

Place, Rural Education and Social Justice:  
A Study of Rural Teaching and Curriculum  
Politics

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## **Certificate of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge and belief, understand that it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the dissertation. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Library Services, Charles Sturt University or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of thesis, subject to confidentiality provisions as approved by the University.

Name: Philip Christopher Roberts

Signature:

Date:

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## **Ethics**

This research was conducted with ethics approval from the University of Canberra Human Ethics Committee, approval number 11-108, and the Charles Sturt University Human Ethics Committee, approval number 2011/127.

Two approvals were necessary due to a transfer of candidature.

## Abstract

Through the use of a rural standpoint, this dissertation offers new insights into how rural educational disadvantage is socially, and spatially, produced in rural areas of New South Wales, Australia. It argues that the rural is often positioned on the periphery of mainstream, normative educational research and compared to an imaginary metropolitan norm. This positioning does not allow rural meanings to be explored or the rural to be considered in its own terms.

Along with notions of curricular justice and spatial justice, the ideas of ‘place’ and ‘rural social space’ (Reid et al., 2010) are applied to a consideration of social justice and curriculum, arriving at a position of curricular-spatial justice that informs a renewed turn to curriculum negotiation. Curricular-spatial justice suggests that approaches beyond distributive, recognitional and associational justice are needed to reposition the rural in educational policy and research.

In exploring place, social justice, curriculum and rural teaching in a manner that allows rural meanings to be at the forefront, a new perspective in research has been necessary. The resultant ‘rural standpoint’, a perspective that works *in, for* and *with* the rural to value rural people and communities and the knowledges produced therein, enables this. Methodologically the rural standpoint is operationalized in this study in the approach of ‘strategic eclecticism’, an approach drawing from mixed-method research.

The argument is made in four stages. First, a range of publicly available secondary data is used to look at rural educational achievement and equity from a perspective that raises important questions about the appropriateness of the dominant distributive approach to equity funding. The concept of a rural standpoint is then developed through a reflexive re-reading and reanalysis of an earlier report by the author, highlighting the importance of researcher perspective in research conclusions. The study then moves to a consideration of how teachers engage with place and the role of curriculum in rural areas, before a historical analysis of equity policy related to curriculum is presented. This reveals the dominant perspective of curriculum neutrality and centralised distributive assumptions of equity policy. Finally, a spatial analysis of

curriculum access and achievement data reveals the problem that needs to be re-framed as the existence of high-status subjects and highlights the existence of a metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledge hierarchy in which student access and success is mediated by school location.

## Published work

This dissertation draws upon ideas refined, published and/or presented prior to, and throughout, its development. In the case of joint authorship only work that is my own has been drawn upon in this dissertation.

The below are previously published works related to this dissertation:

- Roberts, P. & Downes, N. (2016). Conflicting messages: Sustainability and education for rural-regional sustainability. *Rural Society*, 25(1), pp. 15-36.
- Leonard, S. N. & Roberts, P. (2016). No Time to Think: The impact of the logics of New Public Management on teacher pre-professional learning. *Journal of Education Policy*, 31(2), pp.142-160.
- Roberts P. (2015). Education for Rural Australia. In A. Hogan & M. Young (Eds), *Rural and Regional Futures* (pp. 117-134). New York: Routledge.
- Roberts, P., & Cuervo, H. (2015). What Next for Rural Education Research? *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 25(3), 1-8.
- 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), 80-93.
- Roberts, P. (2014a). A curriculum for the country: The absence of the rural in a national curriculum. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 34(1), 51–60.
- Roberts, P. (2014b). 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.
- Leonard, S.N. & Roberts, P. (2014). Performers and Postulates: the role of evolving socio-historical contexts in shaping new teacher professional identities. *Critical Studies in Education*, 55(3), 303-318.
- Roberts, P. (2013). The role of an authentic curriculum and pedagogy for rural schools and the professional satisfaction of rural teachers. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 23(3), 89–99.
- Roberts, P. & Green, B. (2013). Researching Rural Place: On Social Justice and Rural Education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19(10), 765 –774.
- Roberts, P. & Drummond, A. (2012, December). *A Curriculum for whom? Representations of the Rural in the Australian Curriculum*. Paper presented at the joint Australian Association for Research in Education and the Asia Pacific Educational Research Association, Sydney, Australia.
- Roberts, P. (2010, November-December). *Rebuilding the schoolhouse: From the 'Empty Schoolhouse' to a schoolhouse in each place*. Paper presented at The Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference, Melbourne, Australia.
- Roberts, P. (2008a). Developing a place-based social justice approach to the development of rural school staffing policy. In C. Boylan (Ed.), *The Face of Learning Generation M: the mobile generation SPERA*

- National Conference* (pp. 103-13). SPERA.
- Roberts, P. (2008b). Re-thinking teacher stress and satisfaction as an issue of place. In C. Boylan (Ed.), *The Face of Learning Generation M: the mobile generation SPERA National Conference* (pp. 202-211). SPERA
  - Roberts, P. (2007). *Shaping Future Staffing Systems to Support Students in Rural, Remote and Isolated Communities*. Australian College of Educators: Online Refereed Article 46.
  - Roberts, P. (2005). *Staffing an Empty Schoolhouse: Attracting and retaining teachers in rural, remote and isolated communities (full reference version)*. Sydney: New South Wales Teachers Federation.
  - Roberts, P. (2004). *Staffing an Empty Schoolhouse: Attracting and retaining teachers in rural, remote and isolated communities*. Sydney: New South Wales Teachers Federation.

## Abbreviations

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research.
ACT	Australian Capital Territory.
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.
ARIA	Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia
ASGS	Australian Statistical Geography Standard
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank.
BOSTES	NSW Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards,
CAP	Country Areas Program.
DSP	Disadvantaged Schools Program.
HSC	NSW Higher School Certificate.
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Economic Advantage.
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
NSW	New South Wales.
NSWIOT	NSW Institute of Teachers.
NSWBOS	NSW Board of Studies.
NT	Northern Territory.
PSFP	Priority Schools Funding Program.
Qld	Queensland.
RA	Remoteness Area
SA	South Australia.
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas
SES	Socio-Economic Status.
TAS	Tasmania.
Vic	Victoria.
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education.
WA	Western Australia.

## **Section I: Framing**



# Chapter One

## Introduction

In this dissertation I examine education in rural areas of New South Wales, Australia (see figure 1), from a rural standpoint. I do so in order to enable the generation of new insights that suggest that rural educational disadvantage is socially, and spatially, produced. Specifically this study engages with the idea of *place* and *social justice* to explore issues of curriculum politics related to rural education. It does not seek to definitively answer, or define, the issues raised: instead this study identifies new insights made available from this perspective in order to develop a warrant for further research.



Figure 1: Location of NSW, shaded, in Australia. [Source: <http://www.conceptdraw.com/How-To-Guide/picture/Maps-Australia-map-NSW-in-Australia-Map.png> (Creative Commons licence)]

### **1.1: The Wicked Problem of rural educational disadvantage.**

Over the last 80 years, successive Australian Federal and State government inquiries have made conclusions in relation to rural educational disadvantage (Commonwealth of Australia, 1973; Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988; HREOC, 2000; Vinson, 2002; NSW-DET, 2005; Roberts, 2005; Halsey, 2005; Lyons, Cocksey et al., 2006; Australian Government, 2011). This disadvantage has been evidenced through generally poorer academic results, lower retention rates and a high level of teacher turnover. Reports from these inquiries and the ensuing academic literature generally conclude that rural disadvantage exists due to the interplay of isolation, an average lower Socio-Economic Status (SES) than other areas and lower levels of resourcing. The concept of geographic isolation is linked to an average lower socio-economic status and as such is rooted in the dominant paradigm of socio-economic status as the cause of disadvantage. This assumption has prevailed as a central theme of recent literature in relation to ‘rural disadvantage’ (Teese, 2000; James, 2001; Marginson, 2002; Teese & Polesel, 2003; Lamb, Rumberger et al., 2004; Lamb, Teese, & Helme, 2005; Holmes-Smith, 2006; Council for the Australian Federation, 2007; Welch, Helme & Lamb, 2007; Stilwell & Jordan, 2007).

Given the long history of examination of an apparent rural educational disadvantage it is most concerning that the situation seems to remain unchanged (see for example Lamb, Glover, & Walstab, 2014). As such, rural educational disadvantage has become a wicked problem. A ‘wicked problem’ is a persistent complex problem that seemingly cannot be solved by existing modes of inquiry and disciplinary tools (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Instead such problems need new thinking, new modes of inquiry and interdisciplinary thinking. Corbett (2010b) reinforces this notion in the context of education in rural coastal Atlantic communities in Canada and the relationship between school, home and community language use, noting that there are “no easy answers here, and the complex set of problems around language and pedagogy are thorny ones indeed” (p.125).

This is why in this dissertation I adopt the perspective of a *rural standpoint* (Roberts, 2014): a perspective that rural people and communities really matter

(Sher & Sher, 1994), which recognises the value of knowledge produced in, for, and with the rural (Roberts, 2014). I do this because, as I argue, much existing research related to rural educational disadvantage is informed by an implicit metropolitan norm (Roberts & Green, 2013) and informed by distributive perspectives (Rawls, 1999) on social justice. That is, it is ‘spatially blind’ (Green & Letts, 2007), and focused upon the distribution of resources to address some (assumed) lack of social or capital resource. Implicitly then, this dissertation engages with the nature of modern Australian society and the role of the rural within that society. Indeed as Brown, Harris and Russell (2010) argue: “since wicked problems are part of the society that generates them, any resolution brings with it a call for changes in that society” (p.4).

In addition to being informed by distributive justice assumptions and a metropolitan norm, most recent studies of rural educational disadvantage rarely examine the role played by the school curriculum in producing the very rural educational disadvantage they purport to examine. Instead, I argue that curriculum is overlooked: assumed as neutral in educational equity *or* as a pathway to ensuring equity by distributing access to it. That is, curriculum, and the knowledge it represents, is not seen as problematic. Again, I argue, this is due to a metropolitan assumption about knowledge. Where studies have explicitly examined curriculum in the production of inequity (Teese, 2000/2013; Teese & Polesel, 2003), the rural has not been a particular focus. Instead the category ‘rural’ has been linked with other traditionally categorised disadvantaged groups and their disadvantage attributed to the traditional notion of lower SES.

The rural, as a specific focus, has recently attracted the focus of a number of Australian studies: for example the *NSW Rural (Teacher) Education Project (R(T)EP)* (Green, 2008 [Ed]); *TERRAnova: Renewing Teacher Education for Rural and Regional Australia* (Reid et al., 2012); Graham and Miller’s (2015) *Bush Tracks* collection exploring teaching in, and preparation for teaching in, ‘the bush’. There have also been dissertations such as those by Cuervo (2010) exploring social justice in rural areas, and Noone (2007) bringing the voices of rural teachers to the ‘problem’ of rural education. Notably, each of these studies

brings ideas of ‘space and/or ‘place’ to the examination of the rural in search of new theoretical and empirical insights. They are then part of the spatial turn in social theory and education research (Gulson & Symes, 2007).

Internationally, recent works by Corbett (2007), Schafft and Jackson (2010), Brown and Schafft (2011), and Howley, Howley and Johnson (2014) have focussed upon various issues of education in the rural. Combined, these works illustrate the increasing international focus on education in rural areas, and the growing concern at the continued marginalisation of rural communities through generally poorer educational outcomes. However, most of these works only engage with the curriculum in a limited form and generally do not problematize the nature of the curriculum as a source of the production of disadvantage. The notable exception here is the work by Corbett (2007; 2010a; 2010b), who engages with the nature of education in Atlantic coastal communities and its role in undermining rural, and rural community, values. In this work, the curriculum is implicitly implicated as the message system of modern society; however it is still not engaged with as the central issue.

This is not to say the curriculum has been absent from consideration. For example, questions have been raised in the past, in Australia, about the ‘relevance’ or ‘acceptability’ of the official curriculum for rural communities (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988; McKenzie, Harrold & Sturman, 1996; HREOC, 2000). These considerations are, however, now dated, and reflect a period where knowledge was considered more contestable than it is arguably today. That is, the period informed by the work of Young (1971) and Connell et al. (1982), for instance, has tended to have given way to more neoliberal perspectives (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) that focus on performance and competition rather than the nature of the curriculum. In this dissertation, and in work published throughout its development, I have also explored the issue of the official curriculum in Australia and its applicability in rural areas, especially in the contemporary neoliberal context (Roberts, 2014).

In questioning the role of the curriculum, through the use of a rural standpoint, I am returning to discussions of social justice and rural education. Again this is

largely unstudied, save the reports or inquiries mentioned above, and not explored as a specific consideration of social justice. The exception here is Cuervo's (2010; 2012; 2014) important work that seeks to 'enlarge' the social justice agenda for rural education. Here Cuervo engages with notions of distributive justice, while also connecting with notions of recognitional and associational justice. However, here too, the curriculum is not examined in any significant manner, and while place is engaged with, the notion of spatial justice (Soja, 2010) is not. While informed by the spatial turn in social theory (Gulson & Symes, 2007), much of the work aimed toward this end has tended to emanate from the field of education, whereas considerations of education have largely been absent from the rural social sciences (Roberts & Downes, 2016).

In this study, then, I engage explicitly with the rural, and with notions of social justice informed by the spatial turn. In doing so, I argue that I am able to reconstitute the 'wicked problem' of persistent rural educational disadvantage. Specifically I bring together Teese's (e.g. 2000/2013) work on the curriculum with Corbett's (2007) critique of schooling in the rural, Cuervo's (2012) call for an enlarged social justice agenda, and Green's (2008) spatial examination of rural schooling in NSW. Methodologically I engage with White and Corbett's (2014) call for a greater focus upon the rural in methods, Howley, Howley and Yahn's (2014) call to engage with rurality in research, and most importantly, Sher and Sher's (1994) call to value rural people and communities.

This is contra the standard logic in Australian education that the rural is of little consequence. As Green and Letts (2007) argue, Australian education is 'spatially blind', resulting in a particularly large set of centralised education systems that have been historically justified as being in the interests of equity and quality for rural communities. This 'character' of Australian education has been extremely problematic for rural communities and people, and rarely considered. W. F. Connell's important history of reshaping Australian schooling (1993) is a notable exception. Here Connell (1993) noted the long-held (under-)achievement, or disadvantage, of rural students. Though he also noted the centralized dissemination of education from the capital, and how the

state attempted to provide equivalent education regardless of location through a basic curricula and standard examination. It was, according to Connell (1993, p.58), “an effort to establish the universality of urban standards of behaviour which were strongly reinforced by the mass media”. Here we can observe the implicit cultural domination of the urban. As Connell (1993, p.58) goes on to suggest, “Rural culture and education, by 1960, suffered not so much from the tyranny of distance as from the possible tyranny of the metropolitan connection”.

The “problems of distance and isolation, indeed, still existed” (Connell, 1993, p.58), but as Connell noted, the development of ‘area schools’<sup>1</sup> led to the loss of small differences in relation to the rural as they increasingly came to resemble the urban. Thus an urban model of education was transported to the regions and in so doing remade these regions in its own image. “The metropolitan connection, however, acted more as a benevolent despotism, than as a tyranny”, Connell (1993, p.58) suggests. To support this point Connell cites a number of studies that illustrate a greater lack of congruence between parental attitudes and schools’ aims among rural communities than urban ones. As Connell (1993, p.59) concludes, “it appeared that the system was, in effect, an instrument which favoured middle-class male, urban students”. My aim in this work, and in response to the perspective Connell describes, is to enlarge the social justice agenda (Cuervo, 2012) by doing what Brennan (2005, p.11) suggested: that is, to “put rurality [back] in the educational agenda”.

