

Facing the Challenge of Retaining New Teachers in Rural and Remote Settings: A Report of Two Case Studies using a Community-based Mentoring Model in Queensland, Australia.

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Abstract

Attracting teachers to live and work in rural and remote schools is a continuing challenge in more isolated parts of Australia and internationally. It was this challenge that prompted the Priority Country Area Program (PCAP) to fund the trial of a Community-based Mentoring Model in Queensland to ascertain if a joint approach could make a difference for teachers. Two aims guided the research; 1) to design and implement a Community-based Mentoring Model for enhancing the lives of teachers living and working in rural and remote settings and; 2) to ascertain the effectiveness of the mentoring model by conducting two case studies in different geographic locations. One site was in a medium sized rural setting (population 900) and personnel from two schools and the local community were involved. The second was in a much smaller remote community (population 323) where local community members and school personnel participated.

Data were collected in two phases. The first data set was obtained from a State-wide survey and these data were used to identify suitable sites for the case studies and inform the design of the Community-based Mentoring Model for Phase 2. Findings reported in this paper relate to Phase 2 of the study and include pre and post individual and focus group interviews with educators and community members. Previous research has shown that both social and professional needs of new teachers in rural and remote settings need to be addressed. With this in mind, members of the school communities and the wider local community worked together to design and trial a Community-based Mentoring model. Findings from the study showed new teachers appreciated the face-to-face community-based mentoring program. Teachers felt a greater sense of welcome, became more knowledgeable about the local area, felt safer and more accepted in the new community following the implementation of the mentoring. Benefits were found for all participants and relationships between local schools and within the wider community were strengthened.

Key Words

rural and remote; mentoring; attracting teachers; social and professional needs

Introduction

Attracting and retaining teachers in rural and remote communities remains a major issue for employing authorities both overseas and in Australia (Campbell & Yates, 2011; Collins, 1999; Hare & Heap, 2001; Skilbeck & Connell, 2003, 2004; Victorian Department of Education & Training, 2004; White, Green, Reid, Lock, Hastings, & Cooper, 2008). In Australia, this is largely due to the trend towards urbanisation and the growing reluctance of new graduates to move beyond their usual place of residence which is most often in large towns or cities. As populations in rural and remote areas decrease, so do facilities and services (Miles, Marshall, Rolfe & Noonan, 2004). In Queensland, with close to one third of state school-age children being educated in rural and remote communities, the demand for education in these communities remains high (Queensland Government: Department of Education, Training and the Arts, n.d.). Employing authorities have prioritised new strategies for attracting and retaining teaching staff in these communities, but many who are sent to these areas are inexperienced or beginning teachers and often find working in a new context a personal challenge (Queensland Government: Department of Education, Training and the Arts, n.d; Victorian Department of Education & Training, 2004).

To address these issues, the experiences and challenges of teachers working in these communities need to be acknowledged and addressed in order to meet the social and professional needs of educators. Teachers, when placed in unfamiliar environments, need support to enable them to adapt and integrate successfully into new communities (Queensland Government:

Department of Education, Training and the Arts, n.d.). Meeting the personal and professional needs of teachers is an ongoing challenge that must be faced if teachers are to be supported while working in rural and remote regions. Currently in Australia, the age profile for teachers shows a disproportionate number in the older age groups and there will be a “replacement bulge over the next decade” (Skilbeck & Connell, 2003, p.32). In rural and remote communities this will exacerbate the current problem associated with attracting and retaining teachers. Thus expectations are rising in relation to the need for principals and teachers to build new community partnerships in order to assist and support new teachers who come to work in rural and remote settings (Queensland Government: Department of Education, Training and the Arts, n.d.).

A recent review of research relating to teacher attrition and retention sought to understand why teacher attrition occurs and what factors moderate attrition outcomes (Borman & Dowling, 2008). The analysis involved 34 studies and researchers found that ‘personal characteristics of teachers are important predictors of turnover. Attributes of teachers’ schools, including organisational characteristics, student body composition and resources (instructional spending and teacher salaries) are key moderators’ (p. 367). A key finding was that attrition from teaching is not just a ‘healthy turnover,’ but is influenced by personal and professional factors that change across teachers’ career paths. Teachers’ work conditions are a stronger influence on attrition than previously reported, and the authors recommended that new policies and initiatives could address the challenges of teacher attrition (p. 367).

