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**Bush Tracks:
Journeys in the Development of
Rural Pedagogies**

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Journeys in the Development of Rural Pedagogies¹**

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Abstract

The academic and social achievements of students in rural schools are very uneven and often absenteeism and suspension rates are high. Factors such as globalisation, economic restructuring, unemployment, youth suicide and family trauma, drought and environmental change (see Bourke & Lockie 2001) also impact on rural schooling and add further challenges to good teaching and learning in rural schools. As complex processes involving cognitive, contextual and affective understandings, rural pedagogies need to be situated within rural contexts (McConaghy & Burnett 2002). How do rural teachers respond to the challenges in rural communities and schools that make quality learning for all students a difficult task? What pedagogies do beginning rural teachers use, why and with what effects? What images do beginning teachers have of ‘the good teacher’ and ‘the good student’ in rural schools and what are the obstacles to becoming these? What professional learning communities are available to beginning teachers in rural schools, and how effective are they in supporting beginning teachers to work through their identity issues and pedagogical challenges? Our case study and survey data provides valuable information about the lived experiences of rural teachers in relation to their journeys in pedagogy for teacher professional learning programs.

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² The authors are members of the Bush Tracks Research Collective which includes Associate Professor Cathryn McConaghy, Dr Lorraine Graham, Di Bloomfield, Dr Judith Miller, Dr. David Paterson, Linley Lloyd, Kathy Jenkins, Dr Joy Hardy, Dr Neil Taylor, and PhD student Genevieve Noone. All are members of the School of Education at the University of New England. The Bush Tracks Research Collective acknowledges the financial support of the UNE PVC-Research and the Faculty of Education, Health and Professional Studies.

Rural Teaching: Situating Pedagogy and Practice

Rural schooling is a site of challenge and structural disadvantages (Vinson 2002, xxii). Numerous reports, including the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Report (Commonwealth of Australia 2000) have identified the lower retention of rural students (p. 8), their overall lag in terms of the performance of urban students (p. 9), their prolonged travel times in attending school (p. 18), the restricted range of subject choices available to rural students (p. 27), the higher rates of turnover of teachers in rural schools (p. 31), the often inadequate condition of schooling infrastructure in rural areas (p. 37), and the disadvantage in learning opportunities for rural students (p. 40). The academic and social achievements of students in rural schools are very uneven and often absenteeism and suspension rates are high (Doherty 2005, 3). Rural communities are also facing considerable changes (Vinson 2002, 112). Factors such as globalisation, economic restructuring, unemployment, youth suicide and family trauma, drought and environmental change (see Bourke & Lockie 2001) also impact on rural schooling and add further challenges to good teaching and learning in rural schools.

As complex processes, rural pedagogies need to be situated within rural contexts (McConaghy & Burnett 2002). This paper considers how it is that rural teachers respond to the challenges in rural communities. We are interested in identifying what pedagogies rural teachers use, why and with what effects. Central to these practices are issues of identity, but here identity is not theorised in terms of its adequate representation but in terms of the idealisations, fantasies and fears around who one should be. What images do rural teachers have of 'the good teacher' and 'the good student' in rural schools and what are the obstacles to becoming these? What learning activities are available to rural teachers, and what are the obstacles to their participation in the generation of new pedagogic knowledges. Our focus here was initially on teachers who were within their first ten years of rural teaching but this has broadened to include more experienced teachers. In more isolated or small schooling contexts, what professional learning communities are available to beginning teachers in rural schools, and how effective are they in supporting beginning teachers to work through their identity issues and pedagogical challenges? Our case studies draw upon the narratives of 17 rural teachers that provide valuable information about the lived

experiences of rural teachers in relation to their journeys in pedagogy. Two major foci for recommendations emerge from the analysis. The first concerns the need to consider how generic models of pedagogy are recontextualised in and for rural teaching contexts; and the second suggests that teacher professional learning programs need to consider (following Bernstein 2000) the regionalisation of teacher knowledge. Central to both is the need to retheorise the gaps in learning from student teacher to beginning teacher, from beginning to more experienced teacher, and from teaching in one place to another, not as deficits but as necessary aspects of the generation of teacher knowledge about pedagogy.

Recontextualising Pedagogy: Place, Movement and Practice

Higgins (1992, 122) writes that rural education ‘is a complex task of relocating curriculum to people in places taught by those whose tenure may only be temporary.’ Here the central motifs of rural education problematics, namely the relocation of bodies of knowledge, place and teaching transitions, are evoked. In our theorising of these problematics we have been drawn to new mobility sociologies and new theories of pedagogy and place.

