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# Regenerating Rural Social Space? Teacher Education for Rural-Regional Sustainability

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and Simone White

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**Keywords:** sustainability; pre-service teacher education; rural-regional; schools; social space

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## **Regenerating Rural Social Space? Teacher Education for Rural-Regional Sustainability**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

How might schools and teachers play a role in the project of rural-regional sustainability? How is teacher education implicated in the renewal and regeneration of rural communities and, more generally, rural Australia? Sustaining and enhancing the diversity of rural communities is essential for social, economic and environmental sustainability, and therefore the long-term security of the nation as a whole (Halsey, 2009). There is a complex interconnection among the issues and concerns that impact on rural-regional sustainability, and this requires an equally complex program of research designed to support, understand and direct the work of school systems, teachers, teacher educators and local communities, who are collectively involved in a key aspect of the sustainability of inland Australia: the attraction and retention of high-quality teachers. As more than just a pedagogic challenge, a systematic and informed understanding of what we call *rural social space* may be specifically needed in rural (teacher) education.

How to understand the rural as complex social space is the focus of this paper, which outlines and introduces the conceptual framework of a current ARC

Discovery Project – the TERRAnova project<sup>1</sup>. Our aim in this Project is to describe and theorise successful teacher education strategies (both pre- and in-service) that appear to assist in making rural teaching an attractive, long-term career option for Australian teachers. The research objective is to be achieved through the identification and analysis of: a) key indicators for success in retaining rural primary and secondary teachers in their situation of practice; b) successful teacher education interventions aimed at promoting rural teaching; and c) successful State-based financial incentive programs, across Australia, aimed similarly at promoting rural teaching.

Drawing on earlier research in this area (Green & Reid, 2004; Green & Letts, 2007) and also the recent work of Donehower, Hogg and Schell (2007), along with contemporary understandings of space and place (Agnew, 1993; Massey, 2005; Cresswell, 2004), we are working with a framework that combines quantitative measurement and definitions of rural space based on demographic and other social data, with constructions of rurality in both *geographic* and *cultural* terms. This supports the development of a theoretical argument for understanding the rural today – and also for coming to know, and prepare people for teaching in rural communities – in terms of the interrelation of economy, geography and demography as key constitutive aspects of contemporary rural social space.

## **THE RURAL PROBLEM IN TEACHER EDUCATION**

As teacher education academics working in and for inland rural locations, and committed to producing graduates from our institutions who want to teach and will teach well in and for rural and remote communities, these issues are central to the practice and research of all members of this research team. And as we have argued elsewhere (Reid & Green, 2003; Green & Reid, 2004), the challenge of providing high-quality education to Australian children in rural and remote locations is both ongoing and significant. In 2003 we argued that “‘Rural Problems’ in education have dogged our nation from before its inception”, noting that over a century ago a “Pastoral and Agricultural” Sub-Committee of the NSW Legislative Council and Assembly, reporting to an inquiry into educational issues in 1904, raised “an important question in regard to the country teacher”. This ‘question’ related to the already well-established perception that “frequent changes, with the hope of ultimate appointment to a city school, tend to lessen the teacher’s interest in the education of the rural child”. Indeed, it was suggested that: “the teacher’s own unrest might tend to lessen the rural-mindedness of the

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<sup>1</sup> ARC Discovery Project DP0879987: *Teacher Education for Rural Regional Sustainability* (2008-2010), Chief Investigators: J. Reid, S. White, B. Green, M. Cooper, G. Lock and W. Hastings.

children, and to create in them an ill-defined urge towards city life” (NSW Parliament, 1904, p. 5, cited in Reid & Green, 2003, p. 7).

This inquiry noted that improvement in the quality and dedication of rural teachers might be achieved through the implementation of:

[a] plan whereby teachers might rise in seniority with length of service in important rural areas. We feel that the cause of education in rural areas would benefit were successful teachers with aptitude for work in country schools made to feel that their legitimate desire for professional advancement could be fulfilled by continued service in a country centre. It is only after some years that a teacher may be expected to become the influence in a rural district to which we feel the importance of his profession entitles him (NSW Parliament, 1904, p. 5).

