PROCESSES OF ADAPTATION TO MULTIPLE ENVIRONMENTS FOR RURAL AND REMOTE TEACHERS.

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Abstract

Educational systems around the world are struggling to attract and retain teachers to rural and remote teaching locations. This becomes an equity issue because high levels of teacher turnover in these locations, negatively impacts on the quality of educational experiences for rural and remote students. To understand the experiences of teachers in these locations and the factors impacting on their retention, this paper reports a longitudinal collective case study of 20 novice teachers newly appointed to 14 schools in rural and remote Western Australia, examining issues impacting on teachers’ quality of worklife. Data from interviews, journals, emails, documents, on-site observation and a questionnaire were collected over 15 months to construct contextualised case studies.

From the findings, the theory of Processes of Adaptation to Multiple Rural and Remote Environments was generated, identifying processes leading to four employment outcomes for teachers: integration; resilient integration; disequilibrium; and withdrawal.

The quality of organisational and workplace environments significantly influences quality of teacher worklife in rural schools. By understanding factors related to these environments, protective and risk factors can be addressed to improve teacher retention.
Introduction

Staffing rural and remote schools equitably presents a challenge for education systems (United Nations, 2010), with high quality teachers essential to achieving quality student outcomes (Darling Hammond, 2000). Despite recognition of the importance of quality rural teacher appointments and action to improve teacher retention (Ministerial Review of Schooling, 1994), the difficulty of attracting and retaining high quality teachers in rural schools remains in international concern (for example, ECU, 2007; Huysman, 2008; The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2001; Stellmach, 2011; Education Workforce Initiative [EWI], 2007).

Rural teachers in the United States (US), Canada, Latin America and Africa are less qualified than suburban teachers (Ballou & Podgursky, 1998; McEwan, 1999; Mentz, 2001). In Western Australia (WA), a four year tertiary qualification is the minimum requirement, but Limited Authority to Teach status is granted for ‘difficult to staff’ vacancies. In practice, this means under-qualified people are appointed to rural and remote schools (Auditor General, 2000).

Historically, new graduates staff rural and remote schools in Australia, the US and Canada (ECU, 2007; Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Mills & Gale, 2003). This has resulted in a disproportionate number of inexperienced teachers being employed in rural and remote WA; for example, in four districts, approximately 50% of teachers had less than five years experience (The Ministerial Review of Schooling, 1994). Home (1999, p. 5) claims there is “indisputable evidence that quality was compromised in finding teachers willing to fill…[rural] vacancies”. Teacher shortages in rural locations continue (Department of Education and Training [DET], 2006), with the forecast for continuing and increasing teacher shortages (EWI, 2007).
The difficulty of attracting teachers to rural appointments has been attributed to diverse factors including: limited financial rewards; limited support; limited access to professional development; multi-grade classes; difficulties obtaining permanent employment; resource issues; difficult students; greater living costs; lower housing standards; restricted social life; lack of privacy; partner work issues; different culture; fear of isolation; and perceptions of places as undesirable (Loney, 1993; Stellmach, 2011; Yarrow, Herschell & Milwater, 1999). Put simply, “rural areas present more onerous living and working conditions than urban areas” (McEwan, 1999, p. 849) for teachers from predominantly urban/suburban backgrounds.

Defining Rural and Remote

Definitions of rural and remote are promote debate and dismay about inconsistent usage in the research (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy & Dean, 2005; Atchoarena & Gasperini, 2003; Stellmach, 2011). Simplistic definitions denote rural and remote as areas that are not “greater metropolitan regions” or “within 50 km of those regions” (The Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987, p. 24). Such definitions promote a rural-urban binary, marginalising rural populations, asserting the dominance of metrocentric views and promoting rural-deficit models (Ankrah-Dove, 1982). Remoteness definitions are often driven, or skewed, by instrumental policy and political purposes (Griffith, 2002), framed from geographic or sociological data, emphasising geo-physical characteristics or psychocultural aspects (Halsey, 2009).

In Australia, several national classifications for measuring remoteness and access disadvantage exist; however, at the time of data collection, the DET identified schools as: metropolitan, rural or remote according to Department of Primary Industry and Energy classifications (DPIE, 1988) and Australian Bureau of Statistics divisions (ABS, 2000). Rural schools were classified by an index of isolation (school size; distance from a
population centre of 10,000; distance from a population centre of 5,000; distance from the nearest school; distance from district office; and distance from Perth) and an index of disadvantage.

