Book Review

Rural teacher education: Connecting land and people.
Corbett, M. & Gereluk, D. (Eds.). Springer, 2020.

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This new important book, edited by Michael Corbett and Dianne Gereluk, interrogates the multiple intersections between people, land, rural spaces and education in Canada. While the contributors to this volume examine the perennial problem of rural school staffing and the importance of teacher education (as the title of the book suggests), the book goes beyond this topic to offer a robust engagement of the connection between land, rurality and people. It covers a vast ground in rural education and schooling research and challenges readers to rethink the relationship between Canadian settler society and Indigenous lives and cultures; the clash between capitalist development, modernity and rural spaces; the intersection between education and Indigenous people; the usefulness of discourses of aspirations and mobilities in education policy and for rural youth; what is a community for; how useful and what is place-based education; what is education for; and how rural schools can enjoy proper staffing.

The book is divided in three sections: "rural education landscape in Canada", "rural identity and relationality", and "place-based and land-based pedagogies". While it is almost impossible to review each of the sixteen chapters in such a short space, it is fair to say that this book matters because it enables ways of thinking, researching and writing about the rural in a relentless urbanized society. In a sense, much of the book can also be understood as an attempt to make sense of, and counteract, the displacement and misrecognition of rural lives and places such as: the displacement of rural people and places by urbanization, "progress" and development; the misrecognition of the cultural status of teaching in rural schools by teacher education programs; and the displacement of Indigenous ways of living and the misrecognition of its cultural rights, status and power.

Readers in this book will not find analyses of educational outcomes through assessments such as the PISA scores that utilise rural and Indigenous education as the perennial social groups lagging in the nation's efforts to build a "smart" new workforce. Nevertheless, the editors, Corbett and Gereluk, observe in the Introduction chapter, that in Canada the more rural one goes, the poorer the PISA performance. Corbett and Gereluk, however, also note that this is also a "human capital" view that will always find rural education lagging. It is a developmental view that is concerned with "progress" – that is, urban agendas. They also assert that when one adjusts results by SES, rural students perform better or as well as urban (see Roberts, 2016, for a similar finding in the Australian context). Within a highly decentralized system, with 13 education systems, in the struggles of providing quality of education, the editors of the book want to place the lens on the need to move from deficit model to hopeful discourse of rurality. Thus, the book also aims to counteract the deficit view of

rural education by establishing the distinctiveness of rurality – including relevance to place, Indigenous people and culture and rural students' aspirations beyond metrocentric norms.

In terms of teacher education, through detailed quantitative analysis, Dianne Looker and Ray Bollman argue in their chapter that teacher mobility (attraction and retention) is not so dissimilar between urban and rural areas that are adjacent to metropolitan areas. They state that majority of rural Canadians live nearby metropolitan areas. The disadvantages in terms of teacher mobility appear the more rural we go, in the "smaller, remote rural areas that are often causes for concern in educational circles" (p.23). Further, when examining urban and rural (those "rural" closer to metro) they find no difference in "share of teachers with permanent contract" and that "non-metro teachers have a slightly longer tenure compared to metro teachers" (p. 66). The chapter by Cameron Smith and Peter Peller continues the teacher education analysis by identifying a common challenge for pre-service teachers in rural areas (in Canada and other countries): most teacher education programs are offered in metropolitan areas. The authors paint a picture all too common in other countries: rural students are under-represented in universities and are more likely to drop out. Smith and Peller affirm "nearly 60% of the rural population is still too far from any teacher education program to spend less than 2 h commuting each day" (p. 93). This is a common problem found in Australia (Cuervo 2020a; Cuervo & Acquaro, 2018; Downes & Roberts, 2017; White, 2015).

Against this problem of lack of teacher education programs available for rural communities, Dianne Gereluk and colleagues argue that the key is to grow your "own" teachers and to do so, they examine "the provision of blended preservice teacher education" in "one community-based program" (p. 137). As the COVID-19 scenario has accelerated online provision of education, at least for urban educators and students, the online delivery mode can be a new way of connecting teacher education programs to rural communities. The program consisted of a "two-week on-campus residency in the summer, followed by a combination of online and field experience practicums in students' home communities over the fall and winter" (p. 138). This is an interesting approach; however, it demands the existence of material resources, such as high-speed internet in rural areas, that might not always be there (this issue is noted by the authors – an issue also present in Australia, see Downes & Fuqua, 2018). The authors also noted an anxiety about "relationality", the undermining interpersonal process due to the online mode – however, as it has happened with COVID-19, the notion of relationality as a physical contact/presence shifted with the use and understanding of online delivery. Practices of empathy, care and reciprocity, Gereluk and colleagues noted, can be fostered online and not just in face-to-face activities. This is an important finding that can be a game-changer for rural and remote communities to "grow their own."