In enlarging the social justice agenda for rural education (Cuervo, 2012), I engage here with notions of both *curricular justice* (Connell, 1993) and *spatial justice* (Soja, 2010). Curricular justice (1993) examines the nature and construction of the curriculum from the perspective of the least advantaged. Spatial justice (Soja, 2010) examines the spatial dimension of justice and how inequity is spatially produced. The resultant construction of *curricular-spatial*

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Area Schools’ was a particular classification used in South Australia for a school in a rural or remote area that caters for kindergarten to matriculation. In NSW these schools are called ‘Central Schools’, in WA ‘District High Schools’. Connell (1993) uses the term more generically to refer to schools in rural or remote areas that brought students together from small primary schools, in conjunction with, a secondary education component.

*justice* allows an examination of the nature of the curriculum and its relationship to rural areas, and how access to the curriculum is spatially distributed. Coming from the perspective of a rural standpoint, this construction starts with the values and knowledge of the rural, and then engages with the processes of curriculum. In engaging with the rural as inherently valuable, the *Rural Social Space* model developed by Reid et al. (2010) is particularly helpful. Through its connection of people, place and economy, the model provides a tool to help come to understand and appreciate rural place.

Knowing the rural is a particular problem. As mentioned above, the rural is often not considered on its own terms. This lack of recognition is also related to research methods that similarly assume a metropolitan norm (Roberts & Green, 2013; Roberts, 2014). As such, the Rural Social Space model provides a framework to consider what it is that makes rural places unique. Important to note, however, is that there exist distinct fields of study related to the rural apart from education: notably, rural geography and rural sociology. Each brings a particular understanding to rural research. This complicates the task of defining the rural, and rural research, in a way that is perhaps not well recognised in the education field. For example, describing just what the rural is, and what the rural means, is a central pre-occupation of rural studies (Woods, 2011). Indeed determining exactly what is rural is subject to competing definitions, many of which differ in terms of geographic determinations, economic basis or cultural definitions (Cloke, 2006). This then creates particular problems for defining rural social research, as most definitions in use emphasise the social construction of the rural, as does the Rural Social Space model (Reid et al., 2010). Consequently I have positioned the discussion of what constitutes the rural within the issues of methodology, as determining its construction is part of determining the epistemological framing of the problem itself – something missing from most previous studies.

Finally, to emphasise why this is important I turn to the work of Mills and Gale (2010): *Schooling in Disadvantaged Communities: Playing the Game from the Back of the Field*. This book takes a Bourdieuan perspective to examine the community of ‘Crimson Brook’ (a pseudonym). This work has been very

influential for this study for two reasons. Firstly, it is informed by the sociology and approaches of Bourdieu – as is my own study – and as such, it provided a sort of guide to practice for this study. Secondly, it happens that ‘Crimson Brook’ is categorised as a rural school. With that categorisation however comes a reminder that rurality is little understood in the educational research community: in this study its assumed meaning is inconsequential to the nature and purpose of the research itself. That is, the rurality of ‘Crimson Brook’ has no influence on the design or conduct of the research, or in the production of the inequity it explores.

Reworking Mills and Gale’s (2010) subtitle ‘Playing the Game from the Back of the Field’, I am suggesting here that perhaps we are playing the game on the *wrong* field. Or perhaps it is the wrong game – e.g. Australian Rules football in a Rugby League state, or Soccer in National Football League<sup>2</sup> territory.

## **1.2: Place**

In developing an awareness of the particularities of the rural social space that students come to school in, teachers need to understand that place is socially constructed. Important here are notions of geography, culture, economy, personal biography, and the meaning and value that individuals place on these at any one time. Place is not as simple as context, in that it is multifaceted and movable, and as such is perhaps best understood in educational situations as a capacity to be reflexive about how these, and other, factors come together at any one time. Such fluid meanings are in many respects the antithesis of fixed cosmopolitan ideals and performative accountability regimes, as they deliberately work against such universalising definitions by valuing the particularities of places. While context is indeed part of the constitution of the issues impacting on any particular educational phenomenon in each ‘place’ (Seddon, 1993; 1995), I move beyond its usage in this study. This is because

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<sup>2</sup> In Australia, ‘football’ has traditionally referred to the ‘Rules’, ‘League’ or ‘Union’ games dominant in particular states.

‘context’ tends to be used more to describe features of the situation (Seddon, 1993; 1995), rather than their social construction and particularities.

The idea of particularity is arguably where place differs from the more impersonal and abstract idea of space, which operates on a larger scale and without reference to the meaning individuals ascribe to it. As such, ‘space’ corresponds with cosmopolitanism in that it takes ‘place’ as read, as in the case of rural education. In this way, ideas of space have been used to position the rural and justify the centralisation of education in Australia, as “space is fundamental in any exercise of power” (Foucault 1984, p.252). For education policy in Australia, Massey’s (2005, p.4; cited Green & Letts, 2007) view that “the way we imagine space has effects” is important, as all rural has been considered as one place, and as such, each community denied the ability to be recognised.

According to Reed-Danahay (2005, p.132), social theorists such as “Bourdieu viewed individual lives as taking place within social and physical spaces that are connected to cultural and symbolic capital”. I would also suggest that the use of ‘spaces’ here moves towards a recognition that people in fact occupy places, something that seems distinctly lacking in notions of cosmopolitanism. As Gieryn (2000, p.465) has suggested, “place is space filled up by people, practices, objects and representations”. These ideas of place recognise that at its heart is the issue of knowledge, as discussed above, and that therefore students in each place have a unique relationship with knowledge within that place.

Recognising place, and valuing the situated knowledge therein, is important in education, as we can only develop a care for what we know, whereas we cannot care for what we don’t know (Pile, 1997). Thus educators need to understand and value place to be able to value the lifeworld of their students, otherwise through valuing knowledge of other places teachers are implicitly telling students that their place, and hence they, don’t matter. Similarly, students need to know that their place matters as a necessary pre-condition of engagement in learning, but also, more deeply, in understanding their place in the world and

their ability to take action in their world. Thus I would suggest that valuing place is essential to achieving part of the second of the National Goals of Schooling in Australia, that students become active and informed citizens (MCEETYA, 2008). In some ways, this goal sits in contrast to equity and excellence when place is not valued. Echoing Connell (1993), for instance, Shor writes:

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 (Shor, 1992, p.12).

Such a view may suit performative agendas and cosmopolitan knowledge, but it certainly doesn't help students who are positioned outside this knowledge, and it certainly doesn't value active citizenship or empower forms of justice that recognize and value ideas of difference.

Recognising and valuing place also impacts upon the pedagogy teachers employ and, further challenges the performative agenda and the unitary view of pedagogy promoted through professional standards and models of pedagogy that reinforce a cosmopolitan knowledge base. According to Gruenewald:

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 (Gruenewald, 2003a, p.621).

Thus by recognising place, students not only learn about rural topics that are absent from the curriculum, but they are taught in a way that starts with them and their place, and then connects their place in a meaningful and valuable way to both the broader world and the high-stakes curriculum. Ironically, connecting content with students' backgrounds and making connections with their world is

a recognized part of the various models of ‘quality’ pedagogy promoted by Australian education departments. Glimpses that such approaches are successful can be seen in Bonner’s (2008) analysis of student achievement in NSW, which showed that some rural schools further from large centres outperformed those in or near such centres. Similarly, Cormack et al.’s (2008) work demonstrated improved literacy skills when students, living along the Murray River in Australia, wrote about the places they knew. Conceivably, in both cases schools in such remote areas are forced to situate their practice or were encouraged to do so by researchers. Sadly, though, as examples I will outline in Chapter Five illustrate, without an informed appreciation of place, teachers are often unable to do this effectively as they have been conditioned to value other forms of knowing, measured against other ways of performing.

The lack of engagement with the rural in the new Australian Curriculum<sup>3</sup> and the promulgation of a centralised, value-laden curriculum is in many ways in keeping with the tradition of Australian education being geographically blind (Green & Letts, 2007) and designed to ‘control’ the vast regions of Australia. Geography has been seen as a problem to overcome rather than an opportunity to harness. Within this approach, curriculum thinking has remained subordinated to policy and instrumentalised for policy objectives (Green, 2003) that are primarily economic in nature (Roberts, 2014a). There has been no substantial re-conceptualisation of curriculum either as responsive to place or in terms of genuine equity and social justice concerns. Thus the historic opportunity of the first curriculum for all of Australia to build a new vision of curriculum, and subsequently society, has passed. Instead, centralized technicist approaches have been entrenched. Within this view of curriculum, the rural remains absent and ill-considered. Consequentially rural educational achievement will continue to lag behind non-rural achievement, as it is measured against knowledge and approaches from elsewhere.

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<sup>3</sup> Beginning in 2007 there have been moves at a federal level in Australia to develop a curriculum framework that is common across the nation. The Australian State and Territory governments have agreed to this ‘Australian Curriculum’, formally introduced in 2011. See <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au>.

### **1.3: A Cosmopolitan Nation**

Curriculum is a window on the nation; what it values about its past and what it hopes for its future. In this regard Judith Brett's (2011) argument that the importance of the rural in the Australian national imaginary and economy has been declining since World War Two is prophetic, and this has been accelerated by national competition policy that demands that rural regions be self-supporting. The shifting relevance of the rural raises the spectre of an important curriculum question about the nation we represent to future generations and the nation we aim to build through our curriculum. As Green (2003) has argued, curriculum development in Australia has been particularly concerned with developing the nation's identity, yet within this is the problem of how to represent the nation of today to the students of tomorrow (Green, 2010). At this point in curriculum history, the issue of the nation and representation is fraught as politicians look to curriculum to both preserve a version of the past (as evidenced in the debates around the content of the 'Australian Curriculum: History') and reference a global future, as seen in the Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals of Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008).

However, instead of providing a framework to discuss issues of the nation and uncertain futures, Brennan (2011) argues that the Australian Curriculum is a political instrument that legislates the nation through a form of coercive federalism. That is, the Australian Curriculum serves to empower the federal government at the expense of the states. This is a significant shift in that it works to reshape the fundamental governance of the nation, and it also co-opts the curriculum into this new nation-making. Through this move, the traditionally separate fields of policy (the distribution of scarce resources) and curriculum (the knowledge we pass on to future generations) have been conflated such that curriculum has been repositioned as an instrument of policy (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Brennan, 2011; Luke, Woods & Weir, 2013). Perhaps even more problematic is that the dominant policy discourse of at least the last decade sees education in human capital and economic terms. Through this shift, education has become a tool in what Rizvi and Lingard (2010) call the 'neoliberal social imaginary', a socio-political perspective based on the

‘necessity’ of neoliberalism. As both the neoliberal imaginary and the national goals for schooling have a global outlook, seek economic advancement, and value mobility in a modern globalised world, they are inherently cosmopolitan (McLeod, 2012; Popkewitz, 2008). Combined, the neoliberal social imaginary and cosmopolitanism form the basis of the system of ideas and reasoning that influences the development of the curriculum (Popkewitz, 1997). Such cosmopolitan outlooks tend to marginalise the rural (Corbett, 2010a) by positioning it as embracing old, unproductive, inefficient and inward-looking ways (Brett, 2011). Consequently, educational (under-)achievement is socially constructed as a natural outcome of rurality. Completing the cycle of neoliberal necessity, this natural (under-)achievement then enables the construction of standardisation, monitoring and reporting as ‘common sense’ approaches to improving equity for disadvantaged groups.

Modernism has tended to position the rural on the negative defining side of a binary, which associates the future, sophistication and advancement with the cosmopolitan-urban (Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Popkewitz, 2008; Corbett, 2006), and therefore preferred, future. This evolving cosmopolitan character has a long history in Australia (McLeod, 2012) and has resulted in a situation where, as noted by Connell (1993), rural schools mirror those in metropolitan areas, with the ideal of the urban school being mythologised and rural teachers being forced to ignore their differences (Boylan et al., 1992). Indeed as Corbett (2010a) notes, the cosmopolitan character of the new global, metropolitan, economy has effectively embedded its values in schooling, changing its character and marginalizing many rural areas.

#### **1.4: Framing rural educational (under-)achievement**

As I have noted, it has become well established that most rural areas on average have lower social indicators, including education, compared to most non-rural areas. While not dismissing these other social factors, this dissertation is primarily concerned with educational achievement and to a degree its interaction with the other factors of disadvantage. The causes of continued

rural educational (under-)achievement comparative to non-rural regions are generally attributed to the average lower socio-economic status (SES) of rural communities, location or distance from cities, attracting and retaining staff, the economic decline of regions, and ‘rurality’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010; Welch et al., 2007; Creswell & Underwood, 2004; HREOC, 2000). My aim in this dissertation is to challenge this orthodoxy, by highlighting that none of these explanations actually explains the process of creating and reinforcing rural educational disadvantage. Instead, they develop a logic of rurality and location *as* Socio-Economic Status, and in so doing reduce them to economic variables. This process in turn excludes consideration of social factors such as the role of cultural capital, and related rural knowledges, or the social construction of place. Consequently equity is redefined in terms of the economic distribution of resources rather than a matter of social justice. I will contend that without an understanding of how rural educational disadvantage is produced, policy will fail to improve rural educational achievement, and instead continue to entrench rural educational disadvantage.

To contextualise this basis for the dissertation I will in this section outline the nature of rural educational (under-)achievement and the arguments used as explanation for it used by the main report shaping contemporary Australian policy and public debate – that is, the ‘Gonski’ Review of School Funding (Australian Government, 2011). While I will briefly point out the relevant philosophies, assumptions and limitations of the report, I will not enter deeper discussions here, as that is the work of subsequent chapters. Where possible I have used original quotes in order to represent the perspectives on the rural and equity of those influencing and implementing policy. The report provides a contemporary illustration that the production of rural educational disadvantage is poorly understood.

The Review of Funding for Schooling (Australian Government, 2011) was a major review into the funding of Australian Schools. Significantly for the purposes of this study, the review was a proxy for an equity review as its remit was to look at educational achievement as a basis for recommending fairer funding models to improve the equity of Australian Education. It

commissioned a number of separate reports that, while not used here, share the same perspective. From the outset this sets up the position that equity is a matter of the distribution of economic resources, something I will discuss in detail in Chapter Three. Described as a ‘once in a generation’ inquiry, the review was intended to form the basis for new approaches to funding Australian schooling, and improve equity, for at least the next decade.

In describing the achievement of remote schools, the review included a section that outlined the performance of students:

The location of schools in Australia can be classified within one of four groups<sup>4</sup>: metropolitan, provincial, remote and very remote, as determined by MCEECDYA. The remoteness of a school is a well-known factor that impacts on student outcomes, and the most recent data confirm that this is the case.

NAPLAN results from 2010 show that students in remote and very remote schools are consistently outperformed by students attending metropolitan schools. While 92 per cent of metropolitan students performed at or above the national minimum standard of achievement in Year 9 reading, 79 per cent of remote students, and only 45 per cent of very remote students, performed at this level. [reference to a table removed] the performance of very remote students is of particular concern. More than half of these students achieve at Band 5 and below, which is below the minimum standard. In remote and very remote areas, these results may also reflect the impact of low socioeconomic and Indigenous factors.

An analysis of mean 2010 NAPLAN scores conducted by MCEECDYA’s Strategic Policy Working Group further demonstrates this trend. The analysis reveals that average reading scores decrease with distance from metropolitan centres and that this trend holds across all year levels. Other data sources confirm a disparity in outcomes according to student location, with 2009 PISA results showing the gap between 15 year-olds in metropolitan schools and remote schools across all domains is equivalent to 1.5 years of schooling (Thomson et al., 2011).

