The Role of the Rural Community in Teacher Commitment

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the problem of rural educator turnover through the lens of organizational commitment. The question asked in this study was: in what ways are rural British Columbian teachers' perceptions of their community related to their perceptions of their school organizations? It was hypothesized that long-term and successful rural teachers would tend to commit to their schools and their communities in conjunction, while those who are disenfranchised from their schools would also be disconnected from their communities. It was further hypothesized that committed teachers would integrate the community into their teaching practices and would tend to emphasize place-based pedagogies in their classrooms. The study used a mixed method approach to gather data via an anonymous online survey administered through hostedincanadasurveys.ca. In addition to gathering demographic data, the survey measured three types of community commitment along with school commitment using Likert type questions. Comments and long answer questions enabled the survey to elicit narratives regarding views on community-school links. The research was conducted between April 2017 and June 2017 with 55 rural educators from remote rural schools, spanning seven school districts within B.C. The data suggest that there is a correlation between participants’ normative community commitment and their commitment to their school organizations. Also, there is a link between participants’ affective and continuance community commitment and the number of years that they intend to remain in their jobs. A model is developed to differentiate between duty-oriented and retention-oriented educators and to sort their varied opinions about community-school connections.
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Chapter 1: Problem to be Investigated

Purpose of the Study

Recruiting and retaining rural teachers has been a challenge in many countries worldwide for as long as the term “rural education” has been around (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Corbett, 2014). In Canada, recent government reports continue to lament the high turnover of rural teachers just as they did twenty or more years ago (Canada. Parliament. Senate. Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, 2006, 2008; Storey, 1993). Constant teacher turnover is widely accepted in the literature to be an important contributing factor to the general underachievement of rural schools (Brasche & Harrington 2012; de Feijter, 2015; Dykstra, 2014; White & Reid 2008; Yarrow, Ballantyne, Hansford, Herschell & Millwater, 1999). Teacher turnover is harmful for several reasons, some of which are obvious, and some of which are more complex but perhaps more serious. The obvious effects of high turnover include disruptions to teachers' and students' lives, and to small schools and communities in general. From an administrative standpoint, turnover of teachers has a significant impact on the quality of curriculum planning and implementation possible at a strategic level. It can also increase the level of administrative problems associated with constant recruitment, orientation and service delivery that can affect policies, curriculum preferences and pedagogy (Brasche & Harrington, 2012; de Feijter, 2015; Dykstra, 2014).

A less obvious but pertinent problem associated with turnover is that it signifies a greater malaise in teacher attitudes. Wherever high job turnover exists, there is likely a fraction of teachers who are still employed but ambivalent or even resentful about their rural teaching jobs (Brasche & Harrington 2012; Campbell & Yates, 2011). It is these uncommitted teachers who have a great potential to negatively impact student learning. Understandably, there is a growing body of research aimed at reversing the problem of teacher turnover by first identifying its underlying causes. The purpose of this study is to add to that body of research; to examine rural teacher job commitment in
British Columbia (B.C.) and to analyze the effect that the rural community has on teachers' level of job commitment.

When approaching this topic at first, I found the high rates of rural teacher turnover puzzling. Why have I been paid a “remote recruitment and retention allowance” every month when I actively prefer to live on a beautiful island? For me, teaching in a rural environment is a dream job. I grew up in cities, but moved to the country as a lifestyle choice. As a rural educator on a remote island with a tight knit community, I get to build my own house, make my own electricity with solar panels, record and perform music, dig in the garden and experience nature on a day-to-day basis; all of this can happen with my students, working together and discussing our journeys. With the popularization of the internet, my community has become less isolated too. With so many opportunities for hands-on authentic experiences, I believe many rural settings are fantastic places to teach and learn.

On Lasqueti Island, where I live, community is intensely important, particularly in the winter when the number of residents drops to about two hundred. Many authors echo the importance of community as part of the rural lifestyle (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Brasche & Harrington 2012; Canada. Parliament. Senate. Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, 2006, 2008; Storey, 1993; White & Reid, 2008). It seems that by and large, rural communities are wonderful places to get to know one's neighbours and surprisingly difficult places to be anonymous. The ways in which interpersonal community interactions play out in the many towns, villages and islands across B.C. is potentially crucial in either enfranchising or disenfranchising teachers.

Clearly there are a variety of rural teaching stories to be told, not all as happy as mine. What is the nature and extent of this variety? One way to find out is to gather rural B.C. teachers' stories by providing them with an opportunity to express themselves at length, using open-ended questions. Another way is to quantitatively study each teacher's level of commitment to her/his community (place) and relate it to her/his school (job) commitment.
Justification of the Study

The reasons for high rural teacher turnover have been examined in this province in a general sense. Over twenty years ago, Vernon Storey (1993) surveyed more than 500 rural B.C. teachers, asking them how much their salaries, job requirements and living conditions affected their decisions to accept, remain in or eventually leave their positions. His findings were striking: social factors and community factors, which often have little directly to do with job conditions per se, seemed to be the most important determinants of teachers' decisions to either remain in or leave their jobs. Salaries and bonuses seemed to play a key role in recruiting teachers, but not in retaining them. While Storey's survey sample size is impressive, the study asked broad questions and didn't explore the specific nature of these place and/or community interactions. Also, his study was done in different cultural times - some native residential schools still operated in B.C. Since then much has changed and the internet has made so many remote B.C. communities more socially connected to the outside world. Gathering a more up-to-date picture, through both quantitative data and detailed narrative, seems like the obvious next step to re-examining the complex puzzle of rural teacher job stability and motivations.

An important feature of my study is that it focuses explicitly on teacher commitment, rather than following the path of many previous studies that use “quitting” or “staying on” as a crude proxy (Storey, 1993; Jo 2014). Specifically, this study looks at two types of organizational commitment: commitment to the school organization (i.e. school commitment) and community commitment (i.e. commitment to place). There are two main lenses through which teacher organizational commitment has been studied (Jo, 2014). One way focuses on ensuring a high degree of teacher effort to support school effectiveness. The second pertains to teacher job retention. Jo (2014) suggests that one way to assess both these topics simultaneously is to examine teachers' overall organizational commitment through an emotional/behavioural analysis. In this study, I will use instruments that address these nuances of teacher organizational commitment. In a similar study, Washburn (2003) developed an even
more detailed emotional/behavioural instrument to study teacher commitment to community/place. Using this emotional/behavioural approach, and comparing each individual educator’s community commitment to her/his school commitment, is a new and potentially fruitful way to study the overall job stability and motivation of B.C. rural teachers.

By gathering demographic information from survey respondents, the current study may also serve to chart any changes in the demographic makeup of rural educators that have occurred in the last two-and-a-half decades. Asking closed-ended demographic questions may also help reveal some of the patterns of commitment exhibited by educators.

Finally, enabling educators to provide detailed views on their schools and communities will help to provide some nuance to how commitment patterns may or may not be linked to job retention or student learning. One key feature that this study will look for will be the presence of place-based pedagogies or place-based mindsets in rural educators. B.C.’s rural areas are diverse from one another and consist of subarctic regions, dry plateaus, mountainous regions, deserts, as well as moist coastal rainforests and islands of every size. The people who inhabit these regions and the fabrics of their communities are as diverse as the climates and topographies of the regions themselves. Several authors have highlighted the importance of studying rural education with a place-based mindset in order to reflect this diversity (Azano & Stewart, 2015; White & Reid, 2008). While it is likely impossible to do this exhaustively and thoroughly as a researcher without embedding one's self in each community, it is possible to examine rural teachers’ narratives with this topic in mind.

**Research Question and Hypothesis**

This study will examine the extent to which each rural teacher's commitment to community is linked to his/her school commitment. It will examine potential correlations of educators’ numerical questionnaire scores of community commitment and their scores of school commitment. More specifically, it will look at what factors contribute to teachers' commitments to community and to their
school organizations. It will also seek to describe the nature of this community-school commitment linkage, if it exists. The current study hopes to answer the question: in what ways are rural British Columbian teachers' perceptions of their community related to their perceptions of their school organizations?

Based on my own experiences, my hypothesis was that long-term and successful rural teachers would tend to commit to their schools and their communities in conjunction, while those who are disenfranchised from their schools would also be disconnected from their communities. Committed teachers would also tend to integrate the community into their teaching practices and emphasize place-based pedagogies in their classrooms. Descriptions of successful rural teachers in the educational literature give several examples of their place-based mindsets and cultural sensitivities (Azano & Stewart, 2015; White & Reid 2008). In my own experiences, I have found that people who are successful rural teachers feel supported and celebrated by a web of community friendships, relationships, and responsibilities. While B.C. rural/remote school teachers probably stay in their jobs for a wide variety of reasons, I expected to find that these social/community factors would be paramount.

**Definition of Terms**

“School Commitment” refers to the organizational commitment of the teacher to the school in which they work. Behaviours such as additional energy investment, acceptance of wider responsibilities, setting high goals for role activities, and taking initiative in promoting quality education all relate to increased organizational commitment in a school context.

“Community Commitment” refers to the organizational commitment of the teacher to the place that he or she lives. This commitment can relate to the town, village, wilderness region or island, along with all of its other inhabitants. In this study, Community Commitment is broken down into its three
aspects (defined below) – affective, continuance and normative community commitment.

