

## **Wider Field Experience and Supervised Professional Experience in rural schools as operative segues from pre service teacher to graduate teacher**

Anne Drabble, Maddison Wilkins, Sarah Middleton, Louise Lyndon and Nathan Zahra  
*University of the Sunshine Coast*

### **Abstract**

Graduate teachers generally experience an array of emotions and self-negotiations about beliefs, values, personal and professional identity and their ability to evidence the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) at graduate stage when they commence as new classroom teachers. Much has been said about developing pre service teachers' knowledge and sense of rural awareness to meet the expectations of teaching in rural contexts. This small study explored four new graduate teachers' rural experiences during Wider Field Experience (WFE) in an Aboriginal Community School, their Supervised Professional Experience (SPE) in rural schools and everyday classroom teaching experiences they engaged in as classroom teachers. These varied experiences were used to evidence the APST at graduate stage. A participatory action research approach was used because the quality of shared communication and collaboration exchanged was considered beneficial in developing confidence and teacher identity. The graduate teachers engaged in autobiographical reflections because it provided a strong platform for developing shared perspectives and identifying priorities in their new roles as classroom teachers and decision makers. The graduate teachers exchanged APST evidence and sought support for challenging experiences. Differentiation to accommodate students with diverse needs was a particular focus because of each graduate teacher's context and location.

### **Introduction**

In the Australian context, the problem of the provision of adequate levels of staffing in rural and remote schools has long been the focus of education departments and governments. Increasingly, Higher Education Institutions charged with the preparation of teachers are joining the ranks of those seeking to find a solution to effective preparation of graduate teachers in rural areas. Higher Education Institutions are examining the experiences offered during teacher preparation courses, and more importantly, examining the workplace knowledge gained through practical experiences such as Wider Field Experiences (WFE) and Supervised Professional Experiences (SPE) that allow preservice teachers to seamlessly enter into employment in rural and remote communities. This study contributes to an understanding of the relevance of WFE and SPE in rural settings as a precursor to future performance as a graduate teacher. The APST was used as the framework for graduate teacher autobiographical reflections about WFE, SPE and current classroom teaching experiences.

Research indicates that pre service teachers avoid rural placements because of the misconceptions they have about life and employment in rural communities. (For example, Barley and Beesley, 2007, Hemmings, Kay & Kerr, 2011). (Inverarity 1984), delineated these preconceptions into four factors; physical isolation, realised in geographical position and climatic extremes; interpersonal isolation, related to the distance from friends and family; cultural isolation, associated with feelings of

dislocation from the community expectations and values, but also related to the lack of facilities in terms of the Arts and entertainment; and finally intellectual isolation, associated with the lack of access to professional development activities. Boylan (2004) also included financial isolation, which referred to issues such as the lack of employment opportunities for the partners of remote teachers.

In examining the lives of teachers placed in rural and remote settings, research that examines issues of teacher emotion and psychological effects on teachers' lives following a cultural relocation becomes important. The idea of a "fit" between a preservice teacher and a rural placement is one which can be found in research dealing with managerial psychology. (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Research suggests that there are parallels between the culture shock that teachers experience when transferred to an international settings, and that which is experienced by those relocated to rural and remote settings (Joslin, 2002). Studies on transfer to international settings, like work relocation to rural settings within Australia, tend to focus on both the stability and length of placement, the efficacy of the teaching pedagogy and cultural adjustment. While much of the literature which focuses on person/environment "fit" is developed with the intention of developing criteria for managers to select the appropriate staff, the value of the work in this area provides insight into the sort of qualities that Higher Education Institutions should try and develop in their preservice teacher programs.

Kristof-Brown et al (2005), outlined four domains that might describe how a person and a job may be compatible. These include: person-job; person-organisation; person-group; and person-supervisor fit. In terms of these domains, the person-job fit is one which aligns most closely to the preparation of preservice teachers. Edwards (1996), breaks down the person-job fit into two subcategories:

- demands-abilities fit: which is achieved when the employee has the opportunity to develop the appropriate knowledge, skills and abilities, commensurate with undertaking a job
- needs-supplies fit: which is achieved when an employee's needs, desires and preferences are met.

In attending to the effect of these two aspects of person/job fit, (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005) notes:

*"If a person does not have the requisite abilities to meet situational demands, overall and task performance are likely to suffer. Even contextual performance may decline, if employees do not have adequate attentional resources (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989), to engage in organizational citizenship behaviours because they are being stretched by task demands. Strain should be high under such conditions, and turnover may result because of consistent underperformance...". (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005, p. 289).*

Sharplin, O'Neill, & Chapman (2011), cite Schouteten and de Witte's (2007), classification of two perspectives that link the idea of person/environment fit to individual's response to workplace. The first, named a conditional approach, examines the degree to which workplace conditions influence a worker's quality of life, whereas the second, the "fit" approach focuses more on the influence of workers' perceptions. Perceptions, in this sense are critical:

*"...because job characteristics and psychological states are moderated by knowledge, skills, need for growth and degree of satisfaction with the work context, contributing to motivation levels and job outcomes.....".(Sharplin, et al., 2011, p. 8).*

A "fit" approach then, focuses on the relationship between teacher perceptions of the qualities of a workplace, in relation to the degree of job satisfaction. This approach is useful as it allows for an examination of the influence of efforts to prepare preservice teachers in terms of their perceptions, but also in terms of their developing knowledge and skills.

