

CONTEMPORARY PARADIGMS OF RURAL TEACHING: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PLACE

Nicole C. Green

University of Southern Queensland

Genevieve Noone

University of New England

Andrea Nolan

University of Victoria

ABSTRACT

This paper begins by setting the scene with an overview of a recent literature review examining teacher preparation for rural and remote settings. The discussion considers the relevance of the findings, exploring possibilities of reconceptualising rural teacher education. The next section of the paper engages with a move away from a deficit model and negative perceptions of rural Australia, to consider more contemporary paradigms of rural teaching. Two studies will be presented which have drawn upon various research methods and conceptual frameworks to inquire with families and teachers about the everyday life of living and working in rural and/or remote locations. The research methods and conceptual frameworks of the studies shared in this paper contribute to on-going research and offer possible foci for conversations about enabling approaches for rethinking rural and remote locations as not simply a physical location, but the 'whole experience of being there'. The findings of the literature review and the two studies suggest that more attention to the personal, interpersonal and collective experiences of (rural) place, in both pre-service teacher preparation and early career teacher support, may assist in teacher transitions into rural and remote education settings.

INTRODUCTION

The recruitment and retention of teachers in rural and remote locations is under the government spotlight. Issues relating to tenure and turnover of skilled and

experienced teachers, the impact of 'culture shock' that some early career teachers experience, affordable housing and limited opportunities for professional learning in relatively isolated communities have been reported (Productivity Research Report, 2011). These lead to negative perceptions of rural Australia which act to deter the take up of teaching positions in 'the bush'. This paper offers more contemporary paradigms of rural teaching as ways to reconceptualise thinking and move beyond these negative notions of rural teaching. These paradigms highlight the lived experiences of *being* in a rural place. By drawing attention to the personal, interpersonal and collective experiences of (rural) place, a better understanding and appreciation of what is experienced by those working and living in these locations can be gained which can inform both pre-service teacher preparation and early career teacher support.

Beginning with an overview of the literature examining teacher preparation for rural and remote settings, the paper then presents two studies which offer new ways of thinking about teaching in these communities. Each of these studies begin by drawing attention to the emotional embodiment the researchers engaged in, as a tool for beginning to re-imagine rural teaching from a different perspective. This required a 'letting go' of any negative perceptions of both *rurality* and *teaching*, and engaging with their own and their participants' lived experiences of (rural) place. This data, which is embodied in the researcher, has been called transgressive data. Transgressive data includes data which is emotional, and data which is sensual and responsive (St Pierre, 1997a). In both studies the researchers attempted to ensure that the research "honours the views and expressions of the participants" and that there is a "balance of bias for both the participants and the researchers" (Vallance, 2005, p.194).

LITERATURE REVIEW: TEACHER PREPARATION FOR RURAL AND REMOTE LOCATIONS

From an examination of government reports, reviews and inquiries over three decades, Boylan (2010) concludes that 'special attention' is needed to prepare teachers to work in rural schools. This has been supported by Auh and Pegg (2009) who determine the need for some form of 'intervention' in both the pre-service and in-service contexts to improve rural education. This 'intervention' in relation to teacher training is seen as developing preservice teacher understandings of rural schools and rural life. In the past there has been little or no preparation of teachers for rural teaching, with emphasis instead being placed on helping beginning teachers get established once they had started (Baills et al 2002; Howe, 2006). There is now a stronger movement to prepare preservice teachers adequately before their first teaching appointment.

There is evidence that a range of initiatives have been trialled to improve preservice teachers' capacity to confidently take up positions in rural and remote locations. These include innovative ways of providing authentic teaching experiences for preservice teachers in rural and remote locations, as well as monitory and/ or

resource support enabling preservice students to take up such practicum opportunities (Nelligan, 2006; King, 2006; Hudson & Millwater, 2009; White, 2006; Maxwell, Reid, McLoughlin, Clarke & Nicholls, 2002). Another focus has been on the course offerings and how understandings of rural education are embedded within courses (Baills et al, 2002; Page, 2006; Gregsom, Waters & Gruppetta, 2006). Lock (2008), from research conducted in Western Australia focusing on the preparation of teachers for rural appointments, suggests a number of content areas that need inclusion in teacher preparation courses to ensure a program specifically targeted rural education. These areas include the development of appropriate teaching/learning strategies, characteristics of students in rural/remote schools, general operation of rural/remote schools, school expectations of teachers, managing student behaviour, teaching in multi-age classrooms, support provided for teachers in rural/remote locations: e.g. District Office as well as resources within schools themselves, staff-student / staff-parent relationships in school, staff-student/ staff-parent relationships outside school, community expectations of the school, community expectations of teachers outside school hours, rural/remote lifestyle, and development of one's own living skills.

Lock, Reid, Green, Hastings, Cooper and White (2009), reporting on the first set of data collected from a study of three states, presents the preliminary conclusion that pre-service education should enable students to understand the concept of rural social space. For example, Somerville (2007) experimented with 'place pedagogy' as a post-graduate student undertook an extended internship at a school in NSW. This form of authentic learning sprung from the idea that "learning place and forming community" (p. 1) are part of preparation for rural service, "especially in the context of culturally and environmentally challenging places" (p. 1). Considerations of 'place pedagogy' (Somerville, 2007) and 'rural social space' (Lock et al. 2009) provide means to begin discussions about the impact of place and time on cultural behaviours when related to rural and remote locations. Student teachers can be challenged to think about influences impacting on their social lives and behaviours in these contexts with the notion of 'place' providing "a category of investigation and analysis" (Somerville, 2007, p. 1).

It is time to go beyond dominant past approaches to rural education, gather together all the good ideas about improving rural teacher education, show what was working and what was not, and develop a pathway for national development (Lock, Green, Reid, Cooper, White & Hastings, 2008). What we see as the way forward is the importance of making connections between preservice teachers learning and their backgrounds, considering 'place-based pedagogy' (White & Reid, 2008, p. 48).

