NETWORKING THE 'BUSH' - IS THERE ANYONE OUT THERE?

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"Education, if it is worth anything, should not take people away from the land, but instill in them even more respect for it ...."   Wangari Muta Maathai.

ABSTRACT

Local rural communities and individuals are increasingly disarmed by the socially transforming processes of post modern times including the globalisation of rural production systems and trade. There is a new climate 'in the bush' that is imbued with a deep suspicion that globalisation processes will continue to threaten the sustainability of agrarian practices and continue to impose relentless 'restructuring' of both rural customs and industrial capacities. Networks between rural communities of widely separated social and cultural landscapes are as challenging to achieve as the possibilities of networking across the cultural, political and economic divide that stands between local rural jurisdictions and empowered and enriched national and global spheres. These 'higher' jurisdictions more closely reflect metropolitan social, economic and environmental needs and aspirations, and tend to overlook the validity and value of the local social and cultural places 'below', even as these might mysteriously maintain vital landscape and industrial assets.

How then do we connect the multiplicity and variety of increasingly disabled local places when the networks between these local places have been weakened by both social and physical disconnections, leaving them sporadic and incomplete? Rural networks are dependent not only on an equal and equitable access to the infrastructure of interpersonal connections - communication, transport and education - but also on the human capacities and perceptions that motivate (or reject) the seeking out and maintenance of such networks.

In attempting to network more widely and deeply between local rural communities and national and global spheres, educators must address the reality that the shallow and incomplete networks that lie across and between rural landscapes must first be re aligned and interconnected. The recognition that an inter community network is largely missing might also illuminate the need for rural education advocates and practitioners to take a more courageous stand in the facilitation of relationships between separate rural locales by employing education practices that connect locally relevant issues and teach for the intellectual re arming of potential rural leaders and their communities. The deployment of sympathetic and appropriate actions by educators to disarm the persistent and pervasive deficit paradigm in rural schooling, and the development of a critical rural education paradigm focused on excellence, equality and equity is urgently needed. Transformative practices in education and a political commitment to funding crucial communication and transport networks and a rural education 'revolution', are the precursors to building networks to connect local, national and global spheres.

INTRODUCTION

Scholarly debates about what and who is rural and the apparently recognisable characteristics that ostensibly define which places and which people *are* rural has invariably either explicitly or implicitly clung to knowing 'the rural' as those places that are non metropolitan. Rarely has scholarly investigation attempted to see beyond the general in the rural to identify what schisms or connections might exist in the social and cultural mosaic that exists beyond the congested and

expanding metropolises that sit along the most attractive harbours, river mouths and coastlines of the nation. There is an underlying assumption in the definition of what is rural, that by virtue of their very habitation of rural places, individuals and groups who live there must share at least some measure of easily identified rural social and cultural characteristics, values and behaviours.

In assessing and investigating education for rural people there is an oversimplified acknowledgment of the disparities that exist in education achievement and student engagement in schooling. There has been little investigation of how such educational outcomes might in fact reflect wider social and cultural issues and how these issues might have an impact on student attitudes and achievements. It is possible that complex social and industrial processes as these have been imposed from outside the realm of education are deeply implicated in unequal educational outcomes for rural students. Divisive social, economic and political processes that disempower some rural groups compared to other groups in society, or groups within the multiplicity of rural spheres, has created wholly new divisions both within the totality of the rural and between the rural and the metropolitan.

Among the most divisive of these processes has been the bureaucratization of land management practice through the prioritising of conservation and formal Natural Resource Management over traditional land use activities. In livestock producing areas where there has historically been minor modification of natural landscapes as a result of rangeland or pastoral grazing practices, profound jurisdictional and formal land management changes have remade community life in many cases (Franklin, 2011).

An equally significant impetus for rural industrial and social change has been the centralising of local political power away from agrarian groups within rural jurisdictions. In local governance the process of amalgamation has seen the transfer of power to larger rural towns and cities. In state and national spheres political power has settled in the capital cities as their populations increase as a result of migration from both rural areas and abroad. The acknowledged loss of rural industrial viability and thus rural social sustainability that has so often been simply described as industrial adjustment or restructuring, overlooks a plethora of complex social processes that have not only remade agrarian landscapes, but also rural community social lives and rural cultures.

