



Australian and International Journal of Rural Education

Connecting Rural and Urban Education Research

Melyssa Fuqua

University of Melbourne

melyssa.fuqua@unimelb.edu.au

Robyn Henderson

University of Southern Queensland

robyn.henderson@usq.edu.au

Cheryl Glowrey

Federation University

c.glowrey@federation.edu.au

Karl Maton

The University of Sydney

karl.maton@sydney.edu.au

Abstract

In this special issue of the *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, a collection of international authors considers how their work and experiences in rural education research can inform, and sometimes even improve, urban-based education research. The issue responds to the provocation to shift such perceptions and locate the rural as a key and constituent part of the wider field of education. The articles set out to show connections between the rural and the urban. In doing this, the authors challenge existing notions of a rural-urban divide. They present examples of *ruraling*, a term coined by Roberts and Fuqua (2021) to explain the move to a rural perspective across the broader field of education. The collective aim of the articles is to demonstrate and speculate how rural education research might *rural* (using the word as a verb) urban education research.

Keywords: ruraling, rural education research, urban education research

Editorial

In this special issue of the *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, a collection of international authors considers how their work and experiences in rural education research can inform, and sometimes even improve, urban-based education research. The field of rural education research is embedded in understandings of context, place, and space, but is often treated as sitting on the margins, as if it is separate from education research more generally (Corbett, 2016; Roberts, 2013; Roberts & Fuqua, 2021a). As Roberts and Fuqua (2021b) noted, in 2005 Brennan highlighted that rurality was mostly missing in education research, but more than 15 years later that is often still the case.

The special issue responds to Fuqua and Roberts' (2021) provocation to shift such perceptions and locate the rural as a key and constituent part of the wider field of education. The articles set out to show connections between the rural and the urban. In doing this, the authors challenge existing notions of a rural-urban divide, advocate that researchers step away from thinking about the rural and other examples of marginalisation as deficit, and attempt to “reframe metrocentricity and metro-normativity in education research” (Roberts & Fuqua, 2021b, p. 3). They

present examples of *ruraling*, a term coined by Roberts and Fuqua (2021a) to explain the move to a rural perspective across the broader field of education. The collective aim of the articles is to demonstrate and speculate how rural education research might *rural* (using the word as a verb) urban education research.

The papers explore how the spatial and contextual considerations of rural education research have developed perspectives and methodologies that can inform and enrich the broader research community. The first paper, *Rethinking deficit discourses in education through rural education research and the concept of querencia*, focuses explicitly on the reporting of positive stories to replace deficit discourses. Judith E. Gouwens and Robyn Henderson draw on rich interview data from teachers working with the children of migratory agricultural workers in the US. They use a Spanish term, *querencia*, to conceptualise how the teachers assist families to build relationships and a sense of belonging with their new, but generally temporary, places of residence. The paper suggests that the collection of positive stories like these, across diverse locations including the urban, could be a useful way of countering and replacing deficit stories.

The second paper, *The “new” rural: Small and rural schools’ influence on regional urban developments*, comes from Jennifer Tatebe. She shifts the focus to the North Island of New Zealand, where urban developments are impacting on rural communities, including their small primary schools. From the perspective of school governance, three perspectives were evident in this complex, changing and contested reality. However, despite some despair about the encroachment of the urban on the rural, it became apparent that urbanisation was not a done deal; rather, at the intersection of the urban and the rural, there was evidence of the development of a new semi-rural identity that was influencing the urban.

Laurence Lasselle provides the next paper, *Depicting rural deprivation in a higher education context: A Scottish case study*. In this, she explores how the national socioeconomic index exacerbates the inequality of access to Scottish higher education. She argues that the index has negative effects on rural communities and goes on to suggest positive paths forward through further contextualisation. It is these core features of rural education research – the greater attention to the subtleties of places and the labelling of them – that she contends could benefit both rural and urban communities through more nuanced policy making. Lasselle’s work is another vital voice in the increasing calls challenging the roles and impacts of national indexes that all too often position rurality in deficit to the metro.