A common feature of rural and remote placements in teacher education programs is the provision of enlightening and educative experiences which are designed to change the largely negative preconceptions many preservice teachers have about rural placements. In other words, to build a person-environment fit through deeper understanding of local culture. These rural experience initiatives, seek to introduce preservice teachers to life in rural and remote schools through a short period of supported SPEs and WFEs. Critical to this approach is the notion of going beyond simple physical placement to include a process of engaging with rural communities. In examining ways to better understand educational practice, Gruenewald (2003b) asserted place based pedagogies were essential to allow education to have some direct relevance to context in which students were being taught. What is indicated in the literature is the need for a reconceptualisation of teacher education programs where rural and remote communities are places where place based pedagogies are discussed, examined, analysed and trialled, with a view to making recontextualising of curriculum a standard practice. One of the better resources for this process would be discussion about pedagogies observed in rural and remote SPE. Page (2006), proposes that a critical place based approach shifts the focus from the local to the generic and places the problem solving aspects of designing learning experiences in a more global context. The outcome of a critical place based approach is a particular brand of student responsive curriculum, and one that has the capacity for, “developing, knowledge, sensitivities, awareness, skills, attitudes and abilities that will allow them (teachers) to feel more at home and more powerful in a rural setting”. (White & Reid, 2008, p6). This focus on a critical place-based pedagogical approach is particularly poignant given the diversity apparent in all schools, not just those in rural and remote locations. Furthermore, White (2015), maintains that rurality should be the responsibility of all teacher educators. In doing so preservice teachers would benefit from relevant and inclusive practices that include rural and remote perspectives

## Background

The Graduate Teachers in this study participated in a week long WFE initiative called “Coast to Country” as preservice teachers in at the end of their first year of their Primary Education Program. “Coast to Country” provided them with a weeklong orientation trip to rural schools where they spent time in classrooms, had discussions with classroom teachers about teaching in rural schools and interacted with community members. They were extremely positive about their “Coast to Country” experience. In particular, their interactions in rural schools and communities had done much to allay the negative pre conceptions and hesitancy they had about employment in rural schools. As a result of the friendship that formed between the four preservice teachers and their developing interest in teaching in rural locations, they volunteered for a Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) funded WFE in an Aboriginal Community school. The preservice teachers worked closely with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and teacher aides. They observed cultural lessons, implemented small group learning experiences in literacy and digital literacies and developed units of work that reflected place based pedagogies. The preservice teachers interacted with community members and learned much about the Indigenous protocols that were necessary for cohesive and harmonious relationships both within the school and the wider community. As a result of the shared learning from the WFE and the professional conversations they had continued to engage in, the Graduate Teachers felt they had the knowledge, pedagogy and experiences to confidently complete a five week rural SPE. They chose to complete the rural SPE in pairs, because of their friendship, their shared understandings about rural communities, diverse learners, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and familiarity with each other’s developing pedagogy. Sharing was also financially beneficial. During the SPE they reflected on improvements made to their lesson planning, teaching and assessment because of their shared communications, the assurances they received from one another when they experienced challenges they were unfamiliar with in their respective rural school contexts and the social activities they participated in during their time in the rural communities. As graduate teachers, two are teaching in rural locations with a high number of Indigenous students, one graduate teacher is teaching in a regional location and one is working in a Special School.

## Research questions

This small study examined the autobiographical reflections of four graduate teachers as they commenced their new role as classroom teachers. Their reflective comments were linked to the APST and how their learning and teaching was evidencing the APST at graduate stage. In addition to the classroom evidence, they reflected on their earlier WFE in an Aboriginal Community school and the SPE they completed in rural schools as preservice teachers to answer the following research questions:

1. How did preservice teachers' prior rural and regional WFE and SPE placements evidence against the APST?
2. How did the current Graduate Teaching context align with the APST?
3. How relevant were the prior rural and regional WFE and SPE as preservice teachers in supporting the Graduate Teachers functioning against the APST?

## Research methodology

### Research framework

The research method adopted for this study was Participatory Action Research (PAR). The research method was chosen because it is a methodology for developing new knowledge about teaching and learning within an educational context. PAR is a useful method for bringing together theory and practice, teaching and learning, and reflection and action in programs involving the preparation of teachers (Baum & Smith 2006). This study provided opportunities for Graduate Teachers to examine their learning and teaching in rural, regional and a special needs school and helped them make links between the APST studied at University and the realities associated with teaching in their current locations as Graduate Teachers. Participatory Action Research is predicated on action and focuses on research to promote this action. This continues in a cycle as data is gathered and analysed, participants construct a path of action which is reflected upon, and the process continues. In learning contexts PAR tends to focus on educational change within communities through a process that relies upon self and critical awareness about the participants' and researchers' lived experiences (Lykes, 2000).