Personal and professional factors for teachers living and working in rural and remote communities need to be investigated. A review of research studies with a focus on recruitment and retention of teachers in the United States (Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006) noted that the highest attrition rate occurred early in teachers’ careers and ‘schools that provided mentoring and induction programs, particularly those related to collegial support, had lower rates of turnover by beginning teachers’ (p. 201). Other studies support the need for support for new teachers as they enter a new teaching context and raise the concept of ‘thriving, not just surviving’ (Wendt, Tuckey, Prosser, 2011). A recent report in Queensland where induction practices for teachers were reviewed (Caldwell & Sutton, 2010) recommended ‘induction should be supported as a continuing program, not a one-off engagement’ (p. vi).

There has been a call for a re-conceptualisation of rural schooling away from a ‘deficit model’ to a more ‘positive naming’ and beyond seeing rural appointments for teachers as fraught with problems such as ‘loneliness, heat and snakes’ (Reid, Green, Cooper, Hastings, Lock & White, 2010, p.267). A deeper consideration is needed where the social, economic and environmental dimensions of rural-regional sustainability are aligned. The re-conceptualisation needs to define communities where ‘society and space interact’ as it is the people who contribute more than ‘location and landmarks’ (p.270).

Governments have sought solutions for attracting and retaining teachers to work in rural and remote areas and at times these have been implemented without due consideration of the complexity of the social, economic and environmental factors, nor the support structures needed for appointees. Mostly these solutions have not worked as the challenge of staffing schools in rural and remote areas of Australia is ongoing. Incentive schemes have been introduced, but these have led to some frustration for all as teachers (mostly new graduates) accept appointments only for the minimum time period. Most recently a new scheme of attracting ‘high achieving professionals’ qualified in other careers and fast tracking them into teaching has been introduced (Teach for Australia, 2009). This initiative, although somewhat controversial, provides participants with a six week intensive course (1/3 of their course) prior to being appointed to a school where there is a high degree of inequity. The remaining part of the course is completed over the next two years while the candidate works as a teacher. Teacher mentors in the school of the appointee assist the new teachers as they begin teaching. To date, recruits from this initiative have been appointed to 30 schools located in Victoria and Australian Capital Territory and will soon be introduced into Western Australia. No official evaluation of this initiative has yet been released.

Challenges of attracting and retaining teachers to work in rural and remote communities throughout Australia continue. New issues too are now being faced by educators in all schools including increased work intensification for teachers (Ballet & Kelchtermans 2009, 2008) and working with graduates of generation Y many of whom are increasingly unwilling to move beyond metropolitan areas and have been described as 'metrocentric' (Campbell & Yates, 2011). Throughout much of the research one key factor remains and that is that newly appointed teachers who move to rural and remote communities to teach need induction, support and mentoring in order to address both their social and professional needs and learn how to live in a new community that is often small and intimate (Cornish, 2009; Coronado, 2009; DET, 2011; Down & Wooltorton, 2004; Sharplin, 2009; Somerville, Plunkett & Dyson, 2010).

An examination of the effect of mentoring new teachers within rural and remote communities is warranted and designing and trialling a model that is situated within the community, and not just the school environment, is one that could assist teachers both socially and professionally as they live and work in rural and remote communities. The study reported in this paper provides insights into the findings from a trial of a community-based mentoring model for new teachers living and working in two rural and remote settings (Kennedy, Young & Dorman, 2009), and builds on a previous study of strategies for attracting and retaining teaching personnel in rural and remote communities (Young & Kennedy, 2005).

The Research Study

The purposes for the research study were to identify the dimensions of the rural and remote environments for new teachers, to develop and implement a community-based mentoring model and to report finding from two case studies where the mentoring was trialled. This paper focuses on the effects of the implementation of the community-based mentoring component of the research. The research question guiding the study was:

What is the effect of implementing a community-based mentoring approach as a means of support for attracting and retaining teachers who work in rural and remote communities?

