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## Schooling elsewhere: rurality, inclusion and education

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### Introduction

Over its history, the International Journal of Inclusive Education has had a strong record of naming, critiquing and redressing the ways in which particular social locations shape experiences of inclusion and exclusion in education. In this special issue, we continue this tradition taking as our focus those who live outside the metropolitan mainstream. To date, rural schools and the communities of which they are part have often been overlooked by researchers of inclusive education. This is not to suggest that the rural has been ignored entirely in research on inclusivity and schooling. For example, a number of studies have included rural case studies as part of broader research on subjects such as educational disadvantage and experiences of poverty (Horgan 2009), inclusivity and early childhood services (Penn 1997), constraints to inclusive educational practice (Shevlin, Winter, and Flynn 2013) and the efficacy of inclusivity training programmes for teachers (Strieker, Logan, and Kuhel 2012). Such work provides a critical reference point for this special issue as it has demonstrated that the educational landscape may be very differently experienced in the rural compared to the urban. Illustrative is Wikeley et al.'s (2009, 381) assertion that working class Irish youth living outside the urban sphere are 'doubly disadvantaged' in terms of accessing out-of-school activities and Milovanovic et al.'s (2014, 47) claim that for young children in the Western Balkans, there is a 'dearth of pre-school provision in rural areas'. As well as highlighting cleavages of disadvantage as they exist between urban and rural schools, work in this journal has also revealed disadvantage that exists within rural schools. This scholarship has explored how particular social locations, such as disability, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and class intersect with rurality to produce very different educational biographies. For example, it may be class, as Holt (2012) found in her study of young rural women's transition to a city university, or it may be gender, as Tuwor and Sossou (2008) posited in their work on the schooling of girls in West Africa.

While previous work in this journal on rurality has scaffolded this special issue, we also seek to depart from it in four inter-related respects. Working from Slee's (2011, 14) assertion that 'inclusive education is first and foremost a political position', we draw attention to four ways in which we believe scholarship on inclusivity in rural education can be strengthened to produce a more equitable

educational landscape.

The first dimension of a political project to promote inclusive education in the rural concerns the ways in which we engage with rurality as researchers. We concur with

Howley (2004, 258) who has observed that the rural is often invoked in educational research as 'mere setting'. In contrast, we need research in which rural people's voices and experiences are heard and documented, and the particularities of their communities are detailed and considered. There is no doubt that quality rural research is often demanding and resource-intensive, and requires a high level of engagement and commitment. However, this is necessary if we are to produce meaningful and respectful knowledge in partnership with rural people. Too often, as Henry (1989, 2) rightly contends, while the 'apparent inferiority of rural schools' has often been the focus of research inquiry, 'rural perspectives have generally been taken for granted, understated or overlooked' not only by academics but also by policy-makers and other stakeholders.

A second strategy for politicising studies of inclusivity in rural education is by adopting understandings of rurality that recognise it as multi-faceted, complex and fluid. Just as too often the rural is given only a cursory consideration in educational

research, requiring little more than a footnote, so too is it often taken as self-evident

and, therefore, an unnecessary subject for critique and elaboration. This is highly problematic for those of us concerned with social justice in schooling, for an increasingly rich body of work has demonstrated that sociocultural imaginings, norms, values, meanings and identities associated with rurality are implicated in inclusion and exclusion (Cloke, 2006; Panelli 2006; Bryant and Pini 2010; Pini, Moletsane, and Mills

2014). For example, Pini, Price, and McDonald (2010) reported that teachers in a remote Australian school marginalised children from non-farming backgrounds as they coupled rurality, agriculture and morality. In other work, authors have detailed

how social problems such as homelessness and poverty are invisible outside city

boundaries when rurality is imagined as purified and unspoilt (Cloke et al. 1995; Cloke, Milbourne, and Widdowfield 2002). In contrast, Pini and Mills (forthcoming) note that representations of the rural as harsh, inhospitable and punishing are used to rationalise placing at-risk youth in isolated boot camps far removed from family and friends. We thus not only suggest that there are 'many different rurals' for rurality is

'hybrid, co-constituted, multi-faceted (and) relational' (Woods 2011, 265), but contend that we need to identify and investigate the discursive work done by these various configurations of rurality if we are to understand and redress power and powerlessness in non-metropolitan spaces.

