

Recipient Details

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Responses

Curriculum and assessment

The key point for this review to consider is the existence, and influence, of a metropolitan norm in contemporary Australian schooling. This can be evidenced by even this review. I refer here to the terms of reference that assume poor outcomes for rural students. These outcomes are benchmarked by, apparently, better results in other areas. Roberts & Green (2013) describe the philosophical, and enacted, ways in which such a metropolitan norm is operationalized. They then suggest some practical approaches to disrupting this metropolitan norm – primarily developing, and enacting, policy from a rural perspective and in a manner that takes spatiality seriously. This is described in much more detail, in relation to the curriculum, assessment, and examined using school and student data, in Roberts 2016: 'Place, Rural Education and Social Justice: A Study of Rural Teaching and Curriculum Politics'

Roberts, P. (2016). 'Place, Rural Education and Social Justice: A Study of Rural Teaching and Curriculum Politics'. Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga.

Rating: 7

Teachers and teaching

In order to attract and retain teachers in regional, rural and remote schools we need to develop a system of professional preparation, recognition and reward, that genuinely values rural teaching. This includes specific preparation for rural schooling in pre-service teacher education. I would note here that the AITSL professional standards do not identify 'rural' as a specific category necessitating special consideration (again reference here my earlier point re metro-normativity), and as such units within pre-service courses preparing teachers for rural areas have been declining.

The attraction and retention of teachers in regional, rural and remote schools is more than money and transfer provisions. While important, the professional conditions and the ability of teachers to positively engage with the rural context is critical. Put another way, teachers need to be given the professional freedom to situate their work in their context rather than being forced to fit into an imagined metropolitan norm of practice. In supporting these points I cite the following references, all available online via the noted hyperlinks.

Roberts, P. (2005) Staffing an Empty Schoolhouse: Attracting and retaining teachers in rural, remote and isolated communities (publication version). Sydney, NSW. New South Wales Teachers Federation. ISBN 1875699368

Roberts, P. (2016). 'Place, Rural Education and Social Justice: A Study of Rural Teaching and Curriculum Politics'. Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga.

Downes, N & Roberts, P. (2018). Revisiting the schoolhouse: A literature review on staffing rural, remote and isolated schools in Australia 2004-2016. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 28 (1). pp.31-54.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

My points here are similar to those cited in relation to Teachers & Teaching. In Downes & Roberts (2018) it was noted that the issues, and evidence in relation to, rural leadership positions are much the same to those of rural teachers.

Downes, N & Roberts, P. (2018). Revisiting the schoolhouse: A literature review on staffing rural, remote and isolated schools in Australia 2004-2016. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 28 (1). pp.31-54.

Rating: 4

School and Community

I will limit my point here to a recent project conducted into the teaching of 'sustainability' in the Murray-Darling Basin. In this project we found that the school curriculum and the way sustainability is positioned in it is often at odds with the values of rural communities. That is, rural communities had a rich and complex understanding of sustainability, ala the sustainability of rural communities. Whereas the curriculum valued a scientific definition, and teachers valued a scientific version. This scientific version was in many ways at odds with the complex understandings of communities. This research is reported in the below references. The point I make from this is that often what is valued in schooling (in the curriculum) is at odds with those of communities, resulting in a values conflict.

Roberts, P. & Downes, N. (2016). Conflicting messages: Sustainability and Education for Rural-Regional Sustainability. *Rural Society*. 25 (1) pp.15-36.

McPherson, A., Roberts, P., Downes, N. (2017). Rural-regional sustainability in the Murray Darling Basin: School / community difference and the politics of water in rural Australia. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 27 (2).

Rating: 5

Information and Communication Technology

It seems rather odd that review into regional, rural and remote schools requires an online submission system, especially when many remote areas do not have sufficient bandwidth to participate.

My only point here would be that the old adage of 'ICT will solve everything' is a false promise. If ICT were so great ALL schools would be based on the delivery of the curriculum by distance/ICT lessons and we would no longer invest in traditional schools. That these are seen as the solution to rural school access is, by its very definition, giving students at best a second rate option. That we don't have other solutions at the moment is not the main issue, it merely suggests we need to work harder to find new approaches.

Rating: 3

Entrepreneurship and schools

Rating: 2

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding
Distance education - see my comments re ICT/

Boarding - this seems to undermine the equitable provision of education in rural areas.

Rating for enrolments: 1

Rating for clusters: 1

Rating for distance education: 4

Rating for boarding: 0

Diversity

Rurality needs to be considered as an element of diversity. Such an interpretation, especially in relation to AITSL standards, will help bring a focus to rural education issues.

Rating: 7

Transitioning beyond school

It is problematic that Australian schooling is geared towards accessing higher education. This is only the outcome for a smallish number of students and is not the norm for all school leavers. It is imperative that we develop an understanding of other forms of success and post school outcomes, and that these are genuinely valued.

Rating: 4

Additional Comments