In their review of Participatory Action Research Johnson and Guzman (2013) described PAR as an approach to the research that places a hierarchy on the events of participation, collaboration and transformation. The approach is varied and depends on the context that the questions warrant (Balcazar et al., 2004), and despite extensive study there is no established set of procedures for conducting the research (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, Plano & Morales 2007). There are a number of guidelines, principles and approaches to using PAR. The general approach has the researcher and participants as one collaborative group throughout the process and success of the methodology is determined by a reflection and action cycle to assess the awareness and effectiveness attained by the participants during and after the PAR process (Johnson & Guzman, 2013). Guidelines for similar education research studies proposed by McIntyre (2003) are to engage with the participants in any ongoing processes of critical reflection that are designed to understand their realities, and ensure the participants have full engagement in the PAR process.

PAR is an appropriate methodology in situations where the researcher is seeking to make connections between daily lives, schooling and the teacher preparation programs. Moreover, PAR provided opportunities to investigate issues centred on the Graduate Teachers in the study and engaged in autobiographical reflections to obtain clarity around issues under investigation.

## Procedure

Four Graduate Teachers (GT1, GT2, GT3, and GT4) were invited to participate in the research. The Graduate Teacher cohort had previously participated in autobiographical reflections during WFE and SPE in an earlier research project that examined the use of autobiographical reflections in the development of teacher identity (Drabble, Lyndon, Middleton, Wilkins & Zahra, 2015). Each of the four Graduate Teachers was provided with a document containing a complete set of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) at graduate stage (AITSL, 2011) in which to document autobiographical reflections evidencing the APST through their teaching practices.

## Data collection

The Graduate Teachers were asked to recall specific events during their WFE and SPE that aligned with each of the APST at graduate stage during their undergraduate years. The recalled events were documented against each APST for each of the four Graduate Teachers. The Graduate Teachers were also asked to recall specific events during their first year of teaching that aligned with each of the APST at graduate stage. The data consisted of two complete sets of autobiographical reflections for four Graduate Teachers. The data was recorded for each of the APST at graduate stage.

## Data analysis

The analysis of the Graduate Teachers' autobiographical reflections was considered in terms of observations and initiated events. Every documented reflection was classified as either an observed, or an initiated event that related to the APST. An observed event was defined as an event the preservice or Graduate Teacher participated in as an observer. An initiated event was defined as an event the preservice or Graduate Teacher participated in as an initiator. For each Graduate Teacher, frequencies of occurrence were calculated for each observed and initiated event associated with the relevant APST. The tables and charts in the following results and discussion section of this research paper document the frequencies.

## Results and discussion

### How did preservice teachers' prior rural and regional WFE and SPE placements evidence against the APST?

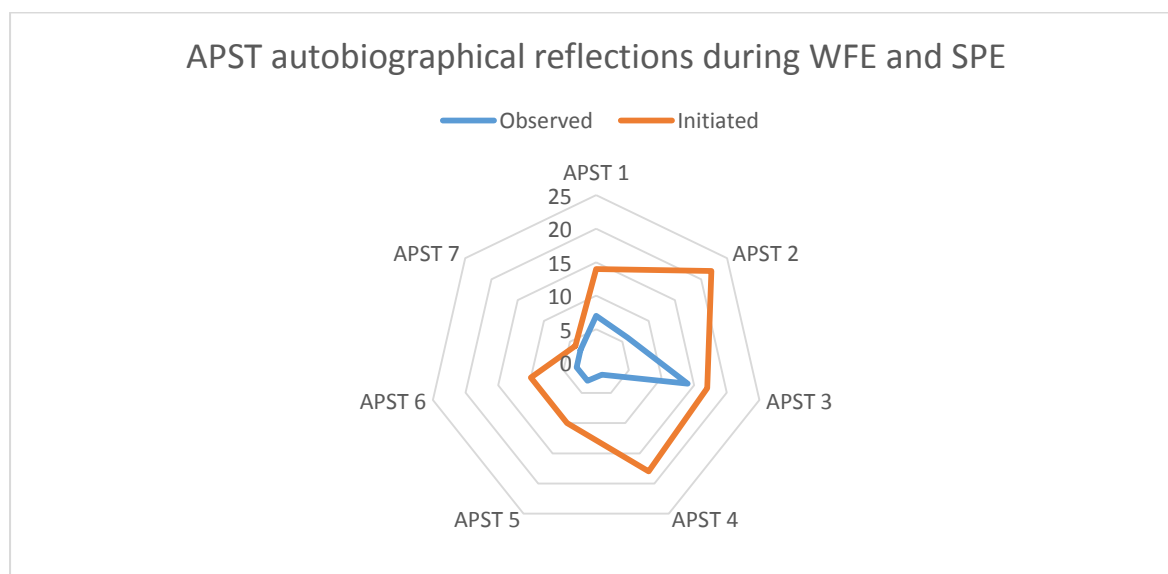
During the Graduate Teachers' WFE and SPE the autobiographical reflections on classroom activities show they were involved in the initiation of teaching practice that aligned with the APST at two times the number of times they were involved in observing classroom activities that conformed to the APST. Total classroom initiated teaching practices (95) exceeded total classroom observed teaching practices (38). Therefore, the Graduate Teachers on average initiated classroom activities at a rate slightly more than double the observed classroom teaching practices that conformed to the APST. The distribution of initiated and observed teaching practices was not evenly distributed among the four Graduate Teachers (GT1, GT2, GT3, and GT4). The relatively high proportion of observed teaching practice events is not surprising given the Graduate Teachers were undertaking WFE and SPE as preservice teachers at that time and the respective Supervising Teachers would have provided explicit instructions to them.

