

Putting rural into pre-service teacher education

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ABSTRACT

A number of recent Australian federal and state government reports, studies and reviews have addressed the issue of the preparation of teachers for rural appointments.

Collectively these inquiries have indicated that the preparation of teachers for rural school appointments requires specific attention being devoted to the exploration of a range of social, cultural, geographical, historical, political, and service access issues that define the difference in working and living in rural contexts compared to other locations.

The ARC Linkages Project, Rural Teacher Education Project (RTEP) (Green, et al, 2002), which is a collaborative project between Charles Sturt University, the University of New England and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training seeks to identify successful practices for building rural teacher and community capacity, and appropriately preparing and retaining teachers for rural schools within New South Wales.

As part of this ARC project, an examination of the current 'state of the art' in preparing pre-service teachers for a rural appointment was undertaken. A profile of the rural education focus contained within the respective primary and secondary pre-service teacher education courses for each Faculty of Education within New South Wales was developed through close examination of their public course documentation available in their respective university handbooks.

This presentation will explore the recommendations from the policy and research documents that informed this analysis for rural teacher education preparation, as well as reporting on the current state of rural pre-service preparation in New South Wales universities.

Introduction

Since the 1980's there have been a number of Australian federal and state government reports, research studies and commissioned reviews on rural teacher education. These have focused on the continuum from the preparation of prospective teachers for appointment in rural communities and their schools through to the enhancement of professional practice by continued professional development programs for rural and remote teachers.

Collectively these inquiries have indicated that the preparation of teachers for rural school appointments requires specific attention being devoted to the exploration of a range of social, cultural, geographical, historical, political, and service access issues that define the difference in working and living in rural contexts compared to other locations.

The ARC Linkages Project, *Productive partnerships for teaching quality* research project (Green, et al, 2002), seeks to identify successful practices for building rural teacher and community capacity, and appropriately preparing and retaining teachers for rural schools within New South Wales.

The Australian literature on the essential attributes of a rural pre-service teacher education program was examined and two categories of relevant literature were identified. Firstly, literature that synthesised the outcomes of federal or state level inquiries, and secondly, the writings of researchers, often working in pre-service courses preparing teachers for rural appointments. A third stage emerged that focussed on a reconnaissance of the current 'state of art' in rural pre-service teacher education in New South Wales

through examining the handbook documentation available from each of the 11 major universities offering teacher education programs.

Methodology

A multi-faceted synthesis on rural pre-service education was adopted in this review. The approach included: a) analysing Australian national and state-level policy documents pertaining to rural education: and b) scrutinising of all eleven NSW university pre-service teacher education course documentation.

Document analyses

Six Australian national and NSW state-level reports addressing aspects of rural pre-service teacher education were examined. These reports were:

- *Schooling in rural Australia* report (CSC, 1988);
- *National inquiry into rural and remote education* (HREOC, 2000);
- *Towards a national education and training strategy for rural Australia*, (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1991);
- *Listening and responding. A review of education in rural New South Wales* (Rawlinson, 1983);
- *Quality Matters: Revitalising teaching: Critical times, critical choices* (Ramsey, 2000); and,
- *Inquiry into the Provision of Public Education in New South Wales*. (Vinson, 2002(a), 2002(b), 2002(c)).

University courses

A profile of the rural focus contained within the respective primary and secondary pre-service teacher education courses for each Faculty of Education within New South Wales was developed through close examination of their public course documentation available in their respective university handbooks.

Specifically, this profile sought to gather information about the following three focus questions that were based on the analysis of the literature:

1. Did the program include any specific subject or subject(s) on or about rural education?
2. If a program did include a rural education subject or subjects, what was the status of the subject(s) within the program structure: Compulsory or optional?
3. Did the program include a rural practice teaching experience as a compulsory or optional component of the program?

Selected research on pre-service rural teacher education

Studies going back to the Turney, Sinclair and Cairns (1980) research on isolated teachers in New South Wales who were portrayed as teachers who 'did not want to be there', the work of McSwan and Duck (1988) with teachers in remote north-west Queensland, the research by Crowther and Kale (1987) on rural and remote teachers working in the Northern Territory schools, the Tomlinson (1994) review of teachers and teaching conditions in rural Western Australia through to the recent *National inquiry into rural and remote education* (HREOC, 2000) and two New South Wales inquiries (Ramsey, 2000; Vinson, 2002(a), 2002(b), 2002(c)) into educational provision provide a comprehensive and longitudinal depiction of the issues surrounding rural pre-service teacher education.

