

Knowledge beyond the Metropole: Curriculum, Rurality and the Global South

Philip Roberts, Associate Professor (Curriculum Inquiry & Rural Education)

University of Canberra, Australia.

IAACS, Melbourne, 10/12/18

Abstract

This paper explore the idea of ‘powerful knowledge’ and ‘knowledge of the powerful’ (Young & Muller, 2016) from the perspective of the global rural. As such, the paper argues that what counts as ‘powerful knowledge’ is characteristically western-scientific knowledge of the global metropole. Engaging with the ‘knowledge question’ (Young, various), this paper argues that ‘powerful knowledge’ as constructed in this debate tends to be ‘Northern Knowledge’ as argued by Connell (2007), and does not engage with the knowledge of the ‘south’ (de Sousa Santos, 2014).

Returning to the traditional questions of curriculum inquiry, the paper asks ‘What, and whose, knowledge is of most worth?’ specifically from the perspective of the *rural* – both within, and as part of, the global south. That is, the rural is constructed here as constituting multiple layers that are socially produced as beyond the global metropole. It is problematic, I suggest, to argue that curriculum needs to move beyond ‘western-centric’ models and related epistemologies as this risks conflating ‘western’ as homogenous. By taking a rural standpoint, I suggest that the ‘western’ rural exists beyond the metropolis, and in many ways can be itself considered as part of the global south. As such, knowledge and theory from the global ‘south’ is important both for itself, and for engaging from all places and spaces beyond the metropole.

Important notions within are ‘powerful knowledge’ – knowledge that facilitates social mobility, as well as ‘knowledge of the powerful’ – the knowledge of those who define what counts as knowledge. Here the notion of what constitutes the rural, and the role of rural schools in communities, is an important consideration. Using the example of rural schooling and curriculum in Australia, I illustrate that access to, and achievement in, the curriculum has been perennially unequal. Rather than the reflexive response of positioning this as disadvantage, I argue that the disadvantage is produced by the curriculum and the knowledge it represents and values. This move is aimed at including, and empowering, both Indigenous knowledges and the knowledges of non-indigenous rural communities. In the example of rural schooling in Australia I highlight the absence of both Indigenous and non-indigenous rural knowledges.

Drawing upon Teese (2013) and Bleazby (2015), I suggest that knowledge as represented in the curriculum, in Australia at least, can be seen as stratified into high status and low status. Higher-status subjects are characterised by a long history, greater literacy demands, abstract ideas, rich theoretical content, relationships, patterns and logic, and a focus on personal distinction. The more abstract, theoretical, cognitive, objective, universal and certain a subject’s content appears, the higher is its status. Whereas lower-status subjects have a more recent history, lesser literacy demands, applied ideas, less theoretical ideas, less relationships, patters and logic, focus on relevance. The lower end of the curriculum hierarchy is dominated by subjects associated with concreteness, practicality, corporeality, subjectiveness, and, thus, contentiousness.

I suggest that much of what has been positioned as ‘lower status’ relates to knowledges of the rural. Here I gesture towards knowledges grounded in an understanding of place, as opposed to meanings rooted in a more metropolitan-cosmopolitan worldview (Downes & Roberts, 2015). This form of knowledge is inevitably situated and emanates from a situated, perhaps rural, standpoint. Consequently this paper engages with the resultant problems of which knowledges have become important, and hegemonic, and their spatial orientation, and which have not. Related to this, the model of knowledge as subjects (and disciplines) is implicated.

1: Acknowledgement of Country.

- i. ‘I acknowledge the Elders, and descendants of the Wurundjeri people who have been and are the Custodians of these lands. We acknowledge that the land on which we meet was the place of age-old ceremonies, of celebration, initiation and renewal, and that the local Aboriginal peoples have had and continue to have a unique role in the life of these lands.’

2: Definitions & background.