A third way in which we go beyond much of the previous literature on inclusion and rural schooling is through our engagement with broader scholarship from rural social science, particularly studies of diversity, difference and rural communities. As scholars of educational inclusion, we cannot simply focus our lens solely on the school. Instead, we need to situate the school in the community of which it is part. This is not to promulgate what Hargreaves, Kvaslund, and Galton (2009, 81) label the ‘modern myth’ of the ‘assumed closeness of the rural school – community partnership,’ but to argue for the importance of context. In taking a wider perspective, we will be gaining much from scholarship on diversity and rural communities. This literature had its genesis in criticism in the last decades of the twentieth century in which a group of leading authors argued that the field had been incredibly narrow and that many people had been invisible or neglected in rural research (Philo 1992; Murdoch and Pratt 1993; Milbourne 1997; Cloke and Little 1997). In response to this intervention and the associated ‘cultural turn’, with its attendant concern with multiplicity and plurality, new literatures emerged bringing previously peripheral rural voices to the centre (Neal and Agyeman 2006; Panelli 2008; Pini and Leach 2010; Gorman-Murray et al. 2013).

Thus, today, rural social science is a more poly-vocal discipline than it was when Philo (1992, 193) argued that its chief protagonist was ‘white, middle-class, middle aged, able bodied, sound-minded, heterosexual men’. Engaging with this literature is critical to the political project of inclusive education in the rural.

The final dimension by which we believe knowledge about inclusion in rural education could be politically strengthened is by contextualising our scholarship within the broader processes, practices and implications of globalisation. As Schafft and Youngblood Jackson (2010, 3) assert in introducing their edited volume on rural schooling, it is not just ‘the interrelationship between school and community’ which requires our focus but the ‘global-local context’. There are two dimensions of this context. The first is the globalising of the rural while the second is the globalising of education. In recent decades, rural areas have been profoundly reshaped as a result of globalising factors such as trade liberalisation, in-migration, corporate concentration, use of migrant labour, increased tourism and non-national rural property investment. This has not gone unnoticed by rural educators interested in inclusion. Sherman and Sage (2011) and Edmondson and Butler’s (2013) works, for example, provide rich insights into the challenges facing schools situated in economically depressed communities. Alongside work such as that by Mills and Gale (2011), they show that shifts in global flows of labour, economic and other capitals have had uneven effects in rural communities which, in turn, imbue local dispositions to, and experiences of, education. At the same time, these authors argue that education itself is being subject to the forces of globalisation as manifest in moves towards managerialism and marketisation. Across the world, it is now orthodoxy in educational sectors to privilege choice and competition, as well as testing regimes and accountability measures. To date, however, we know little about the compatibility of these

generic reform strategies and rural schooling. Evidence from the urban sphere, which suggests that the global neoliberal reshaping of education has increased inequality, is sobering (Lipman 2004; Anyon 2005). Thus, a political agenda for inclusive education in the rural needs to attend to both the ‘global rural’ (Woods 2007) and ‘globalizing education policy’ (Rizvi and Lingard 2010), the intersections between them and the implications they have for educational equality.

### Overview

In the first paper of this special issue, Stephanie Tuters takes up a question that has been of key significance to scholars of educational inclusion. That is, how is diversity understood in the everyday lives of teachers? In keeping with the focus of the special issue, she addresses this idea in terms of the rural context taking as a case study a school in a small town in south-west Ontario. While Tuters examines each of the dimensions of diversity identified by teachers separately, she explains that they overlap and intersect thus bringing to the fore the way rurality is mediated by a range of other subject locations. The teachers demonstrate the malleability of rurality as a descriptor. It can be used to signal deficiency and backwardness. Equally, it can rest on idyllic formulations of rurality and be used to designate communitarianism, nature and tradition. As Tuters and fellow contributors demonstrate, neither caricature is helpful to rural students, teachers or schools. As McConaghy (2006, 334) writes in a powerful and sophisticated analysis of the way ‘the rural’ is deployed in terms of education, ‘fantasies about the rural other’ prescribe what ‘the rural must be’ while preventing ‘it from speaking back’.

