

**'I'M YOUR NEW TEACHER':  
THE IMPACT OF TEACHER MOBILITY ON EDUCATIONAL  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR MARGINALISED STUDENTS**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article provides an alternative perspective on what it means to 'do school' in a disadvantaged community, particularly in the way that disadvantage is reproduced for marginalised students. It explores the mobility of teachers (temporarily) working in a small secondary school located in an economically depressed regional community in Australia, characterised by high levels of unemployment, high welfare dependency and a significant indigenous population. Like many disadvantaged schools, the school has difficulty attracting and retaining high ability teachers, instead relying on a high turnover of often-reluctant staff who are sent to (or feel compelled to) fill positions unable to be resourced through teacher choice procedures. Drawing on parent, student, and teacher interviews, we ask: how does teacher mobility in this context influence the educational opportunities of students who are 'on the margins' of school success and of the socio-economic structure? Specifically, we explore the ways that teacher mobility can reproduce disadvantage by limiting students' access to the dominant cultural capital. We argue that educational policies and politics that reward teacher mobility for moving out of these communities, work to disadvantage students. What is needed is a transformation in policies governing staff placements to establish alternatives that redefine the reward system for teachers in ways that permit these students to succeed.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The capacity of 'disadvantaged' schools to make a positive difference in students' learning is clearly context dependent (Thomson, 2000). Cognisant of this, this article focuses exclusively on one secondary school and what it means to 'do school' there; particularly in the way that disadvantage can be reproduced for marginalised students through the mobility of their teachers. In exploring the effects on students of their teachers' mobility, our research draws on 23 semi-structured interviews with individuals associated with the school, although not all are directly quoted here. It is a purposive rather than a random sample; a mixture of teachers (differentiated by gender, age, experience, and position), parents (varying in gender, age, socio-economic status (SES), ethnicity, family size, and involvement in schooling) and students (distinguishable by their gender, year level, SES, ethnicity, and levels of academic achievement). Differentiation between participants' comments is indicated by their position in the field (teacher, parent, student) and by number (for example, Teacher # 17).

In particular, we explore the ways that teacher mobility in this context can influence the educational opportunities of students who are 'on the margins' of school success and of the socio-economic structure. In undertaking this analysis, we find the social theory of Bourdieu quite useful, particularly his notion that, unlike economic capital, cultural capital cannot be transmitted instantaneously; that its accumulation requires an investment, above all of time. In acquiring the cultural capital of the dominant, there is a clear imperative to 'start early and to pursue its accumulation for as long as possible' (Gale & Densmore, 2000, p. 97). For many of the students in our study, access to dominant forms of cultural capital is frequently limited to time at school. Apart from problems associated with leaving school early or at best maintaining an absent presence, students on the margins of the schooling system are heavily reliant on their teachers (1) having 'the right stuff', (2) being able to pass it on and (3) being around long enough for this to happen.

In this article, then, we explore the ways that teacher mobility may reproduce disadvantage by limiting students' access to the dominant cultural capital of schooling. We argue that educational policies and politics that reward teacher mobility or encourage teachers to move out of these communities, can work to disadvantage students. We conclude that what is needed is a transformation in policies governing staff placements to establish alternatives that redefine the reward system for teachers in ways that permit these students to succeed. We begin our account with an overview of the school in question, to provide context. This is followed by a brief rehearsal of Bourdieu's analysis of the schooling system as generally reproductive of disadvantage. We proceed, then, with our focus on teacher mobility; first, on the difficulties the school experiences in attracting 'good' teachers (those endowed with high levels of the dominant cultural capital); secondly, on the high levels of teacher turnover (even among those with low levels of the dominant cultural capital); and thirdly, on teachers who reside in the community but are not part of it.

## **BACKGROUND**

Located in a rural area of Australia and yet within commuting distance from a larger regional city, the small secondary school (of 200 students) upon which we focus is situated within an historic mining community. After a century of activity, the mine closed just over a decade ago. Reputed to have been the richest mine of its type in the world, its success extended far beyond the community, with its wealth stimulating the growth of nearby regional towns. Having provided work for tens of thousands over its lifetime, the economy of the town had become dependent upon the continuance of mining. Since the mine's closure, the community has experienced considerable economic depression and a high proportion of its residents are now welfare dependent. The town is also characterised by its large indigenous population, and as a place of relocation for many uprooted and transient people, attracted – among other things – by the inexpensive housing available in the area.

