The establishment of area schools in South Australia, 1941-1947

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to trace the establishment of area schools from two vantage points. The first vantage point is those who were legislatively responsible for public education in South Australia from the mid 1930s through to the end of World War 2. The second is the local community, with references to Karoonda (and districts) in particular.
Design/methodology/approach – The paper locates the evolution of area schools in the comprehensive public secondary schooling movement and the practice of borrowing policy initiatives from overseas and other education jurisdictions. Primary source documents have been used extensively throughout the article.
Findings – Initial resistance to the closure of small schools to form area schools was overcome by the provision of free bus transport, and the wider availability of secondary education, locally. Originally intended to provide instruction to students who would remain for most of their lives in rural communities, within ten years of opening, area schools became the means of mobility for many. Social implications – The continuing exodus of youth from rural areas in search of “greener pastures” has become one of the main issues confronting rural communities as they search for ways to maintain viability in a competitive, market driven economy.
Originality/value – The paper is a rigorously documented historical contribution towards debate and discussion about how governments, and others, may ensure access to secondary education in rural areas in light of demographic and economic factors.
Keywords Australia, Rural areas, History of education, Consolidation, Transport, Comprehensive education, Area schools
Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction
The introduction of area schools in South Australia, that is schools that catered for primary and secondary students, was a seminal event in the evolution of rural public education in South Australia. It provided rural students with access to secondary education “locally”, which hitherto had been confined to those who could afford to attend a metropolitan or regional city boarding school, and the few who could attend a higher primary school. The first area school opened in 1941 in Karoonda in the South Australian Murray Mallee. By 1944, eight more area schools had been established at Cummins, Yorketown, Maitland, Eudunda, Penola, Loxton, Oakbank and Brinkworth. Initially, area schools were intended to provide secondary education for rural students for two years. Courses were based primarily on the needs of the local community and heavily biased towards manual and craft subjects. In 1945, the Superintendent of Rural Schools was able to state in his report:

[...] there has come a spontaneous demand for the establishment of a fourth year of secondary instruction which is now being provided, making in all, a period of twelve years’ happy educational activity provided in area schools[1].

The author would like to acknowledge the advice given in writing this article by Professor Kay Whitehead, School of Education, Flinders University.
By 1947, the curriculum had been extended to subjects for public examination, thereby enabling successful students to gain entry to university.

In this paper, the establishment of area schools is traced from two vantage points. The first vantage point is those who were legislatively responsible for public education in South Australia from the mid 1930s through to the end of Second World War. The second is the local community, with references to Karoonda (and districts) in particular.

The paper locates the evolution of area schools in the comprehensive public secondary schooling movement. The idea of comprehensive schooling emerged in the nineteenth century and grew in strength throughout the first half of the twentieth-century (Williams, 1961; Campbell and Sherington, 2006). In addition, the early development of area schools was informed by what was taking place in other countries, principally Britain and New Zealand, and in other parts of Australia, principally New South Wales and Tasmania. Indeed, the development of area schools is an instance of resolving a public education issue, providing rural students with access to secondary schooling, by utilizing ideas gleaned from other countries and places, or what Ochs and Phillips call “educational borrowing” (Ochs and Philips, 2004). Examples of different types of educational borrowing in this paper include educational study tours, exchanges of correspondence, personal networks of communication and curriculum developments occurring in other educational jurisdictions.

2. “[…] appropriate vocational training without great expense to the state”

From the perspective of those who were at the pinnacle of public education in South Australia prior to the onset of Second World War, the idea of establishing area schools in selected rural communities was given prominence in the Director of Education’s Annual Report of 1938[2]. In this report, William Adey gave a detailed account of the reorganization of rural education he had seen during his visit to England in 1936. While there, Adey spent several days in the County of East Suffolk. The Local Education Authority (L.E.A.) of the county had accepted the recommendations of the 1933 Hadow Report that proposed the establishment of area schools, which used the activities of the community as a basis for the courses and purposes of these schools[3]. Adey recorded in his Annual Report: “I was much impressed by the work that was being carried out and felt that here was a suggestion which could be adapted to our own needs”[4].

Establishing area schools, while new to South Australia, was not new to Australia. Tasmania was the first state to establish and open area schools at Sheffield and Hagley. Mortimer argues that these schools “arose in answer to important questions of social, economic and political significance [like h]ow can the gulf between the cultures of town and country be bridged [and h]ow can the drift of rural population to the cities be halted?” (Mortimer, 1993). New South Wales, while it did not establish area schools it did take responsibility for education in rural areas as early as 1844 following the Select Committee which resulted in boards for denominational elementary schools and national elementary schools (Barcan, 1965). Like South Australia and Tasmania, concerns about reasonableness of access to education in rural areas acted as a catalyst for reform. Put another way, “[t]he needs of the countryside were a long-standing pressure, with country interests calling for equality of opportunity through services which only the government could afford to provide” (Barcan, 1965, p. 313).

