VALUING RURAL MEANINGS: THE WORK OF PARENT SUPERVISORS CHALLENGING DOMINANT EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the idea that rurality is important in children's learning even though it is in conflict with dominant educational discourses. Crucial to identifying this was the use of research methods that focused on rural meanings. In this paper we report on an ethnographic study that explored the experiences of parent supervisors of primary school distance education students. The parent supervisors identified that they chose distance education because it enables them to live their rural lifestyle, which in turn reflects the worldview they aim to bring their children up in. However, the schooling they receive values a different, metropolitan-cosmopolitan worldview (Roberts, 2014). In semi-structured interviews parent supervisors described how they would initially focus on conforming to the expectations of schooling, before then realising this was problematic for their students. They would then instead focus on doing what worked for them, which were actions based on their rural ways of being. Ethnography as an approach enabled this research to focus on rural meanings, which identified that parent supervisors work hard to ensure rural perspectives are included when they teach their children because they know this is necessary to meet their children's learning needs. This leads to an important message for school authorities: rurality does matter in education, and education is not confined to the criteria set by school authorities. Importantly, the situated perspective that is implicit in the actions of parent supervisors indicates that adopting a place-conscious (Gruenewald, 2003) approach to schooling would help to sustain rural lifeworlds.

Keywords: parent supervisors, distance education, rural meanings, place conscious approaches

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we argue that rurality is an important reference point in the lives of rural children, and therefore needs greater consideration in the practices of schooling. We argue that this suggestion may well be in conflict with dominant educational discourses, as modern schooling tends to value a more metropolitan-cosmopolitan worldview (Roberts, 2014a). This can be seen to marginalise the rural (Roberts, 2014a) and encourage students to leave rural areas (Corbett, 2007). Such an education is, we suggest, unethical and unjust when considered in light of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This Convention states that children have the right to

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access a school education that begins with their needs, and respects and encourages the development of their culture and identity (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990). In a rural context we interpret this to imply respecting and considering their rurality in schooling. Using the example of the experiences of parent supervisors of primary school distance education school students, we draw on these perspectives to advance arguments about the place of rural meanings in schooling. In focusing on rural meanings, we build on the work of Green, Noone and Nolan (2013; Green, 2006) who argue that rural place influences the experiences of supervisors in distance education.

Parent supervisors are an integral part of distance education schooling, a mode of schooling that allows students in isolated areas to access schooling without leaving their own home. In distance education schooling, students communicate with teachers who are located at a regional centre. These teachers send the students school lessons to complete in their home (Lopes, O'Donoghue, & O'Neill, 2011). Without the physical presence of a qualified teacher, each student needs another adult to assist with their schooling on a daily basis. School authorities have labelled this adult a 'supervisor' in distance education schooling (New South Wales Department of Education and Communities Rural and Distance Education Unit, 2011). Supervisors are required to undertake significant teaching tasks (Downes, 2013; Green, 2006; Tomlinson, Coulter, & Peacock, 1985) and in most cases, the supervisor is one of the child's parents, usually their mother (Alston & Kent, 2008; Fitzpatrick, 1982; Tynan & O'Neill, 2007). In this paper we have used the term 'parent supervisors' to describe these parents. It is this structure that makes distance education different to home schooling, where the students' lessons are designed and overseen by their parents only, not a qualified teacher who is employed by an education authority.

To surface these perspectives and issues in the experiences of parent supervisors, the study referred to needed to take a different methodological approach to previous studies, one that put rural meanings at the forefront as something to be valued rather than a deficit to be overcome (Roberts & Green, 2013). In taking this approach, we draw on a growing body of work around the importance of research, and research methods that value the rural (see for example White & Corbett, 2014). By recognising the interconnection between methods, orientation and subject, the influences of rural meanings were able to be surfaced in this study (Roberts, 2014b).

We will now introduce what we mean by rural meaning and describe how the rural is positioned and represented in schooling to explore these issues. This will then be followed by an explanation of why taking a different approach to previous research was essential to identify the importance of rural meanings. We will then illustrate these issues using the example of the experiences of parent supervisors of primary school distance education students.

