Policy, Practice, and Need in the Professional Preparation of Teachers for Rural Teaching

Ian W. Gibson

University of Southern Queensland

I analyze current policy and practice relating to the preparation and selection of teachers for rural areas of Australia and, in turn, contrast these to the corresponding perceptions of rural teachers. Conclusions are drawn regarding (a) the need for specialised preparation programmes for rural teachers and (b) the responsibility of education departments in the development of specific rural staffing policies and selection practices.

Introduction

Following a hiatus of more than a decade when both government and public attention rarely focused on the educational needs of rural communities, a flurry of recent state and national level reports have attempted to redress this neglect. Despite this renewed activity, however, a recent analysis of training, staffing, and selection practices across Australia would indicate that little of this concern at the policy level has been translated into effective practice. In addition, data gathered from teachers newly appointed to rural communities raise concerns about a lack of preparedness for work in these areas.

The international literature on the provision of educational services to rural areas has for decades stressed the importance of equity and social justice in consideration of policies and practice governing the adequate human and material resourcing of rural and isolated schools (Darnell, 1981; Devlin, 1988; National Board of Employment, Education, and Training, 1991; Sher, 1981; Turney, Sinclair, & Cairns, 1980). This literature also has described the professional and social differences associated with work in these contexts and the need for specialised preservice preparation, teacher induction, and inservice training programmes to accommodate such differences. Despite this recognition, the international scene presents a barren picture of specific rural training programmes (Ramirez, 1981), with very few universities specifically training teachers for rural service (Angus, 1980; Bell & Sigsworth, 1987; Sher, 1981).

Although the tendency around the world is for populations to become increasingly urbanised, there are still substantive rural populations being served by small, rural, and isolated schools. For example, the combined rural population of the 24 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development countries is larger than the combined population of the world's 25 largest metropolitan areas. Consequently, such a presence of small schools suggests that neither their strengths nor their needs should be considered marginal and, further, national and local policies should be designed to attend to both (Sher, 1981).

Despite similar contexts, Australian teachers' attitudes towards teaching in the outback have progressed a great deal since Richmond (1953) described such an assignment as "forced exile." With detailed descriptions of unsuitable physical accommodations, drinking water, and lavatories, together with low salaries, poor teaching materials, heavy workloads, frequently inept leadership, and want of supportive and specialised personnel, the Australian teacher of rural children shared much in common with international colleagues (Carliner, 1969; Muse, 1977). The picture of the young and inexperienced Australian teacher who "didn't want to be there" added to the legitimacy of the notion of rural teachers "being dragooned into teaching in isolated schools" (Turney, Sinclair, & Cairns, 1980).

Ian W. Gibson is Associate Dean of the School of Education and Director of the Consortuim for Educational Research in Rural Australia, University of Southern Queensland, P.O. Darling Heights, Toowoomba, Queensland 4350, Australia. (Internet: gibson@zeus.usq.edu.au)

Other writers of the same era praised teachers for exercising an "uplifting influence on small communities," suggesting that the capably handled small school is "characterised by a warm pupil-teacher relationship and a relaxed atmosphere," where "children receive individual attention in their studies and can proceed at their own pace," and where the school itself becomes "the social centre for the whole district and an educational influence far beyond the mere curriculum" (Browne, 1927, pp. 197-198, 274). These children "are given many opportunities to develop initiative and self-reliance since much of their time is spent working without assistance. There is usually a very active and close relationship between school and home" (Maclaine, 1973, p. 75).

Notwithstanding these claimed benefits of small rural schools, much difficulty was experienced in attracting experienced teachers to certain localities, and rural regions were characterised by a high turnover of young and inexperienced staff. Fitzgerald (1976) suggested that teachers for these communities came in "from outside with little understanding of the life style or of existing relationships" (p. 67). Their training was generally city-based and their move to the country involved little choice. It was generally conceded that teachers came to rural schools as a means of promotion rather than for a desire to work in rural areas. The resulting negative perceptions of the rural child and community were symptomatic of attitudes concerning the prospect of a rural teaching assignment (Turney et al., 1980).