On his return from England, William Adey contacted education department heads in a number of states, including New South Wales and Tasmania. As director of
education in Tasmania, Brooks was invited to report on the progress of introducing area schools in his state[5]. In 1935, Brooks had claimed credit for the lead Tasmania had shown in establishing area schools in rural communities. In 1918, 15 years before the Hadow Report of 1933, the head teacher of the Longford School in Tasmania, F.J. McCabe, submitted to the annual meeting of the Teacher’s Union in Launceston a motion recommending the establishment of area schools (Selth, 1973). The motion was carried and presented to the Tasmanian Director of Education, W.T. McCoy. McCoy rejected the motion claiming that: “such central schools would tend to break and destroy rural community life” (Selth, 1973).

The chairman of the Teacher’s Union meeting at which the motion recommending the establishment of area schools was passed was G.V. Brooks. Brooks may have used the concept of the area school as proposed in the motion of 1918 to inform his decision to introduce area schools in selected rural communities of Tasmania.

The rationale for establishing area schools in South Australia, and Tasmania, was expressed in educational terms. Adey emphasized the possibilities of area schools in relation to providing students in rural communities with instruction in secondary courses. He also commented on the role of area schools as the focus of rural community life[6]. Similarly, in Tasmania, Brooks stressed the educational benefits to rural communities that area schools would produce[7]. However, correspondence from Brooks to Adey reveals that the cost benefit of establishing area schools for students in rural communities compared to other ways of providing access to post-primary education was also prominent in the thinking of the directors. So too was the kind of post-primary education considered appropriate to be provided by area schools – vocational education:

[...] in relation to the establishment of area schools costs were not so high as the cost of any other form of extended education. The aim of the government and the Department was to provide appropriate vocational training without great expense to the state (Selth, 1973, p. 183).

Economic considerations were important in the establishment of area schools in South Australia because of departmental policy in the 1930s that advocated the consolidation of small one-teacher rural primary schools. This policy was driven by a number of factors. Changes to rural farming settlement patterns and mechanisation of farming meant many farms were becoming larger which, linked to a need for fewer farms, resulted in fewer children in a given area requiring education. The gradual improvements in rural road systems also meant that the proposition of transporting students to a larger central school became preferable to providing small rural schools. Transporting students to a bigger school, particularly if the school was comparatively well equipped and well staffed, aided the policy of consolidation adopted by the South Australian Education Department as an administrative technique to assist in the development of area schools. Consolidation was a worthwhile policy from the perspective of the department because the cost of providing transport was less than the cost of staffing and maintaining small one-teacher rural schools.

Transporting rural students to school in South Australia was not an innovation per se. As early as 1904 in New South Wales, horse-drawn vehicles were used on a large scale to bring students from out-lying districts to primary schools. However, the acceptance by the Education Department in South Australia of the responsibility to provide bus or covered motor lorry services for children to be conveyed to schools in rural districts, aided the development of area schools. Once introduced, the transport of children to schools grew rapidly in rural areas and was aided by the introduction in
1943 of a scheme of teacher-driver appointments to area schools[8]. The scheme provided trained teaching staff, usually men, who were also licensed bus drivers. By 1944, 48 education teacher-driver services were operating[9]. Departmental transport services were supplemented by local contractors. The success of the departmental transport service which played an integral part in the establishment of area schools was hampered somewhat by wartime petrol rationing. In spite of this, by 1944, there were 91 transport services for rural schools across the state, conveying >50 per cent of the daily area school enrolment to and from school (see footnote 9). By 1944, the task of administering this service grew too large for the Rural Superintendent and his staff and it became the responsibility of the Chief Clerk of the Education Department[10].

3. “[…] provide the greatest good for the greatest number”
On 30 September 1940, the Adelaide Advertiser newspaper ran an article headlined “Karoonda to Have First Area School” and “TRANSPORT FOR CHILDREN”. In January of the following year, the paper declared the opening of the first area school to be “[o]ne of the most interesting developments in the history of education in South Australia […] which would provide a standard of education much higher than could be given in the scattered small schools”[11].

