Abstract

On most indicators of social and educational achievement, rural schools tend to lag behind their metropolitan counterparts. Overcoming these disadvantages through a common curriculum throughout Australia has been one of the aims of the development of the National Curriculum. However, will the National Curriculum achieve this goal? The answer to this depends first on answering the question posed by Mark Doecke in 1987, specifically in relation to rural disadvantage: ‘Is it for real?’

Any conclusion of disadvantage implies a comparison to some ‘norm’ or advantaged location. In educational achievement terms, this is usually against a form of standardized measure within a common state based, or soon to be national, curriculum. The tacit implication therein that the same knowledge is necessary and desirable for all students fails to recognize that place renders some knowledge more valuable and useful than other knowledge. Consequently rural student dis-engagement and under-achievement can often be a function of a perceived lack of relevance or due recognition of the nature and value of place-based knowledge. To counter this, it is important for teachers to understand that all curriculum needs to be situated.

This paper explores, with particular reference to the History curriculum, how a national approach to curriculum may in fact entrench rural educational disadvantage by positioning rural knowledges in an eternal binary with dominant metropolitan knowledges.
Published in Curric Perspectives 1987 – 25 Years ago. Since then there has been scant reference to the rural in curriculum considerations. Doecke asks us to consider the ‘what type’ and the nature of education issues. It also positions inequity in curricular terms. There is an important caveat here as well – we are not talking about parochial or relativistic curriculum.

I suggest that this asks us to consider how teachers react to space (distance) and place (difference) - as an example it is instructive to consider that ‘there’s a cow outside my window’. What do we do when you can see a cow from your classroom window. For some this may result in a fear, either of the cow itself, but generally a realisation that they are a long distance from what they know. After all cows are in the country and the country is a long way away, there are no Café or takeaway restaurants and my friends and family are not there. The country is so far away that I can’t just pop back to the city whenever one feels like it. More importantly country kids are different, and there are all these stories of violence. Still others however will be enchanted by the romance of the idea of cows outside the window as they envisage a bygone era when things were less complicated and their lives not so hectic. Indeed many aspire to teach in just a place as it is easier and the lifestyle more convivial with the idea of agriculture, even your own little plot, rather quaint. What becomes apparent is that everyone can artificially manipulate the idea of a cow outside the classroom window to suit
What is the (dis)advantage Doecke asked us to question? How has the rural been forgotten? Picolli sums it up as that over various measures the rural falls behind the non-rural (see slide), however I don’t want to focus on these. Instead I want to focus on the curriculum.

In relation to rural disadvantage the familiar argument / accepted logic is that the average lower SES and higher Aboriginal population account for this poor performance. However this is questionable as there are too many exceptions and inconsistencies, wealthy rural places exist alongside poor ones, some schools outperform others.

The language of the recent NSW government to the Gonski submission is a real step in the right direction (see slide), however it also reveals that we don’t know how to think ‘place’
The traditional response to addressing the poor performance of rural areas is the Country Areas Program – CAP.

Writing around the same time as Doecke this rationale cites the idea of an ‘inappropriate curriculum’

But this gets lost in an overall philosophy of disadvantage by distance aka Deficit.

The solution herein is to ‘top up’ what these schools seemingly lack by their location rather than fundamentally challenging the nature of disadvantage or how it is constructed.

Spatial disadvantage here is a noun for location

Allocation is determined by distance from major centers and a matter of degrees of support – there is an imaginary line where schools begin getting support. An arbitrianness that doesn’t actually look at the qualitative features of any location.
CAP is a pretty straight forward example of Rawlinson Social Justice. This focusses upon access and opportunity, in many ways the NC relies upon this by default as it doesn’t challenge the main approach as Doecke suggests.

This is where other SJ approaches come in, by challenging and changing the nature of the ‘playing field’ or the ‘running tack’ of curriculum and schooling.

But none recognise ‘place’ they are geographically blind or see the place as already read.

Social Dem: extra support for those below
Lib Individualistic: Support all so can compete fairly
Recognitive: involve the subjects
Associational: allow people to come together on own terms
Curricular: the nature of the curriculum in creating

Recognitive, Curricular & Associational all challenge the conditions creating disadvantage.

Quality is not a word used in these as it is a word colonised by ideology – seen as a panacea but has no real meaning.
However in the evidence these approaches to SJ either have not had the desired outcome or are fundamentally questioned.

Top Graph: CAP schools are still performing below the average, they are marginally better than PSFP (equity funding schools) BUT CAP schools often also get PSFP funding and many also high high enrolments of Aboriginal Students – thus not an isolated factor.

Bottom Left: Teese & Lamb review – shows us that there is no discernable pattern between CAP and NO-CAP country schools in terms of SES AND outcomes

Bottom Right: Chris Bonner, there are significant stratifications within locations that further entrench issues of disadvantage.
The NC and other federalist moves in education all reflect a changing view of equity in education over the last 15 years. This is clearly shown in the National Goals of schooling from the Adelaide Declaration and the Melbourne Declaration. The Adelaide declaration recognised a range of forms of disadvantage, including 'geographic' isolation (this led to a national framework for rural and remote education, a MCEETYA taskforce – al now disbanded, and occurred at a similar time to the HREOC inquiry into rural and remote education).

Now the Melbourne Declaration has removed any reference to forms of disadvantage and important 'place' and instead gone for 'equity & excellence' a context free generic view replete with neoliberalist ideology, here equity and excellence are pre-determined to meet some view or standard decided by some elite – the antithesis of Doecke’s suggestions.

