Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices 14

Ann K. Schulte
Bernadette Walker-Gibbs *Editors*

# Self-studies in Rural Teacher Education

Springer

# Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices

Volume 14

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# Self-studies in Rural Teacher Education

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ISSN 1875-3620 ISSN 2215-1850 (electronic)
Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices
ISBN 978-3-319-17487-7 ISBN 978-3-319-17488-4 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-17488-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015941283

Springer Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London
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# Biographies

## Editor Bios

**Ann K. Schulte** earned her Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and is now a professor in the School of Education at California State University, Chico. Since joining the faculty at Chico State, she has taught a variety of teacher education courses, with an emphasis on access and equity and democratic education. Professor Schulte coordinates, advises, and supervises students in the Rural Teacher Residency and in the MA in Education programs. In 2009, Dr. Schulte authored the book *Seeking Integrity in Teacher Education*: *Transforming My Student Teachers*, *Transforming My Self*. Dr. Schulte is an active member of the Self-study of Teacher Education Practice SIG in the American Education Research Association, having served as its past president.

**Bernadette Walker-Gibbs** is an Associate Professor in the School of Education at Deakin University and has worked in the higher education sector for over 15 years. Most recently she has been engaged in two large-scale, longitudinal, mixed methods teacher education research projects in examining the "effectiveness of teacher education in preparing graduates for a diversity of contexts". Bernadette also focuses her research on pre-service teachers in rural settings using place and space based understandings of rural as well as creating narratives around "country kids" and pre-service teachers and their journey to university and experiences once they get there. Bernadette is passionate about ensuring quality education for all children regardless of where they are located and has been recently appointed to the International Editorial Consultancy Board of the Australian and International Journal of Rural Education (AIJRE).

## Author Biographies

**Nathan D. Brubaker** works in the Faculty of Education at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, as a Lecturer in Curriculum and Pedagogy. He previously taught in the USA at the primary, middle, and tertiary levels. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in multicultural education and primary level curriculum, while supervising Masters and Ph.D. students in teacher education. His research interests include self-study, teacher education, and democratic pedagogy. His work on classroom authority, assessment, and inquiry has been published in various journals and books.

**Michael Corbett** is a Professor of Rural and Remote Education at the University of Tasmania. Corbett's research interrogates contemporary and historical conceptions of the rural, and particularly the ways in which these conceptions have played into policy and discourse around education, teacher education, and literacies. This research has included studies of rural outmigration, educational decision-making, literacies in rural contexts, conceptions of space, place, and the viability of small rural schools.

**P.A. Danaher** is a Professor in Educational Research in the School of Linguistics, Adult and Specialist Education at the Toowoomba campus of the University of Southern Queensland, Australia, where he is also currently Associate Dean (Research and Research Training) in the Faculty of Business, Education, Law and Arts. He is also currently an Adjunct Professor in the School of Education and the Arts in the Higher Education Division at CQUniversity, Australia. His co-authored research books include *Contemporary Capacity-Building in Educational Contexts* and *Educational Learning and Development*: *Building and Enhancing Capacity* (both published by Palgrave Pivot in 2014); *Researching Education with Marginalized Communities* (Palgrave Macmillan in 2013); *Identity and Pedagogy in Higher Education*: *International Comparisons* (Bloomsbury Academic in 2013); *Mobile Learning Communities*: *Creating New Educational Futures* (Routledge in 2009); and *Teaching Traveller Children*: *Maximising Learning Outcomes* (Trentham Books in 2007).

**R.E. (Bobby) Harreveld** is interested in learning and earning capability development, brokered webs of knowledge production, education pathways and workplace transitions. She is an Associate Professor in Professional and Vocational Education and Deputy Dean (Research) in the School of Education and the Arts at Central Queensland University, Australia, and was the Foundation Director of its Learning and Teaching Education Research Centre.

**Christopher Hickey** is currently the Associate Dean of Research in the Faculty of Arts and education at Deakin University. Chris is an educational researcher with an orientation toward social critical scholarship. His research interest in social

disadvantage is rooted in a theoretical framework that recognises the importance of "networks of social relationships" in influencing personal direction and opportunity.

Building on this, his research has focused on the practices of identity for socially (economic, geographically and culturally) disadvantaged groups across a wide range of settings. Using qualitative research methodologies he has undertaken extensive work with schools, families and sporting clubs as key socialising institutions. Throughout his work, he maintains a strong interest in the translation of research into practice.

He is currently Chief Editor of the *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health*, *Sport and Physical Education*

**Gaelene Hope-Rowe** is a Lecturer in Pedagogy and Curriculum at Deakin University, Warrnambool campus. Her teaching intersects with her research through her continued classroom teaching practice in rural and regional school settings. Gaelene's research interests are in middle years classrooms, interdisciplinary and community-based curricula, and perspectives on teaching students with diverse cultural and linguistic resources. She is interested in pedagogies that promote positively diverse classrooms and the role of withdrawal programs in providing literacy support for older "at-risk" learners. Gaelene teaches preservice teachers from predominantly monocultural communities to reflect on their personal resources in preparing to teach diverse learners and to address disadvantage.

**Máirín Kenny** is a former Principal of a primary school for Irish Traveller children and an independent research consultant. With Patrick Danaher, she has co-authored and co-edited works addressing mobilities and education internationally, including *Traveller*, *Nomadic and Migrant Education* (Routledge in 2010). Her research in Ireland includes studies of the experience of people with disabilities in the education system; sectarianism in Early Years education; and Travellers and Roma and the education system.

**Jodie Kline** Jodie's research and scholarship focuses on rural and regional teacher education, exploring the partnerships between teacher education, schools and local communities. In recent years, Jodie has contributed to development of the Renewing Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum package and has been a Chief Investigator on state and federally funded projects including the Longitudinal Teacher Education and Workforce Study, and an evaluation of teacher, quality, supply and retention initiatives for the Victorian rural school workforce. Jodie is a Research Fellow appointed through the Centre for Research for Educational Futures Innovation, Deakin University, to the Studying the Effectiveness of Teacher Education project (ARC Linkage). This large-scale mixed-method project is helping to provide an evidentiary basis for policy decisions regarding teacher education and beginning teaching.

Jodie is co-editor of the Australian and International Journal for Rural Education and is a reviewer for international journals including Pennsylvania State University's

“Journal of Research in Rural Education”. Before joining Deakin University in 2009, Jodie was instrumental in driving the Australian Early Development Index language diversity study through the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute.

**Amanda Mooney** is a Senior Lecturer in Health and Physical Education at Deakin University and is the Course Director of the Bachelor of Health and Physical Education degree. Amanda has extensive experience as both a teacher educator and secondary Health and Physical Education teacher, a role she enjoyed for nearly ten years prior to her academic roles.

Amanda’s research draws on qualitative methodologies to explore the ways in which cultural and societal factors shape identities, professional practice and pedagogies in Physical Education, Health Education and Sport. To date, much of this work has been largely centered on the role gender can play in these processes. Spanning various contexts including school-based Health and Physical Education, community sporting clubs and Physical Education Teacher Education settings, this work seeks to promote more equitable, enjoyable and meaningful experiences for youth in physical education and sport.

**Sri Soejatminah** worked at the Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education in Jakarta for almost 10 years before migrating to Australia. Inspired by her experience of studying and working in a multicultural context, Sri completed her doctoral degree in internationalisation of the curriculum and intercultural competence development in teacher education at Deakin University in 2013. She has co-authored another paper on rural education – “Space, Place and Race: Ethics in Practice for Educational Research in Ethically Diverse Rural Australia” which will be published in *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*. Drawing on her previous working experience in Jakarta, Sri wrote a book chapter on Internationalisation of Indonesian higher education system.

**Simone White** is a Professor of Teacher Education at Monash University and leads the Faculty of Education Teacher Education research group. Simone’s publications, research and teaching are focused on the key question of how to best prepare teachers for diverse communities in particular “harder to staff” communities including low socioeconomic, high cultural and linguistic diversity and rural, regional and remote. She recently launched the Office of Learning and Teaching extended funded project known as RRRTEC (www.rrrtec.net.au ) and its accompanying online learning community at https://www.facebook.com/rrrtec. This project has created particular resources, curriculum guidelines and strategies that have been developed aimed at teacher educators (both school-based and university-based) to make more “visible” the ways in which preparation for rural and regional communities staffing needs can be addressed. Simone is currently the President for the Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA). She convenes the Rural Education SIG in the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) and has recently been elected to serve as the Secretary/Treasurer of the Rural Education SIG in the American Education Research Association (AERA).

# Introduction

**Bernadette Walker-Gibbs and Ann K. Schulte**

## Genesis of the Book

The purpose of this introduction chapter is threefold. First, we provide the genesis of the concept of this book and a general overview of rural studies and self-study. Second, we describe the complexities, challenges and affordances of entwining conceptions of rurality with self-study, and finally we briefly introduce the chapters. The idea for this book was seeded in 2012 when Ann Schulte decided she wanted to study rural teacher education during her yearlong academic sabbatical; she knew that this work would become part of her next self-study. In fact, she sought out rural education scholars in Australia with whom to work and this is how she began the collaboration with Bernadette Walker-Gibbs.

Ann's previous scholarship has been in the field of self-study; she has written for the International Handbook of Self-study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices and authored a previous text in the Self-study Series for Springer Publishing. During her tenure as Chair of the Self-study of Teacher Education Practice (S-STEP) Special Interest Group (SIG) in the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Ann worked to develop connections with other scholarly organizations. For example, the S-STEP SIG held a shared reception with Teacher as Researcher SIG so that they might benefit from each other's backgrounds and expertise. Ann sees this book as another opportunity to introduce new people to the field of self-study, while promoting rural studies to self-study scholars. Bernadette on the other hand had never worked in the field of self-study, rather her

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© Springer International Publishing Switzerland 2016

A.K. Schulte, B. Walker-Gibbs (eds.), *Self-studies in Rural Teacher Education*, Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices 14,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-17488-4_1

expertise was in rural teacher education and post-structural theoretical perspectives that worked alongside narrative as a means of exploring rurality. Bernadette has been a researcher on several teams who have studied rural education. Most recently she has been engaged in two large scale, longitudinal, mixed methods research projects in examining the "effectiveness of teacher education in preparing graduates for a diversity of contexts" (see http://setearc.com.au and https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/ltews-main-report). As part of these projects Bernadette has focused her research and writing on the implications of these findings on pre-service teachers in rural settings. The connecting threads in our work were the shared experiences preparing teachers for rural placements together with a passion for social justice in all contexts.

The initial proposal for this book was to highlight the work of teacher educators in the field of rural education. Ann and Bernadette both agreed that there was extensive research on urban teacher preparation but there is much less emphasis on rural teacher education, despite the high numbers of rural districts in our respective countries. For this book, we proposed that education faculty interested in rural studies would use self-study to examine the ways in which one's identity impacts their teaching, their research, and/or their partnerships with rural school districts.

Before inviting authors, we had many discussions with each other, learning about our respective backgrounds and thinking about what it might mean to combine our interests in what we came to refer to as a process of "cross-pollination." Bernadette raised thoughtful concerns about pairing an already marginalized scholarship (rural studies) with a commonly marginalized methodology (self-study) and how academics under pressure to produce traditional research in top-tier journals might respond. Ann expressed apprehension about the potential of being positioned as the self-study "authority" and guiding the authors in her own personal constructions of self-study.

After working through our concerns, we sought out authors whose self-study scholarship touched on the issues of rural contexts and with discussion, could look more closely at the aspects of rural studies. We then identified rural education scholars who had written in ways that we would consider either forms of self-study or their writing had significant references to self reflections where we thought they could easily move that work forward with common processes used in self-study. What resulted from our recruitment was an illuminating range of expertise that provides a variety of approaches and perspectives in order to provide multiple examples of these journeys in self-study.

Finally, we both committed to writing our own chapters. Ann relied on Bernadette to help her to become familiar with the genre of rural education studies, as well as the contexts of rural schooling in Australia. Bernadette helped Ann to challenge the meaning of "rural" and consider the complex ways rurality gets positioned in the research. Despite spending nearly a year collaborating with Bernadette, Ann barely scratched the surface of the research on place and space studies as they relate to rural contexts. Bernadette depended on Ann to help her frame the ways in which she might conduct her own self-study, something she had not previously done. This process challenged Bernadette in understanding her previous work in terms of

self-study. After having worked for so long in an under-valued field, Bernadette had concerns about how self-study might further marginalize her work, and additionally challenge her own academic identity, given the culture of universities in which research in other fields are more valued. More pragmatically, Bernadette had concerns about engaging with another framework within a workload that already does not allow time for self-reflection and academic engagement.

## Overview of Self-Study

Although many varieties of academic reflective practice have a long history (e.g. in the traditions of Dewey and Schön), by the early 1990s teacher education scholars had formed a group within the American Educational Research Association (AERA) called the Self-study of Teacher Education Practice (S-STEP). Zeichner (1999) described self-study as "disciplined and systematic inquiry into one's own teaching practice" (p. 11).

The process of self-study provides educators with the opportunity to study salient questions that arise in their practice, questions that were not necessarily new, "but more so, that they were being seriously considered and responded to by those involved in teaching about teaching" (Loughran 2004, p. 15). LaBoskey (2004) describes self-study as having the following characteristics: self-initiated and focused; improvement-aimed; interactive; multiple, mainly qualitative, methods; and "it defines validity as a validation process based in trustworthiness" (p. 817). The variety of qualitative methods may include, for example, narrative, autoethnography, personal history, action research, or autobiography. "Self-study tends to be methodologically framed through the question/issue/concern under consideration so that it invokes the use of a method(s) that is most appropriate for uncovering evidence in accord with the purpose/intent of the study" (Loughran 2004, p. 17).

Some of the common critiques of self-study methodology are regarding the scientific traditions of generalizability and validity. As in other forms of qualitative research, validity in self-study can be garnered through descriptions of methodology that lend the findings verisimilitude (Feldman 2003). Employing a critical friend and describing processes of triangulation can provide greater trustworthiness in what the author has written. Findings in self-studies are not intended to be generalized in the positivistic tradition, applied widely in different contexts, but rather readers of self-study are able to interpret the learning and the knowledge gained and therefore naturalistic generalizations are more appropriate for this type of research (Stake and Trumbull 1982). Quality self-study provides a robust description of the context because it "is important in shaping how teacher educators might construct their own interpretation of others' results in their own situation" (Loughran 2004, p. 18). Ham and Kane (2004) write:

> If the goal of a piece of research is to understand, and then improve, one's own practice by means of a rigorous investigation of one's own pedagogical actions, then one is implicitly

> working within a constructivist notion of truth, a relativist ontology, and a participative epistemology which highlights the subjective, or at the very least the intersubjective. The positivist notion of objectivity as being commensurate with truth, has no coherent place as a test of the integrity of such a research process. (p. 126)

Although understanding the need to ensure that our work is intellectually rigorous and reflects the highest level of academic engagement, we do resist to an extent what MacLure (2006) argues is the fact that "[e]ducation policy-makers and research sponsors seem animated by the desire for certainty, willing to sacrifice complexity and diversity for 'harder' evidence and the global tournament of standards" (p. 729).

## Overview of Rural Studies

To provide an overview of rural studies one must first examine the term rural. There are various ways in which rural has and can be defined. A common way of positioning rural is in binary terms, in contrast to metropolitan, and also in terms of limited access to services and perceptions of isolation (White and Reid 2008). The impact or affect of this isolation and/or access is often linked to population size and connections to agricultural industry. The challenge is that much of the literature on rural education centers on the notion of small size equating to isolation, which is portrayed as being a challenge. The deficit view of rural includes lack of resources (Fluharty and Scaggs 2007; Aaron Drummond et al. 2012), limited access to a support network of experienced teachers (Stack et al. 2011), and a lack of awareness of the cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic status of rural students (Australian Government Productivity Commission 2012).

More positive conceptions of rural are linked to quiet, calm and relaxing environments, usually with a strong sense of community (Beutel et al. 2011). This picturesque country description is often still portrayed within a binary in that the pace of rural is slower compared to the fast pace of urban settings, or there is a strong connection to one's neighbors versus the anonymity of larger population centers.

Although there are some references to the "idyllic rural," overwhelmingly the literature on rural studies in teacher education is often considered from the deficit viewpoint and tends to focus on challenges linked to attracting and retaining staff (Walker-Gibbs 2012). Such challenges can result in student populations that are often isolated, insular, with low academic expectations, lower test scores, and more social welfare issues. The rural student population, it seems, suffers a disproportionate level of disadvantage (White and Reid 2008).

Conceptions of rural as either idyllic or deficient are limiting and do not provide a complex reading of what and how these rural spaces are experienced by teacher educators or others in rural communities. Simplifying of these spaces in these ways opens up rural studies to be dismissed as an easy to resolve "problem" that can be "fixed" or "solved" in some way. Because of this potential dismissal of rural, and to an extent self-study, we have ensured our work in this book is making a contribution

to not only both fields of study but to the broader discourses of teacher education. The following section explores the importance of combining the two fields more completely.

## Significance of Combining Self-Study and Rural Studies

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2004) argue that practitioner inquiry is built on the assumptions that:

> Practitioners are knowers, that the relationships of knowledge and practice are complex and distinctly non-linear, and that the knowledge needed to improve practice is influenced by the contexts and relations of power that structure the daily work of teaching and learning …. Most versions of practitioner inquiry challenge the idea that knowledge can be generated in one site and directly and unproblematically generalized and transmitted to another site. (p. 617)

As co-editors of this volume, we draw a parallel between what Cochran-Smith and Lytle describe about self-study above and what various authors in this book contend about the work of rural education studies. Preparing teachers for rural contexts is complex, non-linear, and influenced by power structures that are themselves contextualized. The challenge becomes, therefore how one does not just accept the findings of rural education studies as a broad recommendation and unproblematically transmit them to just any rural site. Korthagen and Lunenberg (2004) agree when they write, "traditional research seemed to focus more on the question of how isolated variables in teaching and learning relate to each other, but generally tells little about the question of what this should mean for the often different and complex situations teacher educators have to deal with" (p. 434). The self-studies here help teacher educators to speak initially to the particular contexts and then connect this to the broader field of education.

In 1999, Zeichner wrote "the birth of the self-study in teacher education movement around 1990 has been probably the single most significant development ever in the field of teacher education research" (p. 8). He described the self-study genre as the "one clear example of where research has had an important influence on practice in teacher education" (p. 12). Later, Zeichner (2007) added that self-study must seek both to improve practice and contribute theoretical understanding in the field of teacher education. In the rural self-study work in this volume, we wanted to ensure that the scholarship advances understanding of teacher education, potentially not only in rural contexts but also more broadly. Because we viewed the authors' previous work to be significant contributions to the field of teacher education, we were confident that although some of the rural scholars may take up self-study in preliminary ways, that their theorizing about rural education within their practice would benefit the broader base of research.

As we worked through the chapters in this book and considered the implications of linking self-study and rural studies, we recognized that we may be critiqued by

those who will marginalize both the rural and the self. Ham and Kane (2004) suggest that self-study has been challenged as legitimate research in the academy, "not so much as a matter of epistemology, but as a matter of academic politics" (p. 132). The critique around rural spaces is similar but more likely to be linked to justifying the rural (see White and Corbett 2014) rather than the legitimacy of rural research. The absence of a strong critique of rural research itself speaks volumes in that it could be argued that outside of rural studies it garners little attention from mainstream research circles.

Ham and Kane (2004) outline three criteria to determine if self- study is research: "(a) the extent to which a study is grounded in empirical evidence; (b) the extent to which a study has actual or potential generalized, or theoretical, import; and (c) an enacted intention to make public" (p. 113). One of the strengths of this book in terms of rurality that speaks to Ham and Kane's criteria for research is that these studies have drawn from numerous international experiences of the rural. This plethora of contexts serves to illustrate the ways in which we are able to demonstrate "theoretical import" across a variety of teacher education settings. For example: Kenny, Danaher, and Harreveld are positioned in Australia and Ireland; Brubaker was a teacher in the United States but now is an academic in Australia; Corbett hails from Nova Scotia; Kline and Soejatminah share their perspectives as influenced by their origins in Australia and Indonesia respectively.

The perspectives brought by the authors in this book add a richness that serves to begin to counteract part of the international conversation on teacher education more broadly where there is a greater emphasis on comparing and ranking systems (including international league tables) in order to "to identify the distinctive features of those countries which consistently 'come out on top'" (British Education Research Association 2014, p. 9). What we argue in deliberately drawing authors together from different contexts is that we are acknowledging and in fact, insisting that context matters. The authors of the self-studies emphasize this by engaging with their own histories in order to make explicit the implications for their practice as teacher educators. As Hudson and Hudson (2008) argue "There are particular contexts for teaching and learning in rural schools that make it significantly different from non-rural teaching" (p. 68). As we assert our work as "legitimate" research in a time when data driven, standardized outcomes are held up to be the goal for "good" research, we are heartened by Palmer's (1998) reflection that "The work required to 'know thyself' is neither selfish nor narcissistic. Whatever self-knowledge we attain as teachers will serve our students and our scholarship well" (p. 3).

## Diversity of Authors

The authors in the book come from a range of epistemologies, geographically different contexts, and with varying levels of previous familiarity to rural studies and self-study; consequently, the chapters represent a range of approaches. Periodically throughout the process we, as co-editors, provided the authors references and

guidance about what we thought were the expectations of studies that might be described as principally about the rural or particularly self-study. As co-editors, we discussed the difficulty in defining, for example, what would make a self-study specifically about the rural. Stanley (1992) in *The Auto/Biographical I* writes,

> Is the fact that the text is feminist authored or about a feminist subject sufficient to define it as a feminist auto/biography? Is the form or structure of what is written as feminist auto/biography, not just the subject who forms the bones of the content, actually different from any other auto/biography? (p. 247).

The question that needs to be asked by all of the authors ultimately is what makes my work rural?

As we were drawing together the various authors (including ourselves), we were faced with a dilemma in how we argue for a more complex definition of rural that moves away from binaries, resists deficit conceptions, and is strongly linked to notions of identity, place and space. The complexity of conceptions of rurality in these chapters combined with the numerous perspectives on self creates certain synergies which have emerged for us, but this complexity also reflects one of the challenges of engaging with any critical or post-structural framings so as not to "wallow" in nihilistic arguments that make it impossible to speak in any sense about the "rural" or the "self" with/in the rural. Giroux et al. (1996) take the position of a postmodern counter-narrative that is also reflected in this book where:

> "[they] counter not merely (or even necessarily) the *grand* narratives, but also (or instead) the "*official* and "*hegemonic*" narratives of everyday life: those legitimating stories propagated for specific political purposes to manipulate public consciousness by heralding a national set of common cultural ideals." (p. 2)

For this volume, we believe it is more about making explicit the discourses that emerge consciously and unconsciously that position rural in particular ways. As Somerville (1999) posits "What stories does mine make space for and which ones does it displace?" (p. 5). From the positionings reflected in this book we hope the readers are empowered to bring these understandings to their work and to engage in rural spaces and places with more complex lenses.

## Author Contributions to the Fields of Rural Studies and Self-Study

This book was proposed to highlight the work of teacher educators who relate to the field of rural education. We have argued that the field of research on teacher preparation has an abundance of studies about preparing students for the challenges of urban settings but there is much less emphasis on rural education. In this book, teacher education scholars examine the ways in which the self is part of their teaching, researching, and/or working with rural community partners.

The first section of the book includes four self-studies that focus carefully on each author's identity as rural and how this impacts their knowledge of themselves

and their understanding of the work of preparing teachers for rural contexts. "Personal history – the formative, contextualized experiences of our lives that influence how we think about and practice our teaching – provides a powerful mechanism for teachers wanting to discern how their lived lives impact their ability to teach or learn" (Samaras et al. 2004, p. 905). The reader will find similar threads throughout the chapters that relate to autobiography and place.

In the chapter "Looking for My Rural Identity, Finding Community and Place" Ann Schulte begins this engagement by comprehensively outlining the ways in which examining her identity has always played a significant part in her practice as a teacher educator. She uses the theories of Dewey and Freire to frame her purpose of working with under-served, and in the case of this study, rural populations. What Schulte's self-study highlights in terms of rural studies is the ways in which rurality is often perceived as just another identity marker. Through the process of self-study, Schulte discovers that claiming this identity of rural is much more complex than simply being from a small town. She begins to connect this understanding with a more multifaceted understanding of place and how she is able to connect more closely with and advocate for the rural communities in which she works in teacher education. Absent from this self-study experience, Schulte (and those who read her chapter) may continue to underestimate the complexity of the meaning of rural places and the ways that this underestimation further marginalizes those spaces.

Simone White, author of chapter "A Road Less Travelled: Becoming a Rural Teacher Educator", has had an extensive career in rural teacher education. She argues that if teachers are better prepared for rural settings, it is more likely we are able to attract and retain staff in hard to staff areas and it is more likely they will be able to meet the learning needs of rural students. White makes an important contribution to rural studies by demonstrating how through self-study, teacher educators can more acutely engage with the concept of rural specifically, in contrast to the urban-centered or one-size-fit-all approach of many education programs. White takes seriously the value of systematic self-reflection informing the structure of teacher preparation programs, and she suggests changes for rural teacher education curriculum.

Bernadette Walker-Gibbs uses narrative and post-structural framings to uncover and make explicit her journey as a rural female and how that has impacted on her practice and career as a rural teacher educator. The priority for Walker-Gibbs is to resist simple answers to what it means to be rural but at the same time to recognize that engaging with concepts of place and space form the basis of what it means to be an effective teacher educator. Walker-Gibbs emphasizes the significance of the diversity of rural spaces that are often perceived through a deficit lens. The process of self-study highlights her own experiences of education in rural communities and how the implications of visibility and perceived disadvantage of her own rural background impact how she understands her students who come from similar backgrounds.

White, Walker-Gibbs, and again Gaelene Hope-Rowe in the next chapter, highlight the value of self-study in revisiting one's purpose as an educator. All three authors revisit the recommendations from their dissertations many years prior and

re-evaluate the extent to which their doctoral work impacts their current practice, especially with respect to notions of rurality that were retrospectively under-represented in their dissertations. Integrity can be defined as the extent to which one is able to practice what one believes (Schulte 2009); White, Walker-Gibbs, and Hope-Rowe provide examples of how self-study can be used to work toward a more rural-focused practice with a high degree of integrity.

Additionally, Hope-Rowe's chapter illustrates some of the challenges and positionings of working across roles with/in and out of school contexts. Hope-Rowe's personal history highlights the complexities of being a border/boundary crosser within her dual roles of teacher and teacher educator, a balance of which she believed would keep her grounded in her vision of equity work in rural schools. Through her self-study, she describes the ways in which she is always coming back to her passion for "getting good teachers in the bush."

Outside of self-study, very little is known about how teacher educators make sense of their own identities, dispositions, and assumptions in the context of teaching. In the subsequent chapters, Nathan Brubaker and then Amanda Moody and Chris Hickey carefully examine the ways their assumptions and dispositions effect how they enact the methods of Physical Education. Brubaker provides a provocative chapter in which he outlines his experience as a beginning Physical Education teacher in a rural community in the northeast United States. Brubaker's account of rural is closer to the conception of rural as "hell" which can be likened to Sharplin's (2002) account of rural as perceived as either heaven or hell and therefore resists the conception of the country as friendly, close knit and idyllic. Within Brubaker's chapter, the reader is drawn to the literature on how to prepare teachers to work in rural communities as well as some of the difficulties of retaining teachers once they have been recruited into rural communities. Brubaker analyzes a plethora of data from his initial teaching experience, examining his assumptions and the ways he navigated micro-politics within a small, rural context. He concludes by describing how the political context of schools can impact significantly on a teacher's identity and sense of place and space.

Similar to Brubaker, Moody and Hickey position their collaborative self-study in the discipline of Physical Education. Unlike Brubaker, Moody and Hickey identify their long history of living and work in rural communities from a predominately positive perspective. Moody and Hickey reflect on how this is linked back to being successful at sport at a personal level, which is highly valued in Australian rural communities, thus leading to "privileged positions" in their chosen profession. Mooney and Hickey reflected on their self-study this way: "Rarely have we deliberately engaged in questions about the ways in which our own biographies and research understandings inform our own practice as teacher educators. In becoming familiar with the tenets of self-study methodology we were able to think more deeply about how our own learnings, produced through research collaborations and ongoing dialogue that might inform our work with pre-service teachers, many with theories of practice developed in contexts similar to our own" (Moody and Hickey, personal communication). Moody and Hickey use the process of self-study to not only work with each other to critically reflect on their own personal rural journeys

but to draw parallels to the teaching experiences of a graduate of their program. This juxtaposition with the former student helps the authors to unpack and make explicit the impact of their own teacher education practice in the field of Physical Education.

In the last section, Michael Corbett draws on his extensive experience in rural studies to conceptualise further how Lefebvre helps him to "think globally about the rural." Corbett acknowledges the way in which rural conjures up numerous images for people and has occupied significant space in the written world – both from a fictional as well as more research-oriented accounts. Using narrative to unpack his own identity as rural, Corbett draws on the work of Lefebvre and Lacan to unsettle simple and easy conceptions of rurality in order to position rural as important and significant in a time when the "urban" is seen as the ideal aspiration. Corbett further challenges us as readers, and as teacher educators more specifically, to move beyond the binary and consider more that we "need a rural education that recognizes this while at the same time understanding that all places are subject to incessant and radical structural and spatial transformations that are larger than any particular place."

Jodie Kline and Sri Soejatminah focus their chapter not on the teaching of teachers but rather frame their self-study on researchers in teacher education. How researchers approach the issues of identity is complex and varied, highly dependent on the experiences of both the researchers and the researched. Kline and Soejatminah, in their collaborative study, highlight the need for critical conversations and deep engagement to work in ethical ways with ethnically diverse rural school communities. Upon reflection about the self-study process, Kline notes, "I believe it was the collaborative aspect of our work that was of the most value. The independent reading in preparation for our workshops didn't have much meaning until we were able to share our interpretations and connect these to our personal and professional experiences" (Kline, J, 2014 personal communication). Kline and Soejatminah's self-study demonstrates for the reader various ways in which the authors' diverse identities have influenced their practice with/in these communities and how this can help (or hinder) ways in which teacher education researchers are able to engage meaningfully in these spaces. The outlining of rural as ethnically diverse further moves the conversation of rural away from stereotypical perceptions of rural as mono-cultural and the antithesis of diverse. There is a significant gap in the self-study scholarship where scholars of color examine their race with respect to their practice, and even fewer where this is done in pairs of mixed race researchers. Kline and Soejatminah might choose to grow their self-study practice in these directions.

Finally, the chapter by Máirín Kenny, Bobby Harreveld and Patrick Danaher evokes a highly visual conception of "dry stone walls and black stumps" that are reflective of three authors' experience of the rural across the waters of Ireland and Australia. The challenge of engaging in a self-study with three authors is easily taken up by Kenny, Harreveld, and Danaher where they draw upon the similarities and differences of their personal histories of rural and the impact this has had on their own practice in teacher education. Kenny, Harreveld and Danaher draw upon Michel d Certeau and his distinctions between place and space in order to examine ways in which self-study, as deployed in this chapter, can help sustain and transform the professional learning of teacher educators, regardless of their country of origin.

## Conclusion

In writing this book we argued that it would problematize the notion of rural, or rurality, which is often considered via a deficit or a generalised model where a stereotype of one kind of rural is outlined. We sought to develop the argument that more complex understandings of rurality was key to preparing pre-service teachers for a successful career in rural locations (Lock et al. 2009). Our goal was to ask teacher educators to think deeply about how their identities and their experiences with rurality have shaped their work, to draw knowledge from their autobiography and their experience, and to use this knowledge to change their practice so that they might continue to improve the ways they honor the complexities of living and working in rural spaces.

For many of the authors, this book was their initial foray into either self-study or rural studies and we hope that the reader will agree that these chapters are good examples of how academics can engage in the "reciprocity of shared experience and meaning making" (LaBoskey 2004).

Ham and Kane (2004) contend that:

> The commitment to publish represents a general commitment to the notion of a steadily accumulating body of reported evidence which is useful not only as a necessary foundation of robust theorizing about educational practices, but also useful to the writers themselves, and, more importantly, useful to the community of others. (p. 117)

By making this work public, self-study researchers hope to contribute to a larger educational reform agenda (LaBoskey 2004). We hope that readers of this book agree that the authors have done this research with integrity and in thoughtful ways that have enabled us to make what we see as a great example of the cross-pollination of disciplines and a significant contribution to both fields of study related to rural and to self.

**Acknowledgements** We would like to thank Kai Schafft for extensive and critical feedback on initial chapters. We owe gratitude to our authors who worked across oceans to refine and take on board our editing for the chapters. We appreciate Louise Clancy who has helped with some initial editing. We want to thank John Loughran for providing guidance and support throughout this process. We also appreciate Bernadette Ohmer and Natalie Rieborn with Springer Publishing who provided helpful support in the completion of the manuscript. Final thanks to California State University, Chico and Deakin University (in particular Jill Blackmore from the Centre for Research in Educational Futures and Innovation) who sponsored Ann's visiting scholar opportunity in Warrnambool, Australia.

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# Part I
# Rediscovering Rural Identities

# Looking for My Rural Identity, Finding Community and Place

**Ann K. Schulte**

My early self-study research (Schulte 2009) examined how my shared identities with my students impacted the way I prepared them to teach diverse populations. These identities of white, middle-class and female were comfortable identities for me to wear. Although my understanding of white privilege was transformed dramatically in graduate school and continually evolves, I easily accepted the criteria that identified me in all my whiteness. I also, safely and without much scrutiny, wore the middle-class and female identifiers. The privileged positions of white and middle-class mitigated any potential marginalization of female. As I will explain, other privileged identities revealed themselves more dramatically.

I regularly share with my students a personal story when talking about the concept of privilege. I recall with them that during a class in graduate school, the instructor gave us two minutes to compile all the words that would describe any category in which we could place ourselves. The resulting list included terms like white, middle class, teacher, sister, able-bodied, English-speaking, Catholic, etc. I managed to include 17 words in my list. After time expired, I glanced over at my friend's list next to me. Number one on her list was "lesbian". I looked back at my list of 17 words and my sexual identity was nowhere to be found. Within this moment, I became acutely aware of my identity as heterosexual. I realized in that instant that although I had known that I was *not gay*, I never had to specifically claim the identity of heterosexual because of my heteronormative privilege. That experience was a powerful example of how my frame of reference (e.g. my race, my class, where I grew up) significantly shapes the extent to which I am conscious of my identities.

When I embarked on my journey into the scholarly world of rural education, I wondered if I would have a similar experience connecting to my rural identity.

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A.K. Schulte, B. Walker-Gibbs (eds.), *Self-studies in Rural Teacher Education*, Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices 14,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-17488-4_2

Initially I thought, sure, I'm rural. I grew up in a small town in South Dakota, so obviously I am "rural". But is this what it means to be rural: to grow up in a sparsely populated state, home to many farms and ranches? I sought out an understanding of how rural is marginalizing or privileging and how this might inform the way I prepare teachers for rural contexts. I made this identity journey the focus of a yearlong sabbatical self-study in Australia.

## Heading Down Under

I chose to immerse myself in an experience of relocating to a rural area in Australia for my academic sabbatical at Deakin University. My partner and I spent nearly a year living in the rural/regional town of Warrnambool, located in southwest Victoria. Warrnambool may be considered rural as defined by its considerable distance from an urban center, and it serves as a commercial hub for the many smaller towns and farms in the area. Warrnambool has a population of 33,000 and is usually described by those who live there as 'regional', rather than rural. Deakin University has four campuses in Southwest Victoria, and faculty at the other metropolitan locations often refer to Warrnambool as the "rural campus". As a visiting scholar, I regularly engaged with faculty at the Warrnambool campus by observing courses, offering guest lectures, visiting P-12 schools in Warrnambool and smaller rural towns in the area, and engaging in thoughtful dialogue about teacher preparation. Throughout the year, I attended both local and national conferences (e.g. Australian Association for Research in Education) and presentations that focused on the topics of rurality, diversity, and teacher education. I immersed myself in the experience of connecting to a community, both the academic one and the broader community of the town.

As I embarked on this study of my ruralness, I wondered how this aspect of my identity would be revealed to me, how it might allow me to think differently about myself, my students, or my teaching. Much has been written about how rural schools are portrayed as deficit, their students are under-educated, and the school curriculum lacks connection to rural places (Theobald and Wood 2010; White and Reid 2008; McCosh 2014; Corbett 2007). I sought to understand how I would relate to these constructions of rural and how that understanding might connect me to the rural communities with whom I work as a teacher educator in the Rural Teacher Residency Program at California State University, Chico.

## Theoretical Frameworks

I choose self-study in particular as a process to study my own identity and my practice because it situates my learning within the relationships with my students. It is my continued pursuit of integrity as I practice teaching in the ways that I teach my students to practice. In the words of Freire (1970, p. 60) "those who authentically

commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly". Self-study of one's practice is one way to achieve praxis. Praxis involves engaging in a cycle of theory, application, evaluation, reflection, and then back to theory. Social constructionism views knowledge and the knower as interdependent and embedded within context, culture, and experience, and social transformation is the product of praxis at the collective level. As a social reconstructionist, I agree with Theobald and Howley (1998, p. 164) when they write, "we must now not only restructure schools but also re-culture them".

My academic upbringing, as it were, was steeped in the philosophies of both Dewey and Freire. I have a deep commitment to the ideals of equitable public schooling for all children and believe that in order for this to happen, teachers should adopt liberating pedagogies. Dewey (1938) saw school children as restricted by the institution and sought a more freeing pedagogy that connected learning more closely to their lives. Freire (1970) reminds us that liberating pedagogy must be engaged in alongside the oppressed, not administered by beneficent oppressors. Too often, teachers and teacher educators who are conscious of their role as oppressors, or of the role of schools in hegemony, believe they are acting for the benefit of underserved students; however, Freire teaches us that true liberation is led by those who are marginalized and that those who are privileged work in solidarity.

I have previously used Freire's and Dewey's theories to engage future teachers in recognizing the oppression of ourselves, as teachers, and our students in the neo-liberal attacks on teachers and schools, and in confronting the reality of this oppression together, in an attempt to change schooling to be more liberatory. This study was intended to examine to what extent my identification as "rural" might contribute to my ability to work in solidarity with those who may experience inequity and lack of relevance as a result of their being positioned as rural. Throughout this study I began to learn more about the theories of place and space and this work will figure in my future scholarship (Gruenewald 2014; Theobald and Siskar 2014).

## Methods

"Self-study is not done in isolation, but rather involves students or colleagues working collaboratively to build new understandings through dialogue" (Samaras and Freese 2011, p. 29). The methods used in this self-study involved regular and ongoing dialogues with academic colleagues in Australia and in the United States, and current and former students in the CSU-Chico Rural Teacher Residency program, in which I am a faculty member. In addition, I regularly initiated email dialogues with authors of articles I was reading in order to clarify or extend some of the ideas put forth in the article. I sought out the perspectives of what might be termed "non-education" friends and acquaintances that I met in our Australian town in order to better understand my perceptions of local and/or rural culture. In all cases, for those I quoted by name or to whom I referred in the chapter, I requested their feedback on what I had written in order to check my own perception and to

preserve their intent to the best of my ability. In at least one case, this proved to be very important as my words were missing the essence of someone's point.

I used reflective journaling throughout my experience to reveal assumptions that might influence my conclusions. In addition to seeking out contrasting perspectives from those mentioned above, I engaged in a critical friendship with both my co-editor for this text and a critical friend from my previous text (Schulte 2009). My co-editor brought some shared philosophical perspectives in teacher education, but different experiences and knowledge of both rural education and Australian culture. This was crucial for how I analyzed my experiences during my sabbatical. These practices of triangulation and member checking all lend validity to the findings in this study.

Although I have generally used forms of autoethnography, this study used more narrative inquiry throughout the process. In a narrative methodology, stories of lived experiences are co-constructed and negotiated between the people involved as a means of capturing complex understandings of the work so that we can learn from it (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). Other people's experiences and stories were analyzed as I read, discussed, and experienced their stories. I compared and contrasted these stories with each other and with the teacher education literature. Simultaneously, I connected this information to my own personal and professional experiences and further analyzed them with my critical friends. As a culmination, I reflected on these ideas in the context of teaching a course upon returning to my teacher education position in California. Throughout this self-study, I sought to align my knowledge about myself with my purpose as a teacher educator, with the goal of improving my practice and the program in which I work.

## My Autobiography

Although it may have been my first sentient acknowledgement of my heterosexuality, I know without a doubt that my list of 17 self-identifiers in that graduate class so many years ago included the term "South Dakotan". I have always found my Great Plains heritage to be a bit of a novelty and am always keen to share it whenever it comes up in conversation with new acquaintances. I am proud to share corny trivia about the World's Only Corn Palace in the town of Mitchell or to describe the unique, and sometimes bizarre, qualities of Midwestern food. I can rarely remember ever feeling particularly unworthy or inferior because I came from a small town in South Dakota.

I do not recall feeling marginalized growing up in my hometown of 12,000 people. In fact, as Catholics, I perceived our family within the upper status of our social groups. However, my first teaching position was in a town of 5,000 in nearby Iowa. I was teaching in a Catholic school where Catholics were the minority, and in fact, discriminated against by the majority who were Dutch Christian Reformed. Living in this small town was when I felt the most isolated – socially exposed as a schoolteacher, Othered as a Catholic, experiencing the fears associated with my first year

of teaching. All of these things probably contributed to a somewhat negative sense of identity, and perhaps my "ruralness", while living there but I never named it as such.

Based upon reflections on my own upbringing, I would define rurality by the strong connection to farming, bland food options, and the limitations caused by the distance from an urban setting. It is clear that I have spent most of my life not really thinking about my rural identity because I have often lived among or near other rural folks. When I have been in contexts that are decidedly not rural, I have worn my country identity as an idiosyncrasy.

Although it is one of the major deficits indicated in research about white female teachers from small towns (Villegas and Lucas 2002; Irvine 2003; Hyland 2005), my lack of experience with other cultures was not something I thought much about until I moved to where ethnic cultures were more diverse. I completed my doctorate in Madison, Wisconsin (population 250,000). Although it is the second largest city in Wisconsin and the capital, Madison still feels much like a small town. It was actually the University of Wisconsin's diverse student population (roughly 40,000) that made me feel rural. I remember sitting in classrooms with other graduate students from all over the world and thinking, I'm just a schoolteacher from South Dakota. Although I felt inexperienced and occasionally backward about issues of culture, I always spoke of my hometown and state with mostly affection. Perhaps the paradox of my experience is that many people of color feel Madison is not very diverse and experience discrimination as a result (Ladson-Billings 2014).

Living in California now, I find that I often reveal that I am from South Dakota. Occasionally I share a little trivia: the population of the state of South Dakota is the same as the city of San Francisco. Sometimes people muse that they have never met anyone from South Dakota before, and often people will share their story of driving across the state in some cross-country trip during their childhood. Where I live now in California could be considered rural/regional in that the population of Chico is 80,000, but agricultural land and small towns surround us. Sacramento, the closest city, is 90 miles away. Many of our university students come from the small towns in northern California.

Theobald and Wood (2010) explain that negative constructions of rurality go as far back as seventeenth-century Europe and have proliferated with globalization and mass media. In my written reflections on growing up and living in rural places, I do not detect any significant shame or embarrassment, but through the course of this self-study, I have acknowledged more thoughtfully how these experiences have shaped the way I understand other rural places.

## My Purpose of Teaching

I believe that teaching and learning occur through relationship and this is a reciprocal experience; I intend for my students and myself to learn from one another. I regularly engage in challenge-based community building activities with the purpose

of developing a sense of belonging and connection to one another because I believe relationship is at the heart of learning. These physical activities focus on creative thinking, problem solving, and communication and usually result in bonding among the classmates. My primary purpose as a teacher educator is to help students to understand and articulate their own purpose of teaching and to determine how they might serve all students equitably.

I aspire to constructivist pedagogy where I am able to scaffold students' prior knowledge and worldview with knowledge and understanding about the ways that different people experience the world. I also agree with Gay (2003, p. 5) who says that teachers need to "realize that there are no absolute guarantees and no one, regardless of how gifted and insightful a guide or teacher they may be, can ever determine the exact course of action for anyone else to take to be effective multicultural educators". I accept that I may never see the enacted pedagogies of the future teachers I teach, but I believe that this initial learning will provide the groundwork for continued progress toward a more just view of teaching.

Usually on the first day of every course I have a familiar anxiety, not from nerves or lack of confidence but from the anticipation of the emotional exhaustion that knowing my students will entail. I agree with Knapp (2014, p. 48) who says "teaching depends on establishing a person-to-person relationship with my students". I anticipate that I will need to regularly interact with each of them on a personal level, to attempt to learn from their personal experiences, to allow them to learn about me, and to continually use all of this information to connect course content to their lives. Then, I will need to reflect publicly on this so that they might learn how to do this with their future students, which will probably include some acknowledgement of how hard this is to do in the current education system. And, I will undoubtedly fail to do this sufficiently with any number of students, which will require additional reflection on my self and my teaching. I begin each semester knowing this process will be mentally and emotionally draining, and yet within 15 min of the beginning of the first class, I feel joyous and affirmed in my chosen profession. Theobald and Siskar (2014, pp. 356–7) argue that, "it is only through relationships and commitments that an individual can come to acquire any identity, unique or otherwise".

My major assignment as a teacher educator at California State University-Chico is in the Rural Teacher Residency (RTR) program in the School of Education. It is described, in part, on the university website in this way:

> The Rural Teacher Residency is a pathway that bundles the Master's in Education with a multiple subject or education specialist preliminary credential… The Rural Teacher Residency is a comprehensive partnership between the University's School of Education and four high-need rural school districts in northern California designed to improve the preparation of new teachers, to address the needs of rural schools, and to improve the achievement of all students to overcome the Achievement Gap (Rural Teacher Residency 2014).

As one of the programs within CSU-Chico's School of Education, RTR supports the School's mission statement which identifies us as a "learning community" and includes the statement: "We believe in the power of education to create a diverse, democratic, socially responsible society in which every student is valued" (School

of Education 2014). These values can be seen exhibited in my practice as I teach the foundations course of the RTR program which is steeped in the values of democratic practice and critical pedagogy.

The RTR program has been designed with one of the primary goals being to prepare teachers to work in rural settings. White and Reid (2008) found that rural communities benefit from teacher preparation that addresses the unique needs of rural schools. I had taught in the RTR program nearly 3 years before I carefully examined what preparation for rural settings might mean other than placing the residents in rural schools. Field placement was the only specifically 'rural' thing we did, though we were acknowledged to be one of very few residency programs in the U.S. designed specifically for the unique needs of rural settings, as opposed to the many programs occurring in urban environments (Teaching Residents at Teachers College Program in New York; Newark-Montclair Urban Teacher Residency in New Jersey).

I began to do some reading on the preparation of teachers for rural schools, and I slowly incorporated it into the foundations course early in the RTR program. I took sabbatical the fourth year into the life of the RTR program and commenced to look deeply at what else rural might mean for our program. I did this by moving to Australia where many of the rural education scholars whom I had read do their research. I sought out rural education scholar, Bernadette Walker-Gibbs who works at Deakin University, Warrnambool campus. I learned of the contributions that many rural scholars had made through The Renewing Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum (RRRTEC) supported by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (White et al. 2011). The RRRTEC website was created "to address this issue and to provide all teacher educators with the necessary resources to make more easily accessible, rural and regional teacher education research, curriculum resources and pedagogical strategies for their teacher education students" (http://www.rrrtec.net.au).

## Sabbatical as an Exercise in Mindfulness

One of the most profound benefits of a year long sabbatical is having the time to be mindful and notice. Gunaratana (2002) writes:

> Mindfulness is the observance of the basic nature of each passing phenomenon. It is watching the thing arising and passing away. It is seeing how that thing makes us feel and how we react to it. It is observing how it affects others… It is the wakeful experience of life, an alert participation in the ongoing process of living Mindfulness (section, para 14).

One of the reasons I choose to use the methods of self-study is because this process allows me to focus both on my personal and my professional self (Samaras and Freese 2011, p. 29). The ways in which I became more personally mindful during my sabbatical directly impacts my professional practice, so it benefits me to be consciously reflective about these experiences. As Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998, p. 236) note, the "study of one's self (…) draws on one's life, but it is more than that.

