South Australian background
The three universities and schools in South Australia have long had a positive working relationship. This is reflected in the connections between the Department for Education, Training and Employment (DETE), the Catholic Education Office, Independent Schools Board, and the three universities: Flinders University, University of South Australia, and Adelaide University.

Examples of working together abound, both between the universities, and between them and the systems of schooling. The closer connections between school communities and schools of education is seen to have many positive outcomes including closer links between course work and the actual world of teaching, effective recruitment into education, and coordination of university course deadlines and education department employment procedures. In the early development of the project the links were loose and opportunistic. Thus the nature of the project was set in place, and possibilities for collaboration were sought.

The DETE/Universities Professional Collaboration Project
As it exists now the project has several threads.
• Course work development
• Schools’ involvement in university curriculum
• DETE personnel working in university situations
• Collective solutions for shared challenges

An aspect of the program of special interest is the recruitment of new graduates to difficult to staff areas, eg Anangu Lands of the far north west of the state. As well there is a paraprofessional-to-teacher education project (pilot) which seeks to assist school based workers to gain their teaching qualifications by making course work available and recognising experience.

The collaborative approach to recruitment
One example of the collaborative nature of the project work, and one which addresses all four threads of its success is the recruitment of teachers to rural and regional school communities. In SA there is considerable regional variation in teacher supply. For this reason, the collaboration team involves all major stakeholders, including local district offices, country schools, the central employment and placement unit, universities, local businesses and student teachers in developing initiatives to address the issue of teacher shortages. The aim is to provide a group of teachers who have the training and experience to work successfully in country schools, and the understanding of country life to make a success of a career there.

This program commenced in 1994 to provide student teachers with opportunities to live and teach in a range of country locations, with the view that they would eventually seek employment in those communities.

The program began as a collaborative enterprise between DETE schools in remote communities and the University of SA (School of Ed). Since 1997 the
The program
The key objectives of the ‘Teaching in Rural and Regional Communities Project’ are:

- DETE, in collaboration with its university partners will develop and implement accredited teacher education subjects which promote teaching in country schools.
- Design course work and field experience components that will enable student teachers to work effectively in country school settings.
- Coordinate recruitment strategies so that new recruits will elect to begin their careers in country South Australia.

The subject is configured slightly differently at different universities. At UniSA for example student teachers can elect to undertake a subject or series of subjects with three components which can be accessed over a two year period in the penultimate or final year of their degree. There is a varying mixture of university based course work and blocks of field work (in the country schools) varying from 10 to 30 days.
The university based course work focuses on these issues:

- The forces at work in education delivery in country schools
- Deep analysis of student learning and teaching implications
- Curriculum programming
- Development of a behaviour management plan
- Incorporating IT in the classroom
- The interpersonal and professional side of teaching

Extract from report, J Joseph, PO Retraining, DETE, SA, 1999
The field based program focuses on these issues:

- An in-depth induction to a country school(s)
- Identifying & articulating the differences between metropolitan & country teaching
- Workshadowing of classroom teachers
- Planning and delivering classroom work
- Researching school based special projects
- Establishing discussion groups which reflect on preparedness for country placement

Extract from report, J Joseph, PO Retraining, DETE, SA, 1999
A case study

I would like to tell you the story of a group of final year students with whom I was involved in 1998. DETE has had difficulty in staffing the Anangu Lands for several reasons. One of them is ignorance, and we set about addressing this in planning for semester 2 subject.

The Anangu Education Service (AES) has a strong connection to employing recruits to the Anangu Lands.

The Anangu Teachers Education Program (AnTEP) began its operations with 10 students from Ernabella in 1984, is a community based teacher education program run by the University of SA through the faculty of Aboriginal and islander Studies. In 1996 there were 81 graduates from three stages of study. It prepares Aboriginal students to become independent classroom teachers in their own community schools, and ultimately to become part of the decision-making body that controls education in their own communities. It was important to keep such an important body informed and seek advice from their officers about the proposed initiative.

The field trip was designed to provide participants with first hand experience of the requirements and conditions for teaching in remote South Australia. To prepare for their field trip some students enrolled in a university subject: Teaching in Rural and Regional Communities. Their coursework enabled them to hear from teachers who had recently returned to the city after teaching in isolated schools. Further, the Anangu Education Services Unit at Northfield presented two workshop days in which students identified some of the positive elements of working with Aboriginal children and considered some of the issues which have an impact on learning outcomes. The coursework required student teachers to construct a reflective journal and to share their thoughts and experiences with others in the group.