RURAL MEANINGS

By the phrase 'rural meanings' we are gesturing towards knowledges grounded in an understanding of rural life worlds as opposed to meanings rooted in a more metropolitan-cosmopolitan worldview. This form of knowledge is inevitably situated and emanates from a rural standpoint (Roberts, 2014b). This is not to suggest that one is more important or more valuable than the other, rather it is to suggest that different knowledges exist and that to be effective, schooling needs to work with that which is familiar to students. Here we reference the central tenant of student engagement that learning, and good teaching, begins with where students are in their learning journey and with examples that are known to students (see for example Boomer, 1992; Bruner, 1960; Dewey, 1938). The aim here is not to move towards any form of cultural or educational relativism, instead we are talking about the starting point of educational instruction. Though we do so in the context of the broader concern, that education may indeed work against the interests and needs of rural communities (Corbett, 2007; Roberts, 2013; Roberts & Downes, in press). More generally we recognise that education should take students beyond their known world and give them broader experiences and opportunities; however we would suggest it is unethical for schooling to actively de-value or undermine children's life worlds.

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Equally we do not mean that schooling should reinforce that lifestyle akin to stasis but that it should enable it to maintain a place in the students' life, for to deny it is to deny the student their history and arguably culture.

The difficulty arises in defining what rural meanings are due to the multiplicity of meanings of the rural (Roberts & Green, 2013). As such we suggest that describing rural meanings is one of the ongoing avenues of rural educational research. Our aim here is to begin such a discussion. To do so we turn to definitions of the rural and rural social space as broad markers of what such meanings may relate to. However, as Cloke (2006) argues, there are many competing definitions of the rural, many of which differ in terms of geographic determinations, economic basis, or cultural definitions. The rural is inherently spatial (Halfacree, 2006) such *that [t]he idea of rurality seems to be firmly entrenched in popular discourse about space, place and society in the Western world* (Cloke, 2006, p. 18). As a spatial concept, and with reference to notions of place, the rural can be seen as a socially constructed space with competing and layered conceptions of its meaning and value (Cloke, 2006). Whilst certain physical characteristics can be described as relevant to scale, for example topography, others such as location are relative to other locations and therefore do not exist independently. Complicating matters further is the social construction of space and place and that meanings are relative to experience and perception.

Describing just what is rural and what rural itself means is a central pre-occupation of rural studies (Woods, 2011), and something that remains an ongoing topic of debate and discussion. Recognising this complexity, models representing the rural advanced in the rural social sciences tend to be multidimensional. For example, Halfacree (2006) puts forward a three-fold model of rural space, consisting of: rural locality (inscribed through practices of production and consumption), formal representations of the rural (particularly how it is framed in capitalist consumption) and, everyday lives of the rural (with reference to culture). Alternatively Cloke (2006) proposes three theoretical frames for understanding the rural: functional (land use and life linked to land), political-economic (social production) and, social (culture and values). Moving to what they term a generative theory of rurality Balfour, Mitchell and Molestone (2008) suggest rurality as: context, forces (space, place and time), agencies (movement, systems, will) and resources (situated, material and psychosocial). Notably each of these three approaches implies some quantifiable dimension, but rests upon predominantly socially constructed values.

This complexity is also reflected in studies concerned with matters pertaining to education in rural areas. For example in the context of a study of rural literacies Donehower, Hogg and Schell (2007) suggest a threefold model involving quantitative (statistics on population and region), geographic (regions, areas, spaces or places) and cultural (interaction of people, groups and communities) elements. As they argue, and Green and Corbett (2013) endorse: *It is important to define rural not only demographically and geographically but culturally as well* (Donehower et al., 2007, p. 9). Focusing upon the social side of an already identified rural space, Reid et al. (2010) highlight the elements of rural social space in a model that draws upon: demography (population, culture, people), economy (work, industry, production, and geography (environment, place) as key considerations for policy. Finally, looking at how these may come together in relation to defining rural communities, Howley and Howley (2010) propose three rural community types: durable agrarian (sustainable rural industries), resource extraction (mining, logging) and, suburbanizing (becoming other than rural).