“Affective Commitment” is the aspect of organizational commitment that is associated with positive emotions and desire. In the context of this study affective community commitment would indicate an individual’s love and affection for their community.

“Continuance Commitment” is the aspect of organizational commitment that is associated with avoiding the costs of leaving an organization. In the context of this study, continuance community commitment would indicate an individual’s apprehension about leaving her/his community. Concern about a lack of opportunity elsewhere, or an awareness that moving would be difficult are factors that could increase continuance commitment.

“Normative Commitment” is the aspect of organizational commitment that is associated with an individual fulfilling a sense of duty. In the context of this study, normative community commitment would indicate an educator’s sense of moral obligation towards his/her fellow community members.

The operational definition of “rural” for this study refers to a setting containing a school whose teachers receive the British Columbian Ministry of Education's Remote Recruitment and Retention Allowance. By extension, a “remote rural district” would be composed entirely of designated “remote rural” schools.

A “local” is defined as an individual who has lived in his/her community for over ten years before teaching there.

A “newcomer” is defined as an individual who has lived in his/her community for less than a year before teaching there.

“Place-based pedagogy” is a movement designed to ground school curriculum and instruction in the local geography, ecology, culture, economy, and history. It has been recently highlighted in the 2016 B.C. government curriculum as a way of including and respecting rural communities and the cultures they represent. Similarly, a “place-based mindset” is one in which these local elements are
given an elevated level of conscious value.

Brief Overview of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the problem of rural educator turnover through the lens of organizational commitment. Previous research on rural education indicates both community factors and school factors play a role in educator turnover. In this study, educators’ commitments to community were compared with their commitments to their school organizations.

The study used a mixed method approach to gather data via an anonymous online survey administered through hostedincanadasurveys.ca. In addition to gathering demographic data, the survey measured three types of Community Commitment along with School Commitment using Likert type questions. Comments and long answer questions enabled the survey to elicit narratives regarding views on community-school links. The research was conducted between April and June 2017 with 55 rural B.C. educators from remote rural schools, spanning seven school districts in B.C.

Quantitative data was analysed to assess if the commitment categories were correlated. Demographic factors such as gender, age, experience, and property ownership were used to divide the sample group so means comparisons could assess the influence of these demographic factors on commitment. Open-ended written responses were analyzed by tallying frequent responses and coding for emergent themes. These narrative responses were then examined from the perspective of each participant’s quantitively assessed commitment levels.
Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

Defining “Rural” when Choosing Relevant Literature

One of the difficulties with studying rural education as a whole, is that there are many ways to define “ruralness”. The Canadian Senate’s Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry (2006, 2008) favours the “Rural Small Town” (RST) definition which includes any locale with fewer than 10,000 people and where fewer than 50% of the population commutes to an urban area. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) prefers to include any area in which 50% of the population lives with a density of less than 150 people per square kilometre (Canada. Parliament. Senate. Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, 2006). Suffice to say, there are several different definitions of “rural” versus “urban”, and it is perhaps best to think of it as a smooth continuum. The different definitions can greatly impact various studies’ approaches, their findings, and their conclusions. Context matters greatly, so for the purposes of this study, I will concentrate on literature that originates from English-speaking regions with low population densities: Canada, the United States (outside of the Eastern Seaboard and California) and Australia.

This study involves educators in schools that are designated “remote-rural” by the B.C. Ministry of Education. To be designated, each school must get approval by a government committee, based on an application form that includes a variety of factors of ruralness (British Columbia Public Schools Employers' Association, 2008). These factors include the driving distance from Calgary, Vancouver, Victoria, Edmonton and/or a B.C. community over 20,000. School communities that are only accessible by rail, ferry or air travel are considered by the committee to be more remote, as are communities that have a small population. The proximity to major medical centres is also considered in the committee’s deliberations. The result of this process is that only very remote communities receive the designation. Thus, by global standards, the communities in this study are at the more “rural” end of the rural-urban continuum.
Recruitment and Retention of Rural Teachers

One of the most prominent topics in the rural education literature pertains to the high teacher turnover of rural educators in the United States, Australia, and Canada (Sharplin, O’Neill, & Chapman, 2011). Many reports and articles describe how rural students’ achievement and morale suffer as a result (Brasche & Harrington 2012; de Feijter, 2015; Dykstra, 2014; White & Reid 2008; Yarrow et al., 1999). Several authors employ deficit models of rural education and suggest reasons for this high turnover, some of which could conceivably apply to British Columbian teachers.

Deficit models for high turnover. Some studies suggest that teacher turnover is made worse by districts and schools that recruit the wrong people for the job (Brasche and Harrington 2012; Yarrow et al., 1999). Campbell & Yates (2011), for example, point out that young “metrocentric” teachers often come to small rural communities to teach, but are fundamentally unsuited for the life and culture there. Cultural clashes between teachers and locals can lead to acrimonious relations within the community (Brasche and Harrington 2012). Several authors point to the difficulties involved with training more suitable pre-service teachers in a rural setting, when universities are almost always located in larger urban centres (Brasche and Harrington, 2012; White & Reid, 2008; Yarrow et al., 1999).

Other authors suggest that geographic and social isolation play a major part in the attrition or retention of rural teachers, regardless of their backgrounds or predilections for a rural lifestyle (de Feijter, 2015; McClure & Reeves, 2004; Storey, 1993). Still others point out that rural teaching situations often have more difficult working conditions, such as having to teach classes in multiple subject areas that are outside of one’s area of expertise (Kitcheham & Chasteauneuf, 2010; McClure & Reeves, 2004), or in teaching multiple ages in one class (Storey, 1993; Yarrow et al., 1999).

Factors that relate to increased teacher recruitment, retention, and effectiveness. There is a growing body of literature that is aimed at mitigating the causes of rural teacher turnover, or simply suggesting ways to improve rural education. Three Canadian studies (de Feijter, 2015; Kitchenham &
Chasteauneuf, 2010; Storey, 1993) examine the causes of teacher recruitment, retainment, and effectiveness, and serve as a guide for how to proceed with my research.

Vernon Storey’s (1993) study of rural B.C. teachers remains a landmark study in this province. His huge sample size of over 500 teachers enables him to present extensive information about teacher demographics as well as the detailed reasons why teachers enter, remain in, or leave their professions. He finds that the most important allure of rural teaching is the nature of the job itself; it was the top reason rural teachers accepted and remained in their jobs. Additionally, factors such as spousal jobs and social/recreational opportunities played a major role in rural teachers’ successful recruitment and retention. Most striking were the reasons why teachers left their rural jobs: departing had much more to do with social/recreational reasons or feeling like they had no friends or family in their rural communities. Furthermore, many of the other top seven reasons for accepting and remaining in the position seem to relate more to the community than to the school or workplace. Based on these findings, exploring community influence on teacher retention and effectiveness in B.C. seems to be a worthwhile avenue of study.

More recently, Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf (2010) studied recruitment and retention efforts in Northwestern Canada by surveying and interviewing educators. They found that school districts’ recruitment efforts could have focused on providing more monetary incentives such as moving allowances and that teachers in the North sought more professional development opportunities in the form of blended learning (partially online) programs. However, like Storey (1993), the authors’ key finding was that Northern teachers have strong community-based motives for staying in their jobs. 53% claimed directly that their “integrat[ion] into the community” (p. 884) is one of the reasons for remaining in their rural teaching position, while 66% of respondents claimed more generally “I love where I work” (p. 884). Clearly, community and school factors both play a role in teacher retention.

Chris de Feijter (2015), in his doctoral study on novice teacher retention in Northern Canada,
develops a conceptual model to explain how teachers choose to leave or remain in their positions. He begins by highlighting the positive effects that teacher retention has on student achievement and points to the link between teacher experience and teacher effectiveness. When it comes to retaining teachers in rural areas, personal and family factors play a big role, and are largely independent of everything else. The other three factors can be considered as spheres surrounding the teacher: classroom factors (the closest sphere) are affected by school factors, which are in turn affected by community factors (the outer sphere). Thus, positive interactions with students, positive school culture (including professional development opportunities) and supportive community factors can all help to keep teachers in their jobs. With specific regards to community factors, he echoes Storey (1993) by highlighting the importance of social and recreational activities (or the lack thereof) in causing teachers to stay in or leave their jobs.

The overarching conclusions that I can draw from these three Canadian studies is that there are multiple factors leading to rural teacher retention and teacher effectiveness. Some of these are concerned with the job itself, some have to do with the personal lives of rural teachers, and some pertain to the rural communities in which they live and work.

**Teacher Commitment**

Some scholars explore teacher commitment and its relationship with both teacher effectiveness and teacher retention. In particular, teacher retention and effectiveness have been viewed as by-products of different aspects of organizational commitment (Jo, 2014; Washburn, 2003). Studies of organizational commitment began in earnest in the early 1980’s, and by 1991 Meyer & Allen had proposed a three-component model of organizational commitment which separated its different psychological aspects. These three elements describe a member’s love of (affective reasons), need for (continuance reasons), and obligation to (normative reasons) remaining in an organization.

Affective commitment is usually seen as the most desirable way of committing. From the
standpoint of the organization, it usually leads to increased efficacy of members (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin & Jackson, 1989). From the standpoint of members, it leads to an improvement of work ethic through desire, and enables a positive feedback loop whereby commitment leads to positive work results, which in turn feed more commitment. With specific reference to teachers, affective commitment might include a teacher’s feelings of affection for his/her students, school, coworkers, administrators and/or community (Washburn, 2003).

