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***Researching the schoolhouse:
Rethinking research on the staffing of
rural, remote and isolated schools in
Australia (2000-2019)***

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Our strengths, developed over more than fifteen years, are those of collaborative and participatory research in regional and community development in both Australian and international contexts. Working in partnership with communities and related regional and community agencies, we aim to:

- Build sustainable environmental, social, cultural and economic capacity through partnership in research and development
- Work with communities in the recognition of their own strengths, assets and capacities using processes which respect action learning and collaboration
- Develop strategies for change in response to evolving environmental, social, cultural and economic contexts
- Build leadership and professional networks that support sustainable and cooperative endeavours in communities.

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- Rurality
- Space, Place & Spatial Justice (Social Justice)
- Rural Regional Sustainability
- Rural Standpoint

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Executive summary

The staffing of non-metropolitan schools has been a significant concern in Australia since the inception of compulsory schooling. Over the last twenty years a plethora of research has been undertaken into the opportunities and challenges of staffing non-metropolitan schools. In this monograph we explore the research through the approach of a systematic literature review. This method creates a measure of comparison if a review is repeated in future years as a measure of progress on this issue.

The search strategy identified 161 results over the last twenty years, with this number of results highlighting just how problematic this issue is and continues to be. Despite a consistent research effort, Australia has not managed to achieve significant long term positive change. This is an issue that has the potential to impact on students and their future beyond school.

Many of the research studies focus on identifying the same issues as those that have gone before them. That is, while more recent studies undertake research

to further advance understandings of the staffing issue, they are often repeating studies that have already been undertaken elsewhere, with another cohort of students. In fact, many studies could be considered program evaluations rather than research studies as they focus on the impact of an initiative undertaken in teacher education. While these studies are important, theoretical advances and methodological advances also need attention. For example, most studies used qualitative methods, were undertaken over a short time period, and involved small numbers of participants. There were few studies involving long term research into the issue, with more than just one cohort of participants, or studies that involved quantitative research methods.

To achieve long-term change in the staffing of non-metropolitan schools we need a divergence from the approaches used over the past twenty years. Future studies need to focus on using new methods, collaborating with all stakeholders, and pursuing sustained efforts to value the distinct nature of the teaching profession in these locations.

Key findings

1. Twenty years of staffing research: We are no closer to solving this perennial issue, suggesting a need to rethink approaches to research and practice.
2. Stakeholders: Staffing of non-metropolitan schools needs to involve all stakeholders.
3. Research approach: New approaches to research are needed to avoid reproducing the same studies and results without change.
4. Professional identity, stress and satisfaction: Place impacts on teachers' ability to teach in the way they imagine to be quality teaching.
5. Social justice and equity: The long history of staffing issues signals a failure of ideologies and capacities to correctly identify and address disadvantage.
6. Isolation: It is not enough to simply view isolation in terms of geographical distance, instead, isolation needs to be understood as a multifaceted and complex issue.
7. Standardisation and regulation: The increasingly controlled and standardized nature of school education only acts to reinforce disadvantage by marginalising non-metropolitan communities.
8. A model for change: Future studies need to focus on using new methods, involve collaboration with all stakeholders, and include longer-term research programs.

Introduction

The staffing of non-metropolitan, remote, and isolated schools remains a significant issue of concern in Australian education. Over the last twenty plus years, much research has been undertaken into opportunities and challenges of non-metropolitan schools. In this monograph we review the literature on the staffing of schools outside metropolitan locations in Australia and propose ways forward for research into the staffing of non-metropolitan schools.

Here, we use the term 'non-metropolitan' to encompass any location outside the main metropolitan centres in Australia. In terms of schools, this includes those classified as Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote, and Very Remote by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) on the My Schools categorisation⁵. This categorisation draws on the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Remoteness Classifications structure⁴ that is based on distance, population density and access to services. Remoteness classifications are on a scale of decreasing density and increasing distance to and availability of services, from major cities through to very remote locations. Major cities are considered to have a higher density population, more service availability, and less distance to major services and facilities, and very remote locations have low density of population, services and are larger distances to other locations.⁴

It is important to note that non-metropolitan locations encompass more than the structural features and measures described by the ABS. Rurality also involves diverse cultural, social, geographical considerations that influence factors such as identity, beliefs, knowledges and actions.¹²¹ This understanding of rurality is crucial to the staffing of non-metropolitan schools and will be explored throughout the monograph.

Research over the past twenty years has highlighted that non-metropolitan schools are hard to staff and that they have a high staff turnover.⁴¹ They are staffed by new and young graduates,^{41,98} there are more teachers teaching out of field,¹³¹ teachers are more transient,^{97,106} and teachers often take on leadership roles early in their careers^{38,39}. Research to understand what contributes to these issues focuses on identifying the opportunities and challenges of teachers, why teachers choose to stay or leave non-metropolitan appointments, why teachers choose to work in non-metropolitan locations, and the pre-service teachers' understandings and attitudes about non-metropolitan teaching. Research on strategies to overcome these issues predominantly focuses on pre-service teacher education, the role of school leadership, and strategies to attract and retain teachers. Within these focus areas there are suggestions for policy, professional development, and teacher education²⁸. In this literature review, rather than simply reviewing the findings of these studies, we continue to explore the question we have raised elsewhere: If we have such a well-developed knowledge of matters related to non-metropolitan school staffing, why does it remain an ongoing issue?²⁸

In raising this question, we highlight the need to focus on the research approach and the impact of these approaches. This includes considering who is responsible for initiatives that contribute to understanding staffing of non-metropolitan schools (the community, institutions, or individuals), the methodology used in the research (qualitative or quantitative) the scale of studies undertaken (the number of participants and locations) and the timeframes involved in the research (short term or longitudinal studies). From an analysis of these factors we argue that to achieve long-term change in non-metropolitan schools we need to focus on a student-centred approach to change. This involves developing a long-term, collaborative approach that values the distinct nature of professional practice in these communities.

Methodology

Staffing non-metropolitan schools has been an ongoing concern over the past few decades and is an issue that continues to be revisited in research studies in Australia and internationally. To provide a comparative point for analysis in future years, we undertook a systematic literature review to provide a clearly defined and structured approach that outlines search criteria including the terms used, databases used, years covered, and type of research included (articles, chapters etc.). This approach will enable the issue to be revisited in future years to identify any progress and change that is occurring in the research about staffing non-metropolitan schools. In this section we outline the process and results of the systematic literature review.

Research Question

What strategies have been used to recruit and retain education professionals in non-metropolitan Australia?

Search Terms

1. Austra* AND (rural OR remote) AND (educat*) AND (recruit* OR retain* OR retention*) AND (staff OR workforce OR teacher OR educator)
2. Austra* AND (rural OR remote) AND (pre-service teacher) AND (prepar*)

Procedure

1. Define the research question.
2. Define the search terms and years included in the search.
3. Identify the databases to be searched.
4. Search the databases using the 'Title/Abstract/Key words' search.
5. Remove duplicates, editorials, commentaries, and non-research papers.
6. Screen all articles by title and abstract. This screening is completed by two researchers.
7. Retain articles where both researchers agree they should be included.
8. Search the reference lists of the articles for additional articles that could be included and review these articles.
9. Search for book chapters to be included.