One hundred years later, in 2008, newspapers around the nation were announcing the pumping of \$300 million into local infrastructure projects, to “breathe new life into regional cities and country towns” (Harrison & Martin, *The Age*, 18/11/08). This was federal government funding for approved projects for improving the social and community health of rural communities. At the same time, newspapers also reported that state-school teachers in the largest State system (NSW) had begun a series of strike actions on a number of grounds (Patty, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3/9/08), including the issue that ‘transfer points’ formerly accruing to appointments in ‘hard to staff’ city and rural schools were no longer to be prioritised in staffing decisions. It seems that the sorts of incentives that systems have been offering teachers to take up positions in rural schools, created for a generation of teachers who began working over a century ago, are indeed out of date.

A typical story that illustrates the prevailing attitude towards working in rural schools was provided to teachers’ union members in the following website publicity for the strike action:

Federation has proposed the extension of a 50 per cent rental subsidy scheme to 4-point incentive schools. This matter was raised with the Minister when he attended the August 2007 Federation Council meeting and his office has subsequently indicated that DET Staffing has indicated that it has had no problem in staffing 4-point incentive schools and therefore, there is no need for such a scheme. This may come as some surprise to teachers working in these schools as many (including schools such as Condobolin High

School, Condobolin Public School and Wee Waa High School) have reported to Federation a significant problem in attracting and retaining teachers - both permanent, temporary and casual (Hasler, 2008).

This account illustrates the way in which many teachers who take up positions in rural and remote schools around Australia see their appointments as something that only an incentive would encourage them to accept. The naming of towns like Condobolin and Wee Waa as ‘problems’ for staffing here, gives them the same mythic connotations that ‘Boggabilla’, ‘Walgett’ and ‘Lightning Ridge’ (all worth more than 4 points on the transfer scale) have achieved in teachers’ war stories over time, and echoing across Australia. Accepting an incentive to teach in places like these treats the appointment as ticket to a ‘better place’, or as an encouragement of what has been called “out-migration” (Corbett, 2007).

Naming a particular, usually small and fairly isolated country town, like these, evokes all the history of ‘the rural problem’ in Australian education. The name itself is enough: it indicates the notoriety of the town, like the equally notorious place names in the inland suburbs of metropolitan cities that are also, but differently, ‘hard-to-staff’<sup>2</sup>. And the sufficiency of naming places as undesirable thereby articulates and reproduces the discursive truth in teaching that country postings are ‘normally’ impermanent, short-term, temporary, and in effect, second-rate. It is in this way that many teachers entering rural social spaces such as ‘Condobolin’ do so either reluctantly, because they were given no choice of location in their offer of employment, or perhaps strategically, as in the example provided here, with a financial incentive that will act in enhancing their careers. What this indicates very clearly, we suggest, is that this whole issue is profoundly socio-political in nature, requiring a theoretical lens that can help us understand more clearly what is going on here, in a manner that is useful in the development of an improved teacher education for rural practice,

### **PRODUCING THE RURAL AS PROBLEMATIC**

In his discussion of the power of naming, in *Language and Symbolic Power*, Bourdieu (1992) discusses the power of language to define and construct relationships of power, where questions of quality, class and distinction are produced when some natural and social products (certain art-forms and accents, practices and physical capacities, suburbs and shoes, motor vehicles, movies, and so on) are coded symbolically as superior to others. As Bourdieu writes:

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<sup>2</sup> In recent years, the term ‘employment opportunity schools’ has been used by the Department of Education and Training (DET) in NSW to describe such ‘hard-to-staff’ schools.

