

GRE041038**REDEFINING THE URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE****Mike Grenfell
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How do practising teachers and educators enrolled in a Master of Education program view the urban-rural divide in Australia and elsewhere? Using postings to a Discussion Board, this paper looks at teachers' awareness of social justice and equity issues as they affect educational provision in the rustbelt areas of the cities and amongst communities in rural and remote areas of Australia. After situating themselves on the divide, participants then engage in memory work and relate two stories of city or country life which are subsequently deconstructed by other members of the group. The paper seeks to identify changes in beliefs and understandings during the period spent on-line; and how teachers and educators believe the issues identified can be addressed.

The context of the research

In her work on computer-mediated communications discourse analysis Herring (2004) stresses the importance of beginning with contextual analysis which examines (1) participant demographics, (2) medium variables which describes the technical features that may influence how the participants structured their discourse, and (3) context variables such as purpose of discussion, language, participation structure and anonymity. This enables comparison with similar work undertaken in other contexts.

Applying Herring's context variables to the current research reveals the following:

Participation structure. One-to-many with some collaborative writing and private e-mails. The site is semi-private with membership restricted to the Expert Reference Group and students, but is not fully secure in that others can be taken into the site. There was some face-to-face contact for those living within reach of Darwin and those who came through Darwin from around the Territory to attend Departmental meetings, workshops etc.

Participant characteristics. 16 students contributed regularly to the Discussion Board. Of these nine were male and seven were female. The majority were practicing teachers and included two Principals of rural and remote schools and a former Principal. Role hierarchies were blurred, but still detectable. Departmental people knew one another through professional interaction and shared considerable socio-cultural knowledge/experience.

Purpose. Of group: Primarily members wanted to secure a broad knowledge of the issues would they might encounter in the rest of the Masters program in order to take out the award. At the same time many were concerned at the lack of success of Indigenous Education in the Territory in equipping Indigenous students to enter secondary and tertiary education (Collins, 1989). Of lecturer/program: The unit was designed to encourage a socially critical approach to developments in education; to increase awareness of the way that global trends and national policy impact upon teachers' work and educational development; and to reinforce a commitment to social justice and equity through forms of social action based on critical pedagogy.

Topic or theme. Impact of globalisation; Refining the Rural/Urban Divide; social reconstruction.

Tone. Relatively informal and friendly with some banter. But also contestatory with provision for critique.

Activity. Narrative work leading to deconstruction of stories/events based on memory work. Case studies of educational initiatives under the heading 'What Works'.

Critiques of recent monographs/articles for purpose of sharing and comparison.

Contributions to Federal and State/Territory Investigations. *Future Directions* (Charles Darwin University, & NTDEET 2004). Teacher/School as activist. Group autonomy. Individual agency.

Norms. Emphasis on building trust through reciprocal sharing, respect and regard for views of others whilst acknowledging multiple interpretations. Possibility, Tentativeness. Established 'netiquette'.

Code. English as an International Language. Comprehensibility. Acceptance that other regional forms of English added to heritage.

Stance. Contestatory, transgressive, transformative.

The meaning of place

Feelings and attitudes towards community are heavily influenced by beliefs associated with place (Edgerton, 1991). Place can come to dominate the individual and restrict or promote opportunity and development (Agnew and Duncan, 1989). When we move away from the broad sweeps of topographical and geo-political place such as the 'Top End' of Australia to consider location, we become embroiled in the complex interaction of the particular and general, the local and universal. As Kincheloe and Pinar (1991:4) have put it:

[P]lace is that which brings the particularistic into focus: a sense of place sharpens our understanding of the individual and the psychological and social forces that direct her or him.

Place, in other words, grounds our way of seeing by providing the contextualisation of the particular, and whilst it may be true that from a postmodernist perspective, we are in the process of 'denaturing context' (Hayles, 1990:270), if we dispense with the notion of context, we deny the possibility of identification and belongingness. The notion of different sites implies that such sites are underlaid by common ground. However sites are not laminar or interchangeable and there will be rifts and fissures apparent in the multiple strata. Particular texts and cultural sites resist assimilation into the generalisations of universal theory and the participants are caught up in the resulting turbulence (Ley, 1989). Meaning cannot be separated from the particular organisation of signs that characterise a given site (ibid:212).