Table 1. Frequency of APST recalled events during WFE and SPE

APST	Graduate Teachers (GT)									
	GT1		GT2		GT3		GT4		Total	
	Observe	Initiate	Observe	Initiate	Observe	Initiate	Observe	Initiate	Observe	Initiate
APST 1	1	2	6	2	0	10	0	0	7	14
APST 2	3	4	0	6	0	6	3	6	6	22
APST 3	8	3	0	6	1	4	5	4	14	17
APST 4	1	4	0	5	0	4	1	5	2	18
APST 5	0	4	0	5	0	1	3	0	3	10
APST 6	1	2	0	4	0	3	2	1	3	10
APST 7	0	1	0	3	0	0	3	0	3	4
Total	14	20	6	31	1	28	17	16	38	95

Reported teaching practice events were generally uniformly distributed across the APST, but highest for APST 2, and lowest for APST 7. Figure 1 shows diagrammatically the relativities between the observed and initiated teaching practice events during WFE and SPE for each APST. Also, APST 2, APST 3 and APST 4 showed the greatest number of initiated teaching practice events, and APST 2 and APST 4 showed the greatest diversion between initiated and observed recorded teaching practice events during the WFE and SPE. A further observation in Figure 1 is the low teaching practice events, both initiated and observed associated with the APST 7.

Figure 1. APST autobiographical reflections during WFE and SPE as preservice teachers



The results in Table 1 and Figure 1 above indicate generally high number of events for the Graduate Teachers:

[GT1] Observed teaching practice events (8) recorded by GT1 for the APST 3. With regard to student goals it was stated that it was not expected that all classroom students had to do the same amount of work or in the same amount of time, but learning goals were set in a way that all students were challenged in a supportive environment. Also,

*“The Supervising Teacher showed me the benefits of rotations and how they can be managed, and particularly how they can cater for different student levels”.*

[GT2] Initiated teaching practice events (6 and 6) recorded by GT2 for the APST 2 and APST 3. With regard to organising content into an effective learning and teaching sequence it was stated,

*“I was given the opportunity to re-write a unit of work to suit the students within the class. I had to take into account the students’ current level of learning and personalities and capability. For students working at a lower level the unit started with very simple content. This increased to meet the needs of students who were working at a high level of achievement”.*

With regard to setting learning goals that provide achievable challenges for students of varying abilities and characteristics the adopted approach involved helping students create learning goals in regard to their reading skills. To ensure the goals were achievable SMART goals were used.

[GT3] Initiated teaching practice events (10) recorded by GT3 for the APST 1. With regard to demonstrating knowledge of teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse backgrounds it was noted the SPEs provided an understanding about the diverse range of cultural knowledge that included implementing different strategies to accommodate differences between low and high socio-economic backgrounds.

*“It gave me an understanding of principles associated with diversity, cultural proficiencies, empathy, compassion and consciousness of issues and equality”.*

[GT4] Initiated teaching practice events (6) recorded by GT4 for the APST 2. With regard to using curriculum, assessment and reporting knowledge to design learning sequences and lesson plans it was stated there was an opportunity to augment the technology unit.

*“I was able to develop a technology unit from scratch and that early experience helped me with the teaching practice I am undertaking now”.*

### How did the current Graduate Teaching context align with the APST?

During Graduate Teacher practice the initiated teacher practice events (164) substantially exceeded the observed teacher practice events (2). This is an expected result because the Graduate Teachers had their own classrooms and were not under the surveillance and guidance of a Supervising Teacher. In this situation the Graduate Teachers would initiate the teaching practice events as part of their role as a classroom teacher. Characteristics of the overall initiated Graduate Teacher practice events which stand out are the high number of teacher practice events (36) evidenced against APST 1, and the limited number of teacher practice events (10) evidenced against APST 7.

