

‘New Ground’ in Teacher Education for Rural and Regional Australia: Regenerating Rural Social Space

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Our title refers to TERRAnova – the ‘new ground’ that we are aiming to claim and cultivate in the area of rural teacher education in Australia. Like others in this symposium, we are aiming to understand the role and significance of education in and for rural-regional sustainability, within larger eco-social dynamics of sustainability and change. A socio-ecological approach to sustainability assumes a multiple perspective, and requires us to work with a parallel and simultaneous attention to people and place, time and space, culture and nature, discourse and practice, reality and hope. Using notions of ecosocial change and sustainability (Lemke, 1995), we draw from an overall conceptual framework within which sustainability is expressly understood in terms of the integration of social, economic and environmental (or ecological) imperatives (McKenzie, 2004; Cocklin & Dibden [ed], 2005). Within a general focus on rural schooling, we are particularly concerned with the issue of rural (teacher) education and the practice of sustainable educational (school) communities for rural-regional sustainability more generally.

How to understand the rural as complex social space is the focus of this paper. We explore here the theoretical parameters of TERRAnova as an ARC Discovery Project¹ that aims to describe and theorise successful teacher education strategies (both pre- and in-service) that appear to assist in making rural teaching an attractive, long-term career option for Australian teachers. This objective will be achieved through the identification and analysis of: *a*) key indicators for success in retaining rural primary and secondary teachers in their situations of practice; *b*) successful university interventions aimed at promoting rural teaching; and *c*) successful State-based financial incentive programs aimed at promoting rural teaching. An early challenge for the project team is how to think about rural social space at the present time, and we use this paper to explore a developing conceptual framework that will enable us to think productively about the implications for teaching and teacher education of what characterises and constructs rural social space today.

Drawing on earlier research in this area (Green & Reid, 2004; Green & Letts, 2007; see also the recent work of Donehower, Hogg & Schell, 2007), along with contemporary understandings of space and place (Agnew, 1993; Massey, 2005; Cresswell, 2004), the theories of social practice articulated by Bourdieu (1978, 1992) and de Certeau (1984), and also broad Foucaultian notions of social power and subjectivity, we are starting to work with a framework combining quantitative measurement and more qualitative understandings of rural space. These are based on demographic and other social data that works with constructions of rurality in both *geographic* and *cultural* terms. This supports the development of a theoretical argument for understanding the rural today – and also for coming to know and prepare for teaching in rural communities – in terms of the interrelation of industry, environment and Indigeneity as key definitional aspects of contemporary rural social space.

The Rural Problem in Teacher Education

As teacher education academics working in an inland rural location, and committed to producing graduates from our institution who will want to teach and will teach well in and for rural and remote communities, these issues are central to the practice and research of all members of this research team. And as we have argued elsewhere (Reid & Green, 2003; Green & Reid, 2004), the challenge of providing high-quality education to Australian children in rural and remote locations is both ongoing and significant. In 2003 we argued that “[r]ural Problems’ in education have dogged our nation from before its inception,” noting that over a century ago a “Pastoral and Agricultural” Sub-Committee of the NSW Legislative Council and Assembly, reporting to an inquiry into educational issues in 1904, raised “an important question in regard to the country teacher”. This problem related to the already well-established perception that “frequent changes, with the hope of ultimate appointment to a city school, tend to lessen the teacher’s interest in the education of the rural child. Indeed, it was suggested that the teacher’s own unrest might tend to lessen the rural-mindedness of the children, and to create in them an ill-defined urge towards city life” (NSW Parliament 1904, p. 5; cited in Reid & Green 2003, p. 7).

The report of this 1904 inquiry noted that improvement in the quality and dedication of rural teachers might be achieved through the implementation of:

¹ Rethinking Rural Teacher Education; Sustaining Schooling for Sustainable Futures, ARC Discovery Project 2008-2010.

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

Here in Australia, earlier this month, as newspapers around the nation announced the pumping of \$300 million into local infrastructure projects, so as to “breathe new life into regional cities and country towns” (*The Age*, 18/11/08) by ensuring federal government funding for approved projects for improving the social and community health of rural communities, they also reported that state-school teachers in the largest State system (NSW) had begun a series of strike actions on a number of grounds (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 19/11/08), including that ‘transfer points’ formerly accruing to appointments in ‘hard to staff’ city and rural schools were no longer to be prioritised in staffing decisions. On this same day, our project received advice from the Acting Director of Strategic Services in that system that the conduct of research into the sustainability of rural education was “not in the interests of public education at this time”, and refused us permission to talk to teachers working in rural schools.