As the participants situated themselves on the divide, their life histories reveal the social, cultural, and political influences which had impacted on them. The majority of participants were born in the 1960s putting them in the 40-45 year old age group. Several were part of the new diaspora resulting from the anti-colonial struggle in Africa, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, and religious and political persecution elsewhere. Two had lived through the Chimurenga war in what became Zimbabwe, another coming to Australia as a refugee and asylum seeker. A number

belonged to the earlier diaspora which saw immigrants from England settle in Australia. The majority described themselves as middle class and/or as Anglo-Saxon.

A recognizable group were part of the alternative life style movements of the 1970s and their lives resemble a road show, the writers often finding their way to the Territory with music groups and ending up in the Territory by chance. For example, Tammy tells us that having seen an advertisement for teaching in Darwin and going for an interview, she jumped on an old motorbike and started the adventure to the Northern Territory.

It took me two years of relief teaching along the coast of NSW then inland to Toowoomba, bar maiding in Longreach, etc. etc. – When I finally reached Darwin the bike broke down and still is.

Footy and sport played an important role for some. One of the attachments accompanying the early postings shows one a Principal as the proud owner of a motor cycle, whilst another reveals the writer snorkelling.

As might be expected, place plays an important role in the construction of and search for the self, and one can detect the Enlightenment tropes of travel and exploration. A number of participants tell of the discovery of privilege and a restless determination to strive for greater social justice and equity

The whole gamut of educational institutions and pedagogical movements is represented from private schools, denominational schools, the comprehensive movement, the Middle Schools, and the Universities

The process of knowledge construction

An understanding of the way knowledge is constructed on the Discussion Board is necessary before we consider the themes which emerge. A preliminary analysis of the postings to the discussion board reveals the following:

A fragmentary level of response. Participants tended to be working and posting messages in isolation and it took some while before this feeling of separation was overcome. Even after four weeks, interconnection with other participants was limited.

As a result there is *limited reference to, or incorporation of the ideas of other contributors*, as revealed through social network analysis. (See Garton, L., Haythornthwaite, C., & Wellman, B. 1999). An example of social network analysis is given on p6.

A deferential and respectful approach. The participants demonstrate a deferential and respectful approach in communicating with each other as can be seen from this introduction to a posting made by Paul Hobson discussing social justice and equity issues.

In all our readings (and I'm benefiting from them in a huge way) and from all YOUR contributions (and I'm simply in awe of them), I stagger round my

work place thinking two things: (1) I am out of my depth, and (2) thank God for Prusack and Cohen.¹

This deference is accompanied by *high levels of tolerance*, with no rush to judgement. Few unshakeable truth claims are made and there is only limited recourse to empirical evidence, beyond anecdotal experience and life history.

A tendency to identify important questions without attempting to take them further or expecting answers. For example Sandra Johns' main preoccupation is 'How can I overcome this divide in my own teaching practice?' which remind us of the continuing need teachers have to add to their practical knowledge.

Blurred genres. Those used to producing formal academic papers found the looseness and informality of the discussion board difficult to handle at first. The posting contained highly ambiguous, sometime elliptical, cryptic comments which assumed a tacit understanding and gave rise to multiple (and hazardous) interpretations.

The postings provide evidence of testing out the medium and exploring one's thinking and beliefs. A week after his initial posting, John Evans wrote:

I feel compelled to give my thoughts on the latest topic issue through a series of points. I am also brave enough to speak more candidly, although it may appear to be very opinionated, which I am prepared to be challenged on. Moreover, I will attempt to add to the concepts already mentioned so far.

Lack of sustained, developed argument. This fits with Lash's work on information critique and tends to be an effect of the medium. Few people, as we know, are comfortable reading extended, complicated material on screen. Lash (2002) detects the changing nature of symbolic power and asks what happens when symbolic power is largely informational? Disembeddedness, spatial compression, and temporal compression mean that ideologies are no longer extended in time and space. Information can no longer claim universality and is contained in the immediacy of the particular. Professionals no longer have sufficient time to reflect. As in electronic messaging, the message has now become the paradigmatic medium of the information age, in contradistinction to the narrative, lyric poetry, discourse, and the painting. Metanarratives have been shrunk or compressed to a mere point, a signal, a mere event in time. (Lash 2002, p1).