Further, since the 1850s there has been increasing concern regarding the quality of educational opportunities afforded the outback child. Current awareness of social justice and equity considerations have added to these concerns. Although many advances have been made during the last century to remedy obvious deficiencies, the adequacy of the education afforded the outback child continues to be criticised (Turney et al., 1980). For instance, it has long been realised that the challenges and conditions confronting rural teachers are not necessarily experienced by other teachers (e.g., living conditions, relationships with communities, the level of professional support provided, restricted access to one's family and friends) (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987). Nonetheless, there are few preservice programmes that prepare teachers for the rural context (Queensland Board of Teacher Education, 1983). Consequently, teachers taking positions in rural schools do so with inadequate preparation (Lake, 1986; Watson, Hatton, Grundy, & Squires, 1986). The severity of the effect wrought on rural communities then becomes obvious—and the indictment of the bureaucracies involved more focussed—when it is realised that the majority of Australian "teachers . . . can expect to be appointed to geographically isolated areas at some stage of their career" (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987, p. 142).

There is considerably more that teacher training institutions could do to encourage their students to consider teaching in rural areas, especially those students who show a predisposition towards an appointment to remote schools. Given that graduating teachers have shown a greater willingness to teach in areas with which they have some familiarity (Watson et al., 1986), an appropriate conclusion would be for teacher education students to study aspects of rural schooling and gain experience in living and teaching in these areas in order to increase the available pool of teachers likely to be attracted to—and successful in—this context.

Following this line of thought, I set out to describe the existing policies and practices of both government and employing authorities who are the major stakeholders in the provision of educational services to rural areas in Australia. I then contrasted these findings with the perceptions of newly appointed rural teachers.

Method

The methodology involved several facets. I conducted (a) a document analysis of recent national reports and policy statements on rural education, (b) a series of telephone interviews with representatives of teacher recruitment offices in state or regional departments of education across Australia, and (c) in-depth, structured interviews with all teachers newly appointed to rural communities in the two outback regions of Queensland during one school year. Each component is briefly described below.

Document Analysis

Nine recent national and state reports focussing on policy or strategies for the provision of educational services to rural communities were analysed for statements concerning the training, supply, and selection of teachers with specialised skills for appointment to rural schools. These re-

ports are *Schooling in rural Australia* (Common-wealth Schools Commission, 1987), *Difficult edu-cational contexts* (UNESCO, 1988), *A fair go: The federal government's strategy for rural education and training* (Ministers for Employment, Education, and Training and Primary Industries and Energy, 1989), *A fair chance for all: National and institutional planning for equity in higher education* (National Board of Employment, Education, and Training, 1989a), *Teacher quality* (National Board of Employ-ment, Education, and Training, 1989b), *Delivery of rural education and training* (Ministry of Education, 1989), *Focus on schools* (Queensland Department of Education, 1990a), *Towards a national education and training strategy for rural Australians* (National Board of Employment, Education, and Training, 1991), *Policy statement of the Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations* (Queensland Council of Parents' and Citizens' Associations, 1992).

Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews were conducted in May 1993 with either the executive director of the re-gion or the employment/recruitment officer re-sponsible for teacher selection in state depart-ment, ministry, or regional offices of education (with the exception of the Australian Capital Ter-ritory). In each case, the interviewee was asked to provide all of the policy documents or informa-tion available that would have an impact on the selection of teachers who exhibited the appropri-ate specialised training or experience for rural teaching.

Department of education personnel. Telephone interviews with key departmental personnel from all state and territory level organisations in Aus-tralia (with the exception of the Australian Capi-tal Territory) provided descriptions of current practices regarding the selection of teaching staff. In some instances, relevant documentation was forwarded to the author to assist in those descrip-tions. Seven of the eight states or territories of Australia were represented in these data.