The Rural and Remote Context in WA

Communities in rural and remote WA are some of the most isolated in the world, spread across 2,529,880 square kilometres (ABS, 2000), an area the size of Western Europe. The state is sparsely populated with only 25% of the population living outside the capital city (Education Workforce Initiatives, 2007). Other areas of Australia have large rural and regional contexts, and rural populations in the US and Canada are similar to WA, at 30% and 24% respectively; however, different settlement patterns create unique conditions which impact on education provision in different ways (Moriarty, Danaher & Danaher, 2003).

At the time of data collection, 349 WA DET schools were located in rural and remote areas, staffed with 17,855 teachers, approximately 30% of DET’s teacher workforce (DET, 2003). Their student population was 82,684 or 30% of DET enrolments. The school sites in this research included primary schools, district high schools, remote community schools and senior high schools located in seven of ten rural and remote districts throughout the state.

Literature Review

To understand the experiences of teachers working in rural and remote schools, a broad range of literature from diverse disciplines (education, sociology, psychology, vocational studies and human geography) needs to be synthesised. This review examines: relocation for employment, quality of teacher worklife, (including person-environment fit, workplace socialisation and resilience) and retention and attrition of rural and remote teachers.

Relocation for Employment

Migration to remote and rural locations creates worklife stresses similar to those experienced by teachers relocating to international schools. Joslin (2002, p. 34) described
this as a “logistically, legally and emotionally complex” experience, yet there is a paucity of data associated with teacher work relocation (Canadian Employee Relocation Council, 2005). Findings reported by Churchill and Carrington (2000) suggest that teacher relocation produces contextual changes which impact on self-confidence, self esteem, family harmony, stress levels and health. In fact, relocation ranks among the top three stressful life events (Steele-Carlin, 2001). Those moving a greater distance found the experience more stressful, with family and housing issues the major obstacles for employees (CERC, 2005). Munton (1990) identified concern with: lack of social support in the new location; property issues; and education for children. Families who experienced the greatest stress found the loss of social relationships to be most difficult.

Similar to teachers relocating internationally, those moving to rural and remote areas experience phases of culture shock: a honeymoon phase of euphoria and optimism, a period of confusion and anxiety, followed by recovery and readjustment (Joslin, 2002). Joslin viewed culture shock as a dynamic interplay between emotions, social skills, individuals’ identities and ways of thinking. Some teachers retreat into a “culture-bubble” relying heavily on support from culturally familiar backgrounds while others “go native”, immersing themselves in local culture (Joslin 2002, p. 50). Unlike their international counterparts, rural teachers rarely receive pre-departure, cross-cultural training and orientation programmes to assist teachers achieve a balance between maintaining their cultural identity and understanding their new cultural context.

**Quality of Teacher Worklife**

Quality of worklife, according to Hart (1994, p. 119) refers to the judgements “teachers make about the extent to which their work is satisfying and meeting their needs. It reflects the overall impression that teachers have about their work”. From three studies of 1,593 Australian teachers, Hart concluded that correlations existed between psychological
distress and five dimensions of negative work experiences: authoritarian leadership; employer demands; parent demands; poor staff relations; and student behaviour. Positive work experiences contributed to morale and positively impacted on quality of worklife. Organisational factors were stronger influences than classroom variables and organisational factors, particularly collegial interaction and feedback, were more important sources of morale than curriculum consultation and discipline policy.

Louis (1998) synthesised organisational quality of worklife concepts into seven criteria applicable in education: respect from relevant adults; participation in decision-making; frequent stimulating professional interaction with peers; structures and procedures contributing to efficacy; making full use of existing skills and knowledge; resources to perform the job; and congruence between personal and school goals. Louis concluded that “creating effective working conditions for teachers requires paying attention to the multiple dimensions along which individuals experience their work…which can be potentially affected by changing the social organisation of the school” (1998, p. 18).