One of the most notable shifts in sociological theorising in recent years has been the focus on the regionalisation of social phenomena (Urry 2000). Urry’s elaboration of ‘sociology beyond societies’ focuses on the trends towards regionalisation as an aspect of new social mobilities. Urry reconsiders the social as society and instead elaborates a notion of society as mobility, in which mobility is understood as both a geographical and a social phenomenon. Within rural teaching, mobility can be understood both as an issue of geography – the relocation from place to place which is common to many areas of rural schooling– and in terms of social transitions or learnings – the generations of new knowledge about pedagogy and practice – that accompany such movements. Further, these social processes take place within geographical regions. Both the notions of the regionalisation of education (in our case, the ruralisation of education) and the new significance of understanding educational mobilities (teacher transitions) are central to the aims of our current research.

Linked also to the move to consider the social phenomenon of regionalisation and mobilities is Bernstein's (2000, 9) elaboration of the regionalisation of knowledge which is the basis for his theorising about the development of pedagogic knowledge. The linking of place to movement is central to both the new sociologies and the new theories of pedagogy and provides the theoretical foundation for our current focus on the journeys of rural teachers — their Bush Tracks.

Rethorising 'the Gaps'

'My university degree didn't prepare me to teach in this place' [1]

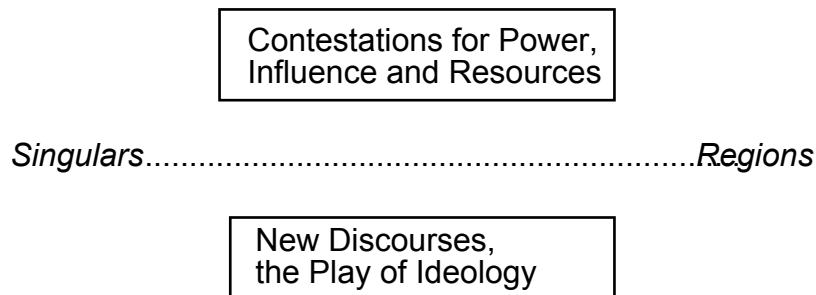
Bernstein's (2000) discussion of the regionalisation of knowledge begins with an elaboration of types of knowledge he calls 'singulars'. 'Singulars address only themselves. Singulars are intrinsic to the production of knowledge in the intellectual field' (p. 9). Further, a region is created by the recontextualising of the singulars, that is, by their change. A gap emerges between the singular knowledge and the context in which it is being played out. Such gaps in knowledge are a necessary result of the recontextualising of knowledge. Hence when our teacher participants commented that their university education did not prepare them adequately for rural teaching, they are alluding to the process by which the singular knowledges of university education are recontextualised by them in their resituation in rural schools.

As Bernstein (2000) suggests, the regionalisation of knowledge implies a recontextualising principle: 'which singulars are to be selected, what knowledge within the singular is to be reintroduced and related?' (p.9). By this we consider Bernstein to be discussing the shifts in knowledge that are the result of their re-situation. An example of this in our NSW rural schooling context would be the introduction of the NSW Quality Teaching Model (State of NSW 2003) in recent years, a singular knowledge in Bernstein's terms, in that the model addresses only itself. That is, the model is complete and singular, without reference to other knowledge. When this model is used in rural schools it is recontextualised for rural schooling contexts. Here several of us have been academic mentors in rural schools where the Model is in fact being being redeveloped for their contexts. Bernstein argues that such a recontextualising constructs new discourses. Further. 'Every time a discourse moves, there is space for ideology to play. New power relations develop

between regions and singulars as they compete for resources and influence’ (Bernstein 2000, 9).

The issues of ideological play and power relations with respect to contested pedagogies are evident in our teacher narratives: contestations around resourcing, adapting policies and procedures, bending the rules and anxieties over doing so, emerge as central preoccupations of the teachers interviewed. Our analysis of the teacher narratives also suggests an interesting set of discursive shifts in the generation of knowledge about rural pedagogies that is taking place in the process of recontextualising the singular knowledges of the department or the university. When a teacher says, ‘Uni did not prepare me for this’ they are involved in the regionalisation of teacher knowledge. The gaps discourse signals new learning, not deficits in learning.