Self-study also involves a thoughtful look at text read, experiences had, people known and ideas considered. These are investigated for their connections with and the relationships to practice as a teacher educator".

Certainly much of my time in Australia was spent noticing the birds, the plants, the new and interesting cakes, but it was this act of observing the daily experiences that I could translate into my professional noticing as well. I could take time to notice how Australian politicians talk about rural communities (which I perceived to be significantly more than in the US), how my urban and rural colleagues talk about small town Australia, and how it feels to learn to be a new member of a community. This habit of mindfulness is nurtured when one has the time and inclination to be present each day and to connect to one's place. Although I intellectually understood this practice and believed in the benefits of it, I have never been able to engage in it in such a focused and sustained way as I did during my sabbatical.

Gruenewald (2003, p. 627) contends that, "Becoming aware of social places as cultural products requires that we bring them into our awareness for conscious reflection and unpack their particular cultural meanings". My partner and I chose to live in a smaller town rather than Melbourne because we wanted the opportunity to become a member of a community and to develop a strong sense of place by engaging regularly with local activities. We opted for a yearlong sabbatical rather than the 3-month option, as we felt that amount of time would be necessary for us to become rooted in our experience. Humanistic geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan (cited in Hess 2014, p. 115) writes:

> Abstract knowledge about a place can be acquired in short order if one is diligent … but the 'feel' of a place takes longer to acquire – it is made up of experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and over the span of years. It is a unique blend of sights, sounds and smells, a unique harmony of natural and artificial rhythms such as times of sunrise and sunset, of work and play. The feel of a place is registered in one's muscles and bones. A sailor has a recognizable style of walking because his posture is adapted to the plunging deck of a boat in high sea…it takes time. It is a subconscious kind of knowing.

When I asked Kristy Hess, Deakin University Lecturer who studies the role of local journalism, if I would be considered a 'local' in Warrnambool after a year of living there, she wrote, "I would suggest that while you might not be a 'local,' your 'sense of place' might extend to the Warrnambool area after living and breathing the place for a while now and that means picking up some of the subtleties associated with local habitus" (K. Hess, personal communication, February 12, 2014). In fact, in many small communities to become a local may take many years or even generations.

Although we did not have the luxury of many years in our new community, we did take every opportunity to learn the sights, sounds, and smells of our new home. We developed a slower rhythm of life, as we walked the beach regularly, each time seeing it anew. I began painting more which resulted in me more carefully noticing the reflections on the water, the curves of a wave, or the colors of the plants. Within me awoke a keen interest in bird watching (and listening), which meant, in part, that I have many blurry pictures of tree branches. It is the warble of the Australian Magpie that I miss most.

My partner and I regularly reflected on our experiences on a blog we set up for friends and family back home. I believe this commitment to blog posts increased our attention to our sense of place as we were deliberately relaying our experiences through writing and photography, often in a way that sought to make our subconscious experience even more conscious. It also meant that we talked with one another more about our experiences as we critiqued one another's writing and prepared it for the blog. Even as our friends and families responded to our blog posts, it sometimes caused me to think in new ways about our experiences.

One of the potential hazards of our blog writing experience is perhaps a tendency to romanticize the experience of living in rural Australia. This act of romanticization is similar to what might cause people to seek out a "sea change" or "tree change" (Ryan 2013). These terms have been used to describe the phenomenon in Australia where people are drawn to leave the city for simpler lives at the coast or in the country.

As part of my investigations about the perceptions of rurality in Australia, I talked with Monique Bowley, the president of a local chapter of the South Australia Country Women's Association. I was interested in how members of this organization might think about being identified as 'country women' who live in Adelaide, with a population over a million yet often described as "a big country town". Monique told me that many of the members in her chapter are interested in reconnecting to the romantic ideals and simple notions of country living such as preserving jam and baking sponge cake. We discussed the deficit connotations people often ascribe to being rural, and Monique noted that her organization was hoping to capitalize on the more idealistic views of country, to live a slower pace of life, and to connect to one another in meaningful ways (M. Bowley, personal communication, December 10, 2013).

Halfacree (cited in Neal and Neal 2013, p. 61) would argue that these idealistic notions might be described as an "effaced rural". Halfacree identifies this type of rurality as hollowed out by capitalism, only existing and sustained by performances of rurality, or by living in the countryside in ways which are disconnected from the previous codependent relationships between those living in the countryside and land, nature, locality and the environment".

Having moved to a place for a predetermined amount of time for a sabbatical certainly affected the way we viewed our experiences. The things that might be frustrating in the long term, such as a 4-hour train trip to an airport, were entertaining in the short term. While our personal experiences of bush walking and wallaby spotting might have contributed to some idealistic notions about living rurally, they also helped me to practice the personal process of mindfulness, which I was able to translate later to a professional purpose.

Regardless of the potential romanticization of my experience "downunder", the time and opportunity to slow down and connect to the people and places of our community enabled me to think carefully about the ways in which teachers might learn to be a part of a community in order that they might work in solidarity with those who experience inequity and lack of relevance as a result of their being positioned as rural. The two themes of community and place emerged from my

experiences in Australia so I sought out those themes in the data from my RTR program and initiated communications with program participants in California around these topics. Loughran (2007, p. 12) notes that, "although the term self-study suggests a singular approach to researching practice, the reality is that self-studies are dramatically strengthened by drawing on alternative perspectives and reframing of situations, [and] thus data, ideas, and input that necessitate moving beyond the self". What follows are discussions about the themes that interweave my experiences in Australia, my review of the rural education literature, and my dialogues with current and past Rural Teacher Residency participants.

## Experiencing Community

Rural education researchers have written extensively about the importance of community. In thinking about what it means to become part of a rural community, I explored how various rural scholars describe the concept. Nisbet (cited in Howley and Howley 2010, p. 36) writes, "One well-known account of community contrasts it with society: in community humans remain together despite their differences, whereas in society humans remain separate despite their commonalities". This conception of community is useful because it explains that the focus in community is mutual interdependence whereas the priority in society is mutual independence.

Other definitions of community focus on the goals of those within the group. Howley and Howley (2010, p. 36) describe the concept of community in three ways:

1. the everyday, local life-world of important meaning that are constructed in a particular place;
2. the ideal of a locally constructed common good; and
3. an indeterminate group of people in a place who engage the project of constructing the common good in a way that reflects but also redefines important local meanings".

The focus here is on a common good, established and pursued by a group of people in a local place. Theobald and Siskar (2014, p. 341) extend on the idea of a community's goal being one of the common good when they write, "the degree to which a particular place in fact constitutes a community depends not on the number of people living in close proximity to one another, but on the amount of life circumstances that are shared".

Inherent in many other definitions of community is the consideration of difference or diversity. Theobald and Siskar (2014, p. 342) note, "Because diversity seems to celebrate differences and community seems to promote commonality, the two concepts are often thought to be at odds with one another". In an attempt to "prove" this theory of incompatibility, Neal and Neal (2013) ran computer modeling of different fictional neighborhoods and, after millions of trials, consistently found the same thing: The more integrated a neighborhood is, the less socially cohesive it becomes, and vice versa. The reason for this conclusion has to do with how people form

relationships. Neal and Neal say people usually develop relationships with others who are close rather than far away, and similar rather than different from themselves (be it through race, religion, social class, etc.). Because these two qualities have a negative correlation, Neal and Neal conclude that perhaps the goal should not be high levels of either one, but finding the balance of both a respect for diversity and a sense of community in a particular place.

In practice, Neal and Neal's (2013) suggested approach might look like people in a community actively choosing relationships with people who are dissimilar but with a shared similar goal, for example, people from different religious backgrounds working together to address a local concern. This application would surely be achieved through a community focus on place-conscious education (Knapp 2014). It might also mean that those who prefer tight social networks, usually those with a high degree of social capital with which to attain those networks, may need to choose to accept what they might perceive as a slightly different 'sense of belonging' with those in their community.

Cheryl (student names are pseudonyms), a previous graduate of the Rural Teacher Residency Program in Chico, accepted a job in rural California as her first teaching position. She has found the limited resources and services to be challenging, but she feels that the community has embraced her enthusiastically. This encouraging reception may be related to the fact that she is coming to the community as a teacher, a position often well respected in rural communities (Kline et al. 2013). This status can give a person an imbedded connection and role within the community, Cheryl states that:

> I think rural schools, or at least this one, need what we thought they needed. I think we made good choices. I think it boils down to, as I said, seeing the role of a teacher as a community role, seeing the school as a community site, courting the Latino community and bridging communities, having a big tool bag and being educated and nimble about responding to individual student needs as much as possible in a multi-student classroom, being a passionate professional. Being part of the solutions. (Cheryl, Personal communication, November 26, 2013).

Cheryl joined the English Learner Advisory Committee, built relationships with the Latino/a community, and at the request of her students' parents, began an adult education class for native Spanish speakers. Cheryl is working alongside people who are from different backgrounds than her self in order to address a shared local need that came from the Latino/a community. This is perhaps working toward the type of liberating pedagogy Freire (1970) writes about.

During our yearlong sabbatical in Australia, my partner and I attended various local events so that we might better know our community. Some of the events we attended were project presentations being made by young adult students in the VCAL (Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning) program at one of our local tertiary institutions. (VCAL is similar to the General Educational Development (GED) program in the U.S.). One of the groups of students conducted interviews with recent immigrants to the local area and compiled them in a film called *From There to Here*. Most of the immigrants in the video expressed appreciation for living in the Warrnambool area and noted the benefits of being in that community, though it was clear that one of the women from Cameroon who lived in a smaller nearby town felt isolated because of the small population and their lack of exposure to diversity.

In the VCAL students' video Otha Akoch, a South Sudanese immigrant of 10 years, noted, “The place that you are, you belong to that place.” I invited Otha to have coffee and to tell me more about how he experienced his new community relative to his homeland. Although a STATT (2012) report on the settlement experiences of people from South Sudan in Australia concludes that immigrants more commonly experienced isolation, perceptions of discrimination, and employment frustrations in rural areas, Otha told me that the people of Warrnambool have been very welcoming to him and his family. He added that, “it is not enough for a community to welcome you – you have to show that you belong there as well.” Otha told me it is important to be an active participant in your sense of belonging in a place, that one should take the initiative and lead others in that process of belonging (O. Akoch, personal communication, March 10, 2014).

Otha invited my partner and me to a fundraiser for some South Sudanese families who were suffering from the ravages of war. While sitting at the long tables in the parish hall, I met a woman with whom I chatted only briefly. She mentioned to me that she had moved with her family to Warrnambool from Melbourne many years prior, and I asked her how she liked it. She talked of how she was drawn to the beauty of the town and coast, but when they got there it was very difficult to make friends and fit into the community. As a Catholic schoolteacher, she learned that her students were part of big families and so she assumed they did not need any more friends. She appeared to be of European descent; she noted it was not a very diverse town and she missed the many cultures of the city. She said it was 5 years before she made friends and felt part of the community. This woman who I met at a fundraiser for African refugees seemed to have been seeking that balance of community and diversity that Neal and Neal (2013) have suggested.

Although I have always prioritized the process of building community in my teaching practice, I had done so with some amount of naiveté. A major, albeit somewhat obvious, realization for me during my sabbatical was that community building is not done in a vacuum. How people in a community connect to each other in one place will look and feel different than in another place because places help to shape who we are. Chen, Orum and Paulsen (2013, p. 8) agree that, “places provide us with a sense of who we are, and we may attach the meanings associated with a place to ourselves”.

## Connecting to Place

I would like to acknowledge the Mechoopda people who are the traditional custodians of the land on which my California State University is built as well as the Gunditjmara people who were the original custodians of the Australian land where I lived during my sabbatical. I would also like to pay my respect to the Elders past and present of any indigenous peoples who sacrificed so that I might live in those places (Adapted from Protocols for Recognizing Traditional Owners 2014).

The above formal Acknowledgement of Country is similar to the Australian Government's protocol that I experienced at many different events during my sabbatical in Australia. Although it is sometimes critiqued as tokenistic, in my experience it was a tangible and a visceral reminder of the history of the place we were in. Each time I experienced a Welcome to Country performed by the traditional people of the land, it served to ground me to that particular place in a way I have never experienced. An Acknowledgement of Country, performed by those who are not indigenous custodians, was not usually as culturally rich as Welcomes, however it indicates to me that those who are conducting it are keen to remind everyone present of the place we inhabit.

"A theory of place that is concerned with the quality of human-world relationships must first acknowledge that places themselves have something to say" (Gruenewald 2003, p. 624). These ways of thinking about place have reminded me of the importance of engaging future teachers in learning about and understanding the qualities that make up the places where their students live. As part of my self-study, I reached out to both people in our Australian community and Rural Teacher Residency participants in California to better understand how they experienced their places.

My partner and I met many wonderful people in our local Australian community as we sought to connect to that place. I often engaged in dialogue with other people around topics related to rural identity, community, and sense of place. Occasionally, they would even agree to read an article so we could discuss my analysis of it. I had engaged in several conversations with our friend Barry Peters, musician and community advocate, about the importance of place. Although not indigenous himself, Barry has had some experience working with groups of indigenous and non-indigenous youth. He was the first to teach us about Aboriginal dance and the importance of bare feet touching the soil to confirm one's place and space on the earth. When I asked Barry to give me his analysis on an article about place-conscious education, he objected to the fact that this particular author did not once reference "place" as the ground, the soil, the land to which we are all inextricably linked - the land that gives us life and the land that we are destroying by our over-living. Barry wrote to me, "This of course lies at the very heart of your journey and all of the identity crisis in western culture - having separated ourselves from the earth, we are conned into travelling and scouring and rummaging through every neighborhood, every library and every possible work locker looking for 'who we are,' but we simply cannot know this until we are 'known' by the land on which we live" (B. Peters, personal communication, March 17, 2014).

Deborah Bird Rose, in her book *Nourishing Terrains*: *Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness* (1996, p. 7), agrees with how Barry characterized the Australian indigenous community's profound connection to the land when she writes:

> Country is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imagined or represented, it is lived in and lived with… People talk about country in the same way they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel for country, and long for country.

Jay Arthur, an Aboriginal language scholar, says, “The words that Aboriginal people use about country express a living relationship (…) For many Indigenous Australians, person and place, or ‘country,’ are virtually interchangeable” (cited in Nicholls 2014, Dreaming Cartography section, para 12). Although not all indigenous Australians live rurally, I did learn a great deal about how traditional Aboriginal culture is often expressed through its connection to the land as a place.

The concept of place figures prominently in the artwork of Tracy Roach, an indigenous art teacher at a local school where I volunteered in Australia. Tracy had been raised by a white foster family in a suburb of Melbourne but began discovering her Gunditjmara family when she turned 17. Tracy described her life story to me through a piece of her art. She traced the images with her finger, telling me how each circle represented each of the places she had been in her life, but that all of them led to the center image of Framlingham Aboriginal Community, the place of her birth, the place of her people, the place she always finds herself returning to. Tracy told a group of primary students that she always returns to “Fram” to connect to her culture and to hear the dreamtime stories from her auntie.

In reference to the Western Apache in the United States, Basso (cited in Gruenewald 2003, p. 626) writes, “place roots individuals in the social and cultural soils from which they have sprung together, holding them there in the grip of a shared identity, a localized version of selfhood (…) selfhood and place-hood are completely intertwined”. It is important to remember the ways in which colonization of places has impacted the identities of indigenous peoples and their oppressors all over the world. Colonialism has left legacies that continue to shape the experiences of the privileged and the marginalized in any place.

When I asked four teaching residents at one site in our Rural Teacher Residency program how their students connected to identity and place in their settings, they noted that the students were usually the ones to connect the classroom content to their life experiences. The students drew upon their own interests and connections with activities such as hunting, dirt biking, and raising animals. One RTR resident noted that it was generally the students trying to push their own experiences into the conversations, supplementing their own instruction so to speak (Angie, personal communication, February 7, 2014). Community values relating to religiosity permeated some of these residents’ experiences in the school, however they observed this was perhaps a conflicted source of connection to place because not all teachers or students shared these values and one resident felt these values competed with broader democratic values because he felt the religious values limited representation of diverse views.

Theobald and Howley (1998, p. 1) argue that “rural communities need rural teachers who can ‘ground’ traditional school subjects in local realities and dilemmas and at the same time fashion instructional approaches consonant with larger intellectual, ethical, and social purposes”. This may prove difficult for some teachers whose school communities have conflicting community values or who face significant and profound ethical and social challenges.

One of the participating districts in the Rural Teacher Residency has a high percentage of students who have family members who are imprisoned. When I asked Wanda, one of the teaching residents there, what a place teaches us about our possibilities, she responded in this way:

> Many of my students have at least one parent in jail or have a close family member in jail. When my students talk about jail, it is as if it is a societal norm for them. It is just a normal part of their existence and no big deal to go to jail. The simple fact that they are surrounded by so many families in the same situation makes their living situations a common occurrence within the community… My action research is on writing personal narratives, which has been a somewhat difficult process. I wanted to incorporate their experiences into their writing. We met in small groups and discussed small moments in their lives. They love being able to express themselves, but I was having a mini heart attack because the stories were about abuse and neglect. I came to the realization that this may be why teachers shy away from the personal connections (Wanda, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

As a resident teacher, Wanda is attempting to connect new content to background knowledge and is building on the students' experiences through her teaching of narrative writing. In this way she is supporting what Somerville et al. (2009, p. 6) contend, that place and identities are known and transformed through place making and story-telling. Wanda concludes:

> Although I have had to report a few things, I came to the realization that these are their stories, and writing can be a great outlet for them. They want to talk about it and it's what is on their mind, so who am I to say they have to write a funny personal narrative (Wanda, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

Places can present opportunities for conflicting or challenging perspectives, as in the examples above, or they might not elicit any awareness at all. Sue, an RTR graduate from 2 years ago wrote:

> I get the impression that many students feel neutral at best about where we are… People aren't entirely negative about [our town] all of the time, but I can't remember ever hearing anyone speak about it with much enthusiasm or pride. Few (maybe two?) of our school's teachers actually live in [our town], and the experience of living in [our town] doesn't come up much in conversation (Sue, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

Gruenewald (2003, p. 620) suggests rural education can be enhanced by place-conscious pedagogy because it "becomes more relevant to the lived experience of students and teachers, and accountability is reconceptualized so that places matter to educators, students, and citizens in tangible ways… furthermore, it aims to enlist teachers and students in the firsthand experience of local life and in the political process of understanding and shaping what happens there". Place-conscious education can help students and teachers to develop connections to places that help them to understand that they all contribute to making places what they are. "from the perspective of democratic education, schools must provide opportunities for students to participate meaningfully in the process of place making, that is, in the process of shaping what our places will become" (Gruenewald 2003, p. 627).

## Implications for My Practice and Rural Teacher Education

This study was intended to examine to what extent my identification as "rural" might contribute to my ability to work in solidarity with those who experience inequity or lack of relevance as a result of their positioning as rural. I had thought a stronger sense of this identity might better connect me as an ally to other rural folks. As I ended my yearlong sabbatical in Australia, I concluded that I have not related personally to deficit constructions of rural, probably because other factors of privilege moderated any negative experiences I might have had. Instead, I maintain a hopeful view about the promise and opportunity of what rural might offer. Mostly I learned about taking a step back and thinking about the ways in which I, and my resident teachers, connected to the communities in which we worked. My journey was not about more clearly defining myself as rural per se, but it was about these rural communities, the places where the young students lived, where our resident teachers would teach, and with whom our faculty partnered.

As my year in Australia came to a close, I prepared to teach my first class back in California. The foundations course is titled Critical Perspectives in Education and it is the students' very first course for the Rural Teacher Residency. I built into my course new content specifically about understanding community and developing a sense of place. I had previously decided to use Rural Education for the Twenty-First Century (Schafft and Jackson 2010) as one of the required texts in my course, but as I was putting the book on my syllabus, I noticed the subtitle of this text was: Identity, Place, and Community in a Globalizing World. It is no coincidence that the themes from my sabbatical self-study were those that were already present in some of my course materials, but it required me to live those themes in a new space in order to know them in a deeper way.

In this Critical Perspectives course, I have regularly had students create a "Where I'm From" poem to get to know one another and for me to learn about them. I have traditionally used a common formula for the poem that highlights concrete aspects, such as objects, food, and people in their childhood home. I did two things differently this time; I changed the prompts for the poem to focus on more abstract experiences of place such as emotions, not requiring the place to be from their childhood, and I created my own poem as a model. The result was that the poems were less formulaic and our discussions about their places were more dynamic. One student focused on the experiences he had on his childhood bike and where ever he was on his bike was where he felt most happy. One woman wrote about walking among the native plants of riparian environments and how she considered herself one of them. A woman from Virginia connected her childhood experiences to the infamous historical places of the American South. These poems about place revealed identity in ways I had not experienced in previous courses. We discussed the importance of tying this reflection on their place to the communities they would study and soon be assigned for their teaching residency. Gruenewald (2003, p. 622) suggests that an understanding of place is "key to understanding the nature of our relationships with each other and the world".

A major assignment of this Critical Perspectives course is to, as a group, conduct a community study of the town where they will spend their residency. As part of this project, the group must spend time in the community, walking the area nearest to their schools, creating a map designating features of the community, and researching information about the school. After having spent a year becoming a member of a new community myself, I redesigned the descriptions of the assignment to include additional activities that required them to be more present in the places and connect to people outside of the school community. One part of the assignment was for each group member to contact a local business, agency, or organization that partners with the school and to interview person from there. In addition, I added that they must spend time talking with people from the community in the park, the library, or a local café. I asked the students to try to learn about the community from those who live there, even if they themselves lived locally (two students did). I reminded them to be mindful as they experienced the community, to imagine it through the eyes of someone who was from there.

During the course I introduced the residents to the concept of place-conscious education and we began to discuss potential activities they might conduct in their placement communities based on the unique qualities of the area. "Learning to listen to what places are telling us – and to respond as informed, engaged citizens – this is the pedagogical challenge of place-conscious education" (Gruenewald 2003, p. 645).

When these residents reported on their visits to their placement communities, they spoke much more than students past about how they interacted with locals on the street or in nearby businesses. They received a variety of both encouraging and discouraging responses to their inquiries, but there was a greater sense of connection to place in the conversation than in years past. The students critiqued each other's use of deficit language and struggled to try to connect to places about which they had some prejudgments. We spent a significant amount of time deconstructing their personal frames of reference (Jackson 2011) that shape the ways they understood what they saw in these rural communities and the students challenged themselves to stay open to this new lens. Somerville et al. (2009, p. 9) remind us that, "Changing our relationship to places means changing the stories we tell about places".

Loughran (2007) contends that telling a story about one's practice itself does not constitute self-study research, but self-study must entail knowledge generation. The work I had done while on sabbatical contributed to changes in my summer course content, presentation, and evaluation. More than just changes to assignments, this knowledge about how community and place influence one another and the ways we understand teaching, will continue to inform my practice in the RTR program throughout the year and into the ways we structure the program in the future. This study also serves to provide an example of rural self-study within the fields of both self-study and rural education scholarship. This work has the potential to inform the ways teacher educators who serve rural communities might begin to think about how rural places shape the ways they develop partnerships with local districts and to continue to resist the negative constructions of rural life.

## Future Directions

In addition to simply altering assignment tasks and increasing class discussions, I will continue to focus on place and community with residents, mentors, and faculty in the Rural Teacher Residency program. I will repeatedly remind all of us to stay present and be mindful about our connections with one another and with our place(s). I will strive to help residents and mentors to think about the ways place-conscious education can empower students in rural settings to connect to their community in ways that challenge rural stereotypes and honor their presence there. Gruenewald (2003, p. 627) advises that, "becoming aware of social places as cultural products requires that we bring them into our awareness for conscious reflection and unpack their particular cultural meanings. Such is the educative potential of place-conscious education".

Although I continue to improve the way I teach my students these skills, I still have a long way to go in terms of how I personally connect to communities and places in a way that I can act in solidarity with those who live there and work against the inequities they experience. As part of my growth in this area, I will continue to explore the theories of place and space (de Certeau 1984; Somerville et al. 2009; Walker-Gibbs 2012) and learn how the changing of places into spaces has the potential to challenge and even transform power. "Through its focus on the mutual constitution of bodies, identities, histories, spaces and places, place studies offers a conceptual tool for important cultural transformations" (Somerville et al. 2009, p. 7).

Self-study scholarship allows me to develop both my personal and my professional self (Samaras and Freese 2011, p. 29). I seek in both my professional and personal life a balance of respect for diversity and a strong sense of community. I will continue to be mindful about how to pursue opportunities to work in non-colonialist ways with people from different backgrounds than myself on issues of local concern.

Finally, I would be remiss to not mention the personal benefit of mindfulness, which I practiced with greater intent on my sabbatical. The profession of teaching has become a battle ground where defending ourselves against the destruction of democratic and public schooling has become arduous and painful work. Slowing down, paying attention, and connecting to place are mindsets I will continue to employ in order to mentally survive and persist in the face of the continued neoliberal reforms in education.

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# A Road Less Travelled: Becoming a *Rural* Teacher Educator

**Simone White**

## Introduction

Examining the identity, professional learning and work of teacher educators is a relatively new but growing research field (Murray and Male 2005; Boyd et al. 2011). As a greater focus on the importance of teachers' impact on student learning emerges in the literature, so too does the focus on those who prepare the teachers: the teacher educators (Cochran-Smith 2003; Murray and Male 2005; Van der Klink and Swennen 2009). Cochran-Smith (2003, p. 6) for example calls teacher educators, "linchpins in educational reforms" and calls for more attention to what teachers of teachers themselves need to know, and what institutional supports need to be in place in order to meet the complex demands of preparing teachers for the twenty-first century.

Much of the teacher educator studies (See for example Zeichner 2005; Murray and Male 2005; Loughran and Russell 2002; Mayer et al. 2011; Kosnik et al. 2011) to date have focused on research questions such as: What is the role and work of teacher educators? Who becomes a teacher educator? And what are the professional learning needs of teacher educators? These studies are built on the premise that by shining a light on understanding more about teacher educators' identities, knowledge base, professional learning needs and career trajectories, we may better support in turn the education of future teachers. The work I share in this chapter also seeks to examine these questions but for each one I seek to add the 'rural' to further explore and consider the professional learning of becoming a *rural* teacher educator.

Rural (teacher) education is another under theorised but growing research field (see Green and Reid 2004; Roberts 2005; Halsey 2005; White and Reid 2008; Reid

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A.K. Schulte, B. Walker-Gibbs (eds.), *Self-studies in Rural Teacher Education*, Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices 14,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-17488-4_3

et al. 2013; Green and Corbett 2013; White and Corbett 2014). These studies argue the importance of focusing on the education needs of rural students, their families and school communities to identify key aspects about the best ways to re-design teacher education to better prepare teachers to work *in* and *for* rural places (Green and Reid 2004). Studies have identified key links between the sustainability of rural communities and teacher preparation, finding that rural communities stand to benefit from teacher education curriculum that is inclusive of rural education needs (White and Reid 2008). In earlier work (White 2010) I argued that the relationships between rural schools and local communities are reciprocal, whereby successes in the areas of rural leadership and community collaboration can in turn inform teacher education reform.

In this chapter I combine these two research fields further using what I have termed an 'expanded' self-study inquiry. Namely, a self-study that spans a number of years and that revisits key research themes to see, from another vantage point, what relevance and impact they have may have for the future.

## Using an Expanded Self-Study to Improve Teacher Education

I do this work by drawing from what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) describe as an 'inquiry stance'. Through a recursive self-study writing process, I examine my own professional learning journey from beginning teacher to teacher educator and in reflection, becoming a *rural* teacher educator. Self-study and teacher education research have both been critiqued for being too small, too self-focused to make any real difference. Loughran (2002) in his chapter titled *Understanding self-study* counters this view and notes:

> For teacher education to become better equipped to respond to the expectations placed before it, there is a realisation that there must be change by teacher educators themselves before there can be genuine educational change. In essence, it can be argued that by focusing on personal practice and experience, teacher educators inquiring into their practice can lead to a better understanding of the complexities of teaching and learning – for themselves and their students. (p. 242).

Self-study research collectively is a large and influential research field informing teacher education and professional learning. Numerous self-study research projects have contributed significantly to understanding the pedagogy of teacher education (Loughran and Russell 2002; Loughran 2006) and have important implications for those who are the subjects of the researchers, namely teachers and teacher educators. Feiman-Nemser and Floden (cited in Loughran and Russell 2002, p. 242), highlighted the importance of the individual or the self in research *on* practice as important because the knowledge of teachers is an important source of insights for the improvement of teaching. The same can be said of teacher educators.

In examining my experience of beginning teaching in a small rural community, a narrative self-study approach was used because both self-study and narrative are useful tools to excavate 'lived experience' (van Manen 1991). As Loughran (2002)

describes, self-study can be a powerful tool for teacher educators to "look into their practice with new eyes" (p. 242) in order to see other possibilities of how teacher educators can better understand teaching and learning about teaching. Looking into one's practice requires a step back from the personal experience and an inquiring lens into one's own professional practice. I used this approach in my doctoral research and again now as an experienced teacher educator. Many researchers using self-study, describe it as a way of overcoming the 'experience barrier' (Russell 1995) and of enabling separation of the experience and the self. It is a process of examining the personal experience and what you can learn about your practice and in turn your own professional learning.

This chapter is an attempt to do this important work and further contribute to the field of teacher educator professional learning and rural education from the standpoint of becoming a *rural* teacher educator. I seek to uncover a better understanding of the ways in which 'rural' can be framed as important work for all teacher educators, not simply those who may live in rural communities. Some may say this work is of course generic and question the need for the addition of the rural focus. I explain below why 'adding the rural' is key and why I emphasise the importance of becoming a *rural* teacher educator for all teacher educators.

## Adding the Rural

Increasingly the term 'rural' is being used as an adjective to further frame, reframe and redefine aspects such as teaching and schooling and even more recently research, teacher education and in this chapter, teacher educators. Bill Green (2013) in his chapter *Literacy*, *Rurality*, *Education*: *A partial mapping* in the book *Rethinking Rural Literacies*: *Transnational perspectives* posed the question of why add the rural? And, "what does the adjective 'rural' do?" (p. 17). He explains that if we do not consider the notions of 'rurality' then it can become something of a blind spot. As I note with Michael Corbett and colleagues (White and Corbett 2014), the addition of 'rural' to terms such as teaching, research and teacher education seeks to work against often taken for granted assumptions of a 'metro-urban normative approach' (Green 2013) to all aspects of education and as a consequence that often positions rural students, their families, schools and communities as invisible (White and Corbett 2014).

By adding the adjective 'rural' to teacher education and teacher educators, I seek like others (see Green and Corbett 2013) to deliberately trouble and disrupt the 'one size fits all approach' to being a teacher educator and teacher preparation that currently exists in most teacher education programs and which has seen by default what Atkin (2003, p. 515) describes as an:

> Urban agenda rolled out across the countryside, with issues of equity and access rather than appropriateness dominating the discourse. It is as if rural society is to be 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).

### *A Rural Standpoint*

Adding 'rural' also serves another purpose; it further defines us and provides a different perspective and standpoint. I use the term 'standpoint' drawing from the work of Roberts (2014) in his chapter, *Researching from the standpoint of the rural* here to mean the intersection of a person's various positions, such as gender, class, ethnicity and rurality, and how these combine to influence how one might see the world. I also use the term drawing from the work of Sher and Sher (1994) who note a rural standpoint refers to approaching one's research and scholarship from a position that rural people and communities really matter. This is important because it is inclusive and invites all teacher educators no matter where they might be physically located to take up the notion of becoming a *rural* teacher educator. Roberts (2014) notes, that appending such an adjective as rural is valuable "as it signals a group or perspective that has not previously been identified or able to speak on its own terms, and thus has remained outside knowledge production" (p. 141). Like Sher and Sher (1994), he further reminds us that 'standpoint' theory does not simply imply that the researcher must in some way have a lived or organic affinity with the perspective. Adopting a 'rural' standpoint for example is not exclusive to someone with extensive rural experience or heritage. Instead, as Reid and Green (2009) and White and Corbett (2014) suggest standpoint helps us utilise knowledge produced *in*, *f*or and *with* those we research, in this case as a teacher educator for rural teachers, student's, schools and communities.

Increasingly, I have reflected on the importance of 'adding the rural' to further identify the teacher education research work I do and thinking of my work from the standpoint as a *rural* teacher educator. So this begs the question how might one become a *rural* teacher educator and how does adding the adjective re-shape, re-position or re-define my own research work? I have titled this chapter, *A road less travelled*: *Becoming a rural teacher educator*, because I wanted to explore this question through my own self-study research and by endeavouring to bring together and document my own lived experiences as beginning teacher working and living in a small rural community, novice teacher educator and now experienced teacher educator combined with other empirical studies. The notion of 'becoming' also draws from what Jenkins (2008) defines as identity construction as an active, intentional, continuous process that is never complete but rather a perpetual path of becoming.

Before I further delve into my self-study research, I feel it necessary to raise the serious implications of not adding the 'rural' focus to the teacher education work we do.

## Why Adding the Rural Matters?

In my own country of Australia, with more than one third of our population who live 'beyond the metropolis', the further away from a major capital city the School is located, the more likely it is harder to staff (Halsey 2005; Roberts 2005; White and

Kline 2012b). This has dire implications for rural students, their families and school communities. As most recently reported by Lamb, Glover and Walstab (2014) comparing findings to the earlier work of Karmel (1973), disturbingly, nothing much has changed between the two studies. Their findings indicated that Australian rural communities continue to suffer aspects of educational disadvantage including higher teacher turnover, low retention rates, less confidence in the benefits of education, limited cultural facilities in the community, lack of employment opportunities for school completers, and a less relevant curriculum. These combined continue to lead to lower levels of attainment and opportunity for our rural students.

Australia's rural schools are still staffed with younger, inexperienced teachers who do not appear to stay long (Roberts 2005) or as in recent studies indicate employment conditions are not favourable for continuity with many on contract or placed in uncertain sessional positions (Mayer et al. 2014). These new teachers are typically seeking employment in the beginning phases of their teaching career with some Australian States and Territories providing particular incentives for early career teachers to take up a rural position but with not necessarily the appropriate induction and mentoring support (Halsey 2005; Roberts 2005; Mayer et al. 2014). As O'Brien et al. (2008, p. 13) found, burnout of beginning teacher's continues as a common problem that "not only has a devastating influence on the personal lives of beginning teachers and their families but the associated attrition also negatively impinges on the entire teaching profession".

While on the one hand rural schools churn through more inexperienced teachers, there also exists a staffing population who have remained in the same school for very long periods of time with many describing limited opportunities for renewal, professional learning or career progression (Starr and White 2008). While studies have suggested that learner outcomes are more positively influenced by teacher retention, ongoing professional learning, renewal and stability (Page 2006; Roberts 2005), it appears for many Australian rural school students they are caught in the middle. The consequences on student learning of having these two sets of teacher workforce demographics needs further investigation and I suggest teacher education needs to play a far greater role in supporting both these groups (novice and experienced).

As cited by Kline et al. (2013) the rural staffing issues in Australia are also reflected in studies in other countries. For example, a study by Brill and McCartney (2008) in California found that 33 % of teachers leave within their first 3 years and 46 % within 5 years of graduating. These figures are relatively high. Rural schools in the United States also appear to have higher levels of inexperienced teachers (Monk 2007).

Adding the rural, in short, matters indeed. It matters to students, to teachers and it needs to matter to teacher educators and teacher education. In this next section I seek to tease out the literature into teacher educators' professional learning briefly in preparation to discuss the notion of adding the rural to teacher education and improving the preparation of teachers working in rural communities.

## Teacher Educators' Work

As Bullock (2007 p. 292) notes, "Learning to teach teachers is a complicated process that requires a teacher educator to confront and re-examine his or her prior assumptions about teaching and learning while constructing a pedagogy of teacher education". Studies have shown that teacher educators are in a rather unique position as their work involves being role models for the actual practice of the teaching profession. As Korthagen, Loughran and Lunenberg (2005, p. 111) describe, "Teacher educators, whether intentionally or not, teach their students as well as teach about teaching". The work of teaching *to* students as we teach *about* teaching, often *as* we teach as Loughran (2006) notes is a difficult task for the most experienced teacher educator, let alone a novice. Studies, such as Murray and Male (2005) have shown that there is little in the way of induction, preparation or professional development for teacher educators in this unique role. If we accept that teacher educators' work involves teaching *to* and teaching *about* teaching, often simultaneously, then any induction or professional learning model must likewise support an awareness and understanding of this dual relational process and practice.

One strategy offered by Zeichner's (2005) story of *Becoming a teacher educator: a personal perspective* is to try to make more visible to the students the deliberations about a teacher educator's work. He calls for those who work in teacher education programs "to think consciously about their role as teacher educators and engage in the same sort of self-study and critique of their practice as they ask their students to do in school classrooms" and "to do their work in teacher education with more conscious links to the programs in which they teach" (Zeichner 2005, p. 123). Likewise, Murray and Male (2005, p. 139) suggest teacher educators need to develop a process of making their personal assumptions, beliefs and practices which make the individual a successful practitioner in schools explicit and open to analysis.

Making this process explicit, however, is vexed due to what Myers and Simpson (cited in Loughran 2006, p. 30) describe as a 'personalised, professional set of knowledge, skills and values' that is dependent on what an individual sees as important to his or her practice over time. It is this very personal reflection on one's professional practice and making it explicit to ourselves and our students, however that I argue, is required for teacher educators' professional learning and is in keeping with the dual relational process of 'teaching about, while teaching to' work required of all teacher educators.

For teacher educators, making their personal assumptions, beliefs and practices explicit and open to analysis requires a separation process, a split screen analogy if you will, of making visible what one draws from in their past personal experiences to that of their professional practice. I believe as a novice teacher educator I drew often unconsciously from my own personal experiences on my early teaching experiences in a small rural community and used these as a somewhat unexplained guide to my professional practice. My doctoral studies (which I share and revisit below) where I documented my first year teaching experiences were a catalyst to seek to engage in raising this consciousness as a teacher educator. I return to my own

standpoint and self-study narrative in this next section of the chapter, to share with you my experiences, and then to further draw from the themes that emerged now as an experienced teacher educator and in light of more recent studies.

## Using a Narrative Self-Study Approach

I often define my own childhood, as a 'rural' one. My mother's extended family came from central New South Wales (NSW), in Australia, and we tended to move across the central NSW tablelands. As my very young parents regularly sought various work we constantly moved from one country town to the next, peppered with some extended periods of living in Sydney, with my grandparents. As a consequence my education was relatively unorthodox and 'mobile'. I experienced over the length of my schooling; small rural schools, larger regional schools, public and catholic schools as well as some city based and briefly some alternative learning settings. Which school I attended depended less on choice as such and more on the context, location and opportunities that each place we travelled to offered in terms of access and affordability. I suspect that this is the case for many low socio-economic families.

In completing school I found myself in the very fortunate position of having a College of Advanced Education (CAE) which later became Charles Sturt University, in my home town at the time of Bathurst, a small regional town located 3 h from Sydney. I had also been recommended by my Geography teacher (to whom I am very grateful) to go on to study and she encouraged and supported me to apply for a scholarship for which I was successful. This gave me the extra boost and finances I needed to study teaching.

After completing my Diploma of Teaching I began my first teaching position some further 4 h north-west of Bathurst in a very small service town (population of 2000 in the surrounding district) called Gilgandra – or Gil to the locals. This move as described (White 2003, unpublished doctoral thesis) has been a significant catalyst for the rest of my career. Its significance however did not come to the forefront until a decade later when I accepted a tutoring role at a city based university and began my work as a novice teacher educator. It was the coming together of my new work as teacher educator and recollections of my first teaching experience that collided and I began to read research into teacher education and teachers' work and how I might be a more effective teacher educator that set me on my doctoral path. Ken Zeichner's (1995) work and the call to make more visible to my pre-service teachers the deliberations about my own work as described earlier was particularly influential.

In my endeavour to look seriously into my own professional learning and development as a novice teacher educator and to 'think consciously' about my work I decided to embark in my studies using a narrative self-study of my personal experiences and struggles as a beginning rural teacher teaching in 'Gil'. This exercise for me became a way of enacting what Murray and Male (2005, p. 139) suggest as a

process of making my own personal assumptions, beliefs and practices explicit, firstly to myself and then in turn to my students. I revisit this work again here in this chapter and describe the process of the self-study and the themes generated and then examine how these themes have further influenced the current work I am doing in the field of rural teacher education.

## *Narrative Inquiry*

Narrative inquiry is a tool to explore personal teaching experience as it is strongly autobiographical. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 121) suggest, "Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines". Van Manen (1997, p. 127) states that "writing separates us from what we know and yet it unites us more closely with what we know" by the process of writing down our thoughts and ideas we are able to distance ourselves and then confront what we have written. The writing of this chapter has served the same purpose.

We are able to reflect on what we have constructed and the meaning that is embedded in the written text. In using narrative inquiry, van Manen (1997) also cautions against simply producing endless reproductions and fragments of transcripts under the guise of letting the data speak for itself. In my doctoral studies I wanted to focus on both aspects in my self-study in order to step back and examine the experiences of struggling to teach in a rural community and what I could learn from this experience as a teacher educator preparing teachers to work perhaps in rural settings.

I used the work of Crawford et al. (1991) that highlighted the fact, that the significance of a personal event is often a result of the turmoil or tension that the memory caused and the fact that it may be unresolved. As they state, "the actions and episodes are remembered because they were significant then and remain significant now. Their significance lies in the continuing search for intelligibility necessitated by the unfamiliarity of the episode, the conflict and contradiction that might have been present and the lack of resolution" (Crawford et al. 1991, p. 38). I am amazed in re-reading the narrative I wrote more than 12 years ago and actually experienced more than 20 years ago, how fresh the experiences and memories of my first year of teaching are still to me now writing this chapter and continue to influence my academic work in resolving the ways in which I might contribute to better prepared teachers.

As you will read below, the first 6 months of school teaching, as a personal experience, for me, was an example of a time of great 'conflict and contradiction'. Although I enjoyed this period of life, my memories are rich in the ways I felt very much unprepared to teach and it was these "gaps and silences" (White 2003, p. 6) in the ways that I was unprepared that I decided to explicitly examine in my narrative self-study in my doctoral work. By writing my story I was able to begin a process of 'transformation', from telling to doing something with it. My first 6 months of teaching as a narrative text in my doctoral thesis, is written below.

## *My Story – Being Unprepared to Teach in a Rural Community: A Personal Experience*

After I graduated from three years of university with my Diploma of Teaching I went to a small rural country town in central New South Wales for my first teaching position. I had been unable to secure a full-time position in Sydney and desperately wanted to teach and have 'my own class'. For three years I had worked with other people's classes on practicum and I wanted to be a teacher all on my own. So I travelled seven hours away from family and friends to do what I passionately wanted to do most, teach!

The town, like many others in the area, was suffering from a severe drought. The impact of the drought had an obvious effect on the physical landscape but also on the financial and emotional state of the community. I arrived on a 40 degree Celsius day to be welcomed with a traditional Australia Day March and BBQ. I realised quickly that many young people had left the area to find work and that at the age of twenty I had few, if any of my own age around me. I was the youngest teacher at the school by fifteen years. The school, I felt, had great expectations of this new, young teacher.

I was keen to prepare my classroom and to put all of my knowledge about classroom management into practice. I put the tables into groups and displayed bright coloured paper on the walls. I carefully prepared the nametags and labelled books. I examined every child's name on the list I had been given and carefully wrote their names on cardboard for particular reading groups. I had painted a large clown with balloons for the children's names on the front of my classroom door. My focus was solely on my classroom and my nineteen children. I had no interest in what the other teachers were doing or preparing. I was very busy with what I understood to be the role of a teacher, getting ready for my class.

I remember that the need to follow routines had been discussed at length at university and was a large chapter of my classroom management book and I set about preparing a timetable. What impacted on me immediately, even in those first weeks of teaching was that the routines I tried so hard to establish were continually changing. My classroom was being constantly interrupted with the daily affairs of the school. Timetables were forever changing and I struggled with the demands to be flexible. I remember a funny scene from the children's movie Charlie and the Chocolate Factory where the teacher says something along the lines of "the test that you normally have on Friday will now be moved to Monday so you will be tested on something you have learnt before you learn it." Sometimes, my days felt like this.

My principal encouraged me to take other classes for particular subjects, for example dance and drama. I loved teaching these subjects but found I resented the time taken from my class and that I also struggled with having to work within other people's classrooms and having them in mine. I realised that I had to work on a professional level with many different personalities, teaching styles, teaching roles and responsibilities. I found myself in situations of conflict, which I had to learn to resolve diplomatically. Often I was positioned as the inexperienced teacher and therefore had to follow the lead of other teachers. I frequently found this frustrating and depressing. When I first started teaching I had hoped to have full autonomy over my class and what I taught. I quickly began to realise that there were many stakeholders in the education process and that I was often just a small cog in a large political wheel.

I found my first months of teaching to be an extreme learning curve, about many areas of teaching I had not encountered in my teacher education. My concerns while on practicum were focussed on my lesson plans, my delivery and my evaluations. What I was experiencing in my first year was a whole new world.

What I also found challenging was my role within the community. Wherever I went, I was seen as 'little Bobby's or Susie's teacher' or, as I was fondly called 'Miss'. In the shopping centre, at church, at the pub, wherever I went, I was very conscious of 'myself the

teacher' and what a teacher should or should not be doing. My role was far broader than I had realised or been 'prepared' to expect in my teacher education.

The wider community's needs had a huge impact on my teaching. The drought meant that many of the rural families were suffering financially and the children were asked to help out more on the farms. The children would often arrive at school from a long bus trip and having already completed many family chores. They were understandably tired before the school day had begun. When it came to teaching the unit on 'Water' in the curriculum, we spent little time on water and leisure. The concerns of the community dictated the shape the curriculum took.

It was half way through my first year, when I was just feeling more comfortable about my teaching career that my principal entered my room to discuss my teaching progress. He outlined my strengths and areas for me to work on and then at the end of the conversation he turned to me and said, "you do not understand yet what it is to be a teacher." He smiled at me and left the room.

## *Writing Separates Us from What We Know*

Who would have known that those words by the principal would have such an effect on my future academic work? As stated earlier I wanted my doctoral study to make a difference and I still do, not just tell the story but to do something with it. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that with experience and narrative inquiry it is the retelling of stories that allows for growth and change. My own reflections on my experiences as a beginning teacher were my memories of what impacted on me most as I grappled to understand my role as a teacher. I wanted to go beyond simply writing my story down but to be able to excavate the meaning and the implications for the way in which I, as the researcher, would later relate to the stories the student teachers told me. As van Manen (1997) suggests by writing down our thoughts and ideas we are able to distance ourselves and then confront what we have written. We are able to thus reflect on what we have constructed and the meaning that is embedded in the written text.

Through the written text the author is able to uncover new meanings. The author becomes the reader and in doing so tests what has been written against what was intended. van Manen (1997, p. 130) also reminds us that a phenomenological text succeeds when it lets us see that which shines through that which tends to hide itself. He suggests that the writing process is not one of simply writing but of listening as well and that writing requires a responsive reading. He cautions against the researcher simply producing endless reproductions and fragments of transcripts under the guise of letting the data speak for itself. In phenomenological research the emphasis is always on the meaning of lived experience.

Many qualitative studies position the researcher as either an impartial observer or as an active participant in any given gathering of humanistic data. My own doctoral research however located the researcher in a different paradigm and emphasised the importance of the researcher's story being told. In my studies I decided to explore a possible model of interpretation and found a useful framework that I present further below for the purposes of explaining how the themes emerged from the data.

## *A Model of Interpretation*

To enact the process, I used a method of interpretation similar to that developed by Stevick-Colaizzi and Keen (cited in Cresswell 1998, p. 147–149). These steps are offered to demonstrate how I selected a particular personal experience, constructed the text and then analyzed the text.

A summary of the steps taken are as follows:

1. The researcher begins with his or her own experiences of the phenomenon.
2. The researcher then finds key statements, words or phrases about how the participants experienced the phenomenon.
3. These key statements are then grouped into meaning units and the researcher writes a textual description of the experience.
4. All possible meanings and divergent frames of reference are explored and a description of how the phenomenon was experienced is explored.
5. An overall description of the meaning and essence of the experience is constructed.