Ability to signal disagreement without causing offence although participants could be firm and direct at times.

The use of rhetorical strategies coupled with humour (Edwards et al 2004) as in this posting from Paul in which he voices the mistrust of politicians and election promises.

¹ The reference is to Prusack, L., & Cohen, D. (2001). How to invest in social capital. *Harvard Business Review*, 79, 86-93. This was one of the readings for social capital which highlights trust, loyalty, commitment and goals in business. It was recommended as an exemplary reading by another Principal who was completing her Doctor of Teaching.

I understand what a global economy is. I also understand the effects it has on small, insignificant (in global terms) places like Australia. I understand the global social trends that may impact on how we teach and what we teach...BUT...On my desk today, I received a three page statement from the Federal Labour Party outlining their new policy relating to the "Opportunity and Responsibility for Indigenous Australians". It says, amongst other things: "Today, Labor is announcing a new plan for improved Indigenous self-governance and program delivery." Well, I didn't know that Labor had an old plan let alone a new plan and I also have no idea if the old / new plan was better than anything the Liberals / the Greens / One Nation / the Democrats have to offer.

My point is this: the statement, as far as my remote, Indigenous school is concerned, is total rubbish, as are all political statements. I am NOT having a shot at John Latham. But the document says: "An example of Labor's new approach is the provision of extra support for teachers in disadvantaged schools servicing Indigenous students." Indigenous schools have been promised that since our schools began.

We have a politician who visits my school, twice a year, and he is NOT of the Labor persuasion. He never, ever, comes out without some footballs for the kids and some kangaroo tails. He is globally ignorant, gender biased, politically incorrect and an absolute winner at the polls. So! I take heed of all that I have read and then thrive on the work of Prusak and Cohen. I needed their writings on relationships to give meaning to the reality that I have lived on Indigenous Communities and Schools for the past 11 years. I like to see words like trust, loyalty, commitment and goals because that is why I have chosen to teach in the bush. Partnerships: Prusak and Cohen are strong on them. So is our school, our clinic, our coppers and our town council. Keep those with a political or upwardly mobile career path out of it.

Social justice will occur when we MAKE it happen, not when we allow technocrats to dictate to us.