The theoretical basis underpinning this study is *need-press* theory in which persons are conceptualised in terms of their psychological needs and the environment in terms of its press (Murray, 1938; Pace & Stern, 1958; Stern, Stein, & Bloom, 1956). Needs are the important determinants of behaviour within the individual (Genn, 1984). According to Murray (1938), the press of an object is what it can do to the subject and the power it has to affect the well-being of the subject in one way or another. Pace (1963) suggested that an environment's crucial aspects are its overall atmosphere or characteristics including, the kinds of things that are rewarded, encouraged and emphasised. In addition, the style of life which is valued in the community is most visibly expressed and felt. Within this theory, needs and press interact to produce and guide behaviour. This theory has been the basis for many classroom studies, in which the degree of person-environment congruence is related to student outcomes (Fraser, 1986; 2002).

Need-press theory underpins the paradigm of learning environment research which began in the late 1960s with the work of Walberg (1976). Walberg (1976) focused on the notion that psychology is a science of mental life and that a key aspect of mental life is perception. Where traditional psychology objectively counted or measured learning, Walberg suggested that "what is objectively counted and measured should be weighed and justified by what is subjectively perceived insofar as individual learning is concerned" (p. 156) and that perception optimises learning and experience. Walberg's work raised the importance of seeking perceptions of members of environments as a valid source of knowledge regarding their performance in an environment. Walberg's (1969, 1976) work was extended by Rudolf Moos's (1974) who conducted studies which involved the conceptualising of environments where individuals worked, studied or experienced as patients. Moos conceptualised human environments in terms of three key categories including *Relationship, Personal Development, and System Maintenance and System Change*. Walberg and Moos's important work laid the foundation for environments "to be viewed as social contexts characterised by dimensions which participants within that environment may judge" (Crump, 2002, p. 37). Of importance to the current study, these researchers revealed the importance of an

individual's perception of the relational aspects of an environment, the opportunities for personal growth and the organisational aspects of environments as affecting an individual's experience within an environment.

Present day learning environment researchers have conducted many studies that extended on the seminal work of these two researchers to establish relationships between an individual's perceptions of the dimensions of learning and living environments and their performance in an environment (Fraser, 2002). The present study extended upon these theoretical concepts and was applied to both rural and remote communities. Everyone in a rural or remote community, including the new teachers at the local school, has particular needs and the community's press either satisfies or frustrates these needs. According to need-press theory and more recent learning environment research, if communities are genuinely interested in their school personnel, they will seek the perceptions of new teachers and provide a total community environment that meets the needs of teachers.

In the first phase of the study personnel in local communities and educational staff throughout the State of Queensland completed a survey to investigate perceptions of the holistic environments. Participants were asked if they were willing to participate in the second phase where a community-based mentoring model would be trialled. The methodology for identifying the samples for the case studies was extreme case sampling (Wiersma, 2000). This sampling 'includes units with special or unusual characteristics' (Wiersma, 2000, p. 286). For this project, the special characteristics were determined by both the outcomes of the survey administered in the first phase, advice from the partner investigator and Education Queensland's categories for identifying rural and remote schools (Queensland Government: Department of Education, Training and the Arts, n.d.). Specific sites chosen for the case studies needed to feature beginning teachers recently posted to the local community, at least one experienced teacher and a range of members of the local community willing and able to participate in the study.

Members of the local communities and staff from community schools worked together to design aspects of the mentoring model that suited their particular context. At both sites a town meeting was held and personnel from the schools and the wider community volunteered to form a steering committee that would shape the approach for the community-based mentoring model in each of the case study sites. The results provided insights both before the mentoring model was implemented and after. The insights included details about relocation issues and integration into rural and remote communities and mentoring opportunities and practices.