Databases:

1. A+ Education
2. Education Research Complete
3. ERIC
4. Teacher Reference Centre
5. Proquest Central

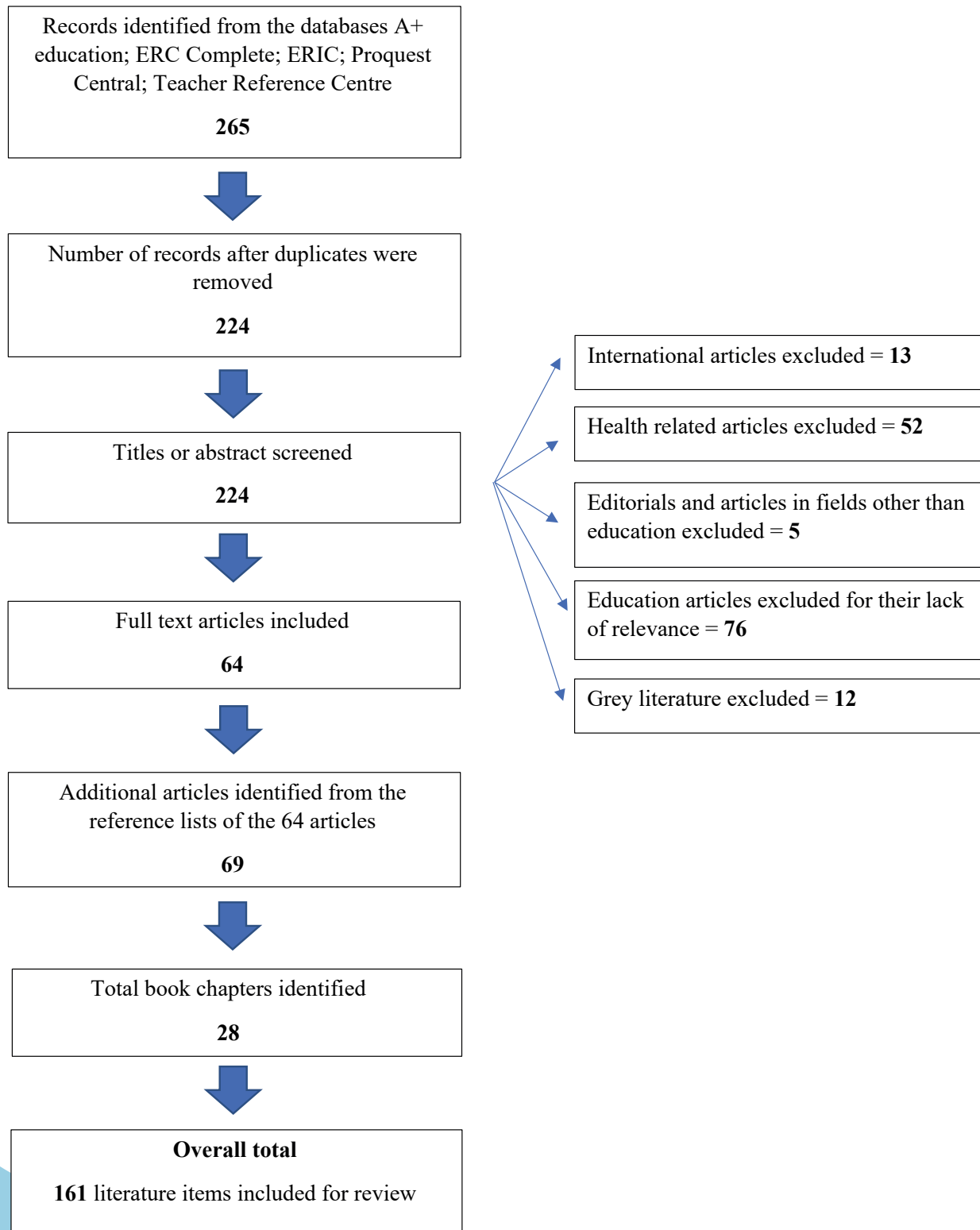
These five databases are the key databases for education research. Parameters were set to ensure only research articles were identified. Grey literature, conference papers, or non-peer reviewed material were excluded.

Duration:

Year 2000 to Year 2019.

Procedure and Results

Here we outline the results of each step of the systematic literature search.



Twenty years of staffing research

“The problem of staffing in non-metropolitan schools has been focused on for decades, however we are no closer to solving this perennial issue, suggesting a need to rethink approaches to research and practice.”

Twenty years of research: What has been happening?

Since the year 2000 there have been a number of large-scale projects focusing on the staffing of non-metropolitan schools. These include:

Staffing the Empty Schoolhouse¹²⁶

This report drew on the experiences of teachers in schools and policy makers to explore approaches and issues around the staffing of non-metropolitan schools in Australia.

Rural Teacher Education Program⁴⁰ (RTEP)

This project focused on the importance of considering context(s) in teaching. Specifically, it focused on school staffing, the preparation and support of teachers, and productive partnerships in New South Wales schools.

Renewing Teacher Education for Rural and Regional Australia^{91, 123} (TERRANova)

This project focused on developing pre-service teacher education for teachers who may teach in non-metropolitan schools. This involved focusing on recruitment and retention strategies, effective teacher education, promoting non-metropolitan teaching, with the aim of highlighting and making non-metropolitan teaching a worthwhile option.

Renewing Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum¹⁶³ (RRRTEC)

This project focused on pre-service teacher preparation for non-metropolitan communities. It identified what a pre-service teacher education program for non-metropolitan communities needs to involve and developed a program package for pre-service teacher education providers to draw on in their courses

Science, ICT and Mathematics Education in Rural and Regional Australia¹¹⁷ (SIMERR)

SIMERR is a National Research Centre that undertook a national survey about the needs of teachers in science, ICT and mathematics in non-metropolitan communities.

The Rural Education Forum of Australia⁵² (REFA)

The Rural Education Forum of Australia undertook research that focused on practicums for pre-service teachers in non-metropolitan locations. This focused on the costs involved, who were interested in these placements, and the issues associated with undertaking non-metropolitan practicums.

Bush Tracks Research Collective^{37,100}

This project focused on factors that make teaching in non-metropolitan locations unique. This included focusing on understanding teacher transitions and movements, school leadership, and pedagogical practices that are unique in these schools.

Other research

There have been several small-scale research projects focusing on the following factors:

- The experiences of new graduates
- The experiences of non-metropolitan teachers
- Programs where pre-service teachers visit non-metropolitan locations
- Non-metropolitan practicums
- Resources to prepare pre-service teachers
- School leadership in non-metropolitan locations
- Mentoring programs

Staffing challenges of non-metropolitan schools

Research over the past twenty years has highlighted consistent patterns in the staffing of non-metropolitan schools.

Hard to staff



Schools in non-metropolitan schools usually have difficulty attracting staff to the majority of their positions, even those that come with incentives.

Staff Turnover



Teachers and leaders in non-metropolitan schools usually stay for short time periods.

New Graduates



Positions are staffed by a high number of new graduates in non-metropolitan schools.

Out of Field Teaching



Teachers are likely to teach in a subject area they are not trained in due to staff shortages.

Transience



Teachers are more likely to be transient, moving closer to metropolitan centres of larger regional centres.

Leadership



Teachers often gain experience in leadership positions earlier than they would in metropolitan schools. Leadership positions are also difficult to staff.

Young Staff



Teachers in non-metropolitan schools are often younger than those in metropolitan schools.

All these issues are more prevalent in schools that are located further away from metropolitan areas.^{39,40} Research has been directed into understanding what contributes to these issues and strategies to reduce the impact of these issues in non-metropolitan schools.