- ii. In 2011 over ½ the world’s population can be defined as ‘urban’! what does this mean for how what is ‘normal’ is understood?
- iii. Soja: ‘Seeking Spatial Justice’ (2010) examines the spatial dimension of justice and how inequity is spatially produced. It argues that traditional approaches to social justice are dominated by **historical** and **social** ways of understanding the world. These are ‘fixed’ in space, or space-neutral. That is, the geography of justice is only a backdrop that social practice happens within and not a substantive factor in creating and producing inequity. Soja proposes ‘spatiality’ as a third way of seeing the world, in a trialectic relationship with historical and social approaches. Sees geography, space and place as important ideas in social justice.
 - a. Do we merely ‘spatialise’ historical and social approaches or something more?
 - b. His argument is city based
- iv. Readily transferable to the rural (Roberts & Green, 2013).
- v. Draws on the construction developed by Lefebvre (1991) and used by Soja (1996) of *space* as constituted in a trialectic of *perceived*, *conceived* and *lived* space that can be real-and-imagined.
- vi. I am using *space* as a broad theoretical tool and *place* as somewhat more specific and situated, though equally temporal.
- vii. Gruenewald’s (2003) formulation of a critical pedagogy of place
- viii. Nesor (2006) centre-periphery dynamics need to be reconsidered,
- ix. Spatial turn in social theory (Gulson & Symes, 2007)
- x. Howley, Howley and Yahn’s (2014) call to engage with rurality in research
- xi. Sher and Sher’s (1994) call to value rural people and communities.

3: Modernity as the move to the city.

- i. Williams (1973) in ‘The Country and the City’ contends that the city constitutes the vision of modernity, which produces a ‘city-centeredness’ that informs ‘taste’.
- ii. Soja (2010) - modernity as primarily about urbanization and the development of the urban-industrial state.
- iii. Foucault (1984), the city was the organizing principle for the governing rationality that was to apply to the whole territory of a state in early modern Europe.
- iv. Metro-normativity (Green, 2013) or Metro-centricity (Roberts 2016) - assume the metropolitan experience to be normal and do not allow opportunities to consider other perspectives.

4: Relevant Social Justice perspectives.

- i. **Curricular** (Connell 1991; 1992; 1993). What kind of education is being provided? - is just, and meaningful, for all groups in society? Curricula practices that allow some groups to gain a greater share of social power, which confirm or justify disadvantage, block Socio-educational change towards equality, and reduces peoples capacity to remake their world – are unjust.
- ii. **Cultural Justice** (Fraser, 1997) the absence of **cultural domination** non-recognition and disrespect.
- iii. **Relational** (Gewirtz 1998, Smith, Todd, & Laing, 2018) focuses on the **nature of relationships** that constitute society, from micro to marco level and linked to recognitional
- iv. **Geographic** (Hallsén & Nordin, 2018; Román et al., 2015): Draws on spatial justice, a spatial and temporal dimension looking at **distributions via geography**, but also how ‘areas’ change and the effect of that.
- v. **Epistemic** (Fricker, 2010; Fricker, 2007; Anderson, 2012). The wrong done to someone in their **capacity as a knower**, through a form of prejudice against certain speakers.
- vi. **Cognitive** (Visvanathan, 2007; De Sousa Santos, 2007, 2014; Odora Hoppers, 2009) Recognises a plurality of knowledges, and the right of other knowledges to exist. Particularly, **epistemologies of the south** valuing ecologies of knowledge from the south.
- vii. **Spatial** – see above

4: Organising principles?

- i. **What happens if we think of the rural & the global as epistemology & then curriculum?**
- ii. Social justice as ‘Spatial equalisation’ – \$(AUD) Billions redistributed on the basis of geographic location, aimed at reducing difference in outcomes.
- iii. Spatial justice goes beyond redistribution & decision making to the geographic distribution of justice where space is **productive and generative**. We can use it as a present & future tense verb.
- iv. Especially powerful when we come at social justice through Epistemic & Cognitive frames of reference. Change the nature of what is assumed and hegemonic: western masculine epistemology. It can open avenues of epistemological thinking that have often been kept marginal due to arguments of relativity.
- v. Complication – not to appropriate Indigenous epistemologies and fights for knowledge, or De Sousa Santos’s epistemologies born of struggle. Avoid neo-colonialism.
- vi. Aiming to articulate a think piece that the ‘north’ - ‘south’ issue essentialness all the ‘north’ as one epistemological space, when the rural in the north may be seen in some ways as analogous to the south - but also avoiding any hints of appropriation or comparison. ‘West’, ‘south’ etc collapses all spaces and essentialises, but also don’t want to appropriate.

5. The rural studies link – defining the rural.

- i. Rural studies frames ‘the rural’ positively, in its own right and recognises the plurality of meanings and definitions.
- ii. We look at rurality as knowledge producing and culturally meaningful, not absent of knowledge and value or deficit as much education and social research does – see modernity point above.