[T]he symbolic strategies through which agents aim to impose their vision of the divisions of the social worlds and of their position in that world can be located between two extremes: the *insult* [...] and the *official naming*, a symbolic act of imposition which has on its side all the strength of the collective, of the consensus, of common sense, because it is performed by a delegated agent of the state, that is, the holder of the *monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence* (p. 239, original italics).

In the social world of education and schooling, rural schools and communities are clearly both ‘insulted’ and ‘officially named’ by the metropolitan mainstream as deficient, backward, and socially undesirable. As teachers name the places where they are reluctant to work, but where it is ‘easy’ to get a job, these places are effectively denigrated as undesirable, and officially classified as ‘hard-to-staff’ by the state apparatus. This is an example of what Bourdieu sees as symbolic violence that ‘insults’ professionals in rural locations, and effectively (re)produces the idea that those who work in city schools and professions are somehow ‘better’ than those who ‘can’t’.

The ‘violence’ done to these schools and their communities, while clearly symbolic in linguistic-political terms, nevertheless shapes the social field, in Bourdieu’s sense, and in this instance is realised in the *habitus* of students who attend rural schools. The greeting that new teachers arriving in many rural and remote schools regularly receive from their students is along the lines of “How long will you be here for, Miss?” In these words, they encounter their students’ retaliation against the symbolic violence they have experienced again and again as their teachers depart after a year or so. Yet this challenge paradoxically reinforces *the students’* lack of symbolic capital – it positions *them* as the supplicants, and the losers in discourses of rural poverty and failure. They are the ones who can’t escape – and who ‘won’t, don’t and can’t learn’ from the teachers sent to bring them the educational and cultural capital that the metro-centre holds valuable. The continued regularity of reports of this experience, aligned with the concern voiced by the NSW state government in 1904 that “the hope of ultimate appointment to a city school, tend[s] to lessen the teacher’s interest in the education of the rural child”, as noted above, clearly indicates how this situation has been reproduced over time.

There is a generalised expectation among many rural children and their families that teachers lack interest in their education. This viewpoint has developed from the typically rapid turnover of staff in many rural schools. When students believes that their teachers have never been interested in teaching in their town, they are likely to become disheartened, discouraged and disinterested in learning from them. The issue for the sustainability of their community, of course,

is that, without the resources that education can provide, they will be unable to participate in and thereby support its continued health and success.

This is a *deficit* model of rural schooling, and it is promoted in the public consciousness through the official naming of the rural as problematic, both by itinerant teachers stopping over to advance their own careers and in the official naming of difficult-to-staff rural schools (Hatton *et al.*, 1991; Roberts, 2005). The fear of the ‘Outback’, the myth of the loneliness of rural living, of heat, and snakes and dirt roads and dust – the fear of the ‘wide brown land’, beyond the mountains – is real in the Australian consciousness. Australians safe in the comfort of the city have learnt to wake in fright through our songs and stories, our movies and media accounts (Green & Letts, 2007). These paint pictures of drought and decline, of the failure of rural schools to achieve educational outcomes comparable to those of city schools, of Aboriginal students failing to thrive in the schools we have provided, and of low achievement, poor attendance, inadequate subject offerings, and Indigenous communities ravaged by alcoholism and abuse. Yet, as we argue here, these are representations. They are not *necessarily* ‘truth’, and they are most certainly not the whole truth.

While we work with the pragmatic assumption that many of our graduates will choose to teach in country schools *because* they are country people, and know that the myths and rumours are not the whole story, or have learnt otherwise, we also believe this to be insufficient and inadequate as a means of ensuring teacher supply and commitment to rural schools. As Atkin (2003, p. 515) argues, “[i]t is as if rural society is judged in terms of a deficit discourse (dominated by the desire to make them like us) rather than a diversity discourse (recognition and value of difference)”. We argue, similarly, that rural social space is richly complex and contradictory – and that many rural communities are characterised by extremes of wealth, age, health and capacity, as well as by racial and cultural diversity. They are not all the same, and they are not *all* difficult to staff or work in. Moving beyond the stereotypes symbolically evoked in descriptions of the rural ‘problem’ in education is essential for sustaining and enhancing the diversity of rural communities. As Bourdieu has argued, in relation to social space:

[R]eferring to a “problem suburb” or “ghetto” almost automatically brings to mind, not “realities” – largely unknown in any case to the people who rush to talk about them – but phantasms, which feed on emotional experiences stimulated by more or less in controlled words and images, such as those conveyed in the tabloids and by political propaganda or rumour (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 123).