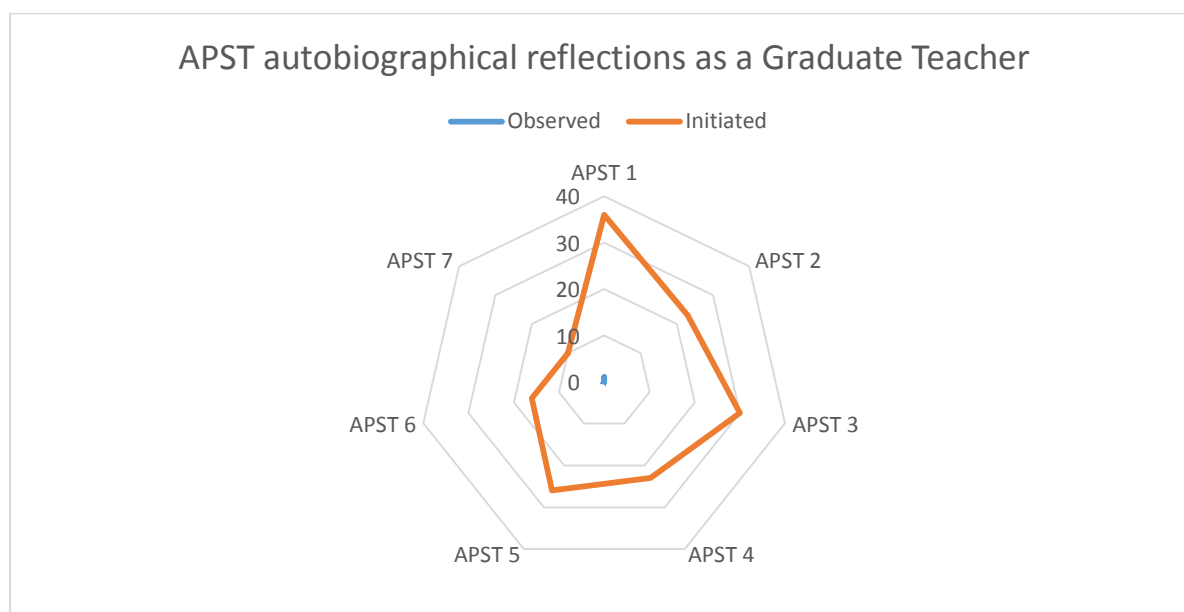
Table 2. Frequency of APST recalled events during period as a Graduate Teacher

APST	Graduate Teachers (GT)									
	GT1		GT2		GT3		GT4		Total	
	Observe	Initiate	Observe	Initiate	Observe	Initiate	Observe	Initiate	Observe	Initiate
APST 1	1	17	0	7	0	12	0	0	1	36
APST 2	0	6	0	5	0	9	0	3	0	23
APST 3	0	13	0	6	0	10	0	1	0	30
APST 4	0	10	0	5	0	5	0	3	0	23
APST 5	0	9	0	11	1	3	0	3	1	26
APST 6	0	6	0	4	0	4	0	2	0	16
APST 7	0	4	0	2	0	4	0	0	0	10

Total	1	65	0	40	1	47	0	12	2	164
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Reported teaching practice events were again generally distributed across the APST, but were less for APST 6 and APST 7. Figure 3 shows the relationship between reported teaching practice events across each of the APST. A possible explanation for the lower events against APST 6 and APST 7 is that both APST 6 and APST 7 focus on engagement, whereas APST1 and APST 2 focus on knowledge and APST3, APST4 and APST 5 focus on practice.

Figure 2. APST autobiographical reflections as a Graduate Teacher



The results in Table 2 and Figure 2 above indicate generally high number of events for the Graduate Teachers:

[GT1] Initiated teaching practice events (17) recorded by GT1 for the APST 1. With regard to demonstrated knowledge of teaching strategies that are responsive to learning strengths and needs of the students it was stated that based on the SPE placement the Graduate Teacher was familiar with Ruby Payne’s work on poverty and that had application to the classroom students.

*“Several strategies were employed to support the students through an informal register of language where students do not have the opportunity to engage in advanced vocabulary. In the class we have word walls”.*

[GT2] Initiated teaching practice events (11) recorded by GT2 for APST 5. With regard to demonstrating an understanding of assessment strategies to assess student learning the Graduate Teacher stated informal assessment was undertaken in the classroom every day.

*“Through observations, reading students’ work, show-me-boards, and class discussion my students are able to show me their understanding of concepts and pre and post testing allows me to see the impact my teaching has on student understanding”.*

[GT3] Initiated teaching practice events (10) recorded by GT3 for APST 3. With regard to demonstrating a broad knowledge of strategies that can be used to evaluate teaching



programs to improve student learning the regular classrooms for teaching in rural school illustrated the approach adopted to improve teaching practice.

*“On our return trips from school our group would debrief and discuss which teaching practices worked and which didn’t. We also talked about different emotions and how we could improve our teaching practice”.*

[GT4] Initiated teaching practice events (3) recorded by GT4 for APST 2, 4, and 5. With regard to APST 4, demonstrate knowledge of practical approaches to managing challenging behaviour, reference was made to behaviour management at a school in a rural location. During teaching sessions it was stated

*“More time was spent on behaviour management than teaching. Strategies used included isolating the misbehaving children, and engaging in intense supervision of the children by walking around the desks in the classroom”.*

How relevant were the prior rural and regional WFE and SPE as preservice teachers in supporting the Graduate Teachers functioning against the APST?