The provision of reliable and transport services or allowances in rural districts to convey students to centrally located schools was a key factor in establishing area schools and was generally successful. Consolidation and transportation were essentially two sides of the same coin – without adequate transport facilities for students, the consolidation of small schools could not be achieved. However, there were vocal opponents to departmental policy, particularly in the initial stages of consolidation of rural primary schools. Opposition generally occurred because the policy of consolidation adopted by the South Australian Education Department meant, for many small isolated rural communities, the end of their one public institution – their school. It also meant an economic loss because farmers used the availability of a local school as an asset when valuing their property. Closure of rural schools, particularly in the Murray Mallee, was seen by local residents as the destruction of the institution which provided a focal point for local community action[12]. The assurances by the Education Department that consolidation of rural schools would provide better educational opportunities for children initially did little to reassure local residents that closure of “their school” was in “their best interest”. Neither did the guarantee that the consolidation of rural schools was the first step in the establishment of an area school with secondary education facilities. In August, 1940, the Minister of Education, Mr S.W. Jeffries, received the following resolution from the Murray Lands District Council’s Association: “That this conference of representatives of the Murray Mallee view with great concern the threatened closing of small schools […]”.

The concern, indeed opposition, by local residents over the closure of small schools to form consolidated schools with primary grades and then eventually area schools with secondary grades, was often intense. Consolidation, for many rural people, was not seen as an educational gain but a social loss. Local residents devoted many hours voluntarily to upgrade facilities in rural schools to benefit their children. Stables, playing fields, lunch sheds and ground maintenance were among the most numerous forms of improvements afforded by local residents. The closure of a rural school as the first step in establishing an area school in a geographical region central to a large
population also deprived many local residents of social status via membership of school committees. However, opposition from local communities to the closure of many small one-teacher rural schools was generally short lived. By the early 1940s, letters of opposition concerning consolidation virtually ceased and, increasingly, petitions were being presented to the local members of parliament requesting that the rate of establishing area schools be accelerated. By 1946, over 40 rural districts had applied for the establishment of an area school[13]. As early as 1943, the Superintendent of Rural Schools commented to the effect that it was no longer necessary to persuade parents to accept area schools as a viable educational institution[14].

Neutralizing the opposition was achieved in part through the provision of free transport and the availability of finance, albeit limited. However, it was the development of secondary courses particularly in the manual and craft subjects, supplemented by general courses, which gave impetus to the demand by rural communities for the establishment of area schools. In turn, the accelerated demand for area schools precipitated other problems for the State Education Department, particularly supplying trained manual and craft teachers.

The provision of bus services as previously discussed enabled the department to centralize a large number of students of all grade levels and thereby make the provision of specialized primary and secondary courses both educationally and economically feasible[15]. The expense involved in establishing an area school limited the rate of the growth of area schools but did not detract from their popularity. Once area schools opened, neither parents nor politicians voiced opposition to the cost factor involved in establishing them. They came to see the cost as something to be met in order to “provide the greatest good for the greatest number”[16]. The provision of transport and finance combined to persuade parents to accept area schools as viable educational institutions.

Before elaborating on the role that the provision of courses of secondary education played in the demand for area schools, there is one other factor which may have contributed to the growth in the popularity of area schools. In 1941, Professor G.S. Browne of the Melbourne University delivered the John Smyth Memorial Lecture. In his paper, Browne praised Tasmania for the lead and foresight it had shown in establishing area schools to provide rural students with secondary education facilities. Browne gave public recognition to the contribution area schools had made to rural education. He gave area schools some increased measure of status vis-à-vis other types of schools, particularly those which provided secondary facilities (Selth, 1973). While it would be an exaggeration to claim that Browne’s statements were read and approved of by the parents of students in rural areas, it seems reasonable to suggest that his statements were probably considered carefully by those in the government sector and the Education Department who were responsible for the establishment of area schools. In essence, Browne’s lecture – another potential example of educational borrowing – and status may have provided political and departmental decision makers with an independent source of legitimation vis-à-vis continuing the growth of area schools.

4. Education in keeping with “the nature of the district”

Initially, courses in area schools were intended to be based on the needs of the local community. The accent on developing courses relevant to local needs with a particular rural bias can be gauged from the answer given by the Minister of Education to a question raised in the House in 1943 concerning courses in area schools. He stated, “area schools are to assist children who are likely to remain in the country for the rest
of their lives”[17]. The Director of Education, Dr Fenner[18] when writing to teachers in the Education Gazette about the Rural Course for Boys in 1944 said:

This is similar to the Technical Course, but some of the Technical Subject periods should be devoted to School Gardening and Practical Metal Work. Science should include Biology and Nature Study and the study of soils, also the keeping of bees and rabbits.