Newly appointed rural teachers in Queensland. A series of in-depth structured interviews was con-ducted with all 24 teachers who had been ap-pointed, for the first time in their careers, to small rural schools. The interviews occurred during one academic year in the two most western re-gions of Queensland. These data were analysed and related to general research questions bearing on the professional preparation needs of teachers

newly appointed to rural schools. The categories of responses appearing in this discussion were the result of a process of inductive categorisation, where repeated organisation and re-organisation of interview responses into logically related group-ings produced the profiles suggested in the tables reported below (Crowther, Cronk, King, & Gibson, 1991).

Following the results of pilot interviews, the structured interview schedule was developed and formed the basis of two hour-long interviews with each teacher. Demographic details regarding the teacher, and characteristics of the teacher's school, were gathered for purposes of comparison. Inter-views were recorded on audio tape. Through the creation of an "audit trail" for each concept analysed, credibility, transferability, dependabil-ity, and confirmability were guaranteed for the categories and conclusions that were generated (Guba & Lincoln, 1983).

Findings

Review of National Policies on Rural Schooling

Each of the aforementioned federal reports raised substantial issues bearing on the need to address the imbalance of services and opportuni-ties provided to rural learners. The Common-wealth has acknowledged a commitment "to pro-vide to the people of rural and regional Australia, in a cost effective manner, the fullest possible range of services as is provided in the major cit-ies" (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987, p. 4). Equally, the concepts of social justice and equity—in the distribution of economic and social resources to the individual (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1991; Queensland Department of Education, 1990b)— are promoted frequently and form a strong com-ponent of the Commonwealth government's cur-rent educational platform. Each report outlines the principle of equity in rural schooling as one based on a doctrine of fairness and impartiality which, among other things, requires deliberations about the provision of well-qualified teachers who are specifically prepared for rural teaching.

Concomitantly, special consideration should be given to selecting teachers to cater for the needs of disadvantaged groups (Queensland Council of Parents' and Citizens' Association [QCPCA], 1992). In their policy on the staffing of isolated schools, the QCPCA suggests the need to overcome the difficulties experienced by isolated teachers

through the provision of specialised training and professional benefits, in addition to the initial selection of experienced teachers for these areas. The report, *Focus on schools* (Queensland Department of Education, 1990a), recommends elaborate processes designed to formalise incentives to attract quality applicants to leadership positions in more remote areas and to guarantee equity in the process.

In the context of the Commonwealth government's overall objective to increase rural Australians access to and participation in education and training, the report, *Towards a national education and training strategy for rural Australians* (National Board of Employment, Education, and Training, 1991), focuses upon a more equitable representation of non-metropolitan people in all sectors of post-compulsory education and training. The major conclusion of this report was that, despite the considerable effort and expenditure of the Commonwealth, state governments, and rural communities themselves, the provision of post-compulsory education and training for non-metropolitan Australians remains uneven and inadequate. People living in non-metropolitan locations simply are not participating in education and training to levels that are comparable to their metropolitan counterparts. It is widely accepted that lower participation rates in this regard are an indicator of disadvantage. According to this same report, one third of Australians are classified as non-metropolitan and therefore suffer "locational disadvantage" in relation to post-compulsory opportunities. This should be a matter of great concern to all Australian state governments, on social justice grounds and economic grounds alike. Such discrimination against one third of the nation's labour force as a result of allowing this situation to continue without remedy remains questionable.

From an analysis of the submissions upon which this national report is based, the single most common factor leading to non-participation appeared to be a lack of access to the broad range of formal and informal educational options without major relocation and personal costs. Other variables mentioned referred to the perception of lower-quality services in rural locations and inappropriate and uneven provision of services.