Non-metropolitan students also have lower rates of Year 12 attainment, as well as lower rates of transition to university. In

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<sup>4</sup> The review, drawing upon data from the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, used an old geo-classification structure. The new geo-classification divides ‘provincial’ into inner regional and outer regional.

2010, 81 per cent of young adults aged 20 to 24 years from major cities attained Year 12, compared to 67 per cent of students from inner or outer regional areas and 64 per cent of students from remote or very remote areas (ABS 2011a) (Australian Government, 2011 pp.121-122).

The report made two key findings in relation to addressing rural educational disadvantage:

(Finding 19) The key dimensions of disadvantage that are having a significant impact on educational performance in Australia are socioeconomic status, Indigeneity, English language proficiency, disability and school remoteness.

(Finding 20) There are complex interactions between factors of disadvantage, and students who experience multiple factors are at a higher risk of poor performance.

It also recommended a resource standard for schools with specific loadings for identified categories of disadvantage, specifically for:

- School size and location,
- Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds,
- Students from Indigenous backgrounds,
- Students with limited English language proficiency.

In relation to the inclusion of the loading for location, the report explained that:

Recognising the additional costs of operating in remote and very remote areas, the panel concluded that there is a strong case for a range of loadings for all schools in these areas to reflect costs as well as school size (Australian Government, 2011, p.168).

Thus the inclusion of the loading appears due to increased costs.

Overall the report focused more on remoteness than rurality, often conflating the two where they were discussed. Specifically, while the factor that caused disadvantage was described as remoteness, the delimitation of this term is not defined in any detail. Exactly how 'remoteness' or 'location' caused disadvantage remained unclear. For example the report noted that:

SES was not an effective differentiator of need where disadvantage is widely spread within a geographical area or where economic disadvantage is compounded by other factors such as remoteness (Australian Government, 2011, p.79).

Just how disadvantage is compounded by remoteness is not addressed.

However the review also separated remoteness out as a factor of disadvantage:

there are five factors of disadvantage that have a significant impact on educational outcomes in Australia. At the student level these factors are socioeconomic status, Indigeneity, English language proficiency, and disability. At the school level, remoteness is demonstrated to have an impact on student outcomes (Australian Government, 2011, p.111).

Again, ‘demonstrated to have’ appears self evident or based upon the statistics cited and not their production. The closest the review got to explaining such relationships was to state the complexity of compounding disadvantage:

The interaction between Indigeneity, low socioeconomic status and attending school in a remote or very remote location is particularly strong in Australia (Australian Government, 2011, p.123).

Notable for this study is the conflation between rural location, socio-economic status, resources and costs, and (often) Indigeneity. This appears to be the standard equity logic in Australian education. A similar pattern can be seen in the longest running equity program for rural schools, the Country Areas Program (CAP), which will be discussed in Chapter Three. Overall these approaches focus on the distribution of resources, and not the nature of education or the curriculum. Though to be fair, I should note that the issue of curriculum and disadvantage wasn’t on the table in the review. In fact the word ‘curriculum’ only appears 35 times in the main report – with nearly all of these in reference to the ‘Australian Curriculum’ or the ‘Australian Curriculum Assessment Reporting Authority’. Only twice does the report refer to curriculum as an issue of disadvantage. The lack of attention to curriculum as an issue in a once in a generation equity review reinforces the very logic that this dissertation aims to critique.

#### **1.4.1: The inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education**

Constitutive of the social space of rural, regional, and remote NSW (and Australia) are issues pertaining to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and communities. These have not been dealt with explicitly, or in any sustained manner, within this dissertation. This is not to imply a lack of importance, but rather to bracket out these issues from this inquiry in order to

lay the groundwork for a new and different standpoint from which they can be addressed in future inquiry. These are crucial, and very complex, issues for all aspects of rural education. But I have needed here to delimit the particular issues I am examining. As research foundational to this dissertation (e.g. Green & Letts, 2007; Reid et al., 2010; Roberts, 2005) argues, the racialisation of rural NSW, histories of difficult race relations, and matters of power and identity are all intertwined with the production of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage. As Green and Letts (p.70) argue, education has in many ways facilitated the “effective erasure of Aboriginal presence” in rural NSW. Indeed, Reid et al. (2010) note the often unspoken connection between rural and Indigenous issues, about which many rural education groups are silent. Similarly Greenwood (2009) and Faircloth (2009) have raised these connections in the international literature.

In *not* engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues specifically, I acknowledge the risk of continuing the ‘silencing and separation’ (Reid et al., 2010), the ‘Silent Apartheid’ (Rose, 2012), or continuing colonialism (McConaghy, 2000) of Indigenous Australia. Acknowledging this from the beginning is important – and there are times in the discussion and analysis of the data I have collected from rural places and people that I have been unable to remain silent in the face of the most obvious meanings and implications for the ultimate project of reconciliation. However, these are all issues of social justice, as I discuss, and constituent of the rural social space that this dissertation engages with. It is not about devaluing Indigenous knowledge (Rose, 2012), or as the Stronger Smarter Institute (2014) criticises, focussing on helping Indigenous students fit into the system rather than exploring what they bring. Instead, my intention is to lay the foundations that will open up a new way of looking at the rural, which includes issues of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, that can then be turned to these specific matters ideally in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers.

### **1.5: Location of study**

This research is primarily focused on the Australian State of New South Wales (NSW). This focus has been chosen as it is the state in which I live and the education system I have a deep knowledge of, through my career as a teacher in rural schools, a rural education researcher, and an activist. Furthermore, NSW is the most populous state in Australia, has historically been one of the more influential in the federation, and has an education system that resembles the one being constructed federally. These factors make it an appropriate and informative jurisdiction to study at this point in Australian educational history. While this delimitation works for the manageability of this present study, I suggest as a follow-up that a national study using the approaches employed here would be beneficial.

In terms of geographical classification, I have used the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) remoteness structure (see figure 2). This categorisation came into effect in July 2011 as a more stable and consistent statistical structure than its predecessor (ABS, 2011). I use this as a basis for the statistics used in this dissertation, and in full recognition of the problems of defining the rural mentioned above and discussed in Chapter Two.

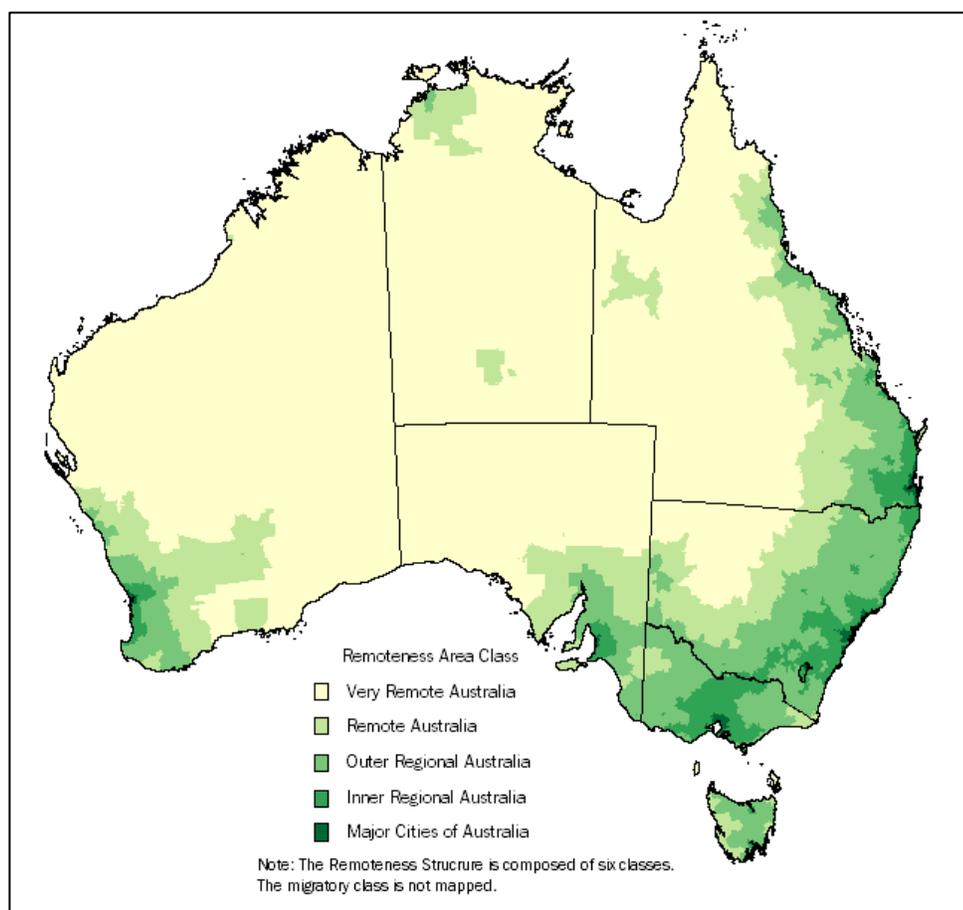


Figure 2: Map of Australia by Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remote Structure

Source: <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/remoteness+structure>

Comparative to the other States and Territories of Australia, NSW ranks fifth in the proportion of students in remote and very remote areas in Australia, after Western Australia (WA), Queensland (QLD), the Northern Territory (NT) and South Australia (SA) (ABS, 2011) (see table 1). Within NSW, 59.5% of schools and 75.8% of students are located in metropolitan areas, 37.9% schools and 23.7% students located in provincial areas, and 2.2% schools and 0.5% students located in remote areas (NSWDET, 2011). This reinforces that 65 % of the NSW population lives in the ‘Greater Sydney’ metropolitan area of Newcastle-Sydney-Wollongong (the biggest metropolitan population in Australia). Figure 3 below provides an overview of the distribution of the population of NSW. Finally, figure 4 provides a representation of both the remoteness structure of NSW and community advantage-disadvantage (referred

to as SEIFA<sup>5</sup>). Together, these provide a context for the regions I refer to in this dissertation.

<b>State</b>	<b>Major Cities of Australia</b>	<b>Inner Regional Australia</b>	<b>Outer Regional Australia</b>	<b>Remote Australia</b>	<b>Very Remote Australia</b>
<b>New South Wales</b>	73.5%	19.6%	6.2%	0.4%	0.1%
<b>Victoria</b>	75.3%	19.7%	4.5%	0.1%	0.0%
<b>Queensland</b>	61.5%	20.4%	14.8%	1.7%	1.3%
<b>South Australia</b>	72.8%	10.9%	12.4%	2.8%	0.9%
<b>Western Australia</b>	75.7%	9.1%	7.9%	4.3%	2.7%
<b>Tasmania</b>	65.6%	32.0%	1.6%	0.5%	0.0%
<b>Northern Territory</b>	56.4%	20.0%	21.8%	0.1%	0.9%
<b>Australian Capital Territory</b>	99.7%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 1: State and Territory Populations by ARIA (Source: 2011 Census of Population and Housing – does not equal 100% as some data removed for ease of display)

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<sup>5</sup> Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas

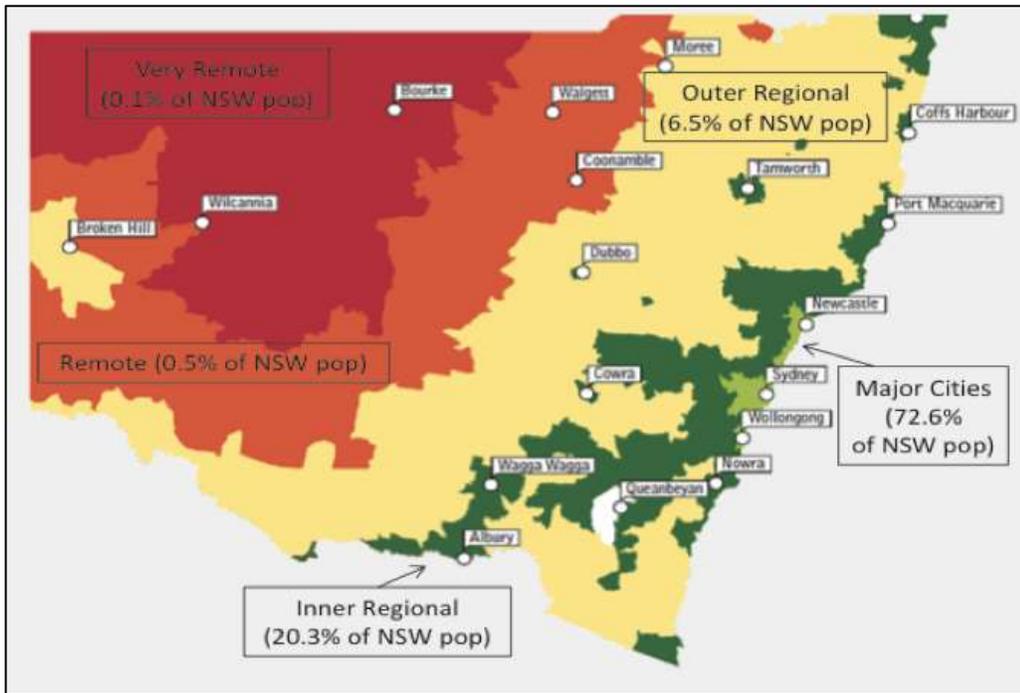


Figure 3: NSW Population by ARIA. (Source: NSW DEC, 2011, p.28, figure 12 in the original report).