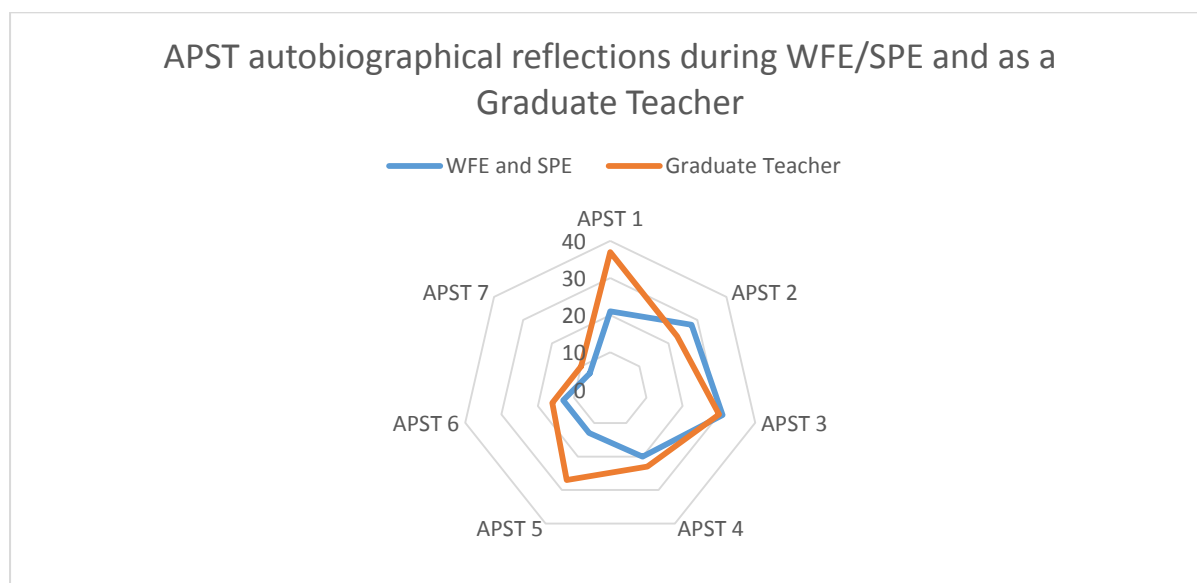
The relatively high number of recorded APST related events (133) during WFE and SPE compared to the recorded number of APST related events (166) as a practising Graduate Teacher confirm the value of properly conducted WFE and SPE as opportunities to align teaching practice to the requirements of the APST. Recorded differences between the WFE/SPE alignment to APST and the Graduate Teacher experience alignment to APST were in APST 1, and APST 5.

Table 3. Frequency of autobiographical reflections evidencing the APST during WFE and SPE and as a Graduate Teacher

APST	APST events during WFE and SPE			APST events as a Graduate Teacher		
	Observe	Initiate	Total	Observe	Initiate	Total
APST 1	7	14	21	1	36	37
APST 2	6	22	28	0	23	23
APST 3	14	17	31	0	30	30
APST 4	2	18	20	0	23	23
APST 5	3	10	13	1	26	27
APST 6	3	10	13	0	16	16
APST 7	3	4	7	0	10	10
Total	38	95	133	2	164	166

As evidenced in Figure 3 there was a close correlation between the WFE/SPE and Graduate Teacher recorded alignments with APST 2, APST 3, APST 4, APST 6, and APST 7.

Figure 3. APST autobiographical reflections during WFE/SPE and as a Graduate Teacher



The results in Table 3 and Figure 3 above indicate generally high number of events for the Graduate Teachers. In particular:

1. Graduate Teacher recorded events aligned to every APST except APST 7;
2. WFE and SPE recorded events for APST 1 to 6 inclusive; and
3. The difference in recorded events between Graduate Teacher and WFE/SPE for APST 1 and APST 5.

These similarities and differences are explained in the following Graduate Teacher observations regarding the three domains of teaching

### Professional Knowledge

*APST 1: Know students and how they learn*

*APST 2: Know the content and how to teach it*

The Graduate Teachers indicated their rural WFE and rural SPE provided extended and specific knowledge to meet the focus areas of APST 1 and APST 2. They gained firsthand and deep knowledge of teaching in rural schools through observations and interactions with teachers, students and community members about culture, socioeconomic backgrounds, students with disabilities and especially the differentiation required to accommodate the needs of all learners. The Graduate Teachers highlighted the digital literacy activities used with Indigenous students to engage the students in writing tasks during the WFE. They implemented lessons where Indigenous students were taught to use iPads to record their stories, take photos and create visuals. The iPads were successful motivators in meeting the needs of the Indigenous students, who had initially been reluctant to create hand written texts because of their literacy skills. More importantly, the Graduate Teachers explained the WFE had provided considerable understanding of Indigenous culture and protocols. They found this to be an advantage when they completed their SPE in rural schools because they were aware of the cultural sensitivities that needed to be considered when working with Indigenous students. All Graduate Teachers emphasised their learning on differentiation during the WFE and SPE. For

example, one Graduate Teacher described how they were given the opportunity to re-write a unit of work to meet the needs of students in the class. They had to ensure the lesson content accommodated the range of abilities and supported all students' achievement and success. While there were limited opportunities for working with students with disabilities, the Graduate Teachers stated they had gained knowledge about modifying tasks to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

