Chapter 2
Framing Rural and Remote: Key Issues, Debates, Definitions, and Positions in Constructing Rural and Remote Disadvantage

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Abstract Educational research and public policy comment are often framed around notion of binaries and social construction that reference an implicit norm. For the purposes of this edition, important binaries include advantage/disadvantage, centre/periphery, and rural/urban. Similarly, terms such as 'rural' and 'remote' are often socially constructed with reference to these binaries. For instance, remote is often conceptualised as peripheral to the city by distance as well as socially and culturally. However, as this chapter discusses, for people whose families live in remote towns, it is the city that is distant and peripheral. Such perspectives are rarely considered in discussions of educational policy. To address this, and other, implicit biases, this chapter examines how language socially constricts the 'problem' to be solved, rather than implicitly valuing people, places, and communities.

'Rural' is a seemingly straight forward concept, until we attempt to define it. Indeed, this problem has been a central issue for the rural studies field for some time (Shucksmith & Brown, 2018). In this chapter, we do not so much seek to define 'rural' as to highlight the issues associated with existing definitions in use in order to introduce the complexities of naming and issues of power such naming reproduces. This sensitivity to naming is, we suggest, a key insight from rural education research for the broader education research community with implications for the taken for granted-ness of 'the city'.

Researchers are faced with the issues of language and naming from the outset. This is observed by appending 'rural' 'regional' or 'remote' as a locational characteristic in order to signify the research as distinct. However, each term 'rural', 'regional' or 'remote', or even 'country', 'bush' or 'outback', has significant cultural and historical meaning. This meaning is often also linked to national histories and

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cultures. For instance, 'country' has a distinct association with class and culture in the UK compared to Australia where its use has been declining—we suspect due to changing sensibilities to class and the growth of the Indigenous rearticulation of 'Country' as somewhat akin to 'homeland' or 'traditional lands'. Which term a researcher appends signals an often-unspoken assumption about the location and scope of the research. More so, the lack of appending a signifier carries meanings about the assumed location or context-free claims of the research.

In Australia, the term 'regional' is becoming the dominant label for all non-metropolitan areas. This preference appears to be because it includes larger towns or cities beyond the state capitals, and as such is distinct from 'rural', which tends to refer to smaller non-metropolitan towns. 'Small towns' denote a particular type of bounded settlement type by population size, with an ambiguous link to those living on surrounding lands (ABS, 2018). 'Remote', however, tends to be used to refer to locations perceived as 'remote' from larger towns, and increasingly synonymous with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Guenther et al., 2019). Highlighting that each is assumed to carry specific meanings, and associated considerations for education, the recent review into education in non-metropolitan Australia carried the title of 'regional, rural and remote' education (Halsey, 2018). Noting this complexity of language choices, we will, forthwith, use 'rural' as a catchall for all terms noted above, unless otherwise noted. Specifically, we will look at issues pertaining to 'rural' and 'remote', with 'rural' allowing an exploration of the broad debates in rural studies and much public policy. We then deliberately focus up 'remote' as a distinct notion, as a case in point.

Before moving to discussing these definitions, we make one final observation. In many rural studies, the rural is often studied as part of urbanisation (Shucksmith & Brown, 2018). That is, the rural is constituted in some way related to the urban, partly because the rural only developed as a distinct category through urbanisation. How the rural is then positioned, in comparison with the urban or as a distinct social phenomenon, forms one of the central distinctions in defining the rural that we will outline below. What we find curious, however, is that the 'urban'—itself used as a synonym for 'the city'—and the 'the city' are reified. Cities are inherently diverse and made up of many different spaces, each with different constructions, challenges, and needs. Think, for instance, about the spatial geography of a typical city with gradations and interactions of wealthy and less wealthy areas, dense to less dense housing, low crime to higher crime areas, industries, suburbs, and so forth. Recognising the many disparities within, and access to, the city, we have witnessed the emergence of ideas such as 'the right to the city' (Harvey, 2008), which reinforces that not all people who live in the urban environment have access to what 'the city' signifies. Equally then, the city is itself not one space but many, with perhaps the city as 'remote' to marginalised populations within it as it is to population located geographically far from it.