Significantly there has been little scholarly investigation about how some or many rural individuals and communities might have been unprepared and incapacitated by the often rapid and unforeseen changes that have been imposed, invariably without consultation and rarely without formal support for those individuals and communities forced to 'restructure'. Rural 'restructuring' may encompass either adaptation to or rejection of change as individuals and communities do *not* or cannot adjust to and comply with national political commitments to international treaties and agreements on trade, conservation and industrial practices.

POLITICISING AND MARGINALISING THE AGRARIAN RURAL

In discussing rural issues, scholars and bureaucrats have broadly ascribed the outcomes of policies and regulations imposed by centralised governments for the delivery of national and international political, economic and environmental goals to rural 'industry restructuring' (Vanclay, 2003; HREOC, 1998). Analysis of rural industry restructuring rarely differentiates between how intentional economic manipulation has or might diminish or enhance specific aspects of social capacities, nor how these manipulations impact on different rural interest groups and the multiplicity of distinctive agrarian and 'village' cultures that are obscured beneath the anonymity of the processes of rural restructuring. This term glibly generalises a wide variety of social and cultural consequences by assuming contingencies and conformities with goals that are put in place to balance industrial costs and broader national economic or environmental benefits (Mendham, Gosner & Curtis; Cocklin, Bowler & Bryant, 2002). The rural itself has thus become a term of convenience, a term that rarely encompasses or seeks to describe the intricate differences and disparities between, across and *within* a multiplicity of very different

rural spaces. The rural as a term is also invariably employed by those in authority to provide an oversimplified demarcation between unfamiliar multiple rural spaces and empowered urban jurisdictions (Franklin, 2011).

The rural is not as it seems in this generic description of what is not urban. It is most certainly not an autonomous or simple space where inhabitants are comparatively *less* sophisticated, rural lives are relatively more tranquil and uncomplicated but are fettered by shortsighted and archaic practices that may abuse and undermine native and natural attributes that are threatened and destroyed by apparently avaricious and shortsighted agrarian activities. In post modern times inhabited rural spaces have lost their cultural mystique for urban inhabitants, and instead of dreaming about riding with *Clancy of the Overflow* (A.B. "Banjo" Paterson, 1889) they would "rather fancy" that the "the sunlit plains extended" should be saved from the exploitation of Clancy and his cattle, and the mountains of the *Man from Snowy River* (A.B. "Banjo" Paterson, 1890) with their "torn and rugged battlements on high" should be proclaimed for the solitary wilderness experience of future generations of urban people fleeing Paterson's "gritty of the dirty dusty city".

The rural *is* increasingly culturally separated by the social and economic disparities that exist between more and less densely populated places (National Institute of Economic and Industry Research, 2009), but the rural has been and remains everywhere an ephemeral and amorphous eco cultural collective of intrinsically separate geo social entities, each individually and intricately shaped and prescribed by what it is rural people of self proclaimed rural communities 'do' and 'how they live'. Rural life as it is out there everywhere in the myriad of geo cultural corridors and compartments, is constantly being re described and redefined by both visitors and inhabitants in a multiplicity of time and space segments that together become the totality of Australia's rural sociological landscapes (Massy, 1994; Williams, 1995). Only such aspects as place names and physical geographies remain relatively constant, reflecting as they do various historical, industrial and natural landscape attributes. Rural spaces may be inhabited by rural people and in migrants who identify and re identify communities that were once, at least in some ways, democratically autonomous. Such communities retain familiar and persistent nomenclatures and geographies, but are also subjected to a process akin to colonisation (Sloan, 1996), a political process that contests and challenges the veracity of "the collection of shared (stated or implied) beliefs, values, rituals, stories, myths and specialized language" (Kreitner, 1992) of rural life. Wool grower communities or dairy farming communities for example are each connected by their distinctive common practices and marketing needs, suitable geographies of production, infrastructure and labor markets than they are to dissimilar enterprise communities who are reliant on different industrial infrastructures, markets, climate and geographical realities.

Connections and existing networks between communities of common purpose who share common language, rituals, values and beliefs as well a similar environmental and industrial spaces, potentially develop and strengthen rural capacities and connections and employ a particular motility of action in order to endure.(Falk & Kilpatrick, 1999). Maintenance of unique rural community entities as they are separated by physical and self imposed 'distances' and disconnections from other communities and also on contested and accepted *self* defined exclusions and cohesions may founder. Equally within the confines of the specific physical landscape that impose constraints of distance and access, rural social and cultural spaces might be encouraged to embark on social change and re definition depending on the skills and capacities inherent in their cultural and social structures or the acceptance of new skills and capacities to enable positive change (Falk & Kilpatrick). This has always been so with the identities, landscapes and daily actions of individual identities like the Man from Snowy River and Clancy of the Overflow, each existing for a moment in time in separate rural spaces, meeting only briefly if at all and by chance, fleetingly connecting individual norms and rituals through shared threads of common beliefs, practices and experiences before separating again into separate worlds of action and endeavour.

JURISDICTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND DEMOCRATIC FAILURES

In describing social and cultural rurality, scholars have rarely payed attention either to the complexities induced in rural places by the myriad of industrial, legal and political jurisdictional systems and the ways in which larger jurisdictional authorities variously impinge on or benefit rural social and economic sustainability. There appears to be a general acceptance among analysts of the rural that the multiple jurisdictional structures that now overlay and silence many rural lives as these are imposed through legislation to allocate services and resources and to administer regulations to industrial, recreational and social activities, often deliver unequal and inequitable outcomes to rural constituents (Mendham *et al,* 2011; Lewis, Moran & Cocklin, 2002). These jurisdictional structures are rarely locally autonomous and may be overseen by industrial, local, regional, state, national or international legal and administrative authorities (Budge, Butt, Chersterfield, Kennedy Buxton & Tremain, 2012). In most cases these jurisdictional structures have become partly or fully reliant for their burgeoning budgetry requirements on a diminishing number of rural taxpayers, ratepayers and levy payers. It is also the case that participation in the governance of many of these jurisdictional structures by rural people is increasingly being more closely controlled by the higher political and legal authorities of governments (Gray & Lawrence, 2000) and any accountability for the ways in which budgets are allocated are being usurped either by the management of these structures themselves or government bureaucracies tasked with the responsibility of delivering outcomes that are aligned to the wider mandates of state or national governments and international treaties and agreements.

The imposition of higher political and economic systems and processes that *inflict* varying pressures on rural community arrangements and industry practices have often created deep but unforeseen schisms and fractures in the *in situ* architecture of traditional rural lives and once locally relevant democratic structures, and these schisms and fractures have arguably been most keenly felt at the individual community level (Franklin, 2011).

ENVIRONMENTALISM AS RURAL DISENFRANCHISEMENT

Environmentalism as a post modern social phenomenon has persistently inflicted significant if uneven consequences for many rural communities and industries and has rarely been acknowledged formally as being a significant catalyst for rural industry 'restructuring' and demographic change in rural jurisdictions (Gray & Lawrence, 2000; Lawrence, 2005). Aligned as this phenomenon has been and is motivated primarily by western metrocentric values and ideologies, environmentalism has been invigorated and empowered by the bureaucratisation of conservation and Natural Resource Management (NRM) (Franklin, 2011). It has arguably become one of the most strident and marginalising of the globalising processes that have imposed deep social and political change for rural jurisdictions both in Australia and in other western nations (Levett, 2000). Environmentalism as it has been defined and supported by generic ideals and imposed by national and international agreements and actions, has unintentionally diminished respect for rural practices, knowledges and behaviours everywhere, seriously weakening and even usurping the democratic functioning of locally relevant social structures and democratic systems that once served specific rural community needs.

The often draconian state and national regulation of the 'use' by rural individuals of native vegetation, native animal and fishery resources and water for individual farmers or professional fishers, may be and is often swept aside to deliver contradictory national and global economic imperatives for the maintenance of high 'standards of living' of the total population. Mining on farmland, the building of large scale water supplies and energy production systems for cities, the decision to usurp farm land for the establishment of timber plantations to meet international environmental agreements, or for suburban and peri urban developments, are each and all measures that have delivered both minor and catastrophic *in situ* environmental outcomes for disenfranchised rural residents. Consumerism rather than production as the primary driver for economic activity in western economies has also resulted in the diversion of both the

responsibility for and the consequences of environmental degradation to the relatively small number of agrarian users who own and manage a disproportionate percentage of the land surface area of the Australian continent.