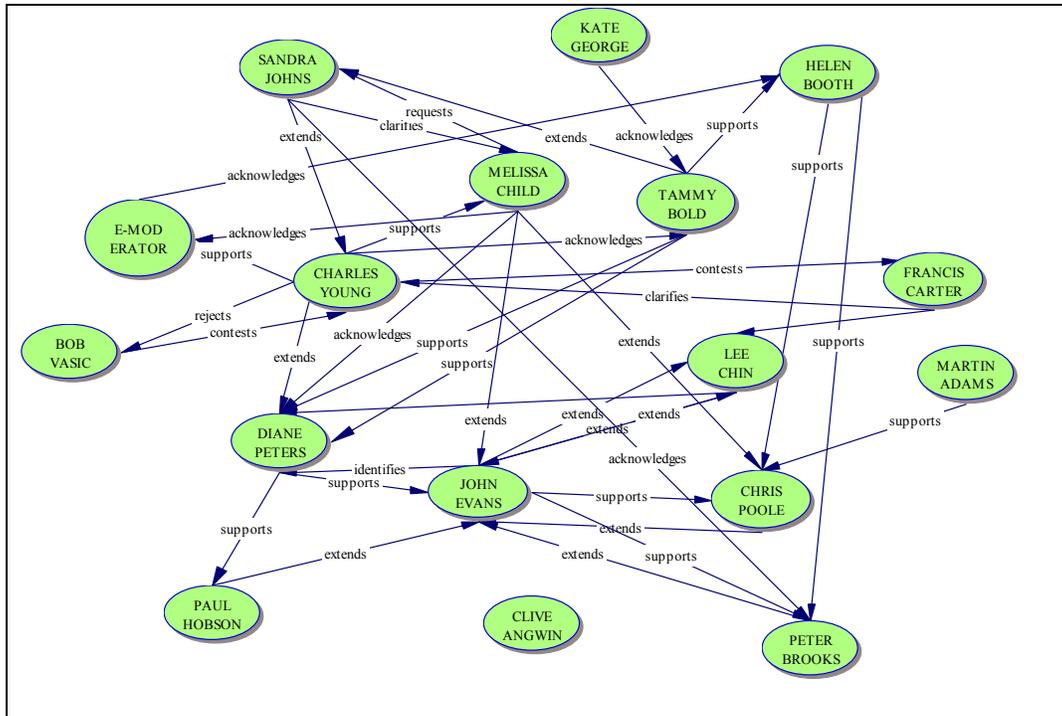


Figure 1. Social Network Analysis for Deconstructing Our Memories

16 students are represented in Figure 1, together with the e-moderator making ten men and seven women. The analysis does not consider messages addressed to the whole group or a recognisable section of the group around which consensus may be forming, and does not include individual mentions in summaries and closures. Seven participants account for the bulk of the interaction. Five of these are women. Of these Melissa Child was working in a private girl's school in South Africa which was engaged in a number of social service and social action projects which took her into rural areas for considerable periods. Hence she struggled to keep up with her postings. Five of the male students establish only one or two connections, usually through supporting comments. One of these students was hospitalised during the scheduled time for the discussion topic. Only one person receives no responses and is given none although he carried out the deconstruction and cannot be considered an isolate. Diane Peters receives the largest numbers of supports. Charles Young is skilled in extending the contributions of others.

THEMES FROM THE STORIES

Place as subjective experience.

Place is considered a highly subjective, phenomenological experience. For Paul 'the whole debate centres on one's perspective, sense of belonging and sense of identity'. Kate agrees. For her the urban/rural distinction is 'a state of mind' involving 'emotional geography' in which our sense of belongingness may be fixed or fluid. Our sense of connection and attachment to place, our feelings of vulnerability, and our

experience of comfortability are all manifestations of our subjectivity. Diane Peters also sees definitions of urban and rural as being influenced by ‘individual perception’ of place.

As such I detected a strong sense of place, not just rural or just urban but PLACE, in Paul’s comment that “his whole life education has led him to *his* place”. Tammy also mentioned that this process has helped her get to “*her* PLACE,” while Clive gave a very powerful sense of the PLACE of people in PNG. (Emphasis added. Capitalisation as in original).

There is here an existential view of place in that place becomes so much part of the individual that they become identified together. This manifests itself in an intuitive notion of belongingness which brings destiny and destination closely together.

The ambiguity of place

There is much concern over the categories of urban and rural which tend to shift their meaning. For Kate there are many versions of rural with considerable movement between them

Just as place is a subjective experience, so our notions of urban and rural are relative to the cultural construction of space, such that definitions of urban and rural switch widely. For some Darwin is predominantly rural and lacks the sophistication and cosmopolitanism of the southern cities.

People also differ in their ability to adapt to their current location and change ‘their relative thinking adjustments’ as Charles Young conceives it. This resonates well with Diane Peters who reflects on the adjustments her sister had to make when their parents decided to move to Brisbane. The girls were 19 and 22 years old at the time.

I have watched and been a part of this process over three years and wow, what a process it has been. It takes a lot to shift or help people to transfer their thinking of PLACE from the point of origin. I feel those who do it with ease are lucky but we must remember some people will NEVER do this.

This is well illustrated by Christine Poole’s reaction when she is sent to boarding school in an urban centre.

The pull of the metropolis

Although the notion of a rural-urban divide is challenged, the stories reveal a considerable degree of metrocentricism. The city is inevitably linked with civilisation, urbanisation, cosmopolitanism and sophistication. Peter Brooke speaks of going ‘up’ to the city as a child and remembers eating in Lyons Tea House and the dressing up and excitement which surrounded the trip. Martin Adams remembers a time when, in an area destined to become part of the rustbelt, the phrase ‘gone to the country’ was an euphemism for borstal. The country was associated with exile, and was indeed so used in government and politics, as being placed outside the pale.