Boylan and Hemmings (1992) along with Yarrow, Ballantyre, Hansford, Herschell and Millwater (1998, 1999) and Yarrow, Herschell and Millwater (1999) reported on the positive attitudinal changes towards a rural appointment resulting from pre-service students completing a rural or remote practice teaching experience. Additionally, Yarrow, Herschell and Millwater (1999) identified that rural oriented preparatory programs needed to include: a) teaching strategies for multi-age classrooms, a sentiment echoed by Lake (1986), McSwan and Duck (1988) and Clarke (1990); b) developing an understanding of and a sensitivity to

the cultural differences, values and mores that exist in country towns; c) appreciating and utilising the nature and extent of community involvement in school life also identified by Bryden and Boylan (2004); and, d) participating in rural practice teaching experiences which Gibson (1994) also recommended.

National inquiries into rural teacher education

In this section of the literature review, three seminal policy documents were identified. Each document is discussed below and the relevant implications for rural teacher education identified.

1. Schooling in rural Australia

At the national level, this document was arguably the first extensive Australia-wide review of rural education. One primary objective of the *Schooling in rural Australia* report (CSC, 1988) focussed upon 'identifying the needs and issues relating to the curriculum, school structures, staffing and other resources' (p. 21).

The authors focussed on three fundamentals for rural teacher education: a) preparation for rural teaching; b) recruitment of teacher for rural schools; and, c) support for teachers in rural areas.

The report makes the generalisation concerning the preparation of teachers for rural appointments that they '..are not adequately prepared for rural teaching' (p. 141).

2. Towards a national education and training strategy for rural Australia

The National Board of Employment, Education and Training (1991) described the disparity in participation and completion rates in secondary and post-secondary education for rural and urban Australians. This policy document sought implementation strategies that would improve participation rates for rural Australians within the broader socio-economic and employment related fabric of Australian society. The policy document identified a series of content related attributes for pre-service teacher education programs for rural teachers as an important component of the strategies needed to redress the lower rural participation rates. These pre-service program inclusions were defined as:

rural practicums (including financial support during the period of practicum for accommodation, and recompense for wages lost through giving up part-time or casual work in metropolitan areas); special units in teaching/living in rural communities; and the development of teacher education programs specifically for teaching in remote traditional Aboriginal communities (p. 47).

3. National inquiry into rural and remote education

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's *National inquiry into rural and remote education* (HREOC, 2000) focussed on pre-service teacher education, school staffing and professional development opportunities for rural and remote teachers. The context within which the HREOC Inquiry operated focussed on developing strategies 'to enhance the desirability of country postings' (p. 41). An important outcome of the specific examination of the pre-service preparation of teachers for rural and remote appointments, the HREOC Inquiry found that 'most teacher training does not adequately equip new recruits with the skills and knowledge needed for teaching in rural and remote Australia' (p. 43). The HREOC Inquiry developed two recommendations (Recommendation 5.9 and Recommendation 5.10) that provided indicative content that needed inclusion in pre-service teacher education programs. Specifically, the HREOC report stated:

All teacher training institutions should require undergraduates to study a module on teaching in rural and remote communities, offer all students an option to undertake a fully funded practical placement (teaching experience) in a rural or remote school and assist rural and remote communities in the direct recruitment of new graduates for their schools. (Recommendation 5.9a)

New South Wales inquiries into rural teacher education

Three state level inquiries into rural teacher education were identified as having specific relevance to the ARC Linkages Project, *Productive partnerships for teaching quality* research project.

1. Listening and responding: A review of education in rural New South Wales

The first comprehensive review of rural education undertaken in New South Wales was chaired by Rawlinson (1983). The *Listening and responding* review's terms of reference included an examination of the staffing of rural schools. As part of this review, the preparation, recruitment and induction of newly graduated teachers, and the professional development of rural teachers were investigated.

The analysis of NSW pre-service teacher education programs found: '...teachers were given no special pre-service training, pre-appointment induction to prepare them for a first [rural] appointment...' (p. 56). The review noted that some tertiary institutions offered an elective subject addressing teaching in rural schools, and that some institutions also permitted their students to undertake a rural practice teaching experience. No detailed analyses of what constituent knowledge's, topics nor experiences were explored in these elective subjects was provided which reduces the value of the review's contribution to the *Productive partnerships in quality teaching* ARC Linkages research project (Green, et al., 2002).

2. Quality matters: Revitalising teaching: Critical times, critical choices.

The *Quality matters* Review conducted by Ramsey (2000) was established with a broad charter to examine initial teacher training through to the professional learnings of existing teachers. The review proposed a reform agenda for teacher education as a New South Wales state wide program. A number of broad, state-wide features were embedded within the proposed reform agenda. These included:

- establishing close connections and productive partnerships between teacher education institutions and the schools and the teaching profession;
- placing the professional experience program at the centre of the teacher education program;
- providing targeted incentives to prospective teacher education students from remote and rural communities as recruitment strategies for these programs;
- the implementation of a standards based system of accreditation of teacher education courses;

These state wide recommendations create a holistic vision for teachers, teacher education and the profession moving into the next decade. Turning more specifically to the rural teacher education focus of this paper, the recommendations and policy implications of the *Quality matters* review are somewhat disappointing. The review proposed a state wide structural framework that supported a diversity of initial teacher education programs. Within this diversity, each institution can determine what areas of specific focus eg, secondary science, rural primary, etc. the institution would concentrate upon. Delving deeper into this framework, there is a paucity of specific recommendations about the preparation of rural teacher education students.