**An adaptation of
Bernstein’s (2000) ‘Recontextualising of Knowledge’**



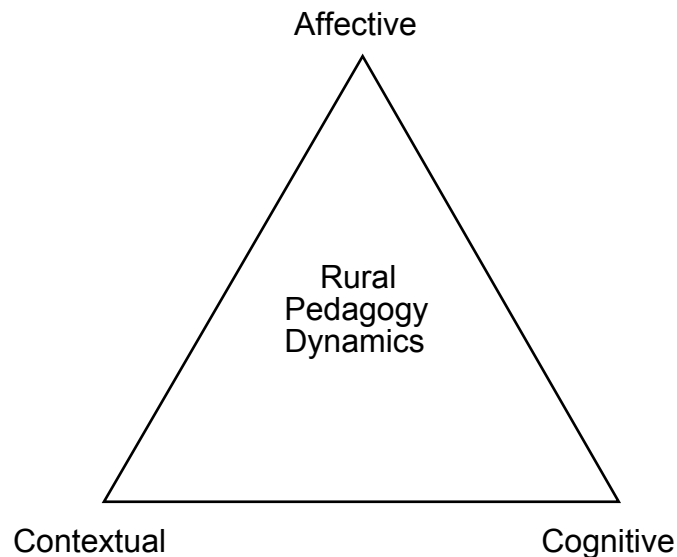
Researching (Rural) Teacher Learning of Pedagogies

The NSW QT Model is a cognitive model that addresses a generic set of cognitive knowledges for teachers for use in classrooms. Significant to the enthusiasm surrounding the Model is the fact that teachers are encouraged to use the model to engage in pedagogical discussions. The model provides a new vocabulary to enable in-depth discussions of pedagogy that is refreshing for teachers after two decades of discussion of curriculums and syllabus outcomes. But what happens to this model, or rather, what happens to pedagogic talk, when this singular knowledge is recontextualised by rural teachers? In this paper we consider the shifts in discussion about pedagogy by rural teachers away from the cognitive dynamics of teaching to the

contextual and affective dynamics. That is, part of the recontextualising of pedagogy that takes place in challenging rural schools is a focus on non-cognitive dimensions of teaching. Place, transitions and emotions become central to the generation of new pedagogic knowledge in the case studies of rural teachers we undertook for the Bush Tracks project.

To some extent it is a truism to say that pedagogy is determined by place since all teachers are constrained by the context within which they work. Teachers in Sydney who have classes of children with little English have to adapt their pedagogy just as much as teachers in rural areas with classes of indigenous students, or very small classes, or high rates of absenteeism, or any other factor directly related to their context. Many students in both urban and rural settings spend long hours travelling to and from school. Many students have after-school work, whether this consists of working in a supermarket or driving a tractor. Is there any real difference between teaching students in urban and rural contexts? In what ways does the concept of social positionality, of being located in a social context, impact on teacher learning, whether it be the learning of pedagogies or other practices? Do different contexts have different influences on the socio-spatial dynamics of teaching (McConaghy 2002); do they give rise to different types of teacher learning and mobilities within time and space?

In this paper, we explore these questions specifically in relation to teacher learning of pedagogy. We have defined pedagogy as a complex process involving cognitive, contextual and affective dynamics, as illustrated below. What is it about rural settings that is qualitatively different from urban settings and affects the situated practices of teachers in those settings? In what ways does the move from singular knowledges to regionalised knowledge play out differently in rural places? Teacher learning here is theorised as the recontextualising of discourses of practice, playing with ideology and the generation of particular emotional or affective dynamics. In our in-depth interviews with 17 rural teachers, contextual and affective factors were emphasised more strongly than cognitive factors, although all factors were described often in passionate ways. In addition, the interplay between each of the factors continually asserted itself in our interviews, as will be shown in the discussions below.