We highlight these multiple models to emphasise the point that defining the rural, and then by association rural meanings, is inherently complex and contested. Given the plurality of places there is always the risk of stereotyped characterisations, or perhaps more likely an impulse to disengage with the complexity and treat all places the same. For our purposes here in suggesting the existence of rural meanings we note that each of the models contain elements of land, cultures linked to land and place, and particular social relations. We contend that, drawing upon ideas of situated knowledge's or a rural standpoint (Roberts, 2014) this produces different relationships with knowledge. There is then a *connection between textual practices and life*

practices (Green & Corbett, 2013, p.4) that have a unique quality in rural places. If, and if so, how, schooling engages with these, is our concern here.

SCHOOLING AND RURALITY

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to access a school education that begins with their needs and respects and encourages the development of their culture and identity (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990). For children in rural areas, this means receiving an education that considers and values their rurality. Rurality is, as discussed above, a complex socio-cultural construction that forms part of a person's identity and influences the way they see the world. Parent supervisors, and arguably rural people more generally, make meanings from enacting the interconnection between social, economic, and geographic features of their place. For example, a decision to live in a rural location may be a choice that is linked to the use of the land for farming, business purposes and a life related to these. In turn, this influences economic factors because it is necessary to engage in work that comes with their rural way of life. Some work, such as calving, harvesting and shearing, have cycles that need to be attended to immediately (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000). This rural way of life brings particular meanings and ways of being and doing, or, what we describe as 'rural meanings'.

Schooling in rural and remote areas is often perceived to be deficient and problematic in comparison to metropolitan areas (Reid et al., 2010) due to concerns about access to education (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000), and access to education that meets the students' needs (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000). For reasons such as these, rural schooling is considered to be an area of ongoing concern (Green, 2008). However, Roberts and Green (2013) argue that in schooling, views such as these are because the rural is compared to imagined metropolitan-cosmopolitan standards. Furthermore schooling can be argued to privilege more metropolitan-cosmopolitan values that marginalise rural ways of being (Roberts, 2014a). Cosmopolitan values, in symbolic terms, refer to an outlook that focuses on economic advancement, competition, and mobility in a globalised world (Corbett, 2010; Popkewitz, 2008). The metropolitan-cosmopolitan values are evident for example, in the Melbourne Declaration National Goals for Schooling, where it identifies school education to be a way of equipping children to live and compete in a global economy (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008), and the curriculum that is taught, as it lacks relevance to rural students (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000). This orientation to equipping students with the knowledge and skills to live and work in the global world (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008) is problematic for rural students and families, as parents want their children to succeed at schooling. However, as Corbett (2007) identified, this perspective invariably means students must learn to leave rural areas, either physically or mentally, to conform to the values of modern schooling to achieve success.

Situating distance education within the context of rural schooling, perhaps unsurprisingly then, Green et al. (2013) identified that the skills of supervisors have mostly been seen as deficient, with most research failing to value their knowledge and experience. They suggest that to understand the supervisors' experiences, there is a need to focus on how place, including the supervisors' interactions, actions and relationships in and out of the schoolroom, influence them in the schoolroom (Green et al., 2013). Supervisors themselves have also described feelings of inadequacy, uncertainty and confusion in their role as supervisor (Green, 2006; Lee & Wilks, 2007; Taylor & Tomlinson, 1985). Rurality it seems, would logically be a part of the identity of these supervisors, and therefore influences their priorities and actions in their role. To explore this, the study referred to need to explicitly value rurality.