The following studies, which received ethical approval from the participating universities (Study 1 - University of Alberta; Study 2 - University of New England) and school jurisdictions in which the studies were conducted, deliberately draw from personal, interpersonal and collective stories of *place*, as a way to understand and present the lived experience of working and living in rural and remote locations. This is an attempt to go beyond a surface, often negative view that is equated with

rural and remote settings. Each study begins with excerpts from field notes to offer a sense of the places of inquiry, and then moves into a consideration of the experiences of the participants in the studies. Study 1

STUDY 1: SCHOOLROOM PLACES - MOTHERS, CHILDREN AND RURAL PROPERTIES

July 25th...My first visit to the Michaelson's. My first visit to any of the families. I feel so alone. Alone in research. Office mates and university colleagues too far away to share my joys and anxieties. Supervisor and committee members too far away to ask methodological questions. Friends too far away to understand. In my car, sound of the engine, old songs on my tape deck, quick bump of a cattle grid. In my car, sight of brown landscape, trees in the distance, the odd car or semi-trailer and a friendly wave from the driver. Large blue sky; open, clutter-less land; seemingly endless narrow roads, and then...

Relief! I am on the right road! A small sign, a windmill and looming shady trees. A turn right and a gate – no remote control? Three gates to discover; open, close, open, close, open, close.

Feelings of being a city girl. I am distastefully attentive to the smell of cattle crammed into the metal cages on the semi-trailers passing by; to the dust which has clogged my nose and caused it to bleed, and to the concern for my car tyres on the rocky, uneven surface over the next 21 kilometres to the family's house. Was I ever a country girl? I have forgotten how to drive safely through "bull dust," I swerve and veer and become relieved that there is nothing, nothing around to drive my car into. A connection is lost, could it be regained? Although my choice was not to continue a life in the country, I always felt that I could if I had to. Not now. On this Sunday, as I step out of my dust-soaked car and hear Louise calling my name to join her in the schoolroom (she is spending the afternoon in the schoolroom preparing for the week ahead), I stand back and admire the distance...I stand back and wonder with curiosity about the distance...distance from anywhere...distance from everyone... I smile with openness and walk over to the small wooden building.

August 1st...Sunday again already. I haven't felt like I have had time to breathe since I arrived home last Tuesday evening from the first home visit...reviewing transcripts, revising interview questions, responding to journal entries, all in addition to what is required of me in my teaching role at the school. I am relieved that this week's visit is only a two-hour drive. When I visit some place new, I experience such nervousness – am I on the right road? Will I make it on time? It is always a sense of relief to arrive. This week, it is not so much about the shorter drive, it is the feeling of being less remote, less distanced...

August 29th...Journeying on the 40 kilometres of dirt road, I experience feelings of despair hoping my car survives the length of my inquiry...the corrugation, the unmissed boulders lying on the road, the dirt sticking to the new suspension. Distance is so relative. I recall fellow graduate students at the University of Alberta (Canada) contemplating the one-hour drive to a school outside of the city. I smile as I think about the 1600 kilometres I have already journeyed in three visits, with nine visits remaining. I am feeling emotionally exhausted even

though I am enjoying the visits so much. Staying with a family, each family I do not know very well, keeps me feeling on edge for the entire three days. I am shy and less talkative so it is a big effort for me to be around the family constantly and in conversation. I am fortunate the families are so welcoming and hospitable.

The field notes shared above were recorded during a study of the distance education experiences of three families in Queensland. As discussed elsewhere (Green, 2006), much of the previous research on distance education in Australia has been concerned with innovations in technology or curriculum. Some attention has been given to home tutors—their roles, effectiveness and professional development. Overall, the trend in most reports reveals a tendency to treat home tutors as deficit and to not value their knowledge and experience. New curricula tend to be planned on the basis of inference and philosophical frameworks external to the distance education families. The nature of the curricula being delivered by new technologies tends not to be questioned. Therefore, the intent of the study was to learn how the mothers as home tutors and their children experience distance education and how it is that they come to experience it in that way. The three families lived on sheep and cattle properties; enrolling in distance education due to their geographical isolation. Because the three families valued both family life and the lifestyle afforded by their properties, home educating became the first choice option. Louise, Kate and Cherie, as mothers, chose to be home tutors in their distance education programs because of the costs of engaging governesses (employed tutors) to take this role.

Data collection occurred during four three-day visits with each family over a period of six months. The participants and I selected the most appropriate data collection methods to gain insight into their experiences and their narratives - dialogue journals, photography, drawing, informal conversations and semi-structured interviews, and observations. As a first level of analysis, a descriptive narrative portrait of each family and daily life on the family's property and in its schoolroom was crafted. Well-crafted narratives were needed to illuminate the ambiguity and complexity of the family's experiences (Tuan, 1991). In further analysis work all of the data were examined to address three questions: (1) how did the mothers experience being home tutors; (2) how did the children experience the places of their everyday lives both in the schoolroom and on their properties; and (3) how did everyday life in the schoolrooms evolve as it did. The following offers snapshots of the findings relevant for this paper.

PLACE, RELATIONSHIPS AND EVERYDAY LIFE

As the home tutors and students spend just over 150 days of the year in their schoolrooms, these spaces are transformed into places as they become invested with meaning by the mothers and children. The initial research question framed for the study was: How do home tutors and students create and experience a 'school learning place' for the distance education program? My use of the word, 'experience', in this question reflected my understanding of place as everyday life in a space, or the whole experience of being there (Ellis, 2005). I used the word, 'create', because I expected that home tutors would have agency in introducing rules,

routines, and resources in the schoolrooms. I also expected that both home tutors and children would be shaping everyday lives for themselves in the schoolrooms. In hindsight I would say that the research question became: How did everyday life in the families' schoolrooms come to evolve as it did? This second version of a way of framing the research question better reflects an appreciation that much of what happened in the schoolrooms happened in spite of rather than because of the agency of the home tutors and children.

I tried to make sense of the home tutors' and children's everyday lives both within and outside of the schoolrooms. I sought to understand how each 'school learning place' -- the everyday life that was evolving in the schoolroom -- reflected or arose from the resources, relationships, rules, and routines of the schoolroom and the identities of its inhabitants. Using *place* as a conceptual framework, I recognized that the everyday lives home tutors and children shaped for themselves in the schoolrooms would be constrained by structural formations of place (Eyles, 1989) -- rules, resources, routines, relationships -- and influenced by the identities they had already been constructing in places outside of the schoolrooms (Ashcroft, 2001). I also expected that the meaning of activities in the schoolrooms to home tutors and children would be informed by the values, motivations, and roles they experienced in their routine activities and interactions outside of the schoolrooms (Ashcroft, 2001).