Of the Rural Course for Girls he wrote:

This is similar to the Home-making Course, but the content of the scheme of work in Domestic Subjects should have a rural bias [with no advice provided about what was a “rural bias”]. Home crafts, fruit preserving, the processes and science of Dairying and Poultry-keeping might be included.

The local emphasis in courses was particularly strong in the manual and craft subjects being offered in area schools. Considerable effort was made to relate the theory and practice of manual and craft subjects to vocations directly concerned with primary industry.

Manual and craft subjects accounted for between 30 and 40 per cent of a student’s time spent at an area school in the secondary section, and were supplemented with studies for boys and girls in English, social science, science and arithmetic[19]. In these subject fields topics set for study and exercises given to students were, in general, also related to the needs of the community. The initial enthusiasm for community-based courses in area schools waned towards the end of the war period when the issue of social and geographical mobility for rural people, and students in particular, became a priority. This had a direct bearing on the development of courses in area schools and is integral to their growth.

The subjects developed for the secondary section of area schools generally required specialist staff to teach them. This was particularly so in the case of manual and craft subjects. Here, boys studied advanced woodwork, sheet metal work, work in concrete and leather, and drawing and design. Girls were taught advanced needlework, domestic science, art work and applied art and home craft subjects[20]. The war effort, which depleted the state teaching force and severely reduced finance and materials available for education, caused many problems in relation to providing rural areas with trained manual and craft teachers. General subjects in area schools, such as English and arithmetic, were initially, where numbers were small, taken by primary trained teachers. In some cases, students taking secondary general subjects were taught in composite primary and secondary classes. However, it was strongly felt that trained specialist teachers for manual and craft subjects were needed in area schools. Such an emphasis, expressed by the Director of Education, Dr Fenner, in a memorandum to the Minister of Education, Mr S.W. Jeffries, highlights the status of manual and craft subjects in area schools[21]. It is also consistent with the amendment made to the Education Act in 1941 to provide for the establishment of area schools. In reporting on the amendments made to the Education Act, the Minister of Education, Mr S.W. Jeffries, emphasized that area schools were rural junior technical schools[22]. Secondary technical schools established in the metropolitan area and in large country centres emphasized craft subjects more than academic subjects and, because of the vocational nature of the craft subjects, much emphasis was placed on gaining skilled teachers to teach them.

Courses in area schools were at first planned to extend two years beyond the normal Grade 7 primary level. It was recognized as early as 1938 that flexibility to modify courses in area schools according to the nature of the district and the changing
demands of the area school experiment, was something the State Education Department should allow[23]. With reference to the statement “the nature of the district”, particular attention was given to making courses in area schools relevant to the dominant primary industry where the area school was located. Freedom, within broad limits, was delegated to the Head Teachers and School Committees of area schools to prepare courses of study for children in the region served by the area school[24]. Several years prior to the establishment of area schools in South Australia, debates and discussions about changing secondary curriculum in New Zealand to accelerate the evolution of a comprehensive model of education, were occurring. This is relevant to the area school narrative in South Australia for two principal reasons. 

First, as for determining the appropriate curriculum for area schools and, as stated before, students who were likely to spend their lives in rural communities, there were some educators and parents “who were unwilling to accept that ‘soft option’ subjects were entitled to any place in the school timetable” (Openshaw et al., 1993, p. 156). The label “soft option” was part of the attack against the push to introduce a comprehensive approach to schooling in New Zealand, “one which combined cultural and practical subjects within a core curriculum common to all courses, for example, Music, Art and History, Arithmetic and Handicrafts [combined with] raising the school leaving age to 15 years” (Openshaw et al., 1993, p. 156). Second, and of particular relevance in terms of educational borrowing, developments in Britain which supported greater differentiation in schooling as advocated by Hadow, were used both by those in New Zealand and South Australia who were advocating for new types of school – in the case of New Zealand, comprehensive schools; in the case of South Australia, area schools.