While this refusal was not as problematic as it might have been, because of the methodological spread of schools across Australia and our emphasis on community informants as well as teachers, it certainly highlights the fact that the sorts of incentives that systems have been offering teachers to take up positions in rural schools, created for a generation of teachers who began working over a century ago, are indeed out of date. A typical story that illustrates the prevailing attitude towards working in rural schools was provided to the state-teachers’ union members in the following website publicity for the strike action:

Melissa Wyper commenced permanent employment with the Department in 2004. When Melissa Wyper made application to the Department to become a teacher during 2003, she selected a number of 4 and 6 point schools. She did so relying upon representations made by representatives of the Department and in Departmental documents about the benefits of working "hard-to-staff" schools, particularly the capacity to earn transfer points. As a result, Melissa Wyper took up a position at Narrabri High School at the commencement of 2004.

She gave evidence that she would never have left the area in which she grew up if working in Narrabri did not allow her to earn transfer points and increase her opportunity to transfer to a permanent position elsewhere in the state. She accepted the inducement offered by the Department to work at a "hard-to-staff" school. (www.nswtf.org.au/info_centre [accessed 18.11.08])

This account illustrates the way in which many teachers who take up positions in rural and remote schools around Australia see their appointments – as tickets to a ‘better place’, or as an encouragement of ‘out-migration’. The temporary or transient nature of this teacher’s commitment to the children and community of Narrabri is indicated by her statement that she only went there in order to get out; that she was aiming to transfer to a “permanent” position elsewhere. ‘Narrabri’ here assumes the same mythic connotations that ‘Norseman’, ‘Boggabilla’, ‘Xanthus’, ‘Cunnamulla’ and ‘Lightning Ridge’ have achieved in teachers’ war stories over time, and in all States. Naming a particular, usually small and fairly isolated country town like these evokes all the history of ‘the rural problem’ in education. The name is enough: it indicates the notoriety of the town, like the equally notorious place names in the inland suburbs of all metropolitan cities which are also, but differently, ‘hard to staff’. And the sufficiency of just the naming of places as undesirable thereby voices and reproduces the discursive truth that country postings are ‘normally’ impermanent, short-term, temporary, and second-rate. It is in this way that teachers entering rural social spaces such as ‘Narrabri’ do so either reluctantly, because they were given no choice of location in their offer of employment, or perhaps strategically, as in the example provided here, only to enhance their careers.

Producing the rural as problematic

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

the symbolic strategies through which agents aim to impose their vision of the divisions of the social worlds and of their position in that world can be located between two extremes:

the *insult* [...] and the *official naming*, a symbolic act of imposition which has on its side all the strength of the collective, of the consensus, of common sense, because it is performed by a delegated agent of the state, that is, the holder of the *monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence*" (p. 239 original italics).

In the social world of education and schooling, rural schools and communities are clearly both 'insulted' and 'officially named' by the metropolitan majority as deficient, backward, and socially undesirable: denigrated by the reluctance of teachers to work there, and officially classified as 'hard to staff' by the state apparatus. The recent statement by Chris Sarra, who has achieved national prominence through his leadership in turning around a rural school with a high Indigenous population, publicly insulting those teachers and other professionals who stay committed to rural and remote schools with high Aboriginal populations as 'white trash' unable to meet the standards required anywhere else but in the country (*The Australian*, 15/11/08), is an extreme example of this sort of symbolic violence that 'insults' professionals in rural locations, and (re)produces the idea that those who work in city schools and professions are somehow 'better' than those who 'can't'.