Place is both a human conception and a social construction. It is the experiences, activities, routines and interactions (or ways of inhabiting a space) to which individuals or groups assign meaning, thereby creating and defining a place. There exists a reciprocal relationship between people and places because the inhabitants of a place do not exist independently of that place (Helfenbein, 2004). Meaning is a key attribute of place and this has often been discussed within the topic of sense of place (Derr, 2002; Lippard, 1997; Rivlan, 1990). Using all of these understandings about place in my inquiry, I paid attention to everyday life within and outside of the schoolrooms. I remained alert to the ways in which everyday life in the whole place of the home sites might be a source of meaning for the families' interpretations of events in the schoolrooms. I expected that the identities home tutors and children brought with them into the schoolrooms would play out in the kind of 'school learning places' that evolved. I was aware of the significance of the resources, rules, routines, and available relationships in the schoolrooms as structures constraining the everyday life that constituted the 'school learning places'. Being aware of these ideas focused my attention as I endeavoured to perceive and make sense of the complexity and dynamics of everyday life both within and outside of the schoolrooms on the families' properties.

I paid particular attention to the relationships between the home tutors and their children as these were negotiated or re-worked in the schoolrooms. I was very interested in the quality of the relationships and social interactions in the schoolrooms (Clark & Uzzell, 2002). I observed that the women in the three families had pedagogical relationships with their children in other places outside of the schoolrooms (Wenger, 1998). Learning and teaching extended beyond the

schoolroom door, into the house yard, into the sheep or cattle yards, into large work sheds, into the seamlessly endless paddocks, into dried creek beds and water-filled dams, into town communities and school-organized events. I paid attention to the mothers' diverse personal, familial and professional roles in other places to further my understanding of their behaviour in the schoolrooms.

I learned about the relationships available to children and home tutors in the larger places of their everyday lives. Further, by inquiring into the children's everyday life experiences in the places they used outside of the schoolrooms. I was inclined to consider how the children's experiences in the schoolrooms were the same or different from their experiences in other places. I was able to better appreciate their identities and their responses to everyday life in the schoolrooms (Chawla, 1992). Learning what was afforded in their favourite places outside of the schoolrooms helped me to consider both the nature of experiences that were supported or limited within their schoolrooms and their responses to these (Gibson, 1997).

The following interpretive accounts and analyses result from my efforts to make sense of how and why the school learning places - everyday life in the schoolrooms - were evolving in the ways they were. I endeavoured to understand what everyday life in the schoolrooms was like for home tutors and children, why it was like that, how it came to be that way, and what it meant for home tutors and the children to experience it in those ways.

LIVING THE CURRICULUM-AS-PLAN

Louise, Kate and Cherie are mothers who care for their children, want to give them a good lifestyle, and want to ensure that they have a good education. The home tutors valued both family life and the lifestyles afforded to families by living on the remote properties they had. Home schooling became a forced choice because of these values. Thus they began their home tutoring work with the support of the Gorman School of Distance Education. Once in the roles of home tutors, the mothers worked within their means and ways of understanding to do a good job as teachers for their children. The mothers accepted the role of home tutors and saw it as a serious responsibility. They valued education highly and believed their children's formal school years would equip them with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and work habits that would provide opportunities for success.

The resources provided by the Gorman School of Distance Education were very significant as a structural formation constraining everyday life in the schoolrooms. Although the three women were not always happy about the described or prescribed curriculum, they did not have the background to work well with it differently. What they did have, was a belief that their own educations had been successful experiences and a strong desire to support their children's education.

Louise, Kate and Cherie did not have professional preparation for teaching. Within their own ways of understanding teaching and learning, however, they were adamant about standards for doing things properly. Because of their isolation, Louise, Kate and Cherie also lacked access to many resources or experiences that

might have informed their critique of the dated curriculum or their understanding of teaching, learning and development in ways other than what was stated or implied in the correspondence papers. In discussions about the curriculum materials, Louise, Kate and Cherie did not speak of the curriculum in terms of learning philosophies or teaching approaches. Each of them did, however, express concerns of one kind or another about the curriculum. For example, Cherie recognized the content of the curriculum was not always conducive to enjoyable learning as there was such a large amount of work to be completed in such a short period. Louise spoke about some topics within the curriculum as not being relevant to her children because of their experience in the place they live. Kate recognised that many of the activities are closed-ended in terms of allowing her daughter, Melissa, choice and giving her the opportunity to bring in her knowledge and experiences. With continued distance education experience from year to year, working from the same curriculum more than once, and receiving feedback as each year progressed, Louise, Kate and Cherie showed that they were increasingly familiar and confident with the curriculum materials. They felt comfortable in making certain decisions about leaving some activities out, usually activities like art or music, or adapting some of the activities to ensure their child/ren's understandings of a concept. However, even with this increased confidence and familiarity, the home tutors' actions and words remained focused on being able to: 1. See the work completed; 2. Tell the school of distance education staff teacher the work is completed; 3. Complete the curriculum work on time, and 4. Receive feedback from the school of distance education staff teacher.

The home tutors were vigilant about the responsibility they felt to have their children complete the prescribed school work. They were trying hard to make sure that their children got a 'good education'. Each home tutor ensured that the 'school day' outlined in the curriculum materials was completed, in particular, the activities in their child/ren's workbooks which were to be sent to the school of distance education staff teacher.

HOME TUTORING AS 'A CHORE' AND DOING A GOOD JOB

Living and working on sheep and/or cattle properties in Western Queensland, each home tutor was also a partner/co-worker/homemaker/mother on her property. As part of the research each of the women took photographs of their daily lives and discussed these with me. In categorizing the photographs, the women differentiated between chores that needed to be done as opposed to activities they would choose to do out of interest or enjoyment - something that needs to be done, something that one accepts, but something that keeps one from other activities of greater interest.