Chapters by David Scott and Dustin Louie; Dawn Wallin and Sherry Peden; by Alexa Scully, and by Kevin O'Connor address "the complexity of the Indigenous-rural interface and the politics it engenders" (p. 13). These chapters are a reminder of the work that still needs to be done to account for "settler" approaches, policies and normativity of Canadian education systems and schools' practices, and the need to actively recognise and foster Indigenous cultures and traditions. These authors show that this might take the form of alliances between the community and school staff, deep changes to the curriculum, and the creation of place-based pedagogies that generate inclusive perspectives of place, as for example O'Connor argues, that reaffirm the value, ownership and relevance of First Nations and their experiences.

Present in this important analysis of the Indigenous-rural interface is the need to problematise the idea of community. These chapters, explicitly and implicitly, address the problematic understanding of rural communities as knit-close and homogeneous. The chapter by Bonnie Stelmach interrogates normative views of community, including "the oversimplified and dogmatic way" school staff and academics "speak about working with school parents". The point being, for Stelmach, is that relationship between teachers and parents are important but drawing on Perkins (2015: 319), "within education, the word *community* is used and overused to the point that it holds little concrete meaning". As Bauman (2001) argued, "community is a feel-good word". For Stelmach, drawing on

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), community is a zombie category ("dead and still alive"), "a taken for granted concept that is void of any substance because it has outgrown the social conditions from which it originated" (p. 208). Further, Stelmach affirms that "relations can be frayed and downright acrimonious in rural communities" (p. 209) (see Bryant Pini, 2009; Cuervo, 2020b; for Australian examples). Her chapter and many others in this book, such as the chapters addressing the Settler-Indigenous interface, correctly point out to the problems of romanticising community life.

The idea of community is also interrogated in several chapters that address and problematise place-based education. I agree that place-based education is a "powerful" and generative" idea but that it also needs to be interrogated, as Michael Corbett affirms in his chapter. Undoubtedly, place-based education is an important idea because it views place not just as a location but also a resource (with all its economic, cultural and social meanings). Drawing on Heidegger, Nespor and Bowers, Corbett theorises the meaning and usefulness of place and offers seven challenges to place-based education that "relate the idea that place needs to be understood relationally rather than bounded container for the agency of particular people" (p. 279). In these seven challenges, which address relationality, curriculum, mobilities, temporal/cultural dimension, hybrid cultures, the danger of insularity and politics, Corbett invites the reader not to dismiss place-based education but to take it seriously by rethinking the concept and practice.

As I conclude reading this significant new contribution to rural education (as well as to rural studies, Indigenous education and schooling), I am refreshingly challenged to think, what is (rural) education for? This is perhaps the quintessential question in education research, practice and philosophy. The chapter by Christopher Martin is a must read if one wishes to be challenged in this sphere. Delving into the liberal political and intellectual tradition, he addresses how a liberal public education can help rural scholars and educators to rethink educational justice at these troubled times. Martin's argument is that "a liberal conception of public education should attend to the meaning and significance of a citizen's community of origin in the pursuit of a good life" (p. 99). Martin's sophisticated argument merits a whole review by itself; nevertheless, readers interested in rural mobilities and aspirations, and community sustainability and justice, will find this chapter refreshing and provocative.

This book transcends the Canadian context and provides many valuable lessons, questions and challenges to rural scholars and educators around the globe. It represents the kind of scholarly work that rural scholars need to do if we want to centre our work among a discipline (education research) that tends to sideline it and often refer or invite it to contribute in education edited volumes as a tokenistic exercise on diversity (see Howley & Howley, 2014). As a reviewer, to sum up this collection of sixteen chapters, as diverse, complex and rich, was a real challenge; to read it, was exciting and a pleasure.

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