As a small district that had relied primarily on a single financial source, the long term downturn of mining in this community has led to economic jeopardy. With reduced employment opportunities, fewer people have money to spend in the community and many small businesses have had to close as a result. The students are conscious of their town's economic vulnerability and know that it will be difficult to obtain employment there. Although educational qualifications are viewed by many as a proven way of accessing more secure, well-paid jobs offered by national labour markets (see, for example, Ainley & McKenzie, 1999; McClelland, Macdonald & MacDonald, 1998), in this town there tends to be disillusionment, especially among older students, about the real value of schooling, given the lack of employment opportunities in the community.

Like many disadvantaged schools, the school has problems attracting and retaining high ability teachers, instead relying on a high turnover of often reluctant staff who are sent to (or feel compelled to) fill positions unable to be resourced through teacher choice procedures. As Thomson (2000) points out:

Schools with high turnover of teachers, casualised support staff, and /or high turnover of leadership may appear on the surface to be 'like' others. Yet is it hardly possible for a school to consider making a difference, when two thirds of the teachers leave each year – and that indeed is the situation in some of the schools. (p. 165)

Overlaying this is a general lack of experience of the entire staff of 20. At the time of the research, the staff profile included four first year teachers, a Deputy Principal who had been in the position for ten weeks, and a Head of Department who is also a first year teacher. There are few mentors for staff other than the Principal and the second, slightly more experienced, Head of Department, who is responsible for the induction program for first year staff.

Rurality also plays a part in the disadvantage that students experience at this school. As is the case in many rural areas, teachers in the case school community are among the few remaining professionals in the region. As economic conditions have worsened since the closure of the mine, many of the professionals – the doctors, dentists and lawyers – have moved to

'greener pastures' (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992). Coupled with this, 30% of children who fall below the poverty level live in rural communities (Bane & Ellwood, 1989) and the white and middle-class population, whom schools have served most well in the past, are giving way to a minority and lower economic class of students, whom schools have served least well (Hodgkinson, 1986). Indigenous people, for example, who predominantly live in rural areas, continue to be the most educationally disadvantaged adult and student groups in Australia (Sanderson & Allard, 2003). These are conditions that the case school seems unable to ameliorate and which we argue are accentuated by the mobility of its teaching staff.

### **DEBUNKING MERITOCRACY**

Pierre Bourdieu writes extensively about the central role that schools play in reproducing social and cultural inequalities. Once thought by some as capable of introducing a form of meritocracy by privileging individual aptitudes over hereditary privileges, the school system is viewed by Bourdieu (1998) as an institution for the reproduction and legitimation of dominance through the hidden linkages between scholastic aptitude and cultural heritage. Thus, despite ideologies of equal opportunity and meritocracy, few educational systems are called upon by the dominant classes 'to do anything other than reproduce the legitimate culture as it stands and produce agents capable of manipulating it legitimately' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, pp. 59-60).

Bourdieu argues against this meritocratic illusion and has been involved in research to expose the fallacy of individuals possessing innate intelligence or 'giftedness' (see, for example, Bourdieu & de Saint Martin, 1974). In such work Bourdieu (1973, 1974) has argued that it is the culture of the dominant group, that is, the group that controls the economic, social, and political resources, which is embodied in schools. In short, educational institutions ensure the profitability of the cultural capital of the dominant, attesting to their gifts and merits. Educational differences are thus frequently 'misrecognised' as resulting from 'individual giftedness' rather than from class based differences, ignoring the fact that the abilities measured by scholastic criteria often stem not from natural 'gifts' but from 'the greater or lesser affinity between class cultural habits and the demands of the educational system or the criteria which define success within it' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, p. 22).

Bourdieu uses the term 'cultural capital' to describe this familiarity with bourgeois culture, the unequal distribution of which helps to conserve social hierarchy under the cloak of individual talent and academic meritocracy (Wacquant, 1998). It refers to a way of thinking and disposition to life where the 'expected behaviours, expected language competencies, the explicit and implicit values, knowledge, attitudes to and relationship with academic culture required for success in school are all competencies which one class brings with them to school' (Henry, Knight, Lingard, & Taylor, 1988, p. 233). Yet 'the school assumes middle-class culture, attitudes and values in *all* its pupils. Any other background, however rich in experiences, often turns out to be a liability' (Henry et al., 1988, pp. 142-143; emphasis added).