In the quality of worklife field, Schouteten and de Witte (2007) identified two main research perspectives: the conditional approach which assumes work conditions determine employee quality of worklife, and the fit approach which focuses on worker’s perceptions of job factors and their capacities to influence those factors. The fit perspective accounts for differences between workers’ evaluations of the same job. Job characteristics and psychological states are moderated by knowledge, skills, need for growth and degree of satisfaction with the work context. These contribute to different motivation levels and job outcomes (Louis, 1998). This study adopted the fit approach, consistent with an interpretivist framework, recognising the significance of individual perceptions of workplace characteristics and conditions.
Person-Environment Fit (P-E Fit)

P-E fit assumes that humans must interact with their environment to survive; therefore, human action is determined jointly by characteristics of the person and properties of an environment (Rice et al., 1985). It is broadly defined as “the compatibility between an individual and a work environment that occurs when their characteristics are well matched” (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson, 2005, p. 281). Motivation is influenced by the fit between personal needs and environmental opportunities for rewards and resources and the anticipated fit between future needs and opportunities. People are motivated to maintain positive P-E states and escape negative P-E states.

A meta-analysis of person-organisation fit studies (Verquer et al., 2003) reported a sizable relationship between person-organisation fit and job satisfaction, organisational commitment and intent to turnover, role ambiguity and conflict. Individuals with poor person-culture fit during initial stages of employment are likely to leave within two and a half years. A relationship was established between person-job fit, person-organisation fit and retention, with degree of person-organisation fit the best predictor of employee turnover.

Workplace Socialisation

The socialisation experiences of novices, in the school and broader community, impact on the development of person-organisation fit, shaping subsequent career choices and influencing attitudes and practice throughout their careers (Gratch, 1998). Through socialisation individuals “acquire the personal system properties – the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, needs and motivations…affective and cognitive patterns – which shape their adaptation to the physical and socio-cultural setting in which they live” (Inkles 1969, p. 615). Socialisation processes are rarely recognised by organisations and consequently,
formal strategies are rarely provided to assist people through the transitions (Hillier, Fewell, Cann & Shepherd, 2005).

Stanulis, Campbell and Hicks (2002) identified school culture as the largest influence on teachers’ beliefs and actions, a more significant influence than pre-service education. Novices are pressured to conform to the dominant culture. They struggle to negotiate personally and professionally satisfying, institutionally acceptable places. Collegial dialogue assists novices because to validate their experiences. Processes and strategies such as induction and mentoring assist with the formal socialisation of teachers into the profession, workplace, organisation and community context (for example Harrison, Dymoke & Pell, 2006; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

Resilience

Resilience is defined as “the ability to adjust to varied situations and increase one’s competence in the face of adverse conditions” (Bobek, 2002, p. 202), influenced by interactions between individuals and external environments (Gu & Day, 2007). Where person-environment fit is weak, the need for teacher resilience is high. Application of the concept to adults in workplaces (Bobek, 2002; Brunetti, 2006) has focussed on investigation of risk and protective factors, such as: significant relationships; sense of connectedness; personal efficacy; social and problem solving skills; sense of competence; future orientation; sense of achievement; individual characteristics; and environmental factors.

Two preconditions are essential for resilience: an adverse environment and positive adaptation (Bobek, 2002; Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000). Resilient individuals overcome effects of adversity, develop protective mechanisms and use challenging life events for self-improvement (Kaplan, 1999).

Howard and Johnson (2004) examined the resilience of Australian teachers, reporting a strong sense of agency and ability to depersonalise difficult events. Resilient teachers
reported having “diverse caring networks of family and friends outside school…caring partners with whom they could talk about their work [and] strong support from colleagues and school leadership” (Howard & Johnson, 2004, p. 412). Provision of caring educational settings, positive high expectations, positive learning environments, a strong supportive social community and supportive peer relationships are all associated with promotion of resilience (Gu & Day, 2007).

Quality of worklife and person-environment fit provide a framework of vocational, sociological and psychological concepts with which to examine the workplace experiences of teachers. The resilience literature re-connects personal, professional and organisational dimensions of teachers’ lives that may help to explain differential outcomes of retention and attrition.

Retention and Attrition of Rural and Remote Teachers

Historically, retention rates for rural teachers have been low. A quarter of teachers from both rural British Columbia and NSW desired transfers at the end of the year (Haughey & Murphy, 1985; Sinclair et al., 1989). While retention data in WA is scarce, in seven of 16 rural districts, two-thirds of staff remained for less than five years (Ministerial Review of Schooling, 1994) and in 44 mainly rural schools, at least half of the staff were new (Auditor General, 2000).