Further, in reviewing the research literature and government material made available to the authors of *Towards a national education and training strategy for rural Australians* (National Board of Employment, Education, and Training, 1991), rec-

ognition was made of the plethora of reports on rural education already existing, suggesting that the central issues of rural participation in, and access to, education and training required a coordinated national response and the development of accountability measures. The relative absence of concerted action to remedy these situations was recognised frequently in this report.

Various state governments have acknowledged the need for quality rural education to be supported and enhanced. For example, the *Report of the remote areas incentives scheme* (Queensland Department of Education, 1990b) suggested that "to improve the learning experiences of children in remote, difficult-to-staff schools of Queensland," a process of "attracting more experienced staff to remote locations and retaining these teachers in remote schools for longer periods" would be necessary (pp. 23-24). This report continued by suggesting that a professional development programme for rural and remote teachers should be developed and include a preparation component prior to remote service, support during remote service, and, in special cases, support at the conclusion of service in remote schools. Further, employers have the responsibility to provide these support services to rural and remote teachers and the communities they service to ensure educational and financial accountability and fair treatment in social justice terms (Loney, 1993).

In the final conclusions and recommendations from the report, *Delivery of rural education and training* (Ministry of Education, 1989), it was recognised that efforts must be made to attract and retain appropriately trained people for work in rural areas and that steps must be taken to ensure that teacher-training courses include subjects, units, and practical experience that will equip and encourage teachers to seek rural appointments. The assumption here is that teacher recruitment and selection policies incorporate the facility to identify specific skills for specific locations and positions.

Other Commonwealth reports have considered the range of content appropriate for inclusion in preservice training. Such teacher preparation programmes should include rural culture and social conditions, Aboriginal culture and the multicultural nature of rural society, knowledge about the natural conditions of rural remote areas, the nature of small-town life, and multi-grade teaching approaches (e.g., UNESCO, 1988).

Despite this recent activity at a national level, however, operational policy development at both

state and regional education department levels lags far behind, and teacher training for rural situations remains at generally meagre levels.

State Level Policy and Practice in the Selection of Teachers for Rural Schools

Australia's six states and two territories are largely responsible for the organisation and maintenance of the systems of schooling within their boundaries. Each of these states or territories organises its schooling system through the function of centralised state departments of education or ministries of education. Variations occur from state to state with regard to the degree of decentralisation of decision making responsibility that has devolved to regional offices of education.

With the exception of only one state, which provided details of promotions criteria applicable to the appointment of principals to rural schools, each regional or central organisation representative offered similar responses. In most cases, the response simply suggested that no policy existed for such "specialised selection" practices: All staff were processed centrally. Other comments suggested that there was no policy in place, that the same process and the same set of expectations were used for all teachers, and that no special arrangements existed for selecting teachers for rural postings (but attempts sometimes were made to look for teachers with Aboriginal experience).

However, each state or region did report that space was provided on application forms for special qualifications or interests that could be considered during placement decisions. "Aboriginal education" appeared to be the closest reference to rural education, but no organisation made reference to additional training, graduate study, or experience regarding rural education. A common practice in all states and territories was that of requesting the applicant to indicate preferences for placement in particular districts.

From the apparent lack of specific policy for the recruitment of teachers for rural and isolated schools, it appears that there is no concerted effort on the part of most states or regions to guarantee specific selection practices that are designed to match rural teaching experience and expertise to rural settings. It should be made clear, however, that when interviewees were asked for a reaction to the lack of policy on this issue, several acknowledged that although no guarantees were made, it was common practice during the teacher selection

process and, specifically, teacher interviews, to consider such specialised training in placement decisions. Other comments suggested that prospective teachers are selected on the overall balance of teaching skill and experience exhibited during the selection process. Although there was no guarantee that such information would necessarily result in specialised placement, it was important for applicants to "put forward all of their skills and abilities" for analysis. One indicated that it would be a "good idea to recognise teachers with special training for rural teaching," but the region was "not doing that yet." It is my contention that no standard approach to the selection of teachers with appropriate training or experience is in use in these states and, further, where attempts are made to match appropriate skills to rural placements, such efforts are random.