The injustices of 'allowing certain people to succeed, based not upon merit but upon the cultural experiences, the social ties and the economic resources they have access to, often remains unacknowledged in the broader society' (Wacquant, 1998, p. 216). Hence, the implicit demands of the educational system 'maintain the preexisting order, that is, the gap between pupils endowed with unequal amounts of cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 20) 'behind the backs' of actors engaged in the school system – teachers, students, and their parents – and often against their will (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In brief, those involved in reproducing the social order often do so without either knowing they are doing so or wanting to do so (Bourdieu, 1998). And this is how we read much of the mobility of the teachers we examine below. As implied above and expanded below, teachers frequently do not see and often do not intend the social sorting that schooling imparts on students.

Bourdieu's further insight is that cultural capital cannot be transmitted instantaneously; its accumulation requires an investment, above all of time. In other words, while cultural capital has the potential capacity to produce profits, it takes time to accumulate and is not readily available to everyone on the same basis. Hence, there is a clear imperative to 'start early and to pursue its accumulation for as long as possible' (Gale & Densmore, 2000, p. 97). But, according to Bourdieu (1997), 'the length of time for which a given individual can prolong his [*sic*] acquisition process depends on the length of time for which his family can provide him with the free time, i.e., time free from economic necessity' (pp. 49-50).

For marginalised groups such as those in our study, the cultural capital of their families, the way in which they see and experience the world, is not highly valued in schools. For many of these students, access to dominant forms of cultural capital is frequently limited to time at schools. We know that exposure to the educative effects of the cultural capital of dominant groups is necessary for success at school. Paradoxically, those who are most in need of time in school to accumulate the dominant cultural capital – as they are less likely to acquire it from their homes and communities – are also those who are least likely to be free from the urgency of economic necessity. The reality is that time in school is a luxury for many poor, ethnic minority students.

According to Grenfell and James (1998, p. 22), Bourdieu's whole mission seems to be 'to render visible these invisible operations as a way of making available the possibility at least of democratizing the product and processes of the field'. Similarly, this article attempts to make visible the invisible affects of teacher mobility in one regional Australian community, with a view to transforming the understandings and practices of those involved and thereby improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged students.

### **WE NEED TO ATTRACT AND KEEP GOOD TEACHERS**

Like many other rural schools in Australia, one of the enduring characteristics of our case school is that it experiences difficulty attracting and retaining quality staff. In this school:

We find it extremely difficult to *keep* good teachers. And we find it extremely difficult to *get* good teachers. If we could in some way, I don't know how we'd do it, get and keep good teachers, I think kids would do better at school ... [If I could change anything] I would try and attract and keep good teachers. Teachers who were good at what they did, were capable and cared about the kids. That would provide stability of staffing ... [That's our problem.] We don't have quality teachers and so you either have to work with what you've got and have a real emphasis on pedagogy and supporting them and teaching them to teach in a different way that's more effective for kids, or we need to recruit better staff. (Teacher # 22)

While length of service is not a direct indicator of teacher quality, a high proportion of staff who find themselves working in the school are relatively inexperienced. The year in which the study was conducted was typical in this respect:

We have four first year teachers this year [in a staff that is] under 20. Four brand new teachers. We have another two that have been teaching for a number of years and another one that's been teaching for probably three years part-time. So they're all getting used to the procedures in this school. (Teacher # 15)

One of the consequences of this young or early career staffing profile concerns student discipline, at least in the minds of students:

It's a bit hard with all the first year teachers ... with discipline and stuff ... [If the teachers] don't sort of discipline the [disruptive students], they just run rank and then no one actually gets anything done and it sort of is hard on the Grade 8s because there's a lot who want to do the work but there's a lot who don't and then they can't do it. (Student # 22)

Parents too were concerned about the kind of education available from beginning teachers. Within the community, there was:

a perception that we haven't got experienced teachers in this school, that a lot of our teachers are graduates and I don't think they feel that they're getting as much from a graduate as they might do from say a teacher that's been here five or six years and knows the ropes and is confident in their position. That's just one perception that I have is that they don't feel that their kids are getting the best education. (Parent # 19)

Perhaps this concern has some grounding in that staff of the school, first year teachers included, find themselves teaching out of their areas of specialisation. As one teacher confessed, 'I'm a first year teacher ... I teach English and Studies of Society and Environment but I'm qualified to teach English and Maths. Studies of Society is always fun, I'm learning heaps, along with my students' (Teacher # 16). However, for the school's Principal, who is more acutely aware of the shortcomings of her staff and of the school's failure to adequately prepare its students, the issues are far closer to home:

There are staff here who – and I'll be very honest – the schools in [the nearby regional city] won't have ... Some of the staff were transferred here because either they were seen as not reaching benchmarks in performance at other schools or, because of their reputations and ability, the schools wouldn't take them. Whereas, we were desperate so we'd say, 'Look, we'll have them'. (Principal)

This difficulty experienced by the school in attracting and retaining quality staff is a challenge to students' access to the dominant cultural capital. As Bourdieu suggests, exposure to the educative effects of the cultural capital of dominant groups is necessary for success at school; it is the knowledge of and familiarity with bourgeois culture that is rewarded and recognised. For students from marginalised groups, whose families' cultural capital – their dispositions, competencies, attitudes and values – is not always highly valued in schools, access to its dominant forms is frequently limited to time at schools. So while the staff of the case school are the bearers of highly prized capitals with their knowledges, skills and modes of expression constituting the heritage of the cultivated classes, for some students their only exposure to this cultural competence is in the form of interactions with these very teachers. If we consider Bourdieu's observation that the acquisition of cultural capital involves, amongst other things, extended periods of time with those who are themselves endowed with 'strong' cultural capital, the importance of attracting and retaining quality staff in the school takes on a new significance for students' learning. Such transmission and accumulation is time-intensive, but it also relies on the quality of one's associations (with those who know). It is therefore not only time in association with teachers (as those who possess the cultural capital of the dominant) that is important; but time in the company of quality teachers.

### **ONCE WE GET THEM HERE, THEY MOVE ON**

Coupled with the problems of attracting quality staff – and even those they do attract are often inexperienced first year teachers – the school also faces frequent teacher turnover. As one student mentioned:

I don't know what the teachers are like at other schools but we're getting teachers in and out all the time. Like changing too much. Like this year in English we've had two teachers and we're on our third one already for English. And everyone has a different teaching style so you've got to adjust from one to the other. (Student # 20)

At least one teacher agreed that 'we have a big problem at school with our staff turnover' (Teacher # 22). Indeed, some staff considered such teacher mobility part and parcel of working in a regional school:

It's always a fairly young staff here because being like any country school, it's not on the coastline and so you get a regular turnover ... It was the same when I was in [another regional town]. The year I left, I was one of about 17 or something, you know, more than half the staff turn over in one year. It's very difficult for the kids. (Teacher # 18)

For the case school, the year of our study was exceptional in this regard:

We've been unfortunate this year, we've had just huge staff changes. For me, it's just been a nightmare, like there's been seven teachers alone in Grade 8 this year ... It's just huge. Grade 9 has also seen a total change in Humanities teachers. The two teachers that started the beginning of Grade 9, they don't have them now, they have two totally new teachers. (Teacher # 17)

Speaking about the impact of this teacher mobility on students, one teacher commented:

I was speaking to a teacher today who teaches a senior class and he's their third teacher this year ... I walked into his classroom yesterday ... and he asked me to talk to the students because he had a bit of a crisis of confidence with them. He didn't think that they thought he could teach early childhood because he was a male so I asked him to leave the room while I spoke to the students and they told me that, basically, it boiled down to him having a different teaching style, and they had had their old teacher and then they had to adapt to someone new and then she came back, now they've got another one ... So it really directly impacts upon them because they're the ones that have to deal with new teachers. (Teacher # 15)

Teacher turnover in this context, poses a real threat to students' sustained access to dominant cultural capital and suggests that there is more to students' difficulties than what is particular to them alone. At times, educational institutions and their representatives actually construct students' difficulties, not just in how and what knowledge is privileged, but also in its processes of transmission and accumulation.