Methodology

A mixed method design was adopted for the study and included two surveys and two case studies. Findings from the case studies, phase 2, only are presented in this paper. The two sites were characteristically and geographically diverse. One was located in a medium sized rural setting (population 900) and personnel from two schools and the local community were involved. The second was in a much smaller remote community (population 323), where local community members and personnel from the only school in the local area participated.

Interpretative case studies (Neuman, 2003) were conducted with a focus on the implementation of both the social and professional components of the community-based mentoring model. The purpose was to examine the effectiveness of the key features of the mentoring model designed to increase satisfaction and retention of teachers who live and work in rural and remote settings across Queensland. Importantly, the mentoring model included members of the whole community where a new teacher was working. Teams comprising members from the community and schools worked together to plan ways if explicitly providing local information and inviting new teachers to attend local events. This model ensured matters were not left to chance and an explicit approach was made for all local events.

Specific sites chosen for the case studies needed to feature beginning teachers recently posted to the local community, at least one experienced teacher and a range of members of the local community willing and able to participate in the study. The interpretive studies focussed in detail on

the knowledge, beliefs and actions of beginning teachers, school personnel, and members of the local communities where the mentoring model was implemented. Data sources for each case study site included semi-structured and focus group interviews (Neuman, 2003). Interviews with individuals and focus groups were held before the project commenced and following the implementation of the social and professional components of the community-based model of mentoring.

Interviews conducted for the study were as follows:

Site 1 – located in SW Queensland

Before and After the Project: School 1A

- Individual interview with the Principal;
- Individual interview with the new teacher and
- Focus group interview with community members.

Site 2 – located in Central Queensland

Before and After the Project:

- Focus Group interview with community members.

Before the Project: School 2A:

- Individual interview with the principal;
- Individual interview with the deputy principal;
- Focus group interview with teaching staff (including new teachers).

After the project: School 2A:

- Individual interview with deputy principal;
- Individual interviews with 2 new teachers.

Before the project: School 2B:

- Individual interview with the Principal;
- Individual interview with the new teacher;
- Individual interview with other teachers involved with the project.

After the project: School 2B:

- Interview with the principal and teacher representative on the community committee and
- Individual interview with the new teacher.

Results of the Study

Findings from individual and focus group interviews were analysed in both the pre and post implementation periods and common themes were located and synthesised. These findings are now discussed.

Case Study Findings

After analysing the interview transcripts to highlight data relevant to the project, several recurrent themes common to each case study site were identified. These themes, outlined below, are reinforced later by quotes drawn directly from participant responses. The themes mirror the broad range of shared experiences, of school staff and community members alike, regarding the many demands and rewards of teacher relocation to rural and remote communities. While not exhaustive, the themes and the responses from which they are derived encompass the most informative of those concerns and observations relevant to the overall aims of this study. Each theme is separate, distinct and significant in terms of the research objectives, but also inter-connected with other themes related by similar notions and sentiments as expressed by subjects in their interview sessions.

Two clearly identifiable categories of response types, which altogether encapsulate the breadth of subject reaction to interview questions and to the objectives of the research project as a whole are reported. These broad categories can, in loose terms, be identified as:

- Relocation and Integration into Rural and Remote Communities and

- Mentoring Opportunities and Practices

Perceptions from Interviews Prior to Mentoring

During initial visits to case study sites the researchers conducted initial focus group or individual interviews. These were conducted with school administrators and class teachers. Individual interviews were conducted with new teachers who were recently appointed to the school. Information sought from these interviews included gauging perceptions about the needs of new teachers, the levels of support perceived as necessary, and the frequency of mentoring for newcomers to the school. Similar perceptions were sought from community members.

Moving to a New Community

Beginning with perceptions from school 1A, the following themes and responses were prevalent and most pertinent. The newly-relocated teacher here found the prospect, and early experience, of relocation extremely daunting, particularly when faced with the typical lack of amenities and services compared to larger urban centres: "I had never been this far west ... let alone anywhere without a supermarket;" and going from "having everything at my back door to ... then learning how to make food stretch for two weeks" was a challenge. Staff members at Case Study site 2, School 2A were perhaps even more emphatic on this point in their initial interviews. During the focus group sitting, one teacher suggested that, typically, newly-relocated teachers "are shell-shocked; if they haven't been here before. It is just too much." This sentiment was reaffirmed by new teaching staff in the individual sittings. The school's Deputy Principal was, perhaps, a little more circumspect: "Difficult is too strong a word, but it [relocating as a new teacher] could be challenging."

