PUTTING RURALITY ON THE EDUCATIONAL AGENDA: WORK TOWARDS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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It is perhaps too easy to suggest that rurality in educational terms has been largely missing from the pages of educational research texts. A search of the past few AARE annual conference papers throws up few papers on this topic; although an issue of *Australian Journal of Education* includes a paper on long-staying rural teachers (Boylan & McSwann, 1998), while the *International Studies in Educational Administration*, looks at small country schools in Wales (Huckman, 1998 p.3). However, there are two main areas in which educational research has been active in considering rurality in education: educational disadvantage for secondary school students in relation to access to curriculum; and recruitment and retention of teachers. Yet much of the research on disadvantage is largely gestural; included in the 1970s and 1980s as part of the discussion of the list of groups for policy intervention, alongside Aboriginal students, girls, students with disabilities and so on. Attention to the expansion of secondary schooling retention in the 1980s and early 1990s helped to focus attention on a large group of students - those in rural areas - for whom this phenomenon has not been true (Teese, 1996), and explanations for weaker achievement of students in rural areas have largely been connected to issues of access to a broad curriculum in smaller high schools. Current research efforts on 'like schools' may well show up some issues for further attention in this regard. The second major area of research has been into the characteristics of teachers who stay in rural and remote areas (Boylan, 1998 p.13), for example, and the problems of recruitment and support needed to maintain an experienced and expert workforce in more remote settings. Education Departments and the Country Areas Program have also continued to place such issues on the agenda, resulting in some policy development, but not much long term, refereed journal (i.e. accessible/retrievable) research. The demise of many policy and planning divisions of state education departments has contributed to the difficulty of sponsoring research or access to previous research.

What is at stake in the invisibility of the non-metropolitan in educational research? The projects we present in this panel arise from re-analysis of data with a specific interest in foregrounding what it is to live and work in non-metropolitan areas, what it is to be educators/educated in such circumstances, and what education might mean if re-read against the grain of the prime foci of globalising processes, the metropolising of social life and theory. In what follows, I first consider the role of universities and disciplinary traditions in the continued invisibility of rural schooling. I then outline four projects that staffs at Central Queensland University have used as jumping-off points to explore theoretical issues for re-inscribing rurality within their own educational research. This is followed by a brief overview of some key theoretical resources drawn from contemporary social theory (mainly outside education) which we have found helpful in exploring these projects as enscribed in rural education.

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[1] This paper was written when Marie Brennan was employed by Central Queensland University.

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH AND/IN THE RURAL

Universities themselves are normed upon cities - they are the quintessential metropolitan institution. And even though, in more recent years, there have been universities located in rural and regional areas of Australia, those located there bring with them the trappings of the habits, theoretical frameworks and valued disciplinary foci of their normative metropolitan counterparts. In Australia, they have often been seen as (at best) second-class institutions; slow to engage in formal research, and needing to establish their own legitimacy by engagement with debates whose terms are set by the 'sandstones', the truly legitimate universities, and the prestigious journals, also reflexively concerned with the metro-centric concerns of the more traditional university.

Universities have rarely examined themselves. The recent moves to corporatise the university, the challenge of knowledge production that is occurring outside the gate-keeping of the university, and the funding cuts to the public sector have tended to focus attention on the relationship of the university to its political/economic/cultural contexts; the self-examination that has occurred in the wake of such major changes has tended to be reactive, rather than treating the university as contributing to, and productive of, certain of those changes.

It is not that there has been NO research in regional universities, or even on the topic of regional schooling. However, for a country with such a strong mythology about the bush, continued even in current tourist advertising, there is not even much in the way of historical work in this area. In their introduction to their 1993 collection of essays, Petersen and Rodwell note the paucity of research into the history of rural education and the consequent problem that "[p]art of the curriculum problem is that 'rural' is a term which conceals more than it reveals. Whereas city life is much the same all over Australasia (except, of course, for connoisseurs), rural life is very various and always has been" (1993, p. vi).

More complex understandings of the role of rurality/regionality in education have been difficult to achieve in the broader public arena. When I note the paucity of research, I am talking about refereed journals which make material accessible beyond the location in which the knowledge has been produced; I do not mean to imply that there is not complex understanding that continues to emerge from non-metropolitan sites. However, most published research reflects a metro-centric bias, either explicitly or through lack of specific attention to issues of similarity and difference. Where the research does exist, it starts from an assumption of the self-evident nature of the problem through a focus on the geographical dimensions of space, generally noted as problems of 'distance' or 'remoteness'. Note that I am not assuming that those researching rurality ought to be located only in regional universities, although in these times of funding constraints for research, they are likely better placed for access to sites than metropolitan colleagues; but I am pointing to a serious concern with the lack of well theorised and rich data for an important area of public schooling in this country.