## *Writing Unites Us More Closely with What We Know*

After constructing my story as a written text outlined above (step one) I then reflected on key statements, phrases and words that emphasized for me the difficulties experienced in the transition from preservice teacher to beginning teacher (step two). Particular statements emerged (step three) which I extracted and examined. The phrases I chose were statements that spoke to me; for example I extracted, *I found challenging my role in the community*. This statement captured the difficulties I faced every time I went anywhere and how my role and work as a teacher extended far beyond the classroom, which at the time I believe I falsely understood to be where my work as a teacher, was solely located.

As I extracted key statements, I began to sort and cluster them into ‘like statements’ or what I called ‘meaning units’ shown in Table 1.

After grouping the ‘meaning units’, I further analyzed them in terms of how I could refine them to an overarching theme that would capture the essence of the experience. In taking, for example Meaning Unit 5, I drew conclusions about what these statements might be categorized as. I noticed that what I was emphasizing was my grappling with my own professional identity. Phrases such as I was conscious of ‘myself the teacher’ and what a teacher should or should not be doing and My role was far broader than I had realized all speak to me about trying to understand the work of a teacher, the boundaries of my profession and how others perceived my professional identity. I endeavoured to do this process for all five meaning units and I emerged with major themes.

**Table 1** Meaning units

| | |
|---|---|
| Meaning unit 1 | The routines I tried so hard to establish were continually changing |
| | Many areas of teaching I had not confronted in my teacher training |
| | What I was experiencing in my first year was a whole new world |
| Meaning unit 2 | I also struggled with having to work within other people's classrooms and they in mine |
| | I found myself in situations of conflict that I had to learn to resolve diplomatically |
| | What I also found challenging was my role within the community |
| Meaning unit 3 | I was often a small cog in a large political wheel |
| | I quickly began to realize that there were a lot of stakeholders in the education process |
| Meaning unit 4 | I wanted to be a teacher all on my own |
| | I had no interest in what the other teachers were doing or preparing |
| | I struggled with the demands to be flexible |
| | I resented the time taken from my class |
| | The broader community's needs also had a huge impact on my teaching |
| | The concerns of the community dictated the shape the curriculum took |
| Meaning unit 5 | The school had great expectations of the new teacher |
| | Often I was positioned as the inexperienced teacher |
| | Had to follow the lead of other teachers |
| | I was very conscious of 'myself the teacher' and what a teacher should or should not be doing |
| | My role was far broader than I had realized |

These five themes outline the areas of difficulty I experienced:

1. Dealing with the broader school (as opposed to classroom) demands of being a teacher.
2. Working professionally with a wide group of staff and school community members.
3. Accepting the role politics plays in the running of a school.
4. Accepting the loss of autonomy in teaching and realizing that many factors influence what, when, why and how you teach.
5. Defining the professional identity of a teacher and being able to separate this from the personal identity of the teacher.

These processes and themes documented in my thesis (White 2003, p. 87), illuminated for me at the time a particular view of the problematic nature of the way I was prepared in my teacher education studies and the difficulties I experienced in my first year of teaching in a small country town. Many of my difficulties, I realized, emerged from my own lack of pre-service teacher experiences in any whole school and community settings and understandings about the complex nature of teachers' work and the different social and cultural contexts. This occurred, I believe, because much of my teacher preparation was focused on teachers' work solely in the classroom and I still believe this to be the case today.

I may well have been 'taught' about the impact of the community on teachers' work at university and in my school experiences, but I only recall my professional experiences as focused on lesson plans and teaching those lessons. Even though staff meetings and extra curricula activities were deemed important to attend by teacher educators, (and I did attend them) the attendance was simply not enough to enable the realization of what teachers were actually doing.

I still find the pre-service teachers that I am working with today, lament "I didn't get time to teach" and then describe the rich activities of field trips, incursions, cross disciplinary activities that they participated in that took them away from being what they determine, teaching time. It seems to me we, as teacher educators are still narrowly focusing the attention of what it means to teach and be a teacher on 'the teacher in the classroom'.

## Reflexive Rural Teacher Educator Work

It is an interesting experience for me returning to my doctoral work, so many years later and the themes identified. I realise how influential and present these experiences and themes are still in continuing my work of becoming a *rural* teacher educator and in particular the focus for me now in trying to improve teacher education for rural communities. This reflexive process of returning to my own personal narrative experience once helped me as a novice teacher educator to sharpen my awareness of my understandings of the phenomenon of rural teaching and in what ways I might have been 'unprepared' and now the narrative can be interrogated and aligned with more recent studies and projects as an experienced teacher educator.

### *Becoming a Rural Teacher Educator*

The themes lend themselves to thinking here about becoming a *rural* teacher educator and the professional learning and work involved in redesigning a rural teacher education curriculum. I particularly argue for more attention by teacher educators to be paid to curriculum re-design adopting a broader school-community focus. To me it does not appear that simply preparing *more* teachers is the answer to the staffing churn experienced by rural school communities – rather what is needed are *rural* teacher educators who can reconceptualise our programs. As Kane (2007, p. 74) claims, there is clearly a pressing need to examine closely both the 'what and how' we teach as teacher educators and how programs of teacher education are thus designed.

In revisiting the themes I note for example that the first two themes of 'Dealing with the broader school (as opposed to classroom) demands of being a teacher' and 'Working professionally with a wide group of staff and school community members' are still relevant today. I would like to highlight the importance of our future

teachers not just being 'classroom ready'. In Australia the work of the Australian Professional Teacher Standards (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership 2012) emphasises the important work of teachers beyond the classroom. Standard Seven for example, captures the important work of teachers to "Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community". This Standard reflects an area I particularly struggled with and from current research I have been involved with colleagues in a large ARCLinkage project titled Studying the Effectiveness of Teacher Education (SETE) (see Mayer et al. 2014) new graduates also struggle with.

Having this community focus embedded in our Australian Professional Teacher Standards will mean that Teacher Education Institutions will need to reflect this perspective in their programs. Understandings of 'place' (Grunewald 2003) sit alongside this work. Just as Thomson (2002) highlighted the needs for teachers to understand the places from which their students come from in order to connect more meaningfully students to their communities, so too do teacher educators need to adopt a place-conscious approach in their teacher education curriculum that links pre-service teachers and teachers to the places they will work and the students they seek to serve (White and Reid 2008). Thinking as *rural* teacher educators about becoming 'community ready, school ready and classroom ready' (White 2010) might further open up the spaces for preparing our future teachers. Helping pre-service teachers and indeed beginning teachers look beyond the classroom to the school community is important, and is vital to better understand rural and regional students' funds of knowledge (González et al. 2005), and the virtual school bags that teachers need to unpack (Thomson 2002).

The theme of community, connectedness and place also emerged in the Australian Research Council (ARC) funded 3-year Discovery Project study titled *Renewing Rural Teacher Education*: *Sustaining Schooling for Sustainable Future* (now known as TERRAnova) (see Reid et al. 2012, 2013). This project sought to discover the successful strategies for preparing, attracting, and retaining high-quality teachers for rural and remote schools. The research design combined an exploration of pre-service teacher responses via survey to university and state-based rural incentives and case studies of twenty schools from across the Country that all were successfully retaining high-quality teaching staff and going against the staffing churn trend where success was measured as maintaining beginning staff for more than 3 years. In almost all of the case studies, community-readiness was a key feature for ongoing success in retaining quality teachers (White 2010; Reid et al. 2010, 2013). Communities actively sought to positively involve novice teachers in the community. Schools provided community induction and in one case study I documented that the town had as part of their strategic Community Council plan the active participation of preservice teachers and graduate teachers in their economic and social development (See Hamilton Case Study in Reid et al. 2013). Again connecting pre-service teachers, teachers, students and their communities appear important work of becoming a *rural* teacher educator.

Building on TERRAnova, the Renewing Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum (RRRTEC) project (White et al. 2012b) funded by the Australian

Teaching and Learning Council, also looked at what teacher education could do differently to prepare teachers for the rural workforce. RRRTEC aimed to develop a teacher education curriculum resource that would be inclusive of rural education needs and made visible rural and regional teacher education research, curriculum resources, and pedagogical strategies for teacher educators to use with their teacher education students (White and Kline 2012a, b). Data collected built on data from TERRAnova and used semi-structured interviews of teacher educators across Australia to explore questions such as: What do you think are the distinctive features of preparing a student teacher for a rural career? Where in your teacher education course (if any) do you believe rural curriculum should be embedded? What would you see as key or essential content to learn about if you knew your student teacher were to take a rural teaching position? What are the professional learning needs of teacher educators to deliver a rural teacher education curriculum? Findings indicated that teacher educators needed a set of easily accessible resources that highlight rural students, their lives, families, communities and knowledge, to embed within their teaching (White and Kline 2012a, b) and in short what I am arguing to become consciously aware of adding the rural to their own professional learning as a teacher educator. A website now houses these resources aimed to assist all teacher educators in the preparation of pre-service teachers for working in rural and regional schools. The website can be located at www.rrrtec.net.au and is an attempt to make the road of becoming a *rural* teacher educator more accessible to all teacher educators.

## Conclusion

While the actual distance of time between my first year as a beginning teacher, to now, is well over 25 years, the image of my first class children's faces and the experiences as shared are still fresh in my memory. Likewise the period of time from when I embarked in teaching my first undergraduate class to now is also so far and yet so near. Using an expanded self-study has been an important tool to re-examine, confront and explore my own personal and professional learning and to revisit studies in line with this work. As Loughran (2002) notes:

> The usefulness of a self-study begins with the individual and works its way on so that, through teacher change, the possibility for genuine educational change might be enhanced. The interplay of the inquiry and its value and form of representation inevitably influence whether or not a self-study speaks to those envisaged as its audience (p. 244).

The road of becoming a rural teacher educator might be less travelled as such for many reasons complicated by the fact that the field of teacher educator research itself as explained is under theorised (Murray and Male 2005; Kosnik et al. 2011). Yet this work is vitally important in the context of the implications of beginning teachers who are, as a consequence, less likely to take up a rural position. As Reid and Green (2009) remind us, we need not have physically walked this road (i.e.

grew up in rural communities or taught in rural schools) but more teacher educators need to take up the rural adjective to ensure that all students have equal opportunities for education.

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# Notions of Place, Space and Identity in Rural Teacher Education

**Bernadette Walker-Gibbs**

## Introduction

How did a girl like you get to where you are?

This comment above was directed towards me after a casual discussion with a member of my local community about educational pathways and the importance of offering subsidized accommodation. On the surface, this comment could be taken in negative ways but it was about him trying to understand the story of a rural girl from a poor, single parent family background, whose mother left school when she was 12 and barely literate. He was seeking to understand this person before him, a girl who had a checkered relationship with high school, and was able to not only attend university but received a PhD and is now an Associate Professor in Education at a

This manuscript draws on data collected as part of the *Studying the Effectiveness of Teacher Education* project. The project is supported by a strong partnership involving the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), the Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment (QDETE) Deakin University's School of Education in Victoria and Griffith University's Faculty of Education in Queensland. This research was supported under Australian Research Council's *Linkage Projects* funding scheme (project **LP110100003**). The views expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Australian Research Council or the Industry partners. The research team includes Diane Mayer (Victoria University), Andrea Allard (Deakin University), Richard Bates (Deakin University), Mary Dixon (Deakin University), Brenton Doecke (Deakin University), Jodie Kline (Deakin University), Alex Kostogriz (Deakin University), Leonie Rowan (Griffith University), Bernadette Walker-Gibbs (Deakin University), Simone White (Monash University), and recently, Julianne Moss (Deakin University).

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A.K. Schulte, B. Walker-Gibbs (eds.), *Self-studies in Rural Teacher Education*, Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices 14,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-17488-4_4

[relatively] young age. My perception was that he was genuinely interested in the pathways I had undertaken as he has devoted much of his own work to helping youth undertake educational opportunities in rural communities. His question to me sets the scene for this chapter in which I will argue that perceptions of yourself as a teacher and a teacher educator is entwined with notions of place, space and identity.

This chapter explores the concepts of space, place, and identity through a self-study narrative lens that focuses on the importance of rural within these conversations. Current research into teacher education acknowledges the significance of context and how it matters in terms of teacher preparation; this chapter examines context in terms of the impact of working in a rural context and the differences and similarities of rural to other contexts. The overarching framework for this chapter will be on myself as a rural teacher educator and how this bounds and is bounded by my own identity and experience 'growing up rural' in Australia. I will also outline my own emerging research into self-study as a methodology and how this adds to my role as a teacher educator within rural communities. Firstly however, I will explore the concepts of place and space and how this guides my own rural self-study.

## Place and Space: Setting the [Rural] Scene

Working through the concept of space and place there are blurred lines in the academic conversations currently circulating in the literature. According to McInerney et al. (2011, p. 5) "[i]n many respects, 'place' is a lens through which young people begin to make sense of themselves and their surroundings. It is where they form relationships and social networks, develop a sense of community and learn to live with others". Greunewald (2008, p. 308) theorizes notions of place, which he sees as "a narrative of local and regional politics that is attuned to the particularities of where people actually live, and that is connected to global development trends that impact local places".

Notions of place are intimately connected to notions of space, and frame much of my understanding of rural in my work and teacher education practice. In a previous publication entitled *The country's not what it used to be: Research participants' understandings of space, place and identity in rural Victoria* I refer to place as being geographically located and where a "person is situated whereas rural space is primarily concerned with rurality in terms of understandings, accounts and interactions with rural community" (Walker-Gibbs 2012, p. 129). Significantly for my work in rural teacher education in general and this chapter specifically, neither concepts are fixed or clearly bounded. As Fenwick et al. (2011, p. 142) highlight "[s] pace is considered not as a static container into which teachers and students are poured, or a backcloth against which they act, but as dynamic multiplicity that is constantly being produced by simultaneous practices-so-far". In the next section I link these theorizings of place and space with self-study and narrative inquiry.

## Self-Study Narrative Lens

I have been living and working in rural and regional Australian places for most of my life. When approaching this chapter however, the self-study component of this work was new to me. Examination of this field led me to the following questions. What do notions of rurality bring to self-study? What is the question I have around rurality that I can bring to self-study? *How did a girl like me get to where I am*? *And how does this impact on my teacher education practice in the university sector*? The intention is that a better understanding of these questions should be clear at the end.

In this chapter I draw upon a variety of data to help me to explore these questions more fully. Firstly I return to my PhD completed in 2003 to map the ways in which I originally explored notions of identity (in particular generational) and education (more specifically schooling). I then draw upon various transcripts from two specific research projects: one that aimed to explore rural educational pathways and another that is exploring the effectiveness of teacher education to prepare teachers in a variety of contexts. I also draw upon ongoing dialogues (both written and verbal) with Ann Schulte, the co-editor of the book in which this chapter is situated and my critical friend. This reflecting back was crucial to fully examine the impact my identity as rural has impacted on my practice in teacher education. The following quote by Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) illustrates for me my goals for self-study with this chapter:

> While self-study researchers acknowledge the role of the self in the research project, echoing Mooney (1957), such study does not focus on the self per se but on the space between self and the practice engaged in. There is always a tension between those two elements, self and the arena of practice, between self in relation to practice and the others who share the practice setting. (p. 15).

As I work through the key concepts and reflect on myself and my practice, the emphasis will be on the space between and the implications for rural teacher education more broadly.

Just as important to this chapter I also note that sitting alongside self-study is the notion of narrative inquiry and story. Connelly and Clandinin (2006, p. 477) state "narrative inquiry comes out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives". Xu and Connelly (2010, p. 356) further argue that "[s]tory is not so much a structured answer to a question, or a way of accounting for actions and events, as it is a gateway, a portal, for narrative inquiry into meaning and significance".

For me the appeal of self-study is in critically reflecting on the moments that resonate strongly from my memories that allow me to more fully understand the impact of my identity on my practice and teacher education more broadly. As Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009, p. 23) remind me, "When we have a memory of a past event or retell a story of it, we bring it forward into the present moment, thus repositioning it on the landscape of our total lived experience". The challenge for me as a researcher new to the concept of self-study, but more embedded in research into the rural, was where to start the conversation in this chapter. As Andrews et al.

(2008, p. 1) highlight, “Unlike many qualitative frameworks, narrative research offers no automatic starting or finishing points”. Do I start with the email from my critical friend that began this part of the journey?

> Hello Dr. Walker-Gibbs, My name is Ann Schulte and I’m pursuing a Fulbright grant to work at Deakin University for the year July 2013–July 2014 (…) so I’ve been in contact with various professors to coordinate my proposed teaching and research agenda while I am there. (Email correspondence Tuesday 29th March, 2012).

Or do I turn back to 1984 when I graduated from high school and couldn’t wait to leave my rural/regional town fast enough, leaving not only my community but my State:

> I moved to the ‘big smoke’ (…) discovered SBS [multi-cultural television not available to me in a small town] (…) realized that TV helped to define you even more. My lack of knowledge of certain TV shows not available on regional TV helped to define me as a country girl – more specifically a Queensland country girl. (Excerpt from chapter one in my PhD, Walker-Gibbs 2003).

Or do I turn to 2008 when I relocated to my current university on a rural campus in Victoria where I first started to explore seriously notions of rurality and community and what it means to be rural? The following quote was taken from an interview with a pre-service teacher around their experiences studying at a rural university:

> Well I think with people who’ve come from rural areas they probably find it harder to join groups, they just stand back whereas you see a lot of the people who’ve come from Melbourne down to here they’re really gung-ho… I think the cities probably just better prepare them with that sort of life style, everything is go, go, go, you can tell who’s from Melbourne and who’s from the country at uni? … Just their laid back nature from country kids and the Melbourne people are just go, go, and go. (“Paddy” – excerpt from interview transcript included in Walker-Gibbs 2012).

What this quote emphasizes for me is the ways in which rural is perceived by a variety of people challenges me to recognize how these stereotypes confine and define definitions of rural when I am trying to think through these issues in more complex ways.

As I explore the connections between narrative inquiry and self-study I realize that the story is the catalyst in order for me to understand the significance of myself (and others as rural), although I need to firstly pay attention to the way in which these stories allow me to posit the significance of rurality to the broader context of teacher education. As Loughran (2010, p. 222) argued “Self-study allows such knowledge development to be tied closely to one’s teaching in ways that can lead to a more coherent and focused work portfolio and can therefore be seen as an enticing way of responding to the needs and expectations of the academic world”.

## Rural Identity, Place and Space

Much has been written about rural identity over the years and I have spent a considerable amount of time in my academic career as previously discussed thinking about notions of identity, place and space. As part of working through some questions

around notions of rurality and in preparation for this book, Ann Schulte and I posed the following questions to each other:

1. How do you come to define yourself as rural?
2. How does your identity as rural reveal itself in your work as a teacher educator?
3. Why is studying our rural identities important? Does it even matter?

The following data draws from these questions and conversations to help me position my work in teacher education as rural. As I work through these questions in conversation with Ann I am struck that there are so many points of similarity between us in terms of place but it is the detail of the space that we differ. I am reminded of Margaret Somerville's work where she talks about place literacy which through narrative and journaling is "based on the experience of the sensing body-in-place. What does this place smell like, sound like, look like, feel like when I move through it?" (1999, p. 153). This is the point at which for me place becomes space. A conversation Ann and I had early on in this process challenged how I think of rural identity and visibility when we talked about navigating the complexities of friendships in rural places and how this fits with our work. For example, in my previous position at another institution my friendship group was largely separate to my work but in my current context they are closely tied together. Staff have close connections – both familial (daughter-in-law, cousin, uncle etc.) and familiar (e.g. play tennis together, go to the same church, live close by etc.) which is also played out among a complex network of professional relationships e.g. I may be a PhD supervisor, friend, colleague, and/or mentor to the same person. Although I have written about this previously in terms of what new graduate teachers might experience when placed in a rural community, as I have become older and more 'used' to these connections I had stopped seeing this part of my rural identity and/or if I even thought of this as being part of my rural identity.

Throughout my previous writing I have worked through various references and signifiers around gender, class, religion, ethnicity, and sexuality and in my PhD there was a particular emphasis on generational understandings of visual literacy where although I discussed these other 'categories' they were not the focus as can be seen in the following excerpt from my thesis:

> I always wanted to be a teacher. The burning ambition I had when I entered university as a mature age student was to teach children always to question and never to take their beliefs and values for granted. It would be in this way that I could help to 'fix' the problems I perceived to be inherent to all educational systems. I felt that schools encouraged students not to think or to question, but to accept passively information given to them by the teacher. The consequences of this, as far as I could tell, were that we were just going to perpetuate the problems of previous generations.
>
> My belief was that, if only children had access to numerous perspectives, cultures and experiences, we could make our world a better place – a place in which we learned to live together in a way that was enriching for all concerned. This was more than learning to tolerate others. The word 'tolerant' has always had negative connotations to me, and something that only people in 'power' positions can grant to those who are disempowered. It helps the 'power' people to say they tolerate someone but they don't have to change their worldviews or even understand different worldviews from their own. The 'tolerating' always define what is acceptable behavior by the 'tolerated.'

> These views did not necessarily change when I went to university. They did however become more focused, and I was able to understand the underlying issues of the problems I had perceived previously. I was now more aware of cultural contexts, economic discourses, different realities, hegemony and numerous other critical understandings of the world that provided me with a theoretical and analytical framework with which to view and articulate my experiences. (Walker-Gibbs 2003).

I linked my story in my thesis back to notions of retrospectivity and how the act of looking back changed the memory as the person you were looking back was/is different than the person who had originally experienced the event. According to Baudrillard (1994):

> Reinvoked values themselves are unstable and subject to the same fluctuations as fashion or the stock exchange. Reinstatement of earlier borders, of former structures, of the former elite therefore will never attain its identical meaning, i.e., will never be the same as it once was (…) All retro-scenarios currently in the making are without historical significance as they are completely enacted at the level or surface of *our* time, like an overlay of images that cannot affect film in motion …. This will alter nothing in the *current* melancholy of the century which we will never get over because, in the meantime, it has looped back onto itself only to be freed up again with a different meaning. (p. 2; emphasis in original).

As I re-read this excerpt from my PhD and try to recapture how and why rurality seemed so significant to me I am challenged by the small focus I had during that time. What it tells me however, is that as I reflect back on all the ways in which I signify myself as rural, it is done so from the here and now using the referents of the time period from which I come. As I said in my thesis "Although we can try to be retrospective about things, it can be only a simulation of that time (…) we can interpret [our understanding of being rural] only according to the multiple cultural, social and historical experiences that we have had" and are having. As notions of rurality have assumed prominence for me both personally and professionally in recent years, so too my perception of my 'lack' of attention to rural in the past sharpens. To explore my retrospective understanding of what it means to be rural I turn to my own story of growing up rural.

## Growing Up Rural

In this section I discuss how I came to think of myself as rural, and how I have spoken about rural in the past. As I reflect back on this I am struck by a couple of things: one is about how big (or small) rural is in terms of people but also in terms of thinking we/I am either rural or not. Often for me being rural has been defined as 'lesser' in some way – sometimes (in the past) by me and other times by others. Although I was born in the Queensland capital of Brisbane, which could designate me as having an urban background, I didn't grow up there.

My first 'real' memories are of a place called Marian, which is inland (30 km West) of Mackay in North Queensland. We lived down the road from the pub (where my Mum worked) and the main industry was cane or dairy. I know that I knew everyone and everyone knew me. What is less sure is whether this was rural or it

may purely have been that I was young and just felt that it was rural. There weren't many streets and all the kids down the street went to either the Catholic school or the 'other' school. I spent the grand total of one year at the Catholic school and I loved it. It was a big, open space with lots of room to run freely at 'big' lunch. Cane fields (and cane toads) next door were the norm. Many an evening was spent sitting in the back yard watching when the cane fields were burnt as part of the process of getting sugar. I remember adults sitting with a drink in hand whilst the children ran around trying to catch the bandicoots, wallabies, and other native animals or feral cats and rats as they ran to safety away from the fire.

I remember being devastated when we moved from Marian to Mackay. During the school holidays my Mum became the housekeeper for the Christian Brothers at the then all boy's Catholic school. The primary school I was supposed to attend was across the road and I spent the summer staring at the school thinking how big it was and how big the town itself was (population in 1976 just over 20,000 see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_of_Mackay#cite_note-qhr-3). Mackay was a different kind of rural than I had experienced before in terms of size, which at the time was very intimidating to me. I remember they even had North and South Mackay that were separated by a bridge. Many a joke was made by locals about why would I have to go to the other side of the bridge when I have everything I need on this side? This connection to bridges and not needing to go to the other side was experienced when years later I moved to Rockhampton, Central Queensland. At the time of writing this chapter Mackay is no longer considered to be rural, rather it is a large, regional town that has experienced a boom due to investment linked to the coal mining industry.

Although I had a sense that I had moved from a place where I knew everyone to a place where I was new, I never really thought of myself as from the country. On reflection that is because my Mum was raised on a dairy farm in central New South Wales in a place called Missabotti. Nearly every Christmas we would hop in the car and take two to three days to drive there to visit Mum's family. There were cows, pigs, creeks, fresh vegetables and hills and manure and trees and SPACE. I really didn't like the cows and the manure. My cousins always laughed at what they saw as the 'city cousins' and often mocked how amazed we were with tank water that had wriggly things in it (which is where we had to get our drinking water) and how dark it was without street lights. We were amazed at how far away everyone lived from each other and how many dirt roads there were. This highlights for me the way in which definitions of rural are closely linked to notions of size and this matters. Often literature on rural education denotes small size equating to isolation (geographically, socially and professionally) and the deficit view of rural which includes: lack of resources; limited access to 'quality' education and teachers; lack of cultural diversity; and limited educational expectations or aspirations (see Fluharty and Scaggs 2007; Drummond et al. 2012; Stack et al. 2011; Mitra et al. 2008; Pietsch et al. 2007; Kenny et al. 2008; Broadley 2010; Shaw 2010; White and Reid 2008).

More positive aspects of rural life include quiet, aesthetically pleasing environments, usually with a strong sense of community and a social atmosphere, and life is considered more relaxed with a focus on community events and outdoor activities

(Beutel et al. 2011). As I grew up in the regional town of Mackay I felt more and more as if I didn't belong. There really wasn't much sense of what a girl was to grow up and be other than a wife, mother or secretary. Mackay grew increasingly small to me. I wasn't a great athlete; I wasn't tall, blond, buxom or beautiful. In fact I looked 'foreign' with my dark curly hair and short stature. I just didn't quite fit. Thinking back, I had an ideal adolescence in terms of natural opportunities. I had the Great Barrier Reef, rain forests and beach in my backyard. I grew up with absolute freedom to explore the natural beauty of North Queensland. It was all the other parts that felt restricting: the visibility; the sense of being an outsider because I wasn't a local – which I know now means more than one generation of family being from the area; the sense that I wasn't 'right.' Some of those feelings were due to the baggage from my schooling but also linked to my father who was an angry alcoholic, who was a 'con artist,' who had 'conned' many a local with some mad scheme or other. I couldn't get away from this – everyone knew who he was even after he left. This visibility I couldn't escape soon enough. This part of my story is closely linked to the high sense of visibility that is experienced in rural communities and can make it difficult to be 'different' in any way (Starr and White 2008).

As a consequence of wanting to be more 'invisible' when I finished grade 12 I left a week later. I moved to Canberra; although it is the capital of Australia, it has a definite rural feel – by which I mean in terms of geography and size. The surrounding area of Canberra has lots of agriculture and compared to most other cities in Australia is quite small. My sense of myself as rural however started to focus when I lived in Rockhampton and then Yeppoon where I was working with students who came from very small towns and were overwhelmed by being in Rockhampton which they saw as large and impersonal. Yeppoon (population 10,000) installed its first set of traffic lights the month before I moved away from there. What was interesting about Yeppoon is that it went from a very 'sleepy' place to a place that became incredibly expense to live in, due to the mining boom of the early 2000s. Overnight it became a place where the miners' families chose to live while the miners worked in a remote mining area. I started to work really closely with schools around the local area that I considered to be rural as there were cows and grass and space as well as lack of resources, lack of opportunities, lack of access to technology, and lack of access to professional development, for example.

## Claiming My Title as a 'Rural Girl'

Although I was working in the ways described in the previous section, I didn't actually explicitly position my identity as rural or examine what rural means until I moved to Warrnambool. Moving to Warrnambool in Victoria changed everything for me both personally and professionally. Victoria is a much smaller place than Queensland in a geographic sense, but overall population is significantly larger. The reason this was important to my sense of how I understood distance in terms of rural was that it in Yeppoon it took over seven hours to drive to Brisbane, whereas it is

three and a half hours to drive from Warrnambool to Melbourne (the State's capital). Warrnambool was classified as rural the same as Yeppoon and was considered to be a significant distance from the major city. My previous experience in Queensland was that you were more likely to have the categories of urban, regional, rural and remote. Remote is seen to be not only in terms of distance but also access to resources or according to Baxter et al. (2011, p. 2) "[o]ne way of categorizing regions is in terms of the road distance from services, and this is the standard method to define remoteness for statistical purposes in Australia". I am yet to experience the level of remoteness in Victoria and therefore feel that I am more connected to services than previously experienced.

The significance for my practice as a teacher educator at this time was much about how I started to think about identity and the experiences that had shaped me but also how I was viewed by Victorians having come from Queensland – which is seen as one big country state. I wasn't in Warrnambool long before I became very visible. My husband had always joked in Rockhampton about how being married to me was like being married to someone famous – without the perks – because we often bumped into my students. That notoriety was nothing compared to Warrnambool. My second week here I was talking to a taxi driver and he said, "Oh, you're Bernadette. You are teaching my daughter. Didn't you come from Queensland? You must be bloody cold? What brought you here then?"

When I moved to Warrnambool I was also able to revisit and re-explore the idea of "fly in fly out" I first encountered in Yeppoon where the trend for professionals was to not necessarily to locate themselves in the community in which they work. For my 2012 publication *The country's not what it used to be: Research participants' understandings of space, place and identity in rural Victoria*, I interviewed a rural council member, and considerable time was spent on her outlining for me the various strengths of her community and how wonderful it was. Further conversation indicated that she didn't actually live in the same community in which she was employed. As I discussed in my 2012 paper, an excerpt from the interview with 'Mary' reveals the interplay of rural identities being experienced by her. Her response to the question to her role in her community was as follows:

> I'm the group manager for community development for the council and that means really I'm a third line manager I report directly to the CEO and my role is working with council and CEO and the coordinators of the relative departments or units that report to me and they include things like arts and culture, library, children's services we've got a child care center and a family services hub we've got recreation services so they're all the parks, gardens, recreational facilities. We've got rural access which is disabilities, we've got youth services as well we've got a youth development officer and also aged and disability services so all the home and community care workers.
>
> Q: …. and I'm assuming that you live here
>
> A: No actually I live in (a two hour commute away).
>
> Mary then went on to emphasize however
>
> Well I love the … community because it is eclectic and rather vibrant and broad and you have a real mix of people it's sort of a bit of an edgy place in terms of a culture here. We've got a really good community of artists here as well as that we've got a lot of diversity in terms of we've got a high proportion of indigenous population here. We've got people who are quite well off and we've got people who really aren't quite so well off and a broad

> diverse range of people in between. We don't have a high LOTE community and that's unfortunate but it's still a good community … that diversity that eclectic mix of people being by the sea of course it's fantastic and I enjoy working for this particular council because of the whole range of things that we do which is above and beyond any other council of its size in Victoria (Walker-Gibbs 2012).

When I reflect back on this section of my story I know now I spent a lot of time running away from the idea of being rural as I was pretty sure that meant 'small,' 'less,' 'slow.' What I turn to now is what does this mean in terms of my practice as a teacher educator? Am I making assumptions about what it means to be rural based on my own experiences? How are these experiences historically situated? Or how does identity as rural reveal itself in my work as a teacher educator?

## Rural Teacher Education and Rural Communities

I began this self-study pretty sure that rural was important and also that I had some idea about what it means to be rural. Having said that, as I have already indicated, I never thought too much about how my identity as rural reveals itself in my work as a teacher educator. During my PhD studies I was very strongly focused on different generational understandings of visual media. My argument being that, today's children interpret, interact with, and experience the visual world in ways significantly different to previous generations. I spent considerable time thinking and writing about the role of being from a particular generation and although during my thesis I wrote about being from a rural/regional background, it was more in terms of access to media, art and/or experiences. It was a given that I was from a rural background but it was a cursory discussion.

In trying to unpack my rural background I am drawn to reflecting on this sense growing up that there had to be more to life than where I was. In a paper co-written in 2011 with Juliana Ryan (Ryan and Walker-Gibbs 2011) we explored notions of identity construction with/in communities of practice and used Trinh Minh-Ha's notion of "identity construction in the context of cultural hybridity." We described Trinh's concept of identity as a "way of living with differences without turning them into opposites, nor trying to assimilate them out of insecurity (1992, p 156)." Trinh further proposed that 'Since the self … is not so much a core as a process, one finds oneself, in the context of cultural hybridity, always pushing one's questioning of oneself to the limit of what one is and what one is not' (p 156). Juliana and I argued in this paper that for "Trinh this process of finding oneself questioning and pushing to the limits makes it possible for Trinh (and others) to question her condition in the understanding that 'the personal is cultural, historical or political.' As she puts it, 'The reflexive question asked (…) is no longer: Who am I? but when, where and how am I (so and so)?'(Trinh 1992, p 157). In pursuing this question, Trinh contends that what seems like displacement is in fact a 'place of identity' because it shows that there is no 'real self' to return to. Instead she finds that there are various 'recognitions of self through difference and unfinished, contingent, arbitrary closures that make possible both politics and identity' (p 157)."

My reflection on myself as rural and the journey I have described in this section has focused my understanding of my identity as rural as complex, and contingent on my cultural, historical and political constructions of rurality. Prior to moving to Warrnambool I had begun to explore identity in general terms with an emphasis on generational contexts and had thought of rural as uncomplicated and somehow either just part of me or something that I ran away from to the 'big smoke.' Since moving to Warrnambool it has become more about when, where and how am I and the significance of community within this conversation. Thinking through my sense of rural as significant but resisting simple constructs of rurality I now pose the question "When, where and how does rural matter in teacher education?" In the next section I will explore ways in which I think about identity and how this has impacted on me as a rural teacher educator.

## Significance of Rural Context in Teacher Education

In an upcoming article (Walker-Gibbs, Ludecke, and Kline, in progress), other researchers and I explore the concept of the pedagogy of the rural which conceptually involves conflicts of understandings of the rural that lends itself to that working through differing interpretations of rurality to move beyond the either/or discourses dominant in rural research. What this means for my self-study is that although I position rural contexts in teacher education as significant to my practice, it is equally as important to problematize what it means to be rural and avoid the binaries and deficits too often evident in rural discourses (see Sharplin 2002; Fluharty and Scaggs 2007; Drummond et al. 2012). I have spent much of my work as a teacher and teacher educator unpacking the significance of identity and how it impacts on aspirations to further education, be that completing high school or beyond. The significance of where one comes from has troubled me and been part of how I explore notions of identity as long as I can remember. Since 2010, however, I have been working with a team of researchers working in diverse teacher education contexts in Australia on a large-scale, longitudinal teacher education research study that has examined the effectiveness of teacher education to prepare graduates in a diversity of contexts (see www.setearc.com.au). As part of this project (Studying the Effectiveness of Teacher Education – SETE) I have interviewed a variety of graduates over 4 years about their perceptions of their 'preparedness' or 'effectiveness' in their particular contexts. During this time I have interviewed some of these graduates who have been placed in rural and regional schools ranging from <1,000 students to small (two teacher plus teaching principal and >30 students).

One particular school in the SETE study stands out for me during this time; Grevillea [pseudonym] is a small rural school which according to its vision is committed to improving the teaching and learning outcomes for every child. Community and extracurricular experiences are seen to be essential to the mission of the school. There were a teaching principal and two recent graduates from their teacher education program employed there when I first visited the school. The

stereotypical indicators of rural were present and easily observed. It was a distance from any major facilities, long winding roads, cows and hills dominated the sky line. The school itself was small and mostly fit into two main classrooms. One graduate was a constant during the four years; Theresa was a mature age student who had changed her career to become a teacher. The Principal's reflection on the graduates was positive. There was a sense that the mature age graduate in particular was seen as very articulate and able to discuss and understand pedagogy as well as being enthusiastic and committed. The graduates felt that, as this was a very small school, it was difficult to have been prepared for this setting because of the three-person staff and thus having to rely on each other more for guidance. Although overall they felt prepared, both indicated that a concentration on a more practical application of the theory at university would have been useful. Both indicated stronger mentoring and induction would increase their confidence and ability to feel better equipped in the classroom. Due to the geographical location of this school and the difficulty to source relief teaching and professional development, this largely wasn't available to the new graduates. Significantly for Theresa, she had a sense that because she is working in a small rural school that she is lacking or lesser than in some ways – in particular knowledge and experience. Despite having had a previous profession, littered throughout the transcripts Karoline constantly makes references to needing to go to a bigger school or community in order to be seen as a 'real' teacher. There is considerable angst on her behalf of being unsure if what she is doing is 'right.' This can be seen from the following excerpt when asked about whether she felt she had a successful first year as a teacher:

> Oh some levels, yeah. Definitely. And then on some other levels I was going oh, this is my one little world view. I'm telling a student this is how it's done or whatever, but, you know, there's so many thousand ways to skin a cat, isn't there? So I just said you know, you need to get out in to a bigger school and ask that question to a broader… you were just getting my one small perspective. (Karoline, Grevillea).

Despite being assessed as successful and having completed a certified teacher education degree, the impact of context for Karoline seems to be the most significant factor for her as a beginning teacher. This reflects the importance of teacher educators to pay attention to context within teacher education. According to White and Reid (2008, p.1) it is important to connect teacher education and recruitment and "suggest that teacher education providers can more successfully prepare teachers for rural settings if they understand and enact teacher education curriculum with a consciousness of and attention to the concept of place". Engaging in this SETE longitudinal study has enabled me to focus my theorizing of place and space and enact this in my teaching on a rural campus in the teacher education program. A systematic review of my teaching materials (lecture notes, text books, readings and online discussion) over the last ten years illustrated this enactment of place and space and revealed five main themes:

1. Education for equity and diversity
2. Understanding learners and diverse pathways and a focus on possible futures i.e. educating children for all the possibilities of where they might be

3. Importance of networks and partnerships
4. The impact of your identity on how you see and are seen in the world
5. The role of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship (in particular social) in engaging students
6. Closely tied to the themes that have emerged through my analysis of my teaching materials is my use of story and narrative to help my students understand their emerging teacher identities.

On arriving in Warrnambool I was asked to present to the local principals' organization. I have used many versions of that presentation, both before arriving and since in my teaching. The story I tell is one of a rural girl whose pathway would reflect similarities to the students in their schools. In a professional conversation with my critical friend about why this seems to be so important to me I reflected that for me my story is my way of saying 'if I can do this anyone can – you just need someone to give you an opportunity and then to embrace that opportunity – as the pathways to success.' A key part of my story is always about how I struggled much of my life in school and then initially at university but my point is that I always had someone who encouraged me and didn't stereotype me according to my low SES, or other indicators, and believed in me. This also allowed me to return to my previous question of "Am I making assumptions about what it means to be rural based on my own experiences?"

What struck home for me in my conversation with Ann, my critical friend, was that she sees that I use my story to assert my credibility in my context/networks and to emphasize another layer of my identity beyond that of university professor (one that still does not sit comfortably with me) and this idea is closely linked to notions of social capital. Woolcock (2001) examines three kinds of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking. Bonding social capital is a strong connection to those closest to you and linking are the broader connections at a macro level. They all serve to establish the ways in which we link or make sense of the connections that we have with others. By using my personal story I am seeking to connect to my students, my community and others in order to establish my credentials in a way in which they can relate. A bigger question for me in my work has become how seeing myself as rural frames my identity and how understanding myself as rural enables me to help my students understand and become better prepared in rural contexts. In addition, I want to examine how this impacts policy more broadly. I agree therefore with the assertion by Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) that:

> (…) for public theory to influence educational practice it must be translated through the personal. Only when a theory can be seen to have efficacy in a practical arena will that theory have life. However, (…) articulation of the personal trouble or issue never really becomes research until it is connected through evidence and analysis to the issues and troubles of a time and place. (p. 15).

Recently I was asked to attend an information day in Warrnambool where all the schools from the district were promoting their school to parents and prospective students. Traditionally there is a competitive element between schools in attracting school enrolments in order to be sustainable. Despite this, the day was undertaken

as a cohesive and collaborative event. All schools showcased their schools and their individual strengths but at the same time were promoting 'quality' rural education to the region – which included the university sector. As part of this event I collected the promotional material and subsequently analyzed the dominant themes appearing. Consistently the following words were used to describe the schools: individualized, small, learning is part of the school and broader community, safe, inclusive, respectful, supportive and environmentally friendly. Other descriptors used were partnership, technology, range of curriculum, linked to broader State educational goals, pathways to education, qualifications of staff, benchmark against National School Data. The importance of regular information nights for parents, an environment that is friendly, caring and fun where the staff have an open door policy and know the students personally and aspire to create students who are personally empowered to be global citizens was also emphasized in the materials. Often testimonials from parents or students were included as evidence.

One such parent testimonial struck me as it was claimed about a small, rural school where 'no member of staff sees themselves as above any other no matter what their position.' This links back to my self-reflection on my own identity and the challenge I have of 'owning' my title of university professor. I have long wondered about my pathway to university and how this resonates with my working class Australian background in which I have been raised under the missive "Thou shalt not be a tall poppy (…) In other words, anyone who dares to poke his head above the crowd must be attacked, denigrated and brought down to the common level" (Peeters 2004, p. 72). I have had a feeling of being 'lesser than' having come from a rural background. Data such as this comment by the aforementioned parent sits alongside the ways in which I include my story and stories of the local schools in my teaching materials on a regular basis. My goal always in sharing these stories is to make the implicit explicit and help map these identities for my preservice teachers as recommended by White et al. (2011) when developing resources to prepare graduates in rural communities.

## Conclusion

The self-study journey for this chapter for me has been the most complex and unsettling. The significance of self-study for me is linked to story and narrative and how according to Kitchen (2009, p. 37) "Narrative inquiry is the study of how people make meaning from experience. Telling or collecting stories is the beginning of the process, but it is through the multi-dimensional exploration of these stories that narrative knowledge emerges". I return back to my previous quote from my PhD when I reflect on what having the opportunity to attend university gave me; I argued that I was "more aware of cultural contexts, economic discourses, different realities, hegemony and numerous other critical understandings of the world that provided me with a theoretical and analytical framework with which to view and articulate

my experiences" (Walker-Gibbs 2003, p. 6). Self-study has allowed me to examine my identity as a rural teacher educator and legitimate this personal story in the broader context of teacher education – something that I have not done in the past but now see as significant. Or as Bullough and Pinnegar (2001, p. 13), attest "Many researchers now accept that they are not disinterested but are deeply invested in their studies, personally and profoundly".

Throughout this chapter ultimately I keep coming back to the fact, "I am rural". Each time I moved further into my data and journey I did so with the increasing realization that "Oh, I'm rural and it mattered here more than I realized at the time". The next part of this journey was to interrogate this notion of "I am rural" and more fully examine and question how all of this adds up to a different understanding about how I prepare teachers and how do I make them aware and conscious of the importance of remembering that they are rural or at least what it means to work in rural communities if they are not from a rural background. What has ultimately been revealed to me throughout this process is how everything I do and everything I am is rural. I am also a multitude of other identities. Rural is not all of who I am but it is significant. Claiming this identity through the use of narrative and story has allowed me to insist on working with my preservice teachers (and broader community) to address issues of diversity in a broad and complex way that is critical. Claiming a rural identity enables me to have powerful relationships with students that demonstrate to them the importance of relationships in rural communities beyond the classroom. I am committed in my work both professionally and personally to ensure that there is a complex, in-depth recognition that the work of education (and teaching) directly impacts the lives of students. I strive to maintain my identity as a rural educator to model for my students that our work is multi-layered and to acknowledge local, national, and international contexts.

I also acknowledge that to be a labeled a 'rural' scholar in a rural area is potentially marginalizing. I insist that understanding rurality is an important but often under- acknowledged part of understanding the teaching profession. I continue to insist that all students from all backgrounds are entitled to quality and diverse educational experiences.

Undertaking this self-study has enabled me to consolidate all of these aspects of rural teacher education and pay attention in the future to examine how rural gets taken up in the academy and ways in which we can strive to achieve the goals of quality rural education and demand legitimate attention to rural education in urban communities. I will also continue to explore the challenges for me as a rural teacher educator that often get positioned as rural which is both a passive and active positioning. I have explored in depth how my identity and those of my preservice teachers matter. I have outlined the impact and significance on the impact of understanding place and space and identity. I have highlighted that rural identities are important through my discussions on my perceptions of myself as rural and how this reveals itself in my work as a teacher educator. To end where I began, this process has enabled me to begin to answer the question:

> How did a girl like you get to where you are?

My answer to this question has considered not only my journey but my understanding of my journey in complex and complicated ways. The reframing of my view of the previous scholarship pieces examined for this chapter has altered the way I understand the work that I do now. It has also challenged me to acknowledge the ways in which 'being rural' has been intimately connected me to where I am and my journey to my current identity. Although much of which I have overcome to be successful in an academic context can be attributed to a deficit positioning of rural, I have illustrated that the complexities of this rural identity has in fact helped prepare me well to adapt and achieve in the particular places that I have worked and lived for many years. Once examined these key concepts around rural and the reflection on myself and my practice will continue to inform and challenge conceptualizations of rural teacher education more broadly.

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# Getting Better Teachers in the Bush

**Gaelene Hope-Rowe**

This chapter explores concepts of identity, difference and disadvantage through a self-study that focuses on preparing teachers to teach for diversity. I consider influences of my rural, working class background in a homogeneous setting as it shapes my professional identity as a teacher educator. I begin the self-study by reflecting on my early teaching career and work as a language and literacy teacher educator at a regional university where I began to carefully consider the discursive resources that students in regional and rural settings bring to teacher education. A decade on, in a different but somewhat similar university, I am still grappling with ways of raising awareness of diversity and discussing issues of race, social class, gender and ability and implications for teaching and learning. In this chapter I use the process of self-study to examine my own practice as a teacher educator using the implications from my doctoral studies as a focus.

## Circumstances of Being 'Rural'

I was born and raised in a small farming community in rural Victoria, a post-World War Two child born into a family of three generations of rural white Australians who were born, raised and educated in similar circumstances. Mootown [a pseudonym, as are all place names in this chapter] had a population of around 200 and the majority of families ran very small sheep and mixed farming properties of under 1,000 acres and supplemented the family income through outside work such as bee keeping (my father's primary source of outside income), droving sheep, shearing

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A.K. Schulte, B. Walker-Gibbs (eds.), *Self-studies in Rural Teacher Education*, Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices 14,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-17488-4_5

and shed hand duties, wood cutting, hunting foxes and rabbits and laboring on larger district farms and vineyards. Similar to 'other working class families we supplemented our livelihood by, 'living off the land,' growing our own vegetables and meat, and 'making do' in tough times by harvesting what was available on the land such as wood and eucalyptus leaves for fuel and oil, and fish, wild rabbits, ducks and kangaroos for food. People often shared resources and skills, as 'work in kind' or on a bartering system, out of necessity in order to remain self-sufficient and to provide the best that they could for their families. It was a tight knit community of people, many with shared ancestries, and, due to geographic isolation and constrained economic times, most families had limited experiences of life outside Mootown. Resembling most rural small towns in the area at that time, the town also lacked any ethnic diversity in the population. Community experiences were centered on maintaining stable community foundations: school, churches, community hall, cemetery, recreation reserve and local government. Now, reflecting on this particular circumstance of 'being rural' in a small, somewhat isolated rural town in Victoria, I gain further understandings of myself as 'rural' and some of the factors that have impacted on my identity and practice as a teacher educator. I am partly, a product of generational rural working class circumstances from a largely homogeneous community.

My primary school was a small rural school of between 20 and 25 students from a few local well-known families, who had lived in the rural district for many years. The school played a vital role in this community and parental involvement in school matters, from working bees, fund raising, ground improvements to keen audiences and participants at school concerts, sports, art and craft days, nature walks and bird watching, was very strong. In my early life, one aspect of 'being rural' was a connection to community and this perceived sense of community was positive as the links between school, home and community supported me personally and socially.