### **BEING THERE WITHOUT BEING THERE: MOBILITY OF HEARTS AND MINDS**

While attracting and retaining good teachers are important issues for schools located within Australian regional communities, parents and students in our study also desired staff willing to make the community their home. One of the parents, for example, told us that she didn't 'feel that [the principal had] lived up to expectation' (Parent # 19). She went on to say:

To start with she told me that she wanted to make [this town] her home, that this was going to be the school that she retired from, that she wanted this to be her final position and she was going to really make something out of it because she had so much that she wanted to offer the kids and that. Now she's talking about perhaps applying for a transfer so I just wonder did she sort of lead me on because a lot of the things that she said were the things that I wanted to hear? (Parent # 19)

This parent went on to say:

But this school is difficult. You know, the kids are difficult. The community is difficult. If they don't like you they'll never like you basically. So she's sort of pushing a big stone uphill really because I think the perception in the town probably is that she isn't the person that they wanted. But there's not much that can be done. She doesn't want to get involved with the town and yet that was what she said in the first place, she wanted to live in the town and be part of it. And there were functions that we have now and then, we ask her, you know, would she like to talk to the people and welcome them and stuff and she says, 'Oh no, that's P&C business. It's got nothing to do with me.' So she's basically putting a barrier up and you can't do that in a town like this. You've got to be a part of the town and that is what I thought we were getting. (Parent # 19)

Indicated here is a particular conception of the relations between school and community: a desire by the community for staff to get involved with the town and make it their home. This is desired both because of the approval and acceptance of the community that such acts convey and because it provides the community with greater access to privileged linguistic and cultural competencies, necessary in achieving success in social institutions. Implicitly, they are aware that:

what meanings are considered the most important, what experiences are deemed the most legitimate, and what forms of writing and reading matter are largely determined by those groups who control the economic and cultural apparatuses of a given society. (Giroux, 1990, p. 85)

Of course, teachers' presence in disadvantaged communities is not sufficient to bring about their transformation. Depending on the curriculum and pedagogy on offer, schools and teachers can either:

silence students by denying their voice, that is, by refusing to allow them to speak from their own histories, experiences, and social positions, or [they] can enable them to speak by being attentive to how different voices can be constituted within specific pedagogical relations so as to engage their histories and experiences in both an affirmative and critical way. (Giroux, 1990, p. 91)

To several members of the community in this study, the mobility of teachers associated with the school communicated a low outside valuing of the community, and is a good example of what some perceived as educational experiences in less than satisfactory circumstances. More broadly, it exemplifies regional schools having to 'make do' because the necessary resources taken for granted in major cities – in this case, ready access to those with the cultural capital of the dominant – are in short supply.

Clearly, teachers who live in and are committed to the community are more respected by students. As one parent told us in relation to his son:

I talk to some of the [teacher] aides over [at the high school] and I say, 'Well, how'd he go with the English lesson there?' ... And one of the

[teacher] aides says, 'No, he's good when he's with me, when I'm in the classroom.' She's an Aboriginal and he respects her so when she says, 'Do this' he'll do it ... She's someone that he's grown up with from a baby to now. (Parent # 21)

Another community resident – one of the few staff to live in the community and one of three indigenous staff members – told us of the positive relationship that she has with the school's students.

I go to barbecues, or if one of the kids have a party, I'm actually invited because I know a lot of them. I've lived here for over 20 years see. A lot of the kids here they've known my kids and they hang around the same circle, same football team. So I know a lot of them. If someone has a going-away party I'm usually invited and I know them. Like one's my nephew and my niece and my God-daughter and things like that. So I know 'em all. Mix in well. (Teacher # 21)

She finds that this helps her in her role as a teacher aide. She told us:

there [were] three kids. They were learning support kids and another teacher aide had them and I was in the library with my class and they were playing up. They're pretty naughty kids and two of them were fighting, actually physically fighting. And the lady with them was saying, 'Stop it. Stop it.' And I just looked up and I thought, you know, they're fighting so I said to one who I knew personally, 'You, stop it. Get up and stop it now,' and he did. I'm very close to his father and his father is my husband's best mate, you know ... I've got that good rapport with the kids and that helps. It really does. I mean if they hate you, you haven't got a chance. (Teacher # 21)

Bourdieu would argue that it is the profitability of the cultural capital of the dominant, and it is teachers' access to such cultural capital, that facilitate their relationships within the community. That is, their knowledges, skills, and modes of expression constitute the heritage of cultivated classes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979); they are examples of the middle class culture, attitudes, and values the school assumes in all its pupils (Henry et al., 1988). The respect shown to such staff could be because some members of the community consider them to be bearers of highly prized capitals and recognise the importance of spending time in company with them.