Continuance is generally seen as a less desirable aspect of commitment. From the standpoint of the organization, positive work results do not necessarily motivate further commitment. From a member’s point of view, the need to stay in an organization may consist of several stress-inducing motivators. A teacher might exhibit strong continuance commitment if she/he had no other options but to work in a particular school or community, and the need to stay could lead to resentment (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1989). However, this resentment is not necessarily the only outcome. Continuance may also stem from a feeling of being in one’s “comfort zone”.

The third aspect, normative commitment, refers to a member’s sense of duty or obligation towards the organization. Normative commitment is based on moral decisions to remain with an organization and may be somewhat independent of practical reasoning (Meyer & Allen, 1991). A teacher may exhibit normative commitment in through a duty of care that he/she feels toward students or fellow community members. This aspect of organizational commitment can be seen as the most altruistic of the three.

Two notable studies have sought to measure teacher retention and efficacy by measuring teacher organizational commitment, and both have influenced the design of my study. Jo (2014) focuses his study on measuring teachers’ commitments to their school organizations. His instrument blends the three aspects of organizational commitment (affective, continuance and normative) into each question (Jo, 2014). Washburn (2003) performed a study of teachers’ community commitment in rural
Ohio. In this study, each of his questions focuses on a separate aspect (affective, continuance or normative) of organizational commitment (Washburn, 2003). Both studies use methods and survey questions that are transferable to this study of B.C. teachers.

**Place Based Pedagogy**

Currently, a major theme in the rural education literature is that of place-based mindset and place-based pedagogy (Azano & Stewart, 2015; White & Reid, 2008). A place-based mindset is one that encompasses the local geography, ecology, culture, economy, and history. Place-based pedagogies are the educational extensions of such a mindset. In 2016, in an effort to embrace B.C.’s diversity, the provincial Ministry of Education sanctioned and encouraged place-based learning through its new curriculum. Rural communities lend themselves to place-based mindsets by virtue of their geographic and cultural separation from other communities (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Washburn, 2003; White & Reid, 2008). Several authors have expressed a desire for more place based pedagogies to be included in rural teaching practice, due to the perceived positive effects on student engagement and teacher commitment (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Washburn, 2003; White & Reid, 2008).

Some scholars take a social justice stance on the issue of place-based education. They suggest that place-based learning is crucial in a time when rural areas are declining in both population and social infrastructure, with large fractions of youth choosing to leave to the city (Washburn 2003; White & Reid 2008). Place-based learning is proposed as one way of helping to save rural communities by providing youth with a consciousness and skill-set that enables them to succeed as adults in their local communities (Washburn 2003; White & Reid 2008).

So far however, place-based pedagogy has not taken hold as much as some researchers would have hoped (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Washburn, 2003; White & Reid, 2008) and results of various studies are mixed. Azano & Stewart (2015) found, for example, that despite learning about place-based pedagogies in pre-service training, novice teachers displayed little consciousness of it in practice.
Washburn’s (2003) study, on the other hand, did show a positive link between teachers’ commitment to place and their use of place-based pedagogies.

The literature on place-based education has implications for the design of this study. It is important to view not only how educators view the places they live, but also the effects of place on their teaching practices. It will be interesting to see if place-based pedagogies have become established yet among rural B.C. educators.
Chapter 3: Procedures and Methods

Research Design

The primary goal of this research was to investigate rural teachers’ commitments to their local communities and investigate whether and how this is linked to their commitment to their school organizations. A related secondary goal of this study was to gain a better understanding on what teachers believe community is all about and to identify how local communities can influence teachers’ jobs.

The present study used a mixed method online survey (Appendix A), administered through hostedincadadsurveys.ca, to assess teachers’ commitment to their communities and to their schools. The survey’s Likert scales provided quantitative data on teacher commitment while the open-ended questions provided qualitative data. This variety of questioning was performed in order to triangulate data and to provide deeper insights into how teachers’ jobs and their local communities were interrelated.

Description of the Sample

Since this study is about rural teachers, it was prudent to examine teachers from the more extreme end of the rural continuum: those teachers who live in the most remote B.C. communities. A convenient way to ascertain a school’s remoteness was to use the B.C. Ministry of Education’s criteria. Across B.C. certain teachers are eligible to receive a remote recruitment and retention allowance if they work in schools that are deemed to be in small remote communities. Educator participants for this study were recruited from a list of schools whose teachers receive this allowance (BC districts and schools which qualify for the Remote Recruitment and Retention Allowance, 2014). Once the target sample was recognized, every effort was maintained to increase the sample size for the survey by
contacting the relevant school districts. District superintendents were contacted via a collective invitation email, and then again two weeks later by follow-up personalized emails. Seven out of the 29 relevant school districts chose to participate in the study. In these districts, superintendents forwarded the invitation email (Appendix B) to the relevant staff via their email servers.

Out of the 766 educators who received survey invitations via email, 55 surveys were completed, a return rate of 7.2%. Participating districts represented areas from all over B.C., from northern regions, coastal regions and interior regions. Eight out of fourteen of B.C's biogeoclimatic zones were represented by the regions encompassed by participating school districts (Biogeoclimatic Zones of British Columbia, n.d.). The online survey was anonymous, and asked no school district information in order to protect privacy of individuals and school districts. It was impossible to tell which proportion of educators responded from each area.

Instrumentation

The study focused on teachers' commitment to place and on their organizational commitment to their schools. The instrument that I used to collect data was an online survey administered through hostedincanadasurveys.ca (Appendix A). This survey used a mixed method approach and included closed answer demographic questions, Likert-type questions to provide quantitative data on commitment, and open-ended questions to provide participants with a chance to discuss community-school links. The survey was designed using guidelines from Mills (2014) and Wolcott (1994) for creating surveys. The length of the questionnaire was considered in order to maximize participation in the study (keeping it short) while still eliciting detailed data.

The survey covered two main areas of commitment: firstly, educators’ organizational commitment was assessed using five Likert questions adapted from Jo (2014). Secondly, teachers' commitment to community/place was assessed using fifteen Likert scale questions adapted from Washburn (2003). When adapting these scales, the Likert questions from these two authors were put
on the same zero-to-five scale so that they could be compared more readily. Also, some of the questions were changed slightly so that the questions would be clearer for B.C. educators in 2017. In particular, several of the questions from Washburn (2003) were changed to be distinctly place-based (“community/place” or “local community”) rather than using the vaguer word “community”, which might be misconstrued to denote on-line communities.

The community scale from Washburn (2003) assessed the three aspects of organizational commitment – affective (love), continuance (need) and normative (duty) (Washburn, 2003). The Likert “Community Commitment” scale that I used in this study contained five questions for each of these types of commitment. Thus, there is a potential to see which types of social/psychological motivations are most at play in teachers’ Community Commitment.

The survey’s open-ended questions provided participants with an opportunity to express themselves in more detail by asking them to comment on how their school jobs and community lives were connected. The first question asked, “What are some ways in which living in this community affects your job as a teacher?” and the second asked, “What are some ways in which working as a teacher affects your life in the local community?” The questions were phrased this way to elicit responses that showed the direction of causation in community/job interactions. In addition to these long answer questions, each Likert-type statement had an associated “comments” section to encourage participants to clarify or add to each response.

**Procedures Followed**

After receiving approval from the VIU Research Ethic Board, relevant school districts were contacted in April of 2017. Thirty districts across the province were recognized as having remote rural schools, including District 69, which has one remote school where I taught concurrently and was the only administrator. My district was removed from the group of candidates for potential ethical reasons. For the remaining 29 districts, each superintendent was emailed to ask for permission to survey
educators in her/his district. If no response was received, personalized follow-up emails were sent two weeks later. Out of 29 districts, 7 agreed to provide participants for the study, including 6 district that were entirely rural-remote. As each superintendent agreed, he/she was asked to forward on a survey recruitment email (Appendix B) to the remote-rural educators in his/her district, and tell me the number of email addresses it had gone to, so that I could calculate my survey’s rate of return. The online survey (Appendix A) was then administered through hostedincanadasurveys.ca.

Validity

To decrease the risk of data collector bias, my own school district was eliminated from the study and data were collected entirely via an anonymous online survey. In order to test the validity of the survey's questions, and to ensure that the survey would provide reliable data, a trial survey was presented to two teachers in my own school district. These colleagues helped to provide feedback on the merits of each of the survey questions. This improved the overall validity of the instrument by ensuring that the questions were clear and that participants could interpret them consistently.

To improve the internal validity of the study, the survey included closed answer, multiple choice Likert-type questions and open-ended questions to triangulate the data. The survey was designed to provide both quantitative data via close-ended and Likert-type questions, and qualitative data via the open-ended long answer questions.

One major threat to the external validity of this study is the fact that participants may have been quite different from non-participants. It is entirely possible, for example, that the online survey attracted only teachers who were already committed to their rural postings. It is certainly conceivable that a teacher who volunteers for a study about place and community may already have a strong predilection for (or aversion to) his/her rural lifestyle. Thus, this study likely contains some degree of volunteer bias.

The results of this study are limited to the region in which the study was conducted and are not
generalizable to the global rural context. Not only does B.C. have a very low population density, particularly in northern regions, but its educators are paid more than in most other countries. Effectively, Canada has a different educational system than Australia or the United States. It is also important to note that even within British Columbia rural conditions vary vastly and the sample may not provide a uniform representation of this variation.