Cognitive Dynamics in Rural Teaching

The question of whether cognitive expectations should be different for students in different locations was not well supported in our data. Many teachers very strongly held the view that their students needed to realise that they were part of a wider world and, more importantly, that they could compete successfully within this wider world. The following quotes from three teachers in three very different rural settings — the first from a teaching Principal in a one-teacher primary school, the second from a young Head Teacher in a small regional high school, and the third from a third-year out high school teacher in a central school — clearly illustrate this point:

... in rural schools the parents want their kids to succeed. They want their kids to learn. ... I just think the more isolated the community is that they don't see the bigger picture so much. And so my role is for them to see that they are so much a part of a cohort of thousands of kids in the state ... I set higher benchmarks because that's where I want them. [2]

We have to provide opportunities for the students to see where they're at, to recognise that they're every bit as good as a kid across the state. I think that probably is one of the biggest challenges. [4]

— what kids have been exposed to. [You] sometimes amaze kids with something that might be stock standard for others. ... This presents as a challenge in a reading program — pig-shooting and opals is not the only way to teach! [12]

Perhaps as an aspect of their recontextualising work, the cognitive dynamics are linked inextricably to the contextual within the narratives:

We do stuff like count the sheep in twos. [1]

Contextual Dynamics in Rural Teaching

Demographic changes in rural areas have had an effect on cognitive factors, by narrowing the local context:

The other thing that's ... changed our population is the centralisation of a lot of big banks and professions ... we don't have the bankers' kids, the accountants' kids, the lawyers' kids, because they've all gone through. The same lawyers and accountants are here from 20 years ago, so there are no kids at school. Probably your top level of professional coming through school are your teachers' kids whereas they used to be the middle of the road. [4]

How the necessity to broaden children's experience of the wider world is translated into pedagogical practices is what varies widely in rural settings, and the differences in practice are closely related to contextual factors. As teachers also noted:

The expectations of the community can drive the expectations of the school. ... One size doesn't fit all. [3]

The strong role played by community in rural areas was commonly reported, as this Teaching Principal in a two-teacher school continued:

I feel that within the community the school is the focus. ... The parental involvement is greater because of the isolation and the remoteness. Some of these children travel for an hour to catch the bus but the parents will come in if we have an assembly. [3]

So the influence of the community on the school was not something most teachers felt they could ignore. Some teachers reported that they never had formal parent–teacher interviews, for example, because they saw the parents every day and could discuss any issue without any formal arrangement. As one teacher said:

At the working bees when we have them I just come out in jeans and a shirt and that's when your best parent–teacher interviews happen. ... I just attend whatever there is. [3]

The downside to this constant contact and familiarity was the feeling that you could never escape, that everything you did was being observed:

Being viewed by all the locals — steady stream of cars driving down the street, checking her out. ... we were told to go to other towns if we wanted to drink. [11]

You couldn't even go, you know, just somewhere for a drink. Because there'd be kids standing outside and they'd see you go in, even if you were only there for dinner ... it's hard to have a personal life out there ... nothing's ever private. [10]

You're actually part of the community. It's not just when you're at school. And it's even more so in a small community because everything that you do, you're in the looking glass. If you live in [a city] you're in a different suburb and no-one would know what your occupation is during the week so you're free, you know, to do whatever you want. If I go to the pub on a Friday night or you're at a sporting event, people know you're a teacher and they expect you to act accordingly. [4]

Interconnecting Cognitive and Contextual Dynamics in Rural Teaching

The interplay of cognitive and contextual factors is clearly evident but it has another dimension which teachers found particularly troubling — the imposition into their local context of Departmental requirements:

The biggest problem I find as a principal is that these decisions are made from Sydney and are imposed in the small communities and they are completely irrelevant to our situation. Completely irrelevant. ... every school is given the same whitewash. [2]

There were many examples of requirements which small-school teachers found irrelevant and metrocentric, such as distributing information at the local (non-existent) pre-school; or difficult, such as answering the phone during the hours of teaching (and being reprimanded for allowing a student to answer it); or frustrating, such as instructing the roof-worker to wear a safety harness (as required under OH&S regulations) but knowing that he wasn't, being unable to check without leaving the classroom, and not having any other person who could be employed to do the job. Of greater concern were the requirements that were more directly related to their students' learning, such as the number of outcomes that had to be assessed when your class consisted of children in seven different grades. This latter example is a very clear case of cognitive and contextual factors directly affecting pedagogy — teachers in these situations are forced to think of creative ways of organising their students' learning so that multiple outcomes can be achieved at any one time.

Other ways of broadening children's horizons include arranging for specialist visitors:

I'll apply for as many people as possible to come along to the school because I think it's important for the children. If we can't get them out all the time we can still get visitors in, with their expertise. [3]

The recontextualising of knowledge, the linking of cognitive with contextual dynamics, invoked powerful affective responses within the teacher narratives, as discussed below.