Moving beyond the symbolic violence directed toward rural communities and schools is essential for the social and economic sustainability of inland Australia, and therefore for the coherence and security of the nation as a whole. The complex interconnection of the issues and concerns that impact on rural-regional sustainability requires an equally complex program of research designed to support, understand, and direct the work of school systems, pre-service and in-service teacher education, and local communities, all of whom are collectively involved in the attraction and retention of high-quality teachers for rural schools. It does require a new grounding, even though sustainability itself is not a new concept. We have long understood sustainability as the ability “to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43). For Owens (2001, p. xi; cited by Donehower *et al.*, 2007), sustainability is “an intergenerational concept that means adjusting our current behavior [sic] so that it causes the least amount of harm to future generations”. The work of educating the young for the needs of the future is precisely the work that society assigns to its schools and teachers, and it is clearly crucial work for our survival not simply as a nation, but as a species (Green, 2010).

## **RETHINKING THE RURAL**

As we noted above, conceptualising the ‘new ground’ of the TERRAnova study in this way has taken us to a framework that attempts to go beyond received definitions and understandings of the rural, to support teacher education that challenges the stereotype and moves to highlight the complexities and even the advantages of rural places. Our reference-point is the following:

We define ‘rural’ as a quantitative measure, involving *statistics* on population and region as described by the U.S. Census; as a *geographic* term, denoting particular regions and areas or spaces and places; and as a *cultural* term, on that involves the interaction of people in groups and communities (Donehower, Hogg & Schell, 2007, p. 2; italics added).

This is a useful formulation, bringing together a quantitative, statistical perspective with that of cultural geography. In so doing, it allows us to work with a particular notion of *space*, one that combines the empirical and the metaphorical, and to thereby foreground socio-spatial considerations in thinking about the challenges associated with rural teaching and rural (teacher) education. We are asking about the sorts of attributes and capacities that teachers need to have if they are to contribute in this way – about the forms of *capital* they need to be able to invest to produce a return on their teaching in a rural place. We work with the hypothesis that teacher education needs to produce a teacher with certain forms of *social* capital, as well as the symbolic educational and cultural capital that is their warrant to be there. As Bourdieu writes about the importance of social capital:

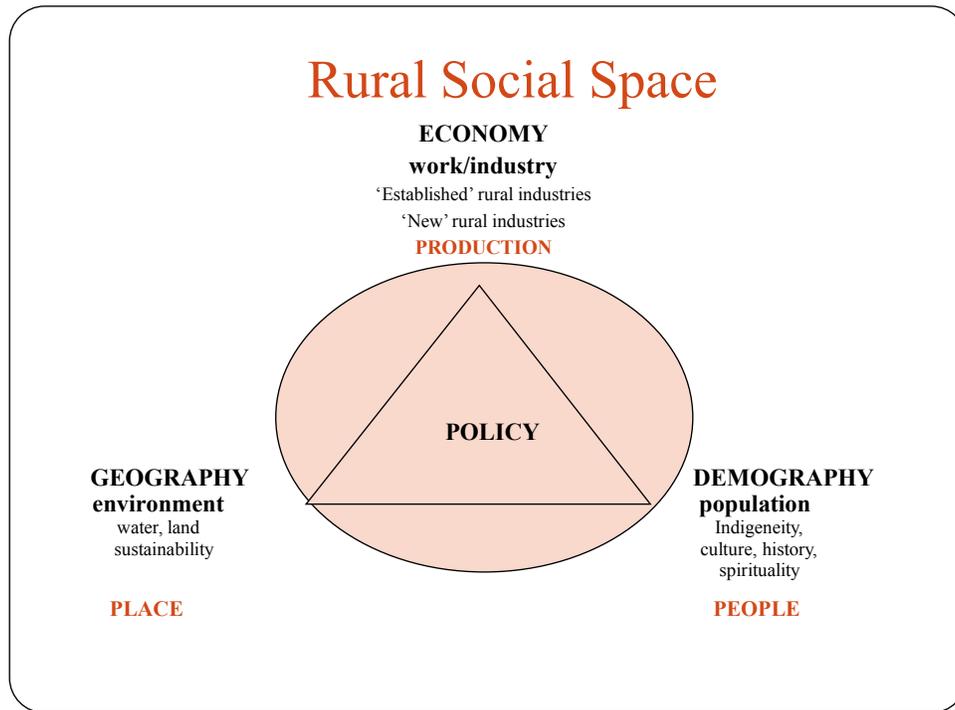
At the risk of feeling themselves out of place, individuals who move into a new space must fulfil the conditions that that space tacitly requires of its occupants. This may be the possession of a certain cultural capital, the lack of which can prevent the real appropriation of supposedly public goods or even the intention of appropriating them. [...] One has the Paris that goes with one's economic capital, and also with one's cultural and social capital [...] (Bourdieu, 1999, pp. 128-129).

Bourdieu's evocative notion of "having the Paris that goes with one's capital" is significant. While this might be simplistically and obviously understood as 'You get what you pay for', or 'You don't know what you don't know', the evocation of a classed distinction as applied to place, here, brings the notion of social capital out of the City and into the Bush. The experience of rural life and teaching that is available to an eco-socially aware teacher – one with an ingrained (i.e. learned) sense of rural places and people, their history and complexity, their problems and their potential, the activities and industry that exist in them, and the particular issues of sustainability with which they are dealing – will be richer and more satisfying than that available to a teacher who does not have this awareness. These aspects of rural social space are all forms of knowledge on which teachers can capitalise. Our responsibility, as teacher educators and teacher education researchers, is to be effective as a force for rural-regional sustainability by providing pre-service teachers with access to the professional and pedagogic capital that can successfully underwrite their investment in rural social space.

## RURAL SOCIAL SPACE

In striving to understand what keeps people in rural communities we are developing a theoretical argument for understanding rurality today – and for coming to know and prepare professionals for teaching in rural communities. As we have noted above, this is emerging in terms of the interrelation of three key factors: economy, geography and demography, that we see as connected both in practice and in place. It is the *practice* of place that provides and produces social space, and the way in which these factors interact and interrelate that suggests ways in which rural social space can be rethought and represented in ways that do not produce symbolic deficit and cultural cringe; on ‘new ground’, in fact, in terms of our project. In this section, we introduce an emerging model of rural social space. Our aim is to demonstrate how these relationships constitute rural social space in ways that can be understood (and demystified) by teacher educators, employers and communities, for teachers and students moving into it for the first time.

As Painter (2000, p. 257) notes, “[i]f society and space are understood as co-constituting then fields are socio-spatial (and socio-temporal) phenomena, opening up the potential of a more thoroughly spatialized theory of practice”. It is this notion of rural social space as ‘practiced place’ that we seek to represent in the model below. Here, rural social space is the set of relationships, actions and meanings that are produced in and through the daily practice of people in a particular place and time. In Australian inland contexts, this certainly entails taking appropriate account of Indigenous issues and challenges, as a particularly significant feature of rural population. Hence, the inclusion in the model of understandings about and engagement with Indigenous culture, histories and demography. These are essential for any focus on education (Eckermann, 1999), with significant implications for Indigenous teacher education (Reid & Santoro, 2006) as well as rural (teacher) education more generally. In policy terms, however, this connection often remains unspoken, with rural education policies (and funding) typically dissociated from Indigenous education policies, and rural education bodies often silent or at least reticent on Indigenous issues. What should be noted here, further, is that the model encompasses what has been described the ‘triple bottom line’ view of sustainability – bringing together social, economic *and* environmental dimensions of (rural-regional) sustainability (Cocklin & Dibden [eds], 2005; McKenzie, 2004). Rural social space is represented here, moreover, as situated within and structured by a network of policy that relates to and governs the practice of each of these socio-spatial and -temporal phenomena: thus highlighting the significance of the rural to the sustainability of the nation as a whole.