What are the main research responses to the staffing issues?

In response to the identified issues around staffing non-metropolitan schools research has focused on five key areas:



Long staying teachers

What are the factors that influence teachers to stay long-term in non-metropolitan schools?

How can we draw on the experiences of successful schools with long-staying teachers to inform approaches to attracting and retaining staff?



Rural experience

What is the role of prior experience or a background in non-metropolitan locations in the attraction and retention of staff?

How can pre-service teachers be given the opportunity to experience teaching in non-metropolitan locations?



School leadership

What is the role of non-metropolitan school leaders in attracting and retaining staff?

What are the opportunities and challenges of school leaders in these locations?



Opportunities and challenges

What are the opportunities and challenges experienced by teachers in non-metropolitan locations?

What strategies can be implemented to minimise the challenges and increase the opportunities?



Pre-service teacher preparation

What is the role of pre-service teacher education in the attraction and retention of staff to non-metropolitan locations?

What does the preparation of teachers for non-metropolitan locations need to involve?

Developing a research program for the staffing of non-metropolitan schools

Research studies over the past twenty years reflect more developed understandings of issues relating to the staffing of non-metropolitan schools, however, they do not present any major change of thinking about approaches to staffing non-metropolitan schools. This, we propose, may relate to a lack of attention to developing the methodologies used in research in this field. It is not possible to improve our understanding of issues faced by non-metropolitan schools simply by repeating studies. Instead, to achieve long-term change, we need to examine both the issues experienced by schools and the research approach used to explore the issues taking place.

In this section we focus on the factors that are involved in the research approaches of studies over the past twenty years. This includes identifying the stakeholders involved in the research, the methods used to understand the issues, the timeframes of studies, and the scale of the research that is undertaken. We do this with the aim of informing a possible path forward in the research about the staffing of non-metropolitan schools.



Who are the stakeholders that are focused on in the research in the staffing of non-metropolitan schools?
We identify three main groups of stakeholders: the community, institutions, and individuals.



How, and by whom, are the research initiatives being led?
We determine whether initiatives are being led by one institution, or, if they are a collaborative initiative involving multiple people, places or institutions.



Who are the participants in the research studies?
We examine the number of participants in research studies and whether they can be considered small or large scale studies.



What types of research methods are being used to explore the issues related to staffing non-metropolitan schools?
We explore whether the methods used are qualitative or quantitative and whether there is any diversity in the methods used.



What are the timeframes of the research studies?
We explore the timeframe of studies, and whether they are long-term or short-term studies.

Using this analysis, we argue that future studies need to focus on using new methods, involve collaboration with all stakeholders, in a sustained effort to value the distinct nature of the non-metropolitan profession.

Stakeholder focus: Communities, individuals, or institutions.

“For the staffing of non-metropolitan schools to be successful all stakeholders need to be involved. Although community and place are crucial in staffing non-metropolitan schools, it is rare for community members to hold the power in programs to support the staffing of their local schools. Instead, the responsibility is placed on institutions or individuals in the school.”

Who are the stakeholders in the research?

Research identifies that staffing in non-metropolitan schools needs to involve all stakeholders, not just jurisdictional staffing officials.⁴² This, we agree, needs to include education departments, schools, universities, students, their families, and communities.

In this section we explore which stakeholders are the focus of the research in the staffing of non-metropolitan schools. We identify which stakeholders lead the initiative related to staffing, and which stakeholder is at the centre of the research. We identify three main groups of stakeholders: the community, institutions, and individuals.



Community



Research initiatives that are led by the community that a school is located in. This includes members of the general public who are not involved in schools as a parent or staff member.



0



Institutions



Research that is related to initiatives led by education institutions. This includes schools, universities and education departments.



68



Individuals



Research initiatives that are related to the experiences or knowledge of individuals. This includes teachers, school leaders, students and pre-service teachers.



87

**literature reviews (n=6) have been excluded from these totals*

All stakeholders matter

There are clear and concerning trends in the stakeholders that are the focus of the research. Most of the literature involved research that was initiated by, or focused on, institutions and individuals. There were very few research studies that were initiated by, or that focused on, the direct involvement of community stakeholders.

The high number of research outputs involving research initiated by institutions and individuals is to be expected because institutions are responsible for pre-service teacher education and research, however, the lack of community-initiated initiatives is a concern. The lack of community-initiated initiatives is a direct contradiction to research that identifies the importance of place-conscious, community focused schooling and school staffing, such

as the RRRTEC study.¹⁶² This highlights that initiatives to attract and retain teachers that involve the community are reliant on the support of individuals or institutions, rather than being directly driven by the community.

Problematically, this removes the focus from those who matter most in schooling; the students, their families and the communities in which they are situated. Instead, it places the power with institutions whose decision making is controlled by metrocentric policies that marginalize the interests of non-metropolitan communities. This is concerning as school education needs to serve the students within them, their communities and the interests of their futures. For this to occur, it is important that community stakeholders are involved in this issue.



Figure 1. A student-centered model of staffing nonmetropolitan schools where all stakeholders are involved, a model that informs policy considerations

From these observations we recommend that a model of research that involves all stakeholders is developed. First and foremost, this research must consider what is necessary for the students and their communities, with policy contexts adaptive to these needs. This recommendation responds to previous research that suggests that the attraction and retention of staff in non-

metropolitan schools needs to be considered part of ensuring quality teaching and learning.⁴³ This means that it needs to be a key part of pre-service teacher education and a policy issue, not just an issue for education departments who currently manage the recruitment of teachers.⁴³

“Research first and foremost must consider what is necessary for the students and their communities, with policy contexts adaptive to these needs.”



Research approach

“To achieve long-term change in the ongoing challenges of staffing non-metropolitan schools new approaches to research are needed to avoid reproducing the same studies and results without change.”

Research approach: Key findings

In this section we focus on four key issues in the research approaches of the staffing studies: who leads the research initiative, who the participants are, the methods used in the research studies and the timeframe of the research studies. This aims to understand which approaches have been already used in each of these areas to inform future approaches to research.

Factor

Overview of the factors in the research



Leadership of initiatives

The majority of research studies involve individual institutions. There are few collaborative studies across multiple institutions (schools, universities, and departments of education).



Participants

The majority of research studies involve small numbers of participants. Studies that involve large numbers of participants are predominantly studies that are not specific to non-metropolitan locations or are part of longitudinal studies.



Methods

The majority of studies use qualitative research approaches. Studies that include quantitative methods are predominantly studies that are not specific to non-metropolitan locations or are part of longitudinal studies.



Timeframes

The majority of studies involve short time frames. Longitudinal studies are rare and are predominantly studies that are funded by education departments and the Australian Research Council.

This analysis identified some very clear trends in the research approaches. Most studies focusing on the staffing of non-metropolitan schools are short term, qualitative studies involving a small number of participants in individual institutions. This is a pattern in the research that has the potential to limit the impact and integration with education policy which often relies upon statistical based research for decision making. Further, the lack of long-term research limits our understanding of the long-term impact of these research initiatives. There are few studies that involve longitudinal or follow up research to determine the impact of these research initiatives beyond their immediate implementation. Building on arguments elsewhere^{28, 128} here we argue for a need to increase a focus on long term research programs that address the above-mentioned limitations.

“To work towards achieving long-term change in non-metropolitan schools we need to learn from history and rethink current approaches to research and practice by focusing on developing a long-term, sustainable, collaborative research approach that values the distinct nature of the profession in these communities.”