The violence done to these schools and their communities, while clearly symbolic in linguistic-political terms, nevertheless shapes the social field, in Bourdieu's sense, and is realised in the habitus of students who attend rural schools. When the greeting that new teachers arriving in rural schools more often than not receive from their students is: "How long will you be here for, Miss?", they are encountering student retaliation against the symbolic violence they have experienced again and again as their teachers depart. Yet this student challenge paradoxically reinforces *their* lack of symbolic capital – it positions *them* as the supplicants, and the losers in discourses of rural poverty and failure. They are the ones who can't escape – and who 'won't, don't and can't learn' from the teachers sent to bring them the educational and cultural capital that the metro-centre holds valuable. The regularity of reports of this experience in the present day, aligned with the concern voiced by the NSW state government in 1904 that "the hope of ultimate appointment to a city school, tend[s] to lessen the teacher's interest in the education of the rural child," as noted above, clearly explicates how this situation has reproduced itself over time.

The generalised expectation that many rural children and their families have developed from the typically rapid turnover of staff in (many) rural schools, that there is a lack of teacherly interest in their education, was again recently reported in an account of an event that took place during the implementation of a new incentive scheme to attract teachers rural schools. As Aboriginal children in a town even further west than Narrabri lined up to farewell a group of visiting student-teachers taking part in a scheme that encourages pre-service teachers to visit rural schools as part of their undergraduate programs, a child called: "See you when you don't come back" (White & Reid, 2008). Her words provide a clear and cynical challenge to the student-teachers' espoused sense of commitment to schools and their new profession: they demonstrate what we see as reactive symbolic violence, evidence of a history of a dialogic dance of disinterest in rural schooling that does not commit to the particularities of place. From this child's point of view, teachers have never been interested in teaching in her town, and she has in turn become disheartened, discouraged and disinterested in learning from them. The issue for the sustainability of her community, of course, is that, without the capacities that education can provide her, she will be unable to support its continued health and success.

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

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

the rural ‘problem’ in education is essential for sustaining and enhancing the diversity of rural communities. As Bourdieu has argued, in relation to social space:

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

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

Rethinking the rural

Conceptualising the TERRAnova study in this way has taken us to a framework that attempts to go beyond received definitions and understandings of the rural, by combining quantitative measurement and attendant definitions of rural space based on demographic and other social data, with constructions of rurality in both geographic and cultural terms. We work from the following:

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

This is a useful formulation because it brings together a quantitative, statistical perspective with that of cultural geography. In so doing, it allows us to work with a particular notion of *space*, one that combines the empirical and the metaphorical, and to foreground socio-spatial considerations in thinking about the challenges associated with rural teaching and rural (teacher) education.

We are asking about the sorts of attributes and capacities that teachers need to have if they are to contribute in this way, as more often than not ‘newcomers’ to rural places – about the forms of capital they need to be able to invest to produce a return on their teaching in a rural place. We are working with the hypothesis that teacher education needs to produce a teacher with certain forms of *social* capital, as well as the symbolic educational and cultural capital that is their warrant to be there. As Bourdieu writes, about the importance of social capital:

At the risk of feeling themselves out of place, individuals who move into a new space must fulfil the conditions that that space tacitly requires of its occupants. This may be the possession of a certain cultural capital, the lack of which can prevent the real appropriation of supposedly public goods or even the intention of appropriating them. [...] One has the Paris that goes with one’s economic capital, and also with one’s cultural and social capital [...]. Certain spaces, and in particular the most closed and most ‘select’, require not only economic and cultural capital, but social capital as well (Bourdieu 1999, pp. 128-9).