THE MARGINALISING OF RURAL COMMUNITY VALUES

The systematic amalgamation of local government jurisdictions during the past several decades continues in rural places and this process along with the usurping of local decision making in many areas that relate to environmental and developmental issues has increasingly shifted the focus of regulatory and political capacities to the centres of population and power. Initially this centralising of local political power was to the major town of the Local Government Area (LGA) but state governments have progressively reduced local participation in governance and crucial decision making processes. Locally elected representatives are also increasingly bound by state government authority through regulation imposed in the interests of uniformity and consistency across state and national jurisdictions. In the case of local government organisations that regulate pest animal and invasive weed control, rural fire operations and other natural disaster responses, natural resource management and landcare initiatives, the authority to formulate and implement *in situ* decisions and actions has been progressively moved away from the local jurisdiction and towards the greater authority of major population centres and seats of government.

Increasingly environmental decisions already removed from local jurisdictional relevance are being further usurped from state to federal and international levels, often against the interests of local community outcomes, but in line with broad national and internationally defined ideologies and commitments. The broad stroke implementation of global scale policies including 'sustainable development' (Lockie, Lawrence & Cheshire, 2006), conservation of native environments and natural resource management (NRM), have not only undermined specific relevance when disseminated to specific *local* jurisdictions, but have also often defied responsible fiscal application at the local level.

The industrialisation of agrarian practices as these so often appear to be in contradiction to the goals and ideologies of environmentalism have further eroded locally relevant social actions and swept aside rural community participation in crucial decision making processes about the structure and functioning of rural social, environmental and industrial neighbourhoods (Franklin, 2011). Australian agriculture once so much dominated by farming family enterprises is increasingly subjected to national and international corporate configurations as a direst result of the deregulation of trade, foreign investment and changes to fiscal policies (Lockie *et al*, 2006; Lawrence, 2005). The family farm is now not only sought after by 'tree changers' but has also become the objective of both national and international company investors including superannuation funds (Budge *et al,* 2012). Agricultural land acquisition and management as well as control of production through powerful contractural arrangements between individual food producers and corporate retailers is increasingly accepted by Australian governments as a legitimate outcome for the achievement of wider economic benefits.

Weakened and marginalized by decades of fiscal, investment and trade policies, environmental constraints and the imposition of regulatory measures that prioritize obligations to customers through low food prices, family farming enterprises are increasingly unwilling and unable to meet the unsustainable economic demands and impositions of the combination of these measures. Resistance to these impositions and changes by family farmers has been muted by their lack of capacity to deal with the burden of these challenges and the inability to contest the resultant inequities of the inexorable political forces that continue to centralise political power in national and international corporations, governments and industry organisations.

RURAL TRANSFORMATION AND DEMOCRATIC CHANGES

Changing demographics in rural areas have been dispassionately assessed and evaluated by

governments, rural geographers and educators, generally with and from the perspectives of those who have been defined as the 'sea changers' and 'the tree changers' (Mendham *et al,* 2011). The reasons people move to rural spaces is often assumed to be primarily about their own motivations, those who appear to be providing the primary impetus for demographic change in rural areas. Implicit in the literature on rural demographic change there has been very little reflection or investigation about the under side of this social phenomenon. There has rarely been an examination of the catalysts for farm abandonment that is the first phase of this change, often initiated by a plethora of complex rural industrial and social catastrophes, themselves initiated by the inequitable imposition of policies and regulations about conservation, NRM or industry imposts delivered to individual rural industry participants through government and corporate policies and regulations. The motivation for such profound change to rural communities is not so simple as the seeking of a 'tree change' by financially equipped urban residents with a desire for an alternative lifestyle.

The effect of the multiple disparities - political, economic and cultural - between the tree changers and the tree sellers initiated by a combination of inequitable political and social positions and uneven financial value systems relating to property and incomes, invariably deepens the already precarious balance between rural industrial and agrarian community values and urban political and economic superiority. A further consequence of the new rural demographic of tree change migrants is that it produces new tensions and disturbances in environmental goals and priorities is rural areas when non compliant residents object to or refuse to comply with pest animal and weed control management or fire hazard reduction programs for example.

Wherever these oppositional positions occur, they continue to widen and deepen the jurisdictional predicament of rural constituents as they are already the silenced minority in state and national political spheres. They then also become a minority in local government decision making processes within their own communities as the new rural interest group as tree changers contest not only issues of critical environmental importance to their agrarian counterparts, but also contest the aesthetics of rural industrial practices as these are seen to impinge on the tranquility of their rural experience.