Affective Dynamics in Rural Teaching

A number of educational theorists such as Britzman (1998, 2003), Boler (1999) and Todd (1997) have drawn attention to the significance of the emotional aspects or affective dynamics of teaching and learning. Britzman (1998) in particular discusses the essential conflicts in learning that have to do with tensions between fear and desire and antagonisms between the interior and exterior worlds that the subject (teacher) inhabits. In the Bush Tracks teacher narratives tensions around power and influence and resources, and strong emotional responses linked to both contexts and practices, were evoked. Although these can be linked to Bernstein's recontextualising of knowledge processes, other theoretical insights are useful in this instance. For example, Woods' (1999) studies of the sociological factors involved in teacher stress and burnout provide a useful analytical framework to examine the frustrations identified above. Woods writes:

A potentially stressful situation is set up when a teacher's personal interests, commitment or resources not only get out of line with one or more other factors, but actually pull against them. The classic case is having too much work, plus a strong moral imperative to do it, and not enough time and energy within which to do it. (Woods 1989a, quoted in Woods 1999, p. 116)

That is, a potentially stressful situation arises from the combination of intensification of teachers' work and clash of educational values and priorities. Both of these elements were recurrent themes in the interviews:

You have to have someone on your staff trained in anti-racism and someone trained in OH&S and so everyone has to have somebody on their staff trained in all these things and in a one-teacher school, it's you. [2]

The only thing I want to be great at is in the classroom, doing teaching. But unfortunately the things that I'm getting good at is being political and finding out things can be done that should be done and I shouldn't have to fight for and it detracts from teaching those other skills. [12]

[The Department] could provide a little bit more assistance to allow people to do what they do well, which is in the classroom. Now that's what we're employed to do, to work with the kids and work in the classroom. The paperwork, yes, um. [4]

Stressors can be classified as operating at micro, meso or macro levels, where “the micro refers to social factors within each teacher’s biography and person; the meso is related to institutional and other middle range factors; the macro deals with wider forces deriving from global trends and government policy” (Woods 1999, 115). Teachers clearly identified that the majority of stressors “*are caused from outside ... from the Department*” [2]. That is to say, the major stressors operate at the meso level.

Woods (1999) defines ‘accommodation’ as the “successful adaptation to changes” (p. 120) and identifies four major kinds of accommodation: contestation, appropriation, strategic action and realignment. The former two kinds of accommodation were well represented in the study. Woods writes that contestation occurs when “teachers resist the changes. This involves active opposition to some significant part of requirements. It induces strong feelings, with a heartfelt desire to reverse the requirement. There is a marked tone of defiance, fight and struggle” (p. 120). Active opposition to changes that intensified teachers’ work was strongly expressed:

I don't go on excursions now because I refuse to go around and do these OH&S things ... I've got enough to do. [2]

We got a directive last week that the kids in Years 3 and 5 had to be re-enrolled on the new forms ... I said, “I'll do it off the top of my head”. I'm not going to do it and if I get my knuckles rapped, that's too bad. [2]

The ‘tone of defiance, fight and struggle’ was also clearly expressed. One teacher, punctuated her responses with: *We fight so hard*, and referred to the Department’s directives as *A test to attack you* [3].

Woods writes: “Successful contestation leads to appropriation” (p. 122). While intensification may result in less time for creative work in the classroom, appropriation opens up spaces for creative political responses to imposed changes. Creative political responses are facilitated where there is greater autonomy over budgeting and the provision of additional funds, such as CAP (Country Area Program) and PSFP (Priority School Funding Program). In order to address the issue of boys’ education in a one-teacher school, where the ratio of boys to girls was 2:1, the female teacher used creative budgetary appropriation to employ her husband to work with the boys for one term. Another example addressed the needs and guidelines for kindergarten students:

I remember when they said no children in a kindergarten class over twenty. But to compensate the thing, I had twenty-five, including five kinders. So they gave me one hour per week for a kindergarten child, so that worked out at almost one day per week. And the money is supposed to be spent on the kindergarten and so I asked someone to take the top end, while I worked down the bottom end. Because I think that if you have not got the grounding in kindergarten, the children will struggle all the rest of their life. [2]

The intensification of teachers’ work can lead to disjunctions between teachers’ practice and educational philosophies. These examples of appropriation, however, demonstrate creative solutions that enable teachers in one-teacher schools to align practice and the values at the heart of their personal educational philosophies.

