



# Australian and International Journal of Rural Education

## Book Review

***Ruraling Education Research: Connections Between Rurality and the Disciplines of Education Research.* P. Roberts & M. Fuqua (Eds.). Springer, 2021,**

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This is a thoughtfully curated volume with contributions by leading Australian and International rural researchers. It is a worthwhile read for any researcher in the field of education and for education academics engaged in the development and/or teaching of courses to pre-service students who may end up teaching in a rural area.

The deliberate incorporation of the verb ‘ruraling’ in the title gives the reader an insight into the tone of the research presented in this volume. Editors Philip Roberts and Melyssa Fuqua explain their adoption of the term ‘ruraling’ as a verb was to “*reframe the metrocentricity and metro-normativity in education research*” (p. 3) and begin promulgating the idea that a rural lens could contribute to all education research. ‘Ruraling’ used as a verb in the title signals that for contributions in this volume, the research approach taken by each researcher was done actively, consciously with thought and processes grounded in the context of the rural as defined by the specific space, place, and geography of each rural community.

One of the important opening statements of the book is that “*rural education does not have a clear home or organising theory*” (p. 5). However, when collectively considering the findings from the rural education research described in the book, it becomes clear that, whilst there may not be a clear organising theory, there are models and theories that underpin rural education research and that researchers in this space are developing their own models for rural education research. For example, in Chapter 3, Bill Green and Jo-Anne Reid, present several case examples using the ‘Rural Social Space’ model (Reid et al, 2010) to highlight “*the complexities and richness of the social, cultural and environmental histories*” (p. 29) of rural places and their impact on rural communities. Chapter 6, written by Jane Downey, describes how the ‘Rural Community Walk’ model is used by education institutions in the USA to prepare students for working in rural schools. The importance of language usage in rural communities and education is illustrated by Pam Bartholomaeus’s discussion of ‘Linguistic Landscape’ methodologies in Chapter 13, whilst in Chapter 14 the issues of underperformance of boys in education in rural areas are addressed by Sherilyn Lennon using ‘Butler’s Concept of Performativity’.

The 19 chapters cover most aspects of rural education from policy development to statistical representation of rural school success and performance, the role of boarding schools to pathways advisors and the importance of linguistic analysis and literacies pedagogies. In Chapter 7, Karen Eppley, Annie Maselli and Kai Schafft, show how metrocentric USA charter school policy was reimagined to keep rural schools, earmarked for closure due to financial reasons, open in

their areas. In Chapter 10, John Guenther and Sam Osborne critique and challenge how policy is constructed for rural education, addressing the role place education can play in contributing to meaningful boarding school policy, whilst in Chapter 11 Robyn Henderson discusses how rural education research can be used to rethink literacies pedagogies.

This is a book that celebrates and champions the differences and strengths each rural community brings in providing education in rural places and the importance of acknowledging these differences. Chapters 17-19 elegantly articulate why the accepted norm for de-identification of research sites and places when presenting findings can in fact undermine and reduce the impact of the findings of the research projects carried out in these areas. These chapters effectively argue for the public acknowledgement of de-identified rural communities as a way of valuing rural research, people, places, and communities rather than the current trend for homogenising rural places to make the findings more palatable, generic and easily understood by the education policy makers in Australia.

Whilst most of the chapters discuss qualitative research approaches, Chapter 8 by Philip Roberts, Michael Thier and Paul Beach discuss the importance of disaggregating data from rural areas to avoid the generation of misleading results for educational outcomes and access in rural areas.

The deficit hypotheses and narratives generally present in rural education policy are strongly rejected in this book. Each chapter addresses the deficit narrative around rural education research and policies and challenges readers to view education research with a rural centrality, instead of metrocentricity and to think what this change in lens can offer in identifying the strengths of rural and other education.

What is obvious from reading the book is that conducting rural education research is complex if researchers hope to contribute to the development of meaningful rural education practices and policies. The contributions in this volume provide directions to ensure established and new rural education researchers follow a path with their research where they work ethically with rural communities to conduct research and present findings that are meaningful for each community and the wider rural education landscape.

## References

Reid, J., Green, B., Cooper, M., Hastings, W., Lock, G., & White, S. (2010). Regenerating rural social space? Teacher education for rural-regional sustainability. *Australian Journal of Education*, 54(3), 262–276.