The mothers' memories of their own school experience resonated with and supported the 'follow directions' approach offered by the distance education materials. Everyday life on the properties meant that time was a limited resource. The home tutors felt compelled to contain the time in the schoolrooms to very specific and tight time frames. This made the time and activities in the schoolrooms feel very pressured and made routines and schedules in the schoolroom very

important. Experiencing the home tutoring work in this way - as pushing children through the completion of all of the prescribed daily tasks on schedule - was very stressful. Even finding time to prepare for daily tasks in the schoolroom was stressful given that the home tutors had multiple roles and responsibilities as mothers, wives, property workers, and community members.

The 'household work' and the 'property work' completed by the women involved keeping up to schedules, doing particular tasks on time, seeing tangible results, and being able to evaluate the work's results. Unlike most chores in their daily lives, the women's work in the schoolrooms could not be easily evaluated. Without professional backgrounds in teaching, how would they know if they were doing a good job? Routines, deadlines, and the tangible product of completed workbooks became the daily criteria for their evaluation of their work in the schoolroom.

The women did have other occasions to appreciate their successful teaching. For example, they witnessed their children spontaneously reading or counting outside of the schoolroom, their children received awards, and their children became more willing to stay at distance education school-organized events without their mothers remaining with them. On a daily basis, however, all that they largely had to go by was the completion of the prescribed activities for the day.

BEING 'MOTHER-TEACHERS'

In this study of the school learning places that evolve when mothers are the home tutors in the schoolrooms I have had the opportunity to witness what can happen when women are mothers first and then become their children's teachers. To better appreciate their ways of being teachers, I paid attention to the ways in which they are mothers. This sub-section is intended to offer a sense of the way they live out their mothering roles.

Louise, Kate and Cherie spend time with their children in a multitude of contexts - in the house, in the sheep and cattle yards, out in locations within the wider property boundaries, in the local town/s at community, sporting and school-related events. Depending on the place and the activity, the mothers assumed many diverse roles in relation to their children. While visiting with friends, watching or participating with their children in physical activity, doing tasks together, or sharing a meal, Louise, Kate and Cherie took roles such as 'protector', 'friend', 'coach', 'cheerleader', 'judge', 'pastor', 'encourager', 'teacher', and 'police person' in relation with their children.

Louise, Kate and Cherie all enjoy playing with their children, laughing and joking with their children, having conversations with them about current affairs or closer-to-home issues, and relaxing with them. They independently observed, judged and encouraged their children's competence in many activities. In the school learning places, these multiple dimensions of their mother-child relationship were markedly less evident in their home tutor - student relationships. Their inclination to extend

themselves to support their children's growth and development in their daily lives outside of the schoolrooms was clearly evident.

As mothers, each of the women felt responsible for their children's growth and development. The three women's 'just get it done' approach to being home tutors in the schoolrooms may have been a consequence of their lack of knowledge and interest related to teaching, and/or their expectations for how to 'do a good job of chores', and/or, the constant press of being with one's children. In these comments, Cherie also speculated that mothers as home tutors expect more from their children which can exacerbate the sense of pressure they feel in that role.

THE CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE OF THEIR 'MOTHER-TEACHERS'

The children's experiences were analysed using Chawla's (1992) and Langhout's (2003) understandings of 'place attachment', and Rasmussen's notion of 'children's places' (rather than 'places for children'). The seven children in the study had many places and activities they enjoyed within and outside of the families' properties. These places supported the development of self-identity both by affording opportunities for them to try out predefined roles in conventional settings and by offering unprogrammed space (Chawla, 1992). They learned to muster, build fences, clean ponds, work in the garden, cook, ride horses, build motorbikes, and more with encouraging attention and useful feedback from their parents. Research by Rasmussen (2004) and others (e.g., Bartlett 1990; Hart 1978; Hester 1985) has shown that children prefer to play in naturalistic places rather than those that are landscaped. Malleable environments provide better opportunity for imaginative play (Chawla, 1992). In their own unprogrammed space on the properties they built private retreats, jumps for their bikes, and a variety of temporary structures for use in their imaginative play. The places of their everyday lives outside of the schoolrooms supported meaningful relationships and opportunities for creative expression and exploration. The children experienced and enjoyed their mothers in many roles and moods outside of the schoolroom.

As the children and I looked at the photographs they had taken of the various places of their daily lives, we discussed their views on 'mum' in different places. The children described the places where they had the most fun with their mothers and the places where they didn't enjoy being with them. In their own ways, the children related how their mothers behaved in different places, including the schoolroom.

None of the children had taken a photograph of the schoolroom; however, they all described their 'mum' as being different there - different from the way she was in other places. Nathan had difficulty in articulating the difference but just knew she was different in the garden than in the schoolroom. All the children described 'school' as a place they didn't like but they all also appreciated having their mothers as their teachers and preferred to work with them rather than having any volunteer retired teachers who visited annually for six weeks. For both the children and the

home tutors, the experience of everyday life in the schoolrooms - the school learning places that were evolving - was an aversive one.

THE MOTHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEMSELVES IN THE SCHOOLROOM

Each of the women believed that their identities did not change when they were in their schoolrooms. They viewed themselves as their children's mothers and the difference in their role was not that of becoming a 'teacher' utilising particular skills, knowledge and abilities, but a difference in their attitude to the task.

The mothers acknowledged that they did not take some of these more enjoyable aspects of themselves into the schoolroom. The mothers' more limited and less enjoyable forms of interaction with their children in the schoolrooms, together with the routinised approach to following the distance education materials meant that the school learning places that evolved lacked aspects of children's favourite places - opportunities for social affiliation, creative expression and exploration (Chawla, 1992) or social support, autonomy, and positive feelings (Langhout, 2003).

The three women viewed the school curriculum work as a task to be completed. No 'mucking around' suggests completion of the task is to be undertaken seriously. While the women saw their identity as parent and educator as not different, one could argue that the tasks, roles and responsibilities required of each were quite different. One could also argue that the multiple parent roles they demonstrated so spontaneously and adeptly outside of the classroom, e.g., 'encourager', 'coach', 'playmate', etc. were not as evident in the schoolrooms. The distance education materials, while providing a resource for home tutors, failed to rescue school learning activities from becoming simply a chore for both students and home tutors.

This summary of highlights from the findings has underscored the way the schoolrooms as places were parts of the larger place of the families' properties. For both home tutors and children, the schoolroom experiences could not be well understood in isolation from the network of the other places and experiences in their everyday lives.