**Analysis Techniques**

The survey data (Appendix A) was downloaded from the hostedincanadasurveys.ca site as an Excel spreadsheet. Numerical analysis was done using Microsoft Excel and the add-on software XLSTAT to provide ease in performing non-parametric statistics. To determine the relationship between various demographic characteristics, commitment to place/community and commitment to school/organization. Four main questions were examined in the analysis:

1. **What is the personal commitment of British Columbian rural educators to their communities and to their schools?** To answer this question, I quantified the Likert-scale data, using positive values of 1 and 2 to denote “agree” and “strongly agree”, 0 to denote “neutral”, and -1 and -2 to denote disagree and strongly disagree (Table 4.1). Mean averages were calculated across the relevant questions to calculate each participant’s score in each commitment category (overall community commitment, affective community commitment, continuance community commitment, normative community commitment and school commitment). Means of categories were then calculated for the entire sample group to indicate overall agreement or disagreement with each category’s Likert statements. These overall means were then tabulated (Table 4.2) and discussed.

2. **Is there a correlation between educators' personal commitment to place and their commitment to their school organizations?** To answer this question, I performed a Spearman’s ranked-order correlation of respondents' Likert scores on the Community Commitment scales versus the School Commitment scale.
3. Do educator demographics play a role in predicting their commitment patterns? To answer this question, I split the sample group into two in a few ways: a) by the number of years they had lived in the community before teaching there, b) by whether or not they had a rural background, c) by their BCTF or administrator statuses, d) by whether or not they owned property in their community, e) by whether or not they were older than 55 years of age, and f) by their gender. For each of these splits I compared one set of participants with the other via ranked-order Mann-Whitney U-tests on their Likert-based scores.

4. How do participants’ experiences in their schools and communities relate to their commitment patterns? To answer this question, written comments from the Likert section were pooled with longer answers from the open-ended questions. These written responses were coded for recurring themes. Excel software was used to count the coded theme frequency. These numbers were tabulated for discussion (Table 4.11). Each response was then reread through the lens of the participant’s commitment patterns. Patterns in the written responses were discussed while referencing each participant’s numerical data.
Chapter 4 – Findings and Results

The purpose of this study was to examine rural BC educators’ levels of commitment to their jobs at school and to their rural communities, and to examine whether and to what extent these commitments are linked. Secondly, the study aimed to gather rural educators’ perspectives regarding working in rural communities and discover how these views are related to different types of commitment. The research took place between April and June 2017. The survey (Appendix A) was sent out to 766 participants working in seven school districts across the province (six of these were designated entirely “rural-remote”). These districts represented a variety of regions ranging from coastal islands, mountainous dry interior regions, northern forests, and eastern foothills. Fifty-five surveys were completed, representing a return rate of 7.2%.

Demographic Data

In July of 2017, I collated the data submitted by the participants. The genders of this study’s participants were 60% female (n=33), 38% male (n=21) and 2% unspecified (n=1). When compared to BC Ministry of Education data, this study’s participant sample shows a slightly higher percentage of males than exist in the 2016-2017 educator population of BC in general, and in its remote rural districts (Government of British Columbia, 2017) (Figure 4.1).

When answering the questions on ethnicity and ethnic communities, 91% of respondents indicated a Caucasian or European background (n=31, N=34). Of these, one respondent indicated that they were Mennonite. 6% of respondents (n=2, N=34) indicated an Indigenous heritage while one person indicated South Asian heritage. All but one of the respondents (97%) indicated that there was a local community who shared their ethnicity. It would appear from these results that ethnic isolation of educators is not a common situation in rural B.C. However, the proportion of Indigenous educators clearly does not yet reflect the proportion of Indigenous people.
Participants’ ages were assessed by asking which age category each participant was in. Ages varied widely across age categories (Figure 4.2). Only one participant was less than twenty-six years old. A slight “tailing off” of the number of participants who were older than fifty-five probably reflects a reduction due to early retirement. Overall, the ages of participants were in keeping with B.C. provincial statistics (Government of B.C., 2017).
84% (n=46, N=55) of participants were BCTF members and 16% (n=9, N=55) were administrators. Participants’ levels of experience ranged from a few months to over forty-five years in their profession (Figure 4.3).

While it is impossible to calculate job attrition rates directly, one can estimate by examining the categories of experience in both schools and school districts. (Figures 4.4 and 4.5) In each case, there is a noticeable drop in the number of participants with 0-2 years of experience and those with 2-4 years. If this is taken to represent the attrition rate of new teachers, it may be estimated that 10 (n) out 55 (N), or 18% of new rural educators leave their school district jobs before their third year of teaching. Similarly, roughly 15 (n) out of 55 (N), or 27% of new educators leave their schools before their third year. At the other end of the experience spectrum, it is noteworthy that a large percentage of participants had a total experience exceeding ten years in both their districts (47%, n=26, N=55) and in their schools (18%, n=10, N=55). Clearly, a large fraction of participants chose to stay in their jobs.
Figure 4.4

How long have you taught in your current school district?

Number of Participants

Experience

0 – 2 years  2 - 4 years  4 – 6 years  6 – 8 years  8 – 10 years  more than 10 years

0  5  10  15  20  25  30

Figure 4.5

How long have you taught at your current school?

Number of Participants

Experience

0 – 2 years  2 - 4 years  4 – 6 years  6 – 8 years  8 – 10 years  more than 10 years

0  5  10  15  20  25
The clear majority (91%, n=48, N=53) of research participants who taught students (full-time administrators were not included in this calculation), worked with students from multiple grades. Some educators indicated that they taught adults as well - these were assigned a “Grade 13” to their maximum grade taught. Figure 4.6 shows the span of each participant’s student grade level, and paints a picture of rural educators as multi-aged specialists.

Figure 4.6

*Participants teaching Adult Education are shown to teach Grade “13”

**Community demographics.** This study’s community demographics revealed that 56% (n=31, N=55) of participants identified themselves as having a rural background. When each participant was then asked to describe this rural background, their descriptions included rough geographic locations (“I grew up in Northern British Columbia…”), or more specific ones “I grew up 10 minutes outside of [Town X].”). Towns’ populations were often cited (“…population of just over 2000.”, “Our town has under 400 people.”). Several descriptions included rural archetypes such as gravel roads, long rides on
the school bus, farming, ranching or “First Nations fly-in community…” to indicate ruralness. While the definition of “rural” is difficult to pin down, all the descriptions of rural backgrounds presented reasonable evidence of participants’ rural backgrounds in a Canadian context. Several participants indicated that they had rural backgrounds from other provinces. A few others indicated that their rural background had started in adulthood.

To gather some numerical data on community background, the survey asked each participant to indicate how long they had lived in the community before teaching there. A noticeable split existed in the participants between “locals” and “newcomers” (Figure 4.7). A large fraction (29%, n=16, N=55) indicated that they had lived in their communities for over ten years, and were essentially lifelong “locals”. 69% (n=38, N=55) indicated that they had lived in the community for less than a year before teaching there and were essentially “newcomers”. Only one participant fell between these two categories.

Figure 4.7
Closed answer questions aimed at examining educator commitment. Two questions were posed to gain a general understanding of participants’ commitment to their communities and their schools. Firstly, property ownership was used as a crude proxy of community commitment. 58% (n=32, N=55) of participants indicated that they owned property in the community in which they worked. Secondly, participants were asked how many years they saw themselves remaining in their current schools. Figure 4.8 shows that the largest fraction of participants predicted they would work for their school for more than five years. Numbers 1 (for “I plan to leave soon”) through 5 (for “5+ years”) were assigned to these ordinal data to provide a way to generate a numeric “Future Years Staying” variable that could be compared statistically with other variables.

Figure 4.8

Measuring Commitment via Likert Type Statements

Twenty Likert type questions were designed to measure each participant’s organizational commitment to school (questions 1 through 5) and to the community (questions 6 through 20).
Specifically, questions 6 through 10 measured affective commitment, questions 11 through 15 measured continuance commitment and questions 16 through 20 measured normative commitment. Each Likert scale answer was given a numerical value so that averages and correlations could be calculated (Table 4.1). Positive values show agreement with the statement and negative values show disagreement.

Table 4.1
Assigned Likert Scale Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert Scale</th>
<th>Number Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Averages, minimums, and maximums of these commitment types, representing the entire participant sample, are shown in Table 4.2. Three participants left one of their Likert questions blank, so the related category of commitment was not assessed for each of these individuals. The sample size numbers (n) reflect these omissions.

Table 4.2
Average Likert Scale Values for Different Commitment Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment Type</th>
<th>Likert Question Numbers</th>
<th>Overall Sample Mean Average</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td><strong>0.79</strong></td>
<td>-1.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Community</td>
<td>6 – 20</td>
<td><strong>0.31</strong></td>
<td>-1.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Community</td>
<td>6 – 10</td>
<td><strong>0.64</strong></td>
<td>-1.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance Community</td>
<td>11 – 15</td>
<td><strong>0.33</strong></td>
<td>-2.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Community</td>
<td>16 – 20</td>
<td><strong>-0.02</strong></td>
<td>-2.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A note on statistical analyses of Likert data and participants’ feelings. It is important to note that there is some controversy pertaining to assigning number values and averages to Likert data.
(Norman, 2010). Strictly speaking, Likert data are ordinal, rather than interval. That is, it is impossible to say with certainty, for example, that the distance between “strongly agree” and “agree” is the same as that between “agree” and “neutral”. A few researchers consider mean averages of Likert data to be useless (Carifio & Perla, 2008). However, Norman (2010) explains that it is common practice to take averages with Likert data in the health sciences and humanities.