At the opening of the Karoonda Area School, Dr Fenner declared that as more area schools “were established, the educational programme for each would be suited to the particular district”[25]. In the following year it was reported that boys at Karoonda were being “better fitted for life in a primary producing district by their work in the blacksmithing class” at the school. Girls, on the other hand, were being provided with opportunities to learn “advanced domestic science, dressmaking, art, general science and applied arts […] fascinating handicrafts awaiting their nimble fingers”[26]. A strong emphasis on area schools responding to local needs meant that schools situated in the South East of the state could, for example, focus on the beef and timber industries, while schools on Eyre Peninsula could concentrate on wheat and sheep farming. In other words, area schools were given (and often used) the freedom to make courses distinctly vocational in nature and purpose and to relate them to the district. The capacity to make courses relevant, while it met many of the immediate needs of rural districts and also fostered secondary education on a scale hitherto unknown to most rural children, ironically, in a relatively short period of time, began to reveal limitations as the state-wide educational contexts changed at the end of Second World War.

One of the basic assumptions upon which area schools were established, as already stated, was they should provide an education for students likely to spend their lives in the country districts and working mainly in primary industry[27]. By 1945, this assumption which had hitherto guided the development of area schools came under close scrutiny, the result of which was the introduction of public examinations into the curriculum of area schools. The reasons for doing this were numerous and were driven primarily by the growing attraction, and increasing necessity, “of getting a secondary
at the end of the war period. The extension of secondary courses from two
to four years' duration was an important step in the evolution of area schools. In
practice, this development provided rural children with the possibility of gaining
the same length of formal education as the majority of children in city areas of the
state. However, the length of the educational program in area schools, although
equal to high schools (with the exception of those which offered five years of
secondary education) and technical high schools, was different in terms of objectives
and content.

In 1941, to overcome the shortage of trained specialist manual and craft teachers,
12 men and women were selected for intensive training in these fields[28]. These
short courses did provide the area schools then established with required staff.
However, the strategy used to overcome staff shortages generated other problems.
The main problem can be stated succinctly as one of specialization. Although the
short training courses produced trained staff to teach manual and craft subjects, the
scheme had an inbuilt deficiency – it focused the skills of teachers into one area and
therefore they were not qualified to teach in other areas of the curriculum. The area
schools which had been opened by 1943 did not have enough secondary enrolments to
warrant the appointment of two full-time manual and craft teachers, one for boys'
subjects and one for girls'. This led Dr Fenner to recommend that area schools be
established in pairs and share specialist staff. It was suggested that such a
recommendation, if adopted, would be both a cheap and efficient method of staffing
area schools with specialist manual and craft teachers (see footnote 28). The
recommendation put forward by Fenner, however, was not implemented by the
Education Department.

Why the recommendation was not acted upon is not clear. However, a probable
explanation is that, with the demand for area schools coming from right across the
state and finances being very limited, establishing two area schools in close proximity
to one another to facilitate sharing staff would be considered intolerable, especially in
terms of a government wanting to be seen to be upgrading secondary education
facilities on a relatively uniform basis throughout the rural areas of the state[29]. To
establish two area schools in the one rural district ran the risk of being interpreted
as an act of inequality of educational opportunity by the Education Department,
as well as being interpreted as political favouritism. Politicians representing rural
electorates were aware by now of the “vote catching” potential of promising to
establish an area school in their electorate[30].

One further point seems pertinent concerning the rejection by the Education
Department of Fenner’s suggestion to overcome specialist staff shortages in the
manual and craft subjects. It is interesting to speculate as to why the Education
Department, instead of training men and women for the respective boys’ and girls’
subjects, did not choose to rationalize the range of crafts taught and train one person to
teach them. Such a scheme may have overcome the problem of over-specialization
referred to previously and, at the same time, have enabled one teacher to be used fully
in one school to teach craft and manual subjects to all secondary students.
Notwithstanding this, however, Fenner did appear to move to a more proactive
and contingent stance in relation to staffing area schools with trained craft teachers as
can be seen in his gazetted notice of 1944:

The Department requires a number of young men and women teachers to be trained for the
special craft and drawing work involved in the curricula of Area Schools in country areas.
Applications are, therefore, called from teachers, preferably under 30 years of age, who wish to undergo a course of training [...]. The question of whether the course of training will be undertaken will depend on the staff position in the early part of 1944.[31].