Lee Chin asserts that in Brunei, most promotion goes to teachers living in the city and that living in the city is a sign of success with material advantages such as modern teaching aids and airconditioned schools. Clive Angwin confirms that teachers in PNG are reluctant to undertake rural postings as they do not have same privileges and reasonable conditions enjoyed by urban teachers. They have to endure temporary bush housing and shared accommodation with no electricity. There is no communication by road and the cost of air travel is prohibitive. Family life is disrupted as wives and children stay behind. Teaching performance is not recognised or appreciated, officials are rarely found in the provincial offices, and inspectors hardly ever visit the schools. Promotion is not on merit but is achieved 'through common understanding and sympathy'. For this they are paid the equivalent of \$400 per year.

No wonder, then, that Bob Vasic ponders the irony of the Afghani refugee who comes to a new country, usually demanding nothing after having escaped a life of horror, is placed in a government sponsored integration program and provided with an apartment, but who subsequently demonstrates the utmost reluctance to go to the rural areas, even with the assurance of free housing.

Kate comments on the presumption of those who hold a deficit view of those in the bush and acknowledges her growing awareness of metrocentrism and the way in which it operates. For her,

one of the dangers of centralising education and health is that those making the decisions are often city/urban based with little current knowledge or understanding of other settings outside their own context. I believe this is where the real division is.

Whilst recognising the existence of dysfunctional communities, she doesn't address them. 'That is another story'.

Contesting the existence of the divide

According to Martin Adams the very notion of postmodernism has done away with centres and peripheries. Therefore, he says, 'if there is no rural, then there is no urban'. The role of education only assists to sever connection with one's rural roots and the rural is eclipsed in the process. Christine Poole saw the divide very much as a 'cultural chasm' exacerbated by 'strong elements of feudalism' in the logging community where she lived. The exchange program the school set up to promote rural children gaining experience of the towns proved unworkable:

No kid from our school would live with another family, somewhere else. The personal risk was too great, the cultural chasm too wide.

For Bob Vasic, whose experience with the United Nations and various NCOs spans a number of countries, the urban/rural distinction makes no difference and he categorises them together as he cannot separate them out in his stories of rebel held areas in Sri Lanka where 'such distinctions have no relevance'.

There is nothing we can state conclusively regarding the urban-rural divide. We can fuse them together, then dissect them surgically but the separation

would be false. The stories are not exactly about city life or country life but they were rather 'in transition' with movement in both directions.

This concept of continuous transition fits well with the idea of community as process (Fernback, 1999) which transcend place and notions of locale, neighbourhood, and is well-suited to the nature of warfare, insurrection and civil struggle which Bob Vasic writes about. Under such conditions place is continually disfigured, violated, struggled over, and erased. The divide has no meaning when it is a question of survival and everything else is on hold.

Francis Carter also questions the value of pursuing the divide and wishes to concentrate on 'bridging the gap'. Using language creatively to produce new understandings and concepts, he speaks of '*fluxing* between the two through our urban-rural linkages and our understanding of social structures' (Francis Carter. Initial thread Mar 17). (to flux = move between, melt, fuse. Shorter Oxford).

There is immediate support from Charles Young who also finds 'divide' is too strong a term. He finds himself 'moving in and out of the two thinkings (paradigms)'. His own research into IDL takes him from city studios out to the bush, across satellite broadband and back to the city. His clients are the bush schools here BUT note the direction: the city is still considered the centre. Electronic messaging and Interactive Distance Education is a metropolitan project directed at recipients (rural dwellers) by 'givers' (city-based researchers).

Lee Chin believes we should disregard place and move beyond it and that we should not segregate the two places but try 'to develop the understanding of how we see from the other dimension.'

Memories of traditional communities

The stories contain memories of close, local communities in which friends and relationships were based on who lived in your street and with whom you went to school. These are the *gemeinschaft* communities of the sociological literature which centred around the church, and sporting and cultural activities. Not that such communities were always happy, enjoyable, caring places. John Evans, for instance, who spent much of his time 'riding around with my mates at night around the suburban areas, not really knowing why,' captures the sense of isolation and detachment in which he never felt that people were looking out for him.

