

From the Editors

Strengthening Rural Education: Gathering Research from Around the Globe

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The papers and authors in this Special Issue ultimately bring alive the complex and interwoven layers of education, globalization, and rurality/regional, both for themselves as researchers and for the places and people they research. They explore, compare, and contrast how the concepts of identity, place, space, and notions of community are played out in the international literature and applied to their specific contexts in the world. They do this, all the while providing insights into how educational research and rural researchers themselves are situated within and for, their rural/regional-global place. In this way, the Special Issue offers new knowledge into ways for understanding and mediating the impacts of globalization in local contexts as well as the important role rural education researchers can play in better framing the challenges and affordances for rural/regional communities.

The impetus for this Special Issue came as a result of the convening of the 2018 International Symposium for Innovation in Rural Education (ISFIRE) co-hosted by the National Centre of Science, Information and Communication Technology, and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR), University of New England, Armidale, AU and the Center for Research on Rural Education, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT. This gathering was designed to bring together rural educators and researchers from around the globe, a group arguably more likely to be marginalized within the larger education research community, to celebrate the importance of rural education, discuss common challenges, explore how research informs rural practice, and share innovative solutions to address collective concerns. The researchers and educators who gathered at ISFIRE 2018 found many more similarities than they did differences in the ways in which global forces and policies are playing out in their regional and rural educational contexts. For this Special Issue, authors were asked to illuminate their local and regional/rural research by paying particular attention to the international field. Thus, in this Special Issue you will find five such papers that draw from quite diverse international contexts and

countries, and demonstrate ways in which a global rural lens can be applied in diverse contexts in various provinces or states and territories within any one country.

Our task as editors of this Special Issue has been to collate and curate a set of papers that both individually and collectively offer the international rural education research community insights into global-regional tensions and possibilities. Our own positions as co-editors and rural researchers from opposite sides of the globe (Simone in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia and Jayne in Bozeman, Montana, United States) can be seen in the ways in which we have worked to connect, communicate, and conceptualize. Both of us have found solace in knowing the other is working hard during the day while the other rests at night and vice versa. Through the different time zones and seasons over this past year, this project has served to connect the often lonely and solitary work of those of us who research in rural education.

There was a strong response to our call for papers for this Special Issue and we received many papers that in their own right offered meaningful, scholarly contributions to the rural education research community. While we were only able to accept five papers for publication in this issue, we hope the other authors will submit their manuscripts for publication in the growing field of professional journals dedicated to rural education. For this Special Issue however we had the inevitable task of selecting papers which paid particular attention to the international rural education literature and explored deeply their rural/regional-global contexts. Through these papers, the authors share their own aspirations, tensions, and challenges as researchers and illuminate those of the participants in their studies.

Some papers provide a more proactive, hopeful stance providing specific strategies that those involved in the preparation and professional learning of teachers or leaders for rural communities can consider for their contexts, while others take a more sober exploration of the dire consequences of globalization on rural students, schools, and leaders. The articles open up scholarly debates for the rural research community to further discuss and theorize.

All perspectives are viewed as essential to the maturing of the rural education research landscape and can be considered holistically as contributing to a greater level of awareness of the complex depth of issues and opportunities for those in the rural margins.

In selecting the sequence of the five papers we offer them as an invitation to the rural research community to both delve into each individual paper as well as consider them as a whole and the positions that they represent in this Special Issue. We invite you to engage with these papers similar to the manner in which you might enter an art gallery and appreciate the various individual artworks, but then also step back and consider the positions and contrasts of the artwork in terms of what they offer to deepen the understanding of the whole. In this way, we hope we promote further discussion into the more nuanced subtleties and notes of discord, tension, and harmony within this collection.

We begin the Special Issue with a paper that highlights and indeed embodies many of the reasons why this Special Issue focuses on global-regional tensions. In “Disrupting Dichotomous Traps and Rethinking Problem Formation for Rural Education” Amy Price Azano and Catharine Biddle open a vital discussion that they commenced at ISFIRE 2018 on the topic of disrupting deficit discourses that frame much of the rural education literature and studies. They pose to the rural research community, the question, why are some challenges viewed tangentially as *rural* ones as opposed to issues of national or global importance? They explore the issue of why rural spaces are socially constructed as a geographic periphery, even though the vast majority of rural landmass in the United States – and the world – would indicate otherwise. Likewise, they note that rural education research has been relegated to a sociocultural periphery, thus permitting the deficit narrative to function as the de facto theoretical lens reinforcing that boundary. They provide discussion and debate on this topic also exploring their own position as rural scholars, using writing and their research as their own form of resistance—resisting the frame of pitting rural challenges in opposition to places elsewhere but, rather, to consider the relationship between rural and “other” in the context of challenge.