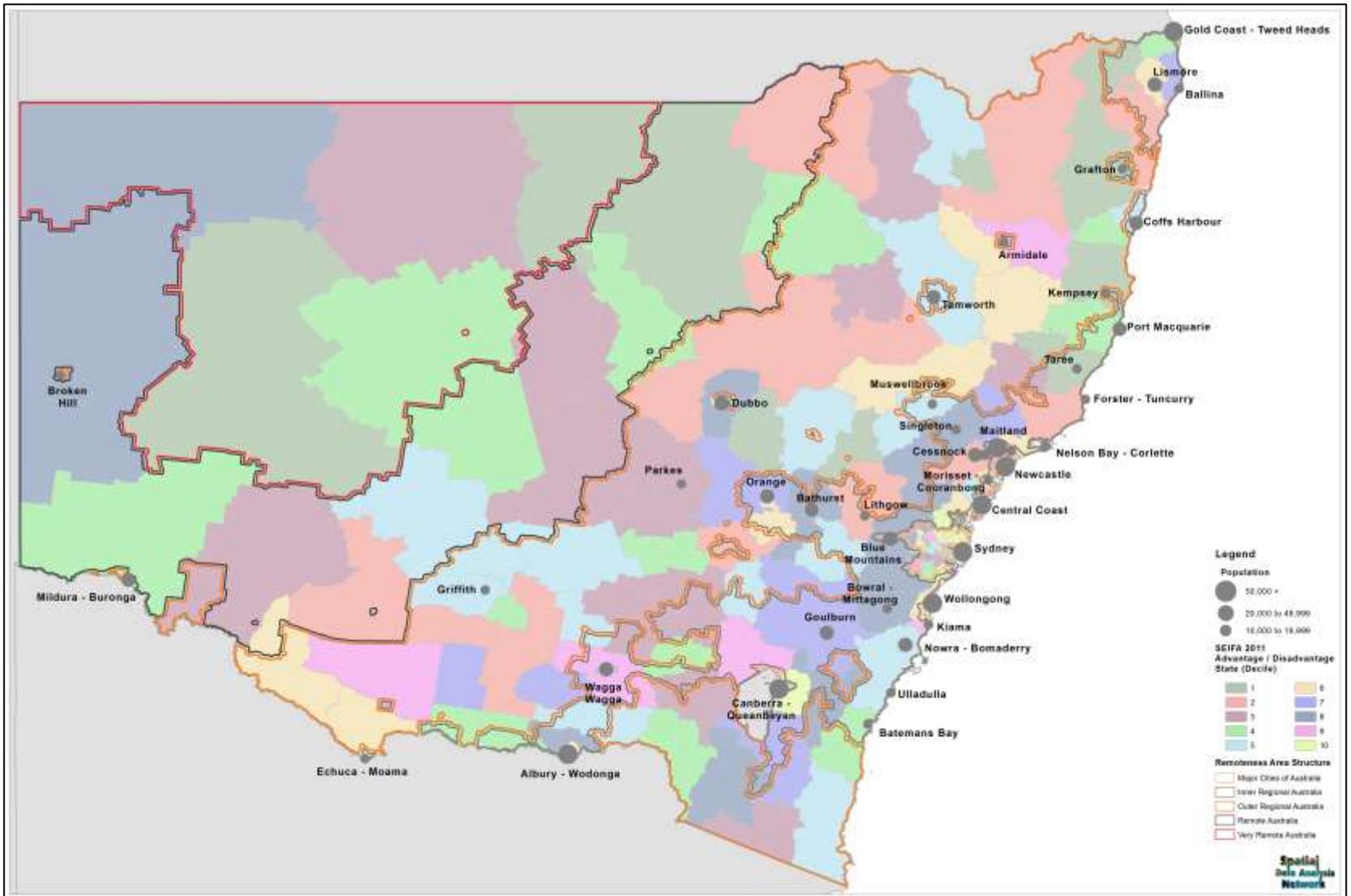


Figure 4: ARIA & SEIFA Advantage/Disadvantage

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## **1.6: A mud map of the dissertation**

This dissertation proceeds in three distinct sections. Chapters One to Three provide the framing for the study. Chapters Four to Seven provide an application of the approach to specific issues. The learnings from the study are synthesised in Chapter Eight before the Conclusion in Chapter Nine. The orientation of this study highlights how a rural standpoint can help us think differently about rural educational disadvantage. In so doing I offer new perspectives on its production and the body of this study comprises what may be termed four related mini-studies. A focus on these four interrelated studies rather than a single detailed inquiry has been chosen in the interests of exploring the broader issue of the production of rural educational disadvantage through the dominance of metropolitan-cosmopolitan values.

Chapter Two outlines the epistemological orientation to the study, before describing the specific methods used. In this chapter I explore the problem of defining the rural which I argue, is entwined with the problems of researching and knowing the rural. From here, I outline my orientation of a rural standpoint (Roberts, 2014) and its use in the approach of strategic eclecticism (Roberts & Green, 2013). As these are broad methodological considerations I conclude the chapter by outlining the specific methods I have employed throughout the dissertation. Specific aspects pertinent to each chapter are further elaborated within each chapter to provide the necessary context for each.

In Chapter Three I outline some approaches to social justice and highlight their inadequacy for thinking about rural educational disadvantage, through the example of the Country Areas Program (CAP). This chapter highlights the limitations of distributive justice, discusses the main equity philosophy informing CAP, and examines a number of alternatives. Specifically, *recognitional justice* (Fraser, 1995) and *associational justice* (Gewirtz, 2006) are also examined and shown to have limitations when considered from a rural standpoint. Finally the chapter engages with the concept of *curricular justice* (Connell, 1993) and *spatial justice* (Soja, 2010), proposing an orientation of

curricular-spatial justice as necessary for reconstituting rural educational (dis)advantage.

Chapter Four is a bridge between the first section of the dissertation, the orientation, and the second section, the studies. It is an elaboration upon, and application of, the methodological orientation of a rural standpoint in that the orientation was developed reflexively through the reanalysis conducted in this chapter. The chapter engages with the reanalysis of the data in a study I conducted over ten years ago. In so doing, the chapter illustrates how a reflexive reanalysis, informed by a rural standpoint, can illuminate issues that were previously unseen. In many ways it acts as a metaphor for the overall dissertation.

Chapter Five draws upon a series of semi-structured interviews with rural teachers in the first three years of their career, experienced teachers and with professional leaders. The chapter explores perceptions of place and the rural, with specific reference to curriculum, pedagogy models, and professional standards. I argue that pedagogy models and professional standards, as technologies of the modern neoliberal context of contemporary education, are interpreted in a way that renders professional practice as placeless. That is, they are imagined to apply equally to all places.

Chapter Six provides an historical study of the last five decades of education policy reform related to equity and curriculum. This chapter draws on the critiques in Chapters Two and Three in relation to the lack of a rural perspective and dominant assumptions of metropolitan-cosmopolitan values and knowledges. As such, the chapter shows how curriculum, and access to it, has been considered in distributive justice terms and not as a factor in the production of rural educational disadvantage.

Chapter Seven builds upon Chapter Six by describing the distinctive curriculum hierarchy in operation in NSW. The chapter draws upon the work of Teese (e.g. 2000/2013) in relation to curriculum hierarchies in Victoria/Melbourne, effectively extending this work into NSW. The chapter further extends the previous work on hierarchies by examining the spatial distribution of access to,

and achievement in, the curriculum hierarchy. Here the relevance of the existing curriculum hierarchy to rural students and communities is considered, especially in light of their limited access to more powerful curriculum offerings.

Finally, Chapter Eight brings the various threads of this study together to explore the notion of ‘situated teaching’ – a form of curriculum negotiation that engages with place and the situated knowledges of the rural. Here ideas related to teaching informed by an understanding of place are extended, using evidence from the previous chapters to unpack the related issues. In the end, an argument is presented that an approach informed by a rural standpoint, and a curricular-spatial justice perspective, is required to work against the persistence of the ‘wicked problem’ of rural educational disadvantage.

### **1.7: Conclusion**

In this Chapter I have introduced the conceptual and locational frames for the dissertation and outlined a number of key orientations that have been used throughout the study. Specifically I have suggested that the rural is socially constructed, and that this social construction impacts on the production of rural educational disadvantage. I have outlined “my” perspective on place, and cosmopolitanism, which I have used to highlight the dominant logic of rural educational (in)equity which I argue is inadequate to achieve socially just educational reform.



## Chapter Two

### Researching the Rural

In this chapter I look at three key methodological perspectives that inform this research: the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, the idea of a rural standpoint, and the approach of strategic eclecticism. Due to the limitations of representation in linear text I will necessarily address each separately. However, in practice each idea coexists in a productive tension, meaning that they need to be considered as a whole and not as distinct elements. Following this overview I outline the more technical aspects related to the methods employed in this study, reiterating that specific aspects related to the focus of each of Chapters Four to Seven are presented in those chapters as appropriate context for the data presented in each.

The impetus in selecting these approaches lies in the problem of defining and representing the rural. As Cloke (2006) argues, there are many competing definitions of the rural, differing on the basis of their geographic determinations, economic basis, or cultural emphases. This creates difficulty both in defining what the site of study is and choosing the most appropriate methodological framework in which to represent the ‘rural’ being investigated. In this sense the rural exists on a variety of scales simultaneously, whether gesturing toward large non-metropolitan areas, or referring to specific communities, schools or classrooms. In educational research such as this, the idea of the rural furthermore acts as a heuristic through which to explore the ideas of space and place as related to scale (Green, 2013). A focus of this dissertation is therefore on understanding the rural and rural meanings; however these are bounded by social, historical and cultural factors. To explore these meanings I have turned to the ideas of *space* and specifically *place* in recognition of the need for a spatial awareness in rural educational research. Furthermore, as the meaning of the ‘rural’ is implicated in how research is conceived of and conducted I have focused upon its meaning in this chapter.

The chapter begins with an outline of place and space as they relate to issues of methodology and method. The chapter then explores the difficulty in defining

the rural, and the argument for why its definition needs to be considered part of the research methodology. The idea of metrocentricity is then examined. To counter the influence of metrocentricity on research, the philosophy of this project – the rural standpoint – and its enactment – the approach of strategic eclecticism – are then outlined. Finally, the specific methods used in this project are described.

## **2.1: Place and Space**

Recognizing that the notion of *place* is problematic (Nespor, 2006), contested, and often used interchangeably with *space*, I offer an indicative elaboration of how I use the terms for the purposes of this chapter: noting that the terms are further developed throughout this work in its entirety, specifically in relation to social justice in the following chapter. This is distinct from the discussion of ‘place’ in the previous chapter, which focused upon its discursive usage, whereas here the focus is related to constructing and examining the subject of research. Broadly speaking I tend towards the usage of *place* as specificity and *space* as more abstract. This is suggested by the ideas of Carter, Donald and Squires (1993, p.xii) that “place [is] space to which meaning has been ascribed”, and Gieryn (2000, p.465), that “place is space filled up by people, practices, objects and representations”. However, I am also sensitive to Massey’s (2005) reservations that this positions place as local and space as more abstract and, as such, puts the two ideas at odds seeking an unnecessary essentialism.<sup>6</sup>

My concern about such essentialism stems from a recognition that place is tied up with power, scale, and a particular time-space temporality. Some places are inherently more powerful than others or defined in terms of other ‘relative’ places’, for example, urban centres versus remote towns, as is explored in this study. As Massey (2005) notes, rural places are defined as distinct from cities,

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<sup>6</sup> While not used significantly in this study due to its focus on curriculum, and education more generally, rather than everyday social life, de Certeau’s (1984) notion of space as a practised place is useful to consider here, as it keeps the notion of scale in flux.

with the focus on the city ‘taming’ our vision of the rural. Revealed here is also the element of scale (Nespor, 2004). *Place* as the ‘city’ or ‘rural places’ exists on a particular scale that is different from a specific location, or more particularly the particular physical location of a person at any given time. Unpacking the problematic further, ‘time’ is thus introduced as another notion influencing the understanding of *place* as non-categorical.

These problematics are why *place* is used hesitantly as a particular time-space-scale reference in relation to the individuals who give it meaning, and take meaning from it, at any particular time. Massey (2005) suggests the idea of place as open, as an event, the here and now, an encounter, a ‘thrown-togetherness’, that will never come together the same way again. It is this idea of place as an event, an assemblage of interactions understood differently by each person involved and thus not universal or knowable beyond the instance of its experience that I am arguing in this study. While certain characteristics of places can be described, such as physical and geographical features, the meaning taken from them can only be suggested and not essentialised. Furthermore, as Green (2013) suggests, place differs literally, physically, culturally, historically and politically, and therefore must be understood in terms of changing relations of power and privilege.

Missing from my discussion is the non-human. This is not to leave the non-human aside, but instead marks the recognition that I cannot speak for it, other than gesture toward it. While place is where the natural and the social meet, with nature inherently part of place (Massey, 2005) and giving rise to concerns for the sustainability of places (Dirlik, 2001), the meaning taken or ascribed is only our human representation. This is an important influence upon our understanding, but as I am referring in this dissertation to education, and curriculum more specifically, I am talking about representation and not inherent meanings.

Space, I suggest, can be described in broad terms, relative again to scale and time. Indeed scale, itself a socio-spatial construction (Green, 2013), tends towards some *places* more akin to the abstract and thus more relevantly spoken

of in terms of space (e.g. ‘the city’ or ‘rural’). It may be more accurate then to echo Heidegger’s notion of ‘space *as* place’ (in Massey 2005, p.183), in that in this dissertation space is used to denote more general, large-scale, descriptions. However, those general descriptions themselves have meaning and are given meaning, whilst also being open to the same differentials of power and privilege (e.g. the city and the rural), time and scale. Specifically I use 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. Thus I am using *space* as a broad theoretical tool and *place* as somewhat more specific and situated, though equally temporal. This is not to imply that, for example, all of the rural, as a spatial field, is the same; on the contrary, I use space as a theoretical tool to highlight that space is socially produced.

Consequently, in researching *place* in the context of this dissertation I am aware that there is no one meaning in use at any one time and that meanings will differ, depending on the scale referenced. Instead I am seeking to understand how *place* is patched together in any particular instance, in any particular moment in time, as a window to seeing how rural places are understood and engaged with – or not – in curriculum. With reference to *space*, I am gesturing towards the rural as a broad category of description that in any usage is constituted of many unique elements. This usage, I suggest, opens a window to seeing the standardization implied in much education policy and curriculum.

## **2.2: Defining the rural**

The rural is inherently spatial (Halfacree, 2006), such that ‘[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). As a spatial concept, and with reference to notions of place, the rural then becomes a difficult site to study and define for research because of its multifaceted and contestable nature. As Cloke (2006) suggests, the primary problem in studying the rural is the difficulty in defining what the site of study is because the rural is a social

construct with competing and layered conceptions of its meaning and value<sup>7</sup>. Whilst certain physical characteristics, for example topography, can be described as relevant to scale, others such as location are always relative to *other* locations and therefore do not exist independently. Complicating matters further is the social construction of *space* and *place*, and that meanings are produced relative to experience and perception. Consequently the rural cuts along traditional methodological divides and does not sit comfortably within traditional quantitative or qualitative delineations.

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. For example, Halfacree (2006) puts forward a three-fold model of rural space, consisting of: *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). Alternatively, Cloke (2006) proposes three theoretical frames for understanding the rural: *functional* (land use and life linked to land), *political-economic* (social production), and *social* (culture and values). Moving to what they term a generative theory of rurality, Balfour, Mitchell and Molestone (2008) suggest: rurality as *context, forces* (space, place and time), *agencies* (movement, systems, will) and *resources* (situated, material and psychosocial). Notably each of these three approaches implies some quantifiable dimension, but rest upon predominantly socially constructed values. Focusing upon the social side of an already identified rural space, Reid et al. (2010) highlight the elements of rural social space in a model that draws upon: *demography* (population, culture, people), *economy* (work, industry, production), and *geography* (environment, place) as key considerations for policy. Finally, looking at how these may come together in relation to defining particular rural communities, Howley and Howley (2010) propose three rural community types: *durable agrarian*

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<sup>7</sup> In a recent special edition of 'The Australian and International Journal of Rural Education', how the rural is understood, and its significance to the nature of the research as 'generative of educational, social and methodological insights' (Roberts & Cuervo, 2015, p.3), was explored.

(sustainable rural industries), *resource extraction* (mining, logging), and *suburbanizing* (becoming other than rural).

The formal measure for Australian public policy, the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (described in Chapter One) as used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, implies a positivist orientation through its designations based on distance and town population size. That the characteristics determining town size, and the official designations, are relative to proximity to other ‘places’, somewhat confuses the matter. This approach positions the rural, and the various designations therein, as purely a statistical (i.e. population) and distance phenomena. It also denies that it entrenches a power relation (Massey, 2005) between socially constructed privileged locations, with large populations, against which the gradations of the rural are defined both in terms of proximity and size. A similar process applies to scale (Nespor, 2004), specifically as larger distances between places are constructed as deficit.

Neither population size nor scale has an inherent power value but it is socially ascribed one in this measure. Why some towns have large populations, and the functionality and desirability of this, is not explored. Instead a ‘normal’ size is positioned and small populations are seen as exceptions, regardless of any other indicators. Highlighting the arbitrariness of this delimiter, it can be seen that if, for example, the frequency with which small-sized towns were the powerful denominator they would be socially constructed as the norm and large towns as the exception. That fundamental issues of power are implicated here is highlighted when Bourdieu’s (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) notions of symbolic power and symbolic violence are used; the very power of naming a space as ‘rural’, ‘remote’, or otherwise, is itself an exercise in symbolic power and symbolic violence.