- iii. The rural is inherently spatial (Halfacree, 2006). '[t]he idea of rurality seems to be firmly entrenched in popular discourse about space, place and society in the Western world' (Cloke, 2006, p. 18).
- iv. The multiple ways of representing the rural tend to draw upon divergent epistemological traditions, emphasising that researching the rural must similarly draw upon various epistemological traditions.
- v. Halfacree (2006). Three-fold model of rural space: rural locality (inscribed through practices of production and consumption), formal representations of the rural (particularly how it is framed in capitalist consumption), and everyday lives of the rural (with reference to culture).
- vi. Cloke (2006). Three theoretical frames: functional (land use and life linked to land), political-economic (social production), and social (culture and values).
- vii. Balfour, Mitchell and Molestone (2008). Generative theory of rurality: rurality as context, forces (space, place and time), agencies (movement, systems, will) and resources (situated, material and psychosocial).
- viii. Reid et al. (2010) rural social space model: demography (population, culture, people), economy (work, industry, production), and geography (environment, place). Looking at how these may come together in relation to defining particular rural communities.
- ix. Howley and Howley (2010) propose three rural community types: durable agrarian (sustainable rural industries), resource extraction (mining, logging), and suburbanizing (becoming other than rural).

6. Fields

- i. Linking curriculum inquiry – rural studies & rural education
- ii. The rural education field has tended to work from within its own boundaries. Consequently the field has been becoming increasingly narrow and removed from the parent disciplines.
- iii. Rural education is somewhat ambiguously placed - it draws primarily from the traditions of sociology and geography, with broader engagements with the non-education fields of rural sociology and rural geography.
- iv. Sociology, and the sociology of education, does not engage significantly with the rural – hence the development of sub-fields of rural education and rural sociology.
- v. Curriculum Inquiry tends to draw more from traditional sociology but not rural sociology, so can provide a bridge.
- vi. Consequently, scholarship is necessary in order to bridge these divides and enhance the quality, and breadth, of scholarship in all related fields.
- vii. New possibilities...

7: Focus on knowledge and the rural

- i. Curriculum is a representation of knowledge deemed valuable (2010) – what nation does it represent?
- ii. Soja (2010) suggests there are 'no' program to address inequity/in-justice equating to spatial thinking or that space produces power - I'm suggesting thinking about dominant knowledges of the metropolitan centre or specific knowledges' of the rural, ie rural knowledges (knowledge in/of/for the rural, Downes & Roberts, 2015)
- iii. Subjects linked to traditions of western (European) universities and sciences (Teese 2013)
- iv. Hierarchies of subjects (Teese 2013, Blazby 2015)
- v. Connell (2007) 'Southern Theory' + De Sousa Santos(2014) 'Epistemologies of the South'

- vi. Knowledge transfer in rural studies work – e.g (Phillipson et al, 2012; Proctor & Klerkx, 2013)
- vii. Rural Literacies (Donehower, Hogg & Schell, 2007; Green & Corbett, 2013),
- viii. Rural Social Space (Reid et al, 2010) and its relationship to educational enactment.
- ix. Spatial reasoning in mathematics (Lowrie & Jorgensen, 2018)

8: The Knowledge Question & the hierarchy.

- i. Young (2007) rethinking knowledge & curriculum, Young & Muller (2016) ‘Powerful knowledge’ / ‘Knowledge of the powerful’. Young (2009)...
 - a. Powerful knowledge:
 - i. Knowledge that all citizens should have an entitlement to
 - ii. Contends it is a requirement of equality (ala social mobility & self actualization)
 - iii. Helps ‘explain’ the world
 - b. Knowledge of the powerful
 - i. High-status knowledge
 - ii. Who gets to define what counts as knowledge?
 - iii. Refers to those subjects that dominate the curriculum hierarchy, and whose enrolment is dominated by students in advantaged, and metropolitan, schools.
 - iv. Similar to the ‘powerful subjects’ in the work of Teese and his colleagues (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000, 2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009)
- ii. Curriculum Hierarchy Characteristics
 - c. Higher status:
 - i. Teese (2013): Long History, greater literacy demands, abstract ideas, rich theoretical content, relationships, patterns and logic, focus on personal distinction.
 - ii. Bleazby (2015): The more abstract, theoretical, cognitive, objective, universal and certain a subject’s content appears, the higher is its status.
 - d. Lower Status:
 - i. Teese (2013): Recent history, less literacy demands, applied ideas, less theoretical ideas, less relationships, patters and logic, focus on relevance.
 - ii. Bleazby (2015) p.678: The lower end of the curriculum hierarchy has always been dominated by subjects associated with concreteness, practicality, corporeality, subjectiveness and, thus, contentiousness.
- iii. Fortified & Exposed Sites (Teese et al 2008)
 - e. Exposed Sites:
 - i. Poor and struggling with competing academic and social demands
 - ii. a similar emphasis on engagement, but semantically here it refers to texts that have accessible language and themes that are close to students’ own experiences
 - iii. History a Liability: tend not to have the requisite historical knowledge for powerful subjects, and as such teachers need to spend time on developing the required contextual understanding
 - iv. students’ literacy skills tend to be weaker at exposed sites and doesn’t always support the complex tasks of analysis, interpretation & communication
 - f. Fortified Sites:
 - i. rich in the financial and cultural resources of students and the expertise and experience of teachers
 - ii. emphasis on texts that favour personal differentiation and intellectual challenge