Mr. Illot was my teacher for the duration of primary school. He lived across the road from the school with his wife, and raised eight children for the term of his appointment at the school. He was well respected as a teacher and as a member of the community and regularly engaged in cultural and social events of the town. Cultural routines and activities for 'Mootown kids' included: mid-week netball and football practice in the winter months, tennis and cricket practice in the summer, and competitions with other small town teams on the weekends; piano practice and tap dancing classes at the local hall; school and homework; bike riding, fishing and rabbiting; and farm chores. The school served an important role as a center of social activity and cultural meaning, helping maintain local traditions and particular identities of rural communities (Theobald and Wood 2010). I had a sense that Mr. Illot knew me well as he would incorporate our home and community interests and experiences in school activities and build on what we brought to the classroom. Through a perceived close teacher-learner relationship my early schooling was memorable and positive in this small rural school. Now on reflection it is difficult for me to question this romanticized construction of my early life in Mootown, both in and out of school, as I still see it as supportive and comfortable.

Generally, I was considered a ‘bright and enthusiastic student’ with a strong will to succeed, according to school reports. With 20 or so students allocated to seven different grade levels in one room, the implementation of classroom routines and management may have been problematic, but from memory it was surprisingly orderly. Students didn’t generally talk over each other during class time or participate in the ‘wrong’ task, allocated to higher or lower grades. This, however, was my weakness, as I could not resist answering any question regardless of the grade to which it was directed. While there were some competitive aspects of this arrangement, Mr. Illot treated this with good humor and firmness, pointing out that others needed a chance to answer and I should wait until the question was directed to my grade. Looking back it seemed as if he was a ‘good teacher’ although until now I had not considered any personal and social concerns he may have had in relation to teaching in the same rural school for several years (Sharplin 2002).

I was raised by my maternal grandmother who lived nearby, reportedly largely due to the size of the family home and limited space for my father’s sibling to move in after the death of my paternal grandparents. I grew up with strong discipline and routines, and was encouraged to learn to be independent quickly. My Nana taught me to be ‘true to myself’, ‘make my own way in life,’ ‘not to depend on others (meaning men),’ ‘to study hard,’ and to ‘get a good job.’ I developed a strong sense of self-understanding and identity, and to be grounded in ‘where I came from,’ but to strive for a ‘better life,’ a life outside the rural area and to see and experience the world with all the diversity it offered. I think she viewed a lot of ‘rural life’ as unsophisticated and monotonous as I can remember her annoyance when she would listen to *Dad and Dave* or *Life With Dexter* on the radio when rural characters were portrayed as backward and somewhat stupid, and gender stereotypes were frequently played out in the plots. Most of all, I think she objected to the slow talking ‘uncultured’ Australian speech, and some of the characters in these programs who were dimwitted with little ambition or sophistication. She was partly resistant to the rural stereotyping and humor derived by making rural people the butt of jokes, but the radio was always on in our house, for entertainment, ‘company’ and connection with the outside world. These kinds of shows delivered negative rural messages and imagery through the use of humor (Schafft and Youngblood Jackson 2010).

## From Rural to Regional

It was a natural progression for students from Mootown Primary School, and other rural schools in the area, to travel to the closest regional town to attend the secondary public school. Throughout my schooling I was encouraged by my grandmother to pursue the best education I could and, to this end, she scrimped and saved her government pension to pay for as many opportunities she could to extend my experiences educationally, culturally and socially. I remember how excited, and slightly anxious, I was to participate in a school trip interstate. It was partly sponsored by the Masonic Lodge, who supported ‘needy’ kids and partly funded by my

grandmother's pension. This was part of my transition and 'natural progression' from farm life to the wider world with all its diversity. From these experiences I learned that if I wanted the best of anything I needed to go outside the rural community to find it.

My siblings and I attended one of the two government secondary schools of around 600 students. One school was for those considering a 'professional' vocation and the other for students entering 'trade areas' of the workforce and my grandmother chose the high school because she hoped I would gain employment as 'a professional'. Throughout secondary schooling I was encouraged to 'do something with my life', which implicitly meant furthering my education, as moving back to work on the farm was an option for the boys in my family but girls were encouraged to find a job or a husband.

Moving from a small rural primary school to a much larger regional secondary school was difficult to begin with. I knew the small number of Mootown kids who had left primary school before me but I didn't know any students in my year level. In addition, I got the impression I was a 'country kid' who was a little out of touch with modern trends in appearance and demeanor. I was also placed in remedial English and Math classes for a term, which was puzzling to me as I wasn't aware that I was behind other students throughout primary school. By the end of secondary schooling my learned belief was that, if I wanted the best of anything, I needed to go away from the isolated rural community to find it.

Two years after me, my younger brother, and then 2 years after him my youngest brother, were also placed in 'catch-up' or remedial classes. Many years later, and on several occasions since, my brothers and I have spoken of our fond memories of Mootown primary school, but we've also discussed the 'problems' of being educated in a small town. Fond memories of close bonds with families and friends and our teacher were mixed with bewilderment over our perceived 'substandard education.' This links with stereotypes that being rural is partly deficient and the condition of living in a rural area creates deficiencies of various kinds, particularly with respect to education (Theobald and Wood 2010, p. 17).

For my brothers, who still live and are raising their families in Mootown working the family farm, now a vineyard, the problem didn't go away. Both brothers were on the local school council for several years when their kids attended primary school and they were determined to give their kids better opportunities than they perceived they had themselves. Many years later, in a conversation about our early schooling, one brother recalled a secondary teacher at a parent teacher interview, labeling his eldest son as 'slow' and explaining that this was common because, 'most kids who come from Mootown need support of some kind'. During such discussions my brothers would argue and probe and demand some answers from me, after all I was training teachers so what the hell was I doing about it? If I had been doing my job, '…there would be better teachers in 'the bush', who helped the 'slow kids'. I have reflected on these words many times throughout my professional life as, on the one hand experiences of living in Mootown had been a positive experience, but on the other hand it was deficient with respect to education and exposure to diversity. Factors impacting on deficiencies related to peoples' life experiences, which may be

limited due to isolation, as well as factors related to schooling, such as a lack of material and human resources.

In this chapter, I will reflect on the ways that my professional path has intersected with my goals to improve my practice in teaching about teaching. At the time of writing this self-study I had returned to teacher education after several years of working with teachers in rural settings and the self-study was an opportunity for me to, once again, '… grasp the sense of excitement' (Loughran and Northfield 1998, p. 8) at improving my professional practice as a teacher educator. As a doctoral candidate at my previous university in Goldridge just over 10 years ago I had begun to examine ways of preparing largely monocultural pre-service teachers for teaching diverse students. A focus for my doctoral studies was what students brought to teacher education and the meanings they were making of their early teacher education experiences yet I had only just begun to reflect on my own practice and what I bring to teacher education. The self-study was an opportunity to 'practice what I preach' (Loughran and Northfield 1998, p. 7) and through interactions with my previous work, literature and colleagues I aimed to better align my teaching intents with my teaching actions (Loughran 2007).

In the sections that follow, I will retroactively reflect on particular phases of my professional career, describe how these experiences led me to my doctoral study, and then I will use the findings of my doctoral dissertation to reflect on my past and current professional decisions and practices. I am using the process of autobiographical writing in this self-study in order to inform the ways my past experiences shape how I now prepare teachers for diverse student populations.

## Teaching in Regional and Rural Areas

Like many rural working class females who completed their secondary education at that time, I went on to attend teacher's college as a 'bonded' preservice teacher in the nearest provincial city with a training college. In exchange for a small government funded studentship and course fees, 'bonded' students were required to teach in rural and regional public schools for 3 years in any location in Victoria. For many working class young people, especially girls, this was the only way to gain access to tertiary education.

I graduated 3 years later and began teaching in a rural school, determined to be the best rural teacher I could. I spent the next 15 years of my teaching and professional life in small schools in and around a large provincial city in regional Australia. My professional experience involved 8 years as a primary and junior secondary school teacher and 5 years as a literacy and numeracy curriculum consultant for Catholic schools in regional and rural towns. In the role of curriculum consultant I worked with teams of teachers in the region to plan, implement and evaluate curriculum and policy changes within school and system educational settings. I undertook this work with a firm commitment to provide access to quality professional development through a model of teacher change which valued partnerships between

teacher/practitioner and curriculum consultant/researcher through collaborative research and action research projects involving reflection, decision making, implementation and further reflection (Carr and Kemmis 1983; Elliot 1984; Shon 1983). Central to the process of professional development was valuing teachers' prior knowledge and understandings of language and literacy learning and teaching, and literacy learners, and providing ongoing stimulus and support, or coaching, for teachers in order to facilitate change (Joyce and Showers 1982; Showers 1985). Informed by research and further study on 'teachers and change' (Johnson 1989), I undertook this work with an understanding that there are various ways teachers come to interpret, understand and respond to change proposals, because their actions were mediated by their past experiences, prior knowledge, socio-cultural backgrounds and 'professional growth states' (Joyce et al. 1983; Rowe 1992). As I now reflect on this work with rural teachers and professional development through coaching I am aware of how it has shaped my practices in preparing pre-service teachers.

## Working as a Teacher Educator in a Regional University

I commenced the role as a language and literacy teacher educator at Goldridge University with a belief that preservice teachers' past experiences, prior knowledge and competencies, and cultural and linguistic resources mediated the ways in which they would come to understand, interpret and respond to teacher education. Therefore, my university pedagogical practices needed to value, affirm and utilize students' identities, past experiences and prior knowledge and also challenge them to examine and reconstruct what they knew in coming to know teaching. This then implied a certain teacher education process and pedagogy which was characterized by personal reflection and critical analysis of educational theories and practices. If I aimed to model the kind of teaching I hoped teachers would engage in – teaching that is based on the idea that their own students construct knowledge – then this implied a certain kind of teaching. Rather than passive listening, teaching must actively engage students in reflection, critical thinking, analysis, inquiry and debate.

I worked as a language and literacy teacher educator and researcher for the next 15 years and my work was self-reflexive and filled with conjecture and detours. I constantly grappled with the difficulties I was having in raising issues of diversity and of the notion of education as a site to value and cultivate diversity and address inequities. In this work I was reminded of the inequities in literacy outcomes for rural isolated, ethnically diverse, disadvantaged and indigenous student populations, as evidenced by various standardized tests, and I continued to be troubled by my brother's plea to 'get some better teachers in the bush'. Changing conceptions of the nature of language and literacy, and what it meant to be literate, changes in school language and literacy curriculum and programs (Lo Bianco and Freebody 2001), and the preparation of teachers to teach literacy in schools categorized as 'disadvantaged' and 'multicultural' also shaped the decisions I made.

The students in the teacher education program at Goldridge University remained largely ethnically homogeneous and could be described as 'Anglo and Celtic Australian'. In many ways, we had shared identities. The majority shared the positives of being rural, although a few of them saw their experience as debilitating in terms of experiences and opportunities as the following student explained:

> I came from a small town called Appleton, do ya know it? God, I thought Appleton was the centre (sic) of the earth; I'd never been anywhere else. It's like you live there all your life and you get buried there in the cemetery, it's that kind of town. Do ya know what I mean? Thank God I managed to get out. If you were like my family you never went very far for most of your life. (Hope-Rowe 2003, p. 249).

My experience as a teacher had been with largely homogeneous populations of students and my experience of preparing teachers for diverse students was a reflection of my professional and lived experiences in rural settings. My view of rural as 'deficient' was fore fronted in these experiences. Therefore, I faced the problem that many teacher educators do. How do we as teacher educators prepare teachers for diverse school populations when we ourselves have limited direct experience?

Similar to other mainstream teacher educators, I believed I was doing important work, and that this attention to diversity was largely unchartered terrain in universities with largely homogeneous student populations and teaching staff (Cochran-Smith 1995; Epstein 1993; O'Shannessy 1996; Rosenberg 1997). However, teacher educators who have undertaken this work are well aware that there are no ready-made or easy answers and the only certainty may be, '… uncertainty about how and what to say, whom and what to have students read and write, about who can teach whom, who can speak for whom, and who has the right to speak at all about the possibilities and pitfalls of promoting a discourse about race and teaching in preservice education' (Cochran-Smith 1995, p. 546). In addition, while it may be possible to raise students' awareness, or to enhance their dispositions for teaching in diverse settings, such work barely begins to address the problem of preparing them to successfully teach children with diverse cultural and linguistic resources and to address disadvantage. However, when I began to research my own practice in 1998 for my doctoral thesis it was not with a 'corrective' attitude, rather I sought to examine my understanding of the perspectives of a cohort of primary preservice teachers in order to recognize how their past experiences, prior knowledge, attitudes and competencies may have mediated how they responded to teacher education.

My doctoral research examined the ways in which identity, difference and cultural diversity were written about and talked about by a group of second year preservice teachers in the Bachelor of Education (Primary) Degree course. The research entailed reading a range of educational texts concerned with identity, difference and cultural diversity: academic publications, policy and media documents, university documents, autobiographical writings and interview transcripts. In my doctoral research, I adopted a discursive approach (Foucault 1979) as I was interested not just in linguistic forms but contexts in which linguistic forms are used. I examined the discursive resources (verbal, interactional and nonverbal) of the particular group of students in my class and the resources that were made available through the course assignments, texts, and assessments as well as the general university experience.

The primary unit of analysis of identities and difference, and cultural diversity in particular, was discourse. Discourse is about what can be said and thought, how it can be said and who can speak, when, and with what authority (Hall 1992).

The genesis of the study for my doctoral thesis was partly personal experience of many years of living and working in regional and rural areas in Victoria that, while some changes have occurred in more recent years, have remained largely ethnically homogeneous populations that can be described as 'Anglo and Celtic Australian'. I had worked with teachers, principals and schools system administrators in the region for many years and continued to have ongoing involvement in teacher professional development and programs for at-risk students (Country Education Project 1994; Prain et al. 1992). While a teacher educator as a graduate student in the regional university of Goldridge, I had developed what were essentially 'hunches' about preservice teachers' and teachers' lack of awareness and concern for issues of socio-cultural and linguistic diversity and implications for teaching and learning.

## Preservice Teachers' Discursive Constructions of Diversity

In the language and literacy education course that provided the focus for my doctoral study, my colleagues and I aimed to raise students' awareness and challenge their assumptions when considering the needs of learners and the selection of teaching resources and approaches. In my teaching across 4 years of the Primary Education Degree at Goldridge, I claimed to present students with various theories and approaches to language and literacy learning and to assist them to develop a repertoire of skills and techniques for classroom teaching with diverse student populations. I also espoused that, to treat ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences as simply matters of 'individual differences', and in some way natural or neutral, does not address critical aspects of literacy learning for diverse students, and multicultural appreciation and understanding for all students. In addition, back then when I reflected on such issues and implications for language and literacy teacher education, I was aware that the educational decisions I was making were influenced partly by the university course structure and the curriculum design, content and pedagogy, and partly by my identity and past experience as well as a particular student population.

As a white middleclass, middle aged, female teacher educator, I began to question if I was paying sufficient attention to particular aspects of my role in pre-service teachers' learning, including the acknowledgement of the power of my position and the impact of my social and cultural biography on their development. It may be that, as a teacher educator, I was unknowingly maintaining existing systems of privilege through who I am, what I taught and how I taught it. With limited course material that related to diversity, and homogeneous student and staff populations this may have been the case. I may also have paid insufficient attention to students' past experiences in various communities and schools in relation to their contact with people from non-mainstream backgrounds and their memories of learning (and teachers of) language and literacy. The challenge for me became to find ways to assist pre-service

teachers to consider how their personal histories and prior experiences influenced their perspectives on teaching and learning, and help to make this knowledge explicit (Weinstein 1989).

Written autobiographies, including cultural and linguistic profiles, of a cohort of 150 second year preservice teachers and interviews with 30 students formed the primary sources of data in my dissertation. In addition, I collected and analysed university documents as data about the particular institutional context and teacher education course. I treated the data generated in the case study as text and employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approaches informed by critical, post structuralist and feminist perspectives to theorise about preservice teacher's discursive constructions of identity and diversity. Foucault (1972, p. 49) described the constructing character of discourse as defining, constructing and positioning human subjects as discourses, 'systematically form the objects about which they speak'. In other words, discourses don't just represent social entities and relations they construct them. Teacher education is a site where dominant sociocultural discourses compete to construct and position teacher educators and preservice teachers in discourses of classroom practices, staffrooms, and educational curriculum and policies (Britzman 1991; Cochran-Smith 1995, 1997, 2000). Knowledge gained from such research is partial, situated (according to the particular social and historical context) and relative (to the researcher's understandings and world) (Wetherell et al. 2001).

I was interested in how preservice teachers take up discourses, and assume subject positions, and use them to formulate and articulate versions of the world in the particular context and historical time. In students' written autobiographical pieces their discursive constructions of their identities and past experiences were read as the discursive resources they brought to teacher education. What students spoke about in interviews was read as the resources that were available to them explicitly, through university course work and field experiences, and implicitly, through the university environment.

In their autobiographies, students showed limited constructions of their identities and it should be noted that over half the student cohort did not complete cultural and linguistic profiles. They simply chose to ignore it, perhaps because they lacked conscious awareness that they had identities including ethnicity and/or culture(s), or they had difficulties in describing themselves and their families in terms of culture (Epstein 1993). Perhaps they did not think of themselves as cultural beings, a term they reserved for other more easily identifiable groups (Gillespie et al. 2002; Nieto 1992), or they did not see themselves as part of the multicultural picture (King et al. 1997; Rosenberg 1998). While many students did not take up the invitation to write and to talk about identity and culture in direct ways, they did choose to describe the influences of families, rural communities, rural schools and religious affiliations in shaping their identities.

In reading across the interview data I could examine how they were positioning themselves and others in preparing to teach in the context of the particular regional community and university. Most had had limited contact with cultural and linguistic diversity in the community, at university and in schools and little formally acquired knowledge. I concluded that, students' discursive resources for analyzing differences

and teaching in diverse settings were limited. It could also be contended that deficit discourses predominated in many of their accounts. The most generous conclusion I came to regarding cultural and linguistic diversity was that the pre-service teachers were, at best, lacking in awareness, and at worst unashamedly racist. In reflecting on why I too did not share adverse views on diversity for this self-study I surmised it was partly due to my grandmother's encouragement for me to see and experience a diverse world, even though she had not. She had provided real and vicarious opportunities for me to be open to diversity through cultural and social experiences and through reading. We would read and talk about the lives of people in other places for hours, and I developed a passion for reading biographies, usually about the lives of women in other places. Perhaps as a result, I spent most of my savings in my early career on travel.

## Finding a Way Forward: Acting on the Goals of the Study

Some of the implications arising from my doctoral study, called for action at governmental and teacher education sector levels and others were pertinent for teacher educators in general and, in particular, teacher educators in universities with largely 'monocultural' student populations. Those that were relevant at governmental and teacher education sector levels, such as the need for more systematic and on-going auditing of teacher education course in terms of content and provision, and how and why teacher education courses are accredited and by whom, were largely not in my sphere of influence at the conclusion of the study. However, implications for course development and university classroom teaching and those that related to the particular institution, such as a need to review pre-service teacher course units and field experiences in order to widen their experiences, were within my range of influence.

Implications for course development and teaching were as follows:

Proposition 1. Teacher education course components should include substantial components on diversity and inclusion in Australian schools with a particular focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the Australian context.

Proposition 2. Teacher education should provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to explore and to clarify their own identities and cultures in order to open up discourse on diverse groups and students with diverse cultural and linguistic resources.

Proposition 3. Teacher education has a major role in opening up discourse around difference, cultural diversity and issues associated with multiculturalism, immigration and racism in university classrooms.

Proposition 4. Teacher education must be regarded as an important site for examining social justice and equity issues.

Proposition 5. Studies in Language and Literacy are an important site for considering issues of cultural and linguistic diversity. Social justice and equity issues

associated with continued underperformance in English literacy among some groups of students in Australian schools warrant particular attention.

Proposition 6. Particular attention, evaluation and direction should be provided for teacher education in mono-cultural settings so that issues of diversity are not dismissed or minimized as irrelevant or inappropriate in particular locations. (Adapted from Hope-Rowe 2003 pp. 305–313).

Before I left my doctoral program, we used findings from my study to make changes in the curriculum of the teacher education program. In terms of course development, associated with Propositions one and five, mapping of changes in the documentation of core units in Language and Literacy across 4 years of the program showed increased inclusions of topics on diversity and inclusion. Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL), Aboriginal English, Community and Family Literacies and Teaching Students with Additional Needs were included in 'core', rather than 'elective' units. This was a shift from a sole focus we had previously on the modes of Language and Literacy (reading, writing, speaking and listening) and can be partly attributed to the efforts my colleagues and I were making in order to raise awareness of diversity and teaching students with diverse socio-cultural and linguistic resources. In addition, students were encouraged and assisted in undertaking school-based and other field experiences with diverse student populations and/or in diverse community sites. As field experience co-ordinator, an administrative role I undertook for 2 years, I encouraged and assisted students to undertake field experiences in multicultural settings and in remote and rural areas, with a particular focus on working in Aboriginal community schools.

In terms of teaching I had become increasingly aware of a need to rethink, review and refine my own curriculum and pedagogy in the university language and literacy units I taught in order to foreground issues of diversity and disadvantage. On reflection now, I believe I did this as a conscious effort to raise standards and opportunities for students with low socioeconomic backgrounds, Indigenous students, those with limited English skills, those from remote areas and students with disabilities (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne 1998).

## Leading Change in the Bush

I began this chapter by recounting and reflecting on some influences of my early life and schooling in rural and regional settings and on the professional path I took to teacher education. I then examined my early teaching career and how and why my research interests and teaching practices developed at Goldridge University. I now turn to consider a decision I made to leave teacher education to take up a 5-year appointment as a Cluster Educator in a group of schools in a rural setting. In reflecting on this decision now, for the purposes of this self-study, I believe I was trying to regain some important contact with schools that was partly lost through my university work. The change provided a degree of personal and professional renewal.

I moved to live in 'the bush' and was based in a Preparatory to Year 12 school, commonly known as 'P-12', or 'consolidated' schools, in an isolated rural town and serviced the school and three small feeder schools. The P-12 school had around 300 students and a staff of 12 equivalent fulltime teachers and each small school had three teachers with a teaching principal. Classes were multi-aged, with several family members in the same room, and each time I went to one of the feeder schools I felt like I had come full circle and was back in Mootown Primary School.

My role was to 'transform the middle years of schooling' so that students could have the best opportunity to make smooth transitions from the primary to secondary years of schooling and to improve student outcomes and retention rates. Improved literacy levels were deemed to be the key, as many students in the outlying schools were considered 'disadvantaged' and 'at-risk' of not completing secondary schooling with the optimum levels of literacy and numeracy necessary for further education or the workforce. The role involved curriculum development, teacher professional learning and community engagement. This was another opportunity for me to pursue a goal to improve literacy outcomes for students in rural schools, an issue reminiscent of my own schooling when I left Mootown to attend secondary school.

In terms of curriculum development I formed professional learning teams of teachers across Years 5–8 to write interdisciplinary inquiry-based units of work on topics such as Health and Wellbeing, Sustainability and Australia and our Asian Neighbours. Teachers designed rich problem-based tasks for multi-aged groups of students utilising the Productive Pedagogies model (Mills et al. 2009). For teacher professional learning I provided seminars on literacy across the curriculum, writing in the subject areas, digital literacies, thinking skills across the curriculum, personal and co-operative learning and inquiry-based methods. Community engagement, the third element of the role, occurred through parent-teacher seminars, shared development of the schools' strategic and annual implementation plans, and parental involvement in curriculum activities such gardening, growing vegetables, cooking, waste management and tree planting. Wider community involvement occurred through activities at the Bush Nurse Centre, the Community Bank and through community groups such as Landcare and the local Eel (music) Festival.

## What I Learnt from My Experiences in the Bush

I had returned to a rural area in Victoria to help improve learning outcomes for middle years students and for this self-study I reflected on the experience in relation to my current practice as a teacher educator. I read back through the cluster educator reports I had submitted each term to the region over those 5 years and initially deduced that my efforts to transform the middle years were filled with challenges and frustrations and that there was more conjecture than certainty in the work. There were successful professional development projects such as the Digital Storytelling workshop that resulted in some wonderful student productions and the less than successful projects such as the Reading to Learn techniques (Rose 2005) delivered

by visiting consultants. Throughout this work there were teachers who participated willingly and enthusiastically, embracing change, and those who stood on the sidelines watching or unwilling to change what they had been doing and thinking about teaching and learning throughout many years in the same school. In reflecting on my time in the bush more deeply for this self-study I concluded that the experience grounded, confirmed and strengthened aspects of my on-going work and research on teachers and change with teachers (Rowe 1992) and provided new challenges in relation to rural education. For example, access to resources and quality professional development, and a lack of teacher awareness of socio-economic and cultural and linguistic diversity in teaching language and literacy.

I had spent over 15 years at Goldridge University prior to this and, in a sense, I had lost touch with the needs of middle years students and the literacy demands in transitioning from primary to secondary schooling where students were encountering more demanding subject knowledge and literate competencies through extended tasks that were frequently multi-layered and multi-dimensional. I came away from 5 years in the bush with a renewed conviction that literacy is a concern for all teachers (not just primary and English teachers) and how critical it is that teachers explicitly teach literate practices that are new to middle years students. I also gained first hand experience in working with older 'at-risk' readers and writers with histories of disengagement and marginalization and, aside from developing my knowledge and skills of policy and program development for Literacy Support Programs, I was able to re-examine how schools, curriculum, educational practices, testing and the discourses surrounding success and failure in literacy may work against 'at-risk' students. Through my work with older 'at-risk' literacy learners in general and adolescent males in particular, who were transitioning to apprenticeships or searching for employment, this work strengthened my belief that there is a need for on-going school support and intervention programs for older 'at-risk literacy learners (Rowe et al. 2000).

On reflection now, I can speculate that my experiences of living and working in the particular rural community during this phase of my professional career helped me to re-connect diversity and educational disadvantage in a rural context. Back in Goldridge teachers from several surrounding rural schools had had on-going concerns about the lower than expected levels of literacy of many middle years students, often associated with socio-economic disadvantage. Back then I had been reading studies of literacy practices in disadvantaged schools and, in particular, those that focussed on the perspectives of students, rather than teachers, and the positive work that was going on in schools with '…highly talented, committed and experienced teachers' (Comber et al. 2001, p. 261). Rather than painting a bleak picture, such studies drew attention to the importance of re-examining teacher-learner interactions around literacy, the socio-linguistic resources that students bring to school and the literacy practices made available to them. Viewed this way the relationship between disadvantage and outcomes are complex but also more positive.

I had opportunities to interpret diversity and disadvantage through a language and literacy lens first hand which confirmed some of the propositions associated

with my earlier research. There were several English as an Additional Language (EAL) students who were new arrivals to Australia, or had moved from metropolitan areas, and a larger Maori population from New Zealand who had settled in the area for work, shearing sheep. The EAL students' parents had taken the opportunity for residency under the Australian government skilled migrant scheme. In this scheme, adult migrants who have skills and credentials where there are shortages in regional Australian can gain residency.

The government had created a funding scheme for new arrivals to remote areas. This funding was used to provide language support for those who did not have English language skills. Through this funding scheme I was able to examine teaching approaches and instructional practices that reflected diverse students' needs and re-examine readings from my doctoral studies that urge teachers to evaluate teaching approaches and instructional practices to consider the effects on minority groups (Comber et al. 2001; Delpit 1986; Dressman 1993; Lensmire 1994; Martin and Rothery 1986). For example, while working with new arrival EAL students from Croatia I observed how, for literacy instruction to be successful, it needs to be compatible with and emerge from the cultural experiences and traditions of the learners (Dyson 1993; Fordam and Ogbu 1986; Heath 1983; Kale and Luke 1991). Moreover I found ways to affirm and utilise the diverse resources they brought to school (Au 1993).

Challenges in my work as Cluster Educator in a rural setting were associated with a lack of resources and professional development opportunities for teachers as well as support for specific Literacy Support Programs for improved outcomes for students with low socio-economic circumstances. Since the provision of quality professional learning is not always accessible to rural teachers, I applied for specific funding through various philanthropic and systems schemes such as the Quality Teacher Program, to enable teachers to attend professional development programs in regional and metropolitan settings and to bring educational consultants and curriculum leaders to the schools.

From my early family life and schooling in Mootown I had learnt that there were simultaneously positive and negative aspects to living in rural communities. From my work as a cluster educator I had learnt that there were positives and negatives in working in rural schools in terms of resources, teachers' aptitudes for change, access to professional learning and professional socialization (Sharplin 2002).

## Returning to Teacher Education in a Regional University

Three years ago, I obtained a position in a large regional secondary school as a teacher and co-ordinator of Additional Needs Programs. In addition to my secondary school position, I accepted a part-time position in teacher education at the regional campus of Sandy Bay University in a coastal regional city. I brought several years of experience of teaching and coordinating pre-service and in-service teacher education units in language and literacy at a regional university and a passion to

teach in teacher education again. In addition, I brought collective experiences of years in rural schools working with teachers and 'disadvantaged' students. I brought recent school-based experience of diversity and difference in terms of students with disabilities and additional needs, Indigenous students and new arrival (EAL) students. Therefore, as a part time lecturer, I reasoned that my dual role as a secondary teacher and teacher educator would keep me grounded and allow me to pursue a social and educational vision of justice and equity in my future work.

I began the process of becoming a teacher educator again by reflecting on phases in my professional career and reviewing the propositions from my doctoral dissertation. I had left Goldridge University with, what I now considered, 'unfinished business', given the idealised list of implications in my dissertation and, on reflection of, my own practice. In commencing teaching I decided that, in order to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to explore and to clarify their own identities and cultures in order to open up discourse on diverse groups and students with diverse cultural and linguistic resources (Proposition 2), I should acknowledge my own subjectivities in teaching. I would talk about my past personal and professional experiences of living and working in rural and regional areas and foreground my sense of place and identity, and the resources I bring to teacher education. I would use my past and recent teaching experience to provide examples to clarify and support the educational philosophies, theories and practices espoused through the unit aims and the enactment of those aims in classes and assessments. I would draw on my particular field of study as a language and literacy teacher educator, educational consultant, and teacher to critique examples of system, school and classroom practices in relation to rurality, diversity and disadvantage.

## Enacting the Propositions at Sandy Bay University

To reflect on my work in developing and teaching the education units, I reviewed study guides, power points and class outlines together with my class follow-up reflective notes, readings, resources and assessments. This formed a corpus of data I could use to reflect on course content and my current practice as a teacher educator. With an understanding that key starting points for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) are social issues and problems (Fairclough 2001), I focused on how preservice teachers are constructing themselves and others in coming to know teaching. In an initial reading I became aware of some overarching changes in my thinking and practices in relation to the doctoral propositions and, in further readings I was drawn to specifics in relation to particular aspects of my teaching and how pre-service teachers were defining, constructing and positioning human subjects in terms of diversity, difference and disadvantage. In Fairclough's (1989, 1992, 1995) model of CDA there are three interrelated and overlapping processes of analysis namely, text analysis, processing analysis and social analysis (situational, institutional, societal), which are tied to three interrelated dimensions of discourse- texts, discursive practices and social practice. For example, in analysing texts of classroom interactions

and discussions I would return to analyse class materials and readings and my reflective notes on particular teaching practices in this regional university at this particular time. I attempted to move between broad social formations and micro textual analytic work as a process of describing, interpreting and explaining (Luke 1995; van Dijk 1993).

For the purposes of this self-study I selected the second year unit, Teacher-Learner Relationships, as a focus because I have been more involved in the development and teaching of this unit and the cohort was in the same program year as those who participated in my doctoral research. I began the analysis by reading the power points and class outlines I had developed for the unit. At the same time I moved back and forth to the study guide developed by the Unit Chair to see how the decisions I was making were influenced partly by the university unit structures, readings and assessments and partly by the pedagogical choices I made as influenced by my identity and past experience as well as the particular student population. I then examined the class activities and my reflective classroom notes on students' responses in order to reflect on my practice in relation to my previous work.

The unit, '…focuses on how building effective teaching and learning relationships can support safe, inclusive, engaging and challenging learning environments' (Teacher-Learner Relationships Unit Guide, Trimester 1 2014). With this broad goal I read across the study guide and class materials and considered recurring topics associated with concepts of teacher-learner relationships, identity and difference. The unit calendar lists the sequence of topics and the readings associated with each topic. Attributes associated with learner-teacher relationships include communication skills, learner self-esteem and efficacy, thinking skills and positive classroom management. Categories associated with identities and differences include: cultural and linguistic diversity; indigenous education; social class and inequity and learning disabilities and difficulties. In the sequence 'identity' and 'difference' are positioned up front in week two with class content and materials focussing on students with diverse cultural and linguistic resources and Indigenous education. The general attributes of communication, self-esteem, thinking and classroom management come later and are linked to the attributes of learners in order to '…understand how the diverse resources of learners may impact on their relationships and their learning' (Teacher-Learner Relationships: Unit Guide, Trimester 1 2014). While the unit guide states that, 'students will explore concepts of diversity and equity related to disability, gender, ethnicity, language, and family background (Teacher-Learner Relationships: Unit Guide, Trimester 1 2014), gender is not a topic for specific attention and rural education is not included as a separate topic.

## Constructing Profiles and Examining Identities

When I was preparing preservice teachers at Goldridge I would not have spoken up front about my rural background, but as a result of my learning since then, I begin the unit by sharing aspects of my identity and show photos of the small rural school

I attended in Mootown to contextualise the idea of close teacher-learner relationships through links between school, home and community (Powerpoint 1, 'Introduction to Teacher-Learner Relationships'). I theorise how the school serves as an important space for social activity and cultural meaning making, helping maintain local traditions and particular identities of rural communities (Schafft and Youngblood Jackson 2010, p. 2). I recount the ways my teacher Mr. Ilott incorporated home and community interests and literacies, and I make connections to literacy pedagogy that proposes that for literacy instruction to be successful, it needs to be compatible with and emerge from the cultural experiences and traditions of learners (Dyson 1993; Fordam and Ogbu 1986; Heath 1983; Kale and Luke 1991). I give my views on attending and working in small and rural schools and I talk about the inequities in outcomes for rural isolated and ethnically diverse students. I recount my experiences of deficencies and tell them about my brother's plea to "get some better teacher's in the bush".

In enacting proposition two from my dissertation, I provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to explore and clarify their own identities and cultures and to open up discourse on diverse cultural and linguistic resources of students they are preparing to teach (Weinstein 1989). In order to encourage dialogue I use a simulation activity where I ask them to position themselves in the room according to where they were born in relation to me. We then move to where our mothers, fathers and maternal and paternal grandparents, and great grandparents were born. I then provide information showing recent demographics of teachers and students in Australian schools and asked them to reflect on our collective identities and consider the populations of students they are preparing to teach.

I ask them to construct personal profiles using a concept map. I prompt them as I too make jottings on family, gender, location (metropolitan, regional, rural), contact with diverse groups, social class, languages spoken and written, religious affiliation(s), relationship 'status', schooling, travel and work. They participated with enthusiasm and when one student called out, 'What about recreation, that's part of our culture and identity?' others contributed and we continued to talk and make jotting on rituals, routines, symbols, lifestyles, food and recreational activities.

In reflecting on preservice teachers' responses to these activities now for the purposes of this self-study I recalled how preservice teachers at Goldridge University had difficulties in constructing personal profiles in comparison to this group. The willingness of these students may have been due to the interactive and dialogic nature of the practices I chose as well as my willingness to share my background and experiences. In addition, unlike the previous cohort, they were challenged to consider implications of the mismatch between the demographics of Australia's school population and the teaching population and their future practices as teachers. At the same time, however, some questioned why it should be a problem at all, as they would do their best to cater for 'individual differences', regardless of diversity (Reflective Notes 20/3/2014).

## Talking About Diversity

In order to discuss diversity in relation to teacher-learner relationships topics for weeks 3 and 4 are: cultural and linguistic diversity; Indigenous education; and social class and inequity. I put 'diversity' up front by highlighting education as a site to value and cultivate diversity (Powerpoint 3, 'Identity and Difference'). In the past I would have focussed on mainstream (language and literacy) practices and raised issues of diversity in relation to them as an 'add on'. I provide Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data on Australian demographics and patterns of immigration and settlement and discuss social constructions of identity and difference as 'deficit' and 'resources'. I have adopted the use of the term 'resources' rather than 'backgrounds' in order to avoid conceptualising culture and language as something in the background or the past, rather than dynamic and forward looking (Comber 1998). In the lecture I propose that 'differentness' in people is an ordinary part of human experience but that inclusion is a political position that challenges the way societies attach values to people so that some are considered more worthy than others. In examining population profiles and the distribution of peoples across Australia I talk about the inequities in outcomes for rural isloated, EAL and Indigenous students and those from socio-economically disadvantaged groups. However, I take particular care to point out the problematic nature of data on student outcomes that is derived from standardised testing that can privilege mainstream students.

From the onset I urge pre-service teachers to be mindful of the language they use in referring to diverse learners. For example, there are implicit messages in using 'EAL (English as an Additional Language) learners', rather than 'ESL (English as a Second Language) learners'; 'Students with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder)' rather than 'Autistic students'; and 'Students with disabilities' rather than 'disabled' or 'retarded' students. I explain that messages conveyed by the language we use are powerful and persistent and that teacher education is a site where dominant socio-cultural discourses compete to construct and position teachers and learners.

In the third week we returned to our personal profiles and highlighted aspects of our identities that we considered to be most and least significant and began to look at the role of the social, cultural and political in shaping human identity. At this point I posed that we should consider aspects of our profiles that may have put us in positions of 'privilege'. I hoped that this may involve pre-service teachers in, 'in-depth and contextualized discussion of the ways learners are 'known' in classrooms, and the competing sociological, institutional and psychological discourses that influence and define teacher-learner relationships in schools' (Teacher-Learner Relationships: Unit Guide, Trimester 1 2014). They could then explore a range of attributes of learners and understand how the diverse resources of learners may impact on their relationships and their learning. In the following workshop we explored the idea of 'privilege' further and completed a round robin brainstorming activity termed the 'Hot Potato'. For this classroom activity students quickly rotate around to large sheets of paper or white boards and record their responses to different questions. The 'potato' is hot so you have to move quickly. The questions were

associated with practices that privilege: white, English speaking, middleclass students; heterosexual and Christian values; and those that advantage boys and girls. After completing the brainstorm table groups each take one question and read through the responses and opinions. They present a report as a summary of ideas to the class and select salient comments from the brainstorms.

Initially preservice teachers were puzzled by the proposition of 'privilege'. One student adamantly stated, 'No we were not privileged, far from it.' In my reflections following the class, I read this statement as indicative of the student's perception of a level of perseverance and hard work in achieving what she had. In addition, the use of the pronoun 'we' suggests that she spoke for 'us', as hard working rural and regional people. When I changed the question about 'privilege' to 'advantage' more students took up the discussion. They considered that living in rural and regional areas offered a lifestyle that was advantageous. It was described as "relaxed and safe" with "clean air" and "a friendly, laid back way of life". I then asked them to consider if there were aspects in which they felt disadvantaged and to this question most answered, "No". However, implicit in some students' responses were challenges and negative sentiments, reminiscent of a small number of students at Goldridge, in relation perceived opportunities in rural areas, as Sam explained:

> I left school early, because I thought I would work on the farm. But then there wasn't much left of that so I retrained as a plumber. Well, have you ever been a plumber? It's not easy work but it can pay pretty well. I tried it for a while, then I looked for something else. (Sam)
>
> Why did you leave? (Judith)
>
> Because I had a lousy boss, who didn't pay the correct apprentice wage. And I couldn't see myself doing it when I was older with a family, nothing left of the farm now, so that's still not an option (Sam). (Week 3 Reflective Notes, 27/3/2014).

At this point I explained that I was the only member of my family to gain a tertiary degree, the majority of preservice teachers nodded, and without comment added 'me too'.

In reporting on the privileging of various groups from the Hot Potato activity, group leaders in turn highlighted aspects of white mainstream middle class practices, heterosexual and Christian values, and gender. Summaries from the Hot Potato activity related to curriculum in terms of subjects taught and assessments in terms of tests as markers of success. For example, one of the salient points from the activity was 'NAPLAN (National Assessment Program Literacy And Numeracy) tests tend to benefit the white middleclass by adhering to the 'standard' set by the middleclass' and 'The subjects taught even electives are still generally directed towards white middleclass traditions. It's only recent that schools are including A & TI (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) perspectives.

Following the report on mainstream practices, one student commented that in the past, Aboriginal people didn't have the same privileges as whites and she referred to the weekly text reading (Foley 2013). She reported how the Aboriginal author could only be educated until Year 9, that he had limited opportunities for employment and had experienced covert and overt racism. "He wasn't privileged then", remarked another student. "They are now", uttered another student. Other students opted into the conversation and talked about the amount of money being "poured into" Aboriginal health and education for little gain, government welfare payments and a lack of accountability for Aboriginal parents in educating their children and keeping them

healthy. One student proposed that payments be stopped and there be a voucher system, where parents have to exchange tokens for goods and services to make them use the welfare system better. Another student recounted how his host teacher for his last practicum had "given up" on one Aboriginal student because his parents didn't care about education. At this point I stopped the discussion and moved to the next group.

The group reporting on the practices in schools that privilege heterosexual and Christian values stated at the onset that most, if not all schools do this. Comments selected included: "Christianity tends to promote heterosexual ways of living in indirect teaching i.e. texts and teachers"; "There's so much in our schools that is Christian- Easter, Christmas, Christian based festivities". There was discussion of the privileging of Christian religious values and children who may be marginalization by this. Megan reported that:

> It's a fact that Christianity is in the mainstream curriculum and that in order to be accepted in the Australian community you have to be a Christian. You must believe in God in order to be a good person and to have an opinion. Those who aren't Christian are expected to be quiet about their beliefs and those who believe in a religion other than Christianity are considered by many as 'Un-Australian'. (Week 4, Reflective Notes, 3/4/2014).

The students' reports on practices in schools that privilege girls, and then boys, focused on the subjects provided and taken up, and the types of tasks undertaken. Girls prefer, 'specific subjects like textiles', 'arty subjects and drama' and cooking, whereas boys prefer 'PE (Physical Education) classes, where they generally outshine the girls', 'woodwork and other trade areas'. Girl's preferences for reading and researching were contrasted with boy's preferences for hands-on and activity based tasks. Gendered school practices were then linked to employment options and Judith summed up with the following comment:

> Hands-on learning suits the boys and books are for girls. Girls aren't encouraged to go on and do trades. Boys have a wider choice in future jobs because they can choose anything and it's socially accepted. Whereas girls are expected to go into areas, which involve children and providing care for people who need it. Not much has changed really. (Week 4 Reflective Notes, 3/4/2014).

In reflecting on week four after class I realized that the activity had opened up an unsettling discourse in relation to Aboriginal people similar to what I had encountered many years ago at the time of my doctoral study at Goldridge. By associating aspects of identity and difference with 'privilege' in these activities I was enacting the intention of proposition three and I had provided an opportunity for the expression of racist views. On reflection for this self-study I realize I am still grappling with the ethics of doing this work, and lament a lack of substantial discussion and reading around social justice and equity issues.

## Reading and Writing About Teacher-Learner Relationships

After analysing power points, the study guide and reflective notes on classroom interactions and discussions, I returned to analyse what students were reading at this particular time, and the assessments they were undertaking. There is a customized

text for the unit, consisting of chapters from five texts. The chapters were selected as provocation for critical thinking about diverse families, communities and schools (Bowes et al. 2012); education and society (Connell et al. 2013); teaching and professional experiences (Ewing et al. 2010); diversity, inclusion and engagement (Hyde et al. 2013) and classroom management (McDonald 2013).

There are three assessment tasks, which help build and evaluate preservice teachers' understandings of teacher-learner relationships through the themes above. Assessment one is a reflective learning log, utilizing Cornell Notes, and based on the unit readings and weekly reflection questions. Assessment two is a group task to research inclusive school environments and practices. Assessment three is a case study to demonstrate how a learner is 'known' and how his/her learning is impacted by his/her relationships in the context of a particular school and classroom.

For the purposes of this self-study I analysed task two, primarily because it occurred in week five and I was interested in what and how preservice teachers were taking up ideas related to diversity and inclusive practices in schools. Task two requires groups of four pre-service teachers to become researchers in a school from their previous practicum and to assemble a portraiture. They observe, research and record demonstrated features of a school community that create a safe, inclusive, engaging and challenging learning environment. They take photographs and video recordings of school spaces; examine websites and other publically available documents, such as the strategic plan; collect artefacts, symbols and logos; and interview the principal, or delegate. From the data they construct a visual presentation to convey the way their selected school builds relationships and supports an inclusive approach. The exercise culminates in an 'Expo', where a member from each team takes turns to present information to their peers. For each 10-min presentation there is an audience of three or four, who make notes and frame questions for a 'Q & A' (Question and Answer) type panel discussion. This sets them up for critical reflection on diversity and inclusion. The tutor chairs the panel and directs questions to particular schools and team representatives for elaboration, clarification and justification of ideas presented in the Expo.

The Expo was busy, noisy and exciting with five groups espousing ideas on inclusive environments, programs and practices of their host schools and questioning and discussing the merits of various approaches to developing positive teacher-learner relationships. The activity created open and critical discussion on: inclusive approaches and programs; the stated, hidden and null curriculum; diversity in school communities; supporting positive behavior and resolving conflict; student voice and advocacy; and parental and community engagement.

At the time of completing this self-study, second year students were completing written reflections on task two and the overwhelming majority considered it to be a very positive learning experience with comments relating to individual and group learnings about diversity, inclusivity and teacher-learner relationships as follows:

> I was able to further my knowledge on topics of inclusiveness amongst diverse learners, restorative practices and pedagogy. I was not only starting to notice the different ways in which schools can celebrate diversity, but began to understand the importance of it.

> The school offers a Koori (Aboriginal) program that enables all students to take part in activities to promote cultural understanding and education. Some readings state that normalization of culture is a large part of schooling and that it is often the culture of power that is dominant, taken for granted and privileged over other cultures. We've talked about this in class, but the Indigenous program made this idea real for our group. They are currently facilitating multiple activities including a fire pit, at which they intend to have a whole school event, and an indigenous garden that will promote knowledge of native plantations and traditions.
>
> The group learnt a lot by researching a rural and low socio-economic school. We learnt that schools are not just about education, they are about healthy lifestyles, sports, culture, differences and other aspects of life. I thought it was a great idea to plant a vegetable garden that is accessible to the school and wider community. It allows people access to fresh and nutritious food and educates students about fresh fruit and vegetables.

These extracts allowed me to reflect back on past limited efforts to raise awareness of diversity and inclusivity in the context of language and literacy teaching at Goldridge University and led me to conclude that these second year pre-service teachers were beginning to construct valuable understandings from readings, classroom experiences, fieldwork and assessments.

## Learning from Teaching at Sandy Bay

In this self-study I consider influences of my personal and professional experiences in largely homogeneous rural settings on my efforts to raise awareness of diversity in teacher education. Through the autobiographical writing I have instigated links to disadvantage as I trace my work in rural and regional schools and students with diverse cultural and linguistic resources. In reflecting on my recent teaching at Sandy Bay in terms of the propositions from my doctoral studies, I have been confirmed in some practices and in others there is more to know.

In relation to the second year unit, Teacher-Learner Relationships, I am confirmed in the value of providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to explore and to clarify their own identities and cultures as a starting point for understanding and interpreting diversity. In my experience in two regional universities such experiences can open unsettling discourse about race and racism. That there is and perhaps always has been 'latent or covert' racism towards Australia's Indigenous population always needs to be investigated and challenged. I theorize that if racist discourses are ignored, then the constitutive nature of discourse works against the attainment of various educational sector policies in relation to Indigenous education and disadvantage, yet I confront uncertainty about how to manage the conversation once people reveal their racist views. I will continue to enact proposition three and, in opening up unsettling discourses associated with race and racism, I will endorse a process of self-awareness and self-reflection on how people's views and practices are shaped. When racist views are expressed I will challenge pre-service teachers to think about where their ideas and opinions came from, and what, when and who helped to shape them. I will explain that open expression of opinions is valued in my classroom, and that thinking about how our opinions are formed by own identities and experiences helps us to develop informed opinions.