In next paper titled “Rural Exposures: An Examination of Three Initiatives to Introduce and Immerse Preservice Teachers Into Rural Communities and Rural Schools in the U.S. and Australia,” Robert Mitchell, Allison Wynhoff Olsen, Patrick Hampton, James Hicks, Danette Long, and Kristofer Olsen take a hopeful and proactive stance in comparing and contrasting different teacher

education institutional responses and ways to address the ever-increasing issues of rural school staffing by looking to initial teacher education. The approaches taken are aimed to provide initial exposure to rural schools and build a rural-intensive element within a practicum/professional experience course, and establish rural immersion experiences for pre-service teachers. These authors met and shared their experiences at the ISFIRE conference and their scholarly writing provides a way for a larger scale examination of rural research to be accessed by joining up smaller scale research projects together. This is an effective strategy for others in the rural education community to consider.

The next paper takes a closer look across a range of contexts, this time within the same country of Canada. Authors Dawn Wallin, Paul Newton, Mickey Jutras and Jordan Adilman share research stories of rural leaders’ experiences from Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. They expose the very real and sometimes painful lived experiences of those endeavoring to lead rural schools and by extension their communities. The title “‘I’m Not Where I Want to Be’: Teaching Principals’ Perceptions of Their Instructional Leadership Practices” reflects the position that many rural leaders feel about their situation. While stark, the paper shares tensions of rural principals’ actions to demonstrate exemplary practice. By sharing these stories the authors argue for recognition of these leaders’ efforts to support learning, and a reconstitution of the role of the teaching principal such that instructional leadership expectations are realistically manageable for leaders in small rural schools.

The next paper explores a particular global phenomenon of displaced people and discusses the situation for refugee students and their families. In some countries, policies are emerging where refugee and asylum seekers are only placed in rural and regional locations, while in others families take agency in selecting the places where they settle. In their paper “It Starts with Us: Including Refugees in Rural Schools and Communities” Alice M. Willie, Miranda K. Maher, Sibyl R. Cornell, Angelica Coumanova Kim, Brad Reimers, and Robyn S. Hess investigate to how teachers and schools can best support relocating families. Discussion from examples in the U.S. focuses on how school districts found innovative ways to overcome their limited resources by accessing funds from the community, reallocating internal funds, and offering positions (e.g., crossing guard, paraprofessional) to individuals from the culture who could assist with interpretation and communication.

The final paper brings together a global set of authors discussing the notion of “Educating for

Sustainability in Remote Locations from Diverse Perspectives.” In this paper, Chris Reading, Constance Khupe, Morag Redford, Dawn Willin, Tena Versland, Neil Taylor and Patrick Hampton describe experiences that involve innovative approaches towards educating for sustainability in remote locations in six diverse countries: South Africa, Scotland, Canada, United States of America, Pacific Island Nations, and Australia. For each, the nature of what constitutes a “remote” location, as well as the detail and challenges of the innovation are presented. Examples are provided from diverse populations in remote contexts such as refugee groups, religious groups, and Indigenous peoples who can find themselves living in locations where the dominant culture holds very different values from their own, and thus could experience a sense of cultural remoteness, as they are distanced (perhaps physically, spiritually, or emotionally) from others who share their culture. The examples illustrate that what constitutes the nature of “remote” is as much an

identity, value, or political construct as it is a geographic one.

Examined holistically we hope the papers in this Special Issue provide a rich tapestry of the many ways in which global forces are at play across a myriad of rural and regional places. The papers reflect both the beauty and harshness of the impact of globalization on rural, regional, and remote places across very different countries and within countries. They also offer alternative place-conscious narratives for rural researchers to participate together in, thus challenging deficit discourses. Most importantly they highlight how rural education researchers can reach across their local rural/regional community contexts, listen to one another, learn from one another, and take a joined up approach to linking their research together. It is our hope that the spark of ISFIRE 2018 will grow and continue to burn brightly across a strong international rural research community, actively learning from and with our rural/regional communities, and ultimately, strengthening rural education around the globe.

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