Problems without solutions? A report on recent work investigating the provision of public education in Victorian country schools

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Tensions between city and country underlie much of the history of Australian politics. This is particularly the case in the politics of education. No more so than now.

A recent project investigating the views of principals in a sample of rural and remote schools in Victoria has brought some of these issues to the fore. In particular school principals see their students as mono-cultural in their experiences, as restricted in their opportunities for career choice and as likely to drift from their home background if they should succeed at school. These principals see their schools as doing a good job in difficult circumstances, as being under-resourced and with staff difficult to attract and harder to retain. They see information technology as full of a promise as yet unrealised because of technical unreliability and inadequate response times and bandwidth. They are torn between the provision of core and core-plus curriculum options and of vocationally-oriented VET programs for a job-starved youth cohort.

The study has investigated some aspects of schools’ practices in addressing these problems and has sought to explore ways in which system-wide policies might better address them.

This paper will report some of these and offer comment on why the dilemmas that exist and the effects these have on the political process are unlikely to disappear.