I have first-hand knowledge, experience and opinions on living in rural and regional communities and working with diverse students in these settings. Therefore, I will continue to speak with students about my personal dilemmas associated with schooling – who I teach, what I teach and how I teach. I will share my personal and professional journey with them and explain how and why I have come to link, literacy, diversity, rural/regional and disadvantage. Student feedback over the past 2 years has highlighted the value of listening to my personal stories and concrete examples from my current practice in my dual role as manager of additional needs programs and teacher educator. In addition, student feedback suggests that using language and literacy as a lens to pursue a social and educational vision of justice and equity has grounded discussion of disadvantage and the privileging of mainstream practices in schooling.

In preparing two new third year units on curriculum and pedagogy with colleagues I will be mindful of beginning with the notion of pedagogies and curricula for diverse groups. In a time of early implementation of a national curriculum I will pose various pedagogical positions and encourage preservice teachers to critique and question practices and develop their own frameworks. In examining curriculum I will offer various educational theories and curriculum models within the national framework and assist preservice teachers to make decisions depending on diverse student populations and school contexts. These units are important sites for opening up discourse around social justice and equity and relationships between factors such as race, ethnicity, culture, class, gender and ability. In order to continue to develop the units I also need to examine other education units in the course in detail, especially with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural information and perspectives. I also need to audit classroom practices in the units that aim to raise awareness of preservice teacher's identities and cultures in preparing to teach.

The journey continues. Throughout the writing of this self-study I have come to recognize the value of self-study as a form of professional development and unlike any I have experienced before. At the very least the process has helped me more fully understand the challenges and difficulties of reflective teacher education (Dinkelman 2003). In addition, the editors for this text consistently challenged my thinking on 'rurality', 'diversity' and 'disadvantage' as they interrogated the practices and pathways I took in writing and making connections with who I am and what I do as a teacher educator. Now I am prompted to find new ways for collegial interactions around my practice and spaces for pre-service teachers' voices to highlight alternative views and challenge my assumptions (Loughran 2007).

I have found some ways to proceed with reframing my practice in teacher education and I am aware that there is more to know. My brothers are now talking about the education of their grandchildren in rural and regional areas. We still question the quality of education in rural schools, but these days they are not so demanding of my efforts to do something about 'getting some better teachers in the bush'. Perhaps they have come to know more of the complexities of issues associated with diversity and educational disadvantage, or perhaps they recognise that I will continue to find ways to work with pre-service teachers that enable them to act effectively with diverse learners, or at least to develop the disposition to do so.

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# Part II
# Notions of Rural as Heaven or Hell

# Unpacking Multiple Realities of Rural School Politics

**Nathan D. Brubaker**

## Unpacking Multiple Realities of Rural School Politics: A Self-Study

> [Micropolitics] is about relationships not structures, knowledge rather than information, talk rather than paper. Even then is it rarely spoken of directly. The hint, the guarded reference, the euphemism are the lexicon of politics. It is the stuff of mutual understanding and misunderstanding, of later denial, of informal sources and second-hand accounts. It deals in short-term gains, expediency and pragmatism rather than long-term goals, principles and ideals....It brings together enemies and divides friends. (Ball 1987, pp. 245–246)

Nearly 15 years ago, from 1998 to 2001, I was a beginning teacher in a rural elementary school in a Northeast state in the USA. I lived where I had grown up, in a suburban area—hardly a large metropolitan region—30 min away by car. Though I had not personally inhabited a remote countryside or farm, and therefore perceived such areas largely through others' eyes, I was always only within a mile or so of many who did inhabit such areas. Like most of my colleagues, I commuted to school each day from a different town—as somewhat of an outsider to the immediate locale—to help instruct children in the community. On the exterior, the school was idyllically located: beside a tall mountain surrounded by expansive wooded areas, farms, and pastures. Only occasional buildings and unpaved roads dotted the landscape, with large homes occupying isolated tracts of land, well removed from travelled areas with extended driveways. From touring the town by automobile, it was difficult to discern how many people lived in the community since few residences and properties were openly visible. On the inside, the school was small yet charming, with a prominently placed display concerning the school's commitment

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© Springer International Publishing Switzerland 2016

A.K. Schulte, B. Walker-Gibbs (eds.), *Self-studies in Rural Teacher Education*, Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices 14,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-17488-4_6

to building a caring community amongst the first signs visible to guests. The physical layout of nine classrooms connected by a single corridor presented a remarkably safe and calming place for the approximately 170 kindergarten through fourth-grade children enrolled in the school. Amongst adults, it was nevertheless rife with political activity.

When I use the term 'politics' in this chapter, I am referring to the micropolitical dimensions of teachers' and teacher educators' work. Schools, teachers, and teacher educators are invariably situated in macropolitical contexts consisting of elections, governments, and laws which inform educational policy and influence the context in which schools operate. From a micropolitical perspective, however, educators help shape the political climate of the educational environments in which they work through more than just voting for holders of political office. To study micropolitics is to be concerned principally with how educators themselves contribute to their immediate political cultures. It involves considering schools as sites where power is exercised rather than owned, in ways that open up space for resistance and agency (Pillay and Saloojee 2012). Such actions occur within particular cultures of surveillance, judgment, and control in which educators both covertly and overtly monitor, regulate, and discipline themselves and others within the school environment (Penrice 2012). Such interactions (politics with a lower-case 'p') can create problems (with a capital 'P') if left unchecked, unscrutinized and unimpeded within the immediate school context. In hindsight, the central defining challenge of my own experience as a beginning teacher in a rural environment was one of learning to navigate the micropolitical realities—and accompanying problems—of my particular school context.

As Green and Reid (2004) have asserted, teacher education—like educational research and schooling itself—should always be understood as a situated practice, as always located and speaking from somewhere. The micropolitical dynamics of rural settings are of particular relevance to this perspective since rural schools are uniquely shaped by the participants and places from which the school community is formed. While teachers' lives in rural communities cannot be explained in singular, simplistic and deterministic ways (Pillay and Saloojee 2012) since rural areas differ greatly from each other, especially in terms of economic resources, community priorities, and demographics (Wallin 2003), it is generally recognized in educational literature that rural areas offer a unique living environment compared to urban areas. Rural places, for example, are often considered quieter and safer environments for raising children, with fewer problems affecting big cities like crime (Yarrow et al. 1999). Furthermore, many parents in small rural communities are often former students of the local school, with families that have lived in the town for generations and that hold closely to traditions and rituals from the past. Such generalizations, largely true in the case of my particular rural context as a beginning teacher, mean that the political dynamics inside small schools can reflect the views formed from community members' own experiences as students in those schools (Bennett 1999). Since teachers are more likely to experience a sense of heightened visibility in such small and localized environments, it is important to understand the micropolitical dynamics of rural contexts to see which dynamics are particularly evident.

According to Gruenewald (2003b), place-based and place-conscious educators aim to enlist teachers and students in the political process of understanding and shaping what happens in local life. From the perspective of democratic education, schools must provide opportunities for teachers and students to participate meaningfully in the process of place making—that is, in the process of shaping what such places will become. As a beginning teacher in a rural school, I actively participated in such processes of forming place by introducing curricular and pedagogical innovations to my particular setting. As Blase and Bjork (2010) have identified, micropolitical activities commonly intensify during times of change, as individuals and groups can experience intense stress and strain from educational change initiatives. Negative forms of micropolitics can impede school change and, as was the case in my own experience of learning to teach in a rural context, resistance to existing or new programs is not always straightforward (Raksit 2006). As Blase and Bjork (2010) emphasize, the dynamic interplay of micropolitical factors and negotiations affecting school change and reform efforts can produce understandings, bargains, and treaties which, viewed retrospectively from real-time observational accounts, are particularly important for understanding the outcomes and unpredictable elements of both successful and unsuccessful initiatives to affect change in schools.

My overall purpose in conducting this study was to conduct such a retrospective investigation of my own lived experiences of learning to teach in a rural setting. Specifically, I sought to examine how my identity as a teacher educator had been informed by my past experiences as a beginning teacher in a rural context. In broadening my focus as a self-study researcher from my efforts to construct more democratic pedagogies as a teacher educator (Brubaker 2012a) to include the influence of my past experiences in rural contexts, I illuminate a unique layer of self informing my pedagogical identity within the particular tapestry of political realities I experienced in my rural school. Such research is important for equipping teachers and teacher educators with relevant micropolitical knowledge and skill for coping with the demands of workplace micropolitics, particularly in rural contexts.

## Methodology

I conducted this study by revisiting data from my third year as a full-time public school teacher—1999–2000—in a rural elementary school in the Northeast USA. Although it has been nearly 15 years since the experiences described in this study took place, I meticulously documented my experiences as they occurred. Nearly every day I wrote in a stream-of-consciousness fashion about what was happening in my teaching and life, usually at school after children and staff had gone home, sometimes multiple entries in a day, with many entries ten pages or more in length. Such a routine was how I consciously processed my experience and prepared for my teaching. From such writing, I generated more than 1,200 pages of personal writing and documents concerning my experiences as a beginning teacher

in the 1999–2000 school year alone. As a teacher educator, I continue to write in such a fashion, though less frequently, and oftentimes for more specifically-defined purposes. In presenting firsthand insight into the daily record of my accounts, such records enabled me, in this study, to extend beyond how I remembered or wished to remember events from my time as a beginning teacher to include what I actually wrote as I was immersed in micropolitical struggle—providing real-time observational accounts of my experience (Blase and Bjork 2010).

I also drew from transcripts of more recent conversations with former colleagues who helped shape the political climate of my rural context. Although I left my teaching position in 2001, I returned to the school on three occasions—twice in 2001 and once in 2011—to visit. Such visits reminded me of the many experiences, emotions, and memories I had maintained from having worked there; they helped rekindle my desire to systematically inquire into my experience as a beginning teacher within this particular school context. In 2013, after having worked as a teacher educator for 5 years in the Southeastern USA and having relocated to a research-intensive university in Australia, I returned to the area as part of a larger research project on the micropolitical dimensions of beginning teachers' experiences. Doing so provided an opportunity to interact with former colleagues concerning our shared experiences of having taught and worked together at the school. Four colleagues provided their consent to participate in the research as it was approved by my university's institutional ethics process. My purpose in having such discussions was to gain retrospective insight on events we had jointly experienced.

Since none of the colleagues with whom I met were any longer working at the school or at other schools within the same district, and more than 12 years had passed, we were able to speak more candidly about our recollections. Such discussions resulted in 206 pages of transcripts, with insight into my own as well as others' perspectives on the events in which we collectively participated. While complicated by distance and time, our discussions were nevertheless punctuated with vivid memories. From having audio recorded and transcribed our discussions, I was able to draw, for this study, directly from what we discussed instead of relying on my memory of our conversations alone. To protect their confidentiality, I have assigned the participants pseudonyms and provided only limited insight into our professional association at the school. Of the four colleagues with whom I interacted, each represented a different perspective on the school context, having worked within it in different capacities, and having extended different degrees of support for my particular practices as a beginning teacher. Two were retired at the time of our conversation; two were employed as teachers in other settings. My conversation with each, I figured, would be my only opportunity to discuss our past experiences. I wanted authentic, unprompted recollections, yet also yearned for insights to particular questions that had long been lingering in my mind. In the case of at least one colleague who I was not sure would willingly discuss past circumstances, I obtained personalized insights that were well worth the wait. From having acted courageously in initiating such discussions—in a way that would have been all-too-easy to let slide—I received a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. Emotional closure was ostensibly what I wanted; it was precisely, I feel, what I gained.

To analyze the data, I used a range of grounded theory methods including constant comparison, theoretical saturation, and memos (Birks and Mills 2012; Glaser and Strauss 1999; Strauss and Corbin 1998). Constant comparison involved continually comparing incidents in the data with previous incidents of similar and different attributes until stable categories emerged to give rise to the findings for the study. When analyzing my personal journals from 1999 to 2000, for example, I identified six main categories and 46 subcategories of relevance to this study, involving 581 total references in the data, which I have summarized as follows:

| Main categories | Total references | Total subcategories | Largest subcategory | References in subcategory |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Communication | 107 | 7 | Need for advocacy | 36 |
| Integrity of PE program | 111 | 6 | Expertise | 43 |
| Obstacles | 113 | 10 | Veteran colleague | 20 |
| Reasons for rethinking teaching | 49 | 11 | Intellectual challenge | 15 |
| Respect | 148 | 8 | Feeling disrespect | 60 |
| Social curriculum | 53 | 4 | Of the school | 30 |
| 6 | 581 | 46 | 6 of 46 subcategories | 204 |

I analyzed the discussion transcripts from 2013 using a similar process, with 3 main categories (e.g., breaking in) and 9 subcategories (e.g., breaking tradition, collegial challenges, and disciplinary marginalization). I used the computer software program QSR Nvivo 9.0 to facilitate this process of constant comparison.

Theoretical saturation involved arriving at conceptually abstract categories until no new codes could be clearly articulated or integrated. Such categories were not forced into pre-determined theoretical frames, but allowed to inductively emerge from the data. Overall, this iterative and inductive method, which proceeded line-by-line through at least three complete passes through the full data set, helped me discern more deeply what was happening in the data and develop themes to descriptively illuminate the phenomenon being examined. Writing memos consisted of maintaining a detailed record of the decision-making processes that informed all of my research activities, including changes in my research direction and my rationale for such changes. Maintaining such records enhanced the dependability of the findings by providing a detailed audit trail from which others could replicate my processes. I enhanced the credibility of the findings through negative case analysis—the process of examining situations that were contrary to what was expected or were inconsistent with participants' contributions in the data (Birks and Mills 2012).

As a self-study of my own practice as a beginning teacher, I sought to grapple with the difficulties and dilemmas embedded in my teaching as a means of constructing knowledge of relevance to teachers and teacher educators more broadly (LaBoskey 2004). I used self-study methodology since many benefits are associated with studying one's own practice, including the opportunity to generate knowledge

about teaching and learning from 'insider' perspectives (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999), assess the congruence of one's practices and beliefs (Berry 2004; Loughran 2004; Schulte 2009), and improve one's credibility as a teacher (Hamilton and Pinnegar 2000) while resolving dilemmas embedded in one's teaching (Loughran 2007). Subjecting one's practices to public critique as a means of both reinterpreting and reframing one's experience, extending beyond oneself, and making explicit the tacit theories embedded in one's teaching is important to realizing the many benefits of self-study as a genre of qualitative research (Pinnegar and Hamilton 2009).

## Context

As a beginning teacher in my rural context, I was uniquely positioned on the staff. I was one of only two male teachers in the school, and was the sole teacher out of 13 with fewer than 10 years of teaching experience. I was also professionally qualified and licensed to teach children through the medium of physical activity. As such, I was the lone physical educator on staff, and like the art, music, and library teachers, spent part of each week teaching at another school in the community. Furthermore, as a physical educator, I was quite unlike stereotypical images of physical education teachers. For example, I wore khakis and turtlenecks instead of sporty windsuits; used my voice and visual cues instead of a whistle; and engaged children in creative and rhythmic activities instead of rote calisthenics and fitness tests. In essence, I did my best to embody my preparation in developmentally-appropriate practices for children, which I had learned from developmentally-minded physical educators in my teacher education program and from close collaborations with experienced colleagues in my first year of teaching (I had taught across two different districts in 1997–1998, which included experiences in both a suburban and a rural school).

In my first year at the rural school featured in this study (my second year overall as a teacher), I made efforts to learn as much as I could about the program I inherited. It didn't take long to find that there were few files documenting program practices upon my arrival. Furthermore, there was little equipment, little record of having used or managed program funds, and there was a history of very traditional practices including dodgeball, joke time, and many gymnastics and games experiences contrary to basic developmentally appropriate practices in the field. Perceiving a need to introduce instructional physical education practices, I devoted my first year in the school to constructing a curriculum for the program and integrating ideas from leading scholars and practitioners to document instructional practices. I received encouraging feedback from the school administrator, colleagues, and families concerning my efforts.

Having taught at the school for a year (and entering my third year overall as a teacher in 1999), and since no one—to my knowledge—had expressed objections to the developmental approach I had employed in my first year at the school, I sought to build a more visible presence for physical education in my second year in the community. Since teachers throughout the school employed a strong emphasis on

cultivating a cooperative and respectful social environment amongst the children, I considered the school climate conducive to introducing a framework for teaching responsibility through physical activity (Hellison 1985, 1995; Hellison and Templin 1991). The particular framework I introduced was widely-used in the physical education profession and consisted, as I adapted it, of five levels of personal and social behavior, from unkind (level zero) to helping (level four). I used this framework with the intention of providing children opportunities to assume increasing levels of responsibility for their learning, to learn to evaluate themselves in the physical education context instead of being labeled or evaluated by others, and to overall promote self-reflection about their conduct instead of imposing on them requirements to which all students were expected to conform. I posted a large visual of the framework prominently in the multipurpose space in which my classes were held. In a newsletter sent to families at the beginning of the school year, I introduced the framework to the school community as follows:

Children are eager to learn more about moving in different ways and making responsible lifestyle decisions. This fits nicely with the overall purpose of the physical education program, which is to help prepare your child for LIFELONG participation in physical activity. To help everyone interact positively in PE and make good choices, we focus on different 'Levels' of behavior.

*Level 0*: *Unkind*. This level describes uncontrolled, disrespectful behavior, like bumping into others, interrupting, and inappropriately using equipment. Potential consequences for consistent Level 0 behavior include: friendly reminders, time-out, visit to the principal, call home, written plan.

*Level 1*: *Respecting*. Level 1 is the bottom-line PE rule. Children at this level may or may not actively participate in a lesson, but demonstrate self-control and respect for others. Examples include: listening, keeping hands and feet to oneself, and controlling one's temper.

*Level 2*: *Trying*. Children at this level demonstrate self-control as well as active involvement, even in activities they do not like. They try hard, follow directions, and challenge themselves to improve.

*Level 3*: *Self-Directed*. Students at Level 3 begin to take responsibility for their own actions. They clean up without being asked, practice new skills without needing reminders to stay on task, and make responsible choices without direct supervision.

*Level 4*: *Helping*. Children who extend beyond themselves and demonstrate genuine regard for others exhibit Level 4 behavior. Examples in PE include sharing space and equipment, helping others learn new skills, and willingly working with anyone in the class.

As Lux (2010) has argued, nearly 35 years of research has demonstrated that physical education inhabits a marginalized position in schools. Visually demonstrating the instructional nature of physical education content is important for raising the status of physical education, increasing its educational value, and improving its position within schools as a valuable academic area. Displaying insight into physical education values and expectations for personal and social behavior is of particular

importance (Lux 2010). In making a conscious effort to visibly showcase the instructional focus of the program, I considered myself to have been actively implementing such recommendations. Little did I realize that my efforts to build a more visible presence for physical education at the school would open a firestorm of controversy.

## Overview of Conflict

As I described to Owen in 2013, a former colleague who had been particularly supportive throughout my time at the school, the conflict concerning the levels of behavior started as follows: "[M]id-way through the school year…one of the vocal teachers in the school was alleging that having level zero, unkind, was inappropriate and contrary to the social curriculum of the school." She "basically came to me saying it's inappropriate; it needs to be changed, and left." In response, we had the following exchange:

Owen: [S]he didn't ask you…to explain it, right? Did she ask you to explain?
Me: No, no, there was never any request for more information.
Owen: And if there was, how would you have responded?
Me: Oh, I would have been delighted to have a conversation.

The ensuing circumstances unfolded over the course of an entire year, involving a chain of negotiations with the principal which he insisted on keeping private between the two of us, plus a series of school-wide staff meetings which were devoted, by the principal, to practicing our school social curriculum. In my journals, I described how I considered myself to have been caught in the middle of a power struggle between a veteran teacher intent on asserting her authority in the school in a time of administrative transition (the principal, albeit experienced, was new to the school like myself, having arrived the same year). In my view, "A huge part of the problem, if not *the* problem, [was the veteran teacher]. Her behavior has been undisciplined, uncontrolled, unkind, and disrespectful" (emphasis in the original). While I considered the school administrator to have demonstrated exemplary support for my program, I was concerned that, "If [he] is not strong enough to take her on individually and stand up for my program, then I'm sunk." After considerable interaction over a period of months, I sensed that, "[H]is level of thought" had become "more grounded in his own…self-interest than anything else." As the veteran teacher intensified her demands to the principal that my instructional materials change, he finally, in my view, relented. As I described the sequence of events in my journal: "Originally [he and I] had decided to change level zero but *only* if there was some sort of collegial discussion that took place. That discussion never took place, and now he's pressuring me to make yet additional changes" (emphasis in the original). As I saw it, "I basically [removed level zero from the display] to protect his [rear end]. That's basically it." In my view, I was "the easy target and the easiest person from whose hide to take." While I had initially benefited, in my view, from

strong administrative support, its continuation, I felt, was contingent on protecting the administrator's standing in the school. As the veteran teacher forced him into increasingly uncomfortable territory, through publicly-visible confrontations and demands, I was ultimately—unjustly, in my view—the one left to change my practices and materials within the school.

Three themes concerning the role of rurality in shaping my experience emerged from the data: closed communication practices, maintaining existing traditions, and constructing a sense of place. Below, I elaborate on each of these themes.

## Closed Communication Practices

As Atkin (2003) has demonstrated, rural settings are characterized by strong community feelings with tightly-knit and firmly-held views of behavior. It is common for people in rural communities to know each other and to know a lot about each other. A consequence of sharing the same social space is that the risks of stepping outside that space can be considerably higher than in urban environments. Actions which violate the local culture prescribing residents' behavior can provoke a fury of micropolitical activity to restore the behaviors that are expected. In the case of my own experience as a beginning teacher, my efforts to make physical education more prominent within the school constituted a transgression of acceptable social boundaries. Closed communication practices soon emerged as a means of restoring and maintaining existing power relations and control dynamics.

Several months after decorating the multipurpose space with visual materials depicting program content, I expressed concern in my journal about what I perceived to be a shifting climate of collegiality. People, in my view, were suddenly participating in what I described as "excessive gossiping, backstabbing, and random speculating." Perhaps my biggest source of "anxiety" in response to such a reality was that "nobody has heard their information from me." From my perspective, "People are sabotaging a program [about] which they…have absolutely no understanding." I asserted: "If people have an issue with the program, *I'm* the person with whom to speak, case closed" (emphasis in the original). In my mind, it was a matter of respect, as I deserved to be "included in the dialogue" and have issues "taken up with me and not with everyone else first." As I expressed in my journal: "I'd be much more responsive to people coming to me interested in having meaningful dialogue about the entire matter and coming to some meeting of the minds than in public confrontation and program denigration attempts." Occupying a reality in which I felt excluded from all relevant deliberations, I perceived my colleagues' actions as being ultimately about "basic level one behavior, our most minimal of social responsibilities, the least that we can do for each other." I elaborated: "[I]f our social program is predicated on respectful and responsible behavior, then the least we can do is practice it in our interactions with each other."

From my subsequent conversations with former colleagues, we discussed how the predominant mode of communication that I encountered throughout the

community was an expression of the broader context of the school. Excluding me from dialogue concerning my program was but a micropolitical tactic to help maintain and perpetuate my reality as one of occupying a marginalized disciplinary status within the school environment. Discussing programmatic practices without me present provided a means of building solidarity about historically-established school conditions. As Neal suggested—a former colleague who had helped mentor me as a beginning teacher—my efforts to pioneer instructional physical education practices in a context previously unaccustomed to such practices constituted an act of stepping onto "sacred territory." Refusing to simply allow teachers to have children "miss class" while asserting my view that physical education was "important" was likely something that my colleagues "had never [before] heard." In his view, simply suggesting that physical education would constitute "an instructional space" represented a violation of cultural norms. Closed communication provided a mechanism for avoiding any unpleasant recognition or discussion of such a reality.

Owen recalled the manner in which staff negotiated collegial interactions in the school as being particularly graphic and somewhat disturbing in nature. Regarding my own experiences at the school in particular, he described the underlying dynamics as "a gang mentality" akin to "bullying" where the participants "don't even know they're doing it" but were clearly engaged in the act of "ganging up on somebody." In his view, I was not "treated fairly" since "nobody was going to bat for [me]" in the midst of "behind-the-scenes divisiveness" which was "mean spirited" and "lack[ed] compassion." He explained: "I almost get a visceral feeling when I think of this stuff…I mean this is really a dark place to go." To experience such dynamics firsthand, he explained, "at best" is "confusing" and "would be like getting sucker punched." He recalled: "[I]t was like you weren't even being given a chance to explain…people didn't want to hear it…they didn't want to engage in dialogue."

Interactions in rural communities draw heavily on established power relationships and hierarchies. In such settings, it is not uncommon for verbal communications to substitute for written communications, and for the validity of information to be based on who said it (Yarrow et al. 1999). Teachers often enter the profession with limited knowledge and understanding of the context of their first appointments (Morrison 2013). Novice teachers in particular tend to be rigid and to carry out rule-governed practices due to uncertainty in their role as teachers, since their ability to articulate their own needs and shortcomings in contrast to more experienced colleagues is lacking (Caspersen and Raaen 2014). My efforts to expand the borders of acceptable disciplinary practice within the school constituted a failure to adequately understand the social space, recognize who was in charge, and discern the behavioral traditions of the school community. In so doing, my actions violated the unspoken organizational ethos of the school and invited repeated exclusion from relevant deliberations.

Overall, the prevailing leadership pattern of individuals and groups within the organizational setting, through a combination of both cooperative and conflictive strategies to achieve their goals, was to control others by inflicting fear of emotional retaliation for making mistakes (Blase and Blase 1997). The social and behavioral

norms concerning disciplinary status in the school, I learned, were not to be overstepped. Such a reality was maintained and perpetuated through closed communication practices. Condemned to occupy a second-class disciplinary status, I had little option but to comply with such a reality and conform with my place within the hierarchy of school subjects. Gossip in particular—as one means of close and intense scrutiny which tends to be negative, spreads quickly, and undermines credibility (Dunshea 1998)—becomes a devastating weapon in the hands of unscrupulous opponents since it fosters antagonism, insult, and indignation (Ball 1987). Such consequences of stepping outside the prescribed social space of the local culture were repeatedly demonstrated within the tightly-knit rural community in which I taught.

## Maintaining Existing Traditions

Closely connected with such communication practices was an emphasis on maintaining existing traditions which proved influential in shaping my experience as a beginning teacher. Such an emphasis was evident through decision-making processes concerning curricular priorities in the community. As is commonly recognized, the official school curriculum is inherently political. Teachers are acting politically when they engage with it in some way. Whether they adopt, adapt, or subvert it, teachers cannot escape the political dimensions of what they do in their curriculum work. The question is not whether teaching is a political act, but rather what kind of politics teachers should pursue (Reid et al. 1998). Rural school communities may be less supportive of change-oriented approaches to curricular priorities since rural citizens may demonstrate a stronger commitment to traditional values and rejection of educational innovations that are considered unnecessary frills (Howley 2003). To the extent that my efforts to enact a particular vision of physical education as a beginning teacher promoted a reforming instead of a conserving approach to curricular priorities in the community, my efforts constituted an intrusion upon prevailing political norms in the school.

My encounter with others' emphasis on maintaining existing traditions was evident from how I responded to the controversy concerning the levels of behavior on display in the multipurpose space. Initially, my response, at least as I had expressed in my journals, was to defend my professional qualifications and assert my disciplinary autonomy as justification for introducing an alternative to existing practices in the school. In my journal, I continually referred to the extent to which "I'm the [physical education] teacher, I'm the one who has the credentials to teach in this area." From my expertise in the field, I considered myself to have been in a position to recognize the extent to which the original source of the levels—Hellison (1995)—was "the foremost, undisputed leader of work in the affective domain in [physical education]." After all, I had "seven textbooks" in my possession, "all of which strongly endorsed Hellison's levels, including level zero." Furthermore, "my library of professional journal articles…all…strongly endorse[d]" the levels. In my

view, it was perplexing—if not insulting—that "other people thought that they knew enough about physical education to basically make decisions about how the program should be run," particularly since "I wouldn't have dared to have gone into a math classroom" to say, "No, really, I think you should be doing this or I think you should be using this material." Due to my specialized knowledge in the field, I felt justified in expecting to have the space to act on such expertise.

By virtue of being the only physical educator at the school, I was the lone person responsible for representing my particular expertise in the community. I experienced isolation in many forms—interpersonally, intellectually, and personally—due to limited opportunities for professional development and interaction with people of similar expertise and interests (Boylan and McSwan 1998). I expected "to be able to exercise professional judgment over my own professional affairs" and "to be able to run my own program," particularly because I was not "proposing the levels be used school-wide" but to be "entitled to practice the best in my own profession and run the type of [physical education] program [I considered myself] capable of running." As the only person in the school community, however, with the responsibility for advocating for, embodying, and acting on such expertise, others' priorities typically took precedence. In my view, the clash over the levels was a matter of disciplinary expertise and integrity, though it was also a matter of school tradition.

My subsequent conversations with former colleagues helped illuminate more clearly the extent to which collegial challenges in schools can influence the emphasis on maintaining existing traditions. As Charles explained, who had helped guide me as a beginning teacher, difficulties in schools are often rooted in basic concerns. As he put it: "[W]orking with the kids is the easy part." He explained: "[W]hen you work with people, you have people problems and no one's exempt from that." From his perspective, "[T]he most challenging task…is not the parents, and it's not the kids, but it's developing respect and collegiality between and among staff." In his view, "[T]he hardest part is working with the adults." While "most issues…can be resolved so they're respectful," he explained, "occasionally you have issues that just can't break down so you have to move forward, but…if you don't address the issue it gets bigger and then that's when it becomes…almost unsolvable" and "drags other people into it and then drags a lot of people down." As an issue that proved difficult to "break down," the conflict concerning the levels of behavior, it seemed, was most easily resolved by maintaining existing traditions. Instead of further disrupting the tangled web of power and control in the school, and prolonging efforts to create collegiality amongst staff, the fierce reaction of some made it convenient to reassert conservative values and keep intact the status quo of school practices.

According to Gruenewald (2003a), learning more socially just and ecologically sustainable ways of being in the world requires conserving cultural practices that contribute to the well-being of people and places while transforming oppressive and damaging cultural patterns. Questions of what needs to be transformed and what needs to be conserved are equally critical and necessary. Developing a critical pedagogy of place means challenging each other to ask constantly what needs to be transformed and what needs to be conserved. In my own experience, I found it

particularly difficult—seemingly impossible—to have such a conversation within the community when the overwhelming force was towards conservation, not transformation.

Overall, teachers and teacher educators use a range of strategies to protect themselves from those they consider authoritarian and controlling (Blase 1991). Some are more cautious, guarded, and defensive than diplomatic, while others are more confrontational, tactless, and designed to intimidate and exert pressure on others to succumb to demands. Underlying the strategies particularly evident in my own experience as a beginning teacher were conserving approaches to curricular priorities concerning the school's social traditions. Research suggests that urban teachers place a higher priority on affective curriculum goals in physical education, while rural teachers provide a stronger emphasis on knowledge-based and disciplinary goals like skills and fitness content (Ennis and Chen 1995). Furthermore, in rural areas in the USA, traditional sports are considered particularly important as a possible means for children to gain prestigious scholarships to secondary schools (Penrice 2012). In the context of my own experiences as a beginning teacher, my particular approach to existing school traditions was mismatched with the more conserving aims of the community. In underestimating the extent to which the priorities in the school were to preserve and sustain what was already in place, I struggled to negotiate my efforts to introduce a different—though not incompatible—approach. In so doing, I demonstrated—to varying levels of success—the importance of teachers having highly developed political skills in contexts where, outnumbered and undervalued, the aim of many is to maintain, not modify, existing patterns of control (Reid et al. 1998).

## Constructing a Sense of Place

In addition to school communication practices and curricular traditions, community relationships are of particular importance to helping beginning teachers successfully navigate the challenges of rural and remote schools (Morrison 2013). In this study, constructing a sense of place was evident through the challenges I faced in gaining acceptance as an outsider to the school community. Since many rural communities are often closed to outsiders, those on the inside must ensure that the newly arrived teachers are not closed out (Yarrow et al. 1999). Relationships based on mutual trust, respect, care and integrity are particularly important for minimizing the emotional labor required for breaking into new communities—demands which can confront early career teachers' perceptions of teachers and teaching and diminish their psychological resilience (Morrison 2013). To the extent that relationships in the school made it difficult to construct a secure sense of place within the community, and ultimately helped undermine my desire to remain in the teaching profession, my efforts to raise the profile of physical education constituted too great an emotional burden to continue navigating the isolated reality of being the sole physical educator within the rural environment in which I was enmeshed.

Feeling welcomed into the school and as though I could construct a sustainable sense of place within the community proved particularly difficult from the outset of the on-going controversy concerning the levels of behavior. As Smith (2002) describes, being engaged in the identification of school or community issues that one would like to investigate and address, while being drawn into the decision-making processes of a community, are important components of constructing a healthy attachment to place. When teachers act as brokers of community resources instead of experts who tell others what to do (Corbett 2009), they are more likely to cultivate strong connections to place in ways that are enriching for the entire community. In my own experiences as a beginning teacher in a rural context, my connection to place was compromised by the underlying influence of one particular colleague's complicated history with the school community, as it was also implicitly enabled by others' in/actions.

From my subsequent conversation with Quinn, a veteran colleague with whom I worked while I was a beginning teacher, I gained powerful—if not ironic—insight into the forces underlying the particular circumstances I inhabited in the school. Quinn was my chief adversary as a beginning teacher concerning the levels of behavior. As she described to me her story of having been a beginning teacher herself at the school at which we had both once worked, I gained insight into several matters of relevance to my experience of attempting to pioneer a new practice in the community. As she described it, she "was not welcomed [to the school] with open arms." Her difficulties transitioning there were the result of bringing new innovations to the school; one such innovation she had introduced as a beginning teacher concerned social curriculum. In her view, "People really resented that there were changes…being brought in" which she "kind of represented." The fact that it was "such a tiny little community and school" made it "hard to let new people in." She experienced the community as difficult to access yet she eventually became a part of maintaining and upholding that community, to the point where she "didn't do that much" about welcoming people who were new to the staff because she "became part of that culture."

Given the uncanny, if not eerie, resemblance between how my veteran colleague was treated as a beginning teacher at the school and how she treated me, could it have been that my own experience was but a projection of hers—that she had unwittingly treated me in the same manner in which she had resented being treated upon breaking into the community herself? If so, how was it that just one colleague in particular, with the support of a small cadre of vocal others, had been able to grow accustomed to having their way, such that when this faction spoke, others complied? As Owen explained: "People were probably afraid of turning into one that [was] getting hammered if they disagreed with the…faction that was coming on strong." In such a highly personal reality, in which a single person could function—with little opposition—as the primary guardian and gatekeeper of the entire community, while oblivious to her own actions to an extent that significantly influenced my own and others' fate, emboldened by a lack of overt resistance, was a humbling and striking reality indeed. Negotiating such a reality was not without its cost. In my own experience, the consequence was to ultimately seek a different occupation.

The emotional toll from my cumulative experiences at the school ultimately prevented me from finding a sustainable sense of place in the community. Even though I received considerable praise and reassurance from colleagues concerning my presence at the school, I had difficulty overlooking the insult of having endured such insidious struggle concerning my program. Charles described me as “an extraordinary beginning teacher,” and another colleague from outside the school had written to my principal at the time that in “13 years” as a teacher, he considered me “one of the best [physical education] teachers” he had seen. In my journal, I nevertheless concluded that I was “no longer interested in working in such extreme isolation” without “collaborative opportunities to enhance and enrich the program and provide great experiences for kids.” In my view, there was “a deeply rooted pathology around power and how it [was] distributed at the school,” from which I perceived limited “respect [for] new ideas.” In my view, what I had ultimately learned from my experiences was that “being disrespectful gets results. All you have to do is…demonstrate irresponsible and unkind behavior, and people listen.” Within such a small environment, in which the inner workings of power made it difficult to construct a sustainable sense of place, I perceived few other options than to leave. I taught at the school for one more year then bid the community farewell.

Overall, Buchanan’s (2010) research on teacher retention suggests that lack of support—not just in rural schools—is the single strongest predictor of teachers’ decisions to leave the profession. Limited freedom to experiment, with fractured staff dynamics, prompt teachers to vote with their feet, seek asylum, and find their niche elsewhere due to a sense of having been gradually worn down, with their goodwill having been exploited for too long (Buchanan 2010)—unable to construct a viable sense of place. According to Le Maistre and Pare (2010), more than 50 % of beginning teachers remain in the profession not because they seek the best possible solution to the problems they encounter, but because they seek the solutions with which they can live given the circumstances. Such “satisficing”—of keeping disruptions and contradictions from becoming too much of a load during initial practice—is difficult for highly successful and idealistic people. For high achievers in particular, excessive knowledge and imagination allow them to compare themselves to realities that do not yet even exist (Le Maistre and Pare 2010, p. 562). In my own experience as a beginning teacher, I was unwilling to satisfice. I expected better. I was not content with power being exercised by default—not because it was granted, but because it went unchallenged—a circumstance exacerbated in rural communities (Huysman 2008).

According to Corbett (2009), formal education is a key institution of loosening ties to particular locales and promoting outmigration from rural places. The challenge for rural communities is to work on developing rural areas not as barren resource extraction grounds where no one would want to live, but as places that have value in themselves and that offer returnees a sustainable future. Rural communities may very well need the kinds of people who are most likely to leave. As Green and Reid (2004) contend, the social, economic, and pedagogical cost of high teacher turnover and inadequately prepared teachers in rural contexts is inordinately high and represents a matter of professional equity and sustainability.

## Navigating Political Complexity as a Teacher Educator

Conducting this study of my past experiences as a beginning teacher in a rural context—as they helped illuminate multiple realities of rural school politics—has helped reveal important insights into my efforts to navigate political complexity as a teacher educator. From my efforts to negotiate the communication practices, curricular priorities, and significance of place in my experiences as a beginning teacher—while occupying a marginalized disciplinary status, negotiating existing traditions, and combating adversarial actions of others—have come three principal influences on my identity as a teacher educator. Such influences inform the manner in which I un/knowingly re-experience such realities as a teacher educator and shape my pedagogical purposes, practices, and priorities.

Personally, my experiences as a beginning teacher in a rural context helped me discern more deeply the interrelation of power, place, and personhood. As Pillay and Saloojee (2012) have stated, power makes visible teachers' identities. In rural contexts in particular, where power is often exercised within uniquely constructed traditions, values, and relationships which can have a constraining effect on those unfamiliar with the community, having to negotiate tangled webs of control may put one's identity on full display. While it could be argued that my narrative of coping within such circumstances represents just another story of novice teacher struggle, it could also be argued that the circumstances I encountered help highlight contradictory and conflicting dynamics of teacher bullying within the larger political arena of rural schools. As a form of harassment, violence, and aggression characterized by systematic use and abuse of power—which ranges in severity from making threats and spreading rumors, to isolating or excluding others, to physical attacks causing injury—bullying involves a combination of intentionality, repetition, and power (AERA 2013).

While the aggressors in my school exercised a domineering presence in ways that explicitly exploited my isolated existence at the school, the bystanders played an equally significant role in permitting such bullying to occur. As a teacher educator, I bear the scars of having been influenced by a school culture in which civility was insufficiently enacted. Promoting anti-bullying behavior as a teacher educator is essential for on-going health, healing, and well-being for all members of school communities. Furthermore, like the pre-service teachers examined by Sharplin (2002), I held—sometimes simultaneously—images of rural and remote teaching as an idyllic retreat and outback hell. Relying on narrow stereotypes and simplistic perceptions of rural and remote teaching may lead to dissatisfaction; it is therefore necessary to cultivate in future teachers' deeper understandings of the complexities of rural contexts so as to be better prepared, to the extent possible, for negotiating the challenges of personal and social isolation.

Professionally, my experiences inhabiting multiple realities of rural school politics helped me develop a deeper understanding of the very profession of teaching. Much to my disillusionment, I learned from my experience that schools—rural or otherwise—are not necessarily particularly thoughtful places. In fact, from

inhabiting a marginalized status and combating adversarial actions, I concluded they can actually be quite intellectually bereft, stifling, and oppressive. While my efforts to pioneer instructional innovations in my particular setting may have been misplaced, premature, and overly ambitious, I nevertheless learned more deeply the extent to which effecting change in rural schools involves striking an appropriate combination of open communication, honoring existing traditions, and cultivating relationships with all stakeholders throughout the community as pre-emptive measures for preventing conflict. As Raksit (2006) has found, teachers in general prefer slow and moderate over radical and drastic changes. Teachers' inclination to change depends on a variety of factors, including the pedagogical suitability of initiatives for their particular classrooms, the extensiveness of changes, and the personal time, initiative, and proficiency needed to implement the change. The more widespread the changes and the more they demand of teachers' commitment, the less likely they are to be adapted.

While conflicts about the authority of professional expertise and teacher autonomy are chronic, unresolved issues (Hoyle 1999; Marshall and Scribner 1991) in schools, and such autonomy can be considered an illusion which involves the subordination of the individual to organizational control (Blase 1991), the relation between core values, conceptions of sound educational practice, and reform efforts in rural school contexts is nevertheless complex and requires further examination (Malen and Cochran 2008). If pre-service teachers are more aware of rural living and teaching before securing positions in such schools, then such awareness may also assist in retaining teachers in rural schools (Hudson and Hudson 2008)—important for undermining the pattern of "learning to leave" rural communities (Corbett 2013).

Pedagogically, my experiences as a beginning teacher in a rural context helped reveal more clearly the necessity of helping future teachers understand the machinations of power in current and future classrooms, schools, and communities as a means of more deeply understanding the challenges of working in rural schools. Without micropolitical literacy (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002) as a central component of teacher education curriculum, teacher candidates will be inadequately prepared to realize long-term professional sustainability—in any context, but particularly in isolated rural environments. In my own practice as a teacher educator, I aim to help students develop such literacy through actively precipitating conflict. As a means of providing firsthand experience in negotiating, managing, and becoming more comfortable with and thoughtful in the face of conflict, I consider controversy an important way of helping teacher candidates access the unspoken lexicon of politics in schools and more deeply discern the informal networks of authority where enemies hide and from which friendships are destroyed (Ball 1987). Had my own efforts as a beginning teacher been less visible, perhaps my transgressions of traditional hierarchies and conservative values would have been more forgivable. As it was, I failed to realize that it was not what I knew, but who I knew within the rural community, that was necessary for countering the closed communication of schoolwide gossip (Huysman 2008).

According to White and Kline (2012), teachers who want to be successful in rural and remote contexts need to be prepared to teach students from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds than themselves. They need to approach the decision to teach a rural community by looking at the benefits of the community rather than from a deficit viewpoint. Furthermore, as McInerney et al. (2011) assert, place-based education acknowledges young people as producers rather than consumers of knowledge. Inviting teachers and students to question the established order, to view communities from the perspective of the most disadvantaged, and to work for the common good rather than self-interest—in an effort to make communities a better place for all—are essential for creating spaces for dialogue, reflection, and political action. Achieving a more democratic society, with a deep appreciation for all aspects of diversity, are core values of my teacher education practice. They pervade my work on negotiating authority and cultivating increased micropolitical literacy through pedagogical vehicles like grading (Brubaker 2010), curriculum (Brubaker 2012c), and inquiry (Brubaker 2012b)—approaches which embrace standards but not standardization, and which seek to motivate students through hands-on, meaningful, relevant learning informed by what students already know (Jennings et al. 2005). By creating in teachers and students a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens to their local communities, teacher educators can help ensure they are better prepared for meeting the needs of all students in rural and remote contexts.

## Rural Teacher Education Today

Adult relationships provide telling glimpses into the micropolitics of schools. Such relationships deserve to be studied in the context of who has the legitimate right to make decisions about personnel, programs, and pedagogical practices (Malen and Cochran 2008). Rural contexts are unique, yet few specialized programs have been developed targeting the preparation of teachers for rural and remote schools (Yarrow et al. 1999). Micropolitics can and should be considered a positive force in such contexts for creating conditions in which people work collegially. It is the responsibility of all involved in such school communities to help create opportunities for educational dialogue concerning school matters, since micropolitics extend beyond just personality clashes and differences (Bennett 1999). While community identity is a manifestation of community culture, and questions about who gets what, when, and how will continue to cause deep-seated resentment in schools (Warner et al. 2010), developing communities in which educators can openly communicate and act civilly is a necessary aim. Perhaps then the petty tyranny of unfriendly behavior, bullying, and workplace mistreatment can be minimized (Blase and Blase 2002), and the important work of educating children—with greater sensitivity to the particular traditions, values, and relationships associated with place—can powerfully proceed.

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# "Knowing the Rules of the Game": Rural Sporting Biographies and Their Influence on Physical Education Pedagogy

**Amanda Mooney and Christopher Hickey**

## Introduction

Amanda: What were your thoughts about coming to teach in an all-boys' school?

Rachel: Well to be honest, I was a little bit apprehensive (…) I haven't taught all-boys before (…) prior to this job I taught for two years in a rural school back home which was actually the school I went to, it's co-ed (…) then I went overseas where I taught, came back and did a year of fitness promotion, then since being back did one term in a girls' school and then about a year at another rural school about an hour from here – its' a co-ed Catholic school, boys and girls from Year 7 to 12, pretty country like and fairly community orientated and then here, I've only been here for like 6 weeks (…)

Amanda: Tell me a bit more about why you were apprehensive, what was going to be so different about teaching here?

Rachel: I think I was a bit concerned about (…) well certain sports I might be teaching, like football or rugby or something. You're sort of thinking well I'm a female, they're male, they probably play these on a weekly basis, know these sports better than I do (…) It's not a major concern but it's something, it's probably in the back of your mind because teaching in a co-ed school (…) well they're probably more competitive here, I mean I'm competitive too, I've played lots of representative sport back home (…) I think it comes back to maybe having taught for a longer period of time in a certain place, like I think that maybe because I am new, that might make it difficult as well (…).

As both researchers and teacher educators committed to critical perspectives in Physical Education (PE), we often find ourselves engaged in conversations about the ways in which our research activities inform and shape our practice in Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE). In a recent article about 'critical' research and practice in health and physical education, Fitzpatrick and Russell (2015, p. 163)

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A.K. Schulte, B. Walker-Gibbs (eds.), *Self-studies in Rural Teacher Education*, Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices 14,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-17488-4_7

discuss "a divide in the field between those who continue to focus on highlighting power relations and those who highlight pedagogical change rather than political change". But what does this mean for those who claim and seek to do both, and what implications does this have for our practice as teacher educators? As Fitzpatrick and Russell argue, critical approaches in PE "have come under fire for being too cerebral and dislocated from the lived experience of young people" (2015, p. 163), yet we would argue that the conversations we have in offices and corridors are anything but this, and very much grounded in scholarship that seeks to infiltrate ours and others' experiences of practice.

To illustrate this, we commence this chapter with an excerpt from the first of many interviews with 'Rachel' (pseudonym), a female physical education teacher, who at the time of data collection had recently commenced teaching in a Catholic all-boys' school after a number of years teaching in rural contexts. At the time of analysis, we as researchers had many conversations about the ways in which 'place' might shape professional identity and practice – what presuppositions did Rachel bring from her previous experiences into this regional all-boy teaching context? How were they formed? And, how did they influence her pedagogical practice in this context? It was through these collaborative discussions that we reflected on the ideas in which we grounded our own practice and how these were formed. Further, we mused about the role our biographies (as shaped through rural experiences), have on the way we think about our own practices as teacher educators of many preservice teachers who also come from rural areas. To make sense of these musings, we were attracted to the potential that self-study methodology holds for "seeking to better understand the complex nature of teaching and learning about teaching" (Loughran 2007, p. 18). Put simply, how do our past experiences shape our practice as physical education teacher educators? We adopt this lens to make visible the ways in which our collaborative interrogations of Rachel's data, juxtaposed with our own theories of practice, allow us to, as Loughran (2007, p. 14) argues, "better align theory and practice, to be more fully informed about the nature of a knowledge of practice, and to explore and build upon these 'learnings' in public ways."