Isolation was another interesting theme to emerge within the affective dynamics of the teacher narratives. One way rural schools try to overcome the disadvantage of isolation is by teaming up (clustering, developing professional learning communities) with other schools for competitions of various sorts. Athletics carnivals are a common example but sometimes schools get together for academic challenges as well. These sorts of competitions are difficult to organise because they involve travel, sometimes billets, and of course paperwork but the academic benefits are rewarding. In this case the contextual factor of isolation and the cognitive factor of lack of academic challenge directly stimulate a creative pedagogical response. A teacher’s pedagogy, in other words, is directly influenced not just by the interplay of cognitive and

contextual factors but by the way a teacher reacts to this interplay. In other words, affective factors become important. Some teachers view the isolation with a deficit mentality and simply accept the situation — social positionality is strong; others engage in teacher renewal and socio-spatial dynamics by devising ways of overcoming the isolation by implementing valuable learning experiences.

I suppose you just have to learn to deal with what's out there and you learn to put up with it. You know you have problems with whatever's going on in the community and things like that and sometimes it's hard to see the positives in it, but it is – you know – it's fantastic and as I've said to all my students that have come through, "If you ever get the opportunity, you need to go out west somewhere and teach because it's just fantastic". [10]

Part of the teacher's response is determined by personality factors:

If you were a really quiet, shy, reserved person it would be really hard to go somewhere like that ... You know you just have to be willing to make that jump; you make that change ... you need to be willing to take a chance [10]

However, the influence of the community is again important:

Word of mouth will either make you or break you. You only have to do one or two dumb things and people will remember it for a long time. Whereas if you do positive things, that's the thing that's remembered. [4]

Developing Rural Pedagogies

Answers to the question of whether teachers develop a specific rural pedagogy proved elusive. However, the question of how teachers developed their rural pedagogies was more easily considered within the framework provided by Bernstein's (2000) recontextualising of knowledge. That is, the process of generating new knowledge was more easily identifiable than the specific aspects of a generic rural pedagogy. Indeed, we would question the use/value of such a quest, given the significance of the recontextualising of knowledge and practice that necessarily takes place in all teaching contexts. The influence of the local context in rural teaching was commonly affirmed, but the local context varied enormously even within a fairly narrow geographic area:

Everything is so contextual. You drive out here but even the school down the road might not be the same. [3]

Although the specifics of a ‘rural pedagogy’ have proved difficult to delineate in any meaningful way, the obstacles to becoming a good rural teacher proved somewhat easier for the teachers to articulate. Access to good professional development, which in turn depended on distance, cost, time for travel and the availability of casual relief, was frequently agreed to be the most influential factor affecting a teacher’s development. The importance of professional development was recognised because of these challenges (of time and distance) but also because of contextual factors associated with rural teaching.

Contestations Associated with Recontextualising Teacher Knowledge

A teacher’s response to the local context, then — his or her situated practice — varies according to the nature of the local context. Other influential factors are the amount of control the teacher has over the budget (with those in leadership positions having a distinct advantage) and access to professional development (PD) opportunities. Here Bernstein’s (2000) contestations around resources associated with shifts in discourse and practice was evident.

Principals and Head Teachers gave many examples of how they could be ‘creative’ with their budgets, usually in order to employ extra people, for either administrative or teaching roles. This flexibility allowed many teachers to implement a range of programs in their schools which would otherwise not have been possible, such as employing someone to do intensive early intervention work for a few hours a week in a one-teacher school or employing someone from the community for technological support. Even this flexibility had positive and negative aspects that were related to contextual factors:

The staff up here are incredible. They won’t take sick days. ... It allows us money but it also makes things very, very difficult. You know, people have worked when they’re so ill. [3]

Lack of access to good professional development was a common complaint. Distance, timing and lack of casual teachers all affected a teacher’s ability to engage in

professional development. With reference to the problem of getting casuals, common views were:

... I'm not game to leave the school. [2]

That is a huge issue because we haven't got any qualified science replacement staff. So if you're going away for the day you're basically leaving a day of babysitting. ... I just cringe every time I go away from my classes. [4]

With reference to the problem of distance and timing, these sorts of comments were common:

There are things I may not go to because I won't be able to leave the school. They can limit the person in what they do professionally. [3]

I look at these [external PD opportunities] and I think I'd love to go to that but they're usually in the middle of the day in Sydney or somewhere else. ... Anything that's really good completely isolates people who have to travel. Like this CAP thing in Bathurst, some people have to catch three aeroplanes to get there. [2]

Some of the computing courses that they ran, they wanted us to travel to X [several hours away]. ... And if you look at the Principal who's going to Y on a regular basis for a two-hour meeting, that's four hours of travel for a two-hour meeting [4]

Interestingly, the quality of professional development was commonly mentioned. Many teachers were critical of the opportunities provided by the Department and felt the best PD came from outside providers, whose continuing employment relied on their provision of sessions which teachers found worthwhile.