- iii. Teachers describe the purpose of the study in the language of personal distinction, that studying hard texts equal higher marks and provide rich material for students to display their strengths
- iv. History is an asset
- iv. Learning starts in place and connection – a foundation since Dewey & a basis of Vygotsky. Alternative is context free abstract knowledge & pedagogy.

References:

- Anderson, E. (2012). Epistemic Justice as a Virtue of Social Institutions. *Social Epistemology*, 26(2), 163-173.
- Bæck, U. K. (2016). Rural Location and Academic Success-Remarks on Research, Contextualisation and Methodology. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 60(4), 435-448.
- Balfour, R., Mitchell, C., & Moletsane, R. (2008). Troubling contexts: Toward a generative theory of rurality as education research. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 3(3), 100-111
- Barrett, B. & Rata (2014) Knowledge and the future of the curriculum. Palgrave Macmillan: Hampshire
- Biesta (2015). Pragmatizing the curriculum: Bringing knowledge back into the curriculum conversation, but via pragmatism. *Curriculum Journal*, 25(1), pp.29-49.
- Bleazby, J. (2015). Why some school subjects have a higher status than others: The epistemology of the traditional curriculum hierarchy, *Oxford Review of Education*, 41(5), 671-689.
- Cloke, P. J. (2006). Conceptualizing Rurality. In P. J. Cloke, T. Marsden & P. H. Mooney (Eds), *Handbook of Rural Studies*, (pp. 18-28). London: SAGE.
- Connell, R.W. (1992). Citizenship, Social Justice and Curriculum. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 2(2), 133-146.
- Connell, R.W. (1993). *Schools and Social Justice*. Sydney: Pluto Press.
- Connell, R. (2007). *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science*. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.
- De Sousa Santos, B. (2014). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers.
- De Sousa Santos, B. (ed) (2007). "Cognitive Justice in a Global World: Prudent knowledges for a decent life". Lanham: Lexington
- Downes, N. & Roberts, P. (2015). Valuing rural meanings: The work of parent supervisors challenging dominant educational discourses. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education* 25 (3), pp.80-93.
- Foucault, M. (1984). Space, knowledge and power. In P. Rabinow (Ed), *The Foucault reader*. (pp. 239-56). Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.
- Fraser, N. 1997. *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition*. London: Routledge.
- Fraser, N. (2008). *Scales of justice: Reimagining political space in a globalizing world*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice. Power and the ethics of knowing*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fricker, M. (2010). Replies to Alcoff, Goldberg, and Hookway on epistemic injustice. *Episteme*, 7(2), 164-78.
- Gewirtz, S. 1998. "Conceptualizing Social Justice in Education: Mapping the Territory." *Journal of Education Policy* 13 (4): 469-484.
- Gewirtz, S. (2006). Towards a contextualized analysis of social justice in education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 38(5), 69-81.
- Gough, Noel. (2003). Thinking globally in environmental education: Implications for internationalizing curriculum inquiry. In William F. Pinar (Ed.), *International Handbook of Curriculum Research*, pp. 53-72. Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Green, B. (2010). Rethinking the representation problem in curriculum inquiry. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 42(4), 451-469.
- Green, B. (2013). Literacy, Rurality, Education: A Partial Mapping. In B. Green & M. Corbett (Eds), *Rethinking Rural Literacies: Transnational Perspectives* (pp. 17-34). United States of America: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Green, B., & Corbett, M. (2013). Introduction. In B. Green & M. Corbett (Eds), *Rethinking rural literacies: Transnational perspectives* (pp. 1-3). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Gruenewald, D. (2003a). Foundations of Place: A Multidisciplinary Framework for Place-Conscious Education. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(3), 619-654.
- Gruenewald, D. (2003b). The best of both worlds: A critical pedagogy of place, *Educational Researcher*, 32(4), 3-12.
- Gulson, K. N., & Symes, C. (Eds). (2007). *Spatial Theories of Education: Policy and Geography Matters*. London: Routledge.