### **WHAT CAN BE DONE?**

So, how can such schools encourage staff to stay longer, or attract better staff to the school? In her efforts to address this, the Principal:

worked very hard with the P&C to get our school's yearly points [Teacher Transfer Rating Points] changed from 2, which is what the [nearby regional city] schools are rated, to 3 ... But it's still not enough because [to transfer back to the capital of the State] you really need 20 or 21 points. For instance, we had a staff member here last year who'd been here 12 years and still didn't have enough points to get to [the capital of

the State] ... because there were people from out west who have higher ratings. (Principal)

These Teacher Transfer Rating Points are determined by the levels of complexity of the schools in question and their geographical isolation. However, while increased Teacher Transfer Rating Points may help to reduce staff shortages in the community, they do not necessarily attract high quality or experienced teachers, or teachers who are inclined to stay. Moreover, the Remote Area Incentive Scheme (RAIS) – which includes compensation cash benefits, incentive cash benefits to encourage teachers to remain in a particular location, extended emergent leave provisions and induction programs – does not apply to our case school as RAIS operates for centres that have a transfer rating of 4 points or above.

Yet the parents of the community:

try and get [the Principal] to get teachers who are going to stay ... [The Principal is] very aware that it would be a good idea for teachers to come to the school and stay for longer than a year. (Teacher # 15)

However, while the community desires staff who want to make the town their home, there are a number of reasons why the school has difficulty attracting and retaining teachers, including the poor standard and lack of subsidised departmental housing, and harassment from the community. As the Principal understands from personal experience, the State's Department of Education:

can't offer [staff] decent housing [in this community]. I was in a house that up until a month ago was probably below anything any principal in this state would live in ... It's a very poor standard house. We pay the same rate per week as someone living in a Departmental house in any other city or town in [the state]. Other places have security and air conditioning and ... we have none of that and ... I've been broken into, I have been assaulted in my house through not having secure facilities ... I can't even have my piano in my house because the roof leaks so badly ... So I can't say to staff, 'There's good houses.' In addition to that there are only four [Departmental] houses in town so that doesn't house all my staff anyway. (Principal)

As for others on staff, 'if you were a young staff member you wouldn't want to live in town either' (Principal), because:

you are subjected to abuse ... I've got one staff member who's had their tyres slashed three times in the past two years [while the car has been] housed in their garage ... He has had windows broken, he has been assaulted, he has had his roof rocked constantly, he's exposed to verbal harassment constantly ... And I've got a married staff member living in [Departmental] quarters that [has] had to cut down every ounce of greenery in the yard because ex-students were hiding and they were concerned about break and enter ... So that's the atmosphere you live in

... So I can't encourage families to live in my town. I can't encourage young females particularly to live in town. (Principal)

However, the Principal did tell us that her:

position [in the community] has improved very much ... When I first moved in I was treated like everybody else [who is new to the community]. I'm treated very well by the community now and don't get any sort of harassment now but it's taken me two and a half years. (Principal)

Of course, it might not be a matter of being singled out for such treatment because one is a teacher. Rather, it could be a reaction to:

anyone that's new to the community. In fact we're having difficulty attracting and maintaining outside students because they come to the school and they complain of harassment because they're not from the community or are different. In fact two that left, their parents bought a house in the community because it was low cost and they were looking at living here and the mother said to me, 'I wish I would have known what the community was like before I moved in. I cannot live here.' And the children are now going to [city] schools. Now not all of the community is like that but unfortunately there's enough of those type of people to make it difficult for the people who want to move here. (Principal)

Given that it is an isolated community within an economically depressed area with high welfare dependency, transience – both of professionals (such as teachers) and of community members – is a real issue. Perhaps the response of some of the community who 'make it difficult for the people who want to move here' could be interpreted as their reaction to a shortlived, 'here today and gone tomorrow' commitment they encounter in many newcomers to their community. Interpreting teacher commitments to schooling in this regional area and understanding the low 'outside' valuing of their community, it is possible that these acts of harassment and abuse toward newcomers are related to past experiences of injustice.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this article we have argued that teacher mobility is an important issue for teachers and students in disadvantaged communities. This is not simply a matter of teachers' selective presence: there for a year or two and gone again. It is also a matter of the scarcity of what teachers have to offer – the cultural capital of the dominant, often in short supply in marginalised regional communities – and the logic of its transmission bound up in extended periods of time in its company. These are significant issues when we consider that:

we do not enter fields with equal amounts, or identical configurations, of capital. Some have inherited wealth, cultural distinctions from up-bringing and family connections. Some individuals, therefore, already possess quantities of relevant capital ... which makes them better players than

others in certain field games. Conversely, some are disadvantaged. (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 21)

For marginalised students in the regional school in this study, teacher mobility poses a real threat to their access to the cultural capital of the dominant. While some are born into hereditary privileges and cultural heritage that lead to scholastic aptitude, many others suffer educational repercussions for having a cultural capital that is in the wrong currency (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995).