## A Biographical Collage

While our respective biographical journeys provide rich independent narratives of the different experiences we have had and the different ways we understand the world, and our places in it, it is their points of intersection that are most relevant to the work we are presenting in this biographical collage. The points of intersection track back to before we ever met. Of note here, is that we both grew up in rural/regional Victoria, and had five siblings. Over coffee, we have often exchanged many like stories about being one of six children being tightly piled into a car (who needs seatbelts when you have each other to absorb any such force) to attend a weekly church service. There is usually a hint of pathos in our reflections around the machinations of who would get to sit in the front seat, who would get sit next to who

on the pews and so on. Prominent in our reflections is the influential place that sport held in early lives and how 'connected' we became through our involvement. Being members of relatively large families meant that engagements through sport, either directly or indirectly, were frequent and eclectic. Be it on the side of tennis courts, cricket fields, marching girls, netball courts, football fields to name but a few of the sporting episodes we experienced through our families, sport has had an omnipresence in our lives.

Our professional journeys first came together, in any meaningful way, during 2005. Here we forged a student-supervisor relationship around a postgraduate research project that sought to explore "the perceptions of female physical education teachers in all-boys schools" (Mooney 2005). As a practicing teacher in such a context, Amanda was keen to find out how others like her (of whom there were still relatively few at this time) experienced their work in this sphere. Similarly, Chris had an interest and experience supervising research projects in school contexts with a specific focus on pedagogical practice (and the factors that influence this). What started out as a relatively routine interview-based study produced a sophisticated data set that raised as many questions, as it did provide answers. This was by no means an unwelcome outcome and in unsettling some of our assumptions and intuitions it provoked new conversations and theoretical explorations. At the heart of this was the emergence of a professional tension around the ways many of these young females understood and practiced their professional identity (Hickey and Mooney 2007). The reflexivity that was built into our research paradigm meant that we would learn to live with the tensions, contradictions and ambiguities that were littered through the data set (Mooney 2012).

How we started to engage with the data, and the issues it provoked, marked the beginning of a reflexively-charged, critically-framed professional 'conversation' that would develop and evolve over the next nine years. In practical terms this would be lived out across an array of strategies. Prominent in the early phases of this journey was the regular deployment of professional journaling and dialogic deconstruction. Here, we would take turns in adopting different positions to frame particular identity positions that emerged though our analysis of the data. During this phase we used the data to (re)construct a number of different 'actors' to whom we assigned particular identity positions and characteristics. We would 'invite' these actors into our conversations at different points as a means of diluting our own instincts and inciting greater depth and complexity in the ways we made sense of particular perspectives and actions that we might otherwise dismiss.

Throughout Amanda's doctoral research we would be further challenged to explore the multiple ways femininity was understood within the context of PE teaching in all-boys' schooling (Mooney 2012). This work extended our previous insights to include voices other than the female teachers themselves. Guiding us here was our interest in giving legitimacy to the different voices we collected, though that did not necessarily mean we saw them as equally informed or meritorious. Here, we found the work of Foucault particularly productive. From a Foucauldian perspective we understood the development of a PE teaching identity as 'agonism' – as a perpetual struggle over what constitutes such an identity, how it

should be made knowable, and who has the responsibility for the management and regulation of different elements of this identity (Foucault 1983). Using a lens that foregrounded discourses of surveillance and power we began to see what was thinkable and knowable in this sphere. Complementing this, we drew on Foucault's later work (2000a, b) to explore ideas about the ways in which we develop a sense of self, and the ways in which others seek to govern us in relation to ideas about the particular characteristics that this self should exhibit. These would be consistent theoretical frames of reference for us in our discussions and analyses of these data.

As is inevitably the case, the understandings we have gleaned through our research permeate many dimensions of our professional engagement and interaction. In the context of our biographical collage, they have cast influence over our relationship as student and supervisor, lecturers in parallel courses at different institutions and as research collaborators on a number of projects. In the context of this chapter, we give particular focus to the ways we have sought to work with and enable the student teachers we work with in our undergraduate programs at Deakin University, Australia. Given that we are located on a regional campus we recognize that the majority of our students identify as regional or rural. To this end, we share an interest in understanding what difference this might make for them, and by association the ways we work with them. In many ways this paper is an amplification of our work in thinking about place-based identities in sport and PE contexts (see for example Hickey et al. 2009; Mooney et al. 2012). Of note here are our questions about how rurality and regionality operate conceptually and practically in the process of professional identity formation. Here, we are particularly interested in the ways the undergraduate students we work with acquire the intellectual resources that help them to form 'effective' professional identities that are not constrained by place and space.

## Self-Study, Physical Education Teacher Education and Rurality: Metaphors for Thinking About Practice

Self-study is a relatively new phenomenon in the discipline of physical education (see for example Brown 2011; Casey 2012; Casey and Fletcher 2012; Ovens and Fletcher 2014b). This is perhaps not overly surprising given the oft-critique that self-study contains a certain allure to privilege self-knowledge in such a way that it can become "a pseudonym for *rationalization* or *self-justification*" (Loughran 2007, p. 13). For a discipline with a strong legacy in both humanistic and bio-scientific discourses that draw on positivist perspectives to produce knowledge 'about' movement (Siedentop 2002), researching PE from alternative theoretical perspectives has historically fought for legitimacy through the 'paradigm wars' (Kirk et al. 2006). That said, the value of a self-study perspective to engage with the "cultural-discursive conditions and possibilities (…) that *pre-define* teaching in physical education" (Casey 2012, p. 220) provides a valuable lens through which to examine,

and make visible for public consumption, taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching physical education in rural and regional contexts.

As has been pointed out on numerous occasions, defining 'rural' or 'rurality' is a rather complex process (Bosworth and Somerville 2013; Bryant and Pini 2011; Walker-Gibbs 2012). On the one hand, it is suggested that rural contexts differ from urban contexts in that they look different, function differently and attract different people to live and work there (Bosworth and Somerville 2013). Atkin (2003) explains that "'rural' and 'community' are both interesting words in that they have no real universal meaning, yet there can hardly be anyone who does not have a mental picture of what they mean". Whilst we share Atkin's sense that there are some commonalities in the way in which these terms are thought about, we also acknowledge the growing research agenda that seeks to examine the complexities of rural community spaces. In Rachel's account above she employs both words and whilst no descriptors are offered, the sentiment conveyed is that there is 'something different' about teaching and living in a rural context, particularly when compared to her current teaching context of a regional all-boys' school. In our grappling with what this 'something different' is, we found Bryant and Pini's (2011) notion of the 'rural idyllic' helpful. Here, they suggest that there are four key themes common to socio-cultural constructions of rurality.

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage with each theme, we do think it is important to reiterate their point that there are some common values and notions associated with social meanings of rurality. In particular they cite the "centrality of nature, community cohesion, safety and physical gains associated with 'outdoor' lifestyles, harmony, permanence, security, inner strength, as well as family values, community cohesion and an emblematic nationhood" (Bryant and Pini 2011, p. 6) as inherently 'rural' values. As individuals growing up in rural communities who very much associate with the physical gains connected with 'outdoor' and 'sporting' lifestyles, given much of our recreational time was spent in and about sports clubs within our communities, it would be relatively easy for us to accept this as a homogenizing definition of a 'rural' identity. Yet, as Walker-Gibbs argues, "the notion of rurality is as problematic as notions of gender, ethnicity, and generation in that there is no single way to define and or talk about these complex contexts" (2012, p. 131), a concept that we will return to shortly.

Elsewhere, amongst others, we have discussed the centrality of sporting clubs in rural communities for their role in developing individual and collective identities and for the role they can play in promoting social cohesion (Hickey et al. 2009; Mooney et al. 2012; Tonts and Atherley 2010). Reflections of our own experiences in football/netball clubs (amongst others) certainly elicit an awareness of the ways in which our own physical sporting ability 'positioned' us within our respective clubs, and wider rural communities as 'privileged' and 'competent'. Yet through a self-study process, we were provoked to consider to what degree these biographies shape particular practices and philosophies in physical education that now seek to develop competent and enthusiastic sportspeople (Siedentop 1994). As a consequence, we found ourselves questioning the role these formative experiences have on what we privilege (and perhaps dismiss) as key 'pedagogical tools' for future practitioners of PE, a concept that is explored in further detail below.

In order to frame thinking around, and give structure to, representations of the self-learnings produced through our collaborative musings about what Rachel's experiences provoked us to think about in terms of our own pedagogical practices in PETE, we draw on metaphoric tools. As other proponents of self-study argue, metaphoric tools can "capture the relational and shared aspects of knowing in educational settings while maintaining individual perspectives" (Hamilton and Pinnegar 2013, pp. 75–76). Herein, and in keeping with the metaphor presented through the chapter title, we explore our key learnings 'before the game' from discussions about the ways in which we have worked to reconcile theoretical tensions before discussing some key 'rules of the game' that describe conceptualizations of the way in which 'place-based' professional identities influence pedagogical practice.

## 'Before the Game': A Self-Study Lens in This Research

Many sporting participants, prior to game day, do some work on themselves in preparation – this may include systematic review of previous game performances, physical training, nutrition monitoring, uniform preparation, refining pre-game routines and establishing a 'game-plan' for their next performance. Here, this analogy became a signifier of the work we undertook to make sense of the ways in which our theoretical perspectives, grounded in poststructuralism, allowed us to 'see' certain things in Rachel's story. As others within our discipline have recently argued, self-study "opens a potentially fertile space…because of the possibility of rethinking the body, self, knowing, and agency, particularly in relation to engaging in pedagogical work" (Ovens and Fletcher 2014a, p. 7). Elsewhere we have argued that professional identities, forged and shaped through various discursive contexts, are inherently linked with pedagogical practices (Mooney and Hickey 2012) and in this chapter we revisit this notion to consider how *place* is implicated in this process.

Self-study is grounded in an interest of the self (embodied and contextually situated) – a self that sets the research agenda and makes meaning from, and acts upon the findings with a view to improving practice (Ovens and Fletcher 2014a). Various methodologies can be employed, although usually qualitative in nature, and whilst there are aspects of our work that resonate with narrative inquiry and auto-ethnography, methodological labeling often constrains us to think in particular ways (Hamilton et al. 2008). That said, LaBoskey (2004) presents four methodological features common to self-study, being; evidence of reframing and transformation of practice, interactions (with colleagues, literature and researchers' previous work) to provoke the interrogations of current understandings and assumptions that underpin these, use of multiple methods that elicit different 'readings' of educational processes, and that it is reported in a formalized manner to make these learnings available for public scrutiny and deliberation. As work that is self-initiated and self-focused, we adopt this lens here to explore transformations in our own thinking about what comprises a rural biography and for whom, and to consider the implications this may have for PE pedagogy in various contexts. As LaBoskey (2004,

pp. 820–821) argued, self-study is expressly interested in improving teacher education practice through a desire to "transform ourselves first so that we might be better situated to help transform our students, their students, and the institutional and social contexts that surround and constrain us".

The data reported in this chapter was drawn from a larger study exploring the pedagogical practices of female physical educators in all-boy school contexts, in Victoria, Australia. In attempting to make sense of data collected through video-stimulated reflective interviews with the teachers, interviews with other members of the school community, including students, and field notes, our collaborative conversations around analyses were often recorded as 'mad scribbling's' in a reflective journal, email trails exploring what this all meant, and on occasion, recorded conversations between the two of us. It is to these sources that we now return in this chapter, armed with the theoretical tools of self-study. These interactions and collaborations are represented in the shaded boxes below as we seek to make meaning from Rachel's experiences (and the other 'actors' that we invite into the conversations) and consider how these conceptualizations might be taken up and mobilized in our PETE classrooms.

## Rule 1 – Identify the Boundaries: Links Between 'Place', Professional Identities and Pedagogical Practices

Amanda: So Rachel, I thought we could have a look at this video of you teaching football to see if you could talk me through your reflections of the lesson.

Rachel: Sure, no worries… I think the class ran as I expected it, I didn't have too many surprises, maybe some of my umpiring decisions weren't the greatest but overall I think they enjoyed it…

Amanda: In this part of the lesson you were asking students which boundaries they wanted to play the game in – a full field or use cones to mark out a zoned area – can you tell me a bit about this?

Rachel: Yeah well I haven't taught all-boys before and most of them probably play footy, I thought it was important to give them a say about how they wanted to play this game, I mean I thought it was probably a good idea… I am probably not really that confident to be honest about the activities I am doing I may need to know more about the skills involved… and the rules… I haven't been in an all-boys' school before and it is a lot different from the other schools I've taught in…

Amanda: In what ways does it seem different, do you think you do things differently here from your past school contexts?

Rachel: I think my knowledge of the sports could be better because I am teaching boys… I'm not feeling that confident about sports I should probably know a bit more about… I think preparing better is the key, you know, is it a matter of joining the local footy club and becoming an umpire yourself to improve your ability, like, the only way you are going to learn the rules to a good level is if you go and umpire yourself in a football league, that is the best way to learn but I'm not sure if it needs to come down to that… I mean it doesn't help when they probably compare me with [another male teacher] who is over six feet and can just walk in and slam-dunk a basketball…

> I mean I have probably used that approach where kids get a say in what they do in rural schools before, but now I am teaching all-boys I think I have decided to adopt this approach more so… I really wanted to maximize participation because you have a range of abilities in the class, you know kids who do and don't play footy and you really want them to enjoy it… you don't want them just standing there, this comes from a Co-Ed setting I think (…).

In trying to make sense of Rachael's experiences, Britzman (2010, p. 244) reminds us that "ordinary narratives give a partial account of the suspended self". Acknowledging this, we attempted to look beyond what Rachel said to consider her practice as a culturally, and contextually, bound configuration of activity that is performed as part of her professional identity (Ovens and Fletcher 2014a). In the extract above, we observe Rachel struggling for pedagogical tools through which to establish her professional identity, connect with students and gain credibility. This is amplified through her reference to her male colleagues' physical ability and perceived credibility with the very students with whom she is struggling to establish a professional identity. Here, Rachael sees physical and sporting prowess as embodied signifiers of one's credibility, and by extension, their perceived expertise.

Amanda: It is interesting that Rachel's initial response was that the lesson ran pretty much as she expected it to but then comments that she really wasn't that confident – do you think she went into this classroom thinking that it was going to be a difficult class?

Chris: I think we get a sense about her lack of confidence in the content knowledge and it is interesting to see her equate improved lessons with preparation. I don't expect she would have had many opportunities to participate in girls' football in her hometown – if it was anything like my football club growing up which was a pretty masculine space.

Amanda: I guess so, she does seem to consider that confidence comes with prior experience in the activity – I mean she talks about going and joining a local football club as an umpire to learn more about the rules of the game…

Chris: I wonder if there was some strategic decentering of herself as the 'expert' through using techniques that specifically sought to give 'voice' to the students in this class….

Amanda: I am not sure, Rachel certainly seemed to comment that because they were boys they were more likely to have played football and that this experience should be drawn on, although here Rachel uses student voice in a negotiation of things like boundaries for playing size…It seems like she does try to use student-centered strategies but only for aspects of the lesson that she can 'control' if it doesn't work…

Chris: Rachel comments that she has used this participatory approach with students in her past teaching experiences and seems to recall this as having 'worked' then – I wonder how the context of a rural school might have contributed to this?

Amanda: Maybe she was more confident in this space because they all knew her and she had established herself, I do remember changing schools when I was teaching and it felt like you pretty much had to start again…

Chris: It makes me think about our student teachers, they 'start' again over a number of different practicum experiences throughout their degree, what skills do they draw on when going from one school context to another?

In reflecting upon Rachel's comments and considering these alongside our own musings, it seems Rachel felt that in her previous setting, she didn't have to establish

credibility with her students as it was afforded to her as a corollary of her participation in the community. In a rural setting, Rachael's professional identity was enmeshed with her sporting identity, offering her status, heightened visibility and stature that traversed the locale in which she lived, played and worked. Operating on a regional university campus, we know that many of our undergraduate students come from rural backgrounds. Extrapolating from Rachael's, and indeed our own experiences with place-based identity, it is clear that some aspects of our ways of knowing and being have been shaped by these contexts. In our working with Rachel, we were witnessing the limits of situated knowledge.

On an almost daily basis, many aspects of what had worked for Rachael in the rural school were failing her in her current context. While this did not necessarily surprise us, the immobilizing effect that it had on Rachael did alarm us. As reflective practitioners we questioned what we were doing to prepare our student teachers for when they too might experience classes where things don't work or when students don't respond how they expect them to. In her reflections, Rachel's focus was inherently directed towards improving practice through developing her skills and knowledge, rather than problematizing the experience itself. Rather than recognizing that the boundaries had changed and that she would need to adapt her game to work within them, in her reflections Rachel rendered herself inadequate, being inappropriately skilled to participate effectively in this new game.

What was in the baggage that Rachael had brought with her from one context that seemingly disempowered her in another? While acknowledging that constructions of rural identity are problematic and cannot be considered outside of other identity markers, such as gender, class and ethnicity, Rachel's professional identity and practice was clearly influenced by her place-based learning. Feeding this in to our deliberations about arming student teachers' with tools that can be intercontextually deployed, we reconciled that "improving practice implies calling forth the forms of subjectivity involved in enacting good judgment rather than the reductive focus on refining skills and knowledge" (Ovens and Fletcher 2014a, p. 9). The use of poststructural theory here allowed us to expose and analyze the effects of context, and the associated discourses that constitute judgments about effective pedagogical practice in PE. Following the lead of Britzman (1995) this allows us to "employ more suspicious discourses that exceed practices of normalization" so that we can bring into question the contextual conditions under which Rachel's practices, and our own understandings of these practices, are constituted. In the pursuit of transformative action, this, we believe, is the foundation under which such practices can be reconstituted.

## Rule 2 – Know Your Tactics and Strategies: Contextual Pedagogies and Theories of Practice

Amanda: How do you think your past experiences in your last school informed how you made decisions about your teaching here?

Rachel: What do you mean, like if something doesn't work just give up on that activity here and change it completely? I know what you are saying… I had this game

> that I tried to play with the boys once, it is called 'stop ball' you kick the ball out and you have a batting team who are kicking the ball and a fielding team, once a fielder gets the ball they all line up in tunnel ball formation and they have to do the tunnel ball and when the person at the back gets to the front they yell out stop and then the batting runner stops, you just count how many laps around the cone they have done… they HATED it! They caned it, absolutely bagged it and couldn't say anything good about it and I just persisted… I mean it was a game that worked brilliantly with a group of Year 8's in my last school, they loved it but these boys' despised it!

In her reflections on the breakdown of the 'stop ball' session, Rachel maintained a steely resolve that there was nothing wrong with her selection of activities and that the game was a proven winner. The fact that she 'persisted' in the face of overt student dissent was testimony to her conviction to the pedagogic routine she had established in her previous school. When practices become routinized they tend to be performed non-consciously (Green 2002; Rossi and Cassidy 1999) and form part of a repository of professional practices that are beyond question. Key to subjecting such practices to critique is a need for a level of reflexivity that recognizes the contextual and contingent nature of their substance.

Missing from Rachel's reflective tool kit is an ability to question the situatedness of meaning, and a recognition that what works in one setting is not automatically transferable to the next setting. The challenge for us was to think about what aspects of our own pedagogic theory and practice are unreflexive and habitual, and how these assumptions discursively infiltrate our role as teacher educators as evidenced in our collaborations below. Through the practices of peer review and video analysis we set out to make the invisible, visible and the unconscious, conscious. In this pursuit we are driven to uncover a process, more than a product.

| | |
|---|---|
| Chris: | In thinking about Rachel's reflections of the 'Stop ball' activity it provoked me to think about how we identify when something isn't working – With experience there are most likely certain cues that you pick up on that mean that you recognize the activity as not working and move on or revert to plan B…. |
| Amanda: | Well… yes I guess you are right, I don't actually know how I go about this, I suppose there are some cues but I couldn't tell you specifically what they are right now… I guess if I thought about it a bit there would some specific behaviors in students you might observe |
| Email from Amanda to Chris: | April 8, 2014<br>Chris, I have been thinking a bit more about our discussion the other day and was recalling a school visit I recently did. Tom was at a school where he was teaching a lesson on basketball to a group of Year 9 students and I remember the mentor teacher saying to me that this was the second lesson he was struggling in… when I talked to Tom after the lesson I asked him how he thought it went and he answered, 'terribly'. I asked him what he thought he might do differently to improve the lesson and he said, 'I don't know, they just don't listen…'. When I was observing the lesson I made some notes that perhaps Tom |

> could use the whistle to stop the activity and to get students attention so that he could give some follow up instructions to clarify the activity or introduce a new rule so that the activity might flow a little better. I talked to Tom about this after the lesson and he said he had used this technique during his last school placement and it had worked brilliantly but that this school was entirely different… Tom seemed completely at a loss as to why these students didn’t seem to like basketball as an activity, it was his favorite sport!
>
> This made me wonder how we can address this in classes before students go on placement – what skills do they need to support these kinds of strategies because not every ‘tip’ and ‘trick’ will work for every teacher in every context? How do students come to understand that experiences of sport and physical education can be vastly different from their own – and that those with physical skill and aptitude can often be privileged in some classes?

As Hudson and Hudson (2008) point out, there are particular dimensions of teaching and learning in rural schools “that make it significantly different from non-rural teaching”. We acknowledge that many within our own student teacher cohort come from rural and regional contexts. For this reason it is likely their own biographies are steeped in rural ways of knowing and being, and as we have outlined above this has some implications for the ways professional identities and pedagogical practice are shaped. As teacher educators we identified that the pedagogic toolkit we armed our students with needed to include strategies and skills that enabled them to deconstruct ‘context’ and to make sense of the influence this might have on their practice. Central to this was the need to identify and de-stabilize aspects of their professional identity that were unproblematically formed through their experiences in rural settings. Drawing on our personal experiences, and our interactions with Rachel, it was clear that feelings of security and legitimacy that can be readily built up though the formation of a strong athletic profile within close rural community settings were highly contextual and contingent. Through the processes of self-study we have been empowered to explore theories of good PE pedagogy and the ways in which place-based sensibilities influence and shape them. In keeping with the precepts of the method, we have sought to ensure that these explorations go beyond the personal and be informed and tested by theory (Brown 2011).

## From the Coaches’ Box… Analysis and Conceptualizing an Approach to ‘Game Play’

During many sporting games there is often a coach, or coaching panel, that observe the game from the sidelines or from the coaches’ box. As their players ‘perform’ on the field or court, they are industrious in their analysis of what is occurring and why, and in their conceptualizing of new approaches to game play that seek to produce a

'win' on the board. For a brief moment, if we adopt a 'coaching' role in this discussion, we are provoked to think about the ways in which our own practice as teacher educators in physical education might address some of the issues of praxis that we have raised above. Whilst we acknowledge that this type of language might encourage one to draw on the theoretical tools of Bourdieu (1990, 2004a, b) to make sense of the game, dispositions, and habitus that produce certain performances in this context, as mentioned above we are drawn to Foucault's notion of *agonism* (amongst others) for its potential to make visible the ongoing struggle and tensions involved in establishing a professional identity.

We have discussed in this chapter our sense that pre-service teachers need to be equipped with skills and resources that allow them to identify the limits of 'contextual and bounded' experience, a phrase that we have coined as 'intercontextuality'. Borrowing from the theoretical contributions of 'intersectionality' (Brah and Phoenix 2004) and 'intertextuality' (Bakhtin 1986; Fairclough 1992; Lemke 1992; Wright 1993), we consider intercontextuality to represent the ways in which shifting and multiple identities are forged through intersections and experiences of contextual complexities. Writing from a feminist research perspective, Brah and Phoenix (2004, p. 76) explain intersectionality as a term that encompasses a focus on agency, structure, context and multiplicity. Specifically they comment, "We regard the concept of 'intersectionality' as signifying the complex, irreducible, varied and variable effects which ensure when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts." (p. 76). From their perspective then, this term encourages an identification of knowledge as situated in socio-historical terms. Intertextuality, as it applies to social semiotics and educational research, has been employed to describe the ways in which every text "the discourse of every occasion, makes it social meanings against the background of other texts, and the discourses of other occasions" (Lemke 1992, p. 257). In applying this notion to an analysis of a physical education lesson, Wright (1993) argues that in any text a multiplicity of genres, as well as discourses, are constrained. In describing how speech genres become recognizable, Wright comments that:

> In the same way as a child begins to recognize that a particular group of phonemes constitute a meaningful sign (word) so do individuals recognize that a particular set of utterances or utterance-types constitutes a genre. As with the lexico-grammar, not all members of the culture have access to the same resources due to the limits of their prior experiences of these resources. It can be argued that a command of genres is developed in the same way. (1993, p. 26).

In returning to our thinking about the types of pedagogic actions that are required to better equip our pre-service teachers with the skills and resources required for productive practices in physical education, we consider that a sense of intercontextuality needs to be developed. Underpinning this concept is our belief of the need to better recognize aspects of our successful participation in 'the game' that can be learned through our previous experience. Just as no two PE classes are ever the same, no two games ever play out precisely the same way. But there are many elements of these respective experiences that are knowable and predictable, and the

very best participants will draw on their experiences in like, and even unlike, situations to construct new responses that can be adapted to different contexts. Just like a successful coach or player, the successful teacher will reflect on their experiences to plan, strategize and predict what is likely to work best. In teaching, as it is in team games, the extrapolation of learnings from one context to the next should be purposeful and deliberate.

## 'When the Whistle Blows…': Conclusions and Implications

Continuing with our sporting metaphor, at the conclusion of any game there is a reflective moment wherein judgments are formed about the performance of the participants - the more public the performance, the more judgments that can be made. While there are some agreed upon criteria, the performers, their coaches, the media, and the fans will all have their own scripts for making judgments about who performed well and who didn't. Here, there will be significant points of disjuncture across the various criteria employed to make these judgments. For example, what a coach was expecting of a particular player can be entirely out of step with what a fan might be expecting. In this way the practices of reflecting on a game can be likened to those of a teaching session in so far that there are multiple participants and there will be multiple judgments, using multiple criteria. Through the processes of self-study we have sought to explore and expose points of intersection and divergence around judgments of effectiveness between our own and Rachel's stories. In doing so we have asked ourselves what pre-suppositions we bring with us to make our own judgments, how productive and prohibitive they are and to what extent they traverse context and place. Self-study methodology provides us with the tools to work through this reflective moment and to make meaning from it.

At the heart of this paper was our desire to use a self-study methodology to improve our understandings of how we can better prepare preservice teachers to work effectively across a range of contexts. Our particular focus was on the capacity of teachers to reflect on the contextual dimensions of their experiences to gain a richer picture of what worked and why. Becoming an effective reflective practitioner requires a broad range of tools, of which understanding the influence of context or situatedness on experience is clearly one. To nurture this insight it is important that student teachers are encouraged to give greater consideration to context when reflecting on good and bad experiences. Using the insights we have gleaned from our work with Rachel we have begun to create micro-spaces for self-study work in our own preservice teacher education program. Through our collaborations around a self-study for rural (and regional) teachers we seek to "both use and trouble the dominant discourses of teaching and teacher education…to enable researchers and participants to become aware of the limitations of their understandings" (Sandretto 2009, p. 97). This involves promoting an understanding of the bounded knowledge of particular skills and presuppositions and opportunities to develop skills and knowledge that transcend or are adaptive to context.

Underpinning our transformative intentionality is a shared belief that all teachers have theories of practice, whether they are made explicit or not. The challenge for us has been to find useful analytical tools to "make those theories explicit, consider the effects of those theories and consider new ways of practice" (Sandretto 2009, p. 98). In this pursuit, we have been attracted to poststructural theory as a productive analytical tool through which to critically interrogate the taken-for-granted dimensions of our practice, at the same time recognizing rationality as limited and partial (Ellsworth 1989). To this end, our self-study has sought to "provoke, challenge and illustrate rather than confirm and settle" (Bullough and Pinnegar 2001, p. 20). Using rurality as a lens we have been working to enable our student teachers to pick apart the various discourses and relations of power that are at play in a particular contextual settings. By developing their knowledge of self and others they are being encouraged to recognize their professional identity as multiple and shifting. Through this self-study we have developed a stronger theoretical understanding of the power of context and are now challenged to purposefully and strategically apply this to our practice. Driving us in this pursuit is a desire to give our student teachers the skills and resources to question, reflect and extrapolate. Unlocking them from the originality of the here and now, is key to inviting them to learn from and build on that which has been.

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# Part III
# Impact of International Identities on Understandings of Rural Places

# Reading Lefebvre from the Periphery: Thinking Globally About the Rural

**Michael Corbett**

## Brief Introduction

What I want to do here is make some suggestions, drawing on the work of Henri Lefebvre and Jacques Lacan, to continue the work of unsettling static conceptions of what rurality is. In doing so, I will refer to rural education pointing to my own desire to think beyond the confines of conventional educational theory which tends to operate in a placeless temporal dimension, organized around imaginaries of development and progress. I also want to think beyond spatial constructions that imagine rurality as modernity's other, and that also imagine the compensatory education that should happen in rural places.

Lefebvre's idea of the production of space is, I think, a useful tool for thinking about geographies of education and the way these geographies are made and remade. To do this I weave through the text an analysis of my own teaching practice that is located in rural locations. This analysis is a self-study in the sense that my research and teaching experience in rural areas have led me to consider in more detail how space and place might be thought about more productively. What I offer here are the reflections of a place-oriented qualitative educational researcher provisionally thinking through spatial theory to understand a research trajectory.

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A.K. Schulte, B. Walker-Gibbs (eds.), *Self-studies in Rural Teacher Education*, Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices 14,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-17488-4_8

## Social Space

Recently, my colleagues Bill Green and Joanne Reid (Reid et al. 2010; Green and Corbett 2013) have been developing the idea of rural social space that draws on Henri Lefebvre's (1992) concept of social space. Lefebvre develops the concept of social space out of the idea that historical and popular conceptions of geography are too restrictive to support an understanding of the radical transformations wrought by the development of capitalism. The relative geographic simplicity of space as a neutral container is the central idea Lefebvre problematizes arguing that capitalism develops powerful ways to transform and produce space. People live in geography but also take an active part in creating the places and spaces in which they live. As Yi-Fu Tuan (2001) points out, places are breaks or stoppages in space. But what is space itself if it is not simply understood as a static container for historical analysis and social action? How do we understand space itself?

Lefebvre (1992) develops a number of triads to move us beyond the binaries that have become common conceptual tools for thinking of and thinking in the world. These triads and the trialectical thinking they provoke form the foundation of his concept of social space. Trialectical thinking relentlessly catapults us out of comfortable binary categorization and into an ever emergent and always unpredictable Thirdspace. Edward Soja puts it this way:

> Trialectical thinking is a necessary part of understanding thirdspace as a limitless composition of lifeworlds that are radically open and openly radicalizable … Trialectical thinking is difficult, for it challenges all conventional modes of thought and taken for granted epistemologies. It is disorderly, unruly, constantly evolving, unfixed, never representable in permanent constructions (1996, p. 70).

Lefebvre's ideas are complex, I think primarily because they force us to do several uncomfortable things. The first of these is to think beyond the binaries that are typically used to organize our thinking about phenomena. It is easy and customary to think in binary terms: developed/underdeveloped, abstract/concrete, male/female, good/bad, and importantly for what I want to discuss here, rural/urban. There is always the third space, the *other* which is not explained or grasped in and by the binary. Third space can represent something unpredictable, emergent and new, as in Homi Bhabha's (1990) conception of what happens when colonizer meets the colonized subject. The result is a postcolonial hybridity that has indeed changed but that nobody could have predicted. It can also take the form of a reinscription of what constitutes the center, for example, when the allegedly peripheral northern subject is allowed to speak as in the work of Gry Paulgaard (2012). As we see in the Hobo-Dyer Australian projection map, those living underneath or on the edge of the world can understand a different geography and speak back to the north from their own center (Connell 2007). Secondly, Lefebvre reads Marx in such a way so as to ask us to think of not only a temporal and social world, but also a geography that is incessantly, and in an increasingly profound way, transformed through productive activity.

Lefebvre writes:

> Social space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity – their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object … Social space implies a great diversity of knowledge (1992 p. 73).

Social space, or multiple geographies, are produced just as goods and services are produced under capitalism. The expansion of knowledge practices and power effects that capitalism both embodies and stimulates creates the conditions for an increasingly radical transformation of the world involving its very geography. For instance, I must acknowledge that my practice as a teacher from the early 1980s in First Nations and rural communities has been in large part about reshaping geographies. I spent most of my career teaching in places that had been essentially abandoned, either because the animals or the fish had been depleted or destroyed, or the economies that supported small producers had been corporatized. As a teacher I saw my work as promoting a process of dispossession and geographical reconfiguration that I called "learning to leave" (Corbett 2007). Institutional education was thus implicated in moving human populations out of areas of capital contraction and into areas of capital expansion. As a teacher, and educational researcher I have been intensely interested in various forms of resistance to this "mobility imperative" as I called it.

Space is neither neutral nor innocent in this formulation: it is produced. As Jose Saramago put it in his semi-autobiographical novel *Raised from the Ground*, geography is fundamentally about power:

> Many have died in war and other plagues (…) some perceive this as an unfathomable mystery, but the real reason lies in the land (…) And if not this land, then some other piece of land, it really doesn't matter as long as we've sorted out what's mine and thine: everything was recorded in the census at the proper time, with boundaries to the north and south and to the east and west, as if this were how it had been ordained since the world began, when everything was simply land with only a few large beasts and the occasional human being, all of them frightened (1980/2013 p. 2).

Space is not innocent. Space is not only where capitalism happens; it is also one of capitalism's more important products and representations of injustice (Soja 2010). It is divided, measured, evaluated, represented, bought and sold, defined and redefined, recreated but never destroyed, which is something that any real estate agent or homebuyer understands all too well. So, for Lefebvre, the city is the quintessential "produced space" in modernity. And yet, Lefebvre, unlike many of the postmodern geographers who have taken up his work in recent years, does not ignore rurality describing both the nuances of the transformation of Venice as well as a village in rural France in *The Production of Space* (1992).

Here I would like to open up a discussion of what all of this might mean for and in rural education. I have worked in rural places as a teacher of one kind or another since 1982. I have also worked as a teacher educator and researcher in rural communities. In my experience, local spatial practices have sat in an uneasy ambivalence with the implicit spatial practices and imaginaries introduced through schooling. While in the

1980s it was still possible for teachers and school promoters to speak of an education that leads the rural youth out of his or her community, by the 1990s in the places I found myself teaching, this could only be done with considerable circumspection. It was as though place came to life in certain ways and in my own practice I witnessed the emergence of place-based education, a problematic and yet generative way of developing the injunctions of John Dewey, the developmental psychological tradition, and sociolinguistics, that education must begin in the known universe of the child. But what happens when the "known" world of the child happens to have been declared peripheral and redundant by economic and spatial politics of capitalist development? The irony here is that in order for experience to be taken seriously, the place in which it happens needs to be considered to have a future as well.

By the 1970s Pierre Bourdieu (1984), Paul Willis (1981), and Basil Bernstein (1977) were already problematizing the way that deeply embedded linguistic and social practices effectively caused working class youth and their families to actively participate in their own educational failure and marginalization. So as I have pointed out in a couple of earlier works (Corbett 2010a, b), by the 1990s, my own mission as teacher was complicated by the suspicion that a straightforward valorization of a working-class, rural lifeworld had limitations. Teaching in a relatively isolated rural community it is quite possible to imagine experience as somehow located in a relatively disconnected local space. This is a problem that has been pointed out since that time in a number of critiques of place-based education (Nespor 2008; Bowers 2008).

The rural places in which I have worked and about which I have written are of course, linked into a multitude of scapes and flows, of capital, knowledge, and human movements. The physical landscape that may have seemed so fixed was being shaped and reshaped by political and spatial practices as visceral as logging operations, the loss of small fishing boats from community wharves, and the transformation of more and more family homes to summer residences. People were on the move, relationships were changing, communication and mobility patterns actively shaped and reshaped what is understood as community. The challenge of doing the hopeful, future-oriented work of teaching in places that have been declared surplus is rife with irony. For what exactly are we are preparing rural teachers and rural children and youth? The only conclusion I have discovered here is that the work is oriented to mobilizing people and propelling them away from their home places. It is hard to imagine an education for staying in a place that has few economic opportunities and that is being systematically abandoned by government.

## What is Rural Social Space?

> The form of social space is encounter, assembly, simultaneity. But what assembles, or what is assembled? The answer is: everything that there is in space, everything that is produced either by nature or by society, either through their cooperation or through their conflict. Everything: living beings, things, objects, works, signs and symbols (Lefebvre 1992, p. 101).

To think spatially in the sense that I think Lefebvre means is to think relationally. This is of course similar to Derrida's (1978) idea of language, which understands words to be meaningful only in relation to one another and in themselves. What I think I failed to do as a rural teacher through the 1980s and 1990s was to pay sufficient attention to movement, change and relationality and the way that places fit together in the dynamic production of space. Rural makes sense, for example, only when set alongside other signifiers like urban, city, suburb, development, and indeed, in the work of Marx for instance, capitalism, and even education itself. For instance, Etienne Balibar argues that Marx' progressive project is essentially an educational endeavor largely because the factory system itself that brings into being the conditions for the development of forms of modern education conceived as, "the only method of producing fully developed human beings" (Marx cited in Balibar 2007, p. 82). Here we see the explicit link between modernity, capitalism and urbanism which has always been understood as a complex social space.

For Bill Green and others (Reid et al. 2010; Green and Corbett 2013), a similar understanding of rurality is necessary to grasp the complexity of the way that contemporary transformations and production of space is understood. While many of Lefebvre's antecedents have focused on the city and dynamic urban space as the quintessential manifestation of developed capitalism, rurality too can and should be subject to the same sort of relational analysis. This kind of analysis and understanding is not new in the disciplinary space of rural studies, which has been heavily influenced by rural geography for the past couple of decades at least (Cloke et al. 2006). As Doreen Massey (2005) masterfully illustrates, her home village in rural England is no disconnected, isolated, communal idyll. Rather it is a location for the confluence of global change forces, hybridities and movements, as well as politics and conflict. In the fields of rural education and rural teacher education though, I think it is safe to say that work in critical rural geography is not yet well known. This work has helped me situate some of the problems that I have grappled with as a rural teacher and rural teacher educator. Of necessity, education happens somewhere, and it is more useful to think about the places and spaces in which education occurs as more than backdrop, but rather as dynamic and ever-emergent active geographies. Just as landforms are shaped through time, so too are the built geographies of cities, towns, and rural areas continually transformed.

There is though, an aura of timelessness around rurality and a sense that unlike in urban places, things do not change much. We are not, I think, always well served by nostalgic portrayals of close-knit, insular communities with little schools where time seems to stand still. Transformation in global markets, communication technologies, social class relations (Howley et al. 2014), gender roles and relations (Kenway and Hickey-Moody 2006; Pini and Leach 2011), local knowledge practices, technologies of material production and transportation, mobilities and the demand for labour in resource extraction, industrial and high tech zones, and importantly, knowledge practices introduced in and through school, all interrelate in the complex geography of a contemporary rural "fishing village" or agricultural region if those term even makes sense any more. I think they still do because there remain in these places distinct patterns of life and work that are related to larger

scale processes of capital formation and spatial production in distinct and locally specific ways. They also share elements of commonality (and difference) with other rural locations throughout the world, which is one reason why I think the term rural is still useful. Hedburg and Carmo (2011) have recently coined the term "translocal ruralism" to describe the connections and similarities between rural geographies in different parts of the world. I have tried, in my work to bring together an ethnographic, emic understanding of the rural lifeworld into the analysis of rural schooling. It is my vision that rural teacher education needs to encourage teachers not to dissociate education from ordinary life even when that life seems remote from the worlds a cosmopolitan education describes. Global capitalism, hybridity, the production of space, and dynamic geographical understandings can help teachers understand how global capitalism is not just "out there" in cities, but immediately present in the transformation of wilderness, threats to species, more or less hidden resource exploitation activity, and in the more mundane aspects of life such as the global array of products available in rural supermarkets and information technology pipelines.

Rurality is also a space of knowledge production, or more simply, learning. In a recent collection on rural education research in rural communities Craig and Aimee Howley position their rural education research within their life practices and trajectories as urban migrants who formed part of the demographic shift that led to an increase in rural population in the 1980s in the United States (Howley and Howley 2014). Their choice to live rurally became a journey of learning about place and the complexity of making a life, raising a family, cultivating land and raising animals. They learned from the place they inhabited, and situate rural social space as both the world they transform and their teacher. I have attempted to do much the same thing in the rural places I have lived and taught. The land and the people are wonderful teachers and I have been privileged to learn from both Aboriginal and settler friends how to live on and learn from the land. In rural teacher education practice it is, I have argued, essential that the teacher take the position of learner first in an attempt to discover where s/he is (Corbett 2010a).

Taking the position they do, the Howley's follow farmers Wendell Berry, Aldo Leopold, and social theorists Donna Haraway, Rebecca Solnit, James Scott and many others drawing mainly on the American progressive (Dewey, Pierce, and Kilpatrick) and transcendentalist traditions (Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman). This is not an entirely American sensibility though and this way of thinking also drives the work of several important thinkers in Norwegian rural education including Tom Tiller, Edmund Edvardsen (2011) and Rune Kvalsund (Kvalsund and Hargreaves 2014) each of whom articulates a deep relationship with the sea and fishing traditions. In a different way so too have Raymond Williams (1974), Doreen Massey (2005) developed new forms of spatial thinking as have Bruno Latour and the Actor Network Theorists (Latour 2007; Latour and Porter 2013; Fenwick and Edwards 2010) who encourage us to think of social space as a combination of people, non-human species and objects acting together to create a generative social life. Who can deny today the power of the car itself as an important social "actant" with which we each have a very important and generative relationship? This, I think is

the kind of connected sensibility and commitment to place that rural teacher educators need to encourage rather than to simply participate unreflectively and largely unconsciously in a standardized "learning to leave" agenda.

Howley and Howley (2014) reposition rurality at the center of their embedded and embodied life story as rural dwellers and rural educators. At the same time they address the marginalization of rurality in the relative spatial and political simplicity, they see much contemporary analysis of rurality in neoliberal capitalism. One important part of this is the separation of school and society (another binary) which imagines school as a place where students are alleged to learn to function in an abstracted "knowledge society," "global economy" or what have you. Indeed, it is important for the Howleys (and for me) to work to see better the relationships between their rural lives, the transformation of the rural place in which they live, and the practices of schooling.

Perhaps a second reason why rurality remains an important category for analysis, is that the space outside the city comes in much educational and development discourse to be relegated to a natural resources container that requires little human population, and/or a historical remnant to be left behind. Here, the fishing village is reduced to a historical remnant of the way fish used to be caught before the corporatization and techno-industrialization of the fishery. Such places are then constructed as empty spaces that are depopulated by forces of nature and modernity and not by the politically motivated spatial practices of contemporary capitalism. Anyone left living in these left-behind places are resistant to modernity and hopelessly nostalgic. It is much easier, in the end, to harvest resources out of relatively empty, depopulated places. At best, select rural locations are chosen for tourism development and constructed for the tourist gaze and the consumption of the place itself Urry (2002). Such concerns are central to rural education and to rural teacher education and rural teachers should, I believe, make clear decisions about where they position themselves in the politics of rurality. To ignore or to retreat from these politics is essentially to support the depopulation and marginalization of rural spaces.

I am not suggesting here that rural educators should focus their practice in an insular way, which is why along with Jan Nespor, I am a bit cautious about "place-based" education (Nespor 2008). For Lefebvre (1992), both a fragmented preoccupation with the particularities of place (going tight) or a globalizing compression of space into what he calls a "fetish" or a "space in itself" (going wide) are problematic. It is the uncovering of increasingly complex relationships in space rather than the abstract character of spaces themselves that is most urgently required. It is also the challenge faced by a rural teacher who confronts the history of both his or her profession and its missionary or state-forming baggage and the reality of the experience and sociopolitical position of students and their families. Generic metrocentric visions of curriculum simplify all of this spatial complexity into a readily measurable and "deliverable" set of learning outcomes. What I think this means for rural teacher education is that we need to support ways of thinking about teaching in rural contexts that are non-standard and that directly address persistent and pressing rural problems such as: population loss, resource industry restructuring, resource depletion, environmental and habitat degradation and land use policy, etc.

All of these and other aspects of spatial production in rural contexts demand educational attention and deep intellectual engagement. In my opinion we do not need only a vocationally-focused rural education. Lefebvre writes that conceptions of space are often simplified in a way that has a foundational political motivation:

> … Instead of uncovering the social relationships (including class relationships) that are latent in spaces. Instead of concentrating our attention on the production of space and the social relationships inherent to it – relationships which introduce specific contradictions into production, so echoing the contradiction between private ownership and the character of productive forces – we fall into the trap of treating space as space 'in itself', as space as such. We come to fetishize space in a way reminiscent of the old fetishism of commodities, where the trap lay in exchange and the error was to consider things in isolation, as "things in themselves" (1992, p. 90).

The complex web of networks and relationships that comprise social space exists in every location representing connections that are deepened and extended by the genius and energy of contemporary capitalism. This energy takes both the form of productive and destructive capacities as well as institutional structures (including schools) that are designed to mitigate the effects of capitalism.

In my own work in rural communities as a teacher, as a parent and as a citizen (and of course there are multiple ways I can position myself in rural social space) I have experienced some of the life challenges described by Craig Howley and Aimee Howley, not only in institutional practice as a professional, but also in my everyday life as a rural citizen living and working in places that are routinely positioned as dying, increasingly marginal and largely unimportant to the advance of modernity. This is particularly so if local citizens express resistance to invasive forms of development such as mining, mega-quarries and hydraulic fractionation. In rural communities in which I have worked, resistance and resentment are rife. In the First Nations communities in which I have worked there were persistent discussion and protests over hydro development. In coastal Atlantic Canada I have participated in controversies over resource policy, fisheries regulation, mining and other forms of invasive development. The issues are numerous and rural teachers are in a difficult position navigating the complex politics of these struggles. To use Lefebvre's language once again, I have seen the effects of what he called, "the critique of everyday life" a process in which the ordinary experience of people is folded into, and effaced by, structural arguments that imagine us all on a common teleological express racing toward a common future.

Anthony Giddens (1990) has called this teleology the "juggernaut of modernity" or a "runaway world" (2002). In this view, modernity then is something we all sit inside propelled together in uniform cabins, calculating risk with Ulrich Beck (1992) and drinking in Zygmunt Bauman's liquid refreshments (2000). Out the window we travel so fast that place vanishes as an important sociological construct, and ironically, Giddens own work veers not toward a strong analysis of the structural forces but to the private activity of elaborate self-making (which includes credentialing oneself), and the heated-up intimacy of an insular, more or less conjugal life that again ironically seems to take place nowhere and anywhere. It hardly needs saying

but the image of a juggernaut full of hapless passengers aligns rather well with the conservative politics with which Giddens has been associated in Britain for the past two decades. If nobody is driving the train, then it is nobody's fault that society is organized as it is. Furthermore, transnational challenges like climate change will be effectively unsolvable because forces beyond anyone's control propel the train along. This is, of course, just the news the coal and oil lobby in the United States wants to hear. And where is rural life in Giddens' picture? Of course, it hasn't gone away.

The predominant vision of space, operates, it has seemed to me, within a binary structure that positions education as urban, mobile, cultural, diverse, and central and in contrast, rural living spaces as static, natural, homogenous and peripheral. As such, there is little for children to learn in a rural community other than how to escape it. Why indeed would one want to learn to live in a place that is, at best, hanging on to a dusty, depressing image of what it once was? Under conditions of risk, high stakes choices confront social actors who are "freed" from traditional constraints of place, kinship and other forms of belonging. Baeck and Paulgaard (2012) remind us that in rural areas that have experienced structural socioeconomic change, neoliberal ideologies place responsibility squarely on the shoulders of individuals who are chided for not having chosen better. Often these "poor choices" relate to educational choices and the alleged failure of rural people to take schooling seriously enough (Corbett 2009a).

The recent American film *Nebraska* (Payne 2014) illustrates this stark rural imagery powerfully in its black and white presentation of a deluded old man and his underemployed son moving across the degraded landscape of the rural plains populated by pathetically insular characters. This imagery is a curriculum that has as its central theme the inevitable decline of rural life that is mirrored by the protagonist's descent into dementia. This spatial vision sets the dystopian everyday life of rural citizens to one side in favor of curriculum, pedagogy and educational policy whose chief imaginaries and symbolic practices are designed to create a separate space for rural children who are prepared for elsewhere. And it sits ironically with the imagery of lost rural panacea in mediascapes that range from much of the opus of the Disney studios to modern tourist advertisements that powerfully evoke a seemingly lost rural idyll inviting visitors to come to Newfoundland to heal by returning to a simpler chronotope in which you can "find yourself" (Kelly 2013).