With the absence of a rural-related signifier to research, it is often assumed that the phenomena are 'context free'. Indeed, in many circles, being 'context free', or more so shown to have no observable variation related to geographical location, is itself valorised as the benchmark of validity. However, to many rural researchers,

this absence reinforces a form of metrocentricity (Roberts & Green, 2013) where the metropolitan is the norm, resulting in a form of metro-normativity (Green, 2013). This perspective draws upon the complexity of defining the rural, and the view that rural places are each unique and distinct, as many chapters in this book reinforce. The logic in operation then is that by not referencing the importance of context, an assumed 'norm' is enacted, which, given the dominance of urban areas in population and the social imaginary, is metropolitan in character. Ironically though, much spatial theory that has been influential in rural education research leading to this form of thinking in the last decade (Roberts & Green, 2013) itself often emanates from Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1996) who wrote about, and from, spatiality and the city—Paris and Los Angeles, respectively. The take up of this theory by rural researchers suggests an innate sense of difference, and an affinity with theoretical work that helps frame this distinctness. That the work has been influential (Gulson & Symes, 2007), but not transformative, in education research not explicitly situated in the rural also suggests the power of universalising discourses in modern education. We raise this issue to suggest that, at the risk of complicating things even further, not appending a locational signifier to research creates as many problems as doing so. By raising this issue, albeit in the example of the rural and remote, we ask education researchers to consider the implications of this decision on their work and findings.

Understanding 'Rural'

We contend here that the 'rural' is not well defined in educational research. This then has implications for the generalisability of the research findings and the appropriateness of resultant policy and practice (Roberts & Downes, 2016). Referencing the rural studies field, one which we conceive as encompassing rural sociology and rural geography, a number of trends in the way the rural is understood are discernible.

Shucksmith and Brown (2018) characterise these trends in defining the rural as a distinction between a social constructivist and a more structural/demographic approach. The social constructivist approach, more commonly associated with European rural studies, understands the rural as a social and cultural phenomenon that is produced, and distinct in and of itself. Alternatively, the structural/demographic approach, which is more commonly associated with North American rural studies, understands the rural as constituted of measurable characteristics that can be compared to other places. More recently, Bollman and Reimer (2020) have recast this discussion in terms of spatial characteristics and the characteristics of individual or theory versus operational variables. While not universal distinctions, these differences can be observed in the academic journals situated in different national contexts. The differences can also be observed in the different methodologies employed and the construction of the research question, and the resultant methods. In Australia, the rural studies field is not well developed, with related research tending to sit somewhat ambiguously across both perspectives. It seems that rural communities, and those with an affinity for them, are influenced by the social constructivist approach,

whereas public policy is more aligned with structural/demographic approach. This is arguably due to the political perspective of rational economics and the need to justify resource redistribution based on simply quantifiable measures.

Linking the social constructivist and structural/demographic perspective in order to arrive at a model for defining the rural was an aim of rural studies in the early to mid-2000s. This resulted in three influential constructions that we introduce below. This push was predicated on the truism that the rural is a difficult site to define due to the multiplicity of meanings of the rural. Recognising this complexity, the rural is generally defined in some combination of demographic, geographic, and cultural dimension. Importantly, the relationships between these elements are dynamic. There are three key approaches to defining the rural from this period. Firstly, Halfacree's (2006) Three-Fold Model of (rural) Spaces included rural locality (geographic), formal representations of the rural, and everyday lives of the rural. Next, Balfour et al.'s (2008) Generative Theory of Rurality saw rurality as context, forces (space, place, time), agencies (movement, systems, will) and resources (situated, material, psychosocial). Finally, Cloke's (2006) Three Theoretical Frames encompasses the functional (land use and life linked to land), the political-economic (social production), and the social (culture and values).

Ultimately, while a single definition was elusive, the search was far from futile. Indeed, the ensuing debates highlighted the complex influences on the phenomena of the rural—something that other fields such as education are, arguably, yet to engage in. Instead, an increasingly common refrain seems to be a version of: we know the rural is hard to define so let's recognise that and move on. In the end what is important here is not necessarily some definitional conclusion, as that is probably unachievable, but the act of understanding how the rural is constructed in relation to the research task at hand. Doing so helps us reflect on the limitations and affordances of our research approaches, consider the forces constructing the rural and the phenomena we are exploring, and temper our conclusions. Here again, we can learn from rural studies, where in contemporary publications authors do not go out of their way to define the rural. However, the influence of this definitional work in the background is clearly evident in the way the rural is prefaced, phenomena constructed, research approached and written—it is foundational to all the work and understood by the field.

This debate is not new to the rural education field, though it has been largely focussed in the North American scene. For instance, Howley, Theobald, and Howley argued that an understanding of rural was an essential component of rural education research in 2005. They (Howley et al. 2005) suggested that such meanings were often lost in the pursuit of positivist research in order to have an influence on policy and practice.

