to longer term contracts or permanent positions. For example, I appreciate permanency, however it is not always the best situation - therefore flexibility of choice for new teachers is essential.”

A few responses indicated that there are a range of disincentives which should be addressed. These included little access to professional development which was seen as crucial in the early stage of teaching, lack of temporary relief teachers (TRTs) leading to continual doubling of classes, and lack of Non Instructional Time enabling teachers to prepare lessons.

A few responses stated that university courses should contain compulsory rural teaching components and realistic rather than romantic portrayals of rural life.

Further comments

Respondents were asked if they wished to provide any other comments.

Just under half used this opportunity to reiterate issues that were important to them. The most frequent responses dealt with the need for support, most commonly the need for support in schools from teachers and especially school leaders.

DETE was identified as needing to offer more support in the form of earlier notification of positions, the provision of TRTs in rural schools, and well organised release time (rather than release time which is only provided when the principal has time).

"I love my teaching but have become disheartened due to lack of department support."

"The lack of support has led to my considering not taking a teaching role again, city or country."

The issue of personal support was addressed by a couple of respondents who suggested that support can be provided by sending couples to remote locations.

"My husband and I are a great support to each other. Sending couples or friends to remote locations will help to keep them there as they have ongoing support."

However, other responses suggested that it is very difficult for couples as there is often no employment for the non-teaching partner.

A number of responses indicated the need for better preparation, particularly on the part of universities, with the need for rural prac teaching seen as essential.

"Going to the country is a big step for people who have not experienced country life so opportunities need to be created to make this step smaller."

A number of responses reiterated the need for informal PD support.

"Teachers who are moving to the country need to create a circle of other teachers so that they can bounce off ideas, talk and reflect."

A few responses indicated that most things are going well but...

"I have had some fun - met a lot of people and made a lot of friends - however, it wasn't easy and many times I was ready to pack and go back home to Adelaide."

The most pertinent response indicated the context within which this study has occurred.

"This has been a year of firsts for me, so it is hard to segregate the factors of influence. I have appreciated the sense of responsibility that moving has inculcated in me, but for many that might be a de-motivating factor rather than a positive one."

Cross correlations

A number of cross correlations of the data were conducted. These focused on:

- the relationships between growing up in a rural community, engagement in university rural preparation programs and the extent of preparedness for living in a rural community,
- the relationship between size of the current community and level of satisfaction, and
- the relationship between preparedness and enthusiasm for teaching and living in a rural community.

Of the 57 respondents, 31 grew up in rural locations in Australia. All of these stated that they were well prepared for living in a rural community. Of the 31, 15 completed some form of university preparation and 16 had no university preparation. These data suggest that a strong correlation is found between growing up in a rural community and future living in a rural community, and that university preparation programs do not add significantly to the preparation of these beginning teachers.

Of the 57 respondents, 26 grew up in an Australian capital city. 3 of these 26 stated that they were well prepared for living in a rural community; these 3 had participated in university preparation courses. 12 stated that they were reasonably prepared, 5 of these 12 had participated in the university preparation course, with 7 having done no university preparation. 11 of the 26 who grew up in a capital city said they were not well prepared. Of these 11, 3 had participated in university preparation and 8 had no university preparation. It was also evident in the data that those who grew up in the city and who had not undertaken university rural preparation experienced severe disjuncture between what they perceived life in a rural community to be and what it actually was.

These data suggest that there is a strong correlation between university preparation for teachers who have not grown up in a rural community and successful preparation for living in a rural community in the future.

The cross correlation conducted between community size and general satisfaction showed no differences between community size and satisfaction.

The cross correlation conducted between preparedness and expressions of enthusiasm indicated that those who were best prepared, ie either they had grown up in a rural community or had undertaken the university preparation program, were more enthusiastic about teaching in a rural community and were more likely to be looking for change and adventure.

CONCLUSIONS

Preparation for involvement in rural community life

The teachers in the study have a range of skills which equip them well for involvement in rural community life. In particular they bring a range of sporting and coaching skills that are clearly valued by a rural community. Many have received additional training or recognition for their skills.

It is interesting that in describing the community, a number of responses indicated that tourism is beginning to emerge as a community enterprise. This may offer an opportunity for the broadening of a community's image and for developing a broader range of cultural pursuits. Some teachers suggested that currently there are limited opportunities for their theatrical and musical skills.

