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Rural Knowledges and Curriculum: International Perspectives

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Editorial

In this special issue of the *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, international scholars consider how rural knowledges are – or are not – embedded in their local educational systems. They draw on their work, research, and their lived-experiences in rural education to explore the opportunities and challenges of enacting place-conscious curriculum and pedagogies.

The origins of this special issue lie in a panel discussion held online during the COVID-19 pandemic and hosted by the European Educational Research Association (EERA) Network 14 in March 2022. EERA Network 14, one of the 34 networks of the European Educational Research Association, provides a forum for the development of research-informed knowledge in the field of Education, with a specific interest in the relations between communities, families, and schools. The panel exchanged views on how to build community-school relationships in rural areas, with a particular focus on curriculum and its enactment. The panel discussion can be found at universityofstandrews.padlet.org/laurencelasselle/BuildingCommunitySchoolRelationships.

This special issue gathers papers that further explore the ideas from the discussion panellists and new contributions sparked by it. Our collection of international scholars from Sweden, Norway, Portugal, the United States, and Australia share insights into what is being done within their educational or cultural institutions, as well as their education systems, to strengthen relationships between these institutions and rural communities. With many education systems and policymakers continuing to concentrate on a type of ‘equity’ that values metrocentric norms and goals (Bæck, 2016; Beach et al., 2019; Green, 2013; Passy & Ovenden-Hope, 2020; Paulgaard, 2017; Roberts, 2014; Roberts & Green, 2011) to the detriment of rural knowledges and people, our scholars argue that place-consciousness is needed to improve not only educational outcomes for rural youth, but also for the sustainability of the communities themselves.

The first article, *Rural Education and Migration: A Study of the 2015 Reception of Young Refugees in Sweden*, reminds us of the tragedy of many who fled when war broke out in Syria in 2011. A number of them arrived in Sweden and were dispatched by the authorities unevenly across the country by which smaller municipalities received proportionally larger numbers than others. Elisabet Öhrn, Dennis Beach, Monica Johansson, Maria Rönnlund, and Per-Åke Rosvall explored how schools received these new refugees and how their reception influenced teaching. Their analysis points out that if “some changes in forms of teaching became permanent as they were considered beneficial to non-migrant students, there were very few signs of changes in the content of teaching”.

The second and third articles enable us to encounter the rich cultural heritage of the Sámi, who reside in Northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola peninsula of Russia. To begin with, Anne Birgitte Fyhn and Ylva Jannok Nutti show us how local rural mathematics curricula could be created from the Sámi culture. Specifically, they analyse three traditional activities “with respect to the framework cultural symmetry, which was developed in research in Māori mathematics education”. By doing so, they highlight how the Sámi traditional measuring of length, *ruvden* (traditional braiding) and the coastal fishermen’s method of navigation embed each the Sámi values of *máhttit* (knowing something as bodily knowledge) and *diehtit* (knowing about something) that should be the basis of a culture-based mathematics curriculum and pedagogy. Gry Paulgaard and Merete Saus give us a vivid portrait of rural Northern Norway, Finnmark, and the impacts of the enactment of the national curriculum in the region. From their experiences as local persons and long-time social scientists, they question the ‘equity’ narrative by revealing its inadequacy to reflect the broad diversity of the pupils’ lives and places. Their “*call for a rural education curriculum that is contextualised and can encompass diverse diversity*” is profound and will resonate with many of us.

The fourth article continues the debate surrounding the application of a national core curriculum in rural schools and shifts to the context of Portugal. Sofia Marques da Silva critically discusses how rural schools in border regions and communities “*develop collaborative strategies to promote the integration of local knowledge into the curriculum and education practices in general*”. However, she concludes that in practice “*although schools recognise the national policy of curriculum flexibility as an opportunity to incorporate local knowledge they do not fully benefit from this opportunity.*”

The final article takes us across the Atlantic Ocean and invites us to Ekalaka, Montana in the United States of America. Sabre Moore, Angela Weikart, Jayne Downey and Sharon Carroll detail the place-conscious approach to education adopted by community leaders during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. They document why and how local history and knowledge were the basis of a museum exhibit and a K-12 curriculum about pandemics and vaccines. They argue that these “*contributed to [strengthen] cross-community connections and vitality [during a time] of division and fear amplified by the pandemic*”.

The Rural Connections piece, written by Belinda d’Angelo and Cherie Dyde, fits nicely within our series of place-conscious articles. It gives us the opportunity to learn more about a unique and successful Regional Higher Education Pathways program delivered by La Trobe University (Australia) in schools with low socioeconomic measures across the Albury-Wodonga and Shepparton regions since 2017 and 2019 respectively. The program not only guides and supports Year 12 students to develop their skills and confidence to become independent learners, but also aims to increase further education attainment in regional areas to boost the economic outcomes of local communities.

The final piece of this special issue is the review of the book *Rural Transitions to Higher Education in South Africa: Decolonial Perspectives* by Timmis et al. (2020), written by Dipane Hlalele. The book gathers works issued from a project investigating the learning journeys of students from rural areas of post-apartheid South Africa. The book’s authors adopt a decoloniality lens and highlight how these students can be successful in their university journeys.

To summarise, all contributing authors explore some of the challenges and opportunities around embedding local, rural knowledges in their curricular jurisdictions, with a recognition that each place has unique characteristics. They elaborate on the extent to which the differing contexts (social, cultural, geographical, etc.) of ‘rural’ influence the role of schools – namely through its curriculum as a socio-educational hub (Bagley & Hillyard, 2014). It is in this sense that they all examine how different types/classifications/contexts of rural influence (re)connections within

their communities and tease out key understandings from across the variety of contexts (Hargreaves et al., 2009).

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