Re-thinking the research on the staffing of non-metropolitan schools

Over the past twenty years there have only been minimal changes in approaches to research in the staffing of non-metropolitan schools. Our understandings of issues are now more developed and more nuanced; however, we are still exploring the same issues in predominantly the same way that we were twenty years ago²⁸. As such it is time to reconsider how we understand and label the issues involved in the attraction and retention of staff to non-metropolitan locations. This involves re-situating the issues within four key areas of broader education theory:

Professional identity and satisfaction



Teacher professional identity refers to *“the way that teachers, both individually and collectively, view and understand themselves as teachers.”*¹⁰⁸(p519) This we argue, influences the challenges and opportunities teachers experience, how they respond to the community they are teaching in, how teachers enact their teaching practice, and their satisfaction with their teaching.

Social Justice and Equity



Staffing of non-metropolitan schools is informed by a range of notions of social justice that illustrate the contested terrain of justice, equity and the recognition of difference in Australian education and social policy. We argue that conclusions about disadvantage and the solutions they pose expose the metro-centric nature of policy making and a general lack of understanding of the complex social dynamics taking place in Australian non-metropolitan contexts.

Standardisation and regulation



Education as a profession has become increasingly regulated over the past twenty years. During this time a national curriculum and professional standards for teachers have been introduced, and teacher education programs have been subject to regulation and registration requirements based on metropolitan assumptions. Here we argue that teachers, regardless of context or place, are forced to respond to these changes and navigate their teaching in a way that responds to these issues.

Isolation



Educational isolation is *“complex, grounded in location, situated in access to resources and results in reduced agency for schools.”*¹¹⁴(p4) Isolation is often seen to include, professional, personal, geographical, cultural, and socio-economic isolation. The complexity of isolation is experienced by schools in different ways even though they are all non-metropolitan schools.¹¹⁴ This we argue, influences how teachers respond to issues as either opportunities or challenges.

These perspectives have been highlighted in broader education literature as key issues influencing non-metropolitan schooling. It is through these theoretical framings that we explore the literature about the staffing of non-metropolitan schools.

Professional identity, stress and satisfaction

“Teacher professional identity does not develop in isolation. Place impacts upon teachers’ ability to teach in the way they imagine quality teaching to be.”

Professional identity and satisfaction

Teacher professional identity refers to *“the way that teachers, both individually and collectively, view and understand themselves as teachers.”*¹⁰⁸(p519) Stress, satisfaction, and professional identity are related to place and professional and pedagogical standards in a dynamic relationship. The specificities of non-metropolitan locations influence the experiences, opportunities and challenges teachers face in their role.^{45,109} How teachers react and respond to these issues may be considered as a matter of professional identity and satisfaction.

Teachers who take up non-metropolitan positions do so as a result of a combination of their attitudes, culture, sociological context and psychology that results in a deliberate action and behavioural intention to apply for the job.⁷⁷ Some of the reasons teachers take up positions, that are seen as the opportunities of non-metropolitan communities, include valuing the lifestyle,^{54,72,73,83,89} to experience a challenge,^{72,73,83} being interested in non-metropolitan communities,^{54,90,136} identifying with a non-metropolitan⁶² or Indigenous¹³⁶ background, and for family reasons.^{54,136} The professional opportunities teachers identified include factors such as leadership opportunities,^{62,72,73,90} autonomy of practice,^{62,72,73,90} collegial relationships,⁵⁵ access to the transfer system, financial incentives,⁹⁰ and more employment opportunities¹³⁶.

Once teachers take up non-metropolitan appointments it is important to consider that the challenges they encounter may also influence their levels of stress and their ability to teach in the way they imagine quality teaching to be. Teachers in non-metropolitan locations identified challenges that related specifically to their location associated with the perceived professional, personal and social isolation.^{6,35,55,72,73,81,90,109,116,143} This includes issues with accessing professional development (PD),^{22,36,55,90,116} managing relationships with colleagues,^{61,109} teaching out of field,^{36,81,90,131} and the distance from family and social supports.^{61,62,72,73,81,90} Teachers also encountered challenges fitting into the community,^{83,90} and adjusting to the new environment.⁶ These are all factors that influence

teachers to stay or leave non-metropolitan appointments.

The way that teachers respond to issues they encounter influences their professional satisfaction. Although new teachers implement strategies to respond to challenges with resilience, they are at a stage of their career where they are developing their teacher identity which is influenced by the challenges they encounter.¹⁰⁹ As a result they may struggle to feel competent in their role without support.²² For example, newly appointed teachers who were teaching out of field felt this influenced the quality of their work life and levels of dissatisfaction as a teacher.¹³¹ Their expectations and experiences in their role and the way they evaluated these influenced how they integrated into a new school and community.¹³⁵ Factors such as gaining information and support within their community help to create positive connections with the community, a factor that influences the quality of their work life.¹³⁵ Without these factors a teacher is likely to experience instability and withdraw from the community and their role.¹³⁵

Staffing contracts are also a contributing factor to the way teachers made connections in their community.⁸⁷ Many contracts are only short-term appointments^{119,137} which creates insecurity for staff.⁸⁷ This also influences their relationship and dedication to the school community^{119,138} as long staying teachers are more likely to develop stronger community relationships.¹⁵⁵

Professional satisfaction of school leaders

Their reasons for applying for leadership roles relate to professional, personal, place-based reasons, as well as pragmatic, opportunistic, and idealistic motivations. However, financial reasons were not a high motivating factor for potential leaders applying for leadership roles,⁵³ indicating a need to focus on professional factors when considering the staffing of non-metropolitan leadership roles.

In their roles school leaders also experience similar opportunities and challenges to teachers that may contribute to their sense of professional identity.⁷⁶ These opportunities and challenges relate to understanding and navigating community, culture and context.^{49,76,85,141,142} These include adapting policy for contextual needs,^{49,86,141,142,169} building relationships,^{21,38,39,112,141} managing personal and work priorities,^{38,39} adjusting to the environment and lifestyle,^{89,166} experiencing social and professional isolation,^{21,33,105,112,141,142} developing their confidence, and being prepared to respond to the unknown.⁷⁶ They also felt they experienced issues managing school staffing,^{49,50} issues of school sustainability, equity and social justice for their students, and policy matters.^{49,141,142} Many of these factors relate to the added administrative challenge of the dual role of teacher and principal.⁸⁶

One key issue impacting principals is the nature of short-term contracts and their experience in leadership roles. Principals on short term contracts were less likely to want to implement changes and invest time in their school and community.^{16,168} This is problematic because long term commitment and sustainable leadership is influenced by knowing the context and developing relationships with the community.^{16,168} Less experienced school leaders also experienced more demand in terms of staffing their school, as did leaders in more remote schools.³⁰

Women perceived their roles and experiences of leadership to be different to that of men.^{17,18,168} They felt that they took a more collaborative approach to leadership, focused more on mentoring new staff than men,^{17,18,103,104,113} and worked to involve the community in their role.³⁶ However, they also felt they experienced challenges in obtaining opportunities for leaderships,^{104,113} working in a male dominated culture of school leadership, working with community expectations and fitting into the community.^{103,104,113} Further, they felt that despite the trend of early leadership in non-metropolitan schools, their

opportunities for leadership came from their history and experience in roles, rather than early opportunities due to difficulties staffing positions.^{103,113}