## Some Baggage

Rural education scholarship is an activist sub-discipline which steadfastly refuses to accept the *Nebraska* imagery, sometimes by substituting utopian, communitarian tropes in its place, but at other times by trying hard to imagine what Baeck and Paulgaard (2012) call rural futures. One of the key problems for those of us working in rural education is squaring local struggles, many of which tend to be fairly insular in their analytic focus, with movements and influence that "trickles down" from

wider scale governance and distribution networks. In contemporary political and economic thinking rurality tends to be understood as reactive. While not all rural communities are in trouble, many of my neighbors understand that they are under threat but have few resources for either understanding the nature of the threats they face, or a set of workable strategies that chart a reasonable forward course. If rural education research and rural teacher education has any unifying purpose it is perhaps to help struggling communities come to terms with the challenges they face and to strategize with rural citizens about how to deal with these challenges productively.

In North America, many rural education scholars carry on activist or outreach and adult education traditions and take up local struggle over a variety of issues including, for example, the development of locally relevant curriculum, professional development in rural schools, supporting communities faced with school closure by providing a somewhat broader frame for focusing policy positions or curriculum and pedagogical reform. Indeed, it can be argued that rural education scholarship has developed out of place-based rural activism, a focus on rurality as one element of social inequality found in rural sociology, and the historic focus of educational sociology (Seddon 2014) and sociology generally on the identification and amelioration of social problems and particularly social inequality. For this reason I think it is crucial that sociology, history and philosophy remain a key part of rural teacher education. This self-study is a kind of disclosure of the theoretical preoccupations that have motivated my work. Good rural teachers and teacher educators require good theoretical tools in my view.

I grew up in a declining industrial town in northern Nova Scotia where my mother's family migrated from their farm in an Acadian[1] village in New Brunswick to work in munitions plants during the Second World War (Corbett 2013). My father arrived in this town of about 10,000 shortly afterward in the early 1950s from his Nova Scotian village to work for the Canadian National Railway. In eastern Canada people have been escaping and returning to rural places for generations and the Second World War industrial boom was the engine that brought my parents together. Then, in the 1970s industrial decline drove me out yet, ironically back into the rural as a teacher who could not get a teaching job close to home (Corbett 2010a).

My path contains the irony of a society that claims to be leaving the rural behind, but which at the same time seems to offer opportunities to many people in rural areas. This is happening today in mining communities and oil boom-towns. It is in rural spaces that a great deal of Canadian prosperity seems founded, and yet, the rural itself has been imagined in national educational narratives as a space out of

[1] The Acadians are the descendants of the first French settlers in what is now eastern Canada. They were forcibly removed from the lands they settled in the mid eighteenth century in a brutal ethnic cleansing undertaken once the British established hegemony. A significant proportion of the Acadian people walked back to Acadie, the land they considered their home, from Louisiana and other parts of the American south. Many of their descendants still live in Atlantic Canada speaking French.

which modern national states "develop." In these narratives, educated people move to cities, they do not stay in the country. This leads me to wonder what an educated rural life history might look like outside the traditional images of the rough and ready rancher, farmer, fisherman, logger and miner. These perhaps are the new images that rural educators need to help rural youth imagine and enact.

Rurality represents some of the iconic imagery of both colonialism and industrial development that has rolled out since the appearance of European settlers and the imperial governance systems they have represented. For instance, in traditional school curriculum, the pioneer imagery of fur traders, loggers, ranchers and pastoralists carving farms out of the bush or prairie are iconic North American educational and rural tropes (Innis and Watson 1950/2008). At the same time rural identity positions (or even "postures") articulate a felt sense of masculine national identity rooted in historic practices of resource extraction and agricultural production (farmer, fisher, logger). The cast of characters associated with this teleology that imagines the country transforming from wilderness, through cultivation and resource extraction on through to urban modernity are iconic but viewed differently through different lenses. Feminist, indigenous, critical race theory, deconstructive, poststructural and Marxist theorizations have of course offered critiques. The project of modernizing this narrative through the imposition of compulsory schooling, transforming regionally and locally rooted subjects into generic national subjects living not in the specificity of regional geographies, but rather, in urban locations. This project is supposed to have been largely accomplished, but some of us working in rural education question this assessment (Corbett 2001).

## Living Inside Real and Imagined Rurality

I live inside a real and imagined rurality. Lefebvre's fundamental trialectic of space positions us in a perceived, conceived and lived matrix. We perceive and imagine, we conceive when we represent, and we live in a world that always escapes our grasp. It is the pursuit of the nature of the world in which we live that I will turn to now drawing on Lacan.

Lacan (2007) speaks of three fundamental psychoanalytic orders that are used for understanding phenomena: the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. Like Lefebvre, Lacan employs triangles. First of all, phenomena exist as we imagine them. When you think about rurality what is it that you imagine? For instance, I have an image that involves primarily small coastal villages on rocky coastline linked to the sea by fishing wharves nestled in protected coves or behind rock breakwaters. My rural imaginary also includes farmscapes of the Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley and notably the panoramic view from the Lookoff (that is actually the name of a small hamlet). These and other images sit in my consciousness and shape the way I think about what constitutes the rural. Each of us has his or her imaginary order.

This imagery also informs the writing I do and have done about rural social space. I follow then, in a long tradition of raconteurs, scholars, critics, writers, artists, film-makers, teachers, bureaucrats, and other cultural workers whose business it is to generate symbolic constructions to represent phenomena. This is Lacan's second order, the symbolic. The imaginary obviously plays an important role in these symbolic constructions that we produce and consume and that come to play a powerful part in framing public and private understandings of rurality. But of course, these representations are not real, they contain no dirt, water, air, trees, fish, crops, no roads nor people. They are empty of a crucial dimension of materiality. They are cultural and even social representations of phenomena, linguistic and knowledge practice that range from the arts and humanities through the sciences. They are still and moving images, poetry, spoken words, musical sound and the ways used to represent it, the notation of chemistry and mathematical formulae. They are products of our consciousness.

But there is something illusive that these symbolic representations miss; there is always an absence in them or what contemporary philosophers call the "remainder." This is the dark matter of social analysis, Lacan's third dimension, which he calls the Real. The Real, as I understand it, is the material stuff of and in life that we construct in our Imaginaries. Each of us has experience and we touch and represent materiality through our symbolic practices. The trouble is that no matter how refined our symbolic practices become, including those of science, the more we come to understand that the Real is always several steps ahead of us beyond our grasp, or at least our ability to represent it in any final way. We cannot, as Richard Rorty (1981) put it, hold a mirror up to nature. The Real is the remainder (Butler et al. 2000), that which cannot be captured symbolically. It is, as Lacan demonstrates, like desire, always just out of reach and when we think we finally possess the object of our desire we come to see that it is desire itself which motivates us more than its satisfaction. It is, I think, with our imaginative work and symbolic practices and perhaps all we are left with in the end is our dreams and our attempts to tell those dreams to one another. We have, of course, little choice but to acknowledge and pursue the Real, but so far our attempts to grasp it have been quite limited, particularly in matters of human interaction or what Rittell and Webber (1973) called "wicked" problems like how to make school matter in communities of disadvantage.

This framework provides a complex starting point for thinking about my life as a teacher and how I eventually became a rural education researcher. I came to a teaching position in rural Nova Scotia from an aboriginal community where I began my public school teaching career in 1983. I would not have thought about rurality at that time (it was not important in my imaginary), although I was keenly aware that there was a clear mismatch between the ordinary practices of schooling and life in Northern Manitoba and in rural Nova Scotia. When one begins teaching in a social space that is quite different from the familiar (as many rural teachers do) the challenges can be significant. I went north with vague images of what I might find. My Imaginary changed, as I experienced life amongst people and places. My sense of the space became more relational and complex. There was a reality that preceded

me and it is one that I barely understood. And yet I was required to teach and to enact the symbolic practices of schooling in this unknown place.

Today globalized educational scaling is now challenging even national education spaces themselves. When it comes to looking at the kind of educated subject contemporary education is attempting to produce, we now encounter the image of an idealized model of a mobile, flexible, networked knowledge worker who is constructed as human capital in a globally competitive marketplace. The most elite forms of this labour tend to be nomadic. The middle class variant operates knowledge, production and consumption systems that span the globe. The working class variant often represents flexible, deployable, specialized manual and/or technical labour that is at least as mobile as its middle class variant. It is these kind of labour that education systems seem to be pressured to produce by global governance bodies like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. There seems to be little pressure to produce good members of communities or critical citizens.

Globalization has produced and reproduced old and new boundaries and geographies and increasingly sophisticated forms of mapping have allowed us to see how we produce and divide space and create populations. National borders and boundaries remain important, but at the same time they are easily spanned both through wired communication, and through ubiquitous travel for privileged agents in advanced capitalist nations both in the form of business travel but also in the form of consuming places through tourism. National and regional boundaries are thus drawn into larger spatial constructions made possible by "big data" and comparative analytical frames such as the Programme for International Student Assessment. Indeed the extent to which individuals, communities, regions and even nations are networked into the mobile, yet striated space (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) of modernity is a measure of one's "connectedness" or relevance. The located agent rooted too firmly in some isolated geography in an increasingly "mobile modernity" (Corbett 2009b) as I have called it, is "stuck" either in urban spaces of disadvantage or in increasingly dysfunctional and fragmented rural locations.

What I mean here by "fragmented" reflects the way that rural spaces have come to be divided between those locations that are private and desirable to relatively wealthy in-migrants seeking natural beauty and privacy (some of whom are mobile workers), and, on the other hand, an increasingly marginalized remnant of agricultural and resource extraction workers and their families living in places with little "gaze" value. Added to this mixture is a cadre of elite technical and manual workers who are deployed for periods on construction projects, remote resource extraction projects and other forms of what the Australians call DIDO (drive in-drive out) or FIFO (fly in- fly out) work. The disappearance of these high income workers for periods of time creates new challenges for children, parents and grandparents and other extended family members left behind to raise children, care for elders and maintain property.

The central question concerning rurality for me is not to theorize its disappearance in the flowering of an ever more urbanized modernity, but rather to understand and delineate the complex relationships and interdependencies between different

spaces within modernizing societies that are connected in increasingly complex ways. Rurality should no longer be understood, or misunderstood as a simpler, more natural space left behind by the advance of modern capitalism. This atavistic teleological imagery is clearly present in much of the founding theoretical work that formed the basis for a kind of social thought which generates imaginaries and symbolic practices that have been spatially unsophisticated, ideologically invested in status quo economic hierarchies. Rural educators and rural teacher educators, I think, are in an excellent position to correct and critique the spatially simplistic imagery of rural places as empty and unimportant natural backdrop to some imagined real life that happens in cities.

We require a rural education that recognizes rural hybridities, rural mobilities and deployments, rural transformation and social change, rural knowledge employed by both aboriginal people and settler societies, rural marginalization in the discourses, boundary making and mapping practices of contemporary capitalism, established and emerging rural identities, and the way the power operates in and on the rural. The kind of rural education this imagines must cross borders and situate rural places not on the periphery of capitalist spatial production, but at its center. Every place is the center of something, a location from which to read the world and dream new futures. We need a rural education that recognizes this while at the same time understanding that all places are subject to incessant and radical structural and spatial transformations that are larger than any particular place. Working in the thirdspace between our imaginaries, what we see represented, what we touch and change with our bodies, and what we can re-imagine in our dreams is, I think, the rural education and rural teacher education challenge today.

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# "Becoming" Teacher Education Researchers in Diverse Rural Communities

Jodie Kline and Sri Soejatminah

## Introduction

This chapter explores how we, two teacher education researchers, conceptualize research in Australian rural school communities and the considerations relevant to forging partnerships with diverse school community members. We look to literature from the interdisciplinary fields of research ethics, rural sociology, intercultural understanding, cultural studies and teacher education to investigate how other researchers navigate this space; we seek guidance from their practice and reflections. We combine learning from the experience of our peers with self-study, enabling us to both track our own transformation as we encounter "becoming" interculturally competent rural teacher education researchers and to consider what this might enable us to contribute to the preparation of pre-service teachers and to teacher education more broadly.

The contexts in which we, and the pre-service teachers we hope will benefit from our work, are preparing to work are ethnically diverse rural school communities, where ethnic diversity refers specifically to the presence of new migrants and/or refugees. Rural in this instance refers to Australian towns and outer regional centers characterized by physical distance from urban centers, small population size, and limited higher education facilities and specialized health services (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs – MCEETYA 2007). We also draw on Gray and Lawrence (2001) where rural is defined as connected to or relying on agriculture, while regional or non-metropolitan, consistent with Withers and Powall, is defined as localities with a population of more than

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A.K. Schulte, B. Walker-Gibbs (eds.), *Self-studies in Rural Teacher Education*, Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices 14,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-17488-4_9

100,000 and situated outside of Australia's major cities (Withers and Powall 2003, cited in McDonald et al. 2008, p. 13).

Rural Australia is regularly represented by deficit discourse that frames rurality and rural people unfavorably in relation to their urban-counterparts—rural and regional communities experience rates of socio-economic disadvantage that are higher when compared to metropolitan settings and children in rural and regional Australia tend to have poorer outcomes on a range of education, health and well-being measures than their metropolitan counterparts (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development -DEECD 2010; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission – HREOC 2000). These representations negate the complex tapestry that is rural Australia. Reid and colleagues (2010) describe rural communities as "richly complex and contradictory," noting "many rural communities are characterized by extremes of wealth, age, health and capacity, as well as by racial and cultural diversity" (Reid et al. 2010, p. 267). Similarly Corbett (2009, p. 166), with reference to rural North America, discusses rurality as "dynamic", a changing entity marked by increasingly networked production, consumption and communication systems; the globalization of markets; declining population and out-migration and the emergence of eco-tourism and temporary residents (often from urban places).

Regionalizing immigration fits with what Corbett (2009) describes as "structural transformations" and is a phenomenon in several countries such as Canada, Australia, England and some European countries (Boese 2010a). In the Australian context, the aims of rural and regional immigration have been twofold: to address the declining rural population and to address the arising labor shortage (Boese 2010b; Cahill 2007; Hugo 2008; McDonald et al. 2008). While rural Australia, and hence rural schools, have always been home to a range of rich cultures — including the varied indigenous cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders upon whose land communities are built, the cultures brought by Chinese miners and entrepreneurs who migrated in the 1850s, Italian laborers in the 1950s, and skilled Chilean migrants in recent years — the diversification stemming from immigration policy in Australia's increasingly globalized and networked economy creates a unique environment for which teacher educators need to prepare their students and in which teacher education researchers work.

In this chapter, we use a self-study process to consider in broad and general terms the ethical issues in rural education research and how rural education research impacts teacher education. Ethics is simplistically defined both as "moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conducting of an activity" and "the branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles" (http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/ethics). For the purposes of this study we use the term "ethics" to refer broadly to the principles underpinning our approach to research conduct, including research design and the decisions made "in the moment". Ethics in research encompasses both procedural ethics granted by ethical review boards and the other dimensions not covered by ethics committees, such as ethics in practice (Guillemin and Gillam 2004; Small 2001; Victoria 2011). Procedural ethics refers to the process of gaining ethical approval from ethics committees. "Ethics in practice" are the ethical considerations faced by researchers in the day-to-day process of

conducting research and include responses to unanticipated ethical dilemmas and concerns faced by researchers during the research process (Guillemin and Gillam 2004; Field and Morse 1992, cited in Orb et al. 2001; Small 2001; Victoria 2011).

For this self-study we use critical conversations about ethnicity, rurality and education to develop our understandings of research practice, in particular our "ethics in practice." The study is designed to make visible the beginning of an ongoing journey toward becoming interculturally competent teacher education researchers, as we believe it will enhance our capacity to conduct research and support us as we prepare preservice teachers for diverse school settings, particularly culturally diverse rural schools. Through this work we attempt to develop and/or make explicit understandings about ourselves, which can assist us with our work. Literature on social justice and intercultural sensitivity/competence guided our critical conversations, which were structured around three key questions we developed at the beginning of our work together:

1. How do we understand our own professional identities?
2. How do our understandings of our identities guide our approach to working with pre-service teachers and working in diverse rural schools?
3. How do our understandings of the literature on social justice and intercultural sensitivity/ competence inform our professional conduct as teacher educators and as researchers?

From this starting point we developed sub-questions to guide our inquiry (see the methodology section for more detail).

## Context of the Self-Study

In recognition of our differences relating to professional identity, worldviews, and location, we formed a research partnership to undertake this work. We saw an opportunity to share our learnings and to challenge each other to think in new ways about the ethics of research in diverse rural settings. In particular we differ significantly in terms of our identification with "the rural."

Jodie is a white female. She is a second generation Australian of mixed ancestry, who identifies strongly with her Italian heritage. Jodie has lived in a number of rural, regional and urban localities in Australia, including in two capital cities, in the tropical region of Northern Australia, the central desert and on the Victorian coastline. Each location has a unique demographic in terms of population density and ethnic and cultural diversity. She has worked across various health and education settings, with much of her early experience involving collaboration with multicultural organizations and minority and marginalized groups. Sri is an Australian Muslim female with Indonesian background wearing headscarf. Sri has never lived in rural Australia but has been living in a suburb of Melbourne with a high level of migrant settlement and diversity. She has various experience working with a range of minority and marginalized groups in urban Australia and in Indonesia, and has

experience researching in a majority different culture in Vanuatu. Both Jodie and Sri are employed in research roles, have a range of teaching experiences, and work with preservice teachers.

We undertake this self-study so that when we partner with teachers and rural school communities we bring to the relationship expanded understandings of culture, ethnicity, rurality and schooling. We anticipate that these understandings will better position us to recognize and respond to the issues most pertinent to those we work with.

## Theoretical Framework

To understand the process of "becoming" researchers, we looked at identity as an important factor influencing our ability to work productively with diverse rural schools and the teachers that staff them. In education, identity is commonly believed to be "a key influencing factor on teachers' sense of purpose, self-efficacy, motivation, commitment, job satisfaction and effectiveness" (Day et al. 2006, p. 601). Conle et al. (2002) further highlight connections between practical experiences and academic knowledge. Thus, we expect an understanding of our multi-dimensional identities will give us knowledge about ourselves – who we are, our assumptions or worldviews, what affects us, how we have changed, and how we are likely to develop as educators and education researchers into the future. Gee (2000–2001) describes identity as

> (…) the "kind of person" one is recognized as "being" at a given time and place, can change from moment to moment in the interaction, can change from context to context, and of course, can be ambiguous or unstable. (p. 99).

He suggests four ways to view identity: nature-identity: a state; institution-identity: a position; discourse-identity: an individual trait; and affinity-identity: experiences (Gee 2000–2001, p.100).

Drawing on several scholars, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) contend that identity is multiple and changing and shaped by factors such as the self, emotion, narrative and discourse aspects of identity, reflection, agency, and contextual factors. Conrad et al. (2010) through collaborative self-study of three black professors working at a rural university reported that their participants' values were shaped by religion, family, ethnicity, and society which intertwines in their personal and professional selves and influences their educational philosophy and practice. Social structures and individual agency are considered crucial in shaping teacher identity (Day et al. 2006). Similarly, Coldron and Smith (1999) stated that teacher identity is shaped by active location in social space.

As we are teacher educators and researchers, insights on becoming an academic, including professional and personal identity are also relevant. Young and Erickson

(2011) explored professional identity when examining their career change from school teacher into teacher educator using self-study research. Through composing narratives of becoming and being a teacher, they were able to better understand themselves, reflect on their career transition. Investigation of their identity suggested that their identity as teacher remained unchanged. The professional identity study of Wood and Borg (2010) enabled us to comprehend the transition process involved with “becoming” teacher education researchers. This study reveals the emergence of common patterns of experience that informed the authors about reoccurring issues at “the substantive and situational levels” spurring them to prepare a proposal for their university to provide support for newcomers during transition. These studies reveal that professional identity is not static and suggest that educators and researchers are in a constant state of “becoming.”

Personal identity, manifested in personal life experience and characteristics, is commonly differentiated from group identity, referred to as race, faith, power, and sex (Brown 2000). Draw on Erikson (1968, pp.19&20, cited in Brown 2000, p. 31) who describes identity as “a subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity (…) a process “located” in the core of the individual and (…) in the core of his [sic] communal culture”, Brown argues that “dimensions of identity are constructed at the intersection of the Self and Other, and an empathic understanding of the self is linked to understanding the other” (2000, p. 32). On this basis, Brown used self-study research to learn how her background (ethnicity and race), affects her professional work as academic in a university. She found that students’ identity formation are shaped by curricular material and pedagogy practices, which are influenced by “societal relations of racial and class inequity” (Brown 2000, p. 30).

In light of the writings of our colleagues, we begin a self-study process seeing ourselves as researchers and educators, but recognizing that this identity is always in the state of “becoming,” shaped by what we read, what we discuss and who we relate with/to. We also see that our multiple identities – professional and cultural identities – are interwoven and dynamic, shaped and reshaped by various factors such as professional experiences, worldviews, and location.

## Methodology

### *The Significance of the Self-Study Process*

A self-study process is useful for our work because, like identity theory, self-study is sensitive to construction and negotiations (Soreide 2006). In this instance, we seek “self-discovery” through our collaboration (Samaras and Freese 2009). The self-study process is significant for our inquiry because it enables us to examine both our research practice and our understandings of ethics and identity in order to

come up with approaches to research that are valuable for the wider education community (Conrad et al. 2010; Hamilton et al. 2008; Loughran 2007). Self-study has been defined as:

> The study of one's self, one's actions, one's ideas, as well as the "not self". It is autobiographical, historical, cultural, and political…it draws on one's life, but it is more than that. Self-study also involves a thoughtful look at text read, experiences had, people known and ideas considered. (Hamilton and Pinnegar 1998, p. 236, cited in Hamilton et al. 2008, p. 20)

There are five elements of self-study (LaBoskey 2004, cited in Hamilton et al. 2008, p. 21), including: "it is self-initiated and focused; it is improvement-aimed; it is interactive; it includes multiple, mainly qualitative methods; and it defines validity as a process based on trustworthiness."

The five elements described by LaBoskey (2004) are reflected in this research. Firstly, the idea to investigate ethics in the practice of research in diverse rural communities was identified through reading about Australia's rural schools. Peer-reviewed articles about rural schooling rarely engage with community diversity, including cultural and linguistic diversity—we were not convinced that this omission stems from a lack of diversity in schools. Identification of this gap prompted us to articulate why research (and teaching) practices conventionally applied in rural settings, settings which are largely presumed to be mono-cultural and mono-lingual, are not necessarily appropriate for working with new cultural diversity. Secondly, this self-study aims to help us become researchers and educators capable of undertaking ethical research in diverse rural communities and able to inform wider academia and pre-service teachers of our findings. Thirdly, this research is qualitative, using semi-structured critical conversations to gather data that is analyzed using an interpretive paradigm. Inductive analysis is coupled with constant comparative analysis to interpret the data. Data was clustered, with the key themes to emerge providing a basis for the discussion below. Fourthly, this self-study is collaborative involving dialogue, interaction, questioning, affirmation and reflection between the two of us. Fifthly, we aim to address validity through achieving trustworthiness. Although self-study is about study of self and one's own practice, we wanted to address subjectivity and how this shaped our inquiry, during the research process Peshkin (1988). To monitor ourselves and to achieve high validity we take advice from Feldman:

> Provide clear and detail description of how we collect data and make explicit what count as data in our work; provide the details of the research methods used; provide clear and detailed descriptions of how we constructed the representation from our data; extend triangulation beyond multiple sources of data to include explorations of multiple ways to represent the same self-study; and provide evidence of the value of the changes in our ways of being teacher educators. (2003 pp. 27–28).

Loughran (2007, 2010) argues that a story documenting problems found in practice itself does not constitute self-study research and that to become research, self-study must entail knowledge generation. This is central to self-study in general, as articulated by the American Educational Research Association Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices Special Interest Group which seeks to make substantial contributions related to the theory in practice of teacher education (AERA 2014). To

achieve knowledge generation, Loughran suggests that self-study has to involve framing and reframing the research problem in order to generate new knowledge. In line with this, Mills (cited in Bullough and Pinnegar 2001, p. 15) states that "for public theory to influence educational practice it must be translated through the personal"; that is self-study must contribute to the knowledge base production.

Zeichner (2007) asserts that self-study must aim both to improve practice and contribute theoretical understanding. In this case, we address concerns related to the practical dimensions of research and offer a reference point for colleagues seeking to undertake similar work. This foundational work will ultimately ensure that when we do conduct research in rural school communities, the findings will more accurately represent the views of diverse participants and be responsive to context. Therefore, any research or teaching implications are more likely to fit with community interests.

## *Methods*

Data comprise narratives, specifically recordings of our critical, semi-structured research conversations and a literature review related to social justice, intercultural sensitivity and competence. Narrative tools are used to capture our voice, as such we met for one full day and two half-day workshops in which we had a series of discussions designed to challenge or disrupt our assumptions about education, ethnicity and rurality. The workshops and discussions were structured around the research questions, but allowed for exploration of related topics.

Data was collected during the workshops, as well as through emails and independent personal reflection. Part of this collaborative self-study involved engagement with literature; results of a literature review became part of our data. A summary of findings from the literature on social justice and intercultural sensitivity/competence are provided and were used to guide our conversations (See Fig. 1).

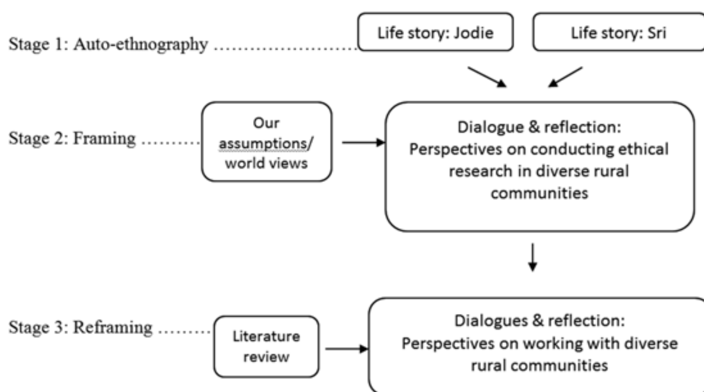


**Fig. 1** Process of data collection and analysis

The figure shows that reflecting on our discussions and the literature were essential components of the data collection. This is in line with Brookfield (1995, 1998) who suggests that critical reflective process can happen through autobiographical reflection and the lens of literature.

These conversations forced us to confront and challenge each other's preconceptions about rurality and cultural diversity so that we could begin to construct more complex understanding of rural communities. Drawing on Schulte (2005), in which she challenged and confronted her own assumptions as a scholar and teacher, we developed some sub-questions which we asked each other to spur reflection and discussion of our assumptions. These were considered alongside the key research questions and were as follows:

1. Could you tell me your professional identity and cultural background? How does your cultural background inform your research conduct?
2. What do you think are the key influences on your worldviews?
3. How do you think your worldview impacts on your perspective on research ethics?
4. What are insights from literature on ethical research that you think are relevant for researchers to work in diverse rural schools?

A summary of the literature we consulted when considering these questions is provided below.

## Review of Relevant Literature

The selection of literature was influenced by our worldviews/assumptions about what we consider when working with diverse rural school communities. While our background reading was extensive covering the fields of rural sociology, teacher education and cultural studies, we provide herein a brief overview of key ideas in the areas of social justice and intercultural sensitivity.

### *Social Justice*

In the main, literature identifies "social justice" as an important concept for research and teaching in rural areas, on the basis that many rural communities experience disadvantage, including educational disadvantage (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development -DEECD 2010; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission – HREOC 2000). Given this context it would appear that achieving social justice in rural education is a crucial issue. However, commonly social justice is viewed from the perspective of economic discourse wherein rural is imagined as socially backward and an equity agenda focused on the quality of education for rural students is promoted (Roberts and Green 2013). The construction of

disadvantages assumes "rural schools need various redistributive programs to provide extra resources to overcome the subsequent educational disadvantage or compensate staff to make rural schools more urban-like" (Roberts and Green 2013, p. 766). Similarly, Green and Letts (2007) argue that rural should not be viewed as merely a matter of geographical difference as it affects the production of identities and values. In particular, they consider rural "as increasingly the site of the other, real-and-imagined, within a spatial economy predicated increasingly on a differential distribution of power and privilege". Howley et al. (2005) also assert that rural life has its own meaning, which can be understood by understanding rural cultures and ways of engaging life. Conceptualization of rurality in ways which challenge the dominant deficit stance have implications for those seeking to identify, research and/or address inequity and injustice in rural education. Cuervo (2012, p. 83) suggests the use of "a plural framework of social justice that includes issues of recognition and participation within the current neoliberal environment". The plural framework of social justice promotes holistic understandings of rural life and appears to accommodate rich diversity.

## *Intercultural Sensitivity*

According to Lustig and Koester's (2003) notion of intercultural context, diverse rural communities in which there are significant cultural differences among members of community can be considered as a representation of intercultural context. Extending on this, intercultural sensitivity and competence are regarded by Soejatminah (2013) as important for developing relations with people from different cultural backgrounds.

As a cognitive dimension of learning, intercultural sensitivity is understood as "the way people construe cultural difference and…the varying kinds of experience that accompany these constructions" (Bennet 1993, cited in Paige and Goode 2009, p. 338). Development of intercultural sensitivity can be explained, using the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity – DMIS (Bennet 1993) as a range of worldviews shifting from an ethnocentric stance whereby our own cultural orientation is central in interpreting different cultures, to an ethnorelative standpoint in which our own cultural orientation is not central anymore as another cultural lens is also considered when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Other intercultural scholars use intercultural competence to ascribe an individual with similar qualities for interacting with others, which is defined as, "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in an intercultural situation based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitude" (Deardorff 2006, p. 254). This term is useful to understand the development of abilities relevant to relating with members of diverse rural schools. Intercultural competence development is considered a lifelong learning that can involve various cultural knowledge gains and a change of attitudes and behavior (Deardorff 2006).

Cultural diversity in rural schools is increasingly evident and a recent study on inclusive practice in a selection of rural and regional primary schools in Australia suggests that current perceptions on inclusivity recognize disability and cultural differences (Forlin and Lock 2006).

## Findings and Discussions

Through critical conversations and engagement with literature, we have begun to unpack our own identities and better understand how these are *located* identities that have an impact on our work in teacher education. From the outset it is important to note that this exercise required us to expose areas for improvement in our knowledge and practice, and as such was confronting.

### *Professional Identities*

The discussions and reflections undertaken for this study suggest that people can see us differently, depending on their perspective and position, and that has ramifications for our work in schools and with teachers. Reflecting on the writing of Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) and Gee (2000–2001), we examined our multiple and coexisting identities and how these are mediated through context, social position, and experience. Our discussion focused on professional identity and we saw each other quite differently to how we saw ourselves, with our perceptions informed by our worldviews, cultural heritage, and location in society (Conrad et al. 2010). We relay herein only the identity markers, and factors that influence them, which emerged frequently in our discussions and are relevant to this chapter. Not surprisingly identity markers which positioned us explicitly in relation to rurality, education, culture, ethnicity and diversity more broadly were those which we perceived to be the most relevant to the task at hand.

Sri gained her doctoral degree in education, investigating Australian pre-service teachers' professional and cultural learning from their international teaching practicum in Vanuatu. She is working as a researcher at the same institution as Jodie. Previously, Sri worked at the Ministry of National Education in Jakarta, Indonesia, during which time she completed two masters' degrees in educational management and agricultural science at two Australian universities. Jodie lives and was raised in regional Victoria. Her research interests include teacher education, social inclusion and rural education. Jodie has been a Chief Investigator on large-scale teacher workforce projects and is a reviewer for a number of academic journals with an emphasis on rural education. Jodie has a PhD in Political Science and completed a Master of Teaching in which her thesis explored notions of inclusivity when educating for political literacy in the Northern Territory. For the purposes of this study, Jodie describes herself as a mid-career academic. She is most passionate about educa-

tional research in regional communities and growth corridors. Jodie is new to self-study and was excited at the prospect of working with a process that differs from her usual mixed-methods approaches.

Through our conversations it became apparent that although Sri identifies as an early-career researcher, Jodie held her extensive experience in the Ministry of National Education and her qualifications in high regard, readily identifying these as an asset for working within diverse rural communities. Jodie looked to Sri for guidance for how to engage members of minority and marginalized groups and appreciated her wealth of knowledge about international education systems. On the other hand, Sri looked to Jodie mainly for information on how she develops strong voice on social justice/inclusion for rural communities, in particular about political sensitivities in rural and regional education discourse, and Sri was interested in Jodie’s understanding of Australian historical contexts. Sri also sought to learn more about empirical practice of ethical research with rural communities when cultural diversity is not a significant issue. Together we shared stories about previous successes and challenges that had arisen in our research, and asked each other to reinterpret these events from differing positions.

The professional hierarchies that exist within universities were also discussed; we acknowledged that we have differing areas of expertise as well as differing lengths of experience in university settings. Jodie has a background in education, population health and political science, and has worked in a variety of research and project management roles. Sri’s work history includes the fields of agriculture and education. Sri’s doctoral research in the area of internationalization of the curriculum provides her with global experience and makes her knowledgeable about intercultural learning through international teaching experience and the relevance of postcolonial perspective in particular setting. This created an interesting dynamic, in that for many sections of conversation we switched between expert and student. These shifts were likened to the dynamic that exists between researchers and participants, teacher educators and pre-service teachers, in-service teachers and students. Consistent with Day et al.’s (2006) work, it was acknowledged that we are positioned differently depending on the context and that in all social interactions, issues of visibility, power and privilege emerge. We discussed how in the research context these issues require careful analysis as they can shape not only what participants choose to contribute, but also how questions and responses are interpreted.

Consideration of the research-participant relationship in turn gives rise to consideration of the hierarchies that exist within schools and how as researchers we try to negotiate these in an ethical way. There are a number of complicated relationships within schools: in-service teacher/preservice teacher, principal/teacher, teacher/student, parent/student, and teacher/parent. It is clear that in each relationship there are power dichotomies. In engaging members of diverse rural schools we see ethnicity as one of many layers of complexity and consider challenges associated with our attempts to examine these relationships through a lens responsive to cultural diversity. In Jodie’s case, she recognizes that having been entrenched in a Western paradigm for so long she can find it very difficult to see relationships with new eyes and has identified partnering with researchers who are part of the communities she is

working with as potentially fruitful because these partners come with a non-Western perspective. Finally, we are acutely aware that in the teacher education research and university context we inevitably mediate relationships and that the ethnicity and intercultural understandings of all participants will require consideration regardless of the research topic.

As part of our reflection we consulted work by Amaro-Jiménez (2012) suggesting graduate teachers are commonly ill-equipped to work with children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and the work of Santoro (2009) summarizing small scale studies that have found pre-service teachers have little understanding or awareness of their students cultural backgrounds. Moll and Gonzalez (1997) have written at length about the failure of White teachers to look beyond their mainstream lenses to see children's "cultural funds of knowledge", and this work is particularly relevant to rural schools.

## *World Views/Assumptions*

With improved understanding of our professional identities, we aimed to tease out the factors informing our assumptions. We questioned each other and reflected on our responses. We found, like Conrad et al. (2010), that our assumptions were largely influenced by religious values and cultural heritage. We also explored how location shapes our worldviews (Walker-Gibbs 2012).

### **Religious Values**

It appears that strong religious background shaped Sri's identity affecting her assumptions about this world. In the first workshop she noted:

> I am a devoted Muslim. I always try to implement Islamic values in my day to day life, including celebrating important days in the Islamic calendar. The thing I find fascinating about living here is that I discover the practice of Islamic values almost in everyday life, such as: behave nicely to everybody, do not judge people, be respectful in particular to the elderly, care, and be helpful.

These humanistic values guide Sri in navigating her life, including in adjusting herself to a new place, and give her assurance that practicing such values will be beneficial when working with rural students, their parents and their teachers. She believes that these values will prevent potential harms in the community:

> As there is the possibility that the diverse rural communities include refugees who happen to be Muslim, I become more confident to undertake the research. I expect that sharing the same religion may enhance my understanding of the life of diverse rural communities

This narrative shows that Sri regards her religious identity as an advantage to researching in rural schools. Sharing the same Islamic beliefs and values with the Muslim migrants in rural areas may develop relationship and trust amongst them.

It is noted that in our work we did not come across any articles in which the authors identified as Muslim indicating that Sri may bring to Australian rural education research a previously unheard perspective.

While religion occupies a less central space in Jodie's life, she noted that she was also "raised in a religious tradition" and that her experience of Catholic education was linked simultaneously to development of a commitment to equity and access, and to development of a critical perspective on the power of patriarchal institutions. Jodie drew on her experiences living and travelling in countries where she was a visible minority, claiming this provided some insight into "otherness" and diverse religious values, but she acknowledged that this was a "temporary status" and so was unable to be compared to migration experiences or seen as "equating with a deep knowledge of world religions."

The influence of religion on our worldviews was readily noted. Religion explains the meaning of life and gives reason for existence, but the content of belief systems varies significantly (Tongeren et al. 2013; Wijngaards and Sent 2012). We reflected on the power of religion to motivate social behavior and influence how people think (Stavrova and Siegers 2014). We briefly discussed notions of obligation/service and how religion can mediate gender relations, and considered how our religious values might assist or inhibit research and teaching practice depending on the context.

Associations between our values and beliefs and our understandings of ethical conduct were examined. The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC 2007 – Updated March 2014) states that "Ethical conduct" is more than simply doing the right thing. It involves acting in the right spirit, out of an abiding respect and concern for one's fellow creatures.

The Statement sets out the values of ethical research as: respect for human beings, research merit and integrity, justice, and beneficence. These values help to shape the research relationship as "one of trust, mutual responsibility and ethical equality" (p.11). These values are consistent with our belief systems, and inform our commitment to action. We distinguish between ethics and religion and agree with Velasquez et al. (1987) "Religion can set high ethical standards and can provide intense motivations for ethical behavior. Ethics, however, cannot be confined to religion nor is it the same as religion" (p. 1).

In the context of research in rural schools where our religious values do not fit with community members, we arrived at the idea that there is always a point of commonality on which to build. Indeed, in working together we have found that we needed only to find a significant point of connection, such as commitment to a similar notion of respect, to provide a foundation for a productive relationship. This noted, this is an important conversation that we feel could be much richer if others were involved.

Our discussion of religion also gave rise to conversations about the "visible other" and how visibility on the basis of skin color, dress, religion and/or cultural practices influences perceptions, particularly in rural communities. It was noted that "beliefs" are perhaps more visible in rural areas where attendance at places of worship and religious and cultural practices are more readily observable. While 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicate that rates of reporting no religion do

not differ significantly between those who live in major cities or in regional Australia, people living in very remote areas were more likely to report having a religion (81 % compared with 78 % on average for the rest of Australia) (Australian Bureau of Statistics -ABS, 2013a, b). In the 2010 General Social Survey, 22 % of women and 15 % of men aged 18 years and over said they had actively participated in a religious or spiritual group (ABS 2013b). These statistics suggest that religious affiliation may not be as strong a social influence as in previous decades, religion is still an important factor when working rural schools which may or may not have a religious denomination.

In discussing how notions of visibility relate to teacher education research, we were able to see how creating a safe and welcoming space for student and teacher participants is critical. Discussion about the use of gate-keepers to assist with religious and cultural translations, background information and access to participants was raised, as was the option of sharing personal stories as an in-way to dialogue. We shared a range of experiences working with gate-keepers, the selection of which proved in each instance to be critical. We concurred that when gate-keepers are to be used the match between them and the research community need to be appropriate in terms of language, culture, gender and social standing.

## Cultural Heritage

Sri, in looking herself as an Indonesian, suggests that her cultural tradition plays an important role in her life. She has lived for more than 10 years in her current Australian city but she is still in love with Indonesian foods and speaks Indonesian language most of the time:

> I always see myself as an Indonesian even though I got my Australian citizenship. Well, what's wrong with being Indonesian living in this country? It is not that I don't want to change or adjust. It's just because there is no contradiction between myself and the society: we hold the same humanistic values.

Having strong cultural background is actually very relevant for this research. Sri suspects her cultural background actually can build insider feelings when researching the diverse rural migrant communities. This is because being Indonesian also develops an awareness of being minority, which is assumed to be a feeling shared by other migrants. Having commonality may lead to better relationships with research participants—enabling collection of richer, more relevant and more accurate data. Thus, this cultural identity as Indonesian Muslim enhances Sri's confidence to take the challenge undertaking research. This reflects how identity is affected by culture/ ethnicity (Conrad et al. 2010).

When discussing cultural identity, Sri indicated that she saw Jodie as simply "Australian" and by inference, a member of the privileged dominant culture in Australia. Jodie recognizes the benefits and responsibilities associated with being part of the dominant culture and could see how in Australia's White, metro-centric society her access to resources, education, and relative economic-security ultimately equate to power. While acknowledging this position of privilege, she also spoke

about her personal connection to her Italian background and could identify ways in which her family's migration stories have enhanced her understanding of difference and diversity. Jodie also spoke about the culture and traditions that are now lost to her family and the impact she thinks this has had, particularly on her immigrant grandparents in terms of their sense of belonging and connectedness. Witnessing the challenges and opportunities migrating to Australia have presented for her family, Jodie wondered if there are parallels that can be drawn with the experiences of new arrivals. The importance of hearing all voices, particularly those of people on the margins was a theme revisited often during the workshops and we resolved to design research that would be based on culturally appropriate relationships/collaborations which respect research participants.

Through the self-study process we have started to confront each other's assumptions and can see the potential for this process to extend to our engagement with research participants. We are developing increased sensitivity, understanding and respect for a range of theoretical perspectives and can now identify how our worldviews are reflected in the theory we choose to employ. We now better understand the arguments of Connell (2007) and Smith (1999) who critique Western centric approaches to social science research because we have seen some of these approaches emerge in our candid discussions.

## Location

Walker-Gibbs (2012) examined how members of rural communities construct and reconstruct their identities in relation to the physical and social spaces that they occupy. We understand our identities as located identities; that is, we understand how experiences living and interacting socially in a variety of settings has influenced how we perceive ourselves and others.

Jodie was raised on the outskirts of a regional center and has lived in a range of rural, regional and metropolitan locations in both coastal and inland Australia. Her father was raised in the Victorian Mallee, and Jodie also has ties to this region. These varied experiences enable her to consider the social and emotional impacts of population size, visibility and distance to services. Jodie thinks that these experiences influence how she approaches research in rural communities and rural schools in particular. Like Miller et al. (2006) who recognize professional conduct as pertinent for teachers in rural settings who are constantly on display, Jodie believes she is sensitive to the visibility of her practice and conducting research in a "fishbowl." However, she notes that when visiting unfamiliar schools she is never able to fully anticipate or understand what the impact of her presence might be. This is something that now troubles her slightly and is a consequence of her practice that she would like to better understand, particularly in relation to working in rural schools where researchers are highly visible within the school and community setting.

Different to Jodie, Sri has lived in two different countries. She grew up in a remote place of Papua, Indonesia and moved to the metropolitan city of Jakarta, Indonesia to work and raise a family. Although Indonesia has the highest percentage

of Muslims in the world, she spent most of her childhood in Papua, an Eastern part of Indonesia, where the majority of the population is non-Muslim. Thus, similar to her current city, Melbourne, she lived as a minority as a Muslim. Though Sri has Australian citizenship, she identifies herself as an Indonesian female Muslim academic reflecting the strong influence of ethnicity/ race, gender, religion, and work in her life. Being minority in terms of religion and ethnicity shapes significantly her multiple identities. Migration to Melbourne, Australia, added further layers of identity. Hence although Sri's cultural identity is strong, to some degree her identity is also influenced by place – rural and urban contexts. This reflects identity that Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) assume as manifold, varied and affected by factors including the self and contextual factors. Because Sri's identity shifts easily as she moves to different places she is able to adjust herself to the nature of a place and is affected emotionally by the social context and population. Similar to Jodie, Sri is also aware that conducting research in rural schools is very vulnerable as in rural areas a researcher is hyper-visible; that is they are more visible in rural communities than in urban settings. Even this is exacerbated by Sri's different physical appearance due to skin color, headscarf and English accent.

We came to see potential links between the impact of our presence in rural schools and taking responsibility for ensuring that the research we undertake is appropriate to the context. The importance of being transparent and establishing processes for sharing research findings with research participants and the participating communities is a common requirement of ethics committees and was regarded as critical for research partnerships with rural communities. These two considerations, we thought, need to be attended to in the initial stages of planning research in schools, rather than "in the moment".

## *Our Reframed Worldviews*

Discussions, reflections and critical engagement with our worldviews and the literature on social justice and intercultural sensitivity presented us with an opportunity to reframe our understanding of "ethics in practice," particularly as it relates to research with rural schools.

In reflecting on our learning about social justice, we came to recognize the significance of deficit discourse and more fully comprehend how comparisons between urban and rural students' outcomes, in particular those based on standardized measures, are simplistic and loaded with metro-centric values. We began to map the complex knowledge of place(s) that diverse rural students, teachers and parents bring to the school context and consider ways to ensure that this was captured and coupled with cultural knowledge in school-based research and research with pre-service teachers. We considered the stereotypical notions of Australian rural students as connected to the land, machines and community, and found that in other countries similar stereotypes exist. In challenging these portrayals of students, consideration was given to how students' localized knowledge of history, geography, sociology and "Others" is connected to

increasingly globalized environments and how rural life in Australia is constantly changing as a consequence of Australia becoming a more networked society.

We reflected on intercultural competency, and how this plays out in the decisions we make in practice. Sri's ability to relate with people from different cultural backgrounds was perceived as linked to Sri being Indonesian and living in Australia for more than a decade. Although she felt confident about conducting research with diverse rural communities, she did not really understand what qualities or knowledge she had, as an Indonesian, which makes her confident to work specifically in rural schools. Critical engagement with literature on intercultural development suggests to her that she may have developed the sensitivity and competence to engage with different cultures through her experiences as a migrant. In particular, the experiences that stem from her own research on learning through international teaching.

Jodie considered how her work bridging allied health professionals with members of diverse communities in inner-Melbourne could transfer into rural (teacher) education research and teacher education. In doing so she identified a desire to couple intercultural sensitivity with intercultural confidence. We used "intercultural confidence" to describe how researchers must and can implement cultural knowledge in research settings. We came to distinguish between being *sensitive* to difference and being *confident* enough to utilize cultural knowledge during research and teaching processes.

Intercultural communication is defined as "a symbolic process in which people from different cultures create shared meanings" (Lustig and Koester 2003, p. 44). Lustig and Koester (2003, p. 51) also highlight the difference between *intercultural* communication and *intracultural* communication. The former occurs in a context "when large and important cultural differences create dissimilar interpretations and expectations about how to communicate competently" while the second refers to communication when the degree of cultural difference is low (Lustig and Koester 2003, p. 52). We suggest that subtle differences in terms of interpretation and expectation can create problems in the research relationship and that one way to guard against this is for researchers with different cultural knowledge to partner together with a commitment to challenging each other's practice and interpretations, such as what we have done through this self-study. This approach is regarded as equally valuable when collecting data in culturally and linguistically diverse communities as in mono-cultural settings. Indeed, the introduction of difference in mono-cultural settings was regarded as one way of ensuring that both participants and researchers articulate taken-for-granted assumptions.

In working in complex research environments with sometimes competing cultural ideals at play the inevitability of "mistake making" was identified. The old adage "everyone makes mistakes" does not sit lightly with researchers and educators keen to serve the communities with whom they work. While the use of gatekeepers and conducting background research prior to entering a community is an approach that can be used to minimize misunderstanding, the importance of researchers being able to recognize their mistakes, hold themselves to account and where possible highlight these to participants was identified as a critical element of intercultural competence that is seldom addressed.