FOCUSING ON THE RURAL IN RESEARCH

This paper is informed by the perspective that rural research should be conducted from a rural standpoint and focus upon the particularities and subjectivities of rural places (Roberts, 2014b). This is in contradistinction to most research methods employed in education that have a metropolitan bias that positions the rural as deficit instead of viewing it as different (White & Corbett, 2014). This perspective would seem to explain the conclusions of most previous work on the role of supervisors that have found the skills of supervisors to be deficient (Green et al., 2013). We would argue that the methodological orientation of putting schooling practices at the centre rather than rural meanings have influenced the studies and conclusions such as this. When rurality has been considered in these studies (for a review of these studies please see Downes, 2013) it has been as a marker of location for the experiences of supervisors. That is they have not actively considered the complexities that rurality encompasses (Howley & Howley, 2014) or how rurality influences our understanding of issues (Roberts, 2014b).

Viewing rurality in this way is not surprising as recognising and valuing rural meanings is difficult to do, and consequently, this is often missing from rural research (Roberts & Green, 2013). By only viewing rurality as a location, these studies were only able to identify clashes between the expectations of schooling and what supervisors can achieve (Alston & Kent, 2008; Lee & Wilks, 2006; Taylor & Tomlinson, 1985; Tomlinson et al., 1985), not the way in which parent supervisors are influenced by rural meanings. As these studies just described rurality as a structural feature without recognising what it means to the parent supervisors (Stehlik, 2001), this made rurality meaningless to the research (Howley, Theobald, & Howley, 2005).

When rurality is considered in a meaningful way, both as part of the parent supervisors' identities and as an influence upon their worldview, it is a cultural factor (Howley & Howley, 2014). Given this cultural meaning, an ethnographic approach was appropriate in order to focus on insights into the interpretations and experiences of the parent supervisors who live in rural communities in this study. Ethnographic studies describe culture-sharing groups of people (Johnson & Christenson, 2012), and focus on their shared patterns of behaviour, practices, attitudes, values, and understandings (Creswell, 2005). Ethnography enabled this research to focus on the practical, day-to-day experiences of parent supervisors, *and* importantly, rural meanings, which gave insight into the influence of rural meanings in the work of parent supervisors.

METHOD

In the ethnographic study, parent supervisors participated in semi-structured interviews using Skype VoIP calling. Potential participants were contacted and invited to participate with the assistance of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of New South Wales (ICPA), a key support network for parents living in isolated regions of the state. An invitation to participate was sent to members of the ICPA, and all ten supervisors who volunteered were interviewed. The supervisors who were interviewed were from three different distance education schools in New South Wales.

Supervisors were given a copy of the interview guide prior to the interviews to allow them time to reflect on their experiences. In the interviews, supervisors were asked questions that focused on gaining descriptions of their day-to-day practices in their role. Semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility for participants to focus on what they felt was important (Tierney & Dilley, 2001), and describe their experiences from their own perspective (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Corbetta, 2003). The supervisors were able to end their interview when they felt they had nothing more to add, with the interviews lasting for approximately one hour each. The interviews were transcribed, with participants confirming and validating their transcript prior to the analysis. The transcripts were first manually coded using a three step data coding framework of open coding, axial coding and selective coding from a grounded theory approach to data analysis (Ezzy, 2002; Grbich, 2007). Transcripts were then analysed using the data analysis

program Leximancer (University of Queensland, 2005) to verify the manual analysis. The research was conducted with the approval of the University of Canberra Human Research Ethics Committee.

FINDINGS: CONFLICTING PERSPECTIVES

By focusing on rural meanings in the experiences of supervisors it became evident that the supervisors valued rural meanings and believed it was important to engage with them to meet their students' needs. However, they were also acutely aware that these were in conflict with the dominant values of schooling and consequently felt a sense of guilt and/or subversion. A typical description of this conflict was that supervisors would recount first doing what they believed was expected of them in terms of the values (and related expectations) of schooling, only to have their students and family more generally struggle with its relevance and meaning. They would then proceed to explain, somewhat hesitantly, what actually worked for them, with this being actions that incorporated rural meanings. Within the context of this overarching conflict, in the following sections we will explore these dilemmas in greater detail.