A more adequate conceptual framework will need to be robust enough to provoke important analytic questions and provide conceptual tools for use in diverse projects. There must be a capacity to recognise diversity as well as similarity within the sector of education generally: in the first instance between different parts of the sector - primary

schools, early childhood settings, TAFE, secondary schools, Aboriginal Community schools, prison schools, primary schools with secondary 'tops' (P-10), Universities, U3A, open learning and correspondence forms of distance education, for example. Within each of these 'categories of provision' there are also differences, some of which might be as significant as between different categories. Thus, there needs to be a more adequate descriptive base of research which has not yet occurred in Australian educational research.

From our perspective as non-metropolitan researchers, the challenge to re-examine our work by foregrounding issues of rurality has shown up a significant blindness in our assumptions in constructing our projects, our theoretical frameworks, our data foci and analyses. We have commenced this work by examining the literature on globalisating processes, exploring our own positioning in relation to this literature, as well as mining it to raise different questions to those we had previously explored. We do not expect to be able to develop a more adequate concept of rural education from only the resources of globalisation literature. This is, however, where we have started and this is what is presented in this panel.

CQU's PROJECTS[2]

This paper takes off from work on four, seemingly unrelated sets of research projects:

1. EARLY CHILDHOOD: Research into the professional development needs of directors of early childhood centres in regional areas and an exploration of delivery of Queensland pre-school curriculum guidelines (Woodrow). *Early Childhood centre directors in Central Queensland consistently raised the issue of their own positioning as lacking opportunities to engage professionally with others in a study of professional development needs of. A further project on Pre-school guidelines delivery, which was available across the state in a wide range of settings, shows up some of the ways by which marketisation and privatisation of services occurs in regional and rural areas.*

2. TERTIARY LANGUAGE IMMERSION: Rural teaching of and a Japanese field placement for immersion teacher education LOTE students (Hartley & Chapman).
Japanese studies and language teaching in Australia tends to be conservative: a transmission model is entrenched. The LOTE teacher education program at CQU works through 'immersion' in Japanese in a way which explicitly tries to address the critical cultural dimensions of working simultaneously in two cultures. In particular, issues of hybrid identity arise within the creation of an 'imagined space' of Japanese culture experienced as part of being a LOTE student in a regional university as well as when the students participate in field experience and hone stay in Japan. Their identities are formally built around being located 'in the country' in Australia, and as Australian foreigners, somewhat knowledgeable, in Japan.

3. SCHOOL COUNCILS: A study of devolution of school management in country primary schools (Brennan).

   Queensland is the last state system in the country to introduce school councils - and then only in advisory capacity and an optional choice for those schools not designated(up until the most recent election) as "Leading Schools". In many of the schools which were required to introduce advisory school councils as part of their funding to become 'leading schools, the context of union disagreement with partnerships with parents as an assault upon professionalism set in train a number of divisions within the school - between union and department officers, between principals and teachers, and between parents and teachers. On one hand, schools establishing school councils in this study felt they were able to build upon well established 'community' roles and expectations of involvement in schooling, something that participant teachers and community members would not expect in a city school. On the other hand, the homogenised policy and legislative treatment of the assumed universal 'school' and school council, which appears based on a metropolitan model, leaves different school communities unable to make changes e.g. to composition of their council which had to comply with a 'model constitution.' The distant 'them' -- the policymakers and legislators -- are clearly seen as 'out of touch' with lived realities in country schools, although this is likely to be the case for city schools as well. There is a problem in the assumption of a universal school, a universal school leader, who supervises standardised accountability documents and standardised tests in 'his' school. What is interesting is the way that discursive positions and self-representations clearly mobilise issues of regionality and country location as central to any explanation of how school councils might or might not work.

4. SCIENCE EDUCATION: First year science teachers experience in Central Queensland (Appleton).

   This project explored the needs of first year science teachers in regional and remote primary schools; like the Early Childhood group, these teachers emphasised their 'isolation' and the problems this raised for them as first year teachers and people who needed to be active in science curriculum in primary schools. The data here is reanalysed from a larger study in which the issue of rural location was not a central focus of the study to explore what isolation might mean in this context. In the process, an additional category of 'isolation' is added to the literature.