The Graduate Teachers identified their rural WFE and rural SPE were significant contributors to the Professional Knowledge they had gained for teaching in rural schools. More importantly, their experiences provided them with a sense of rurality which extended beyond the classroom to the community – which was an essential consideration when teaching in rural communities. They have a developing confidence about teaching Indigenous students and are able to accommodate students on Individual Curriculum Plans (ICPs). The Graduate Teacher who is working in a Special School commented on how she had been able to use her WFE and SPE experiences to meet the needs of her students who required modified lessons to support their achievement and success. As classroom teachers, they are required to work closely with teacher aides. They found groups worked best when teacher aides were provided with explicit instructions including prepared questions and behaviour management strategies to assist with reading groups and work with individual students. The Graduate Teachers indicated they were using similar approaches and strategies to those experienced during their rural WFE and rural SPE because they had seen Supervising Teachers use them successfully, knew how to implement them and knew they generally worked. They credited the WFE and SPE with providing them with knowledge and practice that extended beyond their university studies, because it included first hand experiences with how to teach rural and Indigenous students.

### Professional Practice

*APST 3: Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning*

*APST 4: Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments*

*APST 5: Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning*

The Graduate Teachers identified that all their SPEs provided opportunities to improve their professional practice. However, their rural WFE and rural SPE provided extended and specific knowledge to meet the professional practice required for teaching in rural schools. During their rural SPE they observed goal setting for individual students, where explicit teaching with success criteria being used to support individual students. In their SPE teaching they saw examples of how lesson content had been modified to meet the needs of students. They explained they had learned about differentiation in a number of their University course work. However, it was their rural WFE and rural SPE that had provided them with real examples of adapting teaching to support student learning. One example provided by the Graduate Teachers was the opportunity they had to help students create personal SMART goals. Students were encouraged to consider their personal ability levels and discuss what they thought they could achieve and how they wanted to manage their participation in order to achieve. In relation to creating safe and supportive environments, the Graduate Teachers reflected on their rural WFE and explained how they found some students who were off task and disengaged in an excursion to the local creek to take photos for their story writing using iPads. They managed this situation by speaking to students respectfully with encouragement and support. They also provided students with options in regard to the task. What they noticed, was that the students slowly came back into the group and completed the iPad task without further distraction. In other instances, during the rural WFE and rural SPE, the Graduate Teachers found that students were more likely to be engaged if their learning included their interests. Opportunities to observe preparation for assessment and especially the opportunity to take part in moderation of assessment tasks was well received. It provided Graduate Teachers with opportunities during the rural WFE and rural SPE to ensure all assessment was being marked fairly.

The Graduate Teachers stated that much of the teaching strategies and assessment they were using in the classroom had developed from their rural WFE and rural SPE. They had certainly adapted teaching strategies to suit their individual classroom contexts. However, a significant part of the experience much of what they started with had developed from their rural WFE and rural SPE experiences. For example, the teaching undertaken in the rural WFE with Indigenous students involved explicit teaching. They were continuing to use explicit teaching with their own students. However, they found it more productive to give only one instruction at a time and that this instruction needed to be repeated a number of times. The “over planning” of lessons during the rural WFE and rural SPE had continued in their classrooms because they were still making adjustments for students’ needs. They were well organised for each day. However, there were few days that everything was completed or went to plan. The continuity of teaching as classroom teachers, allowed them to pick up and continue to meet the learning goals established for each lesson. The Graduate Teachers were extremely positive about their experiences with assessment and moderation during the rural WFE and rural SPE. They believed that they have developing worthwhile knowledge of data collection and now shared their assessment and marking with other teachers for consistency and comparability.

## Professional Engagement

*APST 6: Engage in professional learning*

*APST 7: Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community*

The Graduate Teachers believed their rural WFE and rural SPE had provided them with invaluable learning about the importance of the community in teaching in rural areas. The rural WFE in an Aboriginal community had provided them with insight into the prominence of culture. It had emphasised the contributions of community members in developing cultural understandings for the students. Their participation in Indigenous culture classes led by Indigenous staff provided an appreciative understanding of the value of culture, the importance of sharing cultural understandings to young students and the consideration of culture in learning and teaching. The Graduate Teachers explained that parent helpers were on hand in their rural SPE schools. However, it really depended on how far away the parents lived from the school. To ensure they maximised their learning about the rural SPE community, they participated in as many community events and classes as they could. Some of these, such as the boot scooting and water aerobics classes provided them with opportunities to engage with parents as “people” rather than “teachers” who were teaching and assessing their children. It allowed them to socialise and develop collegial relationship with parents. As Graduate Teachers, they have encouraged parent helpers in the classroom. They have also created different communication channels to inform parents about the need-to-know information regarding their children.