Issues cited as reasons for poor retention include: desire to return home; professional advancement (Lunn, 1997), dissatisfaction with teaching; social and cultural isolation (Collins, 1999); and conflict with the dominant culture (Anderson, 1987). Teachers perceived students to be unmotivated, low achievers; they experienced difficulty planning without local knowledge and adequate resources; they taught unfamiliar subjects with limited access to professional development; and cited lack of support facilities (Hatton et al., 1997).
Teachers in rural schools were “confronted by adjustment factors additional to and compounding those which confront all beginning teachers” (Meyenn et al., 1991, p. 21). Concern with community situations were reported by 79% of teachers (Gibson, 1994). A recurring theme was visibility in communities and community attitudes. Teachers were isolated from family, felt vulnerable to public scrutiny and community pressure to participate (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Hatton et al., 1997), and placed in unsupportive contexts (Duck et al., 1988) inconsistent with teacher values.

Conversely, community factors were perceived to be positive and satisfying by some teachers. They valued: positive relationships with parents and the community (Webster, 1998) and lifestyle benefits (Boylan & McSwan, 1998). Teachers police, and nurses believed positive social contexts could outweigh negative geographical contexts (English et al. 2006); however, if work circumstances were unfavourable, teachers sought improved environments, producing turnover and instability (Maclean, 1992).

Teachers relocating to rural and remote schools face multiple unfamiliar environments: the organisation, workplace, work-role, geographic and socio-cultural community (Author, 2008). Teachers experience familial and social dislocation, due to relocation of family and/or separation from immediate and extended family and friends. This creates pressure to adapt known ways of acting and interacting in all life domains in order to integrate and gain worklife satisfaction. Each of these environments contains significant protective and risk factors for rural and remote teachers.

**The Research Project**

This study was conducted in the interpretivist paradigm, seeking to access and understand the lived experiences of participants (Patton, 2002). The research addressed the questions: What are the experiences of teachers appointed to rural and remote government schools in their first years of appointment? Two specific research questions were
considered: What are the perspectives of teachers in relation to the quality of their worklife? How do novice teachers deal with their experiences? A longitudinal, collective case study examined the perspectives of 20 novice teachers commencing employment at 14 rural or remote DET schools in WA. Their experiences were examined from appointment for up to 15 months.

Participants were contacted with their initial appointment notice. They provided informed consent, with an assurance of anonymity and confidentiality. Data were collected through: an initial questionnaire; ongoing telephone interviews, site visits and email contact. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data were analysed using an inductive process (Miles and Huberman, 1984) and emergent grounded theory approaches (Punch, 2005). Case studies were constructed for each participant, then analysed collectively. Completed case studies were returned to participants for verification. From the cross-case analysis, a storyline was developed and propositions emerged to form the theory presented in the next section.

Process of Adaptation to Multiple Environments for Rural and Remote Teachers

The experiences of rural and remote teachers are influenced by their expectations and experiences of the multiple environments: the evaluations they make about their ability to integrate and their ability to develop and implement efficacious responses within those environments. This is the basis of the theory represented in the Model of Outcomes of Environmental Integration for Rural and Remote Teachers in Figure 1. Teachers develop expectations about environments, prior to relocation, which they test, as they enter the environments. They make judgements about the degree to which they fit each environment,
then a cumulative judgement about quality of worklife. In response to these evaluations, teachers maintain, develop or change their thoughts and actions to improve person-environment fit. This involves changing expectations, strategies and attempting to change the environment. Teachers who integrate into environments, easily or through a process of resilience (outcomes 1 and 2), are likely to remain, experiencing a positive quality of worklife. Teachers experiencing continuing dilemmas (outcome 3) are unable to achieve a consistently high quality of worklife. Some continue to experience disequilibrium, while others withdraw from the difficult environments (outcome 4).