As in this first study, the study presented in the following pages also used the concept of *place* as a central organising theme, beginning with the notion of sense of place, moving to an exploration of place as an experience; as a mutual relation. This second study also moved from the concept of the individuated self to the Deleuzo-Guattarian (1988) rhizomatic notion of *becoming*. *Place* and *becoming* themselves are constructed as relational concepts, and so a complex picture of movements is created to represent the often difficult and challenging work of teaching in an unfamiliar (rural) place.

STUDY 2: CLASSROOM PLACES - TEACHERS, PUPILS AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

12th January 2005. It is a very hot day. I head off about 1 o'clock in the afternoon. After the drive down off the tablelands, the landscape for most of the rest of the 400 odd kilometres of the trip from my home to Neil's place is undulating, the vegetation varying from completely cleared cropping land, through partly cleared open woodland and closer scrubby land, to densely vegetated (at least by the road) eucalypt and native pine forests. On one particularly flat stretch of road, the view out the front window is very hazy, as is the view in the rear view mirror. It is like driving in a steam-filled bubble ... Everything is fuzzy. I'd driven this stretch of road often ... and every time it felt like this: a feeling of being "out of place"; of being in-between, in-between home and my destination. And it is the same today. And so hot. With the air-conditioning vents turned so as the cool air is blowing onto my hot skin, I feel cold; my body shivers. But if I turn the vents away from my body so as the cool air fills the car, I feel my body burning up – the direct sun on my "driver's arm" and the radiated heat from the dashboard are unbearable ...

Sunday 13th March 2005... as always, the vegetation fascinates me: What is that crop? And that one? Which eucalypts are these? Are these pines really native? There is so much one doesn't know when one is "out of place".

19 March 2005 ... The drought is bad out this way and I come across several drovers and their herds of cattle on the stock routes along the sides of the road. And always, on the horizon, are the ever present dust clouds...

20 March 2005. I am up early this morning and off for a walk. It is lovely and cool. Even this time of year the days are still very hot and this time of day, just before sunrise, is the only time the air feels cool and fresh.

6th June 2005. In a small village, about an hour from Nicola's place, I stop at a café. The sun is setting and has been blinding for the past twenty minutes. When I set off again the sun has dropped below the rolling hills. The sky is a magnificent luminous pink ... As I continue westwards, the horizon broadens and becomes more distant, and the sky fades to deeper shades of orange and purple. The evening star appears. As all about me grows darker I look in vain for the lights of Nicola's place: surely I am not far away now! At last, as I round a bend in the road, the lights of a cotton gin appear, and soon after a few scattered street and house lights. Almost there!

25th October 2005. I arrive about 12 noon. Rick's place is hot (and it is only late October)... I drive ... to the caravan park to book into my cabin. It is shaded but the air inside is still and warm. I open all the windows and turn on the fan. Still it seems airless, so I take a chair out onto the porch where a slight (albeit warm) breeze is blowing ... At the school I sign in and show myself to the staffroom. It is cool. Oh so cool. Thank goodness for air conditioning ... The bell rings. Shortly I will have to venture out into the hot concrete yard and find Rick

I, too, am a country girl. I grew up 'out west', and always thought I could return to live in the country, but I appear to have lost my tolerance for the heat that is a part of these rural places.

SENSING PLACE

We all have a sense of place; a sense of who we are and how we are relating to the place in which we find ourselves at any given moment. Some of us attune ourselves to this sense more than others. Some of us are better able to 'name' it; to put into words this relationship between our sense of self and the environment around us. Just as the 'mother-teachers' and children in the prior study had a sense of place – a sense of who they were in the different spaces in their daily lives – so too did the five graduate teachers in this second study have a sense of place; a sense of themselves as 'in relation with' the places they had been appointed to as newly graduated teachers.

This second study explored the relations between graduate teachers and the unfamiliar (rural) places to which they were appointed. Five teachers were followed through their first year of teaching. The cohort consisted of male and female teachers, teaching in both public and private schools, and the contexts included a four year old kindergarten class, a K-2 class, and secondary trained teachers teaching classes from Year 7 to Year 10, (as well as some primary classes). The teachers were visited once each of the four teaching terms in their first year, and were observed and interviewed. Four of the teachers also took part in a two day arts workshop in the school holidays following the first term. The data gathered consisted of: (i) interview transcripts, transcribed as spoken language, in poetic form; (ii) observation notes and a researcher's journal; and (iii) objects and artefacts collected and/or created by the teachers. The latter were photographed. The first phase of analysis involved both the searching for themes from the textual data, and the creation of textual and text/image artefacts to explore and represent different ways of knowing, and different knowledges. These first level analyses were then explored through the geophilosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (1988), to create different ways of thinking about and understanding the relationship between (rural) place and becoming-teacher.

Studies of place suggest the possibility of, and explore the nature of, personal intimate relationships between humans and place (Abram, 1996; Bachelard, 1994; Bonyhady & Griffiths, 2002; Buber, 1958; Somerville, 1999): describing how it is to "be bound up in relation" with place (Buber, 1958), with the animate and/or inanimate; and of the need for the "human and non-human to attend to each other" (Bonyhady & Griffiths, 2002). Abram (1996) argues that these relationships first require an awareness of and receptivity to place; not as an object, but as a mutual relation. Prior to their engagement in this study the teachers would not necessarily have been aware of and receptive to the non-human in their places; and may not have been aware of and receptive to all that was human in their place.

To be able to explore the teachers' relations with place I first had to facilitate their awareness of and receptivity to their place. I began by asking each of them to "tell me about this place"; to tell me about the rural place in which they were living and teaching; and then I asked more specifically for them to tell me about their relationships with others in this place, and about times of silence and solitude.