Exploring students’ feelings of place, the paper by Susan C. Webb, Lizzie Knight, Rosalyn Black, and Reshmi Roy, reports research conducted in two Australian states: Victoria and South Australia. Focusing on four case studies of peri-urban and rural locations, the study investigated post-school transitions. It found that young people’s experiences of place interact with material conditions and social relationships to determine their decision to move away from their home location or to stay put. In identifying emotional as well as geographical connections with place, the paper argues for more nuanced understandings of young people. These are important learnings for all education researchers, including those focused on the urban.

The paper that follows, *Does regionality influence students’ perceived employability and career orientation?: A study of students at an Australian university*, was written by Dawn Bennett, Lizzie Knight, Paul Koshy and Ian Li. It takes us to Western Australia and a large study, with almost 5,000 university student participants, that looks at how students from rural, regional and remote areas perceive and conceptualise their employability. The findings problematise the notion that regional, rural and remote students are less sophisticated in their thinking about careers or are significantly different from their metropolitan peers, and this has the potential to inform policy considerations for all students.

In Mahammad Abul Hasnat and Janinka Greenwood’s *Schools celebrating place and community: A study of two rural schools in Bangladesh and New Zealand* article, they take a narrative approach to explore the richness of two marginalised rural communities – one in Bangladesh and one in New Zealand – to tease out various ways the schools address community needs in a rapidly changing

world. By reporting on place-based leadership initiatives in the two schools, they unpack questions of ‘deficit’ and how local innovations challenge certain national curricular concepts. Hasnat and Greenwood’s multi-national reflection highlights how tailoring education to the uniqueness of place, be it urban or rural in any country, can play a role in addressing the complex challenges facing education in the 21st century.

The next paper takes us to Norway where Tobias Werler, Vibeke Solsvik Foldnes, Åshild Berg-Brekhus, and Margaret Kleppstad Færevaag write about *Classroom development through teacher-researcher collaboration: Bridging the rural urban divide in Norway?* They consider a variety of challenges, opportunities, and benefits of creating meaningful collaborations between rural teachers and (typically) urban researchers. They argue that collaborations, where the rural teacher drives the collaboration, have the greatest potential for improving the capacities of both the researcher and teacher. Their work promotes the benefits of conducting educational research in rural schools, not just because it is more appropriate for rural contexts, but also because the small-scale nature of the research allows for greater identification of variables which can subsequently lead to improved practice that is place-sensitive and student-centred.

The final paper of this special issue is a rural connections piece, written by Alessio Claudi. It focuses on George Victor Le Vaux, an educator, thinker, writer and adventurer who influenced Queensland education in the late 1800s. Le Vaux’s life history includes international experiences from two continents, before arriving in Australia and living in rural Queensland. He later moved to the city of Brisbane. This flow from rural to urban fits the theme of this issue quite well.

The contributing authors provide a range of examples of ruring education research in their various fields and disciplines. Through their articles, they contribute to the important work of re-framing norms and shifting ‘rural’ from the margins of education research. This special issue is part of the larger project of re-considering and ruring education research, as put forth by Fuqua and Roberts (2021). The authors in this issue, while building on their own best practice for rural education research, also “take rural education research to the disciplines of education in order to change the way those disciplines, and researchers, construct the rural” (Fuqua & Roberts, 2021, p. 298). As the privileged editors of this special issue, we echo the provocations of Fuqua and Roberts (2021) and urge you to consider how you might contribute to the ruring of education research. The *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education* looks forward to those contributions and your future articles based on them.

It has been an exciting year for *AIJRE*. We welcomed new members to the editorial team (Robyn Henderson, Natalie Downes, Bronwyn Relf, and Laurence Lasselle) and John Guenther has taken on the role of Chief Editor. Congratulations to them and a hearty thank you to all of our past and present editors, authors, reviewers, and readers. We wish you all a restful and recuperative end of year break. See you in March for our first issue in 2022.

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