Teacher Preparation Needs for Rural Schools

The discussion that follows is based on interviews with the 24 teachers who were newly appointed to rural Queensland schools for the first time in their careers. Demographic details of this sample appear in Table 1.

Prior to discussing the perceptions of these teachers concerning their preparation for isolated areas, it is of interest to note their attitudes and first reactions to a rural appointment. If we are to believe the overriding orientation of the literature from earlier eras, the attitudes of such teachers should reflect Richmond's (1953) concept of forced exile. These teachers, however, overwhelmingly contradicted this earlier finding. Twenty of the 24 teachers had requested a placement similar to the one they received. Upon being notified of their new post, 21 teachers reported a largely positive reaction to the appointment, while only 3 reported somewhat of a mixed reaction. Thus, teachers' perceptions of the adequacy of their preparation for these posts were not clouded by a latent hostility to their placement. Rather, their perceptions stemmed from a realistic evaluation of both personal and professional preparedness for the rigours of the job.

In the process of analysing the strengths and deficiencies of their performance in rural schools, these teachers described a list of skills, strategies, and teacher attributes missing from their preservice preparation that carry clear implications for teacher education institutions across the country. Table 2 comprises a series of cross-referenced responses to questions relating to the ad-

Table 1
Demographic details of teacher respondents

Trait	N
Prior Teaching Experience	
Less than one year	8
One to Two years	8
Two to Five years	8
Requested Rural Placement	
Yes	20
No	4
Teachers at School	
One	12
Two	3
Three	2
Four	6
Five	1
Previous Outback Experience	
Yes	14
No	10

equacy of professional preparation, perceptions of success, the identification of personal and professional skills requiring development, and general evaluations of teacher preparedness for a rural appointment. In organising teacher reactions to questions, multiple comments from the same respondent were counted once if they echoed a similar theme. For example, "organisation and planning difficulties" were experienced by a respondent and had become an overriding theme in the responses received from that teacher throughout the interview. These similar responses were grouped together under a general heading, such as "Organisation/Planning," and contained such items as "I didn't expect it to be so hard to organise things," "I am so disorganised," "organisation and planning are such a heavy burden," " I'm frustrated with planning—it's a bit like *Mission Impossible*," and "I need organisational assistance."

It is immediately noticeable that these teachers agreed on several areas of skill or training

deficiency. Sixty-seven percent felt a strong need for assistance in dealing with multi-age groupings, which are so prevalent in small, isolated schools. The urgency of this training need is rendered more salient when it is realised that all teachers had responsibility for at least two age groups: 79% of them had to cope with three or more age groups, and 46% were responsible for seven age groups.

Sixty-three percent of the teachers expressed concern with their preparation in curriculum organisation and planning. This category extends from matters dealing with classroom organisation and planning to school-based curriculum organisation and planning. A fine line seems to separate organisational and planning considerations from general administrative considerations: 46% of the teachers disclosed concern with their lack of familiarity with school administrative procedures, while 64% of those having administrative responsibilities outside of the normal classroom saw themselves inadequately trained for such responsibilities. In total, 75% of these teachers saw themselves as underskilled in areas concerning rural classroom organisation and small school administration.

"Pupil assessment" is another area closely associated with the organisation and management of teaching responsibilities. Half of the teachers expressed a concern with their lack of expertise in this area. Many teachers suggested the need for greater knowledge of curriculum content and the scope and sequence of content appropriate to all age levels.

Other areas of perceived deficiency among these teachers revolve around appropriate and effective techniques for the management of time in rural settings when little professional support is available on a day-to-day basis; strategies for dealing with lower-grade students in mixed-age classes; inadequate understanding of job responsibility; and ability to acquire sufficient resources.