The Graduate Teachers observed some schools operated a ‘Learning Café’ which is professional development for graduate teachers and new teachers to the school. Sometimes staff who have knowledge about a particular teaching strategy/concept are responsible for presentations, or professionals from outside the school delivers the presentation. The schools were usually supportive about sending graduate teachers to develop their teaching skills. The Graduate Teachers commented, they were at a point where they would like to suggest professional development on topics that will specifically help them and the type of students that are in their classes.

As Graduate Teachers, the Principal or other experienced staff would regularly observe them. They also had opportunities as Graduate Teachers to observe more experienced teachers. This was a necessary and valued part of professional learning and self-improvement. They perceived the observations as supportive, whereas as pre service teachers, the observations were really a form of assessment and a report completed on their performance. Of particular interest was the continued relationship between Graduate Teacher and Supervising Teacher. Graduate Teachers have generally kept in contact with their Supervising Teachers from prior SPEs. The Supervising Teachers have

continued to provide advice and feedback and have been sharing what they are doing in their classrooms. The Graduate Teachers believed the friendship and the professional dialogue they shared with their Supervising Teachers was extremely supportive and this had extended their professional learning as graduates.

## Concluding Remarks

As preservice teachers there was strong indications of autobiographical reflections of rural and regional WFE and SPE evidenced against the APST. For each APST, autobiographical reflections during rural and regional WFE and rural SPE initiated events exceeded observed events which demonstrated higher participation rates attributable to rural experience. There was strong indications of autobiographical reflections from the Graduate Teachers' classroom teaching evidenced against the APST. Autobiographical reflections for each APST during classroom teaching initiated events exceeded observed events. Observed events were not significant. Prior rural WFE and SPE where there was strong evidence against the APST were replicated as a classroom teacher. As preservice teachers they observed more events than initiated events associated with the APST during WFE and SPE. The corollary, as classroom teachers, Graduate Teachers initiated more events associated with the APST.

[GT1] *“Doing WFE at University provided me with a lot of confidence and extra experience as a first year teacher. Being in a rural town with a very transient community, many Indigenous students coming in and out from a local community and low attendance rates has been a challenge. However, I have found that being about to draw on my experiences from a rural placement and working at the Aboriginal Community School has allowed me to be more understanding and prepared in my teaching. I am really enjoying working in a rural community and I think that the extra WFE that I completed has helped to shape my teaching”.*

[GT2] *“Teaching in a rural area has been great. I have enjoyed being able to work and live in an area which is close knit. The work I have previously done in rural communities has developed my abilities to understand and work in a small school. With only a small staff it has been instrumental in the running of the school that each teacher and member of staff take on extra roles. A good example of this was a recent whole school event celebrating the Olympics. The Mini Olympics required a lot of planning. However, it was a great way to involve the community within a school event”.*

[GT3] *“Becoming a teacher is certainly a long road for any person to undertake. I am no exception to this road (even at an old age) (what was I thinking!!). However, I work in an environment that every day is never the same but I am fortunate enough to be able to work with some very dedicated professionals who are happy to pass on as much valuable information as they can. I have opportunities to make a difference to the lives of all students no matter their background and I will be able to develop and learn new skills in my new career. Being a teacher is a privilege for me that I take very seriously and as I deliver lessons to my students and I have that feeling that the students are just not getting it but one day it just dawns on their face and you go home with a little smile on your face and this smile is even better achieved because it's a Special School. Knowing that I have the possibility of helping a student achieve a dream would be my ultimate job satisfaction”.*

[GT4] *“The journey as part of the WFE to the Aboriginal Community School has improved my cultural awareness and gave me the necessary skills and strategies to not only prepare and deliver authentic and quality lessons for Indigenous students but also improve the quality and authenticity of the Indigenous education non-Indigenous students can receive. Having spent 5 weeks in Western Queensland in a remote town opened my eyes and introduced me to a completely different pedagogy due to the remoteness, level of education of others in the community, cultural*

*differences, travel distances and the importance and staples such as water and food. Although challenging I believe this experience has been crucial to my success as a first year teacher. Having the opportunity to do SPE interstate has been extremely beneficial for me as a first year teacher due mainly to having a mixed variety of training in curriculum and syllabuses for both NSW and QLD. Networking has also played a major role in my success”.*

The relatively high number of autobiographical reflections on APST related events (133) during WFE and SPE compared to the recorded number of events (166) as a Graduate Teacher could lead to a conclusion that the WFE and SPE provided a solid foundation and personal ‘fit’ for Graduate Teacher performance during their first year of teaching. The authors are realistic about the opportunities they experienced as a small group of preservice teachers and the limitations in generalising the findings reported in this paper. However, they concur their knowledge of rurality, place based learning including understandings of Indigenous culture and protocols has provided them with confidence and competence to engage in effective inclusive practices in rural locations.

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