Reflecting on fifteen years as editor of the Journal of Research in Rural Education, Coladarci (2007) also argued that an understanding of rurality was important, though largely absent, from rural education research. Such calls continued with Howley et al. (2014) again arguing for a greater engagement with rurality in rural education research. That this thread of debate has continued in the North American scene is both curious and significant. Curious, as its persistence suggests an ongoing perceived

need from certain researchers, yet significant as its continuation suggests, it has not been achieved in any significant manner. Indeed, the notion of needing to engage with rurality is not universally accepted. Most recently, for instance, Biddle et al. (2019) revisited Coladarci (2007), though this time to suggest that an engagement with rurality was itself not necessary, and indeed may itself be limiting to rural education research. While we take up this point further below, this is not a position we agree with. Instead, our position is that not engaging with what constitutes our understanding of rurality is fundamentally an act of symbolic violence against rural people, places, and communities (Roberts & Green, 2013). It can lead to normative assumptions about context that in rural educational contexts can be damaging for students (Guenther & Osborne, 2020).

The Australian rural education scene has not been devoid of these debates, though their prevalence is much less. In 2005, Brennan suggested a need to 'put rurality [back] in the educational agenda' (p. 11). This was further taken up by Roberts and Cuervo (2015) as an ongoing absence, suggesting that defining rurality was needed to better orientate our research to the phenomena we are examining. This chapter, indeed, this volume, continues this line of argument. Perhaps most significantly, the pre-eminent scholars using these theories in education, Reid and Green, have taken the various elements of defining the rural from rural studies to develop the rural social space model which combines characteristics of economy, demography, and geography (Reid et al., 2010). We do not explore this here as it is revised in this volume in Chapter 3. This model marks an important innovation for the rural education field, and education research in general, as it provides an approach for researchers to engage the situatedness of the phenomena they are researching.

Making Rural (Education) Policy

As education policy become increasingly standardised, and national bureaucracies move to education 'evidence' clearinghouses, what counts in education research becomes increasingly fraught. As noted by Coladarci (2007), and supported by Biddle et al. (2019), one of the reasons for *not* noting definitions of the rural in research has been to increase impact upon policy and practice. Here, context-free research is deemed to be more valuable, even valid, for making policy and redistributing public funds. This poses a significant challenge for rural education research and the education research community more generally. In educational research, the distinction between the social constructivist and structural/demographic perspective of the rural creates a conflict between the more socially and culturally orientated research of experiences and the more policy-orientated research related to resource distribution and outcomes. In making decisions about the effectiveness and efficiency of the education system, developing and evaluating policy interventions, and determining resourcing, the structural/demographic perspective tends to take precedence in most nations, including Australia.

The spatial turn in social theory (Gulson & Symes, 2007) reminds us that all educational phenomena are situated, be they in the rural or the city, as both rural and city are categories that collapse their infinite diversity into a convenient label. Problematically, those labels are themselves opposite ends of an undefined spectrum of assumption. The challenge ahead for educational research is to speak back to the power that assumes a false uniformity is more valid, and instead prosecute the case that recognition of the situatedness of phenomena is indeed the path towards true validity. In developing this case for the necessary situatedness of educational research, rural education scholarship provides several cases in point—as presented in this book.

While Australian rural education researchers often engage with social constructivist notions of rurality, sadly most research that impacts policy tends to use a limited version of demographically and geographically defined notions of rurality, using measures defined by 'statistical geography' (discussed later). These are expressed solely in a statistical frame of analysis and considered as a policy variable, with, for example, attendance, funding, senior secondary outcomes, and standardised literacy and numeracy test results reported against a statistically imposed remoteness structure. Remoteness is a classification structure within the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) (ABS, 2018). In this classification, remoteness areas are based on the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+) (University of Adelaide, 2018) and measure the remoteness of a point to the nearest urban centre in each of five categories (ranging from least to furthest distance). The Australian Bureau of Statistics has multiple approaches to representing spatial geographies, with statistical structures referring to cities and towns linked to settlement density, available (Hugo, 2014). Statistical geographies other than the ASGS are based upon houses and/or settlements, such as the small towns' statistical geography (ABS, 2018). These are not appropriate for rural education research as they remove the settlement from its surrounds and create a number of data holes, such as assuming all students at a rural school live in the towns' statistical area boundary, something we know to be untrue. Attempts to use such measures may well reveal the researchers' ignorance towards the rural and the composition of rural schools. When it comes to defining larger regions, the ASGS is the main reference point in Australia (see Chapter 8), for the purposes of this book, ASGS is the main structure in use. Reinforcing the metro-normative notions that inform these statistics though, the Australian Bureau of Statistics remoteness structure notes 'remoteness is dynamic, it generally declines over time as new services are built and the road network is improved' (ABS, 2013, n.p.). It seems that the irony of the definitions in use is that they ultimately aim to erase rurality.