These complex issues continue to arise across the interfaces where demographic change has already contested the social structures and cultures of once strong agrarian communities. Weakened through the progressive loss of political and social networks and capacities as they are progressively forced to endure the loss of industrial and social sustainability through compliance with federal and state government policies and international environmental and trade agreements, individual rural communities face the further loss of vital local networks and capacities for maintaining networks between themselves and separate communities of common cause.

WILD DOG MANAGEMENT, DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AND THE SILENCING RURAL VOICES

Within the omniscience of environmental regulations that deeply effect everyday agrarian practices, within the reduced scope for rural people to significantly influence governance at all levels to achieve accountability for government actions, the inhabitants of the multiplicity of rural community landscapes, especially where these remain dependent on agrarian activities, have been silenced through the fragmentation and erosion of their democratic capacities and opportunities (Franklin, 2011). Significant proportions of rural community constituencies have been overwhelmed by the demands of all levels of government to meet the expectations of the consumers of their products, to accept the ideologies of environmental and animal welfare lobby groups and to comply to the demands of industries and groups who are competing for land to access resources or simply because they covet farm land as lifestyle spaces.

In the specific case of dingo and wild dog management, engagement between rural community representatives and conservation bureaucracies about wild dog control, the imbalance of power

between the two groups is further entrenched by the incapacity and lack of resolve of individual rural people to contest the overwhelming nature of the multiple layers of opposition and open denigration of the rural perspective (Franklin, 2011). The large and growing body of scientific research that favours the protection of dingoes as the "top order predator" (Glen & Dickman, 2005) as "native" (Corbett, 1995) animals and most recently as "trophic regulators" (Glen, Dickman, Soule & Mackey, 2007) overwhelms the regulatory requirement for private land owners to control wild dogs on private lands. In a not uncommon contradiction between parallel jurisdictional positions, wild dog control becomes the regulatory responsibility of private land owners when these pest animals move into livestock production areas from public land where they are a protected native species (Franklin, 2011). The incontestable nature of scientific 'facts' about dingo biology and behaviour and the overwhelming support of public opinion for the protection of wild predators worldwide, each reject the possibility of predator population control on public lands but also by intent demeans the actions of land owners who are subsequently forced to destroy individual predators when they enter their lands to kill stock.

The history of the clash of contradictory value systems about dingo protection and wild dog control is clearly a dramatic example of the ways in which local rural jurisdictional rights and responsibilities have been disabled by the imposition of more powerful jurisdictional systems that overlay existing rurally based and focused jurisdictions and by changing the level of viability of local jurisdictional structures. In NSW, the ACT and Victoria, rural individuals have been denied access to the decision making processes about dingo and wild dog management on both public and private lands for several decades (Franklin, 2011). The resulting increase in wild dog numbers and the unmitigated predation of livestock that has followed has remade the communities most affected by this phenomenon. The subsequent demographic transformation as predation affected communities lost economic and social viability that directly led to the sale of land to tree changers is a clear example of the phenomenon that has been absorbed into that broader analysis.

RURAL SOCIAL SUSCEPTIBILITY TO 'RESTRUCTURING' PROCESSES

This particular 'restructuring' process that had its beginnings four decades ago continues along an expanding interface between the widening areas where dingoes are protected either by formal regulation on public lands or on adjacent lands now held by absentee or tree change owners with little interest or resolve to comply to the contrary regulations about pest animal control that applies to private land, but which is rarely enforced. Tentative changes in approaches to dingo management and wild dog control that introduced the concept of co operative community based planning groups a decade ago by the NSW government, have almost everywhere across the state failed to address the regulatory contradictions and imbalances and the marginalizing of its private land owner constituents. In many cases the community based groups and the plans themselves have simply become forums for government representatives to reinforce existing inequities (Franklin, 2011). By maintaining the superiority of dingo protection over wild dog management regulations, local community endeavours to maintain viability are rarely attainable. In many areas in NSW such community based planning groups have rarely become functional despite them being a statutory requirement since 2002 (Franklin, 2011).

As a long term participant in the debates about the contradictions and conflicts in the positions between dingo conservation and wild dog control, as a member of a community that was one of the first to experience demographic change as a result of the industrial 'restructuring' that followed the unprecedented predation of livestock, and as a member of a number of community wild dog management planning groups, it has become clear that the marginalization of rural community members is not as simple as the disempowerment of rural individuals and rural jurisdictional structures by the superior moral or political positions of those entrusted with the conservation of dingoes. As both an observer and participant over several decades at meetings held between professional public land managers and wild dog affected rural people, it is possible that the cause of much rural disempowerment and marginalization is due to the lack of

appropriate leadership, networking and communication skills of affected rural people (Franklin, 2011). Farming men, confronted by uniformed representatives from several separate land management authorities with clear and incontestable jurisdictional regulations and policies, and devoid of appropriate leadership, networking and communications skills, are helpless to challenge and negotiate just outcomes for themselves, their rural communities and fellow industry practitioners.