In addition to the very considerable issue of how best to staff area schools with teachers trained to teach manual and craft subjects, which in curriculum terms, were largely the raison d'être for the establishment of area schools, there were other staffing problems associated with area schools. One of these was securing sufficient qualified staff to teach the general secondary academic subjects which was partly exacerbated by the war effort in the early period of area schools; then by the growth in demand for secondary teachers in the metropolitan areas of the state as the baby boomer generation flourished and created its demands for human services like education. A widespread way of “overcoming” the shortage of secondary teachers in area schools was appointing primary teachers who had some post-secondary level education in a particular subject like mathematics or English or history, to secondary vacancies in area schools. These appointments were typically known as teachers on loan, the “on loan” status reflective of the divisional structures of the state education bureaucracy of primary education and secondary education, each headed by a chief inspector of schools. The matter of the shortage of trained secondary teachers for rural schools was also the subject of extensive reporting by the Karmel Committee of Enquiry into Education in South Australia nearly 30 years after the opening of the first area school:

We think that country people have the right to expect that education for their children to the end of fourth-year secondary should be available locally without requiring that they board away from home [...]. Primary-trained teachers whose academic preparation over a minimum of three-year tertiary course had given them special strength in broad subject areas, such as the humanities or mathematics and science, would be well prepared, with some extra training specially directed towards working in small secondary schools [like area schools], for teaching in such schools (Karmel, 1971).

Teacher shortages in rural secondary schools, particular in specialist academic subjects like mathematics, physics, chemistry and languages other than English, continues to be a major problem in South Australia and throughout the rest of Australia and many other developed and developing countries.

5. Providing “comprehensive” education for rural students

The establishment of area schools could not keep pace with the demand for them. Parallel with this demand for more area schools there was a demand for extending the courses offered in area schools to include subjects examined by the Public Examinations Board (PEB). Such a demand gained impetus from the growing recognition that area school courses, which were originally designed for students likely to remain in the country all their lives, were limiting, particularly in terms of occupational mobility. Pressure to expand the range of courses offered in rural schools was also occurring in other places like New Zealand, which similar to South Australia, had experienced a marked decline in the percentage of the population living and working in rural areas coinciding with increased awareness of the differences in the secondary education available to urban students compared to rural students (Dakin, 1973; Openshaw et al., 1993, pp. 162-76). In South Australia, the Education Enquiry Committee chaired by E.L. Bean, which presented the government with a Special Report on Secondary Schools for Country Children with Special Reference to Area Schools, played a major role in the successful introduction of PEB subjects into
area schools (Bean, 1946). These subjects attracted nearly one-quarter of all students enrolled in the secondary section of area schools by the close of 1947. As recently as March 1943, Fenner had gazetted that “it is not the purpose of Area Schools to prepare pupils for the Public Examinations of the University”[32].

In 1944, there were 6,398 students enrolled in Grade 7 in South Australia. Of these, 4,469, or 70 per cent, went on to secondary education and completed at least the first year of secondary schooling (see Bean, 1946, p. 1). The Bean Enquiry forecast that numbers in secondary schools would rise together with the percentage of students who continued their education beyond the primary level. This forecast was based on a number of factors which were operative in rural and metropolitan areas. There was also an attack upon holding children back in the primary grades and using remedial-type classes to increase levels of literacy and numeracy skills. Progress allowances were paid to all students who received the Progress Certificate which indicated successful completion of primary education. In rural areas, particularly, the provision of free transport increased the number of students entering secondary grades in country schools. These factors, together with raising the school leaving age to 14, gave significant impetus to secondary education in the mid 1940s. So too did the growing feeling that: “secondary education is no longer to be thought of as a special sort of education to be given only to the abler minority who wish to prepare for entry to professional and semi-professional occupations” (Bean, 1946, p. 1).

The Bean Enquiry in its statement concerning the availability of secondary education to all students regardless of geographical location added impetus to the introduction of public examination courses in area schools. Advocates of this development in area schools, while generally acknowledging the contribution community-based area school courses had made to upgrading secondary education for rural students, nevertheless were concerned at the number of restrictions placed on recipients of area school certificates in terms of career opportunities. Area school certificates, first awarded in 1944 by the Education Department, were not competitive in most of the major industrial and commercial enterprises in terms of a recognized credential. These certificates indicated the satisfactory completion of an education with a significant craft component. They were awarded on the basis of performance during the year, plus performance in a final examination set and marked by the school.

Although many candidates who received area school certificates achieved high levels of attainment, their awards were not widely known, were local rather than universal in character and intent and, as such, lacked status. They were not recognized by the University of Adelaide which in the mid 1940s had considerable power in bestowing formal recognition on subjects taught in schools and the types of academic awards made by them. The restrictive nature of area school courses in terms of occupational choice, and the denial of equality of opportunity for rural children in relation to city children with ready access to public examination courses, was the subject of a debate in the Parliament in 1945 between the Minister for Education, Mr C.L. Abbott and the member for Ridley, Mr T. Stott. In this debate, the Minister for Education stated that area schools “provide an all-round education as distinct from an academic or scholastic education”. In reply to this, Mr Stott noted how much such an objective discriminated against brilliant area school students who wanted to join a profession or go to university[33].

