PROJECT INFORMATION STATEMENT #14 (December, 2016)

ARC LINKAGE PROJECT – BEYOND YEAR 10

Background
Increased retention of students beyond the compulsory years of schooling is fundamental to improving the skills and capacity of our youth, to lifting the nation’s educational ranking among OECD countries and, ultimately, to raising productivity and the health and well-being of its people. This three-year longitudinal mixed-methods study investigated factors that influence student retention in rural, regional and disadvantaged areas of Tasmania. It is an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage project between the University of Tasmania and the Department of Education Tasmanian (DoE). The project has approval from the Human Ethics Review Committee (Tasmania) and the Department of Education Tasmania.

Overview of the project
The three-year study (2012-2014) investigated best educational practice to enhance retention in schooling in rural, regional and disadvantaged communities via the following means:

- investigating factors that influence students’ decisions to continue their schooling beyond Year 10;
- examining organisational issues, such as leadership and organisational culture, which contribute to an ethos and commitment among staff to pursuing student retention beyond current levels;
- identifying and documenting
  - key interventions at primary, secondary and post-Year 10 school levels that enhance student retention;
  - school, community and home practices that enhance student retention;
  - specific practices related to the use of new technologies to enhance student retention; and,
- providing recommendations to relevant stakeholders for implementing, developing and monitoring interventions across local (Tasmanian) and national contexts.

Research plan
The design of the study is shaped by four significant and inter-related issues associated with student retention: (1) building student capacity for positive transition for post-compulsory participation; (2) forming positive educational partnerships among school and senior secondary school communities; (3) addressing teachers’, families’ and community members’ beliefs about, and attitudes to, student retention, especially of rural, regional, and disadvantaged students; and (4) building educational leadership and organisational capacity. The study was located in the North, North-West and South. Approximately 75 schools were involved in the study.

Quantitative (i.e., surveys) and qualitative (i.e., interviews, focus groups) methods have been used in the study. Student data collection targeted cohorts of students in Years 5, 7, 9, 10 and 11, using mainly surveys and some interviews/focus groups. Teachers and school leaders,
parents/guardians, principals and community members data collection also employed surveys and interviews/focus groups. A key component was targeted school/community case studies of successful strategies for raising retention. Interviews with other relevant personnel (departmental, school community, other) as they were identified were also undertaken across the life of the study.

Instrumentation was developed specifically for the study. Findings from the pilot study testing the survey instruments were presented in two papers at the 2012 joint AARE/APERA International Conference and have been published in *Youth Studies Australia*.

In 2012, these surveys were administered to students, principals, teachers and school leaders in the target schools. Data were collected from 15 schools in the North, 16 in the North-West and 47 in the South, and included 1,208 primary students, 1,904 secondary students, 931 college students, 213 teachers and school leaders, and 51 principals. Findings from the surveys have been presented at a number of meetings with key stakeholders and educational leaders, and a number of journal articles are currently under review.

There were three main data collection foci for 2013. First, interviews were conducted with key DoE personnel and community members. A total of 29 interviews were conducted with 35 people – 7 interviews in the North, 13 in the North-West, and 9 in the South. The community voice was heard at the Australian Association for Research in Education annual conference in 2015, with additional findings from the community members to be presented internationally at the European Conference on Educational Research to be held in Ireland from 23-26 August, 2016. Additional journal and conference papers offering the views of community members are also in progress. Second, surveys were distributed to parents/guardians and community members in the target areas. Findings from the parent survey have recently been published in the *International Journal of Educational Research* and findings from the community survey are expected to be disseminated later this year. Third, in-depth case studies were conducted in two “clusters” of schools in each of the North, North-West and the South. Each “cluster” consisted of linked schools from and to which students are likely to transition. The aim of these case studies was to unlock the cultural, strategic and practical successes that see school leaders affect retention with positive change and to follow some of these interventions in order to document their impact upon the participants (students, teachers and school leaders, parents/guardians, and principals). Outcomes of this aspect of the research have recently been published in the *Leading and Managing Journal*.

A related focus for 2013 was the implementation of the 2013 Student Accommodation and Transport Survey commissioned and funded by Colony Partnership Brokers and the DoE. The survey was distributed to past and current Year 11, 12 and 13 students living in accommodation to attend school or college in Hobart in 2012 and/or 2013. The survey examined accommodation and transportation issues that might act as impediments to students staying on in education. Findings suggest there are important structural issues such as students being too young to live independently, travel time and lack of transportation as barriers for rural and isolated students, and the cost of living in accommodation and socio-economic challenges that are impacting on the ability and/or desire to continue education beyond Year 10.

In 2014, students, teachers, school leaders and principals from fifteen of the project schools were re-surveyed. Ongoing analysis of data from this aspect of the project commenced in 2015, in addition to the further analysis and dissemination of outcomes from the earlier
surveys and interviews. In 2016, three articles have been published in peer-reviewed journals, with another currently under review. Additional journal articles are expected to be submitted for publication next year, including two for publication in a special issue of the *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*. Project outcomes have also been circulated to the wider community through presentations at national and international conferences, with further presentations expected in 2017.

See below for a full list of project publications and presentations.

**Department of Education involvement**

General Managers, senior departmental officers and principals played key roles in facilitating access to schools for the research team. All such access was negotiated and agreed to by school principals before any research was undertaken. Individual principals, teachers, students, parents/guardians, and community members had the right not to participate in or to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty.

**Project Advisory Group**

A Project Advisory Group was established to provide advice and comment on the project from time to time as well as assist with communication about the project to key stakeholders. The Advisory Group comprised members of the UTAS Research Team and General Managers (Learning Services) and other relevant DoE personnel.

**Project Publications and Presentations**


Cranston, N. (2015, June 25). Keeping young Tasmanians in school: Towards an understanding of some of the issues. Presentation for the Network of Education Associations of Tasmania (NEAT), Sandy Bay (Hobart), Tas.


Problems exist with retention rate data. (2015, April 7). The Launceston Examiner (Launceston, Tasmania), p. 7. [Interview with Prof. Ian Hay.]


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