Highlighting the problem of defining the rural serves two purposes: firstly, it lays the groundwork for the methodological moves outlined later in this chapter, and secondly, it reinforces the contestation of what constitutes the rural, and how the rural is positioned and understood, which is the broad issue explored in this dissertation. That said, for the purposes of moving forward, I accept the following as a working principle, definitionally: “It is important to

define rural not only demographically and geographically but culturally as well” (Donehower, Hogg, & Schell, 2007, p. 9). Put more positively, rurality is seen here as a concept that is at once geographic, demographic, and cultural, and hence as cutting across disciplinary and (meta-)methodological lines and boundaries (Roberts & Green, 2013). As a result, any research that is informed by only one of these paradigms or epistemological position will only ever represent part of the possible picture. Put another way, it will *not* represent other equally valid perspectives on the rural. Thus, as Bæck (2016) argues, the rural is not a fixed concept; the way it is constructed in the research is important and has real effects on the research product.

This, I argue, gives rise to the fundamental problem for rural research: that traditional methods cannot fully represent the rural. It is not as simple as separating out seemingly separate issues that pertain to particular methodologies, such as qualitative research on community perceptions or quantitative studies of population. For, as many authors point out (Cloke, 2006; Halfacree, 2006; Balfour et al., 2008; Reid et al., 2010; Roberts & Green, 2013), the quantitative influences the qualitative, and *visa-versa*, in conceptualizing and understanding the rural. For example, following the Rural Social Space model proposed by Reid et al. (2010), landform and climate influence vegetation and fertility, which in turn influences possible economic industries or traditional lifestyles, which in turn, complicated by climatic variability, influence community attitudes, sustainability, and futures, and so forth. That the dimensions *cannot* be separated in accounting for the rural makes any move to separate them in research nonsensical. Importantly, though, it highlights that as yet we do not have established ways of working within these contradictions.

There is, however, even more at stake than contradictions. This is the issue that educational research tends not to consider the rural on its own terms: it is instead spatially blind (Green & Letts, 2007; Roberts & Green, 2013). As such, educational research does not take into account the influence of space, particularly rural space, in the production of the phenomenon it examines. Building an argument to support this case is indeed the role of this dissertation,

and it is here that I encounter a problem of conventional format – for when I entered this study I had intended to illustrate rural educational disadvantage through a conventional study using conventional methods. However as I progressed, partly influenced by my experiences (see Chapter Four), I began to see that these conventional methods applied independently were not helping me understand the issues I aimed to investigate, in a manner that accorded with my own experiences of them. It was from that point that I have needed to reflexively revisit issues of methodology and methods.

### **2.3: Contra Metrocentricity**

In overcoming the obstacles provided by issues of rural definitions (Bæck, 2016), it has been necessary to make a number of methodological moves in order to explore rural meanings (Howley, Theobald & Howley, 2005) and spatial perspectives (Gulson & Symes, 2007). Specifically, as noted above, I have developed a methodological perspective that intertwines a rural standpoint, the principles of social research advanced by Bourdieu, and what I have termed a ‘strategic eclecticism’ (Roberts & Green, 2013) in the deployment of more traditional methods.

Such an approach is needed to get beyond ‘metrocentricity’, an orientation towards city-based sensibilities, that influences much thinking about the rural in Australia. I am not suggesting a return to ‘country-mindedness’ (Aitkin, 1985), the perspective of the virtue of agricultural life versus the unpleasantness of city life. Nor am I suggesting a reorientation from a ‘country-minded’ perspective. Instead I am arguing that a metrocentric orientation exercises a subtle influence on education policy and research. As outlined in Chapter One, and to be critiqued further in Chapter Three, there exists a dominant logic in Australian education that ‘rural’ equals disadvantage. I suggest that this deficit framing *is* metrocentricity and that it subtly motivates educational research from a metro-normative (Green, 2013) perspective. As a result the rural is researched in ways (and for reasons) motivated by equity concerns arising from within this perspective. This in itself is not a bad thing, but as explored in Chapter Three,

the assumptions of the equity agenda are problematic for the rural when approached from a metrocentric perspective.

The concept of metrocentricity is used widely in work on the rural, without specific definition (Campbell & Yates, 2011), but is orientated around a Western perspective of the urban (Bunnell & Maringanti, 2010). The notion also gestures towards ideas of the global metropole, used by Connell (2007) to refer to the metropolitan areas of European colonialism and their cultural, social, and economic influence. Thus in this study I understand metrocentricity to refer to an orientation towards city life, including a city worldview and way of being emanating from the global metropole. As Massey (2005) suggested, rural places are defined as distinct from cities, with the city focus informing the view of the rural. Similarly, Williams (1973) in 'The Country and the City' contends that the city constitutes the vision of modernity, which produces a 'city-centeredness' that informs what I am calling here, 'taste'. Williams refers to 'personal preferences' and 'traits' to describe what I have termed taste, echoing Bourdieu, on whose approach I will be drawing. Similarly Soja (2010), another theorist whose work is important to this study, advances an account of modernity as primarily about urbanization and the development of the urban-industrial state. According to 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, something that I contend continues today in Australia. Consequently the rural is culturally and educationally defined in terms of the urban (Schafft & Jackson, 2010; Brown & Schafft, 2011; Archer, 2000; Falk, 2002; Heldke, 2006; Sher & Sher, 1994; Williams, 1973), and as a result equity is reconstructed towards making students less rural (Corbett, 2007) and more urban-global (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008).

Modernism has tended to position the rural on the negative side of what has largely become a binary, with sophistication and advancement associated with the cosmopolitan-urban (Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Popkewitz, 2008; Corbett, 2006) and therefore preferred, future. This is particularly the case in Australia where the 'outback' or 'bush' myth is seen as an integral part of the national story, while, paradoxically, the contribution of the rural sector to the nation's

economy, along with rural population, has been declining since the ‘birth’ of the nation one hundred years ago (Brett, 2011). The ‘bush’ has, in other words, lost its position of a power in the national imaginary.

The Bush Myth has similarly epitomized the national character by being synonymous with the valued characteristics of ‘mateship’, hard work, resilience, and ingenuity in the face of harsh geographies and precarious economic conditions. Distance and geography are entwined in the socio-historical construction of the rural, just as degrees of disadvantage are connected in the popular imagination with distance and the fertility or otherwise of the land. Accordingly, wealthy fertile areas bring forth an image of the rural idyll, while marginal semi-arid land suggests isolation, desolation, and even fear. As a result of this national imagery, the rural has been socially constructed as backward, both of the past and obstinate in valuing old ways, difficult, and in need of ‘rescuing’. Indeed, it has been this way from the outset, with one justification for the initial provision of education in rural areas being to ensure the development of an appropriate moral standard in these newly-settled regions (Green & Letts, 2007). This state paternalism toward the character of the rural suggests that social capital is similarly spatially blind, as once more the particularities of place have been erased by a general comparison between the ‘normal’ urban and the ‘deviant’ rural.

Influenced by metrocentric sensibilities and the pursuit of modernist, ‘globalised’ educational goals, education has become a tool in what Rizvi and Lingard (2010) call the ‘neoliberal social imaginary’: a socio-political perspective based on the ‘necessity’ of neoliberalism. As both the neoliberal imaginary and the national goals for schooling have a global outlook, seek economic advancement, and value mobility in a globalised world, they are inherently cosmopolitan (McLeod, 2012; Popkewitz, 2008). Combined, the neoliberal social imaginary and cosmopolitanism forms the basis of the system of ideas and reasoning that influences the development of the curriculum (Popkewitz, 1997). Such cosmopolitan outlooks tend to marginalise the rural (Corbett, 2010a) by positioning it as embracing old or outdated, unproductive, inefficient, and inward-looking ways (Brett, 2011). Consequently, educational

(under-)achievement is socially constructed as a natural outcome linked to rurality.

It is through this frame that I contend rural educational research is mainly conducted. In advancing this perspective, I suggest that much of what purports to be 'rural research' in education tends to use the rural more or less as simply the setting for inquiry, or as a convenient example, and consequently does little to add to an understanding of the rural, or how issues uniquely play out in the rural. As such, it tacitly assumes a metropolitan norm, where the point of difference is the context of rural, without understanding the conditions of the rural and how the category influences the interpretation or advances knowledge. When research is not advancing an understanding of the rural, for the rural, it can be seen as enacting symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) against the places it purports to represent, by inadvertently treating them as a curiosity, constructing them as deviant or ignoring the specificities that make them *places*. Thus, as I argue here, an important component of rural research is its focus upon the particularities and subjectivities of place, and the opportunity this affords to illuminate the modern condition in what is arguably an increasingly placeless metropolitan 'first' world (Roberts & Green, 2013).

Through focusing on space and place in rural education I am building upon Green and Letts' (2007) work on space, equity, and rural education. This work highlighted how space has been overlooked, or generally regarded as unproblematic, in Australian education policy and research. Space matters in education. Instead of using space as a theoretical tool to understand education, the rural has been marginalized in educational research, with the city seen as the norm of progressive education and modern(ist) reform. That this global world values cosmopolitan ways of being, themselves inherently urban and without any spatial awareness, further ensures that the rural is judged against values of the urban and is positioned in a binary from which it cannot escape the status of 'other'. The inter-connectedness between modernity, urbanization, policy and governance also goes some way to accounting for the centrality of metro-centric values in Australian education.

This has resulted in a form of ‘spatial blindness’ (Green & Letts, 2007) and the devaluing and marginalisation of rural meanings on the part of Australian educational research. By overlooking rural meanings as valuable ways to understand the modern global world, research has reinforced metrocentric, cosmopolitan values and limited our ability to critique the influences of globalization and neoliberalism on education. Placeless, or place-blind, ideologies actively deny space as a constituent factor in educational disadvantage, and also limit themselves to primarily distributive mechanisms of justice. However this is also a significant opportunity for rural research, as the value of studying rural places lies within the problem of method and the difficulty in defining the rural: the multiplicity of rural places and perceptions of the rural reminds us of the forces that have become otherwise invisible, and that, inevitably, place matters. Implicitly this is shown by the fact that much rural research does use the theoretical tools of place and situated practice (e.g. Gruenewald, 2003a; Gruenewald, 2003b; Green, 2008). Similarly, much ‘place-based’ education research uses rural examples (e.g. Sobel, 1994; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Somerville, Power & de Carteret, 2009). In so doing, the researchers recognize that it is through a connection with the physical and social environment, and increasingly the local economy, that we come to ‘know’ the rural. With such an approach, we can better understand the larger (global) social, political and economic forces that treat all places, including all rural places, as the same.

It is this perspective that provides the rationale for the methodological moves that I have made in this study – specifically by using a methodological perspective that intertwines a rural standpoint, the principles of social research advanced by Bourdieu, and what I have termed a ‘strategic eclecticism’ (Roberts & Green, 2013) in the deployment of more traditional methods.

#### **2.4: Rural Standpoint**

To counter the pervasive discourse of metrocentricity that characterises much educational research, I have developed the notion of a *rural standpoint*

(Roberts, 2014). In using the concept of ‘standpoint’ I am drawing on the work of feminist theorists (Harding, 2004) to suggest a philosophical position from which one examines an issue or understands the world. I suggest that a standpoint is the basis of the ontological and epistemological position from which an issue is researched. However, the labelling and identification of a standpoint, in comparison with a position that does not need marking or naming, indicates that it is a position associated with an identity that is marginalised in some way. It is through the identification of a standpoint that we come to see that what is regarded as ‘normal’ is in fact imbued with powerful social and cultural knowledge, and that an unmarked, ‘normal’ position actively marginalises other forms of knowledge. A standpoint therefore comes from a position less advantaged: and in this dissertation the position I take up and associate with is the *rural*. Thus, for me, in the terms used by Sher and Sher (1994), adopting a rural standpoint means approaching my research from a position that assumes rural people and communities *really matter*.

In using the label ‘standpoint’, I am also building upon the tradition of standpoint theory, which assumes that a person’s perspectives are shaped by their social locations. Rather than being a singular perspective, such as gender, a standpoint works at the intersection of a person’s various positions, such as gender, class, ethnicity, and (in this argument) rurality, to influence how they see the world. It recognises that while everyone’s experience is different there are also broadly identifiable perspectives that either constitute the dominant culture or are marginalised by it (Williams, 1958). In this way, the dominant culture sets the tone of society, and those whose cultures are not dominant need to put their ways of being aside and learn to ‘pass’ in it (Griffin, 2012). The idea of a ‘standpoint’, arguably begun by Hegel and his discussion of master-slave relations<sup>8</sup>, was brought into popular usage by Nancy Hartsock (1983), looking at the relations between men and women, in what she would explicitly call a feminist standpoint (Griffin, 2012). Whilst initially remaining rooted in feminist theory, the development of a feminist epistemology has contributed a number of important concepts for standpoint theory in social research, and

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<sup>8</sup> And also Marxist perspectives on the positioning of labour.

potentially to the development of a rural standpoint. Notably, Haraway's notion of 'situated knowledges', where knowledge is socially situated and therefore only ever partial (Haraway, 1988), and Harding's (1993) notion of 'strong objectivity', suggest that the perspectives of the marginalised can help create more objective accounts of the world and should therefore be the starting point of research. It has enabled standpoint to be applied more generally to facilitate the perspectives of other marginalised groups – for example, in Australia, by Martin Nakata as an Indigenous Standpoint (Nakata, 2007).

This general applicability of standpoint in research may deem the appending of adjectives like 'feminist' or 'Indigenous' superfluous, as standpoint comes to represent working from the situated perspectives of all peoples and groups. However, initially at least, the appending of such adjectives is valuable as it signals a group or perspective that has not previously been identified or able to speak on its own terms, and thus has remained outside knowledge production. While Nakata brings an Indigenous perspective, he also includes an equally important perspective for my purpose here, the location of the learner as a site of interaction of competing perspectives (Nakata, 2007). He points out that standpoint is not simply another perspective on knowledge that exists simply by virtue of a person's biography or ethnicity. Rather, it is something that has to be *produced* to engage with the questions found in that perspective, and, crucially, to allow a distinct form of analysis compared to studying the same perspective from another position (Nakata, 2007). This is an extension of Harding's 'strong objectivity', emerging from Haraway's 'situated knowledge', that seeks to transform everyone's understandings of the world. As a research approach, it draws in various perspectives while requiring them all to account for themselves and their production in order to expand everyone's understandings.

The notion of standpoint as produced is central to Reid and Green's (2009) use of standpoint in relation to professional practice theory for education.

Illustrating standpoint as epistemology, the appended adjective of 'feminist', 'Indigenous' or even 'rural' is not used in this construction. This gets away from a potential limitation of other approaches, which imply that the researcher must in some way have a lived or organic affinity with the perspective. For this

argument, such an approach would imply that a ‘rural’ standpoint could only be achieved by someone with extensive rural experience or heritage. Instead, Reid and Green suggest that professional practice research ‘has different aims from conventional scientific research, in that the knowledge produced is “insider/outsider” knowledge in, for and with the profession, rather than external knowledge generated about the profession’ (Reid & Green, 2009, p. 174). This approach is highly relevant to rural educational research on at least three fronts: firstly, as rural educational research is about the production of knowledge and understandings in rural schooling, it is professional practice research; secondly, rural educational research is inevitably about insider/outsider knowledges and the place of the rural in a cosmopolitan world; and finally, rural educational research needs to be about rural meanings rather than imposing non-rural values.