As an indication of the diversity of rural places, the second paper takes us to a distinctly different location from that of non-metropolitan Canada – that is, to Australia’s tropical north. It is from this location that Susan Kuhl, Paul Pagliano and Helen Boon report on a study of secondary teacher attitudes to, and experiences of, the inclusion of students with disabilities. In echoes of the previous paper, the research question at the centre of the study is one that has been much discussed by inclusive education scholars, but typically from a metrocentric perspective. The findings make connections with this previous work in noting barriers such as lack of time, support and training, but emphasise that these types of constraints are often exacerbated in the rural context because of factors such as the preponderance of beginning teachers in rural schools, distance and the high turn-over of staff.

The third paper in this special issue addresses educational inclusion in a rural area of the developing world, that is, in Nepal. In this contribution, Damodar Khanal reports on interviews with eight students who experience extensive discrimination because of their designation in the caste group labelled Dalit or ‘untouchable’. According to Ovichagan

(2014, 368), a small group of the Dalit community has ‘experienced social mobility’ in recent years and been able to ‘pass’ as non-Dalits as they have been able to take full advantage of development programmes. However, he notes that this group is highly circumscribed, that is, an urban middle-class. Such a group is far removed from those living in rural Nepal as described by Khanal. In this environment, traditional caste-based practices which marginalise Dalit children continue to be practised by teachers. Poverty and a range of social and cultural norms also operate to limit the educational participation of Dalit children. As Khanal demonstrates, these are deeply gendered. It is young girls who bear a disproportionate responsibility for domestic labour and who are discouraged or prohibited from attending school after marriage, which, in many cases, occurs at a very early age. Despite the distinctiveness of the research setting, Khanal’s findings resonate with others in this special issue, in that they reveal the permeability of school/community boundaries in rural settings.

The notion of porous boundaries is a theme taken up by Carol Reid in the following paper. However, in this case, it is the fractured nature of boundaries as they pertain to the local and the global or ‘rural cosmopolitanism’ which is of interest. Perhaps, given stereotypes about the rural as parochial and unsophisticated, ‘rural cosmopolitanism sounds like an oxymoron’ (Johnansen 2008, 1). However, as we have argued above, rural communities are not the unchanging and internally homogenous entities so often promulgated by the media (and sometimes advocated by rural people). Illustrative, Reid argues, is the increasing number of non-white, non-Western multilingual teachers employed in rural Australia. It is a group of eight of these teachers who provide data for the paper. Reid focuses on an extract in which the teachers discuss Indigenous students and an induction programme they attended about Indigeneity prior to their rural posting. In seeking to understand the teachers’ views and experiences, Reid compares the effectiveness of a framework of multiculturalism and one of cosmopolitanism. She argues that it is the latter which holds greater productive force for its emphasis on contingency, fluidity, connectivity and relationality.

In a similar respect to Reid, Erin McHenry-Sorber and Kai A. Schafft explore educational inclusion through a focus on teachers. However, for these authors, it is the rural teachers’ own experiences of exclusion rather than their experiences of student exclusion which is of concern. In a compelling, yet disquieting, narrative, they detail a case study of community–school conflict in a rural area of the USA. The conflict was essentially between the School Board and the Teachers’ Union and

the genesis is a dispute over teacher pay and health care payments. As the conflict seeped into the community, the School Board initiated an active campaign to disparage the teachers positioning them as elitist and entitled. In these classed inscriptions, they constituted a boundary between ‘the community’ and ‘the teachers’. Even if they lived locally and had inter-generational ties to both town and school, teachers were outside of this discursively constructed ‘rural community’. Understandably, the teachers found the outsider status conferred on them very

difficult and responded by deploying their own disparaging discourses which labelled rural people backward and as not valuing education. Infusing both these discourses and those mobilised by the School Board against the teachers were claims to morality. This is thus a complex story of the splintering of a community and the simultaneous redrawing of a community with marked insiders and outsiders. Critically, McHenry-Sorber and Schafft assert that this case study is not unique, but symptomatic of the neoliberal policies that isolate schools from their communities and discount the value of public education.