EXPERIENCING (SENSING) PLACE

place and becoming

If we conceive of place as an experience, and as consisting of relationships, then the places the teachers were appointed to were different places when they arrived, to what they had been before their arrival. The teachers' presence in these rural places changed the places; changed the relations occurring in these places. The participants were in places that could be mapped and charted; they were in mutual relation with these places; they embodied place; they created the places they inhabited; and their bodies were themselves places.

today was cold
yesterday wasn't too bad
it just depends on how frosty it is

I'm not used to the flatness
I go for a bike ride and it's flat
I like the bike riding here

this town doesn't actually do
deliveries [of babies] any more
they've taken out the facilities
another state government brilliant idea
I think the doctors were prepared to do it here
but the state government removed the facilities
and took them to the nearby rural city
and now they want us to go there

it's not
that far away
but it's far enough away to
have your own
time and your own
events

it's a busy place
you're not only the school
you're the meeting place for the parents after school
you're the meeting place for other children to be picked
up
you're the meeting place for playgroup
parents actually meet here at the school
it's not just a school

we had some rain and some of the farms were blocked off from everything
get that out here

I see the classroom as having a really big interaction
with the environment and everything that's happening in it
because it just
evolves around all of that

have noticed the Aboriginal English
doesn't really worry me but
you notice it
I don't know how to describe it
I'd say it's more concise than how we talk
they're straight to the point
I'm sure Aboriginal English is something that
varies too
but I think we do waste a lot of words sometimes
whereas they just go straight to the point

in this town I've noticed
you've got your higher class
like even higher than middle class really
and then you've got your lower
lower class
that seems to be the two
there seems to be nothing in-between

this town is not as bad as people make
out

Place as an experience fits well with the Deleuzo-Guattarian notion of a multiplicity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). A multiplicity has no object and no subject, only events; only movements. And there are different qualities of movement; different speeds and slownesses. Deleuze and Guattari use the imagery of a rhizome to describe this notion. While a tree has an hierarchical root system, a rhizome moves horizontally, with shoots emanating from ruptures at seemingly random points. So it is with a multiplicity. Rather than linearity, it represents ruptures and unpredictable movements. And what is important is not the points, but the movement between them. The experience of place is not something that can be predicted. It is a relation that is influenced by the experiences of the human and non-human, the animate and the inanimate.

Just as place can be conceived of as a multiplicity, so too can 'becoming'; the development of new and different relationships. The participants in this study were becoming-teacher. While their physical makeup did not change, their movements did: they were developing new relations, new ways of being.

teacher-pupil relations

Teachers' relations with their pupils are at the very heart of their experiences of place. McConaghy et al (2006, p. 26) argue that:

While all teachers have to recontextualise their practice at least to some extent in different rural settings, they also have to enable their students to recontextualise their worldviews ... a rural teacher's journey involves his or her students both implicitly and explicitly ... [the teacher's journey is bound] with the journeys of the teacher's students.

The importance of the teacher-pupil relation is captured by van Manen (1994, pp. 140–141) in his use of the term *pedagogy*. As opposed to terms such as curriculum, instruction, or teaching, he uses the term pedagogy to encapsulate the concept of teaching as a relation.

liking children
respecting children
I think that's probably the biggest thing
respect
they are people
I think people forget that

I show them that I'm
interested in what they're interested in
I'm interested in them
as a person learning and developing

if I make that time
especially for the fringe dwellers
if I make that time for them
it's lovely
it's lovely
you just build on a relationship
then you've just got something to work with

It's really funny like they walk up to you and
"ohh Ms A I did this on the weekend"
I have one who will run up and probably give me a hug
half way through the day or something and she'll say
"you know I missed you over the weekend"
ooh I missed you too

that's always a balance
trying to be soft but
fair

but also disciplined
there's always that balance of
trying to make sure that they are on the
right level
and I'm being fair to them and giving them
a go
that's something
I'm conscious of that I need to work at
and continue to work at that one because
they're all individuals

I think I relate to all of them different
but I try to be fair
and even
how you actually interact with them is different because of
their understandings
of interactions

The most common word the teachers used to describe their relationships with their pupils was respect. It is talked about as a two-way process – if you want respect, you first have to give it. Irigaray (cited in Casey 1997, pp. 328-9) however, contends that “respect” misses the mark. What is needed is intimacy and nearness. Similarly, MacQuarrie (2006, p. 49) argues that the current emphases on observation, interpretation and analysis of students creates the student as a ‘known entity’, an other, and in so doing actually hinders the student's ability to engage in the processes of transformation and change. Instead she suggests that it is through ‘being in relation with our students’ – through being present with them in dialogue, that we can best facilitate these processes. In interpolating Winnicott’s work to the classroom she suggests that to move to “being in relation” requires the teacher to survive “the student’s attempts at destruction” (p.41). Survival is the abstaining from the impulse to retaliate. In Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizomatics the notions of strata (as bodily impulses) and destratification (as abstractions) are used to represent such movements as these. The teachers abstaining from the impulse to retaliate is the abstraction that frees themselves from the known and actively engages them in becomings. After destratification we return to the comfort of the strata but we are no longer the same multiplicities we were before our destratification. Every movement of becoming changes the multiplicities:

every undertaking of destratification (... plunging into a becoming) must ... observe concrete rules of extreme caution: a too sudden destratification may be suicidal, or turn cancerous. In other words, it will sometimes end in chaos, the void and destruction, and sometimes lock us back into the strata, which become more rigid still, losing their degrees of diversity, differentiation, and mobility (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 503).

Developing relations with and in unfamiliar (rural) places, developing pedagogy, is a risk. In discussing pedagogy and place Smith (1997, p. 4) contends that:

Whatever the pedagogy of place may be, it has little to do with a warm cosy relationship with an imagined nature, and perhaps more to do with the courage to befriend one's own mortality in the midst of the ongoing project of self understanding.

A pedagogy of place requires a self understanding—an awareness—of ones' relations with place, and this requires courage. In creating an awareness of their places the teachers were indeed becoming aware of themselves in relation to place; and in doing so they were becoming aware of their becoming-teacher.

solitude & silence

... in our peaceful moments we are ... sensitive inhabitants of the forests of ourselves

(a translation of Jules Supervielle in Bachelard 1994/1958, p. 187)

The teachers told me much about the *speeds* of being teacher in a rural place, and I wondered about the *slownesses*; so I asked them tell me about times of solitude and silence.