The teachers in the study were clearly not aware of the financial implications associated with moving to a rural community. In some ways this is associated with career change as they move from being students into a work environment. However, it is evident that a majority of these teachers experienced severe financial hardship and were not prepared for this. In some cases, this had a major effect on the initial success of their new role.

The role of university teacher education programs in preparation for teaching in rural communities

Whilst many students have the option to undertake preparation for teaching in rural communities, it seems that these opportunities are not available to all students. Some teachers in the study indicated annoyance that they were denied these opportunities due mainly to work or sporting commitments in the city, lack of staff to supervise their rural placement, or lack of opportunity for a placement of their own choice.

The university programs that were most valued and offered the most substantial preparation were those that included opportunities for extended rural practica as part of a structured program.

There is clear evidence that university programs that prepare teachers for rural teaching enable those teachers who have grown up in the city, and as such have not been exposed to rural living, to prepare more successfully for life in a rural community. As well, teachers who have grown up in a rural community benefit from experiencing a community other than their own.

Induction

There is clear evidence of a range of induction practices which differ between schools. Induction programs range from none to extended programs lasting across 2 terms. These programs may include teacher release, visits to other schools and classrooms, as well as the allocation of "buddy teachers". Induction resources may consist only of a school information book or may extend to an ongoing system of support provided by other teachers and/or the school principal. Responses from teachers in Catholic schools indicated that there is a greater emphasis on induction planned at the organisational level, with a series of seminars and school visits prior to placement.

The issue of induction highlights organisational issues associated with the time when recruitment and appointment occur. It appears that recruitment in the Catholic sector occurs earlier, enabling induction processes to be designed on an organisational basis as well as at the school level.

At the school level, induction appears to be ad hoc and at the discretion of the school. There are clear indications that some schools have very well designed, ongoing programs which aim to induct new teachers into all professional aspects of teaching and learning. However, there are equally clear indications that in other schools, induction practices consist of supplying very basic information after which the new teacher is on their own.

There is also evidence that new teachers may not be aware of their industrial rights especially as they apply to release time. This information should be included in an induction program.

There was only brief mention of the involvement of the community in induction and this consisted of tours of the locality provided by the school, rather than any form of engagement with the community.

Collegiate support

There is a clear indication in the study of the collegiate nature of teaching and the willingness of teachers in rural schools to support their new colleagues on an informal basis. The graduates in the study clearly appreciated the input of other teachers in their school who were seen as very valuable in supporting their teaching and classroom management.

Where collegiate support is formalised as in a 'buddy system' there is clear indication that induction is very successful.

Opportunities to experience success as a beginning teacher

It is clear from the data that for the teachers in this study, the experience of teaching in rural schools had enabled them to experience success as a teacher. Teachers clearly described their success in developing positive student/teacher relationships flowing on to effective behaviour management. In particular, they highlighted the value of smaller classes and more motivated students which had enabled them to experience teaching success and clear evidence of student progress.

Many of these responses can be expected of any teacher early in their career and may not be related specifically to teaching in a rural area. However, there were clear indications that lack of success is related to difficult access to resources as well as professional isolation associated with being the only teacher in a specialised area. These issues can be attributed specifically to their experience of teaching in a rural school

Professional development

It appears that traditional PD models are predominant in the minds of these new teachers. These teachers focus on PD being provided by someone else, as is the PD tradition. The major problem here is that most PD is offered in Adelaide and rural teachers are prevented from attending by time and funds. Only a few responses indicated that internet technologies offer teachers the possibility of undertaking PD based on their specific needs. These teachers were quick to point out that this required sufficient infrastructure in the school. A shift of focus from responsibility for PD residing with the employer to the individual is one that will enhance PD opportunities for rural teachers.

However this is not to suggest that PD should entirely become an individual responsibility. Internet resources focused on specific student needs are now readily available. These, along with internet resources provided by subject-based professional associations, could provide a PD program suited to the individual needs of a teacher.

In addition, a local collegiate PD program including school visits, could well service the PD needs of beginning teachers. This would include beginning teachers spending time with specially designated teachers to observe and discuss specific aspects of teaching. Such an approach would reduce the pressure on teachers to attend programs in Adelaide and would enhance professional practice. The development of collegiate PD practices centred around a cluster of rural schools is the model promoted by Lloyd and Mathews (1998).

Rural teaching – an asset or a liability

The graduate teachers in the study tend to fall into two distinct groups. One group views country teaching as an imposition that needs to be compensated, and the other group views country teaching as an opportunity which most beginning teachers don't even know exists. There is evidence that permanency is a strong incentive to a beginning teacher but may in fact serve to trap a teacher in an untenable situation. The balance between stability and flexibility is important but not easy to determine. However, it is clear that new teachers who are appointed to rural schools, especially those who have grown up in cities, need to be fully and realistically informed about living and working in rural communities before they are lured by permanency.