The broader community lens taken by McHenry-Sorber and Schafft is continued by Sam Hillyard and Carl Bagley in the subsequent paper which focuses on the role played by the English village school in two different rural communities in Durham and

Norfolk. Each community has been significantly transformed in recent years as a

result of factors such as the decline in agriculture, pit closures, in-migration and gentrification. Integral to this transformation has been a shifting of class relations. Of interest to Hillyard and Bagley is exploring these changes as they have mediated experiences of community belonging and cohesion, and further, the role of the school in these processes. They write that while, in the past, the economic dominance of coal mining connected the community in the County Durham village, today, it is the school which acts as a material and symbolic force in generating community. In contrast, in the Norfolk village they studied, the school did not enjoy the same currency. Its location on the periphery of the village and the high turn-over of staff, along with a new and extremely diverse group of immigrants with different orientations to village life, have diminished the role of the school as a community hub. Hillyard and Bagley's analysis usefully reveals that the same institution, that is, the village school, can fulfil very different roles within a community.

In the final paper in this special issue, Tanya Brann-Barrett addresses the meaning of being rural from a personal perspective charting the tensions and opportunities that exist around her dual identities as 'rural resident' and 'rural educational researcher'. Like Hillyard and Bagley, she draws upon Halfacree's (2003) three-fold understanding of rurality as imagined, represented and material to interrogate reflexively her own research practices. Brann-Barrett recognises that highly circumscribed definitions of rurality can often result in exclusions. As such, she details her efforts to utilise methodological approaches which open up the space for nuanced and multi-dimensional understandings of rurality to be shared and validated. Brann-Barrett's reflections will resonate with rural educational researchers, but equally, they will be of interest to rural educational researchers as her methodological strategies could be recalibrated to constitute the type of place-based pedagogy which has been found to be integral to inclusive rural schooling (Budge 2006; Corbett 2007; Azano 2011).



## Conclusion

Some years ago, colleagues of ours at QUT noted that in our home state of Queensland, each evening on Australia's public news service, the Australian Broadcasting

Commission, the weather report would begin with announcements pertaining to the capital city of Brisbane (Grace, Daws, and Lundin 1996).<sup>1</sup> It is a practice that continues today, and one we have seen emulated in reports in other states. It is only after detailing the meteorological conditions of the city that the announcer hurriedly summarises the status of the large parts of the respective states that are outside the urban boundaries. In doing so, they inevitably turn to the camera segueing with: 'And now to elsewhere'. In this special issue, we have focused not only on the 'elsewhere' of these weather reports but also on the norms and assumptions which underpin the positioning of the rural. This includes the everyday practices and beliefs by which centre–periphery norms and ideas are mapped on to rurality and rural inhabitants so that they are not only 'other' but 'sec- ondary' to the rural, and the simultaneous homogenising of rural spaces and people. We have suggested some dimensions by which research on inclusion in rural education can be enlivened and enriched in order to advance the political project of socially just schooling.

## Note

1. This phenomenon was first pointed out to us by colleagues at QUT, namely Margaret Grace, June Lennie, Leonie Daws and Lyn Simpson. In turn, it was a practice that they became aware of from rural women when undertaking innovative research on new information and communication technologies and rural women (see Grace and Lennie 1998; Grace 1997; Daws et al. 2002). They found the metaphor so salient that they used it in the title of the report on their findings (see Grace, Daws and Lundin 1996; Grace and Lennie 2002).

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