Valuing situated knowledges and building upon strong objectivity, Reid and Green (2009, p. 180) implore researchers to do the ‘intellectual and imaginative work that is required to “keep ourselves honest”’. Additionally, Green suggests that a professional requires ‘will, intellect, and imagination to take up a standpoint that is not organically one's own’ (personal communication, 2013). A standpoint other than that occupied through biography can come to be appreciated if, as researchers, we are willing to do the hard work. Ethically, we have this obligation, but we must have the will to understand other ways of seeing and experiencing the world to invest the effort to undertake the necessary ethnographic, and intellectual, labour that is required. Intellectually we must engage in the hard work of both coming to know our own predispositions and position in relation to the research, and also do the reading and research to come to know other accounts of the world. Finally we must put this will and intellect to work in imagining the world from the viewpoint of another. We may not be able to *know* the world from another’s perspective, but with will, intellect, and imagination we are able to engage on the terms of another and represent this with honesty and integrity.

## 2.5: Strategic Eclecticism

The discussions above about the meanings of the rural, the problems of researching *place* and *space*, the dominance of metrocentric perceptions and the need for a rural standpoint in research raise many questions of methodology. However they do not necessarily give direction to the methods to be employed in rural research. This is where the notion of *strategic eclecticism* (Roberts & Green, 2013) comes in.

Given the complexity of defining the rural, representing it in its own terms, and working from a rural standpoint, I have come to see traditional methodological stances as inadequate. While this might seem a strong claim at this point of a dissertation I would note that it is indeed a central purpose of this dissertation to convince the reader of such a conclusion. I am arguing that what happens in most research related to rural meanings is that the essence of the rural meaning is lost in the interests of methodological concerns or the trade-off between types of evidence and the intended outcome or impact (an example of which is explored in Chapter Four). Consequently much research does not serve the interests of the rural (Roberts & Green, 2013).

Strategic eclecticism recognizes that rural spaces and places are constructed through the 'trialectic' of perceived, conceived and lived space (Soja, 1996) on multiple, and intersecting, scales and within unequal power relationships. Gruenewald's (2003b) formulation of a critical pedagogy of place is important here, as it asks researchers to critically examine the influence of established and powerful methods on the construction of the rural. Such a disposition to research melds well with the claims of Howley, Theobald and Howley (2005), who argue that rural meanings and perspectives are an essential component of rural education research, and that these meanings are often lost in the focus on positivist research to influence policy and practice. Following Nespor (2006), this approach believes that centre-periphery dynamics need to be reconsidered, along with a form of particularism of method, although it argues against methods that erase the particularity of places, in favour of a situated approach.

This critical pedagogy of place perspective highlights the hegemony of science-based research and neoliberal influences that deny the social and cultural particularities of places. Indeed methodological orthodoxy and the need to produce clear numbers for policy impact often erases important differences between places. It is not so much that rural research needs to be about valuing rural lifestyles (Howley et al., 2005) but, rather, about valuing particularity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Nesor, 2006) and rejecting universalism (Denzin, 2010). To achieve this, researchers need to acknowledge and understand the particularity of the rural lifeworld, and not universalize or pre-position the rural by using methods that erase the distinctness of rural places. This is the productive tension in which rural research methods can emerge to better enable us to understand the social world and the influence of globalization and neoliberal agendas on it – and on rural communities in particular. In this way, we can move from simply knowing the rural to using that knowledge effectively.

Moving away from methodological prescription, then, I argue that rural educational research needs to learn from Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and focus on specific rural issues rather than on a method of study. Such an approach draws on Bourdieu's methodological polytheism (Wacquant, 1998), putting the issue to be investigated at the centre and drawing upon the variety of data and techniques available, or appropriate. In so doing, this approach is also congruent with Nesor's (2006) argument that the controversies of method are not settled. It advances a case against traditional quantitative/qualitative or even mixed-method debates, and their pre-occupation with method over subject (Denzin, 2010). Problematically, while traditional quantitative-qualitative methods may produce clear numbers and compelling examples that are valued in relation to rural education and rural education policy, each is imbued with subtle meanings and perceptions that have shaped the research and its conclusions (Dufty, 2010). The subtlety of such influences necessitates a reflexive approach to research as advocated by Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) in order to foreground, and work with, researchers' pre-conceptions of and experiences with the rural, so that their

influence can be understood whilst also guarding against relativism and parochialism. As Stehlik (2001, p. 41) suggests, “we need to recognize just how important meanings of place are to people and not to just dismiss those meanings in a structural analysis which denies their own experiences and their own narratives”.

In relation to terminology, the notion of ‘eclecticism’ (Howie, 2008; Sawyer and McFarlane 2000)<sup>9</sup> references the bringing together of various methods to explore the central problem or question. Such an orientation is aimed at getting beyond the limitations of a single approach. ‘Strategic’ references its orientation, here, towards the rural standpoint I am advocating. Strategic eclecticism can be found in other contexts too. In relation to teachers’ programming decisions in the subject English, for instance, Sawyer and McFarlane (2000) suggest an intelligent and intellectualised eclecticism, while Howie (2008) notes that eclecticism is principled and a powerful metaphor that recognises teachers’ autonomy in meeting the needs of their students. This orientation provides a useful congruence to the present study where, in Chapter Five, I look at the curriculum decisions that rural teachers make in meeting the needs of their students, as they understand them. This is a deliberate approach to surface these teachers’ perspectives on rurality.

Epistemologically there needs to be coherence to this ‘strategic eclecticism’, and that is where standpoint comes in. In terms of the rural standpoint, it focuses the will, intellect and imagination in relation to the problem at hand. Specifically, I am arguing for a form of eclecticism that is not opportunistic or lazy, but is instead directed towards a particular outcome or objective. Howie (2008) suggested that eclecticism moves beyond ontological foreclosure, in this case an assumption of a metropolitan-cosmopolitan norm, pertinent more directly to methodology, and the problems of researching the rural discussed above.

While Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) describe ‘mixed methods’ as eclectic, I am deliberately not referring to the approach here as mixed-method. This

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<sup>9</sup> Howie (2008) and Sawyer and McFarlane (2000) use the notion of ‘principled eclecticism’ to suggest a form of eclecticism based on principles, including ethical guidelines.

term is tarnished by critiques that much mixed-method research is in practice nothing more than the systematic use of different methods, for example numeric survey data illuminated by quotes from survey comments (Denzin, 2010). Mixed methods often reduce the different forms of data to what is common between them (Denzin, 2010). Instead I would suggest *disagreement* within the data produced by different approaches is the productive tension where new insights might be found when problematized from a different perspective, i.e. a rural standpoint.

The orientation of strategic eclecticism places the focus on the problem being researched, in and of itself, as a key epistemological orientation to the methods and data analysis employed. Focusing on the use of ‘mixed methods’ in understanding what they call ‘the use of rural space’, Madsen and Adriansen (2004) have explored the philosophical and methodological interplay that is produced when different data and methods are combined. Their ensuing focus upon philosophy, the researcher’s ontology and epistemology, and how these influence choices about which questions, data collection and methods to use, reinforces the position I am arguing for. That is, the researcher’s position, and philosophy, in relation to the problem being investigated, is central to the investigation.

Finally, the notion of strategic eclecticism is analogous to ‘bricolage’ (Lennon 2015; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005) – “a qualitative research approach which strategically and creatively harnesses an array of methodological tools and theoretical lenses in order to deepen understandings of the world” (Lennon, 2015, p.51), and oriented towards exploring social inequities and power dynamics (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). However there are three reasons why I am not comfortable referring to my method of strategic eclecticism as bricolage. Firstly, here, I am using the approach for a specific reason, to highlight rural meanings from a rural standpoint. I am not, as Kincheloe and Berry (2004) suggest, coming from a flexible orientation to thinking *and* data collection. In contrast, my thinking is specifically orientated towards illuminating a rural standpoint. Secondly, while I guard against value judgments and attempt to let rural place represent itself without judgment in

order to highlight metrocentric values, Lennon (2015) actively (and justifiably in my opinion) sets out to change values. Finally then, and linked to this last point, while both approaches relate to power imbalances and activism in pursuit of social justice, I would suggest that much bricolage research, ironically, is informed by an implicit metrocentricity without engagement with issues of spatial justice (see Chapter Three). That is, the more traditional forms of social justice I critique structure the power dynamics and social inequities often explored.

## **2.6 The present study**

In relation to the specifics of this inquiry, I use the traditional methods of: secondary data analysis through descriptive statistics, semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis of curriculum documents, policy documents and historical reports, and – perhaps not so traditionally – the re-reading of previously published reports. In the following section I will outline a number of issues related to the methods used<sup>10</sup> to address my research problem: the examination of how rural educational disadvantage is socially, and spatially, produced in rural areas of New South Wales, Australia.

In deploying a strategic eclecticism towards this dissertation uses a variety of sources of data, which, as per the methodology discussed, are positioned in conversation with each other. All data collected and sourced was done with oversight from the University of Canberra<sup>11</sup> and Charles Sturt University Human Ethics Committees. Specifically the study:

- Analyses secondary data obtained under approval from statutory bodies (Chapters Three and Six),
- Analyses publicly available data sets (Chapters Three and Six),
- Revisits an earlier study I conducted and uses new methodological approaches to re-analyze the statistics and qualitative comments (Chapter Four),

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<sup>10</sup> Additional detail about each of these methods is also included in the subsequent chapters where necessary.

<sup>11</sup> A transfer of candidature resulted in the need for ethics approval from both these institutions.

- Revisits the statistics and comments of an earlier study by other researchers (Chapter Six),
- Analyses policy documents and historical reports (Chapters One, Three, Six and Seven),
- Analyses curriculum documents (Chapter Six),
- Analyses the transcripts of original semi-structured interviews (Chapters Five, Six and Eight)

### **2.6.1: Secondary Data Analysis**

Sections of the study draw upon a range of statistical data. As this data was sourced from existing data sets, and not collected specifically in the course of this study, they are described as secondary data sources (Perry & McConny, 2010). Perry and McConny (2010) advocate the usefulness of such data in policy evaluation, and their value for this inquiry supports the effectiveness of such an approach. In line with my aim in this dissertation to highlight the manner in which a rural standpoint facilitates new insights, the statistics used here are directed towards suggesting new interpretations requiring further investigation. While their purpose here is to advance the thesis in relation to new insights that emerge when the rural is central to research, a number could easily be studied in their own right and investigated with more sophisticated statistics.

National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data for NSW was obtained under license from the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). This data was compiled following a specific request to ACARA and included information on schools' ICSEA, enrolment numbers, NAPLAN results, school identification information and features of the student population. The data sourced was subsequently de-identified, sorted and manually cleaned using Microsoft Excel. Once tidied, the data was either analysed using Microsoft Excel or transferred to the statistical software package SPSS (versions 19 & 21), depending on the complexity of the calculations undertaken. 'Standard' descriptive statistical techniques were then used to explore this data, e.g., frequency analysis, averages, correlation and

scatterplots. Some of this data was then manipulated for use with Geographic Information Software (see below) and/or in relation to data for enrolment and achievement in school subjects sourced from the NSW Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES)<sup>12</sup>. BOSTES' data was sourced, under application and agreement, with BOSTES. This data included school subject enrolments, achievement data and school identification information. This data was also manually de-identified, tidied, explored and transferred to GIS software in the same manner as the ACARA data.

A further source of secondary data relates to a project I conducted ten years ago in relation to the staffing of rural, remote and isolated schools (Roberts, 2005). The reanalysis of this report, including reanalysis of the data it was based upon, forms the basis of Chapter Four. The data was collected by myself, for a third-party organization that funded the initial report. Copyright of the report and ownership of the data remained with me, and the data was at no time handed to that organization in its raw form. The data collected in 2004, which took the form of quantitative and qualitative survey data, was again tidied using Microsoft Excel and reanalysed, in 2014, using descriptive statistics with the software package SPSS.

### **2.6.2: Geographic Information Systems (GIS)**

Data on school subjects, achievement, and NAPLAN results were also explored using the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software ARC GIS. This software enabled spatial patterns to be explored in relation to subject offerings, achievement and NAPLAN data. This analysis was led by the Spatial Data Analysis Network (SPAN) at Charles Sturt University as a service for graduate students, with some additional exploration done by myself. In addition to allowing spatial patterns to be discerned, the use of GIS software enabled maps to be overlaid with boundaries for geographic categories and/or demarcations of social advantage-disadvantage. In order to do this, every school in the data set needed to be geo-coded with latitude and longitude. Publicly available files exist with school geo-codes and these were used for this process. This approach

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<sup>12</sup> At the time the data was sourced, the authority was named the NSW Board of Studies (BOS).

was influenced by recent work in relation to cartography in rural educational research project (Green & Reid, 2014; Green, 2008).

Because a recognizable map is produced through this process, it is conceivable that the schools are identifiable to anyone with a basic knowledge of the geography of NSW. In addition, because some information, such as end of school achievement and subject availability is generally (and particularly in the context of this dissertation) likely to be sensitive and politically charged, and could therefore cause discomfort or concern, these maps have not been used in the text of this dissertation. Instead the maps have been used to inform the argument and interpretation of the more ‘neutral’ descriptive statistics. Two maps (maps 3.1 & 3.2) with schools indicated are used, in Chapter Three, for illustrative purposes, and in this instance the representation is only of publicly-available data related to school equity funding and not likely to cause any concern or discomfort.

### **2.6.3: Space & numbers**

At this point it is pertinent to note the contradictions involved in using numbers in representing complex, situated meanings – in this instance to represent relational differences in curriculum access and student achievement. There is the well documented risk that numbers reduce the complexity of the phenomena and relationships they represent to simple forms that mask social complexity and make the state governable (Lingard 2011; Bansel, 2012; Rose, 1999; Foucault 1978/1991; Hacking 1991). Similarly, they mask the situated subjectivities of the places, or in this case the schools, that they represent. By so doing they signify the shift from governance based on more humanistic values to governance based on economic ideas (Foucault 1978/1991) that supports and enables the neoliberal character of much present education policy. In addition, reducing complexity to numeric relationships, many of which can then be plotted on graphs as I have done in this dissertation, enables a topological relationship between socially situated phenomena. This ‘policy as numbers’ (Lingard, 2011) potentially erases space and makes more acceptable the lack of access to curriculum that it represents.

Together, numbers and neoliberal ideologies enable new forms of socio-spatial continuity by creating new equivalencies (that also mark differences) between previously non-comparable sites. For example, through the MySchool website ‘technology’ (<https://www.myschool.edu.au>), all schools are represented in a single jurisdictional or national relationship that assumes each represents an ‘equivalent’ educational instance. This perpetuates the fiction of ‘like schools’ (Thomson, 2000), and, in so doing, denies the ‘thisness’ (Thomson, 2000) of each and every school. As Nespor (2004, p. 320) pointed out, there are “powerful forces at work to produce totalizing maps that allow distant students and teachers to be plotted with respect to one another”. In curriculum terms, indeed in what I have done here, schools serving advantaged, fortified sites are put in an apparently equal relationship with more disadvantaged, exposed sites, and in so doing the ‘poor’ performance or deviance of the exposed sites is confirmed. In this respect, Lingard’s (2011) argument that numbers enable the policy field to work as a technology of distance underscores the notion of curriculum-as-policy when considered topologically. Such an idea builds upon Foucault’s (1978/1991) point about statistics rendering the state governable, and reinforces Green and Letts’ (2007) description of Australian, and particularly NSW education, having been centralised in such a way as to facilitate the control of the vast inland ‘spaces’.