Socialising and Sport in the New Community

It was widely offered that, as long as a teacher's interests included a fondness for sporting activities and socialising with peers and other community members, then the relocation would prove all the easier. "I quite like my sports which this community is very much all about, so if they [new teachers] were those sort of people, I think they will have a fantastic time. If they weren't, then I don't know what they would do." To underline this point, a new teacher at Case Study Site 1, School 1A added: "We have netball and tennis which rotate, so if there is no tennis there is netball. Cricket also is played out here and the surrounding districts, so that is a social game for us to go to and watch the men play. Football is on, when it is not cricket season, so all those interact and keep you busy."

A member of the focus group at Case Study Site 2, School 2A put it most succinctly: "You have got to love your footy." Once again, though, when on their own in interviews the new teachers from Case Study School 2A offered slightly different views on this theme: "Some of the girls do netball, but again that's all the teachers, and I don't know about other people, but I'd like time away from school [peers] as well." When asked about meeting people through sporting activities, another countered that she was "not really interested ... I'm here to do a job, I'm not interested in rodeos or football."

At Case Study Site 2, School 2B, the new teacher again showed a pragmatic grasp of this theme: "At the beginning of the year we had the races, which is a big do in town, [I'm] not a races person, but anyway you go and do these things, you get dressed up and away you go. I think you have to put yourself out there to become known. As a result of that, I think we have gained a lot more respect from the parish members and general community members, because they see you out there willing to do things within the community."

Comparing Relocation for Male and Female Teachers

In a series of similarly interesting observations and perceptions, the notion that the relocation process is somewhat 'easier' or less challenging for male teachers than their female colleagues was prevalent (among the more experienced teaching staff especially). The Principal at Case Study Site 1, School 1A recounted how "[as a female teacher] I have always thought, and I am still cautious now, even though I am married and have had other kids since then, but you are still always fairly cautious of how long you talk to someone's [a student's] dad." When told how some of the female staff members felt that male teachers got an 'easier ride' into the community's good

graces, the Principal at Case Study Site 2, School 2B agreed. "I think that is right, and they are so grateful to have a man in the community. They will do more to keep him involved - like they will invite him out and they do things with him."

Support from Peers and School Staff in the New Community

The issue of teacher support, produced a series of responses that underlined how the support and assistance of teaching peers and other school staff is crucial for successful relocation to a remote posting. The new teacher at School 1A, in recounting her own early experiences after relocation, highlights this perception clearly: "With the teaching aspect, I think what you need is support. I don't think anyone can tell you how to do it, you do need to find your own way, but definitely you need some sort of communication assistance, because out here it is the telephone and at the moment, that is not even working!"

Fitting into the Community

One of the more common perceptions to emerge from interviews was that, once relocated, the onus was squarely on the new teacher to do what they could to 'fit in' to their new surroundings, rather than the community or school adapting itself to the new arrivals. A new teacher at School 1A, felt that successful relocation depended largely upon a teacher's personality and interests, and how well these sat with established norms and expectations of the remote community. Her Principal's advice in this regard was that new teachers should "just tread lightly" until finding their place in their new surrounds. It seemed a concern for the teacher, though, as to just how lightly one should tread, since being seen to be involved and engaged with the community was deemed highly important too. "Depending on their interests and their personality, I find in these small communities sometimes [teachers] can get judged from saying 'no' [to invitations], which can be a problem."

Demands and Pressures for Teachers

The last of the emergent themes linked to relocation and integration into the community highlights how the unique demands and pressures of teaching in a remote location often extend to outside of normal school hours and outside the boundaries of the school grounds itself. As one of the new teachers at School 2A bemoans, "You are still a teacher outside those [school] days, you go to the show and I sit there and I just have the kids sitting beside me, and your life is not your own. Sometimes you can feel like you are still a babysitter when you are on your own time and you are out." Her new colleague in the community expressed it even more starkly. "Look, I'm very much less satisfied [with teaching after relocation] ... with myself, with the system. I've become disillusioned."