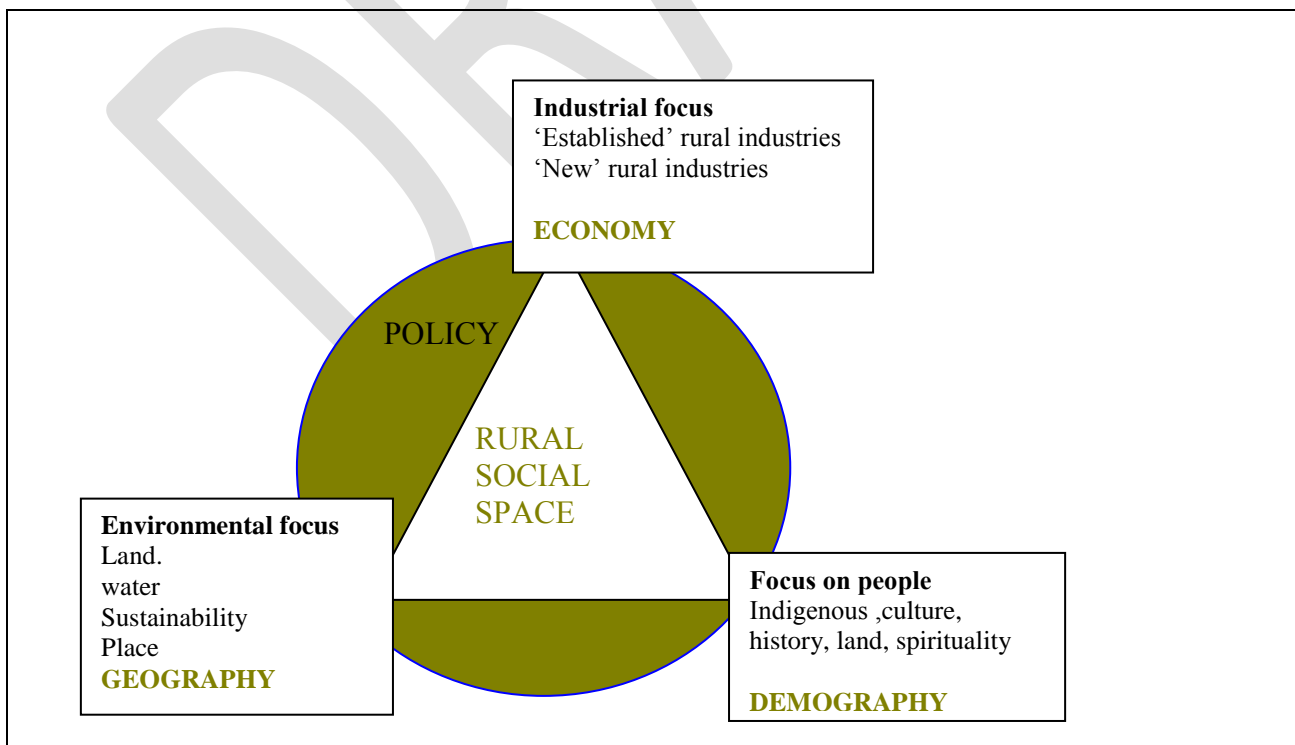
His evocative notion of “having the Paris that goes with one’s capital” is significant for our work here. While this might be simplistically and obviously understood as ‘You get what you pay for’, or ‘You don’t know what you don’t know’, the evocation of a classed distinction as applied to place, here, brings the notion of social capital out of the cities and into the Bush. The experience of rural life and teaching that is available to an eco-socially aware teacher, one with an ingrained (i.e. learned) sense of rural places and people, their history and complexity, their problems and their potential, the activities and industry that exist in them, and of the issues of sustainability with which they are dealing, are all forms of knowledge on which teachers can capitalise. Our responsibility, as teacher educators, and teacher education researchers in this regard, is to be effective as a force for rural sustainability by providing student teachers with access to the capital that can provide a successful return for investment in rural social space.

Rural Social space

As we strive to understand what keeps people in rural communities, and the nature of the strongest forms of knowledge that can serve as capital for rural teaching, we are developing a theoretical argument for understanding rurality today – and for coming to know and prepare for teaching in rural communities. As we have noted above, this is emerging for us in terms of the interrelation of three key factors: Industry, Environment and Indigeneity, which we see as connected both in practice and in place. It is the *practice* of place that provides and produces social space. The way in which these factors interact and interrelate suggests that there may be ways for rural social space to be rethought and represented so that we do not produce symbolic deficit and cultural cringe. This is the ‘new ground’ we are theorising, in terms of our project. In this section we present three scenarios that illustrate the nature of relationships between and among these factors, in order to demonstrate how these constitute rural social space in ways that can be understood, and demystified, for teachers and students moving into it for the first time. The case studies are used to exemplify the complex inter-relationship of environment, industry and Indigenous matters in helping us to understand rural social space as it is produced, again and again, across Australia.