RURAL CRISIS AND EDUCATION FOR RURAL SUSTAINABILITY

Rural educators have increasingly focused on strategies to *engage* students at school including supporting VET subject choices for senior students. Schooling for rural students has as a primary focus the gaining of credentials, despite many rural young people and adults having neither a consistent nor wide choice of work opportunities in their community that match the subjects studied (Franklin, 2010).

What is missing for many rural young people and adults is the opportunity to participate in leadership, communication, negotiation and networking skills training. Such training is rarely available yet agrarian groups and rural people generally are regularly confronted with the need to engage with government and industry representatives who are both highly credentialed and skilled negotiators and communicators. The existing patterns of the interactions between professional representatives from government or industry organisations and rural people are imbued with uneven positions of power based on the combination of authority that is vested in formal government policy and regulation as well as in the superior credentials and the communication skills of the institutional representatives.

A second disadvantage for rural people is that the credentials that are required for professional environmental scientists are invariably based on natural science paradigms and positivist theory that reduces discussions about NRM, conservation and thus agrarian practices to a focus that excludes social scientific paradigms and rejects the unscientific and informal knowledges and practices of individual farming communities. Land use histories as these have been subject to changes in societal values, political and economic policies as well as the disparities in service delivery to rural communities including education have been rarely considered as a necessary inclusion in the curricular for NRM and environmental science students. Equally there is an absence in school education for rural people to learn the skills they need to equip them to deal with the challenges and changes in scientific knowledge and for defending the social injustice issues that result when wider societal goals override individual community democratic processes and industrial viability which each and together manifest as broad stroke 'rural restructuring' and 'demographic change' (Franklin, 2011).

The challenge for educators is whether or not they simply respond to the call to educate for rural sustainability as this both defines and implies the prioritizing of the sustainability of natural resources over *human* resources as these human resources might include legitimate rural knowledge that may be only apparent in the stories, myths, beliefs and values of the myriad of individual rural community histories that *together* make up the vast and formless rural experience that is assuredly *not* urban. The loss of the diversity of rural knowledge resources diminishes as agrarian practitioners submit to the inflexible and positivist NRM paradigm that deflects the human values of equity and social justice away from more easily recognised and accepted notions of rural sustainability that itself is valued simply as it might comply to or deliver global sustainability.

Educators have been tasked by the national curriculum with teaching for social, economic and environmental sustainability. It is clear from the particular perspective raised here about the causes of rural change, that rural people have been silenced by the erosion of their capacities to participate in democratic processes and by their lack of the necessary skills to participate in the networks that might connect them to communities of common practice from where they may communicate their needs and perspectives to educational institutions. The decisions being

made about the future shape and form of rural spaces does not always include rural communities and individuals, at least in part because they are unskilled and unable to negotiate with the decision makers who are increasingly directing the policies and programs that are delivering outcomes to comply with national and global goals and agreements.

PEDAGOGIES, PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES AND PROGRAMS - LISTENING FOR A RURAL VOICE

Rural educators are well aware of and skilled in delivering a range of appropriate and innovative education programs. They have also identified and evaluated practical strategies for the placement and retention of teachers in rural schools, and though there needs to be persistence and dedication for these strategies to bring lasting improvements to rural education in line with curriculum goals for rural sustainability, rural sustainability remains problematic. What has been missing in rural education research, theorising and practice is the employment of a strategy by educators to engage more directly with specific rural community practices and capacities in order to deliver in situ educational solutions that address locally relevant social justices issues. For many rural young people, and especially those who choose to remain in their communities and not undertake further education, specific skills for their engagement in transformative leadership strategies (Shields, 2004; 2010; Wilhemson, 2006) and capacities to engage in locally relevant democratic processes including participation in jurisdictional governance roles, would all seem essential for the attainment of rural economic, social and environmental sustainability. Without such skills, rural voices must remain muted and silenced by the authority and power that is now held by national and international jurisdictions and interests (Maathai, 2006).

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