Mentoring Opportunities and Practices

When the notion of mentoring new teachers within the school was raised, the greatest barrier appeared to be time. "The Deputy Principal has tried to give me a hand along the way, but she's just so busy that it's been hard for her." In the same vein, the Principal at School 2B admitted that, "you think, 'you should be there helping them,'" but I just don't have the time. I suppose being a new Principal I am still learning as well, so I am finding that I am trying to help our new teacher with [settling in], but I just worry that I don't support her as much as I should because I am trying to do my new role as well."

Perceptions from Interviews Post Mentoring

Now turning to those participant responses and associated themes that emerged from the final interview sittings in each case study site, it becomes clearer what were the overall perceptions of teachers, school staff and community members regarding the relocation process and implementation of the project's mentoring programs. We found the following prevalent responses supporting those same themes as identified from the initial interview data.

After the progression of the school year and introduction of the project's mentoring programs, there emerged only one further response under the theme of relocation as a daunting experience for new teachers. This from a member of the mentoring group at Case Study Site 1 School 1A: "[Living

and working in a remote area] is a whole different way of thinking and everything, and if you've only had city or very big town experience, it would be a completely different thing.”

Fitting into the Community

Responses were more forthcoming in these final interviews on the issue of teachers being expected to ‘fit in’ to their new school and community. The new teacher at School 1A offered this reflection: “At first it felt like you were being stared at because everyone wanted to know who the new teacher was.” After suggesting in the initial interviews that new teachers “have got to get some interests of [their] own”, the focus group at Case Study Site 2, School 2A reinforced this view in the final sitting with the following definitive statement: “The thing is ... you do have to get involved in things to meet people.” Some responses under this theme seemed to suggest that tailoring school or community activities to the interests of new teachers, rather than always expecting teachers to fit the mould, would be a worthwhile pursuit for both parties.

Socialising and Sport in the New Community

The theme of sport and social activity as passports to an easier relocation drew numerous responses once again, with the perception reinforced that these pursuits should underpin most efforts at making new teachers feel a part of the community. The new teacher at School 1A saw it quite plainly: “A lot of what they do here is very sports-driven, so if you're not a sports-minded person you'd have to try and hook up with a different set of people.” The focus group at School 2A added their concurring voices to the chorus, at the same time underlining that it is often the school and its staff that encourage most of the ‘socialising’ within the community.

Perceptions from Final Interviews: Mentoring Opportunities and Practices

The case study data indicated how members of the school and local community perceived the success or otherwise of the community-based mentoring project.

Support from Peers and School Staff in the New Community

One theme that drew even greater comment at final interview sittings than initially, was that of new teachers requiring the support and camaraderie of their peers and other school staff to facilitate a happier relocation. This would hopefully indicate the positive influence of the mentoring programs during the course of the study. The responses of the new teachers would seem to reflect this: “Oh definitely [felt nervous beginning teaching]. But they all made sure someone was talking to me and I wasn't standing by myself. I find it good that there are a lot of other teachers around in the community” and I found the whole thing [mentoring project] very positive.

Personal and Professional Mentoring

The focus group at Site 2 School 2A were most effusive on this matter, declaring across the board that the provision of both professional and personal support was crucial to a new teacher's relocation. “We've [teachers] always tried to plan together, we always try to fit in with everybody else's planning.” “There's a very good culture in terms of sharing unit [plans], everyone's willing.

At school 2B, the school's Principal offered some very practical and thoughtful recollections of the kind of support provided to her new staff member: “She [new teacher] sometimes has trouble with the maths concept, relating it to the way kids think. So I've gone and taught in her classroom a couple of times just to demonstrate a different way of thinking, which has helped.