As Painter (2000, p. 257) notes, “[i]f society and space are understood as co-constituting then fields are socio-spatial (and socio-temporal) phenomena, opening up the potential of a more thoroughly spatialized theory of practice”. It is this notion of rural social space as ‘practiced place’ that we have attempted to represent in the model below. Here, we postulate rural social space as the set of relationships, actions and meanings that are produced in and through the daily practice of rural people in a particular place and time. As modelled here, rural social space is situated within and encompassed by a network of government policy relating to and governing the practice of each of these elements in place. Systematic governmental policy actions aimed to strategically manage rural ‘problems’ related to rural environments, economies and industries, and Indigenous issues can be understood as an indication of the significance of the rural to the sustainability of the nation as a whole. It is important to note that, as a theoretical model rather than a description of empirical reality, the depiction of rural social space here is a normative one, aimed to indicate what is arguably desirable in constituting rural social space. We argue that for concepts of rural social space to be adequately realised, issues of *place* (of the environment and its health as a sustainable grounding for social activity) need to be connected to issues of the *economy* (of rural industry and its effects on the environment and social relationships). And, if social sustainability is to be achieved, these both need to be related to issues of *Indigeneity*, of Indigenous histories of dispossession tied to both industry and environment, and Indigenous presence in the social practice of rural communities.

Fig. 1. Rural social space

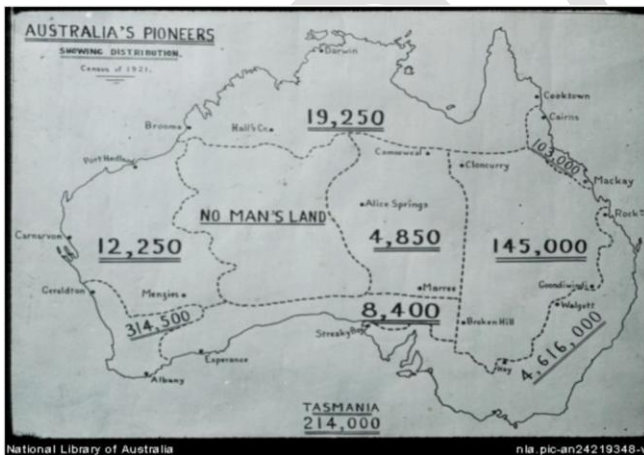


Rural social space, by definition, then, is not a generalised or universal concept – it is an event, a performance, a practice, precisely in the Bourdieuan sense of an interaction of field and habitus, which produces and reproduces itself in accordance with the capitals that define it. Just as we have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

Indigeneity-Environment-Industry

Part of the understanding necessary for this rethinking may have been impossible, historically, until the present time, when Australia is finally able to look at itself as a ‘sorry nation’ in relation to social space in general, and rural social space in particular. In reminding us that we “must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us”, Soja (1989, p. 6) notes that “relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life”, and further, that “human geographies become filled with politics and ideology”. This is particularly the case in rural areas in relation to Indigenous people and place, and their interrelationships with non-Indigenous people, industry and the environment as key aspects of rural social space. Traditional Indigenous cultures have a strong social, symbolic and spiritual relationship to land, which means that a (post)colonial history of settlement and industry has effected far more than symbolic violence to their culture and capital as original inhabitants of the country. For many years in our history, this was both unseen and unspoken – the ‘unsayable’ in discourses of colonial power, rights, and Terra Nullius.

To illustrate this point, we have used cartographic representations to show how the geographic narratives that are involved in mapping a place (de Certeau, 1984) help it become a particular kind of social space. A map of the Australian population distribution at the present time, for instance, indicates that the nation’s population is concentrated around the coastline, with the vast majority of Australians located in the urban capital regions and satellite towns. Such a representation of space can be seen to ‘hide’ much of the social consequences of that space, in Soja’s terms. These consequences are much more obvious in demographic maps of Australia eighty years earlier, read from the ‘sorry’ social positions of Australians today.



While this map of population distribution in 1921 tells a very similar story to that told by the current map, with the vast majority of the ‘pioneer’ population (over 4 million) concentrated in the coastal south east and hinterland, and only about 200,000 in the whole of the rest of the continent, its meanings are different. What is significant, in this map, is the labelling of the vast area of central west Australia as “No Man’s Land” – with no recorded population at all. This indicates that, while these maps are of the same place, they tell the story of two very different social spaces, simply because of the social and discursive norms of that time that positioned Indigenous Australians as ‘fauna’ rather than people.