3. Inquiry into the provision of public education in New South Wales

The most recent review of education in New South Wales, *Inquiry into the provision of public education in New South Wales*, (Vinson, 2002(a), 2002(b), 2002(c)) initiated by parent and teacher organisations involved in public education, was given broad terms of reference to examine the purposes, values, resources and structures required to sustain and enhance public education.

Embedded across each of the three reports from the Inquiry and specifically addressed in Chapter 11: Teacher Education of the Third Report (Vinson, 2002(c)), are critical outcomes focussing on what are the appropriate range of preparatory experiences for pre-service tertiary students who seek a rural appointment. It was disappointing to note that Chapter 7: Rural and Remote Education in the Second Report (Vinson, 2002(b)) did not raise nor discuss in any substantive way the pre-service preparation of rural teachers.

Chapter 7 focussed on processes for recruitment of teachers, supporting professional development for teachers, and enhancing the educational programs offered in schools for their students in the rural and remote locations within New South Wales.

The discussion of the professional preparation of teachers within Chapter 11 of the Inquiry focussed on identifying the range of essential experiences that should be included in all tertiary based teacher preparation programs. The Inquiry's analysis of key components for a pre-service program identified the following attributes:

- classroom management strategies;
- developing a critical and reflective perspective;
- integrating practice teaching experiences overtly with the range of other learning experiences inherent in other subjects studied. Also the inclusion of an extended internship program as the culmination of practice teaching; and,
- knowledge of school settings and organisational structure.

Collectively these pre-service program attributes are summarised in Recommendation 11.2 of the Third Report (Vinson, 2002(c)) (p. 102).

Applying the challenge-deficit framework (Ankrah-Dove, 1982) to analyse the content and intent of this chapter, the focus is predominantly on the 'deficits' or disadvantages inherent in rural locations using educational, social, economic and service access instances to support the deficit orientation. From this orientation, Chapter 7 then explored the development of compensatory programs as the only way to solve many of the issues raised.

Watson and Hatton (1995) caution educational planners and administrators on the duality of incentive schemes and compensatory programs. Their caution is a timely reminder to the purpose of the Vinson report. They warn that these staff recruitment incentives can lead to increasing turnover rather than increasing staffing stability. They stated: 'incentives are not very effective in improving the quality of teaching', and 'the deficit approach is usually a response to some urgent need and often implies short term expediency.' Ankrah-Dove's (1982) challenge model rather 'requires longer term planning and emphasis upon the qualitative implications of staffing decisions, not just the quantitative concern to fill all vacancies'. At the pre-service program level the *Beyond the Line* program (NSWDET, 2000) is one such challenge-oriented initiative and strategy that involves a partnership between the tertiary teacher education institutions and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training that is beginning to show positive rural recruitment benefits (Boylan and Wallace, 2002).

Surveying the pre-service scene

Gibson and King (1998) conducted an Australian national survey of 27 universities and sought to document the level of pre-service preparation provided for prospective rural teachers. The Gibson and King (1998) study can be construed as an extension of Gibson's (1994) earlier research with a small sample of rural Queensland beginning teachers (N=24) who identified the following deficiencies in their preparation for a rural school. These deficiencies in their preparatory programs included:

- pedagogy of multi-age classes and multi-age group strategies;
- curriculum organisation and planning;
- strategies in managing lower grade students in multi-grade classes;
- rural classroom organisation and small school administrative responsibilities;
- accessing appropriate and or sufficient resources;
- effective time management strategies;
- strategies for engaging in successful community interaction;
- developing an understanding of community dynamics that influence the teaching-learning environment;
- strategies for dealing with value clashes;
- isolation;

- developing supportive communication and interaction networks with colleagues, consultants, support groups or friends; and,
- teaching experiences in rural schools and their communities.

Gibson and King (1998) suggested that there existed and still does exist a need for further research into the nature of pre-service education programs purporting to prepare teachers for rural locations. Gibson and King (1998) reported that one problematic issue that evolved from their survey was to develop a definition of what a 'rural focus' within a preparatory program meant. The authors generated a four tier level of definition of this problematic concept that facilitated a productive analysis of the responding university's pre-service programs. This grounded definition categorised the 27 universities as:

- universities that included a full semester long rural education subject linked with a rural practicum experience;
- universities where a rural education topic existed within a general education, curriculum or instruction subject;
- universities that offered an elective subject on rural education; or,
- universities that had no focus on rural education within their pre-service programs.