![Figure 1: Model of Process and Outcomes of Adaptation to Multiple Environments for Rural and Remote Teachers.](image)

The proposed theory is derived from social cognitive theory which “poses that self-referent thought mediates the relationship between knowledge and action (Gibson & Earley, 2007, p. 439). Individuals make sense of their experiences by analysing the demands of the environment, evaluating the available internal and environmental resources, and estimating their efficacy for the given tasks. The stages of this process are developed below.
Expectations

Participants arrived at rural and remote locations with expectations and beliefs about environments, shaped by their prior knowledge and experiences. Participants with limited or inaccurate knowledge faced greater difficulties with cognitive and emotional adjustment. Participants’ expectations were influenced by the extent of prior knowledge, prior exposure or research and consultation about the multiple environments:

I knew what it was like. A lot of people don’t know…They have romantic notions about the outback and all that, fear of the outback. If you don’t know what it’s like you can be in for a rude shock. (Corby, November)

Mature-aged novices were more likely to have prior knowledge of locations, consciously selecting or rejecting locations, while young novice teachers were more likely to feel personal or external duress to accept an appointment to commence their career.

Teacher expectations were shaped by pre-service experiences, application and appointment processes. Expectations were formed by information from DET officers and school personnel. For some participants, early interactions with the organisation threatened to derail their appointment. These interactions created negative evaluations, establishing negative expectations about subsequent interactions. Perceptions of the organisation as overly bureaucratic, frustrating and inefficient and difficulty interfacing with people caused participants to consider withdrawing applications.

Participants had expectations about: the scenery, climate, facilities, possible experiences and people they could encounter living and teaching in the location. Young novices formed negative expectations based on limited knowledge and reactions of others, particularly family. Pre-service experiences provided individuals with expectations and beliefs about schools, students, and pedagogy. Their life experiences provided knowledge of their own behaviours, interpersonal skills and coping strategies. These experiences and location knowledge were used to establish expectations that influenced perceptions and
evaluations of their initial experiences in the organisation, workplace, geographic and socio-cultural community environments.

Participants resoundingly indicated that accurate information about the environments they were entering should be readily available, to shape realistic expectations. They believed that informed choice should be an essential part of selection and appointment processes. Accurate information was essential because of the subsequent impact of expectations on teacher experiences in environments.

**Familiarisation, Experiences and Evaluations**

Individuals commenced processing information on entry to environments. Some participants were stunned by geographic and climatic aspects of new locations:

> The heat is unbelievable! Not only that, but I am constantly going into extremes of temperature (blisteringly hot outside, then freezing cold in the classroom). (Demi, February)

However, once school commenced, participants were pre-occupied with developing familiarity in workplaces and resolving housing difficulties, the environments of most immediate concern. Most were unable to reconnoitre geographic locations or become familiar with the socio-cultural community because of heavy work-loads.

As familiarisation continued, teachers made separate evaluations of environments, their degree of fit and a cumulative evaluation of worklife experiences. For example, Fiona evaluated aspects of her work role as difficult (“I’m teaching out of my area which makes it really difficult for most of the time”), with unpredictable student attendance (“not all the kids come every day so from one day to the next you might get the entire different group of kids”), but she evaluated the level of support as positive (“sometimes you’re not doing so well. It’s nice to know there are other people who know what’s happening”), and she was satisfied with the social infrastructure (“we’re only an hour away from [regional centre].
There you’ve got cinemas and your big shopping centres”). Fiona’s cumulative evaluation was that “I’m having an absolute ball”.

Another participant, Sam also reviewed his different environments. He felt positive about the community (“it’s pretty good, it’s peaceful…it’s a bit slower and there’s no travel time to school”). He liked the climate (“I really like the weather here. I like the heat and the sun”), but he found aspects of his role and workplace difficult (“I’ve got a lot of the bottom streamed classes and they’re really difficult to deal with…I’ll yell at them and go crazy to get their attention”). He evaluated the organisation negatively: “I hate bureaucracy and the Education Department drives me around the bend”, but his cumulative evaluation was cautiously positive: “It hasn’t been that bad”. During the early stages of first term most participants identified issues of concern about environments, but endeavoured to develop cumulatively positive evaluations.