While this might be seen as a potential downside of the ‘spatial turn’ and the use of spatial theory, it is so only if it is the sole use of such ideas. By raising this contradiction in the context of my arguments for an eclecticism in method and a predilection for the problem over method, I am illustrating my approach: in this example, numbers can help identify a problem that may otherwise be obscured, while through spatial thinking we can see how the problem is constituted within the problematic frame of sameness. To really understand what is happening we need to look at the particularities of each place. Using a rural standpoint allows me to use the tools of neoliberal necessity to highlight its own failings, by showing that the overarching patterns it assumes do not exist when different scales are used. The ensuing conflict of values then makes room for spatial justice. Thinking topologically (Allen & Cochrane, 2010;

Lury, Parisi & Terranova, 2012), I want to illustrate the unnaturalness of associating schools as sites in the curriculum field by asking the reader to look at this from a rural standpoint rather than the traditional cosmopolitan-metropolitan frame through which it is normally viewed. While remaining sympathetic to Bansel's (2012) concerns about the subjectivities masked by numbers, the key is to see them as only representative of the multiple social-political contests being played out behind each data plot.

Remaining consistent with the ideas espoused by Bourdieu, it is worth remembering that he was against the either-or of methodologism. As Grenfell and James (1998) point out, for Bourdieu it was not simply what the data represented that mattered, but what it was used for and to what end. Thus while Bourdieu extensively used statistics, he critiqued 'statistical fetishism' and the use of statistics as the measure of all things (Grenfell & James, 1998). Instead, he used statistics to show relations that would otherwise not have been considered, with the caveat that they can only reveal the relations they are asked to show (Grenfell & James, 1998). It is in the spirit, then, of showing new relationships to explore a rural standpoint that I proceed.

#### **2.6.4: Semi-structured interviews**

A series of semi-structured interviews was conducted for this project. These provide the basis for Chapter Five, as well as helping to inform other interpretations throughout. Specific aspects related to the conduct and focus of these interviews will be explored in Chapter Five, in particular, as they relate to the interpretations therein.

Semi-structured interviews were adopted in order to avoid the division that objective interviews can put between the researcher and subject (Oakley, 1981) and to allow greater depth and development of rich narratives (Minichiello, Aroni et al., 1990). In this manner, participants were free to describe what they believed was important from their perspective (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Heath et al., 2009). Such an approach is necessary in rural research as it allows the foregrounding of rural meanings (Howley, Theobald & Howley,

2005) by valuing subjectivity and particularity, and in turn this limits the erasure of rural meanings that can occur with standardized objective approaches (Roberts & Green, 2012). The interviews also allowed the researcher to share personal experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) of rural places and rural teaching to bring both credibility to my inquiry, and to encourage the research subjects to open up about their own experiences of place. Importantly, the approach also allowed the researcher's familiarity with the rural context and the school subject area to be used and questioned in interpreting the participants' responses in an open and transparent manner. I detail in Chapter Four how it was important therefore to engage in a reflexive analysis and to be aware of any influence of the particularities of the background and experience I bring to the inquiry (Curtis & Curtis, 2011; Johnson & Christenson, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011).

Writing and researching place inevitably involves a range of subjectivities and is in many ways an act of autoethnography (Jones, 2005), as the conclusions and interpretations are informed by the researcher's experience of particular places. Similarly, participants' explanations are coloured by their unique experience and perspective of their particular places and through their own biographies in place. However, it is this very grounding in each individual's experience that gives the research validity, as the ideas of situatedness and place are relational to individual experience, and it is the celebration of the differences which is a significant concept in this study. This methodological approach need not be at the expense of rigour and effort to prevent bias, instead it opens up new possibilities for understanding (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Jones, 2005). That participants will inevitably root their experiences within their personal narratives further advances the expansive view of curriculum employed in the study, as according to Pinar (2012), teachers' biographies impact on the curriculum they enact. With this in mind, it is this very situated enactment and its relationship to biography, especially as many teachers' understandings are formed around metropolitan (cosmopolitan) forms of schooling and knowledge, that provides an important window through which to see and understand the mediating influence of place.

The interviews were conducted in the subjects' location in a venue of their choice, or via Skype video calling or by Skype audio (depending on the participants' available technology), with all interviews recorded for subsequent transcription. There was no pattern to the medium used, in that some of the more remotely located teachers were interviewed in person and some were interviewed over Skype. Interestingly there was also no discernable difference in the length, depth or quality of the interviews across the three mediums, suggesting that remote interviewing using either audio only calling or video calling are suitable means of researching with rural and remote teachers.

As the interviews were semi-structured (Fontana & Frey, 2000) and in-depth (Minichiello, Aroni et al., 1990), participants were able to lead the direction of the conversation and to explore in their own way how they situate their practice. There was a basic framework of questions common to each interview, with the researcher ensuring that all questions were asked and answered. Throughout this dissertation, codes and pseudonyms are used for the participants, their professional roles and their location, in order to maintain the confidentiality of all involved.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed in three stages, using a combination of coding informed by grounded theory, content analysis, and an orientation towards discourse analysis (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). In the transcription the interviews were not coded for pauses or affect: however, these became evident and meaningful in the multiple re-listenings to the interviews and helped inform judgments about semantics. The manual use of a grounded theory informed approach allowed the subjects' experiences and understandings to emerge relatively free of researcher bias (Cohen et al., 2011; Corbetta, 2003; Drew, Hardman & Hops, 2008; Heath et al., 2009). As part of this, the interviews were read and listened to multiple times to enhance researcher familiarity.

Manual coding was developed in three steps. First, the main ideas were identified and named (open coding), secondly the 'codes' were related to each other to make the necessary connections between ideas (axial coding), before

the overarching category was selected (selective coding) (King & Horrocks, 2010; Ezzy, 2002). These were then checked using leximancer software (see below). A form of discourse analysis can be considered to have been involved in this analysis, as particular attention was directed to listening and analysing how participants described place and the way they engaged curriculum in place (Cohen et al., 2011).

Finally a content analysis (Cohen et al., 2011; Krippendorff, 2004; Krippendorff, 2013) of key concepts and issues, e.g. place, curriculum, rural, pedagogy, standards, was conducted. This involved combining the indexing of key terms in the transcripts and a thematic analysis of their usage (Krippendorff, 2004; Krippendorff, 2013). The content analysis referred to here was conducted in Microsoft word using the 'find' function. It was followed by a reanalysis using the Leximancer software.

In Chapter Five I present my analysis of what is essentially a mix of categories, identified discourses and response comparisons. I have selected excerpts and focal points that fit the purpose of this chapter, in the context of this dissertation. These are, of course, however just a fraction of what was revealed in these interviews, with my selection influenced by the purpose of this study and the issues I aim to highlight in this dissertation. It is important to note, following Bourdieu, that they are only a partial representation of the work, and perspectives, of the participants, and of rural teaching in general.

### **2.6.5: Leximancer**

A further analysis of the written comments to the survey re-analysed primarily in Chapter Four, and the interview transcripts that form the basis of Chapter Five, was conducted using Leximancer (Leximancer, 2005) software. Often referred to as computer-assisted phenomenography<sup>13</sup> (Leximancer, 2005), the use of this software is claimed to enhance 'validity' (Leonard & Roberts, 2014) by increasing the likelihood that researchers ask the 'right' questions (Kirk & Miller, 1986), and by letting data lead the generation of these question. As such,

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<sup>13</sup> Briefly, I understand phenomenography to be a method involving the mapping of variations in the experience or understanding of a phenomenon (Marton, 1986).

researcher bias in the placing of significance on particular pre-constructions and concepts is sidelined with the software presenting relationships that the researcher then needs to seek explanations for, with further manual analysis of the data. Similarly the use of the Leximancer tool can be, and has been here, used to cross-reference researcher manually identified codes.

The software uses a *corpus linguistic* approach to textual analysis and identifies concepts used within text, mapping those concepts and relationships between them (Leximancer, 2005). It makes no assumptions that one concept is more or less significant than any other, leaving the task of interpretation to the human researcher. Its major contribution to the trustworthiness of a study is in allowing researchers to work with large amounts of data quickly (Penn-Edwards, 2010), and so increase the opportunity to ask ‘good’ questions of the data, simply by asking more questions (Kirk & Miller, 1986; Leonard & Roberts, 2014).

One output of the Leximancer analysis is the concept map, such as the one in figure 4.5, which shows dominant themes and associated concepts. The map visually represents concepts and the strength of association between these; those used together more frequently are grouped together, while those placed further apart are used together less frequently or not at all. Accordingly, by looking at the position of individual concepts, it is possible to determine the semantic relationships between concepts. By coding each sentence in the source data, Leximancer is also able to position different sources within the concept map. Similarly, the more central the location of a concept on the map, the more it is shared. The lines show concepts used in conjunction in the text responses. Theme circles summarising main ideas group clusters of concepts. Each theme is named after the most prominent concept in the group. Further, themes are ‘heat mapped’ according to the colour wheel (Tseng, Wu, Morrison, Zhang, & Chen, 2015). Hot colours (red, orange) denote the more important themes while cool colours (blue, green) denote those less significant. The size of the circles provides an indication of the frequency with which concepts within the theme are used together.

### **2.6.6: Documentary Analysis**

A documentary analysis of historical reports and policy documents was also conducted in the course of this study, with Chapter Six primarily providing an historical analysis. As a former history teacher, I value the contribution of historical and documentary research to provide insight into the past, the process of change, and the origins of the present (McCulloch, 2011). The documents I have used are the seminal reports that shaped the education system in NSW and a number of significant federal inquiries, and similar to the analysis of the interviews, I employed a form of discourse analysis in the analysis of these documents as particular attention was directed to analysing (Cohen et al., 2011) how the rural was presented and positioned and the nature of equity being used.

### **2.7: Conclusion**

In this Chapter I have sought to indicate my understanding of the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu through my engagement with issues of methodology and the framing of the research problem. I have explored the key methodological perspectives that inform this research: the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, the idea of a rural standpoint, and the approach of strategic eclecticism. The reader will note that I did not present a specific section outlining Bourdieu's sociology – to do so, I suggest, is to not understand that very sociology. Bourdieu's approach is not a 'model' to follow as it is specific to the problem being investigated (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Grenfell, 2012). The course of the dissertation will further indicate this understanding and draw upon key concepts from Bourdieu's work (Grenfell, 2012). Highlighting that much of his work is situated in a social context, specifically France, Connell (2007) argues that to engage with Bourdieu is to engage with 'Northern Theory' (Connell, 2006) and the power of the global metropole. However, through the use of a rural standpoint, this dissertation suggests that Bourdieu's philosophy may in fact facilitate the emergence of the very Southern Theory Connell (2007) advocates. I have also built upon Bæck's (2016) argument that the rural is not fixed, and that its representation in research is implicated in the outcomes of that research.

That is, I have argued that the problem of defining and representing the rural is central to rural research. In exploring the notions of place and space as they relate to issues of methodology and method in this study, I have also examined the influence of metrocentricity on rural education research, outlined the philosophy of a rural standpoint, and also the value of strategic eclecticism, as used in this study, to counter its influence. The chapter is rounded out with a description of the specific methods used in subsequent chapters.



## **Chapter Three**

### **Social Justice and Rural Education**

This chapter concludes the first section of the dissertation. It outlines the main approaches to social justice and the philosophical ideas informing them, before outlining a new direction of Curricular-Spatial justice. The discussion in this chapter is grounded through the example of the Country Areas Program (CAP), historically the main equity program aimed at addressing rural educational disadvantage. While it was abolished in 2009 I have included it here as it remains the main policy signalling how the rural is understood in education and social justice in education. As I will illustrate, the equity program it was replaced with reveals how far an understanding of the rural has regressed. The example of CAP, ironically the high water-mark of recognising the particular needs of rural schools, reveals the dominant perspectives on social justice and how it might be achieved.

#### **3.1: The Country Areas Program**

The main equity program of the last thirty years aimed at addressing rural educational (under-)achievement in Australia was known as The Country Areas Program (CAP). CAP was a special program funded by the Commonwealth Government that provided additional funding to education authorities in each state and territory to assist schools in rural, remote and isolated areas. It was managed by each jurisdiction, which could then supplement the federal funding. Approximately 5% of school-age students attended schools receiving CAP funding (Country Areas Program, 1997). Here I will specifically refer to CAP in NSW, as NSW is the jurisdiction from which I am using specific data throughout much of this dissertation.

CAP developed from the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) proposed by the Karmel report of 1973 (Commonwealth of Australia, 1973) (see Chapter Six). This program was proposed, and aimed, to address educational disadvantage by providing supplementary funds to schools designated as being

in need. In 1977 the Disadvantaged Country Areas Program was developed as a pilot program complementing the Disadvantaged Schools Program (Schools Commission, 1988). As a result, CAP was established in 1982 in recognition that the criteria applied in urban areas were unsuitable for rural areas (DEST, 2003b). This reflected a change in rationale “from one that addressed both rural and socio-economic disadvantage, to one that addressed rural disadvantage specifically” (DEST, 2003, p.6). The guidelines suggest that the CAP was founded upon the view that students in geographically isolated areas can be educationally disadvantaged by their geographic isolation, and aimed to help schools and school communities to improve the educational outcomes and opportunities of students who were educationally disadvantaged because of this (DEST, 2007). This disadvantage, as accounted for in a 2003 review of CAP, was understood as:

associated with restricted and/or inappropriate curricula and teaching strategies; lack of support services; inadequate teacher preparation for teaching in rural and isolated areas; high staff turnover rates; and a lack of social and cultural facilities in the local community (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987 in DEST 2003b, p.6).

The program operated on largely the same principles until 2009. To overcome these disadvantages, CAP’s aim was to ensure that, for students in geographically isolated areas, their “learning outcomes match[ed] those of students in metropolitan areas” (DEST, 2007, p.127). The program was specifically targeted to provide students in geographically isolated areas “additional funds to ... supplement the education provided by schools” (DEST, 2006, p.127). The funding provided by CAP could be used for programs which supported; curriculum enhancement through access to extra-curricula activities that are otherwise too expensive due to distance; the development of Information and Communication Technologies; and the professional development of staff. Funds were also used to promote CAP, support schools with costs of the program, and purchase resources (DEST, 2006). Disadvantage in NSW was also addressed through the Priority Schools Funding Program (PSFP), also abolished in 2009, which targeted extra funding and resources to schools in the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

Reinforcing the general connection between rurality and average lower SES, a number of CAP schools also received PSFP support (see below).

### **3.2: Theories of equity**

The concern for equity, particularly for far-flung rural regions, and the challenges of providing a quality education in these regions, is often suggested as a primary reason for the centralised nature of state-based education systems (Green & Letts, 2007). It is not surprising, then, that in a nation that espouses the values of egalitarianism, the language of equity has been used as part of the rhetoric around the development of an Australian Curriculum, and is one of the drivers for federal involvement in education over the last thirty years. However, the notions of equity employed have fallen into either *distributive* approaches, where extra resources are allocated to assist those underachieving, or *recognitive* approaches, where the needs of recognised under-performing groups are specifically addressed (Fraser, 1995). With the exception of some elements of curriculum modification as part of recognitive programs for identified groups, curricular approaches to equity have all but been overlooked. Instead, the curriculum has been constructed as a vehicle for achieving equity, rather than a cause of inequality; that is, dominant notions of equity tend towards uniform approaches and constant measurement, rather than questioning the relevance of the curriculum itself.

Traditionally the concept of social justice is tied in within the generally accepted minority and disadvantage labels of gender, ethnicity, social class and disability. This traditional view thus groups people into designated categories of disadvantage to presumably be measured, and then be the object of some form of equity or equalisation program. Such an approach however is a rights-based approach that regards individuals or groups as needing assistance due to some pre-existing disadvantage-causing condition. Ironically, in relation to rural, remote and isolated communities there has been no such condition of place identified. Instead, rural disadvantage has been disaggregated to the categories of general disadvantage with a loose recognition of distance as a causal factor.