Professional identity and teacher educators

Teacher educators have a crucial role in preparing teachers for their profession. Their personal biography is considered to be influential in the preparation of teachers for non-metropolitan practice.¹⁵⁴ This has been explored by several researchers by drawing on the self-studies methodologies.¹⁵⁴ In these self-studies teacher educators consider the impact of their personal histories, their doctoral research, their careers as teacher educators and their histories prior to having roles in teacher education research. These studies have identified the importance of teacher educators understanding non-metropolitan difference to inform teacher education programs with the aim of supporting the attraction and retention of teachers in these regions.^{66,80,151,158} These include understanding the myths and realities of rurality,^{66,80,151,158,179} and cultural diversity.⁸⁰ These factors inform ethical practice,⁸⁰ understandings, and positionings as teacher educators as well as the research work teacher educators undertake in non-metropolitan locations.^{66,79,80,151,158}

All these examples indicate that teacher educators' histories and connections to non-metropolitan places impacts professional practice. However, it is also important to note that a teacher educator, researcher or teacher practitioner, does not have to be non-metropolitan or have a non-metropolitan history to work in this space. Examples of discussions around this issue draw on insider and outsider research, research positionality, and rural standpoint theories.¹⁶⁰

Social justice and equity

“The long history of problems in staffing non-metropolitan schools is not a natural phenomenon: indeed, it signals the failure of ideologies and capacities to correctly identify and address disadvantage over many decades.”

Social justice and equity

How educational and social disadvantage of non-metropolitan communities is constructed is an important social justice and public policy issue. The long history of problems in staffing non-metropolitan schools is not a natural phenomenon: indeed, it signals the failure of ideologies and capacities to correctly identify and address disadvantage over many decades. In general, conclusions are informed by a range of notions of social justice that illustrate the contested terrain of justice, equity and the recognition of difference in Australian education and social policy. Often conclusions about disadvantage and the solutions they pose expose the metro-centric nature of policy making and a general lack of understanding of the complex social dynamics taking place in Australian non-metropolitan contexts. A consequence of this approach is the belief that because non-metropolitan areas are falling behind in standardised measures they need to be given more resources. What they should get more of and how much of it they should get is however determined by others far away from the site of the supposed disadvantage. Many of these policies are influenced by a distributive approach to justice, rather than other forms of justice.²³ In this section we highlight examples of these policies and approaches.

Support from a distance

The distributive approach to justice is exemplified through the use of online professional development and teacher preparation in the interests of equity for non-metropolitan staff and potential staff.

Resources for pre-service teacher level include online discussion forums, virtual simulations of non-metropolitan teaching, and online access to professional support from the university. It has been suggested that in-service teachers be provided with access to online professional development and support to overcome some barriers and challenges they experience.⁷⁸ These methods of distributing resources have several professional

opportunities and challenges. In-service teachers for example identified that access to online professional development was beneficial, however, a mix of in-person and online methods are required for the use of technology to be successful.^{12,120} In online discussion forums and online mentoring, participants described benefits such as increased discipline knowledge, understanding of the profession,^{20,34,97,120,121,130} resources,^{20,34,95,120,121} and communication skills.^{25,34,130} They also felt it reduced their sense of professional, personal and social isolation and helped them develop networks.^{34,130} Pre-service teachers were able to post questions, reflections and discuss issues while on placement and receive feedback from their peers and university staff.^{25,34,74,95,120,121} However, pre-service teachers identified difficulties engaging online because of time constraints,^{34,120,121,130} failures in the technology they were using,^{34,129,130} and a lack of confidence.^{34,120,121}

An additional approach used is online role playing and simulation software programs that enable pre-service teachers to practice their teaching in situations they may not encounter in a metropolitan location, such as multi-age group teaching.^{46,63} Overall, pre-service teachers felt that these scenarios were beneficial, with participants identifying it had alleviated some of their concerns about non-metropolitan teaching and increased their opportunities to develop their teaching skills.^{46,63} These online simulations were also seen to have a positive effect on pre-service teachers' coursework grades, especially when undertaken with a unit about teaching in non-metropolitan schools; however, they are not seen to be a replacement of placements in non-metropolitan schools.^{46,63,70}

The recent Independent Review into Regional, Remote and Rural Education recommended that ICT infrastructure needed to be improved in non-metropolitan locations to better enable the utilisation of online resources.⁴⁸ However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when population in all locations had to utilise online resources, there have been many complaints about the perceived substandard of online resources. This leads us to question why online

resources are considered to be a solution for non-metropolitan regions when they are not considered to be high enough standard for all communities.

Remote Indigenous teaching

The opportunities and challenges of remote teaching are very similar to these described in previous sections of this monograph.

There are several factors that contribute to the retention of teachers in remote schools. From institutions, a collaborative approach is needed as well as pre-service teacher education that effectively prepares teachers for practice in these locations.¹¹ Teachers who are regarded to be successful are those who have more experience, are able to adapt to change, and are able to develop networks in their community and beyond.⁶⁹ Indigenous teachers felt that successful teachers need to adopt a team approach, working with Indigenous cultures to develop quality teaching.⁴⁷ This involves considering attitudes, sources of power, and including communities in decision making about schooling. Teachers in schools need to be able to recognise their role in the community and share goals and expectations with the community.⁶⁹ Familiarity with Indigenous cultures and education were also crucial.⁴⁷

Pre-service teachers who participated in specific units on Indigenous education, or who undertook an internship in remote locations, felt this helped prepare them for teaching in these locations.⁵⁹ The majority of pre-service teachers who participated in internships indicated a willingness to stay in their school long term.⁵⁹ Induction, community support, and relationships with other teachers also supported the experiences of new teachers in remote schools.⁶⁹

Teachers identified several opportunities and challenges to teaching in remote locations. The opportunities related to the remote lifestyle and personal growth in their positions. For example, the isolation,^{11,144} natural environment, relationships, and opportunities for

personal and professional growth¹⁴⁴ were all considered to be opportunities. Many of the challenges related to the remote lifestyle and the isolation this encompassed. In particular, teachers identified feeling unprepared for the context, experiencing culture shock¹⁴⁴ and difficulties developing culturally responsive pedagogy, a factor that may have been affected by their confidence and experience with these practices.⁷⁵

Research suggests that approaches to encouraging qualified local Indigenous teachers to stay in their own communities should continue due to the benefits they provide communities.¹⁰⁷ They also provide a template for all non-metropolitan communities to develop local capitals and staffing.

Pre-service teacher education

Pre-service teacher education about schooling in remote Indigenous communities focused on allowing student teachers to experience teaching in remote contexts. This included service-learning⁸⁴ and placement opportunities^{4,101} in remote Indigenous communities.