The study clearly indicated that teachers experience severe financial hardship as a result of their appointment to a rural school. They are clearly not prepared for costs associated with relocation and have little understanding of financial planning. Many had to rely on financial support from family and friends to bridge the gap between Youth Allowance and their first salary payment. In many cases this was a period of up to 3 months.

Involvement of the community

The graduate teachers in the study have a range of skills that enable them to contribute to the community in many ways. This appears to be the expectation of the new teachers.

However, whilst community members are described as friendly, there is clear evidence that they take a predominantly passive role as bystander, observer and commentator rather than actively assisting and supporting new teachers who enter the community. The active involvement of community members could serve to reduce dislocation and isolation experienced by many of the teachers in the study. Involvement of the community could begin as part of university preparation programs and could continue through the induction stage once a new teacher is appointed to a rural setting.

The community needs to take an active role in securing accommodation for teachers. There was clear evidence that accommodation was difficult to secure and that some rural landlords took advantage of this situation by charging high rents. The community needs to be proactive in organising accommodation, even if it is on a short term basis. This would enable a graduate teacher the opportunity to experience a secure homelike experience which may support the transition from home to independent living.

“This had been a year of firsts for me.”

Many of the teachers in this study are experiencing considerable life changes which can be attributed to age and stage of life. However, there is evidence that this is exacerbated by their appointment to a rural school.

In terms of teaching, the teachers in this study are beginning their careers and are facing the challenges and frustrations of any beginning teacher. However, there is an overall acknowledgement that their teaching is successful, and that despite inadequate resources to support their teaching, the teaching experience is very positive. There is clear acknowledgement that their success in teaching is assisted by smaller class sizes, by helpful staff and by fewer behaviour management problems. The teachers in the study have gained these impressions by comparing their experiences during prac teaching or in their initial short-term appointments.

In terms of professional support, the teachers in the study are not certain what to expect. There is evidence that they are not aware of their industrial rights and in some instances are being denied access to non-instruction time. This is excused because the principal is too busy to release them.

In terms of personal life, the majority of graduate teachers are leaving home for the first time and are facing intense homesickness away from family as well as social loneliness away from friends. Some are attempting to hold together long distance relationships.

In terms of location, many are living in a previously unknown area. Even those originally from the country experience dislocation because they are in a different country area. Their experience of isolation is not just related to physical location. They are socially and psychologically isolated, and this was the most common experience expressed throughout the study irrespective of whether they were previously from rural or urban locations.

However, alongside this runs a level of enthusiasm demonstrating an attribute which is possibly the best indicator of success in rural teaching. This enthusiasm emphasises a desire for change and adventure, a desire to try something new and experience different things. It is in strong contrast to the external motivation of permanency of employment which may well be the antithesis of adventure and change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Promoting rural teaching

Rural teaching needs to be promoted on a number of fronts. These are:

- Realistic portrayals of teaching and living in rural communities need to be presented by those who live and work in rural communities. These should include the benefits, such as increased opportunities to experience success as a beginning teacher, as well as liabilities associated with rural teaching and living, particularly in remote and isolated communities.
- The opportunity for challenge and adventure should be promoted.
- Special provision must be created for rural students (whilst still at school) to undertake work experience focusing on teaching as a career.
- Scholarships must be made available to assist people from rural areas to gain teaching qualifications.
- A teacher education program should be considered for the Whyalla Campus of the University of South Australia. This could incorporate city and rural practicum components for rural and city students.

2. Preparation for rural teaching

Preparation is crucial in assisting teachers to decide upon taking up a career in rural teaching and experiencing success in the position. Appropriate preparation should consist of the following elements:

- Structured university teacher education programs which include rural practicum components. These components could be supervised by a school-based teacher.
- University and employer partnerships which include experienced rural teachers in the preparation of graduates for professional practice in rural areas.
- Completion of a structured university rural education program as a requirement for employment in rural and remote schools.
- Financial planning advice including an overview of the range of possible expenses incurred as a result of relocation.
- Active involvement of community service organisations in introducing student teachers to the community during practica components.