The data from these projects have been analysed in terms of contemporary social theory, with a particular emphasis on literature concerned with globalisation. In particular we have found helpful a number of propositions in this literature that re-position questions of rurality and regionality:

- The "great war of independence from space" further polarises the world (Bauman 1998)
- Pre-modern, modern and post-modern conditions simultaneously exist (Luke 1996)
- Globalising processes work both to homogenise and to differentiate (Appadurai 1990)

- Educators can act as an "imagined community", drawing on the nation-state analogy developed by Benedict Anderson (1990)

At this stage, only early elements of an analytic approach have been developed, so our work is more gestural than fully worked through. What we offer here is the material we have found most relevant to rethinking our own projects.

SOCIAL THEORY RESOURCES: RE-READING GLOBALISATION

Current ferments in the social sciences provide a rich range of resources around which to problematise issues of 'the country', rurality and what has come to be called 'regionality' in the literature on globalising processes. However, in keeping with the analysis above about the role of university disciplines as metro-centric, the globalisation literature itself, while relevant, has done little to interrupt the metrocentrism of social theory. While discussing matters such as regionality and the importance of the 'local', the main focus for explanation is not the older idea of regions - the countryside - but new alliances among metropolitan groupings, those large areas around such metropolises, more akin to the ways in which the country was discussed previously in economics and geography as the 'hinterland', the land behind the city, the land that supports the city's populations.

Much of the interest in relation to globalisation is connected to metropolitan areas for a number of reasons. The main processes of globalisation are analysed as being focused on economics, culture and information technology, and most of the populations organising them are located in major metropolitan areas. Sassen goes so far as to suggest that there are currently only a few megopolises which are truly 'global cities', hard wired for the bulk of the huge technological infrastructure required to deal with movement of people and information. Appadurai (Appadurai, 1990 p.5) suggests these movements, while concentrated in how they develop, need to be seen as 'flows' - movements that blur or remove boundaries - flows of finance, ethnic groups, technology, media and ideas. Grossberg (Grossberg, 1996 p.9) points out, however, that there is not reason why the flows would necessarily be restricted only to these five. Yet the effects or processes of globalisation are not only to be felt in the cities, around which much of the analysis lies, as many analysts illustrate. Indeed, the 'global village' is meant to encompass us all, wherever we are physically located (Featherstone, 1990 p.11; Featherstone, 1995 p.7), yet the examples are almost invariably located in metropolitan areas.

However, there are clearly significant trends in analyses of globalisation that point to the importance of continuities as well as the changes seen as associated with alterations in economics, information, entertainment/media and politics. What becomes important is to recognise that globalisation is not an even and universal set of processes. Just as over 80% of the current people in the world will not make a phone call in their lifetime, capitalism's new forms of flexibility and speed of movement require unevenness, differentiation as well as homogeneity of certain processes and assumptions (Appadurai, 1990 p.5). Such analyses point to important differences within as well as between nation-state peoples, organisation and processes that have not yet been made evident in analyses of schooling in rural and regional areas.

The 'Great War of Independence from Space' further polarises the world

Zygmunt Bauman, in an essay on "Time and Class" (Bauman, 1998 p.4), argues that "it is quite probable that the last quarter of the current century will go down in history as the Great War of Independence from Space" (1998, p.70). In such a "post-space-war-world, mobility has become the most powerful and most coveted stratification factor" in society (p.71). However, mobility is not a universal feature for humans: there are still many for whom this characteristic, so celebrated in globalisation and technological literatures, remains far from their experience or even desires. Nonetheless, the effects are felt:

> For those who remain 'separated by physical obstacles and temporal distances' (Virilio, 1991) such separation is more merciless and has more profound psychological effects than ever before....Rather than homogenizing the human condition, then, the technological annulment of temporal/spatial distances tends to polarise it. It emancipates certain humans from territorial constraints and renders certain community-generating meanings ex-territorial, while denuding the territory - to which other people go on being confined - of its meaning and identity-endowing capacity (Bauman, 1998 p.77).