Rural Colonialism

Finally, writing in and from Australia, it is important to foreground that these discussions occur in the context of settler colonialism. The idea of rural and remote did not exist prior to the arrival of European colonists. Similarly, education had been

occurring for tens of thousands of years and continues to occur. As such, the very notions being put forward here are themselves implicated with the ongoing dispossession and marginalisation of First Nations peoples. While this has a distinct character and history in Australia, it is common in many places across the globe. As Corbett and Gereluk (2020) state, writing from Canada:

> The very idea of the rural has been freighted with racialized meaning. It is often constructed as the gendered quintessence of the national consciousness: the space of the farmers, loggers, fishers, railway workers, road-builders, surveyors, and miners around whom the mythology of exploration, settlement, and nation building have been formed. The field of rural education has functioned as a space for settlers to tell of their places, sometimes acknowledging its colonized past often recognizing their own immigrant roots. It is arguable that historically, these stories and conversations between Indigenous peoples and settlers largely did not overlap or converge. In fact, they were more often very different accounts of both national history and present socio-political circumstances. This ideological separateness, and stark contrasts in the telling of the stories about our educational past, have often obscured the unacknowledged polyvocality, complexity, and complicity in a long, more troubling history. (p. v)

Corbett and Gereluk's (2020) observations hold in the Australian context. The result of this history is the imposition of a public policy framework, and cultural justification, transported from the British experience of modernity. Such assumptions position places beyond the city, the people who live there, and First Nations peoples as marginal. In the remainder of this chapter, we turn to examine the language of 'remote' and Australia's First Nations peoples as a case in point.

Conceptualising Remote

The word 'remote' conjures ideas of distant, isolated, and beyond the periphery (Taylor, 2016). Statistical geography in Australia at least picks up on these ideas. The Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) measures the degree of remoteness, as 'a purely geographic measure of remoteness, which excludes any consideration of socio-economic status, "rurality" and populations size factors' (University of Adelaide, 2018). However, this linear conception of degree of remoteness misses the diversity and richness of the landscapes and peoples who live in these 'settlements at the edge' to pick up on the description used by Taylor et al. (2016).

Many of the more than 1000 settlements within the 'remote' region of Australia are occupied by Australia's First Nations peoples, who often resent the term 'Indigenous' because of the language and cultural diversity across the nations. A large proportion of the land is Aboriginal Freehold or subject to Native Title claims. Aboriginal people living in their communities see some advantage in capital cities being distant from them and they see advantage in being able to maintain cultural practices, law, and language. History for these people on the 'edge' extends well beyond the relatively short period of colonisation, but the impact of colonisation/settlement/invasion, racist policies, marginalisation, and frontier conflicts has left a legacy of trauma, grief, and loss in many communities.

However, there are other kinds of settlements at the edge. There are mining towns (e.g. Nhulunbuy in Arnhem Land), service centres (like Alice Springs in central Australia), pastoral leases, and rural communities and towns built on tourism (such as Yulara at Uluru). While the First Nations communities tend to have relatively stable populations, the communities where non-Indigenous people live tend to be more transient. Access to the full range of education, health, and community services otherwise available in urban and metropolitan areas is limited in all remote communities, but more so in the smaller First Nations communities. However, it is important to note that there is more to settlements at the edge than statistical geography might suggest and the discourse of relative disadvantage promulgated by the hegemony is not necessarily shared by those who live in the remote.