Another potential statistical pitfall arises when grouping questions about feelings into categories via averages. In this study, for example, the first five Likert questions are averaged to obtain a school organizational commitment value for each participant. How can I ensure that the first question is just as valuable at assessing school commitment as the third question? Can I weight these questions evenly when I calculate means? Again, it difficult to say with certainty, but both Jo (2014) and Washburn (2003), whose instruments my questions are based closely from, go to great lengths to establish the validity of each of their questions. Each question they pose is strongly correlated with the type of commitment it is designed to measure. Uncorrelated or weakly correlated questions are rejected from their instruments (Jo, 2014; Washburn, 2003). It is reasonable therefore to assume that each of my questions is evenly weighted.

In recognition of the statistical imprecision of averaging feelings and averaging Likert type data, some authors recommend performing non-parametric statistics when comparing means and when correlating variables (Carifio & Perla, 2008). For this reason, I performed Mann-Whitney U-Tests, instead of T-tests, whenever I compared the means of two samples in this study. Similarly, I used Spearman’s rho ($r_s$) rather than Pearson’s $r$ values when measuring correlations. Both Spearman’s tests and Mann-Whitney tests are calculated by comparing ranked values rather than absolute values. These non-parametric statistics are weaker at detecting minor differences or weaker correlations than their corresponding parametric statistics, but they are robust ways to detect basic patterns in this study’s datasets.
**Correlations of Commitment Categories**

School Commitment scores were tested for correlation with other commitment types, and the “Future Years Staying” variable (Table 4.3). No significant correlation was found between School Commitment and Overall Community Commitment, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis for one of this study’s main questions. However, when Community Commitment was broken down into its constituent parts, School Commitment was positively correlated with Normative Community Commitment ($r_s=0.377$, $p=0.005$, $n=53$).

Table 4.3

**School Commitment - Correlated to Other Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Commitment vs</th>
<th>Spearman’s Rho ($r_s$)</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Significant at $p&lt;0.05$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Community Commitment</td>
<td>0.272</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Community Commitment only</td>
<td>0.198</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0.156</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance Community Commitment only</td>
<td>0.166</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0.230</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Community Commitment only</td>
<td><strong>0.377</strong></td>
<td><strong>53</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.005</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Years Staying</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0.886</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “Future Years Staying” variable was tested for correlation with all the types of community commitment (Table 4.4). There were strong correlations of this variable with Affective Community Commitment ($r_s=0.561$, $p<0.001$, $n=54$), Continuance Community Commitment ($r_s=0.407$, $p=0.002$, $n=55$) and Overall Community Commitment ($r_s=0.395$, $p=0.003$). Normative Community Commitment was not significantly correlated to Future Years Staying ($\alpha=0.05$).

Table 4.4

**Future Years Staying - Correlated to Other Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future Years Staying vs</th>
<th>Spearman’s Rho ($r_s$)</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Significant at $p&lt;0.05$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Community Commitment</td>
<td><strong>0.395</strong></td>
<td><strong>53</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.003</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Community Commitment only</td>
<td><strong>0.561</strong></td>
<td><strong>54</strong></td>
<td>&lt;<strong>0.001</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance Community Commitment only</td>
<td><strong>0.407</strong></td>
<td><strong>55</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.002</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Community Commitment only</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0.351</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison of Means of Commitment Variables for Sorted Demographic Data

**Community background.** Participants were divided into two groups based on their answer to a question about community background (How many years did you live in your community before you became a teacher there?). Those who had lived in their communities for more than 10 years were defined as “locals”, while “newcomers” were defined as those who had lived in theirs for less than a year before teaching. When these two groups were compared (Table 4.5), it was found that locals had significantly higher levels of Affective Community Commitment ($\mu=1.00$, $n=15$) than newcomers ($\mu=0.47$, $n=37$) ($U=177.5$, $p=0.044$). Locals also had significantly higher levels of Continuance Community Commitment ($\mu=0.63$, $n=15$) than newcomers ($\mu=0.16$, $n=37$) ($U=181.5$, $p=0.040$), and this contributed to locals having a significantly higher level of Overall Community Commitment ($\mu=0.65$, $n=15$) than newcomers ($\mu=0.18$, $n=37$) ($U=162.5$, $p=0.043$). The two groups did not, however, have a significantly different level of Normative Community Commitment. When the Future Years Staying variable was compared between the two groups, locals had a significantly higher value ($\mu=4.3$, $n=15$) than newcomers ($\mu=3.7$, $n=37$) ($U=180$, $p=0.036$).

Table 4.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Locals’ $\mu$</th>
<th>Newcomers’ $\mu$</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>$p$ (two tailed)</th>
<th>Means Significantly Different $p&lt;0.05$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Commitment</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>329.5</td>
<td>0.316</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Comm. Commitment</td>
<td><strong>0.65</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.18</strong></td>
<td><strong>162.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.043</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Community Comm. Only</td>
<td><strong>1.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.47</strong></td>
<td><strong>177.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.044</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance Community Comm. Only</td>
<td><strong>0.63</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.16</strong></td>
<td><strong>181.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.040</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Community Comm. Only</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>252.5</td>
<td>0.813</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Years Staying</td>
<td><strong>4.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>180</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.036</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rural background.** Another of the survey’s questions asked participants if they felt that they had a rural background. When those answering “yes” were compared to those answering “no” (Table
the two groups displayed a significant difference in School Commitment. Those with no rural background showed a significantly higher mean (μ=1.00, n=23) than those with a rural background (μ=0.65, n=29) (U=202.5, p=0.014).

Table 4.6
Comparisons of Means for Participants With and Without a Pre-Professional Rural Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rural Background μ</th>
<th>No Rural Background μ</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>p (two-tailed)</th>
<th>Means Signif. Diff. p&lt;0.05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Commitment</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>202.5</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Comm. Commitment</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>0.932</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Community Comm. Only</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>393.5</td>
<td>0.271</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance Community Comm. Only</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>339.5</td>
<td>0.886</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Community Comm. Only</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Years Staying</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>406.5</td>
<td>0.159</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Administrators versus BCTF members. When administrators were compared to members of the BCTF teaching union (Table 4.7), the administrators showed a higher level of school commitment (μ=1.14, n=8) than BCTF teachers (μ=0.74, n=45) (U=83, p=0.049), but they had a significantly lower average predicted Future Years Staying value (μ=2.9, n=8) than their BCTF counterparts (μ=4.1, n=45) (U=292, p=0.003).

Table 4.7
Comparisons of Means for BCTF members and Administrators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BCTF μ</th>
<th>Admin μ</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>p (two-tailed)</th>
<th>Means Signif. Diff. p&lt;0.05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Commitment</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Comm. Commitment</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>184.5</td>
<td>0.477</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Community Comm. Only</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>178.5</td>
<td>0.700</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance Community Comm. Only</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>245.5</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Community Comm. Only</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>166.5</td>
<td>0.777</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Years Staying</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Property owners versus non-property owners. Participants were also sorted between those who owned property in their communities and those who did not (“yes” or “no” in a demographic question). When property owners were compared to non-property owners (Table 4.8), the property owners showed a higher Overall Community Commitment ($\mu=0.50$, $n=30$) than non-owners ($\mu=0.05$, $n=23$) ($U=245.5$, $p=0.037$). This had to do with their significantly higher levels of Affective Community Commitment ($\mu=0.92$, $n=30$ versus $\mu=0.28$, $n=23$, $U=204.5$, $p=0.005$) and Continuance Community Commitment ($\mu=0.58$, $n=30$ versus $\mu=-0.01$, $n=23$, $U=244$, $p=0.033$), but less to do with their Normative Commitment. Property owners also showed a longer predicted Future Years Staying mean value ($\mu=4.0$, $n=30$) than non-property owners ($\mu=3.6$, $n=23$) ($U=268.5$, $p=0.005$).

Table 4.8
Comparisons of Means for Property Owners and Non-Owners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Property Owners</th>
<th>Non-Owners</th>
<th>$U$</th>
<th>$p$ (two-tailed)</th>
<th>Means Signif. Diff. $p&lt;0.05$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Commitment</td>
<td>0.75 ($n=30$)</td>
<td>0.87 ($n=23$)</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>0.395</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Comm. Commitment</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.05 ($n=23$)</td>
<td><strong>245.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.037</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Community Comm. Only</td>
<td>0.92 ($n=30$)</td>
<td>0.28 ($n=23$)</td>
<td><strong>204.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.005</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance Community Comm. Only</td>
<td>0.58 ($n=30$)</td>
<td>-0.01 ($n=23$)</td>
<td><strong>244</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.033</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Community Comm. Only</td>
<td>-0.02 ($n=30$)</td>
<td>-0.11 ($n=23$)</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>0.817</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Years Staying</td>
<td><strong>4.0 ($n=30$)</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.6 ($n=23$)</strong></td>
<td><strong>268.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.005</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Older participants versus younger participants. When age data were used to sort participants, no significant correlations or means differences of commitment existed between age categories except one: The Future Years Staying variable was lower among participants 56 years of age or older ($\mu=2.9$, $n=8$) than for younger participants ($\mu=4.1$, $n=23$) ($U=73.5$, $p=0.006$) (Table 4.9).
Table 4.9
Comparisons of Means for Participants Aged 56+ vs Younger Age Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>56+ Years of Age</th>
<th>Younger Educators</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>p (two-tailed)</th>
<th>Means Signif. Diff.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Future Years Staying</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender differences. Finally, participants were sorted by gender. Female participants showed a significantly higher Overall Community Commitment value (μ=0.48, n=32) than male participants (μ=0.07, n=19) (U=491.5, p=0.028) (Table 4.10).