From examination of our data in relation to school councils or early childhood directors in regional locations, it is very clear that the conception of distance as a physical barrier is still strong. This is not merely a problem of lack of conceptual clarity but a lived experience. For the people located away from metropolitan areas (as well as plenty internally in metropolitan locations), the new wave of information technology and entertainment is still largely unavailable, appearing as empty rhetoric, especially when policy documents assume an almost universal access. One school, less than 20 kilometres from a major provincial city, has a phone line so unstable the Internet is impossible to use. Even faxes are unreliable. Yet these are now the communication methods of choice from head office to schools. The memoranda of instruction are to be 'on-line' rather than printed and mailed; curriculum specialisms unable to be provided locally are to be found 'on the Internet'.

The restructuring of Queensland Education Department to remove regions was ostensibly to save money to re-distribute to schools. Yet in the rural areas, the professional development allocation does not properly cover travel, let alone replacement, if a replacement is to be found locally. If someone has to travel four hours to visit another school, and there is no replacement teacher or principal locally, then it is unlikely the teacher or teaching principal will be able to attend professional development. If the area is in drought conditions and cash is not available for petrol money, then it is unlikely that local community people on the school council will be able to attend either. Those who might be able to attend are the professionals independent of the local economy. This tends to skew the class and gender of those who can participate in school councils. What has been removed is the professional connection with other people - be they senior education department officers, education advisors in curriculum or special priority areas, or people with experience to answer technical and more complex questions. What remains is a vestigial district office, with a supervisor responsible for ensuring the 30 or 40 principals in the district meet their targets and comply with performance management indicators for leadership. The school council, in this setting thus, is necessarily focussed on management - there is no other impetus to discuss curriculum matters in educational terms.

Bauman's perspective is a timely reminder that geographic distance still exists and still has effects, many of them skewing public policy effects, in differential ways. One school might note its growingly transient community, moving on to the new, 'flexible' job opportunities, while another might find its community shrinking, with growing disparities between those employed or in income generating occupations, compared to those unemployed or in farmers in poverty. The recentralisation and standardisation of many accountability measures tends to obscure such shifts as largely similarities are noted while differences remain unreported and unaccounted for. Attracting teachers to work in remote, rural or regional areas still remains a problem, especially attracting and retaining experienced teachers. Distance from coastal priority areas, as well as from the metropolitan areas, is still seen as a disadvantage, long recognised in Education Department circles and especially by the Country Areas Project members. Waters (Waters, 1995 p.8) suggests that globalisation is largely a social process, by which geographical constraints recede in their effects on society. In our project, however, it is clear that the effects of geography are strongly present, experienced mainly as disadvantage for professional staff dislocated from professional and family connections in many cases. Bauman's reading, allowing a re-focussing on experiences of distance, is thus a helpful corrective within globalisation literature for understanding how markers of distance may themselves be differentially experienced within rural and regional areas.

Pre-modern, Modern and Post-modern conditions simultaneously exist

The debates about de-traditionalisation among theorists of globalisation have strongly divided across those who point to the emerging new forms of operation, many of which tend to undermine traditional ways of thinking and practising, and those who point to strong continuities in practice. For some there has been a break from modernity, while others point up the ways in which many so-called post-modern features (e.g. of a globalised economy) have long been in existence. Timothy Luke points to the importance of recognising the simultaneous working of pre-modern, modern and post-modern conditions. We have found this a particularly helpful conceptual contribution, allowing us to explore the schooling sector in particular, bearing so many markers of high modernity in its structures, habits and practices while existing within a post-modern set of conditions. It has been hard to explain the continuities and the difficulties of reforming education unless we understand the co-existence and inter-relationships made possible by continuities and differences across different underlying tendencies and assumptions built into the organisations in which we educate.

In many parts of the country, there are a number of aspects of modernity which have never applied, or applied differently to how these work in the larger cities. For people in the country, the industrial revolution, while perhaps making possible whole sets of technologies and expectations about work, offered significant ways of reconceptualising a market relationship, for example, between agricultural production and large city populations in need of food and clothing. Yet the changes in technology - e.g. fridges - are still not universal, even within a country such as Australia where piped water, reliable electricity and the technologies which depend upon those amenities are still unknown in the late 1990s. In education while mass primary schools are almost universal, there are still significant numbers of students receiving 'correspondence school' distance education in a variety of media, including radio. And there are

Aboriginal students for whom traditional ways of learning are still 'normal', working alongside modernist schools and beamed-in satellite programs. Similarly, numbers of principals and early childhood centre directors move between using pencil and paper to relying on high technology computer-based communication -- movements that may be at speed and easy for some may also be quite traumatic and difficult for others.