Rural social space, by definition, is not a generalised or universal concept – it is an event, a performance, a practice, precisely in the Bourdieuan sense of an interaction of *field* and *habitus*, which produces and reproduces itself in accordance with the capitals that define it. Just as we have used Bourdieu’s description of ‘the Paris that one has’ as different from that which might be had by another at the same time and in the same place, the rural social space ‘had’ by participants with *some* forms of capital is quite different from that which can be had by others. Society and space interact so that it is not just location and landmarks that define a community, but the people that one meets and interacts with, and what one does together in their environs.

### **THE TERRANOVA PROJECT**

To move this argument forward, and to explicate the work that we see TERRAnova doing in relation to the idea of preparing pre-service teachers for participation in rural social space, we turn now to briefly outline the research itself. We are seeking to describe and theorise successful teacher education strategies that appear to assist in making rural teaching an attractive, long-term career option for Australian teachers. There are three stages to the study. Firstly, we want to understand what pre-service teachers who participate in University- and State/system-based rural incentive programmes see as the costs and benefits

they received from these experiences, financial and otherwise. This focuses on planned attention to rural teaching through pre-service curriculum and practicum experience in a range of forms. Secondly, we want to understand what works to sustain those pre-service teachers who take up an employer's financial incentive to undertake a rural practicum placement or internship, and convinces them to apply for and remain in rural schools – or not. Volunteer students are being interviewed over their first three years after graduation to allow us longitudinal access to their experiences and their reflections. Finally, we want to speak back, symbolically, to the violence that is done to rural schools in popular images of them as 'hard-to-staff' (and 'easy-to-leave').

We have drawn above on Bourdieu (1999, p. 123), in describing the ways in which desirable places are constructed in social practice. To reiterate, he says that "... referring to a 'problem suburb' or 'ghetto' almost automatically brings to mind, not 'realities' [...] but phantasms, which feed on emotional experiences stimulated by more or less controlled words and images, such as those conveyed in the tabloid and by political propaganda or rumour." By studying a number of schools which do not fit the popular stereotype of the 'rural school', which have a high (>3 years) teacher retention rate and quality student outcomes in the view of their local communities, we hope to develop counter-stories, contra-dictions, that provide accounts of successful teachers working and living in rural social spaces, who contribute to rural-regional sustainability not just as individuals, but as whole-school staffs, and as a profession in general.

Through the first two stages of the Project, we have been focusing on ways in which teacher education can best help to familiarise pre-service teachers with rural social space. One of the key strategies that State departments and some university courses (White & Reid, 2008) are currently using to educate and expose pre-service teachers to rural schools is through educational field trips and visits – taking them out and showing them what it is like, in the hope that they will see beyond the stereotype, through experiencing life in a rural school first-hand. These programs have for some time been seen as successful in exposing what are in the majority city people to a taste of country life, although there is no clear evidence that they translate into successful (longer-staying) appointments to rural schools, and they are currently under review in some places. While there is always a danger that such forms of educational 'tourism' may only consolidate and affirm existing prejudices, such attempts to provide real experiential interaction with rural places seems to us worthwhile<sup>3</sup>. As Bourdieu notes, however, "to break with accepted ideas and ordinary discourse, it is not enough,

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<sup>3</sup> In NSW, a program has been operating under the title of 'Beyond the Line' for some time now, with the aim of providing some measure of experience of rural-remote settings for prospective teachers (Boylan & Wallace, 2002; McConaghy & Bloomfield, 2004).