The Expectations of Schooling

In distance education schooling, the school teachers send the supervisors scripted lessons with a timeline for them to be completed with their students. These lessons are scripted so that supervisors are able to '…read straight from the book to the kids' (Sarah) while completing lessons. It is expected that students are 'at' school during the same hours face-to-face school students are at school, and have access to a learning space like a classroom (Dubbo School of Distance Education, 2012). Implicit in these expectations is the assumption that schooling for students in distance education schools must occur in exactly the same manner it does for students in face-to-face schools. Location is not seen to influence the nature of schooling that is provided, and all schools and students are seen to have the same needs (Green & Letts, 2007).

In structuring schooling this way, the school controlled how, when, and what, the students learnt. When the supervisors were starting out in their role they recalled essentially doing what was expected of them by the school to maximise school success. They completed the lessons as the teachers scripted them, focused on meeting the expected timetable of completion, and to do so, prioritised schooling over other responsibilities they had such as farm work. For instance, Heidi described how she felt that:

> …being a parent I know that my kids can count, but do I know that so not push that? I find it very important for the kids to record and let the teacher be aware of where they're at so that the teachers can then keep the child at their appropriate level.

Heidi's example illustrates that the scripted lessons are not set with the students' needs in mind. Instead, they are set with the aim of keeping students occupied in the schoolroom for six hours a day, five days a week, and the expectation to demonstrate certain knowledge and skills in a certain way. The supervisors felt conforming to these expectations was important so that their students were not perceived to be disadvantaged because they undertook their schooling by distance education. Here the supervisors are being influenced by a general perception that rural schools are problematic and disadvantaged (Reid et al., 2010).

Issues with Conforming to the Expectations of Schooling

Although the supervisors tried to conform to the expectations of schooling they experienced difficulties and found it was problematic for them and their students. Schooling as they were expected to embrace it was not meeting the needs of their students or allowing them to engage with the rural way of life that they valued.

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The supervisors felt the lesson scripts were difficult to implement with their students because '…the methods outlined don't really work' (Naomi). Many of the supervisors reported that their students complained about the amount of written lesson materials, the repetitive nature of the lessons, the requirement to be sedate during lessons, and the content of the lessons because it was not relevant to them. Emma described how she felt that by following the lesson scripts exactly as they were scripted she … put my eldest son off school work because I was too strict on that.

Initially when their students resisted these lessons, the supervisors felt …there's something wrong with me, or there's something wrong with my kid, we're not getting all this work done (Helen). However, it is more likely that it was not the supervisors at all, instead it was that some of the scripted lessons just were not suitable for the students' isolated rural setting. For example, one supervisor described how:

> … you get booklets and they're clearly not appropriate for DE, they ask you to go down to the shops and ask people this and that, or do interviews, or ask your friends what they're having for recess (Helen).

These were all tasks the students were unable to do. The teachers did not consider the students' isolated rural setting when preparing the lessons.

The expectation that supervisors would spend six hours a day in their home school also clashed with the supervisors' rural way of life (Alston & Kent, 2008; Taylor & Tomlinson, 1985; Tynan & O'Neill, 2007). Part of rural life is immediately attending to work responsibilities and duties such as harvesting, calving, and shearing that are unpredictable in nature (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000). Regardless of their supervisory role, the supervisors still had to assist with farming and work responsibilities as they arose. As an example, Heidi described how:

> …[the school day] can be broken up by 'can you come and pick me up from the back sheep yards' or 'I'm bogged can you come and pull me out' or 'I just need a hand to draft some sheep'…there are times when we just have to drop everything and go out in the paddock and do whatever.

Consequently, the supervisors experienced tensions between the expectations of home and school (Alston & Kent, 2008; Taylor & Tomlinson, 1985; Tynan & O'Neill, 2007) as school authorities expected the supervisors and their students to prioritise their schooling. This is evident it being an enrolment condition that supervisors are available at all times to assist with their students' schooling (New South Wales Department of Education and Communities Rural and Distance Education Unit, 2011).