The debate between these two members illustrates that in a matter of four years since the establishment of the first area school, the original policy of the Education
Department to give area schools considerable freedom to develop courses based on local needs had become somewhat restrictive and a potential threat to social and geographical mobility. In response to this situation, the Bean Enquiry, while recognizing the difficulties of introducing public examination courses into area schools at a time when staff, finance and materials were all in short supply, recommended that country secondary education be comprehensive in nature:

We conclude that country secondary schools should be “comprehensive” schools; comprehensive in the sense that they will prepare those children, who are capable and who wish it, to sit for public examinations and will give to others a secondary education in some respects of a different kind, but equally well adapted to their capabilities and needs. Only by the adoption of this principle will country children be given a reasonably equal opportunity as compared with city children (see Bean, 1946, p. 2, par. 8).

The conclusion of the Bean Enquiry resonates with arguments made by Campbell and Sherington, namely that “the histories of individual comprehensive schools may play out very differently, and not only as a result of differing responses to new market pressures and opportunities [...] and their placement [...] may profoundly affect their character [...] and what becomes of them” (Campbell and Sherington, 2006, p. 6).

Further, the Bean Enquiry recommended that a system of course grouping involving common core subjects together with options that led to matriculation be used especially in small secondary rural schools where student and staff numbers did not justify two separate types of courses. The Bean Enquiry advocated that the system of course organization as used in Junior High Schools in New Zealand might become the model on which to base the transition of area schools from single purpose to comprehensive in nature[34]. The State Education Department responded to the recommendations of the Bean Enquiry with the successful introduction of public examination courses into area schools in 1947. By the end of that year, 23 per cent of students in area schools had elected to do PEB courses leading to the Intermediate Certificate – satisfactory year ten completion. However, the rapid growth in the popularity of Public Examination courses did not diminish the demand for trained manual and craft teachers. Manual and craft subjects for boys and girls in the fields of woodwork and home management were examined by the Board and the student demand to take these subjects did not decrease with the introduction of public examinations into area schools.

The rise in the demand for publicly examined subjects to be readily available in area schools in South Australia is a particularly interesting further instance of the tight grip – the hegemony? – of the academic curriculum and how schools respond and manoeuvre to its persistent pressures and relentless rhythms. The inseparable bond between academic subjects and external public examinations in area schools relegated locally developed subjects to a junior status, notwithstanding the merits and worth of them. In terms of the movement of people away from rural communities into new suburbs and cities, the high status-low status curriculum differentiation evolving in area schools played into the growing awareness of education being valuable and valued as mobile capital. Put another way:

Examinations are flexible tools capable of serving several discrete functions at the same time. Historically, schools [and education systems and governments] have used examinations for a variety of purposes: as an objective for pupils, teachers and parents; as a form of evaluating the progress and performance on predetermined scholastic criteria; and as a means of providing “equality of opportunity” not only for town and country populations alike but also
by offering the potential for social – and often geographical – mobility to those individuals able to obtain the credential (Openshaw et al., 1993, p. 193).

The PEB chaired by a full professor of the University of Adelaide, as late as 1967, a quarter of a century after the first area school was opened, in its official publication, continued to perpetuate a hierarchy in the classification of subjects that it examined. Woodwork, Metalwork, Home Economics and Needlework, all subjects emphasized as being of special relevance to area school students, while being approved by the PEB and promoted as subjects of the Board as stated earlier, were “not conducted by the Board” (Public Examinations Board of South Australia, 1966). Curiously though, Arithmetic, Social Studies, Bookkeeping, Shorthand and Typewriting had made it into the “PEB examinations fold”. It appears as though the curriculum membrane dividing the academic subjects like English, Latin, Mathematics and Physics as well as subjects needed to prepare students for the growth being fuelled by the baby boomers, and subjects designed for students who were destined for rural life, was indeed impermeable.

6. Conclusion
In spite of the shortage of finance and materials available for the establishment of area schools due to the war effort and the problems of staffing, there were nine area schools established in South Australia by 1944.

There was some initial opposition to the Education Department’s policy of consolidating small rural schools to form sufficiently large centres of student population to warrant the increased expenditure needed to establish area schools. Some local residents assessed consolidation in social and economic terms rather than educational. Consolidation, in many cases, took away their one community body, the school. However, the establishment of an efficient and free transport service to convey students to schools quickly overcame much of this opposition. The introduction of secondary courses which related to the needs of students whose future was seen as working in country areas also had an impact in promoting the establishment of area schools.