Table 4.10
Comparisons of Means for Male and Female Educators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Females’</th>
<th>Males’</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>p (two-tailed)</th>
<th>Means Signif. Diff.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Commitment</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>385.5</td>
<td>0.491</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Comm. Commitment</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>491.5</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Community Comm. Only</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>0.455</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance Community Comm. Only</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Community Comm. Only</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Years Staying</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summarizing Emergent Themes from Participants’ Comments and Answers

The last section of the survey asked participants to answer two open-ended questions based on two directions of cause and effect. The first question asked how the community affects the job, and the second question asked how working as a teacher affects the educator’s community life. When responses to these questions were pooled with the optional comments from all the Likert and questions, several themes emerged and are summarized in Table 4.11, 4.12 and 4.13. 16% (n=9, N=55) of participants did not respond to the long answer questions, or leave any comments for the Likert questions.
Table 4.11  
*Positive themes emerging from long answer questions and comments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Participants Commenting on Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intimate rural community leads to deep relationships with students and/or community members. Blurring of professional/private life can help relationships (<em>Only mentioned positive aspects of professional/personal life blending</em>)</td>
<td>26 (13*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and/or parents are welcoming and make one feel &quot;at home&quot;.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family life and/or spousal relationship increases connection to community.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive interactions with coworkers. Good professional development opportunities exist</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to practice favourite teaching style. Professional autonomy is good.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of duty to students increases connection to community</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel respected. Educator social status is high in rural communities relative to larger centres.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good opportunities to practice place-based pedagogy</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural surroundings increase connection to community</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.12  
**Negative themes emerging from long answer questions and comments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of privacy and/or lack of down-time is a problem. (<strong>Only mentioned negative aspects of professional/personal life blending)</strong></td>
<td>22 (9**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low opinions of adult community members - reduces connection to community</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social isolation. Problems integrating fully into the community. Feeling like an outsider.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of professional options may necessitate move.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low opinions of coworkers and/or reduced opportunity for professional development in rural school.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of school resources is a problem</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long commutes are a problem</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment, retention, and turnover are a problem in school.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions with students are negative</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local culture is at odds with desired teaching practice or pedagogy.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor pre-professional training leaves rural educators unprepared.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.13  
**Neutral themes emerging from long answer questions and comments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The blending of personal relationships and private life with professional/work life has both positive and negative aspects</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural educators have a wide variety of duties both in school and out of school. Must &quot;wear many hats&quot;.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion, and Conclusions

Research Summary

This study investigated school commitment and various types of community commitment among rural educators in B.C. Specifically, it focused on whether and how school commitment was related to community commitment and how these relations affected educators’ statements about their schools and communities. The study was motivated by the lack of up-to-date research on the perennial problem of high teacher turnover in rural schools in B.C. It was also motivated (and biased) by my personal experience with teaching in a remote school on Lasqueti Island, living in a remote community and experiencing a deep, linked commitment to both. One of the main goals of this study was to gain a broad perspective of commitment experiences from across the geographic spectrum of rural B.C.

To gather data, an online survey (Appendix A) with a mixed methods design was issued through hostedincanadasurveys.ca. The survey’s Likert type questions measured participants’ commitments, while the comments and long answer sections served to elicit their reasoned opinions concerning these commitments. The sample of 55 educators from seven rural school districts (including six districts designated “rural-remote”) mirrored the Ministry demographics of their districts and of the province generally, with the exception that there was a slightly higher fraction of males in this study than exists in the educator population (roughly ½ instead of ⅓).

Results indicated that School Commitment was related to Normative Community Commitment (one’s sense of duty towards community), but not other types of community commitment. Affective Commitment (love of community) and Continuance Commitment (avoiding costs of leaving community) were more closely related to the years an educator was planning to remain in her/his job. As themes emerged from participants written responses, they could be sorted and examined in respect to how each participant was committed.
Discussion of Results

The demographic results of this study imply that there are many aspects of teaching in rural B.C. that haven’t changed substantially since the early 1990’s, when educators were surveyed by Vernon Storey (1993). The current study showed, for example, that rural educators teach a wide variety of grades (Fig 4.7), much as they have for over a century in rural B.C. (Fleming, 2011, p.25). Some authors have presented a view of high rural teacher turnover driven by predominantly young inexperienced teachers quitting early (Banasik, 2002; Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010). In this study, examining the ratios of participants’ years experience in schools enables one to roughly calculate attrition rates. A high attrition rate still appears to exist amongst new rural educators, with approximately 27% of participants leaving their schools, including 18% leaving the district altogether before their third year of working there (Figures 4.5 and 4.6).

Another way in which rural teacher demographics remain virtually unchanged since the 1990’s is in the proportion of teachers claiming a rural background. 56% (n=31, N=55) of this study’s participants identified themselves as having a rural background compared to 51.2% in Storey’s (1993) study of a similar set of B.C. educators. My study extended this statistic by asking participants how many years they had spent in their schools’ communities before teaching there. A noticeable split was evident between “locals” and “newcomers”. Only one participant had lived between one year and ten years in the community before teaching there. Everyone else had either moved there within a year of their first teaching job in the community (69%, n=38, N=55) or had lived in their communities for over a decade before teaching there (29%, n=16, N=55).

One notable demographic difference between this study and earlier ones is that over the last two and half decades, the average age of B.C. educators has increased. Storey (1993) noted that most of the teachers in his study were young and in the first third of their careers, with only about 10% of his sample being older than 50. The current study’s sample had 16% of its participants over the age of 55,
indicating a major increase in 50-plus educators. The age profile of the current study’s participants mirrors that of the rural B.C. educator population (Government of British Columbia, 2017). Across the province, the average age of educators has risen from 42.1 years in 1993 to 44.5 years in 2017 (Government of British Columbia, 2017). This aging of rural educators has likely influenced their levels of job commitment and/or community commitment.

**Levels of commitment in different categories.** A preliminary scan of the data reveals that participants’ levels of school commitment are quite high (μ=0.79, min=-1.0, max=1.8, n=54). That is, they appear to mostly agree with Likert statements pertaining to extra work at school or the prioritizing of professional goals. Average community commitment levels vary, depending on what type of commitment was measured: Broadly, participants seem to be committed to their communities – their overall average was a positive value (μ=0.31, min=-1.6, max=1.5, n=52) showing general agreement with Likert statements about community commitment. However, looking slightly deeper, one notices striking differences between the types of community commitment. Participants appeared to feel, on average, strong love and affection for their communities – their average Affective Community Commitment was 0.64 (min=-1.6, max=2.0, n=54). They had slightly lower feelings of “needing to stay” in their community, but still generally agreed that the costs of leaving contributed to their staying in their communities – their average Continuance Community Commitment was 0.33 (min=-2.0, max=1.6, n=55). Lastly, the participant group, when viewed as a whole, seemed to neither agree nor disagree that they felt a sense of duty towards their community – their average Normative Community Commitment was only -0.02 (min=-2.0, max=1.6, n=54).

**Assessing the links between commitment types – establishing two independent continua.** It is well established in the literature that an increase in school commitment by educators leads to improved student learning and school culture (Jo, 2014; Washburn, 2003), so it would be most interesting to
show which factors affect this type of commitment. One of the main purposes of this study, therefore, was to establish whether and how rural educators’ Community Commitment and School Commitment are linked. This study showed no significant correlation between these two variables when they were compared at face value ($r_s=0.272$, $n=52$, $p=0.051$) (Table 4.3). This would lead one to accept the null hypothesis regarding the broad correlation between School Commitment and Community Commitment. However, when Normative Community Commitment (the sense of duty) towards community is considered alone, then it is significantly correlated with School Commitment ($r_s=0.377$, $n=55$, $p=0.005$) (Table 4.3).

Why the difference between correlations? It is important at this point to consider what the different types of commitment represent morally or behaviourally. Professionalism and duty are closely linked moral ideals. Professionalism at work could be seen to be an artifact of an individual’s more general sense of duty. It seems reasonable therefore that educators’ senses of professional commitment and community duty would be linked. It might follow that these two types of commitment are generally “turned up” or “turned down” together, and apply broadly across many aspects of an educator’s life - whether an educator is considering his/her school or community.

Furthermore, when considering the contrasts between affective, continuance and normative commitment, a person’s sense of professionalism and duty can be thought about separately from her/his loves, affections, or personal cost considerations. That is, normative commitment (duty) stands out on its own as altruistic, whereas affective and continuance commitment could be said to be less altruistic. In this study, quite a few individuals commented about a separation of their professional lives at school and their personal lives in the community, and how they strive to keep these realms separate (often in vain). It follows then that some participants’ duty-driven commitments to work would not be related to their affections for, and continuance commitments towards their communities.