This tension also extended to their home responsibilities, where supervisors also had to attend to younger children and complete daily household chores. Before beginning distance education schooling, the supervisors' homes were where their everyday life took place. Their homes involved family relationships, recreational activities, work and household responsibilities. This is similar to the broader meaning 'home' has in schooling, where it recognises students' interactions with their family and community (Kainz & Aikens, 2007). However, once they began distance education schooling, they were expected to prioritise schooling. This meant they had to find a way to manage their home responsibilities and still complete all the school lessons expected by the school, in the way that was expected by the school. That is, they had to find ways to complete the scripted lessons inside a schoolroom, for six hours a day. As an example of the impact this had, Mary described how:

> Morning tea breaks… they were much longer in this household because you'd always have to come in, make phone calls, and order parts and deal with things to do with the farm… and therefore quite often we might still have been working 'til five o'clock in the evening…

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The supervisors also felt the way they were positioned in distance education schooling caused conflict in their relationships with their students (Green, 2006). They felt the pressure to imitate face-to-face schooling as much as possible so they tried to act how they thought teachers would in the schoolroom. When they were not in the schoolroom, they related to their students differently as parents. Many of the supervisors described it to be like *wearing different hats* (Melanie) as they deliberately tried to resist any connections between the two identities. However, to the school, and therefore their students, they were *not* a real teacher, just a supervisor, who didn't have the authority of a teacher. At times their students were not interested in their school lessons and resisted the supervisors' efforts to get them to complete the lessons, something the supervisors felt students would not do for 'real' teachers. Many of the supervisors echoed Heidi who described how:

> *Being a parent and trying to teach your kids, the kids know what sets you off, they know how to pick you... they have respect for you, but they don't have the same respect that they have for their classroom teacher....*

In this version of schooling, compulsory schooling is separated from families and communities, and therefore devalues rural knowledges. The multiple roles of mother, teacher, wife, and farmer are all kept separate by school authorities, placing the supervision of children under the control of the state (Foucault, 1975). Teachers are seen as the experts in modern schooling, where the dominant discourses of schooling are valued. Similarly, early rural schools were developed as a way to control moral values in rural areas (Green & Letts, 2007) and distance education schools, or correspondence schools as they were then known, ensured school education for these purposes was able to reach even the most rural locations (Green & Letts, 2007). Today there is still a power and control function in distance education schooling, as teachers are the experts over supervisors in the knowledge that is taught. Students are allocated qualified teachers by the school who exerted power and authority over the supervisors. The teachers tried to ensure the values of schooling were maintained, which placed the supervisors in a less powerful position in their students' schooling.

Making Schooling Work for their Students: Introducing Rural Perspectives

After experiencing the difficulties described in the previous section, the supervisors felt that schooling was not meeting the needs of their students. They could see that their students were struggling to understand some of the content of the lessons and that the methods were not suitable for their students. As such they worked hard to make sure their students were not just working to master school knowledge. Instead, once they gained experience in the role, the supervisors focused on turning the scripted lessons into opportunities for meaningful learning. That is they actively started taking action to *make it more interesting and give them your own examples...* (Jackie). One of the main ways they did this was by re-contextualising the scripted lessons. This involved teaching the concept that was intended by the teacher in a way that incorporated rural meanings, rather than the knowledge that was in the lesson scripts.

The way the supervisors re-contextualised the lessons meant that their students' schooling did not necessarily occur within the classroom, or within set school hours. Instead, the supervisors would teach their students whenever opportunities arose, including during farm work. As an example, one supervisor, Mary, described how she needed to teach her student to count, and instead of doing it the way that was scripted, she felt:

> *I could tick that off without even doing that in the classroom because I know that we'd completed it while driving along or mustering in the paddock...*

Mary's example of incorporating schooling with rural work demonstrates how the supervisors would use place-based pedagogies (Gruenewald, 2003) and situated pedagogies (McConaghy, 2008), reinforcing that rural place is influential in the supervisors' experiences (Green 2006;

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Green et al., 2013). The supervisors drew on rural meanings to consider *the place-specific nexus between environment, culture, and education* (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 10) when teaching their students. The supervisors were aware of the unique nature of their students' context and considered this in their learning, a factor that McConaghy (2008) argues is a crucial element of quality teaching and learning.