The experiences of some participants challenged initial expectations. For example, there were fewer social activities than anticipated:

Less social things than I expected. I expected at least something each week whether it was going down to the pub…or someone’s having a barbie…and that hasn’t happened. (William, June)

But some found their expectations positively challenged:

Foldguild is…not as “country” as I had imagined. In town, there are heaps of shops – most of the same ones you would find in a shopping centre in Perth. So my fears of never being able to go clothes shopping were eased! There are also heaps of restaurants, cafes and pubs… There isn’t as much red dirt as I thought there was going to be either…Basically I was relieved. (Monica, February)

Participants made judgements about their fit to each environment. Where participants felt dissatisfied with aspects of their environments, they considered the extent to which they could adapt, accommodate or change the environment to improve person-environment fit.
These judgements were shaped by reflection and interaction with others. Participants processed experiences by talking with external others (university colleagues, separated family, mentors), experienced on-site staff, other graduates and relocated family. All reported actively thinking through their environmental concerns. The extent to which participants made positive evaluations about environments depended on the extent to which protective or risk factors existed within environments. Protective factors contributed to positive experiences and risk factors predisposed individuals to feel threatened or negative about the environment; very few structures were embedded into workplaces to positively assist the process.

Responses to Environments

The evaluations made of environments, and person-environment fit, influenced subsequent actions and behaviours of teachers. Where participants made positive evaluations of environments and fit, they maintained or developed behaviours and responses to sustain this evaluation. Participants dissatisfied with their environments adapted expectations and attempted to alter fit through problem-solving actions or palliative responses (Author 2008), developing new responses or changing environments. When efforts to improve person-environment were unsuccessful, participants engaged in avoidant responses. A continual feedback loop of adaptation and evaluation of the person-environment fit occurred with four possible outcomes.

Participants were aware of modifying their expectations, often by lowering them, but sometimes just by accepting the environment. For others, modifications to expectations caused disappointment:

I regret not finding out more what Brush was like before I accepted so that I could have come prepared; so I could have fully equipped myself for it which would have helped me cope. And if I’d realised how isolated it was I
could have prepared…I pictured a smaller school …with mostly aboriginal children and more classrooms. I pictured remote, but I felt you…could teach a variety of things, and you were part of the community and I thought I’d be really working one on one…Expectations have been let down, having a lot of ideals crushed. (Hermione, December)

Others found that while expectations were accurate, their response was different than anticipated: “It was certainly living up to the expectations that I had been told it was going to be, but not how I felt like I could deal with it.” (Rhiannon August)

All teachers made a strong commitment to staying in the location for at least the period of the contract. They did not intend leaving if they encountered problems or difficulties. This commitment continued even when they experienced significant discomfort and dilemmas. The teachers felt strong commitment to students and colleagues. When they considered leaving before contract completion they experienced a sense of guilt and failure:

Just staying here was a milestone, keeping going and saying no, I’ve contracted myself, I will fill this duty of contract and that was a big thing. (Hermione, December)

The trajectory for all participants conformed to the process of expectations, experiences, evaluations and responses to the multiple environments in which they were placed. However, the outcomes of the experiences differed vastly.

**Outcomes of the Process of Adaptation to Multiple Environments**

Four pathways describe the outcome of teachers’ experiences within the multiple environments: successful integration, through positive experiences; resilient integration through adaptation to adverse environments; disequilibrium through continuing dilemmas, fluctuating experiences, or irreconcilable evaluations; and continuing negative experiences
leading to alienation and withdrawal. The experiences of participants are developed for each outcome with illustrative case data presented in tables.

Outcome 1: Integration

Twenty percent of participants were categorised as integrating into rural and remote locations. The majority of these participants were appointed to preferred locations; places about which they had some previous knowledge. They arrived with positive expectations and were most likely to be matched to a congruent role. They identified protective factors within environments and made positive evaluations of their experiences: their interactions with students and colleagues; the desirability of the geographic location; the welcoming community; and adequacy of housing arrangements. The participants were focussed on achieving positive student outcomes and developing positive relationships. They enjoyed lifestyle and recreational opportunities within communities.

Participants worked long hours to prepare relevant and valuable learning experiences for students. They received positive feedback about student motivation, classroom management and the academic outcomes they were achieving. Participants demonstrated high self-efficacy, an internal locus of control and commitment. Some participants experienced uncertainty about career continuity at the end of the year; however, all negotiated contract extensions and remained for the subsequent year, feeling positive about quality of worklife.

Outcome 2: Resilient Integration

Thirty percent of participants experienced resilient integration. Knowledge of locations ranged from direct prior experience through to very limited knowledge. Most were favourably predisposed to the location, but they evaluated one or more of the environments as challenging.
Unlike those achieving integration, these participants identified environments as containing significantly difficult conditions. Typically, participants identified student characteristics (socio-economic disadvantage, poor motivation, limited academic achievement, behaviour difficulties and irregular attendance) and workplace culture factors as creating adverse workplace environments; however, participants adopted a challenge rather than a deficit perspective (Ankrah-Dove, 1982; Kaplan, 1999), as typified by Tate, who after an extremely challenging first day declared that his difficult students would be a professional development opportunity. The workplace, in most cases, provided some level of support to assist participants develop competence.