Apart from specially organised PD opportunities, teachers learn from each other. In a one-teacher school or a one-person department within a high school, even these opportunities are lacking:

Some of the very small places] are incredibly difficult. I think, you know, just having two or three people within a subject area just allows you to see so much, whether you necessarily agree with it or not. [4]

Some teachers overcome these problems by engaging in PD during their holidays. Some schools employ outside providers to come to the school. And some teachers are

lucky enough to have good mentors, even in a small school with limited choice. Insofar as teachers were prepared to articulate their approach to pedagogy, and to relate it to their context, they said things such as the following:

Personal, hands-on. Use more manipulative techniques rather than pen and paper. Provide choice within structure — they are in power and independent learners. ... New ideas (Bloom's Taxonomy and Multiple Intelligences). [13]

I wasn't one of those beginning teachers who thought they knew it all. I knew I had a lot to learn. [11]

Every school's unique. Every school has its positives and negatives. It's not really a rural/urban thing. [2]

I was fortunate in terms of ... teaching with Z, who was very much more aware of the concepts [eg of Multiple Intelligences] and made me very aware of them, ... a lot of the things that are catching up now ... and becoming sort of standard. ... In lots of ways I'll say no, there isn't [a rural pedagogy], because wherever I am I will cater for the individuals and the students that I come across. ... [4]

Lack of mentoring will always be a factor in schools with only a small staff and with high teacher turnover. Lack of experience of many teachers in rural schools means the need for mentoring will remain strong:

Your access to support is, you know, three and a half hours away ... 400 kilometres away. [10]

How this paradox is resolved in any particular context will be a strong determinant of a developing teacher's situated practice.

Friendship as contestation or community?

Hargreaves (2001) writes, "All collegial relations among teachers are a peculiar combination of closeness and distance" (p. 504). When read from a metrocentric position this statement casts the teacher as a "member of a lonely crowd" (p. 504), where friendliness or politeness mediate the rivalry that Waller (1932) inscribed at the heart of teachers' relations with colleagues. A rural/remote reading position, however, casts 'closeness and distance' in terms of physical rather than metaphorical geographies, which disrupt the seemingly smooth transition to duplicitous relationships. Contrary to Waller's pessimistic characterisation of teachers'

relationships, the interview data demonstrated that ‘the combination of closeness and distance’ can lead to the formation of deep and lasting friendships. Indeed, one teacher referred to friend(ship)s fifteen times in a forty-five minute interview. In relation to collegial support in a small, isolated school, the teacher passionately stated:

The friendships you form, friends for life, honestly! It’s amazing. ... You are the biggest support to each other, you know. You don’t have family, you’re in a place and you support each other; you make each other happy; you help. [10]

This teacher also emphasised the support of friendship networks maintained across geographical separation during her accelerated progression into a leadership position:

One of my friends was an assistant principal and she was in charge of the Distance Education Centre through the schools, so I had a good network with her too and the other two assistant principals were sort of friends of mine, so — we kind of — we formed our own mini network. [10]

This self-initiated, friendship-based, mini-network rewrites the social geography of mentoring and professional development in a manner that responds to the challenges that Hargreaves and Fullan (2000) identify for mentoring in the new millennium. Furthermore, this example challenges the criticisms of the professional value of friendships for teachers. Drawing on the work of Lima (2001), Hargreaves writes that “good supportive friends make poor colleagues, since they are reluctant to challenge each other on important ethical or professional matters where they disagree” (Hargreaves 2001, p. 505). More evidence needs to be gathered to determine whether critical friendship was an element in this particular instance, but certainly the accelerated career path of the teacher concerned indicates that this was a productive and affirming partnership.

Situating Practices: Good Rural Teaching

Teachers see themselves as good rural teachers when they are able to give their students experience of a wider world and when they can get their students to see themselves as equal to rather than inferior to students from the cities or larger towns. Giving students these experiences means overcoming the obstacles of time, distance and cost at the same time as improving the learning outcomes of these students. Good rural teachers need to be good teachers with good pedagogy but also good citizens

with influence in the community, good managers and leaders (or to have good managers and leaders) who can be flexible with budgets, and creative persons who can design and implement a range of different programs.