The establishment of area schools created some problems for the Education Department, particularly in terms of supplying trained staff. This was hampered by the war effort. Various strategies were used to overcome this problem including courses of intensive training for people willing to serve in area schools. Staff shortages were particularly acute in the field of manual and craft subjects which had high status in area schools due to their vocational nature.

The transition of area schools from single-purpose schools in 1941 to comprehensive secondary schools with the introduction of PEB courses in 1947 was a period of intense change in the provision of secondary education for rural students and communities. It was also a cameo of “what might be learnt from […] foreign example [and] practice elsewhere” (Ochs and Philips, 2004, p. 7). The Report of the Bean Enquiry was instrumental in ensuring that staff shortages due to area schools becoming comprehensive did not occur to any great extent. The practices cited by the Bean Enquiry as used by the New Zealand education authorities to overcome a situation similar to that faced by area schools in South Australia in 1947, proved to be of value.

Area schools in South Australia provided rural students with the opportunity to gain at least two years of secondary education. They were originally planned to be
junior technical high schools offering courses of instruction to students who would remain in rural areas for the majority of their lives, if not all. This rather short-sighted (in hindsight) purpose of area schools was significantly modified as factors of social and geographical mobility, particularly in relation to occupation, became increasingly important at the end of the war for rural people who could not, or did not want to, remain in country areas.

Area schools, within ten years of their introduction, became the means of mobility for many students. Not evident or even considered at the time was the critical trend this would set in train – the exodus of youth from rural areas in search of “greener pastures” which, in the early twenty first century, has become one of the main issues confronting rural communities as they search for ways to maintain viability in a competitive, market-driven economy.

Notes
5. Correspondence to permanent Education Heads from the Director of Education, Education Department File Number 568/41, State Archives of South Australia, Education Department Collection.
7. Education Department of Tasmania (1942). See in particular the Preface by G.V. Brooks and Chapter 1.
12. Letter from the Murray Lands District Council, 29 August 1940, to the Minister of Education, Education Department File Number 568/41, State Archives of South Australia, Education Department Collection.


20. Memorandum to the Minister of Education from the Director of Education, 31 January 1945, Education Department File Number 2238/44, State Archives of South Australia, Education Department Collection.

21. Education Department File No. 568/41 – Memorandum from Director of Education to Minister of Education re problems associated with proposals to have at least ten area schools opened at the beginning of 1942.

22. Report of the Minister of Education, Mr S.W. Jeffries, 1941, p. 3.

23. With reference to the 1938 decision to allow area schools flexibility to modify courses according to local needs see Annual Report of the Director of Education, 1938, p. 5.

24. Memorandum to the Minister of Education from the Director of Education, 31 January 1945, Education Department File Number 2238/44, State Archives of South Australia, Education Department Collection.


27. Memorandum to the Minister of Education from the Director of Education re the establishment of area schools, 31 January 1945, File No. 2238/44. Statement by the Minister of Education repurposes of area schools. Also South Australian Parliamentary Debates, 26 August 1943, p. 157.

28. Letter in reply to the Minister of Education re-establishing area schools: from the Director of Education, 1941, Education Department File Number 568/41, State Archives of South Australia, Education Department Collection.

29. By 1946, the State Education Department had established area schools at places as far apart as Karoonda, Penola, Loxton, Oakbank, Cummins and Yorketown. Also it had received applications for the establishment of another 40 to add to the 13 already established at the beginning of 1946. Source: Annual Report of the Minister of Education, 1946, p. 4 and Memorandum to the Minister of Education from the Director of Education 31 January 1945, Education Department File Number 2238/44, State Archives of South Australia, Education Department Collection.

30. This assertion is made on the basis of a review of Parliamentary Debates in the South Australian House of Assembly from 1930 to 1946. Particularly from 1940 onward, the Minister of Education during question time was asked on many occasions by members representing rural electorates when an area school would be established in their electorate. Only one reference could be found during the period 1930-1946 of any politician representing a rural seat categorically decrying the establishment of area schools. Reference is made to the member for Stanley, Mr Quirke in the Parliamentary Debates, 3 August 1944, p. 157.
32. The Education Gazette, South Australia, 15 April 1943, No. 681, Vol. LIX, p. 94.
33. South Australian Parliamentary Debates, 1 August 1945, p. 139.
34. New Zealand used a system of course organization in which all students studied a common core and additional courses were taken by those who wanted to matriculate.

References
Education Department of Tasmania (1942), “The Tasmanian area school”, Education Department of Tasmania, Tasmania.

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