Programs such as these benefitted pre-service teachers professionally and personally from the skills and insights they gained during these experiences. Professionally, pre-service teachers felt they increased their cultural and linguistic awareness and were able to challenge their pre-conceived notions about remote Indigenous teaching.^{6,60,101,107} They were also able to develop networks, develop professional teaching skills and learn about the role of community in schooling.^{60,84,101} Pre-service teachers identified personal gains in their confidence and they felt they had the opportunity to develop outside their comfort zone.^{60,84,101} Pre-service teachers also identified challenges in these programs. The challenges all related to their understandings of culture, particularly, that they did not perpetuate current issues of marginalisation, or were not influenced by stereotypes about Indigeneity.^{4,84}

Community teacher education programs

A priority in remote Indigenous school staffing is encouraging Indigenous people to become teachers. Additional aims of these programs are to ensure culturally relevant teaching practice,⁹⁴ and to encourage teacher retention in remote locations.⁹³ This usually involves initiatives that provide opportunities for teacher's aides to train to become teachers while largely remaining in their own community.^{7,93,94,149} These programs usually involve the delivery of teacher education remotely, using ICT and community site visits from teacher educators, mentoring, and rely upon partnerships between stakeholders, such as universities and departments of education.^{118,172} Of key importance is how these programs recognise and draw on the prior learning and experience of community members.¹¹⁸

These programs have several benefits for both the teacher in training and the local community. The community felt schooling valued their culture¹⁴⁹ and there were increases in student attendance, retention, and community involvement in schooling.^{93,94} Indigenous people were able to become a teacher without moving away from their home location, they had the flexibility to balance their work and their life in the community, and they felt a sense of accomplishment and success from the program.^{7,94} An overall benefit for teacher education was the inclusion of culturally responsive pedagogy in teacher education training^{7,94,149}

However, these programs, like many in remote locations, involved challenges around time, relationships development, literacy levels, funding and personal commitments of time from the teachers involved.^{93,94} Further, the process of recognising students' prior learning can be difficult.¹¹⁸

Research suggests that approaches to encouraging qualified local Indigenous teachers to stay in their own communities should continue due to the benefits they provide communities.¹⁰⁷ They also provide a template for all non-metropolitan communities to develop local capitals and staffing.

Incentives¹

One strategy that education authorities use to attract and retain staff are incentives offered to teachers above and beyond employment conditions offered to teachers in metropolitan locations. However, while incentives may attract teachers to non-metropolitan locations, they do not always encourage teachers to stay in non-metropolitan communities.⁵⁵ Incentives are overwhelmingly focused on financial inducements and compensation that are informed by forms of economic and employment rewards. These see motivation in economically informed, human capital means. Offering extrinsically motivated incentives identifies non-metropolitan schools as disadvantaged.¹⁵⁷ There is a very limited focus on internal professional motivations or skills based human capitals.

Incentivising the profession in this way runs the risk of further contributing to the staffing problem. While they attract teachers, without preparation for the specificities of non-metropolitan practice, teachers are encouraged to leave after their mandated duration of service is complete.¹⁵⁷ A better balance is needed.

¹ For a full overview see (127)

The multifaceted nature of isolation

“It is not enough to simply view isolation in terms of geographical distance. Instead, isolation needs to be understood as a complex and multifaceted issue influencing the staffing of non-metropolitan schools that requires more attention.”

The complexity of isolation

Isolation is multifaceted and includes professional, personal, geographical, cultural and socio-economic factors related to location. It is influenced by access to resources, influences a school's agency and is experienced by schools in different ways.¹¹⁴ Isolation is one of the issues that will either enable a teacher to thrive, or merely survive in their role. Some teachers enjoy the isolation and perceive it to be beneficial, while others find it a barrier to their professional and personal life. This has been described as the paradox of non-metropolitan school leadership and teaching.⁹⁰ Many of the suggested support mechanisms to reduce the issues associated with isolation have the potential to support teachers in non-metropolitan areas if they are developed from a non-metropolitan perspective, rather than in a way that aims to provide teachers with access to the same resources and services provided in metropolitan locations. By doing this, support mechanisms have the potential to undermine the value of the non-metropolitan profession and encourage teachers to seek to return back to the metropolitan locations.

The challenges of isolation

Challenges related to isolation were evident in the experiences of staff in non-metropolitan locations. From a social perspective, teachers cited issues such as difficulties integrating into a new community and making new friends, the lack of social activities and distance to social activities, the vast distance from family and friends,^{55,61,62,72,73,80,81,90,131} their visibility in the community,⁶¹ and issues adapting to living close to their colleagues.^{83,90} Teachers also indicated feeling less connected to their community than members of the community who were not teachers.²⁶ From a professional and personal perspective, teachers cited issues with a lack of support,^{81,90,116,143} difficulty adapting to the context and environment,¹⁴¹ lack of resources,^{34,89} the costs of everyday living and the costs involved with relocating to their new community.^{55,90}

Teachers in non-metropolitan locations also struggled to balance the needs of their family with the demands of their job.⁸³ For instance, they felt it was important to consider their children's futures over their role. Teachers who felt that their children's education needs were being met, and that they lived near to their extended family, were more likely to stay. This can create tensions for teachers particularly if they choose to send their children to a school other than their own.⁸³

New teacher support and professional development

More support is needed for new graduates in non-metropolitan locations with any resources targeted to the specific needs of non-metropolitan schools.^{70,71,90,98} At different stages of their career teachers require different professional development,^{72,73,135} with their transition to teaching being a particularly crucial stage for PD. In the first few weeks of their role it is crucial they are supported with information, in the first half of the year they need feedback, and in the three months leading up to the end of the year, they need support to feel a sense of stability and certainty.¹³⁵

Many teachers felt they needed more professional development,^{12,35,55,72,73,81,90,110} with their access being affected due to challenges such as time, distance, availability, relevance, access to casual teachers.^{12,72,73,110} Teachers identified a need for more PD to develop their teaching skills as well as their personal skills. This included PD in leadership, ICT use, behavior management, out of field teaching, gifted and talented pedagogy, literacy, non-metropolitan specific pedagogy, cultural awareness and pedagogy for students with additional needs.^{72,73} From a personal perspective, teachers identified a need for support to develop resilience, mental health management,^{89,135} and to develop networks in their school¹⁷¹ and community.⁶² Support could include mentoring in-school and within the community. Partnerships are particularly important in developing sustainable, effective and context

based professional development.¹⁴⁰ This enables all participants to participate from the perspective of leading professional learning and learning.¹⁴⁰ With community members supporting teachers when they are new to non-metropolitan teaching by initiating connections and relationships.⁶ Teachers also need opportunities to develop networks with teachers from other schools to build their professional skills and knowledge base.¹¹⁶ Support for teachers to access PD is also needed.¹² This may include a system of casual teachers rostered to replace staff away at PD,^{72,73} and offering PD online.^{12,78,103}

Support for school leaders

Attracting leaders to non-metropolitan schools needs to include a focus on providing preparation for, and support in the role in non-metropolitan locations.^{15,19} Preparing and supporting leaders for their role needs to include support to understand their community and the role of context in their job.^{16,18,19,30,49,56,141,167,168} This includes the culture, history, politics, and influence of geography on communities.¹⁶⁷ To enable this to occur, principals may need more time for handovers from previous principals, developing networks for isolated principals and a consultant to support these school leaders,⁸⁹ opportunities to work with understanding policy adaptation and systemic issues.¹⁶⁷ However, while some school leaders who received more formal preparation for the role had higher levels of job satisfaction,²⁹ school leaders who felt most prepared for their role also indicated that there were more challenges in non-metropolitan school leadership, a factor that indicates they may understand the complexity of issues and interrogate the issues involved.¹⁶⁹

National policy needs to address the concerns and highlight the opportunities of these roles.⁴⁹ Further, the qualifications and experience of potential leaders need to be considered due to their importance in success as a school leader.³⁰ It is also important that leaders are offered appropriate conditions for the role, including remuneration for the role and attractive housing.³⁰ Better mental health supports are also important.²¹

Once in the role, support for principals is needed in the areas of mental health services, opportunities to develop resilience,¹⁶⁷ developing personal skills such as relationship building and understanding diversity,¹⁶⁷ opportunities to develop administrative skills,⁸⁹ support to address the attraction and retention of staff,⁸⁹ access to professional associations specific to non-metropolitan locations,⁸⁹ further qualifications specific to non-metropolitan leadership.¹⁵

Standardisation and regulation

“The increasingly controlled and standardised nature of school education only acts to reinforce disadvantage by marginalising non-metropolitan communities.”