In deconstructing the stores Martin Adams is extremely suspicious of many of the memories of rural community life.

Sense of community? Probably great if you are a lifetime member of the community but probably different if you are a newcomer. Are people describing rural living, or rural living the way it used to be, or the way they imagined it to be looking back through their rose coloured spectacles? I doubt that indigenous people living on the edge of that jolly community would have seen it in the same way.

Similarly he points out that in the towns, we now seldom encounter families and friends who lived in the same area for generations.

Communities have changed everywhere and trying to go back in time doesn't work. The image of that happy rural child skipping down the dirt road with a dog at his/her side is probably just that, an image.

Kate Bold captures the same relatedness and connection in her analysis of 'the real country or rural farming towns'. She identifies three categories of rural:

There are those from the country (regional 'towns') those from the *real* country (rural farming towns) and those who are "country bumpkins" (those who only come to 'town' once a month to shop).

During my pre teens I lived in a regional town and a trip to the city (Adelaide) was a once a year event. Then at 11 we moved '*out in the sticks*', which was in reality only 13 km from 'town'. I grew up with the best of all worlds I thought. I commuted each day to school on the yellow bus where I mixed with 'townies' and those from the 'real' country. My friends and I had a great time sleeping over each others' houses and living each other's life for a weekend. I loved staying in town with friends and being able to walk with them to the footy and then go home via the fish and chip shop for take-away tea. We didn't *ever* have take-aways at home!

I also loved staying in the rural farming area where we rode horses, drove tractors and were allowed in the pub. Meal times were the best when there would be up to 20 people around the dinner table and lots of food, noise, jokes and unfortunately washing up.

"*Out in the sticks*" I could roam free as long as I was home by dark, drive cars and motor bikes on the dirt tracks and mix with all ages. I had friends from 6 to 80. I remember sitting on a veranda overlooking the district with the 80 year old while he told me stories of his life as a young boy.

The country bumpkins were really the outcasts. They came to the local dances and we played them in tennis on Saturdays but they were otherwise dismissed as being a bit thick. Country snobbery at its worst!

I grew up surrounded by people who knew me, my history, my family, my extended family and all my friends. Life was very safe and simple and good.

Place and identity

The part played by place in identity construction is demonstrated in a number of stories. For both Melissa Church and Diane Peters, sporting success and prowess is a marker of identity. However, for Melissa, a predominantly rural location brings its disadvantages in that as a sports person you do not have the opportunity to compare yourself with others. There is a certain inevitability, then, about having to move away even if only temporarily.

Some rural dwellers are so conscious of the negative opinions expressed about rurality and rusticity that this increases their desire to leave. Whilst recognising that cultural activities do operate to keep people in their place, one participant acknowledged that she had 'a very negative opinion about being from a rural place. That is why I went to

the city and changed all those things about myself.’ Perhaps for this reason she is very conscious of markers of origin and recalls how a friend at a city school commented: “‘Reckon”, such a country thing to say.’

Helen Booth recalls how she moved from a sheltered existence afforded by elementary school into the confusion of high school and engaged ‘in futile attempt to find that missing sense of community and security’ that she had once known. She finds her way to the Yukon where she is successful in finding ‘a noteworthy rural sojourn’. The power of place as an anchor or reference point around which we secure our histories can be seen when she says ‘although thirty years in the past, lately I seem to be drawing a lot of parallels between Whitehorse and Darwin’.

In his autobiographical reflections, *Growing up rural*, Paul Hobson addresses the gendered nature of growing up in a rural community in which the boys are into ‘bloke things’:

we swam in irrigation channels that we shouldn’t have, raced billy carts down hills that were banned, we tormented the three elderly nuns that were our teachers in primary school and avoided girls like the plague.