Another theme to gain more prominence as the school year progressed was that of the important contribution to relocation of face-to-face contact with peers and other supporting staff from other schools. Judging by the volume of responses, it was widely perceived that meeting with peers or at least having supportive staff colleagues on hand, aided new teachers in successfully relocating to remote areas.

Community Involvement in Mentoring

Attracting much comment at final interview sittings, and indeed from the mentoring groups at the different study sites, was the view that community involvement in the mentoring programs will only improve relations with schools and also impressions of particular teachers. It appeared that entrenched perceptions of teachers, especially those new to remote areas, were seen as a barrier to the integration of school staff into their community. As the Principal at School 1A observed, "I think [the mentoring program] opened some eyes and I would say because our new teacher has always come across as, "she's fine, she can look after herself." She has an outside life as she travels back to another local town regularly, which I think has been a bonus too. But I think when they spoke to her they realised, "oh, it actually might be a bit lonely Monday to Friday in a house on your own on a highway, and I think a lot of people don't realise that." Speaking mostly from the community's point of view, the mentoring group at Case Study Site 1 offered several noteworthy comments on this matter, showing the perceived benefits from their mentoring program. "The happier teachers are when they come to a place, the easier it is ... and the better it is for your kids. It's really good to have someone from outside come in with different ideas and different thoughts, rather than the 'same old same old', because that's what tends to happen in a small community."

Opinions about Mentoring in the Community

Participants across both case study sites provided positive feedback and were keen to offer opinions about the introduction of mentoring programs. Encouragingly, most responses and the themes shaped from them were positive and supportive of the programs (or at the very least constructive in their criticism), and these opinions came from a range of respondents in schools and communities. On the notion that the programs should commence and maintain a regular schedule from early in the school year, the mentoring group at Case Study Site 1 offered these views: "Yes [they should], because sometimes you assume that someone else is doing [the mentoring] and nobody is."

Discussion and Conclusions

The case study data collected before and after the trial of the Community-based Mentoring Model were examined in terms of the effectiveness of the development and implementation of the Model as a means of community-based mentoring for retaining teachers in rural and remote settings.

Findings of the case studies indicated that the development of face-to-face community mentoring programs designed to welcome and support new teachers both socially and professionally were very much appreciated and valued by new teachers (Guarino et al, 2006). A key finding of the case studies was that the design of the Community-based Mentoring Model as a function of the whole community where both school and community members work together as a team was very important. Respondents in the case study sites also indicated that mentoring from the whole community was seen as valuable not just for new teachers, but also for strengthening school/community relationships (Caldwell & Sutton, 2010). One principal remarked that participating in Community-based Mentoring for new teachers had benefits for all involved as it strengthened relationships between the school and the community and acted as a stimulus for re-energising the whole community. The findings confirm the belief that when community and school members work together to form mentoring teams it breaks down social isolation and may therefore enhance a new teacher's sense of social inclusion and reduce his/her sense of personal dislocation (Wendt et al, 2011). Also, the findings confirm that the rural and remote teacher's working, living and learning environment is affected by issues at both school and community level and therefore community involvement in the mentoring of new teachers assists new teachers to feel more positive in places where they come to live, work and learn (Coronado, 2009).

The overall findings of the case studies indicated that the conduct of the Community-based Mentoring Model created a sense of welcome and support for the new teachers and also reduced the new teacher's sense of social isolation. One teacher said, "I found the whole thing [mentoring project] very positive'. This teacher was positive about the effort made by the community to improve the rural and remote teaching experience. One principal was very supportive of the Community-based Mentoring Model and noted, "It's great, the more people you have [involved] - including student teachers and other people who come out - that's good because you're getting a lot more input and it's better for you and it helps them as well. A couple of people [community

members] have said that it's [mentoring] a good idea, it should have been done a while ago." It seemed that the new teachers who did participate in the activities planned by the Mentoring Teams felt less isolated which increased their sense of 'fitting in'.

While the examination of the data from the case study sites support the development and conduct of the Community-based Mentoring Model, there were some social and professional issues that participants identified that may inform the adoption of the Model in other rural and remote settings where community members and school personnel may decide to work together to support new teachers and ultimately attract and retain teachers in their area.