The process of developing situated practices is a complex one. While all teachers have to recontextualise their practice at least to some extent in different rural settings, they also have to enable their students to recontextualise their worldviews. In this sense, a rural teacher's journey involves his or her students both implicitly and explicitly. The concepts of socio-spatial dynamics and social positionality (McConaghy 2002) are inextricably linked in the rural context, describing a teacher's individual journey but also binding this journey with the journeys of the teacher's students. Students are socially positioned within a specific rural context more than a transient teacher is but while teachers are there, they try to move both their practice and their students' worldviews through time and space.

Generating Teacher Knowledge about Rural Pedagogies

The gaps discourse in teacher professional development has been significant and common within the research on both rural teaching and beginning teaching. Baills *et al.* (2002) entitled their SPERA paper 'Bridging the gap between beginning teachers and isolated/rural communities'. It was important to bridge the learning opportunity gaps, they argued. So too the Commonwealth Government's inquiry into beginning teaching, *An Ethic of Care* (2003, 11), identified a gap of some difficulty between beginning teachers and their transition to professional employment. Kiggings and Gibson (2002, 1) describe beginning teachers as confused and ill-prepared in their university learning. Boylan (2002) identified the gaps in rural teacher education in terms of the preparation of rural teachers. Cheridnishenko *et al.* (1998, 41) discussed in some detail this disjunction between the knowledge universities teach and the knowledge needed in complex and changing schooling contexts. They also describe suggestions for dealing with this gap and cite Gore's (1995) strategy of finding 'a third way' and Yeatman and Sach's (1995) strategy of 'practical theorising'. The latter two approaches are closer to what we suggest as a response to theorising this gap, or rather moving beyond the gap discourse to describe what Bernstein might call the necessary space that is created between the singular and the regional in the process of recontextualising knowledge. The spaces are not deficits in knowledge but

opportunities for new knowledge generation that we claim has significant affective and contextual, rather than cognitive, dimensions in a rural context. Such spaces are opportunities for ideology to play and for contestations over power, influence and resources to take place.

These contestations and tensions have been well documented in the literature on rural teaching. Sharplin (2002), in particular, has identified the fears and dissatisfactions that have led to significant numbers of rural teacher transfers and tensions. Contrary to the 'gaps as deficit' discourse we suggest, following McConaghy and Bloomfield's (2004) analysis of teaching in rural postcolonial Australia, that such tensions are necessary aspects of teaching selves relocating within complex and challenging new spaces.

Implications for Quality Teaching in Rural Schools

Both the contextual and affective dynamics of rural teaching were prominent in our teacher interviews. Indeed they overwhelmed teachers' responses in relation to the cognitive dimensions of good teaching. This finding together with Britzman's (1998, 2003), Boler's (1999) and Todd's (1997) arguments about the significance of the affective dimensions of teaching and learning has implications for quality teaching models that place most stress on the development of the cognitive dynamics of teaching. Pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman 1987) needs to be able to accommodate the affective and the contextual dynamics of teaching.

Implications for Teacher Professional Learning in Rural Pedagogies

Ramsey (2000, 59, 219) recommended that teacher education in NSW needed to be structured and funded to meet the unique needs of regional and rural communities. Much has been done in recent years adequately to resource teacher professional learning in rural regions of NSW. Our research suggests that in addition to resourcing and structuring issues, fundamental shifts need to take place in the way we think about pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. We are not arguing here for the type of 'place-based' approach to pedagogy advocated by Gruenewald (2003) and others in which place becomes a factor for rethinking relevance and pedagogy, for inserting community and environment within pedagogy, but rather we are advocating for knowledge of pedagogy to allow for the important

processes of recontextualising. That is, knowledge is not based in place in the sense that it is about place (content knowledge of place), but rather is produced or generated within place (process knowledge in place). Here the arguments of the materialist space/place theorists such as Lefebvre (1974) are influential.

Following Bernstein (2000) the process of learning or developing pedagogies involves recontextualising practices. This process of recontextualising involves the situating of practices within the complex social dynamics of place. Teachers do this in their everyday practices, through their contestations and their friendship groups and in their narrations about practice. This process of developing knowledge of pedagogies (and generating knowledge through narrations about pedagogies) has important implications for teacher professional learning programs for rural teachers.

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