The exclusion of ‘place’ challenges the moral basis of society as a view of equity is imposed – contradicts its own active and informed citizens aspect or perhaps reinforces what is intended here. It sits within civics where civics is ascribed. However rights are not about citizenship, but redefined as consumers in a market within the economy they live in.
When we take Tees’s work which shows the hierarchy of the curriculum (in Vic) we see a nice clear regression line similar to the general Australian line of SES and school achievement, Add to this the issue of ‘absences’ higher in LOW SES communities a clear disconnect between the curriculum and class is visible.

Now, we also have that familiar logic that many rural areas perform poorly due to their average lower SES.

= a hypothesis between class, curriculum (Inknowledge) AND place.

If we accept the pure SES view we accept Teese, even if we think there is maybe some truth (albeit how it is constructed) we accept Teese.

But commonsense also suggests that context will also play a role

Issues of private / elite leaving the rural areas to further their education in the metro, this is in fact a lack of valuing of place. Also has the effect of ensuring the economic leaders of the community do not value the place but value a knowledge away from that place. Thus undermining their own community.
20 Years ago! Initially as a Keynote at ACSA 1991

Questioning the nature of disadvantage and its causes logically leads us to re-consider Connell’s curricular Justice. This challenges the definition of equity and inclusion as purely on economic terms, it brings in knowledge and representation. What we need to do is connect curricular Justice with place.
Place

‘Bourdieu viewed individual lives as taking place within social and physical spaces that are connected to cultural and symbolic capital’
- Reed-Danahay (2005) P.132

Gieryn (2000)

• ‘place is space filled up by people, practices, objects and representations’
  – P.465
• Three features, geographic location; material form; and invested with meaning and value.

Donehower, Hogg & Schell (2007)

• ‘We define ‘rural’ as a quantitative measure, involving statistics on population and region as described by the U. S. Census; as a geographic term, denoting particular regions and areas or spaces and places; and as a cultural term, one that involves the interaction of people in groups and communities.’
  – p.2

Place differs from space as it is about how we interpret location, or in this argument how it generates new knowledge through the act of interpreting.
Place

- The multiplicity of rural places and perceptions of the rural remind us of the forces that have become otherwise invisible and that inevitably place matters.

- Reid, Green et al 2010
Place

• ‘What we know, we may choose to care for. What we fail to recognize, we certainly won’t’

• ‘Curriculum that does not challenge the standard syllabus and conditions in society informs students that knowledge and the world are fixed and are fine the way they are, with no role for students to play in transforming them and no need to change.’
The point of becoming more conscious of places in education is to extend our notions of pedagogy and accountability outward toward places. Thus extended, pedagogy becomes more relevant to the lived experience of students and teachers, and accountability is reconceptualised so that places matter to educators, students, and citizens in tangible ways. Place-conscious education, therefore, aims to work against the isolation of schooling’s discourses and practices from the living world outside the increasingly placeless institution of schooling. Furthermore, it aims to enlist teachers and students in the firsthand experience of local life and in the political process of understanding and shaping what happens there.
– (Gruenwald, 2003, p. 621).
• ‘the way we imagine space has effects…’
  – Massey 2005:4

• ‘space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power’
  – Foucault 1984:252
In this painting by John Glover the Aborigines in the foreground are in the dark while the new ‘city’ of Hobart is away but in the light

Quality is a form of ambiguity for situated knowledge perhaps?
When will we (Asutralia) grow up and trust ourselves rather than feeling compelled to control spaces and place?
Welch’s the city & the bush chapter.
Historical problem of the urban school being mythologized and the rural teacher having to deny their difference.

But teacher professional identity, stress and satisfaction are mediated by the way teachers do their job…

The initial Shape of the Australian Curriculum paper and the shape of history paper had scope for school develop options, the type of unit that would and could value place in the curriculum.

• ‘neither the beginning teachers nor the students will fully comprehend each others’ weltanschauung, or way of seeing the world… central to any consideration of rural education is that of the curriculum… the knowledge base from which rural students operate is different’
21. Depth Study 4. The making of the Modern World and Australia – A school-developed study

Schools will develop a depth study of their choice related to the making of the Modern world and Australia, choosing from an aspect of local, national or world history that relates to this historical period. The content to be taught must be drawn from either the depth studies or the overview. The school-developed study could focus on ONE or more of the following: a significant event, person, group, movement or historical debate.

23. Depth Study 4. The Medieval World – A school-developed study

Schools will develop a depth study of their choice related to the Medieval world, choosing from societies addressed in previous depth studies or an aspect of local or world history that relates to this historical period. The content to be taught must be drawn from either the depth studies or the overview. The school-developed study could focus on ONE or more of the following: a significant event, person, group, movement, mystery or discovery.
But the city, where the weight of numbers is couldn’t handle this place and not controlled aspect of the curriculum so it was removed.
Now adding history to the mix.

We won’t mention the history wars, except to mention they reinforce the contest over knowledge and the contestation of knowledge.
Not just going to a general capabilities, essential learning approach. There is an issue of knowledge as we see in history, a disciplinary knowledge.

It is about raising the expectations for all within an inclusive framework. It is NOT about the ‘soft bigotry of low expectations’.
‘State Theory of (history) Learning’

- Transmitted through the conflation of:
  - a mandated curriculum
  - external examination
  - professional standards
  - sanctioned pedagogy models.
  - external ‘monitoring’ of quality

From Robin Alexander and the Cambridge review of primary
When curriculum frameworks include pedagogy, within an assessment and accountability framework we get a new logic – the ‘state theory of learning’

Remember this is as much about teacher professionalism as about student learning as the two are inexorably linked.
Popkewitz
Demonstrates the economic nature of equity as equality of opportunity is to the economic opportunities of elites and the knowledge they create.