Resilient Integrators were highly influenced by one of two motivators: the desire to make a difference to students and/or the desire to establish their careers. They demonstrated self-efficacy, commitment to students and/or their careers, and an internal locus of control. They believed they could gain career mastery and work/life balance, after an initial investment of hard work. They persisted with seeking alternative strategies to succeed in the workplace and demonstrated a variety of well developed coping strategies to deal with the difficulties they experienced (Author, 2011). Seven of the nine participants remained in their location for the subsequent year. Two participants left their environments based on personal factors, despite professional desires to remain.

Outcome 3: Disequilibrium

Only one mature-aged novice continued in disequilibrium. This participant was appointed to an incongruent role and phase of schooling. She demonstrated a high degree of resilience, but unlike those achieving resilient integration, she was unable to achieve satisfaction within her environments. She continued to experience dilemmas as a result of
fluctuations in environments and evaluations of environments. She felt positively towards some environments, but negatively towards others. She was unable to adapt to the environments or change the adverse conditions. Despite working with students at extreme educational risk, she described interactions with students as a positive experience within the workplace.

This participant experienced career dilemmas, associated with incongruence between skills, experience and the appointed role and phase of schooling, and lack of career stability which encouraged consideration of career alternatives. She was strongly committed to students, but not the organisation. Her commitment to students contributed to continuing stay-go dilemmas. She felt committed to remaining and making a difference to students’ lives; however, dissatisfaction with environments, created fluctuating assessments of worklife quality. She demonstrated resilient characteristics, persisting with the development of alternative strategies, achieving some successful outcomes with students, but she felt powerless to change aspects of the environment with which she was dissatisfied. She remained for a second year and continued to experience fluctuations.

Outcome 4: Alienation and Withdrawal

Forty-five percent of participants were categorised as alienated from rural and remote teaching environments. These participants demonstrated resilient attributes, experienced dilemmas, but these participants concluded that it was not in their best interests to endure the dissatisfaction associated with their environments because improvement in environmental conditions was highly unlikely.

Alienated participants concluded that aspects of the environment were beyond their endurance and locus of control. Nearly all participants were placed in incongruent roles or phases of schooling. They demonstrated low levels of self-efficacy, believing they were unlikely to develop the necessary competence in the role and workplace. Despite categorising
students as at educational risk and challenging, seven participants wished to make a difference for students; however, they were not confident of their success or ability to sustain the effort required to remain in the workplace. They demonstrated an external locus of control. Almost all described the workplace as lacking protective factors, producing lack of commitment to the workplace and organisation. They felt isolated within the workplace and all participants left the location within six to twelve months.

**Implications**

By understanding the processes of adaptation experienced by novice teachers in rural and remote locations, this study provides a conceptual framework for the planning of improved support structures and processes to assist teachers to achieve integration or resilient integration, improving teacher retention in rural and remote schools. For novice teachers decisions about staying in a community are not based on a simple evaluation of the benefits of living “in the country” versus the benefits of living “in the city”. Their decisions are based on a complex evaluation of a variety of workplace, organisational, community and personal factors. The findings suggest that teachers evaluations of these factors can be strongly influenced by the provision of organisational and workplace support structures and processes; that is, educational bureaucracies, administrators in schools and colleagues can make changes that can improve teacher retention in rural schools by addressing protective factors and risk factors.

Participants in this research were overwhelmingly critical of organisational policies and practices related to appointment, relocation, tenure and transfer. The findings endorsed the recommendations of Gerard Daniels (2007), calling for improved workforce planning and recruitment processes. Education bureaucracies struggle to maintain the information systems required to efficiently and effectively manage a large state-based teacher workforce, leading to poor prediction of workforce needs, slow appointment and transfer
response times and inefficient administration of relocation processes. Human resource policies and practices that continue to use duress or misinformation to appoint unsuitable candidates to difficult to staff vacancies are short sighted and expensive.