Standardisation and regulation

In Australia, the profession of education has become increasingly regulated over the past twenty years. During this time a national curriculum and teacher professional standards have been introduced, and teacher education programs have been subject to regulation and registration requirements. These policies have been critiqued for being grounded in metro-normative assumptions and approaches which marginalise non-metropolitan schooling. These factors all impact the staffing of non-metropolitan schools as context is a key factor that influences practice in non-metropolitan locations.^{42,111,122,139,156,161,162,164}

Beyond these metro-normative assumptions, it is important to view the problem of high teacher turnover in the context of the social and political issues and influences.⁹⁷ This can be explored by drawing on areas such as rural geography, sociology and understandings of spatiality, place, mobilities and displacement.^{96,97} These theories encourage local people, places and perspectives to be valued. Policy and teacher preparation need to respond to these diverse considerations, rather than focus on a standardised approach. These are areas that have been focused upon and identified in previous reviews as areas of importance.⁹

Understanding non-metropolitan teaching

Providing successful teachers to non-metropolitan communities is a concern for education authorities, with some authorities seeking to identify non-academic attributes that relate to successful teaching in non-metropolitan locations through aptitude tests.³² Successful non-metropolitan teaching requires teachers to value non-metropolitan locations as distinct and unique. This includes drawing on community relationships, the specificities of place, and the strengths of non-metropolitan communities.^{42,51,111,121,125,139,156,161,162}

Pre-service teachers' attitudes, biographies, and experiences with non-metropolitan locations were all influential factors in their views about non-metropolitan teaching. Pre-service teachers who had positive views about non-metropolitan teaching,^{6,62} those who were from non-metropolitan locations,⁶² and graduates who felt a personal connection to non-metropolitan communities,⁸¹ were more likely to stay and teach in these communities. Further, how pre-service teachers rated their own metro-centricity (their identification with city habits) was a factor that influenced how they viewed non-metropolitan teaching and whether they wanted to take up a non-metropolitan teaching position.¹³ This was more of a predicting factor than pre-service teachers' background location.¹³ Problematically, some pre-service teachers only held idyllic or hellish views about non-metropolitan teaching, a factor that influenced their interest in non-metropolitan teaching.¹³⁴ Negative stereotypes about disadvantage were more prevalent in younger pre-service teachers, however, they also identified that they lacked experience to draw conclusions about non-metropolitan places.¹⁵⁰ Teachers were also more likely to teach in areas similar to where they lived while they were pre-service teachers,^{61,72,73} and with the majority of universities and the population being located in metropolitan locations, this is an important issue to consider.⁶¹ With these factors in mind it is important to ensure that the benefits of non-metropolitan teaching are publicised and students have adequate information to make informed decisions about where they will teach.^{72,73,134}

Promoting and experiencing non-metropolitan teaching

At a pre-service teacher level, universities, in partnership with jurisdictional education departments, may offer programs where students are encouraged to complete a non-metropolitan practicum or participate in programs where they visit non-metropolitan schools. These programs aim to increase pre-service teachers' understanding of non-metropolitan places, challenge students pre-conceived notions of non-metropolitan living

and teaching, highlight the benefits of non-metropolitan teaching, and increase the likelihood pre-service teachers will take up a position in non-metropolitan communities when they graduate.^{14,16,124,133,134,147,162,148,173} All of these aims were also identified by pre-service teachers as reasons for applying for these programs.^{8,124}

Pre-service teachers who participated in such programs identified a number of benefits to the programs. They had more of an idea about what this might entail, they gained more realistic expectations, understood more about living in non-metropolitan communities, and the opportunities of non-metropolitan teaching.^{14,24,99,67,68,88,124,132,146,162,173} They gained professional skills such as teaching in multi-age groups,⁸² working with Indigenous pedagogies,⁹⁹ and skills in assessment and planning.⁶⁷ Schools also reported that the presence of pre-service teachers benefitted the community and teachers.^{82,132,133,137}

Pre-service teachers did however report some disadvantages to these programs, many of which were similar to the challenges experienced by teachers in these communities. The challenges included professional and personal isolation,^{65,82} racism,⁹⁹ family and employment commitments,¹⁴⁷ and the costs involved.^{1,65,90,135,145} The short timelines of these programs also made it more difficult for pre-service teachers to come to know and understand their community and what it means to teach there.^{1,115}

Evaluations of programs that enable pre-service teachers to experience teaching in a non-metropolitan location have recommended that they continue,^{8,68} with some suggestions for improvements to increase their success and support pre-service teachers who experience challenges. Extending the programs for longer periods of time,^{115,145} and opportunities to understand the role of schools in small communities^{1,82} are some ways to support pre-service teachers to gain more realistic understandings of non-metropolitan teaching. Partnerships between community, schools, universities are key to facilitating successful opportunities for pre-service teachers.¹⁴

Universities need to collaborate and share resources to enable these programs to go ahead and minimize costs involved, including costs for pre-service teachers,¹³⁰ as well as offer group placements to support pre-service teachers to network and overcome possible isolation.¹³⁰ Placements in non-metropolitan locations are also the responsibility of metropolitan universities, not just those located in non-metropolitan locations.⁶⁵ More promotion of opportunities for placements outside metropolitan locations is needed to encourage pre-service teachers in all universities to consider non-metropolitan teaching.^{8,68}

Teacher education courses

Teacher education courses are one of the most important ways for teachers to learn about the distinct nature of the profession in non-metropolitan communities, which in turn has the potential not only to arm pre-service teachers with understandings of these communities, but also to influence pre-service teachers to consider non-metropolitan teaching as a desirable and valuable option.⁴² Without appropriate preparation for non-metropolitan schools the staffing problems that many non-metropolitan schools face continue to affect the educational outcomes and aspirations of students in these schools. This is an issue for early childhood teachers as well as primary and high school teachers.⁴⁴ Teachers in non-metropolitan locations indicated they felt just as effective overall as their peers in metropolitan regions, however, there were some differences where they felt less prepared which related to contextual factors their studies did not prepare them for.⁷⁹ Preparing more teachers is not the solution, instead, teacher educators need to take a rural standpoint to prepare teachers for non-metropolitan appointments.¹⁵⁹ This involves ensuring that teachers are aware of the opportunities, challenges and differences in these settings, despite the metrocentric approach to teacher education.^{42,164} This includes opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop understandings of critical pedagogy and practice, as well as ethnographic research skills through modelling in their coursework.²⁷ To successfully achieve this teacher education needs to

change to incorporate non-metropolitan perspectives, not just include a supplementary program where pre-service teachers visit non-metropolitan areas.⁴²

Teacher education needs to support pre-service teachers to be prepared for the unique opportunities and challenges of non-metropolitan teaching, and include a strong focus on understanding the places and communities they will work in.^{27,42,81,88,98,115,161,162} Pre-service teachers need opportunities to learn to recognize and value local knowledges, resources, relationships and people and understand the connection between the classroom and community.^{27,42,81,88,98,115,161,162} This includes understanding how to develop relationships and supports in the community,^{35,111,162} learning to work with diverse student populations, and learning to engage with the curriculum in meaningful ways for the students, learning to use technology to collaborate in their work,¹⁶² managing their own emotions and developing resilience,^{58,143} and manage their visibility in the community.¹⁶² These types of non-metropolitan teaching specific skills are not currently focused on in teacher education.^{42,81,164}

The majority of teacher education programs do not include a focus on non-metropolitan teaching preparation, or options for practicums in non-metropolitan locations.^{42,147} In a recent study of teacher education courses, it was noted that no teacher education course has a compulsory unit dedicated to non-metropolitan practice. This is undoubtedly related to the need for teacher education course units to be related to the teacher education graduate standards and the lack of mention of non-metropolitan practice in these standards. Instead, in teacher education courses non-metropolitan teaching is often conflated with diversity and disadvantage, and remote teaching is often conflated with Indigenous teaching, reinforcing stereotypes of disadvantage in these communities.