## Conclusion

Looking at this self-study, we have found both that the inquiry process is challenging and that the results are very useful. At the beginning of this study we became acutely aware of how as educators and researchers our practice is entangled with our histories. Working together has enabled us to pinpoint and unpack some of the factors influencing our practice, leading us to prefer to conduct collaborative self-study rather than independent self-study. We believe that in working together we have been able to complement each other in terms of knowledge and skills, and that as a result we have produced insights that will be of use to each of us and others working in teacher education engaging with diverse rural school communities. Developments generated through constructive feedback were invaluable; this self-study supported Costa and Kallick's (1993) perspective on the important role of a "critical friend" who "will ask provocative questions and offer helpful critiques" (p. 49).

The process of inquiry was not straightforward. It required us to frame and reframe the research "problem" (Loughran 2007). In this case, our reflections and discussions and engagement with literature were discursive as we wanted to arrive at tangible outcomes. The emergent themes needed to be clustered, re-clustered and interpreted and re-interpreted as new information disrupted our initial hypotheses about what might constitute ethical practice. Combining inductive analysis with constant comparison proved to be a useful approach for doing this and enabled us to focus our attention on social justice, intercultural sensitivity, professional identities and our worldviews and assumptions. The research process demonstrated the prime role of reflective practice in the self-study research (Brookfield 1998).

The outcome of our self-study gives us confidence that we are becoming teacher educators and researchers capable of working with diverse rural schools, their communities and pre-service teachers. The first step towards conducting ethical research is understanding that how and by whom data is interpreted and collected is infused with prejudice. Through self-study, we have striven to deepen our awareness of what influences our own worldviews, shapes perceptions of members of diverse rural communities and informs our approaches to rural teacher education research. In attempting to improve our own practice, we have begun to extend discussion on rural ethics as relevant to researching educational issues in diverse rural areas. Through self-study research we have explored the notion of "ethics in practice" and considered how to relate our growing awareness of the social, political and experiential influences on our worldviews to the decisions we make within the research context.

The process of self-study has given us a greater understanding of the belief systems and socio-political and environmental influences that shape our research and teaching. As our intercultural understandings are broadened and our cultural competencies develop we remain both troubled and comforted by the realization that there is much we don't know, will not know, and, in many instances, should not know. We are cognizant that it is how we approach research and teaching that is critical. The methods we use to scope out the spaces that are appropriate for us to work in, how we engage gate-keepers and participants, how we share our work and

how we develop the research potential of others are factors within our control. We accept that openness to critique and honesty about our research intent and our cultural and social positioning are critical, and we understand that good intentions should not shield researchers from being held to account for sub-standard "ethics in practice." We also recognize that it is our responsibility to work collaboratively with participant communities to ascertain what research it is appropriate for us to pursue and to establish protocols for reporting research findings at the outset of the research process.

In unpacking notions of visibility, we note the almost inevitable visibility of researchers in rural communities and identify the importance of remaining sensitive to the potential impact of our presence both on how this might either elevate or marginalize participants in the eyes of other community members and how this might influence the data we are able to collect. In working in rural spaces and preparing teachers for work in these contexts we speculate that the ramifications of poor practice may be disproportionate to the ramifications of similar practice in urban areas because of the heightened visibility of both the researchers and research participants, and because of issues of exposure associated with small population size. Teacher education faculty have a responsibility to consider this topic of researcher visibility further.

Participation in critical semi-structured conversations forced us to construct more inclusive notions of ethical research and teaching practice. Reflection on the results from discussions spurs us to promote inclusivity in practice. In particular, informed by the concepts of intercultural sensitivity and competence, perspectives on social justice and rural context as a location, we identify the importance of empathy, respect, partnership and giving-back. While in some ways this finding is not surprising, this work is significant in that it gives shape to overused concepts such as 'respect' and 'context' and suggests practical approaches for rural research engagement. The work simultaneously presents the value of self-study as a process that can be used by teacher educators seeking to enhance their research practice.

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# Dry Stone Walls, Black Stumps and the Mobilisation of Professional Learning: Rural Places and Spaces and Teachers' Self-Study Strategies in Ireland and Australia

**Máirín Kenny, R.E. (Bobby) Harreveld, and P.A. Danaher**

## Introduction

Dry stone walls and black stumps are among the images used to evoke quintessentially rural landscapes. A representative text (Garner 2005, p. 6) enjoined its readers familiar with England: "Think of the Cotswolds without their golden stone or the Peak District of Derbyshire without its white limestone walls". Certainly dry stone walls figure prominently in scholarly accounts of Ireland, including its habitats and biodiversity (Hickey 2013), its early mediaeval settlement enclosures (O'Sullivan and Nicholl 2011) and its cinematic history (Condon 2008). Likewise, "beyond the black stump" is well-known in Australian parlance as denoting geographically remote territory – sometimes called "the outback" (Mayne 2008), literally contrasting such territory (implicitly unfavourably) with the settled and developed areas of "the in front" – and as helping to constitute part of the diversity of national imaginings.

Teaching is one occupation whose complex interactions with working in rural settings have been researched extensively. This scholarship includes professional

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A.K. Schulte, B. Walker-Gibbs (eds.), *Self-studies in Rural Teacher Education*, Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices 14,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-17488-4_10

development for Australian rural mathematics and science teachers (Tytler et al. 2011), Canadian beginning rural teachers' self-reported experiences (Hellsten et al. 2011), teachers' selection of teaching strategies in rural China (Wang 2011), a perception of lower levels of school climate by Malaysian rural teachers (Othman and Muijs 2013), a heightened sense of workplace wellbeing among Norwegian rural teachers (Burns and Machin 2013), rural teachers' specialised training needs in Sub-Saharan Africa (Buckler 2011) and rural elementary school teachers' technology integration practices in the United States (Howley et al. 2011). Despite the wide geographical spread of this research, the distinctive affordances and challenges of teaching in rural environments are a recurring theme.

The authors of this chapter seek to contribute to this scholarship by presenting a comparative autoethnographic account of their experiences of working as teachers in rural areas in Ireland and Australia – next to "the dry stone walls" and "beyond the black stump" respectively. In doing so, the authors explore multiple approaches to the notion of self-study, the process of critical reflection contributing to ongoing professional learning that teachers, regardless of location, must mobilize if they are to survive, let alone thrive, in their chosen careers.

By way of the contrastive contexts informing this account, the population profiles of the Republic of Ireland[1] and the State of Queensland (as being illustrative rather than representative of Australia) are portrayed in Fig. 1.

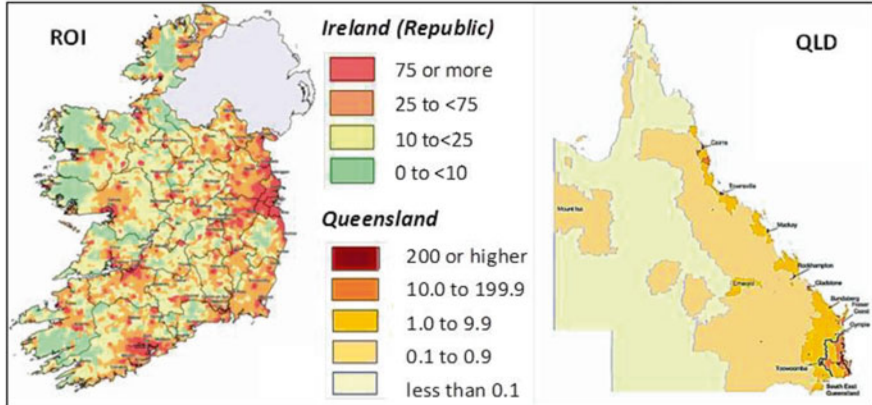
Clearly, although both rurality and remoteness are difficult to define, the catch-all term "rural and remote" has profoundly different resonances in these two contexts. Despite having a 1:1 overall population ratio in 2011, Ireland and Queensland have very different land areas and population densities within those areas. These differences in turn frame and generate very different kinds of experiences of the phenomena pertaining to "rural and remote", including in relation to teaching and learning.

The chapter has been divided into the following six sections:

- Literature review
- Conceptual framework
- Research design
- Authors' autoethnographic accounts of teaching in rural areas
- Analysis of those accounts vis-à-vis teachers' self-study practices in culturally constituted educational places and spaces
- Suggested concluding implications of that analysis

The overall purpose of the chapter is therefore threefold: to present a carefully circumscribed but hopefully engaging and evocative comparison between rural teachers' experiences in Ireland and Australia; to extend this book's coverage of self-study approaches by elaborating the synergies between self-study and collaborative autoethnography; and to link the chapter's concepts of places and spaces

[1] "Ireland" can denote the physical island, the Ireland/Éire of Romantic Celtic imagination and the nationalist vision of an independent, 32-county republic. Currently in this State, "Ireland"/"Irish State"/"Republic of Ireland" (ROI) are used to denote the 26-county republic. It is not possible to include discussion of Northern Ireland in this chapter.




| | Republic of Ireland (ROI) | Queensland (QLD) | Ratio ROI:QLD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Population | 4,581,269 | 4,599,360 | 1:1 |
| Area | 70,273 km$^2$ | 1,852,642 km$^2$ | 1:26 |
| Persons per km$^2$ (Overall geographical location) | 67.0 | 2.6 | 26:1 |
| Persons per km$^2$ (Rural) | 26.0 | <1.0 | at least 26:1 |

**Fig. 1** Population profiles for the Republic of Ireland and the State of Queensland in 2011 (Central Statistics Office, Ireland 2011; Queensland Treasury and Trade 2012)

with self-study strategies for rural educators as well as with broader socioeconomic trends and policy debates in both countries. We see this threefold purpose as articulating with, yet also helping to move beyond, existing scholarship in this field.

## Literature Review

A major focus of the rural education literature has been on investigating the work and identities of rural educators. In the United States, this scholarship has included the distinctive transition practices used by rural teachers with their preschool students (Murphy et al. 2013), the complexities of teaching science, technology, engineering and mathematics in rural areas (Goodpaster et al. 2012), the teachers of gifted rural students (Price Azano et al. 2014), a phenomenological study of rural teachers' experiences of recruitment and retention (Taylor 2012) and the impact on such retention of rural teachers developing a strong sense of community membership (Mahan 2010). In Australia, this literature has highlighted the locational specificities attending rural teachers' engagements with notions of social justice (Cuervo

2012), the value of collaborative professional learning opportunities to offset the absence of a critical mass of specialist rural teachers such as those teaching the visual arts (Mathewson Mitchell 2013), a posited reciprocal relationship between teacher education and the sustainability of rural communities (White et al. 2011) and an asserted structural misalignment between contractual employment and beginning rural teachers' likelihood of remaining in the profession (Plunkett and Dyson 2011).

Selected topics in this literature have encompassed the distinctive professional development needs of rural teachers (Berry Bertram 2010), rural teachers' efficacy to enhance their students' motivation levels (Hardré and Hennessey 2013), the diverse attitudes to educational inclusion articulated by rural teachers (Morris 2013), rural teachers' perceptions of social class (Pini et al. 2010; Smyth et al. 2014), opportunities for community support to augment rural pre-service teachers' practicum experiences (Kline et al. 2013), resilience strategies demonstrated by successful beginning rural teachers (Castro et al. 2010) and equivalent resilience strategies enacted by special educators in rural schools (Zost 2010). The diversity evident in this topic has been accompanied by a similar variability of research paradigms and methods, and of conceptual frameworks.

A significant strand in the scholarship about rural teachers is the intersection between the reported expectations and experiences of individual teachers in particular rural education settings on the one hand and broader issues of sociocultural theory on the other. Examples of this intersection include rural teachers' mobility contributing potentially to rural students' marginalization (Mills and Gale 2003), the gendered framing of a female novice rural teaching principal (Clarke and Stevens 2006), understanding rural teachers' work against the backdrop of sociocultural analysis and literacy theory (Corbett 2010) and applying the notion of place-based teacher education to pre-service placements in rural communities (Ajayi 2014).

A different but parallel theme in the literature is the interplay between self-study and teachers' professional learning (see also Arnold 2011). The cornerstone of this interplay is teachers using the resources and techniques of critical self-reflection to generate, renew and sustain their capacity-building and development as professionals – or, as synthesized by Samaras and Roberts (2011, p. 42), "In self-study teachers critically examine their actions and the context of those actions as a way of developing a more consciously driven mode of professional activity, as contrasted with action based on habit, tradition, or impulse". Kubler LaBoskey (2004, p. 817) encapsulated the key characteristics of educators' self-study thus: "…it is self-initiated and focused; it is improvement-aimed; it is interactive; it includes multiple, mainly qualitative methods; and…it defines validity as a validation process based in trustworthiness…". A more extended overview was provided by Loughran (2007):

> Although the term self-study suggests a singular approach to researching practice, the reality is that self-studies are dramatically strengthened by drawing on alternative perspectives and reframing of situations, [and] thus data, ideas, and input that necessitate moving beyond the self. Moving beyond the self also matters because a central purpose in self-study is uncovering deeper understandings of the relationship between teaching and teaching and learning about teaching. (p. 12)

One example of this approach is the use of pre-service teachers' personal memories of seminal childhood texts called "touchstones" (Strong-Wilson et al. 2014, p. 394) that influenced their decisions to become teachers as reflective devices to distil broader lessons about contemporary educational provision and social justice issues. A different strategy is to focus on the parallel learning activities and outcomes of teachers and their students or, more specifically from the perspective of this chapter and this book, on how teachers' self-study can be enhanced by their understandings of how their students learn (Vermunt 2014). Yet another technique is to employ autobiographical vignettes to maximize teachers' self-knowledge, which "…is vital for teachers because it paves the way for shaping and continuing to shape what teachers know about themselves as learners and what they might learn about teaching" (Ambler 2012, p. 181). Similar approaches have also been deployed to create and sustain self-study communities of practice among beginning teacher educators to "…provid[e] a model of professional development that is self-directed, collaborative, and empowering" (Gallagher et al. 2011, p. 880). When the elements are applied wholeheartedly and the contextual factors are propitious, self-study can indeed be transformative for educators and their students alike (Lyons et al. 2013).

A particular strand of the contemporary scholarship relates to self-study vis-à-vis educators working in regional, rural and remote locations. For instance, self-study was found to be effective in contributing to a successful partnership model of professional learning for teachers in rural schools in Tasmania, Australia (Stack et al. 2011). Likewise, academics at an Australian regional university enacted the principles of self-study to enhance their effectiveness as online educators teaching early childhood teacher education courses (Green et al. 2013; Wolodko et al. 2013). In a very different environment, educators at the Zimbabwe Open University have designed their courses in ways that promote their students' self-study capabilities that resonate with the students' respective contexts, including rural and remote locations (Mafa et al. 2013). Further north in the African continent, self-study has similarly informed the design and development of a long-running program of pre- and in-service teacher education, encompassing teachers working in rural areas in the sub-Saharan countries of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda (Hardman et al. 2011). Self-study has also been posited as one of a raft of strategies designed to regenerate rural teacher education in China (Zhu 2013). More broadly, Tatto (1997) asserted – and assembled empirical cases to endorse that assertion – that "teachers working in the periphery" (p. 139), including those "…located in rural or remote areas of a country" (p. 141), can use selected techniques of self-study to maximise their resilience and to heighten their impact.

This necessarily selective review of current literature pertaining to rural teachers and teaching has highlighted the locational contexts of these teachers' work as exercising a significant influence on their occupational strategies and their professional identities alike. In some ways, those contexts are positioned as constraining, deficit and marginalizing; in other ways, they are constructed as sites of innovation, sustainability and transformation. Against this fluid and politically nuanced backdrop, self-study has emerged as a consistently flexible, successful and useful device for educators' and in some cases for their students' continuing learning.

## Conceptual Framework

Rurality emerges from the preceding literature review as a contested notion that is manifested in significantly different ways from country to country, and certainly between Ireland and Australia as outlined in this chapter. Given that contestation and that variation, it is crucial to mobilize a conceptual framework that affords appropriate explanatory power in analyzing examples of teachers' self-study and accompanying professional learning from across these multiple contexts. The concepts deployed in this chapter to facilitate this kind of analysis are the paired categories of places and spaces.

Several social theorists have developed theorizations of the relationships between places and spaces (see for example Bourdieu 1985; Castells 2005; Giddens 1987; Soja 1989), and these have been deployed to very good effect in interpreting contemporary educational debates and issues. The particular approach to conceptualizing places and spaces applied in this chapter is that of the French theorist Michel de Certeau (1984; Ahearne 1995; Buchanan 1996; Danaher 2001, 2010). For de Certeau, the distinction between places and spaces was less a theoretical binary than an ongoing and unceasing interdependence and interplay, one with politicised overtones and empirical manifestations:

> A *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. On this view, in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualisation, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. In contradistinction to the place, it has none of the univocity or stability of a 'proper'. (p. 117; *emphasis in original*)

de Certeau (1984) distilled his differentiation between places and spaces by asserting, "In short, *space is a practised place*" (p. 117; *emphasis in original*). He sought to signify by this proposition that places are strategic sites of official and unofficial power, and moreover that formally designated, sanctioned and valued places are entered, changed and sometimes transformed into spaces through the tactical consumption of those places. He cited as illustrations of this contention readers turning the texts constructed by authors into different spaces from what the authors had envisaged and likewise walkers turning streets into varied spaces from those imagined by the urban planners who had designed them. From this perspective, despite places being sites of power, the changing of those places into spaces carried with it the potential to contest, to disrupt and even to transform that power.

de Certeau's (1984) distinction between places and spaces has been criticised as a fixed binary and hence as an unhelpful theoretical contribution (Danaher 2001). By contrast, the authors of this chapter endorse the distinction as denoting instead the complex and contextualized intersection between two concepts that are themselves mobile and shifting – veritable floating signifiers (Danaher and Danaher 2000).

As we elaborate below, we see a similarly multifaceted relationship between urbanism and rurality – while the differentiation is politically valenced, meanings ebb and flow between the two interdependent and mutually constitutive terms.

The chapter's conceptual framework, centred on de Certeau's (1984) depiction of places and spaces, thereby constitutes a means of analyzing the following auto-ethnographic accounts of teaching in rural Ireland and Australia as incidents of self-study geared to enhancing educators' professional learning. The presentation of those accounts is preceded by an overview of the study's research design.

## Research Design

This chapter draws on the methodological features and strengths of a comparative, exploratory case study. These features exemplify and exploit the case study's undoubted flexibility and robustness as a research method (Thomas 2011). They also derive from the emergent yet focused character of the study's research question: "What do the authors' autoethnographic accounts of teaching in places and spaces in rural Ireland and Australia demonstrate about broader issues of self-study and teachers' professional learning?" These broader issues relate particularly to the politicized contexts in which such self-study and professional learning are designed and enacted and that help to inform the criteria used for evaluating the effectiveness or otherwise of strategies for maximizing the effectiveness of educators' professional practice. Methodologically, we write ourselves into these accounts of teaching and teacher education (Denzin 2014; Rowan 2001).

Given that interrogatory purpose, as Bleijenbergh (2010, p. 61) noted, "With an exploratory research question, researchers select cases that maximize the opportunities for developing hypotheses or theories that explain the social phenomenon at stake", and furthermore, "Since this is an inductive research design, screening of the cases has to be based on empirical considerations" (p. 61). In this situation, the "empirical considerations" included the authors' ongoing professional collaborations and their shared and separate experiences of teaching in rural locations in their respective countries. Accordingly, the cases represent the three authors' particular reflections on those experiences. The comparative element is clearly partly between Ireland and Australia and also among the authors' reflections on their teaching experiences – for example, the two Australian authors' sets of experiences occurred in different places and at different times from each other.

Autoethnography is rapidly gaining prominence as a similarly robust research method in educational research (see for example Boylorn and Orbe 2014; Holman Jones et al. 2013; Sparkes 2013; Speedy 2013). As Ellis et al. (2011) observed:

> Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. (p. 273)

These two features – the systematic analysis of personal experience and the overtly politicized dimension of that analysis – exhibit close alignment respectively with the strategies of self-study and de Certeau's (1984) distinction between places and spaces elaborated earlier in the chapter.

Moreover, the authors' enactment of joint self-study presented in this chapter accords with the principles and practices of collaborative autoethnography articulated by Chang et al. (2013). In particular, we have been attentive to "…how the method preserves the unique strengths of self-reflexivity associated with autobiography, cultural interpretation associated with ethnography, and multi-subjectivity associated with collaboration" (p. 17), and also to the need "…to be self-focused, researcher-visible, context-conscious, and critically dialogic" (p. 22). At the same time, we acknowledge the potential limitations of autoethnography conceded by Chang et al., including "…the danger of self-perpetuating perspectives," (p. 21) and the risk that "…a study of one's self lacks the possibility of demonstrating researcher accountability during the research process because the researcher is also the participant" (p. 21). Significantly, as Change et al. noted also, both of these concerns are ameliorated by promoting the collaborative dimension of this autoethnography.

Furthermore, while the distinction between autoethnography and self-study is not clear-cut, we do not see them as precisely synonymous. For us, Arnold (2011) encapsulated neatly a subtle but significant differentiation between the terms:

> The self-narrative in auto-ethnography involves more than storytelling: it leads to and involves the analysis of such storytelling and enquiry into self as data rather than mere presentation of one's story. Auto-ethnography as a methodology utilised and valued in the academy takes self-narrative from the arena of storytelling into that of the production of data leading to new knowledge and/or new understanding of areas of known knowledge. (p. 70)

In other words, while self-study is well-established as one among several effective approaches to teachers' professional learning, autoethnography can be seen as a similarly well-established research method that can be deployed to link individual educators' self-studies with broader research agenda and with the generation and analysis of data to address wider research questions.

Because the study drew directly only on the authors' critical self-reflections shared with one another, there was no requirement for formal institutional human ethics approval. Nevertheless, we adhered fully to the spirit of such approval – for instance, by respecting the tenets of confidentiality and by encouraging and supporting one another in the process of articulating and sharing reminiscences of our respective rural teaching experiences. In doing so, we have sought to follow Tolich's (2010) recommendations for "…taking autoethnographers beyond procedural ethics and providing tools for their ethics in practice" (p. 1599).

Finally in this section of the chapter, the approach to data analysis pursued in this comparative, exploratory case study and this collaborative autoethnography was inductive, iterative and qualitative in character. The authors' individual self-reflections were generated in response to the study's research question and conceptual framework and were informed by prior conversations among the authors to assist in evoking memories and in aligning them with the goals of the study. These

data were then shared, clarified and affirmed within the authorial team. Analysis took the form of separate and then combined identification, confirmation and where appropriate refinement of the emerging themes. Writing the autoethnographic accounts presented in the next section also constituted a crucial part of the developing analysis.

## Autoethnographic Accounts

Three autoethnographic reflections are now offered. While the second and the third authors have both taught in regional and rural Queensland, Australia, their experiences were by no means identical, but rather reflected different contexts and divergent frames of reference.

## *MÁIRÍN*

Ireland's dry stone walls are emblematic of a rural way of life, and a national mythology. On both counts, the image never reflected the whole story: there are many sides to this geography, at socioeconomic, cultural and educational levels, and the national mythology powerfully blurred recognition of these. Here I reflect on the construction(s) of rurality in national discourse as reflected in the school experiences of myself and my colleagues, and then on some of the implications for teachers and their self-study.

### *Why Teach in the Country?*

Having trained in Dublin, I found a teaching post there because I liked the city buzz and the freedom of anonymity. A few years on, I considered a post in a rural school but chose to stay in the city. My motives were social and personal, balancing relationships I had formed against the idea of becoming part of an organic community. I was not choosing to be specifically or exclusively an urban or a rural teacher.

Several members of my family are teachers; all initially taught in the city, but now live and teach in rural areas. I asked them about this move. Again their reasons reflected personal, social, cultural and lifestyle priorities, not specificities of their teacher identities. One observed that most teachers she knew went back to their counties of origin, to be near their families, to marry locals, start a family and live in the countryside. And, in twenty-first century motorized Ireland, local towns, cities, even Dublin, are easily accessible; and local teachers' socialising can criss-cross between family and old friends. Teachers who live within reach of town and country may prefer the stimulus of a large school, or the intimacy of a small one.

Teachers are also aware that behavioural issues can pose more difficulty in urban schools but, though some will change schools to escape the problem, very few will move home to do so. So professional interests play a part, but rarely determine teachers' choices.

My perceptions of remoteness were expanded when I took a post teaching Travellers (see also Kenny 1997). Travellers are a historically nomadic indigenous ethnic minority in Ireland; they comprise less than one per cent of the national population. They were commercial nomads, trading in goods and services with the dominant settled majority. There is a mosaic of such populations stretching across Europe, officially termed "Roma and other Travellers" and the most harshly discriminated and socioeconomically disadvantaged minority populations in Europe. Mac Gréil (1996, p. 341) described the prevailing position of Travellers in Irish society as one of "caste-like apartheid".

That choice rendered me more isolated, professionally and socially, than if I had moved to a one-teacher school on the moon. Teaching Travellers brought me and many of my teaching colleagues to question the whole purpose and design of the practice of teaching. We asked: whom are we teaching; what and how should we teach them; what do they want to learn; and how do they do it? And why are they in separate school provision? Some of us teachers of Travellers adopted a wider, sociological framework, and asked: who are these people; why are they stigmatized in Irish society; where are they going; and how does our practice intersect with all that? Thus, this professionally remote teaching sector played a significant role in driving inclusive, intercultural, antiracist education in Ireland.

We teachers of Travellers were pushed by the severity of their marginalization to question our professional identities and practice – a questioning that was deepened by our discovery that we were ignorant of Irish Travellers' identity in the first place. How could we know how to teach Travellers, if we did not know who they were? More broadly, rurality may enter into teachers' identity as a value-related concept later in their careers, but I suggest that the lower level of challenge within rural classrooms means that teachers may not be pushed to think about the specificities of rural identity and their implications for teaching.

## *Myths and Their Interruption(s)*

The Irish identity promoted in teacher education colleges reflected the national myth – it was explicitly denominational, Romantic-Ireland rural and silently middle class. An incident from my own schooldays (in the 1950s) serves to highlight some of the blank spaces in this national rurality myth. It happened during the crowning event of our last year in primary school: the trip to Dublin. There we walked hand-in-hand along the teeming pavements, boys and girls in separate chains, teachers fore and aft. We fell silent, shy of the gaze of so many strangers. And then a bunch

of city kids ran at us, jeering the hand-holding culchies.[2] I was flooded with shame and shock. We weren't fools – we did it only because the teachers told us to; and our tormentors were poor, but an alien kind of poor: rough, and missing school – and in front of teachers!

In that moment, rural was dumb and uncouth; but, in the Celtic/Romantic/Nationalist mythology that pervaded my environment, including school curricula, rural was also privileged as fostering community, purity and spirituality. In all that song and story, my imagination soared. This was the Ireland famously "discovered" by the United States anthropologists Arensberg and Kimball (1940), and contested in subsequent Irish social research (see Byrne et al. 2001).

Another major gap in that myth was identified by a teaching colleague who hails from inner-city, working-class Dublin. Right through his own schooldays, all his teachers were from the country; in college he was the only city student in his class; and, when he took up his first teaching post in a city school, he was the only city-born teacher in that staffroom. He recalled that the Irish identity that he was taught in school, and learned to teach about in college, was rural. His city community's traditions, lore and music got not a mention. He is now the principal of a rural school in the mountains, and the concept of Irish identity explored there is complex and creative.

The Romantic-Ireland depiction of rurality also had little space for the perspective of the rural poor. Class harmony was presumed to prevail in the countryside. As James Gibbons TD (1973) said in the Dáil[3]: "Rural communities are different. People of substantial wealth can live cheek by jowl with people who have no wealth at all. Neither seems to be injured by this proximity". The rural poor, who emigrated to escape working for a pittance for the rural rich (Murray and Feeney 2009), might be surprised at this reading of their situation.

## *Rurality in Teachers' Self-Study and Professional Learning*

Given the social change that is profoundly reshaping rural Ireland, what are the issues for rural teachers' self-study and professional learning? The first sign that this needs attention is the fact that rurality is not a significant factor in teachers' professional location choices. Therefore rural identity is not necessarily consciously thought out in relation to teachers' professional performance. The emphasis on self-study and professional learning in initial teacher education could draw in some of the issues highlighted here. There are implications for teaching in any rural area, prosperous or not (strengthening a sense of belonging and pride in place

[2] "Culchies" is an Irish pejorative term, denoting rough or unsophisticated rural dwellers.

[3] The Irish equivalent of the Australian House of Representatives. Members are called "TDs" (Teachtaire Dála = Dáil Representative).

and culture, and environmental awareness); here I focus mainly on issues for teachers located in rural areas that are experiencing socioeconomic depopulation and marginalization.

The crisis reactions to the threat of change in the small-school structure have strong implications for rural teachers' self-study and professional learning. How can teachers build flexibility and windows on the possibility of different ways of doing things? It is too late to start trying this when parents and teachers are backed up against their school wall, resisting eviction. For many teachers, the grounded complexity of rural identity becomes important when they have settled into the locality, and parish and school life intersect as they coach local football teams, engage in local sports days and festivals, and join pressure groups to protect their community services. This is valuable voluntary work, but not necessarily part of their professional role.

A proactive professional awareness should ensure that teachers, from well before that point, reflect on their community setting. They should do this individually, and within and across their networks of colleagues in the parish, to consider questions such as: what skills can I build in my teaching work with the children, and in my co-enquiry with their parents, that will increase flexibility and creativity in relation to how we all think about and respond to painful changes? Small schools might, for instance, exchange teachers and groups of pupils for joint activities, to augment each unit's talent pool and open spaces for fresh thinking. School clusters, federations, hub schools (Ó Slatara and Morgan 2004) – all could become familiar ideas and inspire lateral thinking.

A further element in this reflection on rurality has to do with cultural identities. There is soul food for all in the great myths of this country, in our Irish and English language and literature, and in our cultural practices. However, how can teachers get this nourishment to flow in synergy with the possibilities and challenges of twenty-first century rural Ireland, and indeed with the very likely chance that a lot of their pupils will emigrate?

In our initial teacher education program, and our ongoing professional development, we need a dialogue with community members, to explore how, in their professional work in schools, teachers can feed into building healthy, confident, flexible communities with the optimism and vision to face forward and build a healthy local society, and a healthy future, wherever they go. This dialogue would begin with the same questions that I and my colleagues first framed as teachers of Travellers: whom are we teaching, what and how should we teach them, what do they want to learn, and how do they do it?

In short, we need much clearer reflection on our national and local cultural identities, on the intersections between education and the way we perform those identities, and on the need for teachers to learn to reflect on their performance in the light of wider social change and a vision for the future, for themselves as professionals and community members, and for their pupils and their education partners. And this must start with teacher educators building this vision, approach and skills into the initial and ongoing teacher education.

## *BOBBY*

Australia also retains a powerful mythology of the urban–rural binary spun from times past, often at odds with twenty-first century discourses of socioeconomic, cultural, educational, health and community wellbeing. My first images of rurality began at home. Whenever Dad filled the water bags, sealed the butter in its tin, loaded one hessian bag with bits of wood and axe, then another with potatoes and onions from the vegetable bins on the back veranda, plus the old single person cutlery set and battered tin mug, plate and frying pan, I knew he would be on the road out bush for another week. As a very young girl, rural Australia was constructed as a place where one had to be prepared, with a sense that self-sufficiency was necessary for survival. Later on, the boarders at secondary school conjured images of their lives on the remote sheep and cattle properties far out west beyond the Emerald line (Fig. 1); and the rural areas of agriculture, crops and cattle closer in towards the coast. Those images and the meanings ascribed to them lay dormant for many years.

After the vicissitudes of that childhood and adolescence in a regional community and its 1950–1960s schooling, early adulthood in a capital city of early 1970s Australia was spent undertaking a scholarship funded initial teacher education program. The big wide world was waiting and, as it was for many contemporaries of that time, it was overseas that beckoned —anywhere over the seas — once the obligatory teaching bond period had been completed. Like all travellers coming to know their localised selves when viewed from afar, so too did my sense of rurality take decades to crystalize. Indeed, it has been the tentative inscriptions afforded through this reflexive three-way self-study analysis that have revivified distinctive meanings of teaching in and teacher education for rural communities.

Fast forward 30 years to new images with deeper, more challenging meanings constructed through a collaborative research project conducted around the turn of the century (Singh et al. 1997). My perceptions of this world, its spaces, sensory objects and animal life (Merleau-Ponty 2004) constructed a conceptual framework for rural teacher education, including its regional and remote dimensions. What started out as a propensity for undertaking projects as a means of understanding my own teaching worlds has grown to become integrated with working on other teachers' projects through research higher degrees supervision. Through the projects, it is possible to become organically connected to multifaceted relationships, the ebbs and flows of power and perception in differentiated yet interdependent spaces and places (de Certeau 1984). Through their potent oracy the bush, its power and its passion can ready teachers to see the world through their students' eyes, through their travails and triumphs, through those of their families, friends and communities. For me those "touchstone" texts (Strong-Wilson et al. 2014) have become lodestars, framing educational questions encountered in the social, economic and cultural worlds of rural communities encountered through this project life.

These questions invariably cluster around the supply of support services for diversely different learners; access to and retention of appropriately qualified teachers and their ongoing professional learning; funding for infrastructure and recurrent

resourcing needs. Here the politicised character of rural teacher education emerges as it is embedded in broader organisational dimensions governing changes in school connected and teacher education both initial and continuing while being connected in quite complex ways to an unceasing evolution of technologies and digital devices. Furthermore, the illogicality of sectoral funding and artificial resourcing divides among early childhood education, schooling, training, university level education and community education provision is starkly evident in small rural communities (Singh et al. 1997). Yet pragmatically it is a feature of life with which rural education is confronted.

There are teaching jobs in Australia's rural communities. "Go west if you want a job" is the mantra for new teachers. A commitment to "country service" is rewarded in the larger school systems with various inducements to entice teachers to include rural teaching as a project in their professional lives. In addition, rural practicum placements may be actively promoted in teacher education programs. However, research conducted for the Rural Education Forum Australia (Halsey 2005) found that factors that mitigated against this included urbanized teacher education students' pre-existing personal and financial commitments, rural community capacity for accommodation, the cost of that accommodation and services, distances to be travelled and the lack of anonymity in small communities. Rural spaces remain at the mercy of the power of place to determine desires for ways of living in which the suburban and the metropolitan reign supreme.

This is a key point of convergence with Máirín's self-study from Ireland where current economic growth and in-migration favour larger towns and "accessible" rural areas (Central Statistics Office 2011). As Máirín also notes, these popular rural areas attract "rurbanites" — people willing to commute often long distances to work in urban centres, to have an urban lifestyle in a safer, greener environment, with cheaper housing and easier access to amenities such as quality childcare. In both countries, rural communities are being affected by the variability of reliable access to twenty-first century information and communications technologies. A related point of convergence occurs as prosperity in one area (for example, economic growth in urban and metropolitan centres) impacts negatively on small rural communities. Máirín reports that environmental, cultural and ecological effects are compounded with high unemployment rates in small towns and remote rural areas still reeling from economic forces beyond their control, gutted by emigration (out-migration), with consequential negative effects on individuals' mental health and physical well-being (Cleary et al. n.d.; Nolan and Maître 2007).

As I travel out west these days, it is the changing landscape that disrupts those earlier images. Hills appear where previously rolling savannah grew sweet grasses for sheep and cattle, where crops of sunflowers and sorghum stretched to the horizon. This ancient landscape has been recolonized by slag heaps of overburden in varying stages of revegetation, while others tower still raw and ragged. The coal trains stretch for kilometres, with engines front, back and in the middle to push their black gold to massive commuter ships plying the oceanic highways towards the hungry furnaces in far-off lands. The soporific boredom as hour after interminable hour the road waits to be driven is interspersed with moments of sheer terror as the

behemoths of the resource industries barrel along both lanes of what passes for a highway. New signposts emerge from the shimmering noonday heat – not to the homesteads but to the mine sites, the accommodation camps and the new townships of the central and far west. There are now airports where once cattle were mustered by horseback in the dry paddocks and where from time immemorial Indigenous people nurtured this land of the Dreaming. The fly-in, fly-out and the drive-in, drive-out lifestyles of Queensland's resources boom workforce are telling their tales in the uber-urbanized café cultures of the coast, while multinational conglomerates fund community development partnerships as part of their loudly proclaimed local/global corporate citizenship. Yet the local is in the global and vice versa. All booms inevitably come to bust with renewed challenges for citizenship in rural communities.

I was never marginalized by rurality because I never really knew it as either insider or outsider. It was not consciously integral to my initial teacher education, nor to professional learning since that time. The rural was just there — the bush out back of the black stump — as unquestioned part of life and living. Today I may be interviewing for a research project at a school but by lunchtime on my last day I hear and heed Dad's words: "Get off the road by sundown because the kangaroos will be out, and always have enough supplies just in case you cannot make the next town". The more the bush appears to change, the more it stays the same.

## *PATRICK*

Living and working "beyond the black stump" was not foremost in my mind when I took up my first teaching position in the early 1980s. Actually the town was not so remote; located in central western Queensland, it was closer to the regional places where I had grown up and completed my initial teacher education than many other areas where I might been assigned instead. I recall answering in the negative when I was asked, "Do you know where that is?" after being told by telephone of my first school, and then locating it on a state map. I soon discovered that it was a site of considerable historical interest (and I attended a re-enactment of that historic event in the town later that year).

Instead of feeling that I had been consigned to "the outback", I experienced a strong sense of anticipation and excitement: here was my first full-time, continuing, occupational role, in a new place with people I had not met previously. Here was an opportunity to put into practice what I had learned about secondary teaching at university and during fieldwork placements. At that time, there was an expectation – probably a formal requirement – that Queensland government teachers complete 2 years of "country service", and I preferred to discharge that duty at the start of my teaching career rather than being instructed to move "out west" after teaching for a few years in a coastal location. Indeed, rumour had it that my peers and I would be rewarded for undergoing our "country service" at the start of our careers, by being able to nominate our preferred locations at the end of the 2 years. (This proved to be

so in my case; at the end of my 2 years, I was granted my first preference of a large regional centre in South-East Queensland.)

More than 30 years later, I look back with appreciation and gratitude for all that I learned in that first teaching post. Like my colleagues, I worked hard, but I battled with classroom management (Danaher 1983). I threw myself enthusiastically into opportunities (such as working with the school's student council) that I realised when I worked in much larger schools were not so readily available in bigger establishments. On the other hand, I had very little contact with the local community, except through attending church and acting a very minor role in a theatrical performance. I did not play or watch sport or drink in the town's hotels, so that I did not meet many townspeople outside a narrowly defined circle.

My choice of teaching as a career was not surprising, given that my mother had been a teacher (she and I taught the same subjects, English and history); later both my younger brothers completed teacher education qualifications, although they ended up teaching at university rather than in schools. As long as I could remember, I had enjoyed learning (although some subjects more than others) and I had been fascinated by the practices of schooling and of teaching. My personal and professional identity was strongly and inextricably intertwined with being and becoming a teacher (and later a teacher educator in regional universities while researching rurality). So the principles and practices – if not the name – of self-study had long been part of my psyche: the urge to improve, to understand, to serve.

With regard to location, I had grown up in a small town of about 4,000 inhabitants on the Queensland coast, close to a regional city. I had no sense at the time of the town's location or size vis-à-vis other places in Queensland and Australia, except that I felt a little overwhelmed when visiting the regional city (where coincidentally Bobby grew up and lives now); I certainly felt no marginalization on account of not living in a city, let alone a metropolis. Nor do I remember experiencing discrimination or disadvantage because of gender, socioeconomic status or ethnicity. On the contrary: I have an abiding emotion of appreciation for being able to live my childhood and adolescence in what for me was a safe, stimulating environment where my brothers and sister still live and where I have an investment property. I experienced fulfilment and happiness that I recall fondly (and no doubt nostalgically).

At the same time, having taught subsequently in a large government school in Brisbane and a wealthy private school in Melbourne, I realise now that significant educational, political and sociocultural differences were at play more broadly and constituted a wider backdrop of socioeconomic status and inequity that helped to frame my professional practice but of which I was largely unaware at the time. More specifically, I have since contributed to research, and also read other academics' research, highlighting the considerable and often lifelong impact of the different levels of resources available to schools and classrooms, and furthermore demonstrating that rural locations continue to experience uneven and insufficient access to such resources. Likewise, despite the ongoing development and refinement of various communication technologies, physical distance continues to exercise a profound influence on the life choices, lived experiences and lifelong outcomes of members of regional, rural and remote communities.

At one level, therefore, my critical self-reflections on being a rural teacher are highly divergent from those of Máirín above. Apart from our experiences being in different countries in different hemispheres and with different approaches to our respective initial teacher education programs, the cultural constituents of the respective communities in which we have taught and lived are very different as well. At another level, however, there are important convergences between our two sets of professional experiences. One convergence relates to the politicized terrain on which particular educational practices are enacted – a terrain that constructs some places as more equal than others and that concomitantly positions other locations as sites of inequity and marginalization. Another convergence pertains to the shared conviction of the necessity and the utility of self-study as an indispensable resource for teachers' continuing professional learning – not only for individual educators but also for the schools in which they work and for the communities whom they serve.

Similarly, there are both resonances and diversities between Bobby's and my experiences and our reflections on those experiences above. The resonances derive in part from the sheer existential and experiential coincidence of growing up in and returning to the same geographical location. They reflect also the shared experience of completing teacher education programs in the same state jurisdiction, albeit undertaken at different institutions and targeted at working with different levels of pupils. Yet, despite these common occurrences, our professional trajectories have differed in significant ways in parallel with our separate life journeys, highlighting the individually unique, even solipsistic, character of such journeys and the meanings that we make of them. This in turn accentuates a defining characteristic of effective self-study. That is, such self-study can and does take multiple forms, including varying degrees of formalization, and needs to be contextually specific, yet its underlying purpose and importance traverse both individual and national boundaries.

## Data Analysis

A striking similarity among the three preceding autoethnographic accounts of teaching in rural schools in Ireland and Australian respectively was how – in very different geographical, historical, political and sociocultural contexts – the classificatory categories of "rural" and its logical opposite "urban" ebbed and flowed across the authors' separate experiences and their shared reflections on those experiences. In Ireland, supposedly rural villages are geographically relatively close (in Australian terms) to Dublin. In Queensland, geographical distances are much greater, yet there is probably more homogeneity across the urban and rural divide than in Ireland, owing partly to Australia's much briefer colonial and postcolonial periods than in Ireland. From this perspective, as the authors moved physically between and within locations during their respective career trajectories, notions of "urban" or "metropolitan", "regional", "rural" and "remote" blurred and merged, morphed and

transformed in concert with the complex interplay of wider forces and influences, including the operation of globalization and localization. For instance, the effects of the global financial crisis of 2008 that impacted severely on the "Celtic Tiger" economy of Ireland are seen in the migration from rural towns and remote communities, the phenomenon of 'out migration' with concomitant effects on local services such as the Gárda (Police) station, the post office and the schools. In Australia, the impact of the resources industries before and after the same financial crisis have had boom – bust effects on local economies in those regions most vulnerable to shifting populations, transport, health and human services, including schools.

All of this illustrates how the historically grounded and geopolitically enacted places and spaces of Irish and Australian teaching and teacher education frame and constrain the respective challenges and opportunities of rural education. More specifically, in both countries the metropolitan places of national and provincial capital cities can be interpreted as the sites of power determining educational policy-making, ranging from curriculum and assessment through to class sizes and the minimum pupil numbers if schools were to remain operational. Correspondingly, rural schools and towns can be understood as the spaces where school principals and teachers interact with their pupils and their families to implement – and occasionally to challenge – those policies. This interplay between places and spaces was a recurring theme in the autoethnographic accounts in the preceding section of the chapter. Another synergy was the increasing political consciousness of all three authors as they read and researched further about rural education and teacher education. A marked difference among the accounts was the strategies for deploying that consciousness afforded and/or contained by the specific contexts in which the authors conducted their roles and responsibilities as educators and subsequently as teacher educators.

Part of the wider significance of this similarity and this fluidity lies in their resonance with the study's conceptual framework, focused on de Certeau's (1984) distinction between places and spaces. As we noted above, de Certeau (p. 117) helpfully encapsulated that distinction thus: "In short, *space is a practised place*" (*emphasis in original*). The autoethnographic accounts presented in the previous section of this chapter illustrated multiple means by which the places of rural schools and the communities in which they are located can be transformed into engaged, lively and sometimes subversive spaces – for instance, when teachers join forces with parents and other community members to resist school closures in Irish villages or when Australian communities take a stand to resist the fly-in/fly-out and drive-in/drive-out staffing policies of multinational resource companies. Rurality offers a conceptually rich space to disturb, disrupt and dissemble teachers' and teacher educators' knowledgeable ignorance (Daniel 1960; Firestein 2012) of the Irish Travellers, of Indigenous Australians, of refugees, of miners, of pastoralists, of the diversely different ways of being and becoming in rural communities. Pedagogically, we have aligned ourselves with Rancière's (1991) ignorant schoolmaster, Monsieur Jactot, to ask inconvenient questions of ourselves and of our teacher education students; for example, what do I [not] know about these people, how can I find out, what and how can I teach them? Each question leads to layers of answers, none of which is singular

or simplistic, yet the dialogic encounters that ensue teach others and confirm for ourselves that doubt, uncertainty and the unknown are fundamental to learning.

Another synergy that has helped to frame the preceding autoethnographic accounts is a shared experiential knowledge as well as a well-developed theoretical understanding of wider changes to the teaching profession in both countries, and also continuing and sometimes highly politicized changes to teacher education and our contributions to it as teacher-researchers and teacher educators. Hence the focus in this analysis of the data selected from the broader study informing this chapter to include in the autoethnographic accounts presented above has been on complex and fluid relationships – between urban and rural locations, between places and spaces, between educators and learners, between professionals and their multiple communities. Far from being fixed essences or static binary pairs, these phenomena have demonstrated their capacity for mobility, for shifting valences, for challenging mindsets, for contesting power relations and for transforming supposedly settled policies and practices. Self-study has been and continues to be a vital ingredient in the mix, by extending and sometimes upsetting existing understandings and by enhancing the quality and the impact of teachers' professional learning. This impacts on the ways in which we prepare teachers for these places/spaces through a deliberate pedagogical commitment to challenge, even to subvert, a seemingly homogenized teacher education that in neither Ireland nor Australia accords critical engagement with the generative, stimulating and transformative professional learning experiences of our accounts.

## Conclusion

This chapter is part of a wider comparative, exploratory case study deploying the attributes of collaborative autoethnography to analyze the authors' experiences as teachers in rural schools in Ireland and Australia. In presenting selected data from this study, we have sought to demonstrate and illustrate some of the virtues and values of self-studies in rural teacher education – in particular, by bringing experiential depth and reflective insight to bear in shining new light on de Certeau's (1984) enduringly significant conceptualization of places and spaces. Through this self-study process, we have created a new dialogic space (Denzin 2014) as we have written ourselves into one another's lives, shared our identities, co-produced a critical consciousness and imagined a new politics of conceptual and pedagogical possibilities for rurality and for rural teacher education. Methodologically, we have connected with our touchstones, then regressively and progressively journeyed to past and present events in accordance with an autoethnographical process of self-study.

The key finding that we have highlighted in the chapter is the need for, as well as the diverse forms taken by, rural teachers' self-study strategies. Based on the autoethnographic accounts presented here, those strategies have both a spatial and a temporal dimension. There have been geographically specific and contextually

localized approaches, both between and within Ireland and Australia, to framing the authors' respective critical self-reflections in ways that 'make sense' in the places and spaces in which they are enacted. Likewise, these approaches have varied over time, in the different phases of the authors' career trajectories as well as in broader shifts in epochs that frame educational policy-making and practice at school and university levels.

We see this diversity of forms as a major strength of self-study, because it enables and supports a range of locationally appropriate techniques for maximizing educators' understandings of themselves and others as they perform their occupational identities. Whether those places and spaces are the dry stone walls of Ireland, the black stumps of Australia or the equally evocative and iconic emblems of rurality in other countries, critically focused, dialogically framed and politically nuanced self-study is crucial for teachers' and teacher educators' professional learning.

**Acknowledgments** The authors are grateful to Professor Ann K. Schulte and Associate Professor Bernadette Walker-Gibbs for having generated the significant contribution to scholarship represented by this book and for being such facilitative and patient editors. The chapter benefited as well from the insightful feedback of Associate Professor Kai Schafft. The authors acknowledge also the ongoing learning that they derive from collaborating with one another and with multiple fellow sojourners and kindred spirits in all manner of places and spaces.

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