Teachers value accurate information about their appointed community and geographic location. With appointment processes conducted during school holiday closure, access to school-based personnel is difficult. Development of community-based support and information networks, for use across government sectors, could provide a positive link between appointees and communities. Appointment of community contacts and hosts, using service clubs and organisations, professional or government organisations, would provide information and assistance in initiating social networks beyond the teaching fraternity.

Where organisational policies exist, such as teacher induction and performance management, effective and consistent implementation is required to increase the protective factors embedded in policy; otherwise, they become risk factors, often associated with leadership inexperience or instability. School leaders have a responsibility to develop, implement and monitor effective induction practices for all newly appointed rural and remote teachers. Timelines for staff arrival in schools, prior to student commencement, should allow for school-based induction activities. With rigorous implementation of transition processes, it should be possible to provide access to the curricular and pedagogical information and resources desired by participants in this study. Further, it should be possible to provide effective induction and administrative information in ‘starter packs’ to help novice teachers with initial planning and programming.

There is a need for policy and practice which improves the match between role vacancies and the skills and experiences of appointees. Lack of role and phase of schooling congruence contributes to workplace dissatisfaction for novice teachers (Author, 2008). Role/phase congruence needs to be addressed in human resource policy (Phillips KPA,
2007), with accurate role information provided to all appointees. Where appointees accept roles that are stretched or incongruent, it is incumbent upon the organisation to provide professional development and support to ensure the prosperity (rather than alienation or mere survival) of the appointee.

While teachers continue to be placed in incongruent roles, additional structures and resources are required to provide opportunities for teachers to develop professional competence, experience success and develop self-efficacy. This may involve provision of mentors, networks (virtual and real), and additional professional development. For teachers placed in support roles, clear definition of roles and responsibilities, outlining the role function and relationships to internal resources, would reduce insecurity and uncertainty. Teachers who remain in rural and remote schools for a second year, with the intention of remaining longer, should receive mentor training to assist with the process of supporting new teachers.

Research findings which endorse reduced novice workloads; increased levels of novice support; increased access to casual relief staff within localities; and improved professional development require implementation, despite the obvious funding implications. The costs of ineffective human resource management are significant with the expense of high turnover, lost-time and workers compensation claims, without consideration of the human and educational toll on teachers, school executives and students. Undoubtedly, the greatest cost is to the quality of education of students in rural and remote areas (HREOC, 2000).

Consistent with other findings (Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000; Jarzabkowski, 2003), this study reinforced the importance of positive collegial and collaborative interactions in the workplace, but identified that formal structures to promote collegiality and collaboration are absent from most rural and remote schools, and those which exist in
the first few weeks rapidly dissipate after the middle of Term 1. The positive collegial support that exists in schools is largely serendipitous, dependent on individual personalities and peer goodwill. Clearly, development of collaborative planning and feedback structures could improve the professional and personal socialisation of new teachers.

**Conclusion**

This paper has elaborated a theory of Processes of Adaptation to Multiple Environments for Rural and Remote Teachers. Teachers relocating to a rural or remote location establish expectations about environments, become familiar with environments, making judgements or evaluations in the process about their degree of person-environment fit. From this they develop and implement responses. The process of adaptation leads to four outcomes: 1) integration, 2) resilient integration, 3) disequilibrium or 4) alienation and withdrawal.

Participants in this study who experienced integration or resilient integration evaluated their fit with the environment positively and experienced satisfaction in quality of worklife. They felt capable of developing their skills to improve their success within environments, demonstrating personal characteristics of persistence, commitment, application, resourcefulness and a strong goal focus. Their appointed workplace environments contained protective factors, and participants used direct action strategies in response to their environments, attempting to resolve or remove causes of dissatisfaction. They were favourably predisposed to the geographic location and socio-cultural community, and adopted a challenge perspective to deal with difficulties encountered. Participants who experienced difficulty integrating endured periods of disequilibrium, some becoming increasingly alienated and deciding to withdraw.

Identification of the existence of four possible outcomes provides a conceptual framework which synthesises the different experiences of teachers appointed to rural and
remote schools. The theory and model provide explanations which account for and subsume some of the divergent findings of earlier research on rural and remote teacher experiences by elucidating a range of responses to rural and remote contexts that go beyond the simplistic binary of teacher retention or attrition. The theory provides a conceptual tool to enhance policy and practices of workforce deployment and development.
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