The consequences of this, of course, though unseen at that time, remain strongly embedded in the social and cultural practice of rural places today. When people grow up in towns where the Mission is still ‘home’ to Indigenous Australians, out beyond the dump and the highway, where signs proclaim alcohol bans in the green-grassed streets around the centre of town, where the few big stone and brick houses have paint, and lawns and sprinklers, and quickly give way to the tussocks and dusty red earth of the wooden homes in less wealthy streets, social relations are practised in those places in particular ways. And when the shops in town are shuttered and grilled, with no windows to invite breaking, and no display of goods and wares for sale to stir the possibility of something other than what is provided, the symbolic meanings of these social practices produce these towns as places which form the habitus of the children and adults who live there, as unconscious, embedded dispositions and attitudes, in Bourdieu’s (1978) sense.

Environment-Industry-Indigeneity

Yet as we depict in the model above, such aspects of rural social space are not definitive; rather, they are *relational*. In our focus on Indigeneity above, for instance, we have highlighted the results of a history that emerged simultaneously with the development of industry in rural places – as settlers entered rural places to farm, or herd sheep and cattle for wool and meat, and Australians benefited from all the accrued value that primary industry had for the wealth of the nation. And as they claimed, tamed, mined and managed the land to the best of their ability – their capacities produced in from the habitus of other land, other climates, other conditions – they did not draw on what were, to them, alien knowledge and practices of custodianship of country that the Indigenous peoples had successfully practised for centuries. There was all too often disrespect for Indigenous ways of living from the land shown by the original settlers, and subsequent generations of farmers in response to the inadequacy of subsistence methods to deal with the demands of development and modernity. The temptation to over-graze, over-fertilise, over-irrigate, over-use and undermine the land for profit and progress, though, has resulted in huge problems of land salination, water shortage and the degradation of vast areas of inland Australia.

These, coupled with the global effects of the chemical outputs and residues from industry, itself powered by the products of the mining industry, make the links between concerns for rural environmental, Indigeneity and rural industry very clear in this sense – although these links are far more subtly made in terms of the social space that is produced in their interrelation.

Industry-Indigeneity-Environment

Within a focus on industry in rural places, we include both established industrial endeavours such as farming, mining, fishing, and the railway, and new forms of these industries as well as others that are newly emerging, such as eco-tourism. For those young Australians who have recently relocated to Tom Price or Shay Gap or Mt Isa, or wherever, in order to earn big money working in the mining industry, something that is currently bringing great wealth to the owners of the land and infrastructure in these places, the social space produced in these communities is quite different from that which existed before the most recent boom. With industry providing salaries and conditions that allow mine workers to fly back to the city each weekend, and which have encouraged huge increases in the costs of housing, food and entertainment in these towns during the rest of the week, social change has been rapid. The wealth from these mines and other industry does not stay in town, any more than the workers do – and this is quite different from the older, established mines and industries, and also from the civic development that came with the wheat and the railway and the gold and silver mines in rural locations over the last two centuries. Recommendations from mining town councillors nowadays to import labour from Indonesia and other parts of south-east Asia, in order to provide the lower paid services that the towns need to sustain themselves as habitable, have been met by resistance from Indigenous groups, who represent members of these communities who remain unemployed in spite of the boom – the wealth around them producing their poverty and disadvantage far more extremely than previously. Similar stories are told in the orchards where farmers cannot find seasonal workers to pick their fruit, and call for guest workers to enter the country for these jobs, while local Aborigines remain unemployed (*The Australian* August 19 2008). In some places there is little chance that Indigenous workers will be employed in the mines, or in the orchards alongside other workers, because of the nature of the social space that has been produced there, over time, and through social practice. In other places it is quite different.

Knowing one's place in rural social space

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

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

In relation to this, it is important to remember that, while for many years teachers in the mining towns of rural WA and Queensland and New South Wales have worked with (and against) the effects of full employment for young males on the attitude and interest in academic programs on offer in the schools, where the sons of the miners and carriers and repairmen know there is little benefit for them in book learning, these teachers have never taught the children of the owners and managers. They are educated elsewhere, in other places. This distinction in relation to the rural social space of this community – that it is appropriate for the education needs of some but not others, that it is a work space for some but a life space for others – is rarely questioned. For the children of the mining engineers and managers, like those of the property owners and farmers in other places, there is significant symbolic capital accruing to this educational difference. For some, the capital accumulated by going away to school is understood as worth far

more than what can be accumulated by attending in the local state high school – and, as we have argued above, when this sort of capital is introduced to the field of rural social space it represents a form of symbolic violence against local, ‘lesser’ forms of education.