A number of the stories deal with periods in their lives when the writers were jolted out of their sense of unquestioning complacency and comfortability. Some deal with unlearning whiteness (Hyttén & Adkins 2002). Paul Hobson tells the group how, after a spell in a Melbourne school, he took off with a new bride, a truck, a motor bike and a bass guitar. He has a strong sense of personal identity, never concerned with where he lived, and he felt comfortable with himself. He was ‘too dumb, just too ignorant to know anything about racism and exclusion’ and it wasn’t until he had equipped himself with practical skills and obtained truck licences, and his grader and bulldozer tickets, that he experiences an epiphany:

I began to grow up. I began to see life, opportunity, employment, self esteem through eyes other than my own. I came to understand what it meant to be impoverished in spirit. I began to understand, just a little bit, a different spirituality and sense of place.

Survival

Issues of survival figure predominantly in the stories. Stories of violence, rape and substance abuse in Top End communities are commonplace in the press. In her early twenties, female and single, and ‘very naïve to the facts of life’, Tammy Bold recalls her early experience in a school in a coastal community in the Top End .

It was barge week. For three days we didn’t really do anything until everyone had had their fill. Some women locked themselves into the arts/craft building for safety. Locked in we did some really good work.

She still finds herself envying teachers from remote communities ‘who had the guts to do it’ but realises that it requires ‘going outside ones comfort zone’.

Tammy quickly had to readjust when she moved to the city:

After living in the city for about a year and a half I realized how naïve I was and how being completely without guile was a disadvantage. I believed people were all they said they were and had the best of intentions. I found out the hard way that some were all too willing to take advantage of country folk like myself and so I wised up. I remember my mother telling me that I had got “hard”. I replied that I had to, to survive.

Even though I enjoyed city life, I was keen to get a posting in the country at the end of my study. I didn't. I was posted to a school in one of the roughest areas in suburban Adelaide. I found life in the city very hard once my friends from the student community had left for country postings. Those of us who were working had much less time to socialize. On reflection one of the main reasons I loved the city was because I met and befriended a heap of other country kids and we made our own country community within the city.

A feminist environmental perspective

Warmed by the reference to the ‘earth essence of country people’ in *There is a Divide*, posted by Paul Hobson, Christine Poole reveals a *feminist approach* to environmental issues and reminds us of the mismanagement of wilderness areas which decreases ‘the rural magic’. She also comments on the ‘essentially fabricated’ nature of the pioneer towns mentioned by Paul which are such a part of some local tourist ventures. In this she resists the inauthenticity and distortion of recreated historical place.

Social attitudes

Urban teachers contemplating ‘going bush’ are subject to discouragement and have to endure deprecatory and condemnatory comments. Christine Poole recall the reaction to the announcement of her taking up a remote rural appointment:

The sound of duelling banjos started in the staffroom. I assumed the staff just believed that the further from Melbourne you went, the less civilized the place became. A small town of 300 people, six hours away from the centre and therefore a ‘real backwater’.

Her later comments suggest how such attitudes develop. The community was ridden with social and political tensions, the little school had only survived through ‘political clout’ and the loggers were ‘the ultimate rednecks’ whose ‘context and world view often stopped at the derestriction sign’.

In her story *She's from Taminmin*, a school in the Darwin regional area. Tammy Bold confides that she still gets comments about living ‘way out there’. ‘There is still the idea that if we are from out there that we are all quite not there’.

Culture workers and border crossers.

It may be somewhat surprising to think of culture workers and border crossers in the context of navigating the urban-rural divide. However this is what some teachers see themselves as doing.

One of the reasons I loved the city was because I met and befriended a heap of other country kids and we made our own country community within the city.

This empathy and understanding is often recognised by discerning administrators who get teachers with rural experience to mentor new students. There is a deeply intuitive, embodied knowledge operating here as revealed by Tammy Bold:

I can often tell a student that lives out bush before they tell me. It's the little things that give them away and sometimes it is nothing at all but a feeling ... When they find I lived out there, they also seem to relax and open up to me more. It is like we have a special bond. We "know"? and we wear it on our sleeve.

Culture workers and border crossers acquire the ability to read place which allows them to move in and out, back and forward, across and around with varying degrees of assurance. They have their sense of belonging to a global world and are identified by their mobility, their assurance and the ease with which they cope with change and dislocation.

Situated nature of learning.

The situated nature of learning is recognised in a number of postings as participants begin to question how an understanding of place affects their work. John Evans states that learning about place requires a genuine degree of experiencing the *academic, cultural and spiritual dimensions* of that place.