Although exposure to the cultural capital of dominant groups is necessary for success at school, teacher mobility in this regional area means that students who are most in need of time in the company of the bearers of highly prized capitals may be less likely to experience this success. We suggest that for teachers to make a difference in such schools and communities, they need to redress their mobility and the messages this conveys. At the same time, however, we acknowledge the complexities surrounding issues of teacher mobility, given the harassment, hostility, and abuse reported by newcomers. The contradictions in this account are indeed perplexing: the very things the community would seem to want and need, work in ways to turn teachers away. Similarly, educational policies and politics that reward teacher mobility for moving out of these communities also work to disadvantage students. What is needed is a transformation in policies governing staff placements to establish alternatives that redefine the reward system for teachers in ways that permit these students to succeed.

One way of rethinking these arrangements is to rethink the social and cultural capital of teachers themselves. Why some teachers choose to be mobile is not simply related to their desire to be somewhere else: closer to family/friends, services and the familiar. It is also about their view of 'teaching as work' and the various opportunities afforded those who make strategic moves within the system. In this search for something better, 'bad' schools and communities are not necessarily 'the problem'. Many teachers enter the profession seeking opportunities to make a difference in students' lives and in the school communities they encounter and enjoy the particular challenges involved in working with/in them. But this kind of work is difficult to do alone and without support. Within so-called 'problem' schools as well as in schools more generally, there is value in fostering a collaborative model of teachers' work, creating opportunities for teacher growth and development within a learning community. It is this kind of workplace that has real potential to attract and retain teachers for professional reasons, not simply because of the possibility of increased Teacher Transfer Rating Points that, in the end, are accumulated in order to aid moving out. Similarly, to treat would-be mobile teachers, those who long to be elsewhere, as recalcitrant (and requiring various forms of discipline) is to individualise 'the problem' and fail to recognise the benefits of a dynamic and collaborative staff for staff themselves as well as for school communities.

This kind of collaborative learning workplace is particularly important for teachers at the beginning of their careers and for teachers located in 'difficult'

schools; a common combination, as illustrated above. Such learning environments provide opportunities for teachers to recognise and build understanding of issues of group difference often afforded them at the commencement of their career when they are first confronted by a multiplicity of cultures, communities, geographies, social classes, learning styles and so on.

It would be easy to read into this paper a negative view of beginning teachers but it is important to understand their comments and actions in relation to their current initiation into schools and school communities. How commencing teachers (particularly beginning teachers) are inducted into schools (especially disadvantaged and/or isolated schools) in ways that value their own contribution and enhance their ability to bridge differences (eg. mentoring, ongoing professional development) is important. Commencing teachers bring new ideas and new knowledge into schools as well as encountering local knowledges, but they can be frustrated by the lack of participatory forums and structures that would enable them to make a difference by sharing their knowledge with others and by learning from others. Instead, as shown here, there is often a focus on their ability to discipline and control students and on their induction into associated forms of teacher-student relationships. Such a focus on reinforcing institutional procedures inhibits the growth of teacher understanding and student development.

In brief, teachers need to see the school as a place worth going to, both professionally and personally so that the community is not regarded as a negative place to be. It is possible to reconceive of their placement and to recognise positives in working in such a school. For example, the fact that this is a school in which teachers really can make a difference for students and their communities, and that they have opportunities to do things, to take on responsibilities they probably could not do in another school because of their subservience to senior staff, can offer professional and personal challenges that are potentially extremely fulfilling. Encouraging community members to consider becoming teachers themselves is another way in which to make stronger connections between school and community, to reposition the school and its staff as centrally important to its community. Regional and disadvantaged schools also require structures to support the development of staff, through professional networks and structures.

In all of this, what is important to understand is that while the extent to which teachers have a physical presence in these communities is important, the nature of that presence is possibly more important and it is this that teachers need to 'pin down'. At centre, the issue is that 'external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus, cannot be transmitted instantaneously' (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 48). Redressing teacher mobility is not simply about being there. It also requires commitment to being there.

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