Workshops enabled the group to consider such issues as cultural diversity, cultural induction, teaching and learning strategies, living and working in remote areas and professional expectations of beginning teachers.

Out in the field

The field component of the subject occurred between the 9th and 19th of November. Buses and fuel were provided by the universities, while accommodation was provided by way of billeting students with teachers in their host school. These arrangements have been extensively trialed over four years in most of our country districts and have proven to be highly successful. The organising and facilitating group consisted of three members of the Retraining Team, a DETE personnel counsellor and a university lecturer. Together, we drove our buses a combined distance of over 10,000km and offered professional learning opportunities to staff in nine schools.

Once in their schools, student teachers undertook school based induction programs. They were provided with opportunities to work-shadow classroom teachers over a two or three day period and gradually moved into taking
greater responsibility for full-time implementation of the classroom programs. Because they were also living with their classroom teachers, students had opportunities to discuss their successes and seek advice on issues and concerns.
‘I liked the closeness between the staff that I would not find in other schools. For example on the weekend the staff got together at the Serbian Club at Coober Pedy to play darts and table tennis. It is very community based.’

Primary student teacher, Coober Pedy, SA
DETE/Universities Professional Collaboration Project, 1998
The students experienced teaching classes from R-11 and some found the specialisation subjects such as Art an opportunity to express their skills.

‘My exposure to student diversity was invaluable to my emerging beliefs as a beginning teacher. Observing other teachers dealing within this diverse environment will be of great value and called upon in my future career.’

*Primary student teacher, Coober Pedy, UniSA*

**Professional learning opportunities**

Meanwhile, the facilitating team undertook a range of pre-planned activities. At Coober Pedy Area School, School Service Officers who are undertaking a worksite-based teaching degree at University of South Australia had their first taste of intensive delivery face-to-face subjects. Many of the Coober Pedy teaching staff were keen to use the group’s expertise to consider issues around middle schooling so a session was arranged. We probably raised more questions than we answered!

As part of its ongoing community services commitment to isolated schools, the University of South Australia provided junior primary classes at Coober Pedy the use of its buses to transport kids, their teachers and parents to Adelaide to watch the Christmas pageant. The camp was an outstanding success and the use of university buses saved the school over $2,000 in hire charges. The University of South Australia has a commendable history of community service for the far north district.

At the Anangu Lands the facilitators worked with teachers who are returning to mainstream schools after completing extensive teaching periods in Aboriginal schools. The *re-orientation to mainstream* setting workshops were designed to support teachers in a successful transition period. The Retraining Team and personnel counsellor combined to facilitate workshops in which participants were acknowledged for the expertise developed during their time on the Lands schools, and were invited to consider areas of concern for their return. Workshops focussed on addressing these concerns. Their skills, developed in the specialist environment of the Lands schools, will be of great advantage to their new locations, in particular their focus on literacy, sensitivity to cultural issues and individualised planning and programming.

**Work on the Anangu Lands**

Fourteen student teachers were placed in 7 locations across the Anangu Lands. They were scattered over approximately 1000 kilometres. The students were quickly absorbed into the communities and as well as teaching duties were encouraged to be part of the life of the community. The teachers, support staff and community members welcomed these students and encouraged them to experience life ‘on the Lands’ with a view to deciding on their role as beginning teachers.
Students found the experience challenging and rewarding. Although the Lands trip was vastly different from previous field experiences all students grew in role, and whether their career takes them to the Lands or mainstream schools, their empathy and skills will be of great value in their classrooms.

‘Our initiation into the community was through the second annual interstate sports day. This opportunity helped us participate in the community of schools in SA and WA. Instead of learning in the abstract from lectures we learned about the children through play and experience.’

*Middle Schooling student teacher, Anangu Lands, Flinders University*

Initially students work-shadowed teachers already working on the Lands in order to acclimatise themselves to the cultural and educational setting. This proved to be a great challenge when working with students for whom English is not the first language. Another dimension to this complexity is the fact that English is not spoken at home.

Another new challenge was working in partnership with Anangu teachers and Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs) who share a wide range of responsibilities including behaviour management and planning and programming classroom lessons with non-Anangu staff.