Even though Affective Community Commitment and Continuance Community Commitment are
not directly correlated to School Commitment in this study, they may nevertheless play a role in affecting educators’ jobs and ultimately their students’ lives. These two community commitment types, along with overall community commitment, were strongly correlated with the “Future Years Staying” variable in this study (Table 4.4). These correlations therefore imply that participants tend to want to remain in communities that they love or that they feel a high personal cost of leaving. This educator retention has important effects on school organizations and students (Brasche & Harrington 2012; de Feijter, 2015; White & Reid 2008; Yarrow et al., 1999).

Broadly speaking then, this study showed that there was one set of variables that was more closely related to School Commitment (professionalism) and another set of variables that related more to the “Future Years Staying” variable (retention).

**Other factors that relate to School Commitment variable.** This study revealed two other factors that serve as good predictors of an educator’s School Commitment. Firstly, participants with a lack of rural background showed significantly higher School Commitment (Table 4.6). While it is difficult to draw broad cultural conclusions about this one result, it remains a possibility that educators from urban backgrounds develop a stronger sense of duty or professionalism than their rural counterparts.

Secondly, administrators showed a higher level of School Commitment than their BCTF counterparts (Table 4.7). This is likely due to the job description of administrators. It seems reasonable that a higher level of responsibility at the school level would entail a higher level of commitment to the school organization.

**Other factors that relate to Future Years Staying variable.** Four other factors were noticeable in this study as predictors of the Future Years Staying variable. Firstly, being a local mattered – participants who had lived for over ten years in their communities before teaching there reported noticeably higher averages when predicting years they saw themselves staying on in their schools (Table 4.5). Secondly, BCTF members had a higher average Future Years Staying value than
administrators (Table 4.7). This may be a result of school district practices that purposely rotate administrators from school to school to give them district-wide experience and perspective. Thirdly, property owners showed a higher Future Years Staying value (Table 4.8). This result validates the use of property ownership as a proxy for community commitment and future retention. Fourthly, educators older than 55 had a lower number of predicted years that they were staying (Table 4.9). This last fact is unsurprising since older teachers are more likely to retire soon.

**Considering “Overall Community Commitment” in isolation.** As previously mentioned, examining Overall Community Commitment reveals little in this study. One noticeable difference in this statistic was that female educators have a statistically higher average community commitment than male educators (Table 4.10). However, women do not show differences from men with regards to School Commitment or Future Years Staying – the two main variables that likely matter the most to schools and students. It is difficult to draw any educationally relevant conclusions about this gender difference.

**Positing a model of four types of rural educator based on retention and professionalism continua.** Based on the variables correlated in this study, it can be said that there exists a continuum that pertains to educator retention in rural communities. We could refer to this as the “Retention-Oriented” continuum, that is associated with the Future Years Staying variable and those correlated with it. Educators who possess a high degree of this would tend to be committed to their communities for reasons of affection, love, and feeling a need to stay. They would end up working at their schools for a long time, but not necessarily out of a particular passion for their school organization or a strong sense of duty.

The statistics of this study also point to the existence of a second linkage - a “Duty-Oriented” continuum that encompasses both community duty and the professional aspects of working as an educator. This continuum would be associated with the School Commitment and Normative
Community Commitment variables. Educators who exhibit a high degree of this might tend towards professional ambition and professional self-improvement. Their professional passion could help to improve the goals of the school and its learners in the short term, but would not necessarily lead these educators to commit to the school in the longer term.

Considering these two continua, one could place educators on either end of both, and create a model of four types of rural educator, outline in Table 5.1

Table 5.1  
**Model of Four Types of Rural Educator based on Years Staying and Sense of Duty Continua**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duty Orientation</th>
<th>Retainment Orientation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Duty-Oriented</td>
<td>Low Retainment-Oriented</td>
<td>Type III. Professionally committed individuals who are driven school servants, but who leave their schools. Schools and students may benefit from their dynamism, but suffer from a lack of staff continuity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Duty-Oriented</td>
<td>High Retainment-Oriented</td>
<td>Type I. Committed and enduring professionals. Help improve student learning and improve school culture over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Duty-Oriented</td>
<td>Low Retainment-Oriented</td>
<td>Type IV. Educators who are less committed professionally, and who are likely to leave soon. Problem may stem from person or from school/community dysfunction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Duty-Oriented</td>
<td>High Retainment-Oriented</td>
<td>Type II. Educators who are less driven to commit to their professions, but who commit to their communities and provide continuity for their schools and students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Viewing participants’ comments through the lens of the model.** When participants’ optional comments from each Likert type question were pooled with their answers from the long answer section, several themes emerged. When one examines these data through the lens of the model, we can see that these comments often reflect the respondents’ Duty and Retainment orientations.

If one uses the Future Years Staying and School Commitment variable to sort respondents into the four types, an interesting picture develops from these comments. Educators who were planning to
stay more than two years at their schools (Future Years Staying values of 4 or 5), are placed “high” on the Retainment-Oriented continuum, while the rest are placed as “low”. Those with a School Commitment of 0.6 or higher are defined as “high” on the Duty-Oriented continuum, and the rest are “low”.

**Type I high Retainment and high Duty orientations.** These three sample respondents are high on both continua and their comments are typical of this group. They each reflect on both the dutiful and emotive aspects of blending private/community life with school life, and articulate the positive aspects of this.

- “I am able to connect students with community member and take part in community projects easily. We are also spending time outside as nature is around the corner. I love living here and am working towards utilizing as many opportunities as I can with my students.”
- “I love my community and the people in it. Because it is such a small community, no matter where I am or what I am doing I am always aware of my role as a teacher. My job doesn’t end when I leave the school at the end of the day or on the weekend. My students are the children/siblings/cousins of my close friends and they consider me to be part of their families and community.”
- “This community makes our school its center of activities and unity. To be a part of the school, that the community rallies around, makes it much more of a place of friendship rather than a place of work. Being a teacher provides a certain amount of presence in small communities. Our position is much more respected than in larger centers.”

**Type II high Retainment and low Duty orientations.** The following two sample respondents’ comments are typical of those in this group, including several references to affection for community and the people in it. The comments do not stress the professional aspects of a rural educator’s life.
• “I am now teaching some of the children of students I taught at the high school. This community comes together to help each other. Although we all know more about each other than we probably should, it’s good to know that such a large group cares for you and is there in time of need.”

• “Overall, I value connection over impersonal relationships, so I feel that even the negative interactions may have an overall positive result for community bonding.”

**Type III low Retainment and high Duty orientations.** The following respondent’s views are typical of this group, reflecting a focus on professional concerns without mentioning community connections.

• “ Teachers are scarce so I feel very valuable here. It is difficult to take time off because most of the substitutes are non-certified. There isn’t much to do aside from work, especially in the winter because it’s soo [sic] cold, so it can negatively affect mood.”

**Type IV low Retainment and low Duty orientations.** The following respondents’ comments are typical of several of the survey participants who feel disconnected and/or disenfranchised by both their schools and their communities. Many of them are ready to leave their positions soon.

• “...[T]he community of professionals that you work with can be unusual and at times trying. In addition to personnel, the usual processes and rules that are taken for granted in more populated districts are sometimes ignored. Sometimes this happens because of a lack of continuity in personnel, but it also happens through a lack of training, knowledge, supervision, and professionalism.”

• “...[A] focus on local culture leads to a strong sense of collectivism within the community which you, an outsider, will never be a part of. Racism, both amongst students, and between adults, is often rampant.”
Emergent themes in participant comments. The most frequently mentioned theme regarded the merging of private and professional realms - out of the 45 participants who left written comments, 35 commented on the blending of professional life and personal life in small rural communities. Thirteen of these respondents dwelled exclusively on the positive aspects of this blending, while nine cited it only as a problem. The remaining 13 mentioned both positive and negative aspects of the blurring of professional/private lines.

A second important theme was that of family and spousal relationships and how they increased participants’ community connections. Nineteen participants wrote about their families.

It is important to note that while 13 participants mentioned that they enjoyed the professional autonomy of working in rural schools, only five discussed what might be described as place-based pedagogies - the use of local people, local culture or local geography to enhance their practice. No participants mentioned “place-based” practice by name. While this topic seems to be at the forefront of the literature on rural education, and has helped to shape the new B.C. K-9 curriculum, place-based pedagogy is not yet a conscious priority of many rural B.C. educators.

Limitations

Location. One of the main difficulties with this study stems from not knowing more precisely where the participants were from. The survey sampled participants from only seven out of 29 rural school districts that contain remote rural schools. In order to respect school districts’ anonymity, the survey did not ask respondents to identify their district. It is difficult to know therefore whether the survey is skewed towards more remote districts, or ones with more amenities. This matters greatly in B.C., since some designated “remote” schools are actually more remote than others. Three quarters of the province’s population is clustered around the South Coast region. Not knowing where the respondents are from, limits the precision of this study’s conclusions.

Knowing the locations of the respondents would have also helped to provide a more place-
based approach when analyzing results. Are educators from one particular region, for example the Gulf Islands, the North, or the Interior, committed differently than teachers from other regions? Answering these and other place-based or regional questions would have provided some interesting nuance to the study and spoken to the current place-based oriented body of research on rural education.