By re-contextualising the scripted lessons it is evident that the teachers and supervisors have different assumptions about the students' learning needs and what is a valued way of demonstrating learning. The lessons the teachers set for the supervisors were based around their interpretation of the official curriculum documents, which Green (2003) identifies as focusing on the type of nation they represent and aim to develop. This is arguably metropolitan-cosmopolitan focused (Roberts, 2014), and centred on developing a globalised future (Brennan, 2011). However, the supervisors' version of the lessons focuses on elements of land and cultures linked to land, all common elements in the different models of rurality. This is something the supervisors wouldn't do if they didn't see that it was beneficial to their students, indicating that rural meanings are valuable and important.

The supervisors also valued rural work and to allow time to engage with this, they did not complete some lessons. The supervisors described how:

> *You've got all the rest of the things you've got to do… that's why I say right we're not going to do that (lessons) or if we didn't get time for something, well, we didn't get time for it* (Helen).

Schooling for these students was integrated with everyday life experiences and rural work was prioritised. Rural meanings were important and beneficial to their students' learning.

CONCLUSION: A PLACE FOR RURAL MEANINGS IN SCHOOLING

In this study, the supervisors' actions indicate that rural meanings matter and need to be considered within the knowledge that is valued in schooling, the subtle messages schooling conveys, and the methods of schooling. Crucial to identifying these issues was, putting rural meanings at the forefront of the research, as something to be valued rather than a deficit to be overcome (Roberts & Green, 2013). This reinforces how, in a rural context, research related to this needs to value the rural (White & Corbett, 2014).

That rural meanings are not included in schooling suggests that their culture and identity is not being respected as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) identifies that it should be. This suggests that these rural students' right to an education is not currently being met. As the supervisors' actions demonstrate, incorporating rural meanings are essential to help their students learn, and to allow them to engage in the rural way of life that they value. However, although the supervisors felt that the contextualised approach they used was more effective for their students' learning, initially they felt uncertain and guilty, and worried they weren't meeting the expectations of schooling. This is because modern schooling subtly conveys messages that devalue the rural lifeworlds of the supervisors.

The supervisors' experiences echo the experiences often described in the literature of new teachers in rural contexts. They were for example expected to disregard their rurality (Boylan, Sinclair, & Squires, 1992) to conform to the values of modern schooling. Rural students and their supervisors have different knowledge bases to their teachers, which characterises the supervisors' experiences by the problem Higgins (1993) describes: *Neither [the beginning teachers] nor the students will fully comprehend each other's weltanschauung, or way of seeing the world* (p. ix-xi). Here neither the distance education teachers who set the work appear to understand the 'weltanschauung' of the students or supervisors. In de Certeau's (1984) terms, as a powerful institution the distance education school and its teachers used strategies of control to maintain the values of modern schooling. They tried to control how, when, and what, the

students would do in schooling by scripting lessons and setting timelines for completion. However, the supervisors resisted the teachers' strategies and employed tactics (de Certeau, 1984) so that schooling worked for their own purposes. The supervisors re-contextualised the scripted lessons to incorporate rural meanings and prioritised rural work over the expectations of schooling.

The situated perspective that is implicit in the actions of parent supervisors indicates that a 'one size fits all' approach to schooling is problematic and, essentially, ineffective. Instead, differences in lifeworlds need to be seen as an advantage, *not* as a deficit to be overcome. This is in a similar way to the aims of the Disadvantaged Schools Program, which focused on empowering differences by providing a school education that is appropriate to the students' needs rather than treating differences as a problem (Kemmis, 2003).

The study reported here gestures towards the notions of a rural pedagogy (Walker-Gibbs, Ludecke, & Kline, 2015) by highlighting the knowledge base from which curriculum enactment and pedagogy needs to originate. While questions of the relevance of some knowledge to be mastered exist (Roberts, 2014a), this study highlights that it is as much the process of schooling as the content that mediates this process that needs to be further investigated.

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