as we would sometimes like to think, to ‘go see’ what it’s all about”. As he cautions:

In effect, the empiricist illusion is doubtless never so strong as in cases like this, where direct confrontation with reality entails some difficulty, even risk, and for that reason deserves some credit, yet there are compelling reasons to believe that the essential principle of what is lived and seen *on the ground* – the most striking testimony and the most dramatic experiences – is elsewhere. Nothing demonstrates this better than the American ghettos, those abandoned sites that are fundamentally defined by an *absence* – basically that of the state and of everything that comes with it, police, schools, health care institutions, associations, etc. (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 123).

While Bourdieu uses the image of the American ghettos to illustrate his point here, the parallels between this example and that of symbolically disadvantaged Australian rural communities is clear. Importantly, as Gibbs (2008) has indicated, these absences and links to elsewhere are the result of policy and government funding decisions that are out of the control, often, of communities themselves. On the ground, the effects of these references to elsewhere can be dealt with, or at least understood and accommodated. More importantly, however, ‘going to see’ is not the same thing as ‘coming to know’.

### **COMING TO KNOW ONE’S PLACE IN RURAL SOCIAL SPACE**

‘Knowing one’s place’ in rural social space is far more possible and probable than in the larger population centres. When everyone knows you and how and where you are situated, spatially and socially, in the community, it is difficult to mistake or to misrepresent one’s position. As Atkin notes:

Perhaps one key characteristic of rurality – or rather its influence in human capital development – is the notion of shared social space. If members of small rural communities share the same social space, the potential risks in stepping outside that space are considerably higher than that of their urban counterparts (Atkin, 2003, pp. 512-3).

For this reason, it is essential that pre-service teacher education does more than help pre-service teachers to ‘go and see’. As Bourdieu (1999, p. 123) reminds us, “[b]reaking with misleading appearances and with the errors inscribed in substantialist thought about place” can only be achieved “through a rigorous

analysis of the relations between the structures of social space and those of physical space". We see this as a key role for teacher education, one that recognises and works with an assumption of diversity and difference within and across rural social space (Green [ed], 2008).

For pre-service teachers, 'coming to know' particular places, and about ways of researching and finding out about the place where one is appointed as a teacher, is essential both in terms of ensuring the relevance and connectedness of the curriculum that will be designed and for the pedagogy that teachers plan to use with their students. We have noted elsewhere (Green [ed], 2008; Green *et al.*, 2008; White & Reid, 2008) the importance of understandings and activities that are 'place-based' in this regard (Shamah & McTavish, 2009), and we acknowledge the importance of 'place-based education' in teacher education more generally (Miles, 2008). But the accumulation of educational capital that will assist new teachers to 'come to know' a place goes beyond this professional academic interest. It is also a key part of ensuring that they can gain access to knowledge and understanding that will enable them to find a place in the social and cultural geography of the place, and find their commitment to their professional participation as workers and residents sustainable. It is this other, the reference to the reality of the everyday life that is 'there' rather than 'elsewhere', which we believe is often missing from teacher education in general. It is a register of our collective failure, to date, to conceive of notions such as rural social space as important, and to work with them as necessary for rural-regional sustainability as an intergenerational concept. Clearly such understandings are to be seen as 'practical', or as having practical utility, even though they might be introduced and developed elsewhere in the overall program than Methods' subjects *per se* or in 'Practicum'.

Coming to know a place means recognising and valuing the forms of social and symbolic capital that exist there, rather than elsewhere. It means using the resources of the people who know. For instance, when a pre-service teacher interviewed as part of the TERRAnova project discussed how she was able to use her knowledge of one rural town where she had grown up to help her come to know and find a place in another, which she was appointed to for her final internship, she highlighted situated knowledge which resides in her as *habitus*, but that can be analysed in terms of both geographical and social space. She drew on her embodied knowledge that the teachers in her town were transient, and that the people in her town only very rarely socialised and interacted with them. She reasoned that the teachers in the new town, therefore, were not likely to be the people most useful for her to connect with if she wanted to know the community beyond the school. She had learned that the teachers only knew themselves, effectively, and she wanted more than that. She noted that, as she was going to be spending five weeks in the town, she wanted to enjoy herself while she was there.