'The power exerted by place emanates from its incorporation of history. Because the past is forgotten it directs without resistance and all too often we are not aware of the significance, the emotional 'pull', of place' (Jacoby, cited in Kincheloe, 1991:181). In such circumstances the past interferes without us being aware of it, deforms our understandings rather than transforms them, calls into question the validity of our theoretical interpretations, encourages us to seize upon the momentary event without considering its origins, and allows us to proceed without attending to the explanatory force of personal and folk memory. For this reason we forget the importance of general educational histories.

Memory and myth making.

In his deconstruction of the stories Lee Chin begins to move towards challenging the concept of memory as a result of his reading around postmodernism. Whilst the techniques adopted in the unit have been partially effective for 'it has opened my horizon to where our memories come from,' he recognises the ahistorical nature of postmodernism as the time of the now and points out that many people are not concerned with foundational questions and don't necessarily want to know what happened in the past.

Helen Booth refers to the power of hindsight which influences construction of myths and she identifies two which are prevalent in the stories: (1) the myth that rural experience is associated with strong community, (2) and the mistaken belief that problems in rural communities are fewer, less serious and/or easier to manage. She

hints at the way in which rural communities have been disadvantaged by the compression of time and space and how the gap has been widened, and goes on to show how representations of place vary and the concepts associated with them become a state of mind.

The new global elite.

Participants were very aware that as educators they were members of a global elite which encompassed a new digital divide. This was illustrated in an ironic contribution from Paul who had

all the IDL gear delivered to the classroom last year. It remains very safe and secure, under a blanket because no one knows what to do with it. It's the same with the squillion dollar BRACS unit. We get more use out of the school's drum kit. Go figure.

The lack of readiness revealed here is taken up by Melissa. Whilst acknowledging the suggestion that technology has the potential to break down the divide, she claims this cannot be done without a shift in mindset in some communities that do not as yet have an understanding of the potential benefits, and for whom the innovations may be way ahead of what the community is prepared for. Charles Young picks this up and queries what people have in mind when they talk of computers in the classroom. After elaborating the possibilities, he concludes by saying that people are often thinking about the internet, but that neither this, nor IDL are necessary to start with.

A discourse of lack.

In reflecting on his own stories, Peter Brooke comments on the differences in perception amongst non-Indigenous teachers working in remote areas and points to 'a discourse of lack': no access to town amenities and entertainments, limited educational opportunities for themselves and their children, feeling of hopelessness and lack of achievement, and insecurity. Whilst Peter appreciates the rich social life, the deregulated society, and his growing cultural understanding, the stories are still written from a Eurocentric perspective. He speaks of the need to achieve in non-Aboriginals as being 'built into their make-up,' and of himself 'getting hooked on the complex challenges associated with school' and 'of making progress within a system that had not found the answers to even foundational questions'.

To conclude, it is ironic that by the end of the deconstruction activity no agreed redefinition of the urban-rural divide emerges. Symbolically, there is agreement that some sort of divide exists resembling a 'cultural chasm' rather than any physical divide. However, the highly subjective nature of our understanding of place means that actually distinguishing between 'urban' and 'rural' is a difficult and unrewarding process. Nevertheless, the influence of metrocentricism remains strongly felt. Deconstruction has need severely challenged in some quarters as too negativist and discouraging (Howe, 2001). However as a technique to encourage students to identify the way in which feelings and attitudes are influenced by beliefs about place and to discover the way the past interferes without us being aware of it, deconstruction has proved itself worthwhile.

Kincheloe (1991) argues that as critical educators we are the bearers of dangerous memories and that as such we need to preserve the memory of human suffering and assist our students to identify the relationship of past suffering to present form of oppression. All too often this 'suffering remains unaddressed and thus insidiously tolerated' (Kincheloe, 1991:183), and this is particularly true of education in the Territory with its toleration of subjugated knowledges, avoidance of dangerous memories, and the failures to expose the concrete mechanisms of exclusion and domination, engage in a commitment to Aboriginalisation and re-affirm the centrality of place and the rights of ownership and possession.

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