It also bears pointing out that B.C. is a unique jurisdiction and that one should be careful when applying its results to other parts of the world. Canada has the lowest population density of any country on Earth, and northern B.C. is very remote, even by Canadian standards. When this remoteness is considered alongside the high provincial standards of education in B.C., and the high remuneration that Canadian educators receive on a global scale, it is clear that the context of this study matters greatly.

**Instrument.** Another limitation of this study was its heavy reliance on Likert-based questions to measure participants motivations and feelings. While these types of questions are helpful when sampling a large number of people, putting one’s feelings down as a number is never precise, nor is it always valid to compare these numbers with someone else’s. All but the most powerful correlations and means differences should be taken with a pinch of salt.

Better triangulation of data would have been ideal too. The comments and open-ended long answers provided clues to the Likert-based patterns in rural teacher motivation, but did not ensure precise conclusions. These written questions asked only about community-school effects rather than educator motivations.

**Representative sample?** Finally, a potential limitation of this study is implied by its low rate of return of 7.2%. It is entirely possible that this small proportion of people represents only those with very strong opinions and that the results of this study are exaggerated.

**Further Research Directions**

By examining educator commitment and its links to retainment, this study has highlighted some persistent issues in rural B.C. education, and have shed some light on new areas. Rural teacher turnover
is still a problem in B.C., particularly amongst inexperienced teachers. Very little research exists on this topic in the B.C. context and what little there is draws only from crude definitions of remote or rural. There are other ways to examine this problem. Firstly, it would be helpful for educational researchers to collaborate with geographers. One could gather broad statistics on job retention time in various locations across B.C. in order to gauge attrition rates regionally. It would be helpful to know the effects that school size and geography made to teacher retention. It would be more meaningful to describe how degrees of “ruralness” effect teacher retention, and ultimately student learning/wellbeing.

Several of this study’s participants highlighted the importance that professional development opportunities play in the lives of rural teachers. Others brought up the feelings of professional isolation that can result from teaching in some rural contexts. Several authors propose that rural teachers are a unique group of professionals who require and deserve specialized teacher training and professional development that is tailored for remote locations, small schools, and multi-grade teaching (Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010; Munsch & Boylan, 2008; Reid, Green, Cooper, Hastings, Lock & White, 2010; White & Reid, 2008; Yarrow et al., 1999). The development and delivery of these programs is in its infancy in British Columbia.

This study also shows the need to fill the gap between theory and practice for place-based pedagogy in rural schools. Only a few educators alluded to using place-based pedagogies, and none of these educators specifically mentioned “place-based” practice. Place-based pedagogy is founded on sound ideals and theories. It is officially and specifically recognized in BC’s new K-9 curriculum since B.C.’s areas are diverse culturally, historically, and geographically – the situation is ripe for place-based instruction to take hold across rural B.C. But this study’s findings suggest that rural educators only rarely take advantage of their unique communities to provide place-based educational opportunities. More research is required if we are to promote meaningful place-based education provincially.
References


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Appendices

Appendix A: Online Survey

The following questions appeared when participants clicked on the “Go to Survey” link at the end of my email invitation

Section 1: Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is your gender?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Are you a BCTF teacher, or a teacher/administrator? (select one)</td>
<td>BCTF Admin (Non-BCTF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What is your ethnicity? (please leave blank if you don't identify yourself as having a specific ethnicity)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Is there a community of people in your local area who share your ethnicity?</td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do you own property in the community in which you teach?</td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What is your age?</td>
<td>a. younger than 26 b. 26 - 35 c. 36 - 45 d. 46 - 55 e. 56 or older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How long have you been a teacher? (number of years completed – type “0” if you have taught for less than one year)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How long have you taught in your current school district?</td>
<td>a. 0 – 2 years b. 2 – 4 years c. 4 – 6 years d. 6 – 8 years e. 8 – 10 years f. more than 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How long have you taught in your current school?</td>
<td>a. 0 – 2 years b. 2 – 4 years c. 4 – 6 years d. 6 – 8 years e. 8 – 10 years f. more than 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. What grades do you teach? (select all that apply)</td>
<td>K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. How many more years do you plan to work at your current school?
   a. I plan to stay at my school for more than five more years
   b. I plan to stay on for two to five years more
   c. I plan to stay on for another year or two
   d. I plan to leave at the end of this school year
   e. I plan to leave soon (before the end of the school year)

12. Do you consider yourself to have a rural background before your teaching career? (The definition of "rural" is up to you. Academics use several criteria, but I am only interested in your self-identification as having a "rural background" or not.)
   Yes  No
   If Yes then please briefly describe your rural background.

13. How long did you live in your rural community before you became a teacher there?
   a. Less than two months - I moved there at the start of my teaching job
   b. 2 months – 12 months
   c. 1 year – 2 years
   d. 2 years – 5 years
   e. 5 years – 10 years
   f. More than 10 years

Section 2: Your Opinions on a Scale of 1 to 5
Please indicate how you feel about the following statements, with a 5 indicating “strongly agree” and a 1 indicating “strongly disagree”. Comments are not required, but you may wish to explain or add to your 1-5 choice. Please attempt to not identify yourself in the comments sections.

1. I am eager to find better ways of doing my job through self-analysis
   1  2  3  4  5
   Comments:

2. I make additional effort to acquire information and skills for my job during my personal hours.
   1  2  3  4  5
   Comments:

3. When I encounter new situations at work, I refer to my professional training rather than using personal instincts.
   1  2  3  4  5
   Comments:

4. I place a higher priority on my job than on my personal interests.
   1  2  3  4  5
   Comments:

5. I am happy to take part in extra-curricular school affairs without extra pay or formal fringe benefits (e.g. School governance, coaching, club activities)
   1  2  3  4  5
   Comments:
6. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this place/community.  | 1 2 3 4 5  
Comments:  

7. I enjoy discussing my local community with people outside the community.  | 1 2 3 4 5  
Comments:  

8. I really feel as if this local community’s problems are my own.  | 1 2 3 4 5  
Comments:  

9. My primary personal support network resides within this local community.  | 1 2 3 4 5  
Comments:  

10. This place/community has a great deal of personal meaning for me.  | 1 2 3 4 5  
Comments:  

11. It would be very hard for me to leave my place/community right now, even if I wanted to.  | 1 2 3 4 5  
Comments:  

12. Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my place/community right now.  | 1 2 3 4 5  
Comments:  

13. Right now, staying in my local community is a matter of necessity as much as desire.  | 1 2 3 4 5  
Comments:  

14. I believe that I have too few job options to consider leaving this place/community.  | 1 2 3 4 5  
Comments:  

15. One of the major reasons I continue to live in this place is that leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice; another community may not match the overall benefits I have by living here.  | 1 2 3 4 5  
Comments:  

16. I would feel guilty if I left my local community now.  | 1 2 3 4 5  
Comments:  

17. This local community deserves my loyalty.  | 1 2 3 4 5  
Comments:  

18. I feel that if I left I would jeopardize my local community.  | 1 2 3 4 5  
Comments:
19. I would not leave my place/community right now because I have a sense of duty to the people in it.

Comments:

20. I owe a great deal to my local community.

Comments:

Section 3: Your Observations and Ideas
You may answer the following two open-ended questions as fully or as briefly as you wish (or not at all if that suits you!). Please attempt to not identify yourself explicitly. If you accidentally do, I will protect any individual or district identities with pseudonyms.

21. What are some ways in which living in this community affects your job as a teacher?

22. What are some ways in which working as a teacher affects your life in the local community?
I understand that completion and submission of this survey indicates my consent for data I provide to be used in this research. I understand that I can skip any questions I choose, and stop participating at any time. However, once I have submitted my completed survey, I understand that the information I have provided will remain in the study as it cannot be distinguished from information other participants have provided.

Are you sure you want to submit your survey results?
[Yes]

Thank you for completing this survey!
Appendix B: Recruitment Email to Rural B.C. Educators

VIU Research Survey: How Rural Teachers Regard their Schools and Communities

My name is Reid Wilson and I'm a Masters student at Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo enrolled in the Masters of Educational Leadership program. I'm also a teacher and administrator at False Bay School on Lasqueti Island.

You are being asked to voluntarily complete my survey as a part of a research study exploring rural teachers' participation within school organizations and their feelings towards their rural communities. I would like to help define what it is to be a “rural teacher” in B.C. and help advance the body of knowledge about recruitment and retention.

This survey is open to all rural teachers (BCTF or non-BCTF) who work in schools that pay the BC Remote Recruitment and Retention Allowance. If you are a BCTF member, this allowance will usually be a line item visible on your pay stubs. If you are a teacher-administrator, you don’t get this allowance but you may still work at a “remote” school. If you're not sure if your school qualifies as a “remote” school, check the following link to see if your school or district are on the list. https://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/SalaryBenefits/RRandR-districts.pdf

Completion of this on-line survey should take 10-20 minutes. Your participation is completely voluntary and anonymous. Please complete the online survey before June 19th.

At the end of the survey, you will be given an opportunity to indicate your willingness to participate in a possible follow-up telephone interview. If you choose to participate in this follow up interview, you and your telephone number will become known to me. However, all collected information will protect your privacy. Individuals and school districts will be identified by pseudonyms.

If you decide not to participate in either the survey or the interview, please simply delete this e-mail.

If you have any questions, please email me at bcruralteacherssurvey@gmail.com.

Thanks in advance!

Sincerely,
Reid Wilson