She decided to use a strategy of ‘phoning ahead’ to the Post Office, local church or supermarket, to see if they could put some feelers out to find somewhere for her to board.

As she explained to the researcher, her mother had told her stories about doing just this to save herself from loneliness and boredom when she had worked as a young single woman travelling around the country towns of Victoria, providing support services to rural banks. This woman had developed the practice of always phoning ahead to find board, rather than staying in the pub or a motel. That way, she knew she would get to meet people, and moreover the people that her hosts knew, and hence she found easy connection into social activities in the community. It seems to us that this pre-service teacher is acting as a pro-active ‘consumer’ of rural social space, in de Certeau’s (1984) sense, and her use of this particular ground-level ‘tactic’ to meet her purposes highlights what might be some of the limitation of policy-level ‘strategies’ that rural teaching incentive schemes located ‘elsewhere’ might produce. This is not new knowledge, clearly, but it was not part of her teacher education, and it is also not something that those who are symbolically devalued as ‘rural’ have believed important to formalise beyond the vernacular.

In another case study, teachers reported a situation where a new teacher arrived in a remote inland community with money to set up a new house yet with no sense that the community did not have an electrical goods store, and hence she had to borrow the school kettle until she could make the trip to a town with a supermarket. A pre-service teacher education curriculum that foregrounds (or even mentions the possibility of) ‘theoretical’ school knowledge of basic Australian geography, history and social studies as useful in preparing for teaching was missing from almost every course of study which our participants experienced. In fact, as we have reported elsewhere, only seven Australian universities offering teacher education have even a mention of ‘rural teaching’ in the information they provide students on their websites (White et al., 2008).

## **CONCLUSION**

While the work of TERRAnova is to formulate and renew the knowledge base upon which systems and (pre-service) teacher education ground preparation for teaching in rural schools, student-teachers who have completed our survey to date and who have volunteered to talk with us about their experiences in rural schools overwhelming share a commitment to the intergenerational aspects of sustainability. As one student-teacher wrote:

Since looking at the survey I have remembered my experience working for the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE) in the western regions of NSW particularly, and how I witnessed the sacrifices and commitment remote families endure to ensure their children get a quality education. Indeed it was this experience which made me realise that I had taken education for granted and became interested in this aspect of society which resulted in my interest in a career in this area. I am interested in remote education and am curious to know who is principally responsible for addressing the plight of remote Australians in ensuring children get equitable access to education? I would be interested in becoming involved ...

Taking education for granted is the prerogative of those with the social and economic capital that few in rural places can accumulate. Our eco-social approach to sustainability assumes a multidimensional perspective that does not privilege the knowledge and symbolic capital of the Metropolis. Instead, it allows us to voice and privilege, and learn from in turn, systematic attention to the people and places that practice alternate and different forms of (rural) social space and thereby participate, as indeed all of us must, in the now clearly critical national project of rural-regional sustainability.

In conclusion, then: The concept of rural social space, as outlined here, is one aspect of a conceptual framework we are developing – complemented by work on the concept of rural-regional sustainability (Green, 2010) – as a resource for rural (teacher) education. We see this as potentially useful for rethinking professional education in this regard. In our view, professional education programs have all too often been under-theorised and therefore have proved inadequate in terms of meeting the challenge of professional practice in and for rural schooling. This requires making due consideration of the framework not just in ‘Methods’ course and the like, although it arguably has value there too, but also in the so-called ‘Foundations’ areas such as educational sociology. At the very least, it provides a larger frame of reference than is usually the case in rural (teacher) education, and therefore provides a sound basis for work towards enhancing the quality of rural teaching and teacher education alike.

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