An additional area requiring increased training effort was revealed when 11 teachers disclosed their inability to engage in successful community-interaction strategies (see Table 3). Most teachers recognised signs of support from some quarters in the community, despite the fact that 79% of the teachers reported some concern with problems arising from community situations. For example, 54.2% believed that strong community expectations required a moderating of their teaching performance. Generalised "problems" were alluded to by 41.6% of the sample, such as value clashes,

Table 2
Rural teachers' perceptions of deficiencies in their pre-service preparation programmes

Category	Percentage of teachers recognising category as a training deficiency
Poor preparation for rural teaching	75
Specific rural teaching strategies	75
Organisation/administration of small schools	75
Multi-grade techniques	67
Curriculum organisation/planning	63
Pupil assessment and placement	50
Role and responsibilities of principalship	46
Community strategies	46
Time management	42
Curriculum content	33
Curriculum sequencing and scope for multi-grades	33
Lower-grade experience	29
Perceptions of rural teaching role	17

liberal criticism for which the teacher is unprepared, low community involvement, socioeconomic or sectarian divisiveness within the community, "living in a fish bowl," and being victims of the "grapevine."

Nonetheless, 71% of these teachers reported strong community involvement in school activities. In combination with the 11 teachers mentioned above who were having difficulty in related areas, these results suggest that further effort is required on the part of teacher training institutions, or departmental induction processes, to create within these teachers an awareness of community dynamics that influence the teaching-learning environment and to provide them with the skills necessary to make the most of these situations.

In addition to areas traditionally included in teacher preparation programmes, other areas relevant to rural conditions were uncovered. For example, information about the expectations of stakeholder groups may be of great importance to the preparation of teachers unfamiliar with rural communities and the role of the teacher in those communities. In describing their impressions of the expectations held for them by the Queensland Department of Education, these teachers perceive that, as they have general primary teaching quali-

fications, the department expects them to be capable of handling every primary school situation regardless of location or community composition. Yet one of three teachers felt ill-prepared in this regard. They perceived the Department demanding that administrative duties and requirements of small schools be mastered without prior instruction or assistance, even at the expense of teaching. Twenty-one percent of the teachers felt they would be left alone as long as they fulfilled their small-school administrative duties. It is encouraging to note, however, that another 25% of these teachers were well aware of the support and encouragement afforded them by the Department through competent inspectors, consultants, and advisers who are readily available and willing to assist.

Perceived expectations held by their host communities were also of interest to these teachers. It was generally felt that these communities viewed "good" teachers as those capable of communicating the basic skills (37.5%) with an authoritarian, strict approach (37.5%), and doing the job required without expecting the community to be involved (37.5%). Smaller percentages of these teachers felt that they were expected to become involved in community activities (29%), be organised (16.6%), do what the community ex-

Table 3
Rural teachers' perceptions of deficiencies in their in-service and induction programmes

Category	Percentage of teachers recognising category as an in-service or induction programme deficiency
Awareness of existing community problems	79
Community involvement strategies	71
Awareness of community expectations	54
Value clashes	33
Male dominated orientation	17
Resource acquisition processes	8

pects (12.5%), and be a model or example for their children (8.3%).

What do these perceived expectations suggest, then, for teachers newly appointed to rural communities? Seventy-one percent of them felt it is critical to be forewarned of a community's expectations, values, and composition if their immediate success is to be encouraged. Additionally, they have developed and refined techniques, frequently through trial and error, that have proved successful in dealing with community influences. Fifty-eight percent of the teachers were convinced that making an effort to join in, to "have a go," would alleviate many of the concerns affecting new teachers in a community. Roughly, a third suggested, however, that listening in a diplomatic, non-judgmental way was important for personal and professional survival. Others suggested that accepting the situation as it is and for what it is (33%), making an effort to communicate with the community by whatever means is acceptable (16.6%), and "lying low" in order to assess the situation before embarking on any community involvement (16.6%) were acceptable means of dealing with these unsure situations.