I've even learnt to have
time alone
when I've got 25 kids on instruments
which is quite amazing
and when I'm walking through the playground
"Miss E come and have a look at this..."
even in all of that I've learnt to
create my own space

I now understand how people can live in a city but still have
anonymity and
aloneness

what I love the most is
sitting in the car
I travel to the nearby regional centre and back
for various functions
that's my solitude
that's why I used to like doing long haul truck driving
I can wind the window down and
s-s-sing as loud as
and the only things that can hear me are the cows and the kangaroos

physically alone
not very often at home
on weekends or after school hours I can be alone at the school

it's often silent on the outside

I love silence
on the condition that noise is not far away if I need
it

it's never really silent
you've got the cows mooing
you've got the turkeys
if I go for a walk of an afternoon
a student along the road down here
he'll come out

I get further down the road and another parent has a chat
right up around the corner another parent comes out for a chat

so
even when
it is the silent sort of time
there isn't that silence

I've started staying up just so I can have that bit of quiet time
sometimes I will put the kids to bed at 7:30
just because I need
peace and quiet

the Japanese gardens
we try to go out there as often as possible
just sit out there and
relax
its just a great place
I'm very much at peace just sitting there
and it's quiet

There was some sort of solitude and/or silence, or perhaps it would be better described as stillness, in each of the teachers' lives. One teacher was even able to create a space of stillness in a noisy class of students, and a playground of children. Perhaps the teachers needed to create places of stillness. Rather than silence, perhaps what is important are places of stillness, of lack of movement; time and space for inward contemplation; time for connecting with the new speeds and slownesses of becomings in a rural place.

PLACE, RELATIONSHIPS AND 'BECOMING'

The aim of the study was to create different understandings of rural teaching. Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy was used in the analysis to create new perspectives of the teacher and teaching, and to engage with conceptions of place that enable an exploration of the relations between becoming-teacher and place. It is these different ways of relating and being that this study sought to explore. A becoming-teacher is movement; it is relations with new speeds and slownesses and different capacities. McConaghy and Bloomfield (2004, p. 103) suggest that the displacement that accompanies the physical movement of teachers from one location to another "presents for teachers the possibility of new ways of knowing, being and relating that accompany the process of transformation." Part of becoming-teacher is engaging with the unfamiliar and being transformed by the resultant changes in relations and capacities.

USING 'PLACE' TO INFORM TEACHER EDUCATION

Scholars from many disciplines, including cultural geography, sociology, philosophy, psychology, education, and environmental studies, have elucidated the significance of using *place* as a fundamental idea in researching human experience.

According to Casey (1997, p. 202ff) place made its re-entry in the realm of western philosophy 'by way of body;' through philosophies which connected place with the body; with the notions of lived-body. Abram (1996) too, writes of the experience of place through the body, through the senses. For Abram, place is a sensual experience. Feld (1996, p. 91) also writes of the sensual connection with place:

as place is sensed
senses are placed
as place makes sense
senses make place

Place is both physical and metaphysical. And place is also more than what is experienced in the here and now. Our experience of any place is influenced by other experiences of other places. In the two studies presented, we have drawn upon common elements in *place* literature to clarify a number of ideas about place: how space becomes place; how people and places are mutually transformative; dimensions or attributes of the meaning of places, and place as a significant medium through which teachers in rural schoolrooms and classrooms develop their pedagogy. Using *place* instead of *context* serves as a reminder of the human agency in place making and prompts critical interpretation of the social structures and relationships that shape everyday life experiences in rural and remote settings.

In reflecting on the literature, writing and presenting the narratives and interpretive accounts from the two studies, we are mindful that they are merely our best snapshots of temporary moments in the passing stream of life. Nespore (1997)

similarly cautions that events re-presented, analysed and interpreted in research are not static. In our continued relationships with each family and with each teacher, we appreciate that, in many ways, they have changed, or their situations have changed.

The ongoing questions generated from the two studies are presented here to contribute to the conversation about preparing and supporting rural and remote teaching in Australia:

- How do/can teachers learn to be, become and belong in (rural) place?
- What if teachers were better able to sense place, and to develop appropriate relations of speeds and slownesses and capacities to respond creatively to place?
- What if, in preparing teachers for a profession which often requires moving to unfamiliar places (sometimes many times over the course of one's teaching career), there was a focus on teachers' awarenesses of, and capacities to develop, mutual relations with place through creating awarenesses of their connections to the places they inhabit - now, in the past, and in the (imagined) future?
- What if directors of early learning environments, school principals and education department personnel were to conceive of becoming-teacher as an ongoing, multiple and complex process which, rather than being an event contained within individuated persons for a given period of linear time, involves relationships between all members of the centre and school communities as well as the nonhuman, animate and inanimate of the places in which the event of teacher occurs?
- What if there was recognition of the ways that newly appointed teachers create and shape centres and schools and affect children, their peers and others, rather than a focus on their 'needs' and inadequacies and their tendencies to not stay long enough?

...perhaps rural teachers would have more capacity to develop a stronger sense of place and its relation to them as teachers. Perhaps

We write this paper with the intent that the two studies and the questions will support more useful ways of thinking about and exploring experiences of teaching in rural and remote settings. We also share the two studies with the intent to invite other researchers of rural and remote education in Australia to consider similar methods and conceptual frameworks in their work. It is through readers' responses and interpretations of this text, that even more provocative ideas and questions about practice and research will be generated.

REFERENCES

- Abram, D. (1996). *The spell of the sensuous*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Ashcroft, B. (2001). *Post-colonial transformation*. New York: Routledge.
- Auh, M.S. & Pegg, J. (2009). International symposium for innovation in rural education: Innovation for equity in rural education. *University of New England: Symposium Proceedings*, 58-67.
- Bachelard, G. (1994). *The poetics of space*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Baills, L. Bell, S. Greensill, B. & Wilcox, L. (2002). Bridging the gap between beginning teachers and isolated/rural communities. *Education in Rural Australia*, 12(1), 55-62.
- Bartlett, S. (1990). A childhood remembered. *Children's environments quarterly*, 7(4), 2-4.
- Bonyhady, T., & Griffiths, T. (2002). Landscape and language. In T. Bonyhady & T. Griffiths (Eds.), *Words for country: Landscape and language in Australia* (pp. 1-13). Sydney: University of New South Wales.
- Boylan, C. (2010). Preparing teachers to teach in rural schools: an Australian perspective. *British Educational Research Association Annual Conference*. University of Warwick.
- Buber, M. (1958). *I and Thou* (Vol. First Scribner's Classics). New York: Scribner.
- Casey, E. (1997). *The fate of place: A philosophical history*. Berkeley CA: University of California.
- Chawla, L. (1992). *Childhood place attachment*. In I. Altman and S. M. Low (eds.), *Place Attachment* (pp. 63 - 86). New York: Plenum Press.
- Clark, C. & Uzzell, D. L. (2002). The affordances of the home, neighbourhood, school and town centre for adolescents. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 22, 95 - 108.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1988). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. (B. Massumi, Trans.). London: The Athlone Press.
- Derr, V. (2002). Children's sense of place in northern New Mexico. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 22, 125 - 137.
- Ellis, J. (2005). Place and identity for children in classrooms and schools. *Journal of Canadian Association of Curriculum Studies*, 3(2), 55-73.