While student teachers were managing classes with minimum supervision, teachers were released to participate in workshops on issues relating to returning to mainstream schools. Experience has shown that this transition can be a particular challenge for capable teachers who have worked in this specialist environment for some years.

**Relationships**

Although shy, the children soon warmed to their new ‘teachers’, and displayed trust and warmth in their acceptance of their teaching and presence in the community. Student teachers were involved in all aspects of the children’s lives due in large part to the openness and welcoming nature of the children. Once in a classroom it is impossible to stay detached from the students. This close engagement with the children, their desire to know more about you, their enthusiasm to work with you and their delightful sense of humour all make the transition so much easier.

Many of the student teachers were invited to participate in “bush trips”, organised by Anangu community members, which provided invaluable insights into the social and cultural life of the children. These trips allowed student teachers to gain a clearer understanding of what knowledge and skills are important to and respected by the community. Digging for honey ants, cooking and eating kangaroo tail and damper, building shelters and swimming in waterholes all proved to be experiences that the student teachers will carry with them for a very long time.
We also learned from them about bush tucker, collected from the tracks we explored in the bush. This allowed us a deeper insight into what knowledge is important and respected in the community.

*Middle Schooling student teacher, Anangu Lands, Flinders University*

‘Through a variety of experiences previous ideas about Anangu people and the Lands were both challenged and enriched. For example the school trip to waterholes was an opportunity to learn about Anangu culture, dynamics of the school and relationships with Anangu people.’

*Middle Schooling student teacher, Anangu Lands, Flinders University*

**Outcomes**

**The university/DETE course work**

Students experiencing the life of a teacher in a rural location were able to synthesise the theoretical considerations of their university coursework with their very real classroom, staffroom and community experiences. Is this country life for them? - for a large number it would seem the answer is ‘Yes!’
‘Country life offers a more diverse range of student experiences than can be found in the city: the diversity of students is great, and has developed my skills in working with children.’

Primary student teacher, Coober Pedy, SA
DETET/Universities Professional Collaboration Project, 1998
As a result of this field experience seven of the student teachers wish to return to the Lands once they have completed their teaching qualifications. This is considered by all parties involved in this project to be a significant outcome. The universities are also committed to continuing the program in 1999 and beyond. The relationships that have been established between the various sectors, DETE, the Universities, Aboriginal Education Services and the Anangu Community are seen as the beginning of a productive and effective recruitment project which seeks to align highly skilled personnel to a highly specialised teaching location.

The project
Since 1995 more than 250 student teachers from across three universities have participated in the undergraduate subject. They have undertaken their field experience placements in 46 schools across six distinct geographic districts. Each student has undergone an average of fifteen days of field experience for a combined total of over 3,750 days. More than half the students are now living and working in country schools. Student teachers are a rich and invigorating source of new influence on schools. Their youth and energy, new subject knowledge and latest theory development enhances the professionalism of schools.

The following comments are taken from student journals in which they were asked to reflect on the benefits of undertaking the recruitment subjects.
I haven’t yet been in a school with such a bunch of friendly people. They made me and the other girls feel as welcome as possible. I felt as though I belonged there. To date, this is the best experience I have had during my four years at university. This experience has reaffirmed that teaching is the career I want to undertake for the rest of my employment life.

Junior Primary student teacher, Barmera, SA
DETE/Universities Professional Collaboration Project, 1998
When I put my name down for Teaching in Rural and Regional Communities, I never realised how valuable such a subject could be. After three trips to various locations, I look back and realise how eye-opening each trip was, and how important they were to me. I’ve grown in enthusiasm, confidence and experience. If I had not taken this subject, I don’t think I would have realised just how much the country has to offer. I only feel sorry for those who did not take this subject, and whose eyes have missed so much and experienced so little.

Junior Primary student teacher, Port Augusta, SA
DETE/Universities Professional Collaboration Project, 1998
Through a variety of experiences previous ideas about Anangu people and the Lands were both challenged and enriched. For example the school trip to waterholes was an opportunity to learn about Anangu culture, dynamics of the school and relationships with Anangu people.

Middle School student teacher, Anangu Lands Schools, SA/WA
DETE/Universities Professional Collaboration Project, 1998
The future

All parties benefit from the collaborative strategies that enhance the work of all organisations. However, these initiatives are not without threats in the present climate.

Robyn Barratt
Project Officer, SA Middle Schooling Network

With grateful thanks for John Joseph, Project Officer, Retraining, DETE, SA