To move this argument forward, and to explicate the work that we see TERRAnova doing in relation to the idea of preparing student teachers for participation in rural social space, we turn now to briefly outline the research itself. We are seeking to describe and theorise successful teacher education strategies that appear to assist in making rural teaching an attractive, long-term career option for Australian teachers. There are three stages to the study. Firstly, we want to understand what student teachers who participate in University-based and State/system-based rural incentive programmes see as the costs and benefits they received from these experiences. This focuses on planned attention to rural teaching through pre-service curriculum and practicum experience in a range of forms. Secondly, we want to understand what works to sustain those student teachers who take up an employer’s financial incentive to undertake a rural practicum placement or internship, and convinces them to apply for and remain in rural schools – or not. Volunteer students will be interviewed over their first three years after graduation to allow us longitudinal access to their experiences and their reflections. Finally, we want to speak back, symbolically, to the violence that is done to rural schools in popular images of them as ‘hard to staff’ and ‘easy to leave’.

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

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

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

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

Coming to know one’s place

For this reason, it is essential that pre-service teacher education does more than help student teachers to ‘go and see’. As Bourdieu reminds us, “[b]reaking with misleading appearances and with the errors inscribed in substantialist thought about place” can only be achieved “through a rigorous analysis of the relations between the structures of social space and those of physical space” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 123). This is what we see as a key role for teacher

education, one that recognises and works with an assumption of diversity and difference within and across rural social space (Green et al., 2008).

For student teachers, 'coming to know' about particular places, and about ways of researching and finding out about the place where one is appointed as a teacher, is essential both in terms of ensuring the relevance and connectedness of the curriculum that will be designed and for the pedagogy that teachers plan to use with their students. We have noted elsewhere (Green et al., 2008; White & Reid, 2008) the importance of understandings and activities that are 'place based' in this regard and we acknowledge the importance of 'place-based education' in teacher education more generally (Miles, 2008). But the accumulation of educational capital that will assist new teachers to 'come to know' a place goes beyond this professional academic interest. It is also a key part of ensuring that they can gain access to knowledge and understanding that will enable them to find a place in the social geography of the place, and find their commitment to their professional participation as workers and residents sustainable. It is this other, the reference to the reality of the everyday life that is 'there' rather than 'elsewhere', that we believe is missing from the teacher education in general, as a result of our failure, to date, to conceive of notions such as rural social space as important, and to work with them as necessary for rural-regional sustainability as an intergenerational concept.

Coming to know a place means valuing the forms of social and symbolic capital that exist there, rather than elsewhere. It means using the resources of the people who know. For instance, when a student teacher interviewed as part of the TERRAnova project discussed how she was able to use her knowledge of one rural town, where she had grown up, to help her come to know and find a place in another, to which she was appointed for her final internship, she highlighted situated knowledge which resides in her as habitus, but that can be analysed in terms of physical and social space. She drew on her embodied knowledge that the teachers in her town were transient, and that the people in her town only very rarely socialised and interacted with them. She reasoned that the teachers in the new town, therefore, were not likely to be the people most useful for her to connect with if she wanted to know the community beyond the school. She had learned that the teachers only knew themselves, effectively, and she wanted more than that. She noted that, as she was going to be spending five weeks in the town, she wanted to enjoy herself while she was there. She decided to use a strategy of 'phoning ahead' to the Post Office, local church or supermarket to see if they could put some feelers out to find a place for her to board.

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

Conclusion

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

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

Taking education for granted is the prerogative of those with the social and economic capital that few in rural places can accumulate. Our socio-ecological approach to sustainability assumes a multiple perspective that does not privilege the knowledge and symbolic capital of the metropolitan centre. Instead, it allows us to voice and privilege, and in turn learn from, systematic attention to the people and places that produce alternate and different forms of (rural) social space.

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