- Halfacree, K. (2006). Rural space: Constructing a three-fold architecture. In P. J. Cloke, T. Marsden & P. H. Mooney (Eds), *Handbook of Rural Studies* (pp. 44-62). London: SAGE.
- Hallsén, S. & Nordin, A. (2018): Variations on Modernisation: Technological Development and Internationalisation in Local Swedish School Policy From 1950 to 2000, *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 49 (4),
- Howley, C., Howley, A., & Yahn, J. (2014). Motives for dissertation research at the intersection between rural education and curriculum and instruction. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 29(5), 1-12.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lowrie, T. & Jorgensen, R. (2018) Equity and spatial reasoning: reducing the mathematical achievement gap in gender and social disadvantage. *Mathematics Education Research Journal*, 30 (1), 65-75
- Nespor, J. (2004). Educational Scale-Making. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, 12 (3), 309-326.
- Odora Hoppers, C. A. (2009) Education, culture and society in a globalizing world: implications for comparative and international education, *Compare*, 39:5, 601-614.
- Phillipson, J., Lowe, P., Proctor, A. & Ruto, E. (2012). Stakeholder engagement and knowledge exchange in environmental research, *Journal of Environmental Management*, (95) 1, 56-65.
- Proctor, A. Klerkx, L. (2013) Beyond fragmentation and disconnect: Networks for knowledge exchange in the English land management advisory system. *Land Use Policy*, 30, 13-24
- Reid, J., Green, B., Cooper, M., Hastings, W., Lock, G. & White, S. (2010). Regenerating rural social space? Teacher education for rural-regional sustainability. *Australian Journal of Education*, 54(3), 262-267.
- Roberts, P. (2014a). Researching from the standpoint of the rural. In S. White & M. Corbett (Eds), *Doing educational research in rural settings: Methodological issues, international perspectives and practical solutions* (pp. 135-148). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Roberts, P. (2014b). A curriculum for the country: The absence of the rural in a national curriculum. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 34(1), 51-60.
- Roberts, P., & Downes, N. (2016). Conflicting messages: Sustainability and education for rural-regional sustainability. *Rural Society*, 25(1), pp. 15-36.
- Roberts, P., & Green, B. (2013). Researching Rural Place: On Social Justice and Rural Education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19(10), 765-774.
- Román, H., Hallsén, S., Nordin, A., & Ringarp, J. (2015). Who governs the Swedish school? Local school policy research from a historical and transnational curriculum perspective. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 1(1), 81-94.
- Sher, J. P., & Sher, K. R. (1994). Beyond the conventional wisdom: Rural development as if Australia's rural people and communities really mattered, *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 10, 2-43.
- Soja, E. W. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Cambridge MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Soja, E.W. (2010). *Seeking spatial justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Smith, L.M., Todd, L. & Laing, K. (2018) Students' views on fairness in education: the importance of relational justice and stakes fairness, *Research Papers in Education*, 33:3, 336-353,
- Teese, R. (2013). *Academic Success and Social Power: Examinations and Inequality* (2nd ed.). North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing.
- Visvanathan, Shiv (1997). "A Carnival for Science: Essays on science, technology and development". London: Oxford University Press
- Young, M. (2007). *Bringing Knowledge Back In: From Social Constructivism to Social Realism in the Sociology of Education*. London: Routledge.
- Young, M. (2009). Curriculum Theory and the Problem Of Knowledge: A Personal Journey and an Unfinished Project. In E. Short & L. Waks (Eds), *Leaders in Curriculum Studies: Intellectual Self-Portraits* (pp. 219-230). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Young, M. (2010). The future of education in a knowledge society: The radical case for a subject-based curriculum. *Journal of the Pacific Circle Consortium for Education*, 22(1), 21-32.
- Young, M., Lambert, D., Roberts, C., & Roberts, M. (2014). *Knowledge and the Future School: Curriculum and Social Justice*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Young, M., & Muller, J. (2016). *Curriculum and the Specialisation of Knowledge: Studies in the Sociology of Education*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Zipin, L. & Fataar, A & Brennan, M. (2015) Can Social Realism do Social Justice? Debating the Warrants for Curriculum Knowledge Selection. *Education as Change*, 19 (2) 9-36.