3. Recruitment

Recruitment policies and practices influence the success of a start to rural professional practice. Recruitment policies and practices need to take the following into account:

- Timely selection and notification of appointments preferably by December at the latest for appointments in the following year.
- A choice of rural school placement giving graduates an opportunity to be close to their rural family if desired.
- Consideration of partners and their employment needs.
- The recognition of enthusiasm and a desire for change and adventure as a positive attribute for living and working in rural Australia.

4. Financial support and financial incentives

Differentiation needs to be made between financial support and financial incentives:

- Financial support should be offered upfront to ensure that those who accept rural positions are not disadvantaged by costs associated with relocation.
- Financial incentives need to recognise the various challenges of rural and remote placement and should recompense accordingly. Financial incentives could include contributions to HECS debts, salary incentives and travel contributions which may include the provision of a car, airfares and fuel vouchers. These could be negotiated on an individual basis taking into account the demands of the location.

5. Relocation support

Graduating teachers must not experience financial stress associated with their initial rural appointment:

- Attention must be given to financial support during the period when university study is successfully completed and AUSTUDY ceases, and when salary commences. This issue needs to be negotiated between CENTRELINK and the employing bodies.
- Appropriate funds for relocation should be provided by the employer. This needs to include removal expenses as well as accommodation bonds.
- A database of accommodation needs to be developed which includes private as well as employer sponsored accommodation. The community should be involved in the provision of suitable accommodation including short term initial accommodation.

6. Career incentives

Career planning should be part of the final year of the university teacher education program. This should include:

- The promotion of a range of career incentives for graduates who choose to begin their career in rural and remote settings.
- Permanency as a career incentive, bearing in mind that as part of career planning, permanency should be given careful consideration as it can also operate as a disincentive.

7. Induction

Induction programs should be mandatory and should be evaluated for effectiveness:

- Induction programs should be structured and include introductions to the school and policies of the school, to teaching and to the community. Induction should be on-going programs rather than single events.
- Induction should include professional and personal support components.

8. Professional support

Professional support is critical to the success of the early career teacher particularly in rural schools where the effect of isolation is most apparent:

- Professional support includes professional development, collegiate support, time to learn, leadership support and access to resources including IT resources.
- Professional development for beginning teachers should be provided within a cluster of nearest schools and should include visits to classrooms, with opportunities for a series of discussions with experienced teachers in the same year level or subject specialisation.
- Access to appropriate online PD resources is crucial for teachers who are isolated by subject specialisation.

9. Personal support

Pastoral care programs need to be provided to decrease personal isolation.

- Personal access to the internet and email should be provided to enable easy and cost effective communication with "home".
- "Buddy teachers" should be established in the school to provide professional and personal support.

10. Community involvement

The community needs to be involved in a number of supportive roles. These could be organised by community service organisations, or by individuals in smaller communities. They include:

- Organising accommodation for rural prac teaching.
- Developing an online inventory of accommodation options suitable for new teachers appointed to the community.
- Introducing new teachers to the locality, to people in the community, to the range of available community activities and to community values and aspirations.
- Offering personal support as a mentor and friend to whom a new teacher could turn for advice and support.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 -Survey of Recent Teacher Graduates

This survey is anonymous. Please be assured that you will not be identified by name or school, in any report or presentation associated with this research.

1. Gender (please circle): Male Female
2. Age (please circle): Under 25 25 – 30 31 – 40 Over 40
- 3a. Where did you grow up?
Please circle: Australia overseas
- 3b. If in Australia, please circle:
a rural location a large country town a capital city
Which state (please name).....

Qualifications and experience:

4. Name of teaching award completed, university at which completed and completion date:
5. Length of teaching award:
6. Other university awards completed:
7. What community / sporting / church involvement have you had in the last 5 years?
8. Other awards completed eg sporting, first aid, community awards?
9. Please describe any preparation you undertook for rural teaching while at university including rural practice teaching.

Community Demographics

19. What form of induction was initially provided?

20. Who has been most helpful to you in your initial appointment?

21. Currently what is going well in your teaching?

22. What difficulties (if any) are you currently experiencing in your teaching?

23. Do you feel you have access to adequate teacher professional development?
Please describe what form this takes.

24. What could enhance your professional development?

Living in a Rural Community

25. Do you live (please circle):
Independently Shared accommodation Boarding situation
26. What do you enjoy about living in a rural community?
27. What do you enjoy about teaching in a rural community?
28. What difficulties do you experience living in a rural community?
29. How well prepared were you for living in a rural community?
30. What were the issues you faced when relocating?
31. What financial liabilities (if any) have you incurred as a direct result of living in a rural community?