Globalising processes work both to homogenise and to differentiate

Arjun Appadurai's emphasis on the simultaneous homogenisation and differentiation involved in globalising processes allows each of our projects necessary leeway in explaining connections to a variety of 'world trends' in education such as marketisation, emphasis on accountability for quality, growing managerialism and increasing reliance on new forms of technology. Even within our geographic region, the differentiation produced by engagement with, for example, marketisation, has been strong - sometimes between similar institutions and sometimes across different sectors.

There has always been differentiation among schools within even the one state system, let alone across them in Australia, while the similarities have also been marked. Central Queensland is not as isolated as some other parts of rural Queensland, and there are remnants of the previous regional structure in the networks of people called upon in emergencies or to provide advice. It appears, at this stage that the markers of differentiation and similarity may be changing among schools. For example, the effects of faxed memoranda or computerised data information systems are lived in all schools, except perhaps when there is no technical expert to fix the breakdowns, or train the relevant staff. Networking takes on different connotations in the context of inequitable access to computerised networks or even reliable phones. This may change in the future as certain technologies become more reliable. Currently, however, there is strong differentiation among the profession.

In the Early Childhood projects, the move towards marketisation and privatisation of services has been particularly strong. As Woodrow and Brennan (1998) demonstrate the literature on marketisation from the schooling sector, largely derived from England and Wales, as well as other Australian states, does not quite capture the complexity of the marketisation and privatisation experiences of the early childhood sector, especially in the Central Queensland region under study. Perhaps the education sector is becoming more differentiated - perhaps not: the paucity of research in sectors other than schooling does not provide a strong enough basis for comparison at this stage. However, the significance of the shifts within early childhood, for example, towards stronger differentiation and competition among providers, suggest that it is possible to expect increased differentiation under the same policy umbrella.

Educators can act as an "imagined community"

Professions and the quasi-professions such as education require distinguishing markers - forms of exclusion - in order to be seen to exist. Just as Anderson (1983) suggests that the 'nation state' is constructed as a shared fictive discursive move, so too are professions constructed, and used, to mark inclusion as well as exclusion. Principals and teachers, especially in more isolated settings, rely on small and regular tangible reminders of their imagined community. Once that occurred in the person of the inspector, or the approved course of study and textbooks, or the changed requirements

spelled out in a memorandum about transfer procedures, or stories of good practice exchanged at Departmental in-service sessions. Some of those activities and connections remain to establish or maintain a sense of 'community' while others are emerging but may be unfamiliar to those expected to maintain their connections with the community. The inspector's replacement by regional directors, and now district directors with different roles has not been fully taken on board, although the removal of the inspector was once celebrated by some as an opportunity to be professionally independent. The phone and fax tend to have replaced letters and memoranda, for both formal and informal contact with 'the' department. At the current time, with the shifts in expectations about 'keeping in touch', complying with accountability information, not all potential members of the community recognise either themselves or their communities through such means.

Students also need to flesh out their sense of community, sometimes imagined-virtual and sometimes lived-imagined. The students undertaking their undergraduate degree through 'immersion' in Japanese based in Rockhampton, experience constant disjunctures between their imagined communities of 'local' - "I'm just a country kid"- and the cultural world introduced by immersion in another culture/language even while in their university classroom, as well as when they experience mainstream city school life in a Japanese placement for field experience.

For those who may be connected in a range of ways that include strong elements of an imagined community, the means by which this imagined community is kept vibrant and inclusive have altered in some significant ways with new opportunities made possible by faster travel, computerised communication technologies and expectations about access. The strength of the 'shared community' relies on levels of connectedness, lived out in recognisable ways. As the means of staying connected shift, so patterns of connection may also alter, and patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Currently, many staff at early childhood, university and school settings note both the new opportunities and the shrinking of others, often to their perceived detriment, and with little input over preferences around those means of connection.

MORE NUANCED UNDERSTANDINGS OF RURAL EDUCATION

The four propositions sketched in here, taken together, pay attention to links as well as differences among the various sectors, issues and people making up 'rural education'. They have offered us some new questions and ways of analysing our projects, in ways that also have demonstrated links between the disparate projects and interests of the research team. We expect to continue this process, and welcome further debates and comments.

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