Social Issues

From a social perspective, respondents indicated that beginning mentoring programs at the start of the new school year would be helpful. That way loneliness may be reduced as one of the teachers indicated, "I find the biggest thing I need is someone to bounce things off, not only school stuff, but also social, so you really need that one-on-one ... someone else that you can communicate with who is in the same situation." In commenting about coming into a new community, one new teacher commented, "you are going to have a horrible time if you do not try to make friends."

A warning also was given by a new teacher, "it was good to have had great support here, but there are times that you just want to do something that is not school-related, because you live and breathe work and school and having something outside of school that you know you might see school people [school staff] at, but not totally, [would be good]."

New teachers also indicated that they appreciated receiving an information kit upon arrival at a new location. The information kits need to include some or all of the following: history of the local area; ways to access shopping; sporting facilities and activities; travel and accommodation information; community service organisations; information about local agencies e.g. police, ambulance and emergency service; church locations and times for services and other interest and social groups. Information regarding these aspects of small towns would assist new teachers who come to work and live in a rural or remote location.

In terms of the types of activities that Mentoring Teams might offer new teachers, one teacher raised a worthwhile issue. She commented that it would be useful to sometimes tailor "school or community activities to the interests of new teachers, rather than always expecting teachers to fit the mould," and "would be a worthwhile pursuit for both parties." Respondents also highlighted the importance of aligning mentoring activities with existing social community events and the provision of mentoring programs ready to start at the beginning of each school year when many new teachers first arrive.

One participant in one of the case study sites made the observation that, "everyone knows you in a small town, and everyone knows you are the new teacher." This can be very daunting for a new teacher trying to establish themselves in a new place both socially and professionally. This issue is one that communities need to acknowledge when conducting mentoring activities and understand that a new teacher may not always be able to attend.

Professional Issues

From a professional mentoring perspective, the respondents provided positive feedback regarding existing mentoring practices and discussed their usefulness. The importance of support and guidance from school colleagues and administrators in terms of information relating to learner needs, available resources and curriculum planning requirements were expressed often by new teachers and those who had some experiences in the case study sites. As one teacher recalled, "My biggest [initial problem] was that I thought I should have known everything. I needed to manage, and then when I didn't ... I needed someone who I could ask all of the 'dumb' questions. " there were a lot of teachers in the same boat as I was." Availability of experienced teachers to

provide professional support for new teachers was an important issue that echoed throughout the data collected from each of the case study sites.

Although one teacher who had been linked to a buddy teacher still did not feel that she was supported, she was emphatic in saying, "I had a very tough class and the only reason I had someone supporting me is because I grabbed hold of them and I wouldn't let them go. I just said, 'I need help.'... "I found that that is extremely hard and a lot of my friends have gone through the same thing ... It wasn't until I was in the Principal's office and I was crying that they saw it as a problem." However, this sentiment was not common for all the participants, but the incident does raise an important issue.

These findings emphasise the issue of the demand placed on senior staff in rural and remote settings in providing professional mentoring for new teachers. This work is in addition to their normal teaching and administrative duties. As many rural and remote schools are staffed predominantly by new, inexperienced teachers, this is a matter that may need to be acknowledged and supported by education authorities in terms of the workload of senior teachers and school administrators. The role of professional mentor needs to be built into role descriptions and additional time should be provided so this valuable work can be carried out appropriately.

Overall, the findings of the case studies supported the development and implementation of the Community-based Mentoring Model for new teachers as a means of supporting new teachers in rural and remote settings. In particular, the findings indicate the value of bringing both members of the school and community environments together to form mentoring teams to provide both social and professional mentoring. It may be extrapolated that the implementation of the Community-based Mentoring Model in rural and remote settings may reduce the situation where new teachers feel a sense of personal dislocation, may increase their sense of social inclusion, may improve their sense of personal safety, reduce their sense of professional isolation and generally enhance their perception of working, living and learning in these settings. This may result in new teachers staying longer in these settings which, in turn may result in increased attraction and retention of teachers in rural and remote settings.

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