Hegemonic Rhetoric

Many researchers have fallen into the trap of adopting an acritical approach to their research on rural issues, inadvertently adopting a discourse that forms part of an unchallenged (maybe unchallengeable) self-perpetuating 'policy paradigm' (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Indeed, it may be in their interest to do so, given the problem-solving nature of research. If research funding is allocated to solving a given educational problem, then the job of the research is to solve the problem. In rural spaces, problems abound. The complexity of problems suggests a need for a critical dialogue with the hegemonic structures that ignore those who Apple (2017, p. 250) describes as 'absent presences' who might be considered as 'irrational' (e.g. parents who want to see their children be educated in a so-called disadvantaged community). However, the complexity of rurality is such that the critical dialogue is not just between us (as the rural) and them (as the non-rural) because:

> the discursive formation of the rural rests on a complex hegemony of domination which both materially and culturally constitutes an acceptance and belonging for some and a marginalisation and exclusion for others. (Cloke & Little, 1997, pp. 6–7)

Nevertheless, in the last decade, a major problem has been the 'gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Turnbull, 2018) particularly in places defined as 'remote', and going back further, there is the related problem of 'overcoming Indigenous disadvantage' (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2016). The apparent 'tyrannies of distance' (Lamb et al., 2014), which disadvantage those who are classified almost arbitrarily as rural or remote (Lamb et al., 2014, p. 66) as if these classifications are axiomatically given, are in many instances tacitly attributed as causes thinly veiled as 'factors' or 'effects' (Wilson et al., 2018) despite the acknowledged complexities of context (Lietz et al., 2014). The axiomatic 'given-ness' of these ascribed characteristics leads to a universalised 'aspatial' (Cloke, 2006, p. 20) rhetoric which constructs truth as if it were normative objective common sense, sustaining 'relations of domination' (Fairclough, 2003, p. 207). To challenge the 'common sense' of discursive rhetoric is to challenge

the hegemony, and for researchers, this may lead to a loss of funding, dismissal of credibility, and outright rejection of evidence, as illustrated in Chapters 10 and 18 of this volume.

Power of Naming

Naming of problems in this way becomes a powerful vehicle to reinforce the hegemony's discursive attempts to problematise (in the sense of making problematic) issues such as rurality, remoteness, and indigeneity. For example, the close proximity of 'Indigenous' to 'disadvantage' may imply that indigeneity is the disadvantage. Similarly, the proximity of 'closing' and 'the gap' may imply (1) that there is one gap; (2) that the 'gap' should be closed (representing a homogenisation as opposed to a respect for diversity); and possibly, (3) that there is a universal (aspatial) benchmark that defines the required performance standard. The voices of the irrational 'others' (e.g. the rural, remote, or Indigenous person) then becomes silenced in favour of the voices of the 'rational' or 'common-sense' hegemons. Naming sometimes subtly infers an opposite connotation. For example, consider the following statement from an Australian Government funding announcement:

> The Government is investing in our next generation of Australia's leaders by encouraging Indigenous students to dream; to have big, bold aspirations and to succeed. (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017)

Here, we see all Indigenous Australian students aspatially lumped into the same basket (while the intent is clearly directed to those living in remote communities) having no dreams, small aspirations, and failing. Naming then carries with it an air of legitimacy, self-reinforced by its own discursive power. This naming or 'generic representation' contributes to the 'hegemonic universalization of a particular representation' (Fairclough, 2003, p. 201) and so in the examples we give, all rural, remote, or all Indigenous people are represented as disadvantaged.

What Is 'Dis-Advantage'?

But what is 'disadvantage'? And what is 'advantage'? To a large extent, the term 'disadvantage' in political discourse is defined by what it is associated with. For example, the 2018 Closing the Gap report (Turnbull, 2018) couples disadvantage 'and determinants of health and wellbeing' (p. 12), 'and poverty' (p. 42), 'and developmental vulnerability' (p. 46), 'or vulnerable families and communities' (p. 47), 'and exclusion' (p. 80), 'and underlying factors that drive violent and criminal behaviour' (p. 119). But the word 'advantage' does not appear, and the term 'disadvantage' is never defined. While the Prime Minister urged us to 'continue to maintain a long-term

vision of what success looks like, and importantly how success is defined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves' (p. 7), the narrow list of targets related to child mortality, early childhood education, school attendance, reading and numeracy, year 12 attainment, employment, and life expectancy (p. 10) appears to limit an understanding of success and advantage to a proscribed set of values that determine what is axiologically and ontologically important. As an aside, it is interesting to see that disadvantage does not appear in the 2020 Closing the Gap report, except in relation to its origins in policy.