Regardless of the lack of focus in teacher education, there are some models to support pre-service teachers (and practicing teachers) to understand rurality and teaching in

non-metropolitan locations. These include:

- The rural social space model that describes rurality as multifaceted and complex that are influenced by factors such as economy, demography, geography and how they come together to create the context of a community a particular time.¹²²
- The RRRTEC conceptual framework focuses on preparing teachers to understand the school, classroom and community factors in non-metropolitan locations.¹⁶²
- Drawing on third or hybrid spaces to prevent thinking in terms of rural/urban binaries by bringing together the non-metropolitan social space model, funds of knowledge, and place consciousness.¹⁵⁹
- A pedagogy of the rural which aims to draw attention to what the non-metropolitan can bring to education by considering the interrelated factors of place, space and identity to understand influences at a meso and macro level.^{152,153}
- A teacher place assemblage that focuses on the influence of place and communities and how these will affect the students' education.¹¹¹

These models all relate to understanding place, community, rurality and the unique features of non-metropolitan schools and teaching. They are also linked to ideas and models of socio-spatial awareness, place-consciousness, a place-based approach and situated practice. Models such as these highlight that teacher education needs to take an approach that acknowledges and responds to the impact of context.⁴³

Resources have been developed by research teams and university educators to support the development of pre-service teachers' understandings of non-metropolitan teaching. The RRRTEC¹⁶² team developed resources and modules of work for universities to prepare pre-service teachers for teaching in non-metropolitan locations. These

resources are based on supporting pre-service teachers to come to know the school, classroom and community they serve.¹⁶² These resources have been further developed by other universities that aim to produce quality graduates to teach in non-metropolitan schools.^{92,146,148} These link to the professional standards for teachers and draw on a model used for the preparation of health professionals for non-metropolitan practice.¹⁴⁶ These resources aim to attract pre-service teachers from non-metropolitan areas into teaching, prepare teachers for teaching in non-metropolitan areas, and create collaborative relationships between universities, the community and industry partners through this program.^{146,162} More resources such as these need to be developed to assist teachers working in non-metropolitan areas.⁹²

Contextually relevant leadership

School leaders, both those in informal and formal positions, have a key role in attracting and retaining staff.^{12,98} Of particular importance is their recognition of difference despite policy, place, community, the influence of spatiality and contextual

Policy

Centralised, standardised policy is an influential factor in the staffing of non-metropolitan schools because it is designed from a perspective that does not consider the needs of non-metropolitan communities.¹⁰²

Adopting a 'rural lens' for staffing policy, by beginning with local communities' staffing needs, is one possible way to overcome this issue.^{10,155} This may include considering targeted support for the different needs of potential staff, such as those moving to non-metropolitan communities later in life, and focusing on the individual community needs then matching this with current staff experience.¹⁰

A model for change

“To achieve long-term change a divergence from previous research approaches is needed. Future studies need to focus on using new methods, involve collaboration with all stakeholders, and longer-term research programs that value the distinct nature of the non-metropolitan profession.”

A model for change

Throughout this monograph we have highlighted the approaches to research and research findings over the past twenty years in Australia. With the short-term nature of these studies and the focus on qualitative research methods involving a small number of participants in individual institutions, many of these studies could be considered program evaluations rather than research studies. While these studies are important, there is a distinct absence of theoretical advances and studies that achieve long-term change in the staffing of non-metropolitan schools.

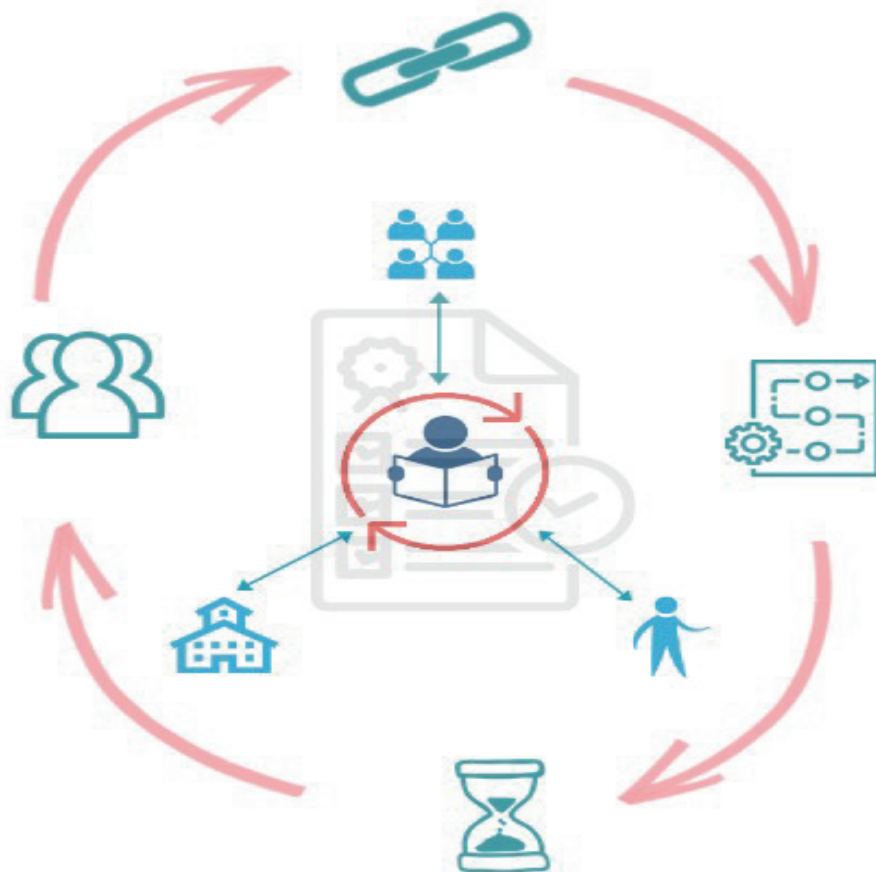


Figure 2. A student-centred approach to researching the staffing of non-metropolitan schools incorporating all stakeholders, new methods, and sustainable efforts.

To achieve long-term change a divergence from previous approaches is needed. A model of research that ensures the involvement of *all* stakeholders, using new methods, collaboration, and sustained efforts which value the distinct nature of the non-metropolitan profession needs to be considered. Broader education and social theory need to be a key part of this new direction.

Future studies need to have the interests of the students and their communities at the centre, with policy contexts adaptive to these needs. Developing these approaches is part of the ongoing work of the Rural Education and Communities research group in the Centre for Sustainable Communities.

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