These teachers have struggled to survive in new situations with varying results. But what areas of skill, other than those related to professional or community considerations, were seen to be important survival strategies for these teachers? What allowed these professionals to perceive themselves as successful—to feel in control and effective in rural teaching situations? Twenty-one of the 24 teachers (87.5%) were dependent on a strategy involving interaction and communica-

tion; 70.8% relied on contacting colleagues, consultants, support groups, or acquaintances for affiliation, contact, or feedback; and 45.8% of them coped with the strains of the situation by "joining in" and interacting with those around them in community activities. Many of those who joined in did so on weekends by offering their skills and talents to the community (e.g., committee work, sports coaching, aerobics classes) or by socialising ("go to the pub," "play sport with local teams," "go to [large farms] and help mend fences"). Nonetheless, one third of these teachers felt the need to leave town on weekends. All of those in this category desired personal social gratification with peers or previous acquaintances—despite the pressure to appear to be part of the local community and despite the negative community connotations that could result from "leaving town."

The information presented in Tables 2 and 3 suggests that these teachers perceived the need for teacher preparation programmes to include greater emphasis on the pedagogy of multi-grade classrooms and multi-age group strategies; skills associated with organisation, evaluation, and placement; time management; and an introduction to the administration of small schools. Of equal importance is the need for greater community awareness, awareness of anticipated community expectations, the development of an ability to deal with values clashes, greater emphasis upon self knowledge and assessment, and a recognition of the role of personal values and their effect on the teaching-learning process. Further, these teachers argued that teacher preparation programmes must cover systematically the con-

cept of isolation and provide experience in rural communities. Indeed, it was the poor treatment of these issues in teacher preparation programmes that led 75% of the teachers in this study to express dissatisfaction with their preparation for teaching in rural situations.

Conclusions

National reports and policy statements recognise the uniqueness of Australian rural schools and the need for specialised training for teachers who will live and work in rural communities. By contrast, the teacher selection practices employed by states, territories, and regions in Australia do not appear to differentiate between teachers who may have specialised experience for rural schools and other teachers.

Further, newly appointed rural teachers have indicated that their preservice preparation was not adequate enough to allow them to deal effectively with the uniqueness of rural situations. These teachers suggested that preparation programmes should stress the technical aspects of the teacher's role in these communities, as well as provide an understanding of the sociology of isolated rural communities. Their comfort and success was also seen to be dependent upon an awareness of value differences and the development of strategies designed to cope with community situations. These teachers' responses centered on perceived deficiencies in performance arising from either a lack of understanding of a situation, a lack of familiarity with procedures, a lack of awareness of job expectations and complexity, or a lack of knowledge of content or strategy relating to the teaching-learning process required in isolated situations.

There appears little doubt that teachers faced with the prospect of living and working in rural contexts perceive a strong need for professional training to improve their chances for successful practice. In describing these perceptions, teachers in rural contexts reinforced both the general literature and the plethora of Australian reports that emphasise the uniqueness of rural schooling and the corresponding implications for preservice and inservice teacher education.

Conclusions derived from this study raise the issue of government and departmental recognition of rural needs and the generation of specific policy guidelines, expectations, and practice related to the selection of teachers for rural areas. In addition, conclusions from this study indicate the

need for specialised programmes of teacher education and induction for rural teachers. Staffing practices and policy guidelines in departments of education must reflect national policies promoting the selection of teachers for rural schools who have undergone appropriate programmes to prepare them for such work.

Despite this increasing evidence, the pervasive attitude in Australian policy documents appears to assume no need for specialised training or selection practices for rural, remote, or isolated teaching personnel—despite a clear recognition of that need by researchers and teachers. Such an attitude appears to be an artifact of previous, highly centralised systems of education. Concerted political action is required to guarantee that state and regional practice is brought into line with national policy regarding equity and social justice for rural schooling.

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