All these associations do point to the 'intersectional' nature of social disadvantage (Platt & Dean, 2016). For example, being 'rural' is not necessarily a disadvantage, but being a 'rural youth' when educational opportunities beyond primary or secondary schooling are limited may well be a disadvantage. Conversely, being a 'rural tradesperson' may be an advantage, especially if you are employed in an industry such as mining, where pay levels and opportunities for professional learning are high. The defining features of advantage and disadvantage become blurry when the ontological and axiological positions associated with the rural do not line up neatly with those of metropolitan. For example, while wealth is often described as a characteristic of advantage (Dean, 2016), if the ancient connections to your land, culture, and language are ontologically and cosmologically more important than the apparent temporal experiences of wealth, whose definition of advantage is correct? However, the measurement systems of the hegemon tend to work with the proximal indicators or objects of disadvantage. For example, in the Australian My School's Index for Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA), the formula explicitly includes remoteness and indigeneity as an indicator of advantage such that:

ICSEA (student) = SEA (student) + student Indigenous status + SEA (school cohort) + Percent Indigenous student enrolment + Remoteness (ACARA, 2013, p. 10)

These understandings of advantage and disadvantage as situated contextually, culturally, relationally, and socially should lead us to reconsider how we do education in the rural (Guenther & Bat, 2013; Guenther et al., 2014; Osborne & Guenther, 2013) and how we do research in the rural (Guenther et al., 2015, 2018). A critical view of our position, of power, of history, of place will help us to see where advantage lies in rural education and where inequities and disadvantages are maintained.

Silences: Who Is Silent in Western Empiricism?

The feverish activity of the last 10 years in trying to close gaps, overcome disadvantage, and improve outcomes in the rural has resulted in a corresponding amount of research activity responding to the stated gaps, the disadvantages, and the poor outcomes. The growth of research about the rural, however, is not matched by a growth of research by or for the rural. The numerous attempts, for example, to find 'what works' in the rural, particularly as it affects Indigenous people (Al-Yaman & Higgins, 2011; Goodrick, 2012; What Works, 2011), overwhelm the quiet voices,

except where they align with the dominant policy paradigm. A corresponding concern with 'best practice' (Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, 2015; Office of the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services, 2011) which along with 'what works' tends to deny diversity and reinforces aspatial homogenisation. For example, the AIEF's *Compendium of Best Practice* (Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, 2015) claims to offer best practice for Indigenous boarding, but fails to consult with students or parents, relying solely on the voices of school and boarding staff. In a similar vein, the 'what works' literature examines the successes of often aspatial interventions, and in so doing silences those who have seemingly failed or taken alternative pathways to success.

Lack of Evidence—A Philosophical Issue

The reasons for silencing the peripheral others, for essentialising and homogenising advantage, for intervening with aspatial interventions, and for the hegemonic 'naming' of problems and solutions, to a large extent result from the philosophical underpinnings of policy paradigms, which in turn dictate the discourses ascribed to the rural. For example, ontologically, if what is 'real' emerges from the metropolis, the democratic weight of numbers subsumes or denies alternative rural realities (take for example the discourse on educational pathways to 'real' jobs). Similarly, axiologically, if what is valued is individual achievement in education (e.g. reflected in individual performance testing), then communitarian and collaborative approaches to learning (as might be preferred in many Aboriginal communities) are dismissed as illogical, impractical, or invalid. Likewise, if epistemological truth is delivered through formalised teacher-student relationships, it leaves little room for other delivery mediums (e.g. learning from country or intergenerational learning).

Research evidence then, overwhelmingly, responds to and inevitably reinforces the philosophical assumptions of the dominant non-rural hegemon. The relative dearth of evidence which comes from a rural standpoint, or which treats the non-rural as peripheral, is a product of these dynamics (see, for example, White, 2016). They are reinforced and strengthened by discourses of power (Vicars & Mckenna, 2013). Further, they privilege some forms of evidence over others, for example numbers over narratives (Bansel, 2012). And the design of research, including ethical approvals, may ignore the investigation of ontologically real rural assumptions and favour the ethical requirements of the non-rural (university) hegemon (White et al., 2012).

Conclusion

When it comes to framing 'rural' and 'remote', the act of naming or not naming is fraught. Our objective here has not been to propose some Faustian bargain for researchers. Instead, the perspective that we have put forward here is that to not

name the spatial composition of the research, and what that composition means to us in the research, is an act of symbolic violence (Roberts & Green, 2013) that only further marginalises rural people, places, and communities, and particularly First Nations peoples. While we have focussed on the impact upon the rural and First Nations peoples, we have aimed to highlight how these parallel to all spaces and places, and the diverse geographies and social compositions of all places. To assume that place, and context, does not matter is ultimately an act of power, that works in the interests of power. We invite researchers to join us in the work of speaking back to placeless power, and to assist researchers engaging in this work we have outlined several lines of thought that we hope they will take up, and further unravel.

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