Further they noted that in some universities, a rural practicum experience was a compulsory. Gibson and King (1998) concluded that, as an overall estimate, 91% of Australian universities claimed to have some rural focus in their pre-service programs. They also reported that 45% of all universities included a compulsory student involvement in rural issues. Finally, Gibson and King (1998) reported that only 12% of all universities reported they included a compulsory rural practicum experience as part of their program. This finding suggests that the percentage of universities that require students in their pre-service program to undertake both a compulsory rural education subject plus a compulsory rural practicum and successfully complete both aspects as a graduation requirement is at best 12% and may well be much lower.

Yarrow, Herschell and Millwater (1999) perhaps best summed up the preparation received by Queensland pre-service teachers for rural appointments succinctly this way: '[it was] sparse, lacking in cohesion, and in many cases non-existent'. (p. 1). The earlier research of Watson (1988) found a similar situation with graduate teachers in New South Wales and Western Australia when he reported that 88% and 84% respectively received no rural education training in their pre-service teacher education programs.

As a consequence of this literature synthesis, the eleven major teacher education institutions in New South Wales were surveyed during 2002 with the specific purpose to identify: a) whether the pre-service course included an identifiable subject on rural education, b) what was its status within the program, and c) whether the course included a rural practice teaching experience and what its status was.

In the following table, the results of this process based on the reported program information contained within each of the 11 university's handbooks is presented.

Table 1
Profile of NSW teacher education programs

Institution	Concurrent Primary Program			Concurrent Secondary Program ¹			End-on Secondary Program ²		
	Rural subject offering	Status of rural subject	Rural practice teaching experience	Rural subject offering	Status of rural subject	Rural practice teaching experience	Rural subject offering	Status of rural subject	Rural practice teaching experience
CSU	Yes	Compulsory	Optional	Yes	Compulsory	Optional	Yes	Elective	Optional
UNE	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional
SCU	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional	Yes	Elective	Optional
U New	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional
U Woll	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional
Syd U	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional
UNSW	No offer	No offer	No offer	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional
MU	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional

UWS	Yes	Optional	Optional	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional
ACU	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional
UTS	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional	No	N/A	Optional

Key:

CSU	Charles Sturt University	Syd U	Sydney University
UNE	University of New England	UNSW	University of New South Wales
SCU	Southern Cross University	MU	Macquarie University
U New	University of Newcastle	UWS	University of Western Sydney
U Woll	University of Wollongong	ACU	Australian Catholic University
UTS	University of Technology Sydney		

1. = the work of Mr. Greg Burnett, Research Assistant Armidale, is acknowledged in collation of this information.
2. = the work of Mr. Matti Novak, Research Assistant Bathurst, is acknowledged in collation of this information.

From this table, the current ‘state of art’ with preparing teachers for rural appointments and the study of rural education course work in pre-service teacher education courses in New South Wales is characterised as sparse and quite poor. This finding provides additional support for Yarrow, Ballantyre, Hansford, Herschell and Millwater (1999) claim that while rural pre-service teacher education is a concern to faculties of education, little effort in providing a ‘unified or cohesive response’ (p. 2) has eventuated. Only Charles Sturt University offered, at least, one rural education subject across all of its pre-service primary and secondary education programs. The University of Western Sydney offers a rural education elective subject in the concurrent primary program. Southern Cross University offered an elective as part of its one year end-on the secondary Graduate Diploma in Education level. A closer examination of the offerings revealed the status of the subject was often optional which meant the students chose it as an elective in their chosen program. What this analysis did not reveal was the percentage of each intake who selected the optional rural education subject. Further this document analysis did not identify if some component(s) within other subjects addressed issues associated with rural teaching through being embedded in general education, pedagogy, or curriculum related subjects. Finally, no institution mandated that their students must complete at least one practicum in a rural place. Perhaps the option of a rural placement was enacted by some students but not information was available on the proportion who so chose.

Conclusion

The paper has critically examined the recommendations from international, Australian and state based literature concerning key inclusions in a pre-service rural teacher education program. This synthesis has identified a set of recommendations on course inclusions that seem not to be incorporated into pre-service programs in many NSW universities. The second focus of this paper set to identify what the current ‘state of art’ with rural pre-service teacher education programs in New South Wales was. Generally, the current situation can best be described as piece meal. Rural education subjects and compulsory rural practicums are not evident in course design across most NSW universities. The challenge now is to apply these elements revealed through the literature synthesis to the creation of place based pre-service courses that prepare teachers to successfully adjust to teaching and living in rural and remote communities.

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