- Eyles, J. (1989). The Geography of everyday life. In M.J. Clarke, K.J. Gregory and A.M. Gurnell (Eds.), *Horizons in physical geography* (pp. 102 - 117). Houndmills: Macmillan.
- Feld, S. (1996). Waterfalls of Song: An acoustemology of place resounding in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea. In S. Feld & K. H. Basso (Eds.), *Senses of place*, Advanced Seminar Series (pp. 91-135). Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
- Gibson, E. J. (1991). The ecological approach: A foundation for environmental psychology. In R. M. Downs, L. S. Liben and D. S. Palermo (Eds.), *Visions of Aesthetics, the environment and Development: The Legacy of Joachim F. Wohlwill* (pp. 87 - 108). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Green, N.C. (2006). Everyday life in distance education: One family's homeschooling experience, *Distance Education*, 12(3), 1-9.
- Gregson, R., Waters, R. & Gruppetta, M. (2006). Breaking the ice: Introducing trainee primary and secondary teachers to rural education settings. *Making teaching public: Reforms in teacher education: 34th annual conference, Australian Teacher Education Association*. Fremantle, Western Australia, Australian Teacher Education Association, 152-159.
- Hart, R. (1979). *Children's experience of place*. New York: Irving.
- Helfenbein, R. J. (2004). Space, place, and identity in the teaching of history: Using critical geography to teach teachers in the American South. In A. Segall and E. Heilman (Eds.), *Social studies--the next generation: Re-searching in the postmodern*. Peter Lang.
- Hester, R.T. (1985). Subconscious landscapes in the heart. *Places*, 2, 10 - 22.
- Howe, E. R. (2006). Exemplary Teacher Induction: An international review. *Educational Philosophy & Theory*. 38(3), 287-297.
- Hudson, S. and J. Millwater (2009). "Over The Hill" is not so far away: Crossing teaching contexts to create benefits for all through rural teaching experiences. *Teacher Education Crossing Borders: Cultures, Contexts, Communities*. Albury, NSW, Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA).
- King, S. (2006). Yes you can afford it! Supporting pre-service teachers in their desire to complete a teaching experience in rural or remote Queensland. *Community, diversity and innovation in rural and remote education and training*. Osborne Park WA, SPERA, 167-169.
- Langhout, R. D. (2003). Reconceptualizing quantitative and qualitative methods: A case study dealing with place as an exemplar. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 32(3/4), 229 - 244.

- Lippard, L.R. (1997). *The lure of the local: Senses of place in a multicoated society*. The New Press: New York.
- Lock, G. (2008). Preparing Teachers for Rural Appointments: Lessons from Australia. *The Rural Educator*, 29(2), 24-30.
- Lock, G., Green, B., Reid, J-A., Cooper, M. White, S. & Hastings, W. (2008). Designing a national research project in rural-regional (teacher) education. *The Face of Learning - Generation M : The Mobile Generation*. Melbourne, Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia, 186-191.
- Lock, G., Reid, J-A., Green, B., Hastings, W., Cooper, M. & White, S. (2009). Researching regional-rural (teacher) education in Australia. *Education in Rural Australia* 19(2), 31-44.
- MacQuarrie, J. (2006). Against interpretation. *Journal of Thought*, 41(2), 39-50.
- Maxwell, T. W., Reid, J-A., Mcloughlin, C., Clarhe, C. & Nicholls, R. (2002). Online support for action research in a teacher education internship in rural Australia. *Education in Rural Australia*. 12(1), 23-33.
- McConaghy, C., & Bloomfield, D. (2004). Beyond the line, beyond the self: flirting with rural teaching. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 20(3), 93-112.
- McConaghy, C., Lloyd, L., Hardy, J., & Jenkins, K. (2006). Bush Tracks: Journeys in the development of rural pedagogies. *Education in Rural Australia*, 16(2), 13-29.
- Nelligan, P. (2006). Rural professional experiences : supporting pre-service teachers. Making teaching public: Reforms in teacher education: the 34th annual conference, Australian Teacher Education Association. Fremantle, Western Australia, Australian Teacher Education Association, 235-245.
- Nespor, J. (1997). *Tangled up in school: Politics, space, bodies, and signs in the educational process*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc: New Jersey.
- Page, J. (2006). Teaching in rural and remote schools: Implications for pre-service teacher preparation pedagogies of place and their implication for pre- service teacher preparation. *Education in Rural Australia*. 16(1), 47-63.
- Productivity Commission (2011). *Early Childhood Development Workforce: Draft Report*. Melbourne: Australian Government. Retrieved from <http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/study/education-workforce/early-childhood/draft>
- Rasmussen, K. (2004). Places for children – Children’s places. *Childhood*, 11(2), 155 – 173.
- Rivlin, L.G. (1990). The significance of home and homelessness, *Marriage and Family Review*, 15 (1-2), 39-56.

- Smith, D. G. (1997). The geography of theory and the pedagogy of place (editorial). *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 13(3), 2-4.
- Somerville, M. (1999). *Body/landscape journals*. Melbourne: Spinifex.
- Somerville, M. (2007). An enabling place pedagogy for new teachers. *AARE 2006 International education research conference*. Adelaide.
- van Manen, M. (1994). Pedagogy, virtue, and narrative identity in teaching. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 24(2), 135-170.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.