The main foundational principles of justice place individuals at the centre, either as active agents or the subject of larger forces. According to Gale and Densmore (2000), people's rights and how they should be distributed are divided into: a Platonic view of right, good and desirable, where societies' prevailing morals (that change over time) are the benchmark; and an Aristotelian view of fairness in the distribution of social and material goods, again based somewhat in prevailing social expectations (Gale & Densmore, 2000). While freedom is held as a central, and incontestable, value, how this achieved in relation to equity is strongly contested, and entrenched in a 'nature-nurture' debate (Sturman, 1997). This results in a view of freedom as either freedom from interference or freedom to develop fully (Sturman, 1997). The freedoms explored are inevitably a comparison between individuals or groups, and further rest on a view of whether these individuals have a collective group consciousness and identify as such, or are autonomous individuals who are merely categorised for convenience (Gale & Densmore, 2000). While Rawls' 'Theory of Justice' (1999) has elements of both these characteristics, his description of the 'liberty principle', which suggests that each person has certain liberties by virtue of their existence that the society cannot override, and the 'difference principle', that the greatest benefit of society should be directed towards the least well off members of that society (Rawls, 1999), provides room for a broader conception of equity. Rawls' (1999) theory of justice has often been seen as a basis for equity programs as it encapsulates all areas of the human experience. According to Rawls (1999), justice has coverage of wealth, position, liberty and opportunity. While these ideas are relevant to place, they are not necessarily applied within a situated framework.

Under the ethics of 'equality of opportunity', the liberty principle is the philosophical foundation of commonwealth projects to recognise marginalised groups, such as CAP. However, within the gap of interpretation between the Aristotelian or Platonian interpretations this principle has come to reflect equality of economic opportunity within a market system dominated by capital cities and the knowledge that their elites create. In education, the language of equal opportunity was highly effective in advancing the needs of students with

disabilities (Rizvi & Lingard, 1993) and has had some impact on policies supporting rural schools. In the example of rural education, it refers to access to, and the quality of, education delivered and received, so that comparable results are achieved through education, along with the ability to participate on a level playing field for employment and economic benefit. As such, equality of opportunity in education is broader than the school context as it is also reliant on the social, economic and health systems upon which communities rely, even though they are not recognised or included in most educational equity programs.

Notions of equality of opportunity reflect the Neoliberal project that, according to Bourdieu (1998), is a political project to reconstruct society according to the demands of unrestricted markets. This ideology has seen a reversal of the tradition of liberalism, which saw the economy as a part of society (McKnight, 2005; Rizvi & Lingard, 1993). Through this ideology the relationship between the state and its citizens has consequently shifted such that citizens no longer have rights by virtue of citizenship, but are instead redefined as consumers in the market fostered by the economy in which they live. The public has become atomised into consumers in competition with each other, and people are no longer members of a community or citizens but private and self-interested consumers (Yeatman, 1990), with the role of the state being therefore to foster an economy within which people can strive (Fisk, 1989). Such a redefinition leaves little room to reclaim such fundamental principles as identity and difference or the concept of community. It is particularly problematic for rural communities, whose fortunes rise and fall at the whim of ‘natural’ market changes, with the few remaining placed into competition with each other.

The ideology of neoliberalism utilises the concept of *desert* as a principle for equity, where essentially people deserve the outcomes of their labour and effort (Gale & Densmore, 2000). That is, one earns the reward for their efforts, or otherwise. Such a focus upon markets, deservedness, and the economics of social services have allowed rural, remote and isolated communities to be adversely affected by economic restructuring (Pritchard & McManus, 2000), with their disadvantage seen as a natural outcome of economic liberalism (Rizvi

& Lingard, 1993) that is entirely their own fault. With the advent of economic rationalism in rural communities, the idea of deservedness has meant that a region's ability to sustain its local economy is thereafter their responsibility and not that of the state, regardless of the consequences of state economic restructuring which resulted in the economic downturn

### **3.3: Social Justice approaches and rural educational disadvantage.**

Within this vexed terrain of equity, social justice has remained a descriptive term used either with reference to describe an economic disadvantage or an agenda for social change. There are however a number of competing views of social justice that have emerged to address the issues of equity and fairness (Gale & Densmore, 2000; Gale & Densmore, 2003), namely the *distributive* (Rawls, 1999; Gale & Densmore 2000), *recognitive* (Fraser, 2008; Gewirtz, 2006; Fraser 1995; Young, 1990), *associational* (Cuervo, 2012), and *curricular* (Connell, 1993) approaches. Each approach entails a particular logic to interrupt disadvantage; however none of these in itself has been successful to date in allowing rural areas to speak for themselves, and all rely on the categorisation of difference to initiate any program. Here the notion of spatial justice (Soja, 2010; Roberts & Green, 2013) provides new opportunities to think differently about rural educational disadvantage. As a guide to the reader, figure 3.1, below, provides a diagrammatic representation of the approaches to social justice that will be explored in the remainder of this chapter.

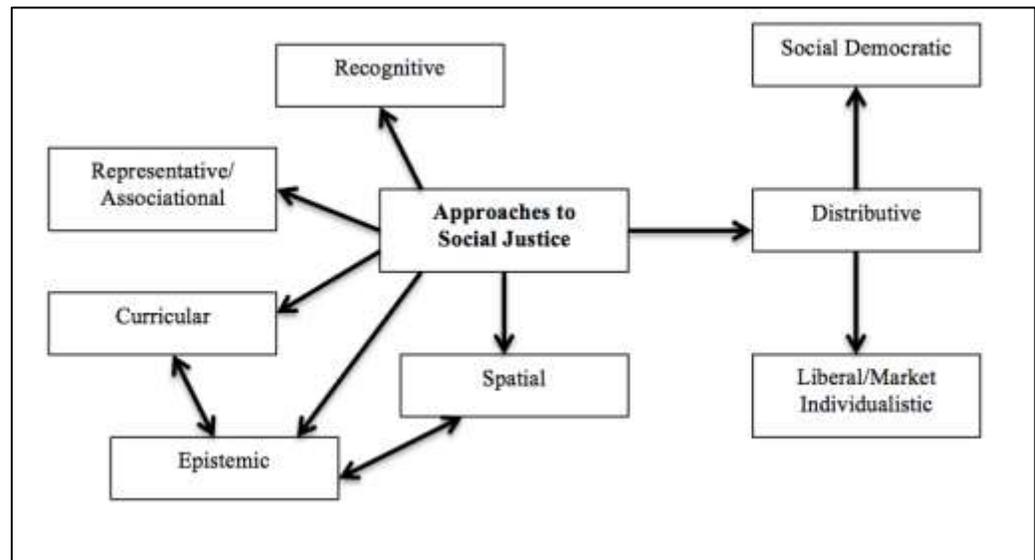


Figure 3.1 Approaches to Social Justice

### 3.3.1: Distributive justice & rural disadvantage

The distributive justice approach is essentially based upon Rawls' liberty and difference principles (1999) and the view of the intrinsic value of each individual (Gale & Densmore, 2000). It is however further divided on the issues of which goods are to be distributed, who the subjects of the distribution are, or who should be and under what criteria any such distribution will take place. Thus there exists a Social Democratic (Rizvi & Lingard, 1993) view of difference, that not all people have the same needs, which puts individual needs ahead of those of social groups or places. It also regards the market as something to be controlled. Alternatively, the variously labelled Liberal-Individualistic (Rizvi & Lingard, 1993) / Market-Individualistic (Gale & Densmore, 2000) view is a deficit view, as it regards everyone as having the same basic needs and, as such, sees equality as sameness within a market that is the basic provider of social justice.

The distributive paradigm has dominated equity programs in education (Cuervo, 2012; Gale & Densmore, 2000), as programs such as CAP allocated more resources to some schools in order to overcome a defined disadvantage. Programs like this are a strange hybrid, with both social-democratic and liberal-individualistic aspects, while hinting at aspects contained within recognitive

and curricular justice. Primarily these programs are liberal-individualistic as they distribute funding to purchase more staff and resources in the view that this will open up student achievement and the employment market. Ironically it is the market-based staffing formulas, where teachers are allocated on a formula based upon student enrolment and funding provided by a similar formula, that are initially failing to meet these schools' needs. This is because under formula-based staffing approaches smaller schools are allocated fewer staff, and consequently can offer less curriculum breadth. The existence of such distributive programs clearly demonstrates that the original formula basis does not adequately meet the need of all school communities.

These programs do nothing, in my argument, to change the underlying social conditions that construct the rural disadvantage discussed in this dissertation. Instead, these programs tend to work from the philosophy that, by equalising access to opportunity, their subjects will be better able to compete in the open market. The existence of arbitrary cut-off points based upon measures of disadvantage further illustrates the market basis of these programs, as they do not recognise difference in how disadvantage is constructed and experienced by different communities. In many respects, these approaches leave the measurement of whether any intervention has been successful within the initiative itself (Rizvi & Lingard, 1993). This is evident in the example of CAP, where outcomes improved in CAP schools compared to their own historical data, indicating the program was successful, while in reality unequal outcomes compared to other schools have been perpetuated and even overlooked (Roberts, 2008).

### **3.3.2: Recognitive justice & rural disadvantage**

As Young (1990) argues, there is a need to move beyond the distributive paradigm, with its focus on what one has or does not have, to a paradigm that focuses upon doing. Or, as Cuervo (2012, p.87) argues, and this dissertation seeks to extend, "a critical analysis of social justice in education should make the process of schooling as relevant as the products or outcomes". In moving towards this focus on doing and the processes of schooling, the *recognitive*

*justice* view (Fraser, 1995; Young, 1990) positions social justice as a verb rather than a noun. It focuses upon actions and processes that create disadvantage and the processes of how to achieve justice, rather than simply describing it or focussing upon economic-based indicators. In this way it acts to change everybody's sense of self (Fraser, 1995; Gale & Densmore 2000) and is not about distributing resources across society but, rather, opening up opportunities and processes to all groups which are components of that society. As noted above, this was not the approach of CAP, which identified disadvantage based on location, or of other equity programs which are based on identification of SES data and arbitrary cut-off points. Instead, a recognitive approach would allow communities and groups to self-identify (Gale & Densmore, 2000) through an approach which "generalise(s) the point of view of the disadvantaged rather than separate(s) it off" (Connell, 1993, p.52). Essentially this would not have made CAP schools the focus of distributive programs but instead made the issues which impact upon them generally unacceptable and, in Fraser's (1995) terms, worked to change everybody's sense of self by developing systems which are not based on the failed economic means of distributing resources.

These arguments about the process of identification versus the identification itself inevitably relate to the nature of knowledge used to measure achievement. In 'Making a Difference', Connell et al. (1982) found that, similar to Coleman et al. (1966) in the USA, the unequal distribution of education between social classes was based on the different relationships that each had with the curriculum (Connell, 1993). Similarly, research in many developed countries has further illustrated the relationship between school knowledge and the production of social inequality (Connell, 1993; Teese, 2000; Teese & Polesel, 2003). This hegemonic curriculum (Connell et al., 1982), Connell argues, is tied up with a class history as it has historically operated to include and exclude (Connell, 1993; Teese, 2000) as well as recreate existing inequalities (Bourdieu, 1973; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Teese, 2000). A similar criticism is emerging of the exclusion of spatial knowledge and the metro-centric construction of knowledge and the curriculum. This can be seen again in the

need to enrich the education of rural students with, what I argue is, a metropolitan-like education, rather than considering a restructuring of education itself around local knowledges. In this way, I argue, the measures used to identify poor education outcomes often reflect measures of somebody else's knowledge.

### **3.3.3: Associational justice & rural disadvantage**

Cuervo (2012) and Gewirtz (2006) make reference to the notion of *associational justice*: 'the degree of participation by individuals or groups in decisions which affect the conditions in which they live and act' (Gewirtz, 2006, p. 74). Essentially an extension of recognitive or recognitional justice, associational justice moves from representation to the ability to associate and speak on one's own terms. However, one first needs to be 'represented' in order to gain the recognition to participate.

Bringing together elements of the distributive, recognitive and associational justice perspectives, Cuervo (2012) argues for a plural conceptualisation of social justice for rural schooling. Drawing upon his study of teachers in rural schools, Cuervo (2012) observed that many rural teachers' views revolved around:

a claim for more democratic processes in the construction of the purpose and content of education, including meaningful participation in the content of curriculum and on what it entails to teach – particularly within the unique characteristics of rural areas (p.92).

While the sentiment expressed in relation to the purpose and nature of schooling is one that aligns with this dissertation, and indeed the ideas expressed for the foundation for the arguments herein, I suggest that we need to go further. Perhaps a pragmatic compromise, I suggest that a focus on meaningful participation does nothing to change the nature of education. That is, if the nature of education is unjust and creates inequity, then it is that which needs to be addressed, not just the mode of participation. In the CAP example, for instance, the operational logic appears to be enhancing student achievement

within the existing system by making the context of education more familiar. In an associational justice sense, rural communities are indeed recognised and have a say in the expenditure of CAP funding. However, as it doesn't change the nature of the system they remain in a position of playing catch up, rather than seeking to change the game.

### **3.3.4: CAP – overcoming rural educational disadvantage?**

Overall CAP was well received and well regarded in dealing with rural educational disadvantage, as defined in its objectives. For example, a major 2003 evaluation of CAP both reinforced the principles upon which is founded:

Students attending schools in these areas experience educational disadvantage in a variety of ways, which have the potential to affect their literacy and numeracy and other learning outcomes compared to students from more densely populated areas (DEST, 2003, p.1).

and affirmed its effectiveness:

This is evidenced by the type of activities that are funded by CAP, which are specifically designed to provide geographically isolated students with access to quality educational services and activities that are not usually available in non-metropolitan areas. For example, in many schools, CAP is valued for its capacity to offset travel costs, enabling children to experience learning situations beyond their immediate environment, as well as benefiting from outside expertise. ... The use of CAP funds to address these types of issues is common in many jurisdictions and is considered appropriate, as they represent the most persistent educational barriers faced by students and schools in geographically isolated areas (DEST, 2003, p.vii).

This review concluded by recommending that: *CAP objectives should remain focused on making a difference in access to educational opportunities for students and teachers in rural and isolated schools* (DEST, 2003, p.x). Overall, this evaluation (DEST, 2003), as well as previous evaluations (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987; NBEET, 1990), the 2000 HREOC inquiry (HREOC, 2000) and subsequent evaluations (Lamb, Teese & Helme, 2005), all reported high levels of satisfaction with CAP and accounted for this by citing

the involvement of local communities and the Program's ability to address local needs, provide access for excursions and teacher professional development.

### **3.3.4.1: A critical reappraisal of CAP**

Taking a more critical stance however, CAP has been well regarded when rural disadvantage is accepted in the terms used in its rationale, and its effectiveness measured in these same terms. In reviewing the principles upon which CAP is founded, its objectives and the methods aimed at achieving these, it becomes clear that it is an excellent example of a distributive justice policy aimed at compensation as a form of equalisation. However, there appears to be no analysis or concern for the dynamics causing the measurable disadvantage or any recognition of the inherent value of the spaces and places where it is allocated. As is often the case with distributive models, a definition has needed to be developed that allows groups to be identified and to limit the distribution to an acceptable proportion of the whole. In the case of CAP, funds were provided "on the basis of relative need ... determined on a proportional demographic basis" (DEST, 2007). This "demographic allocative mechanism" identifies two groups of students; rural students living in settlements with less than 5 000 people, further divided into those with less than 1 000 who are considered to be 'more educationally disadvantaged' (DEST, 2007); and isolated students living more than 100KM from a town of 10 000 or more people, again further divided into those living more than 150KM from such a town who are considered more educationally disadvantaged (DEST, 2007). Students and schools are then grouped, with those fitting the most disadvantaged categories funded accordingly, dependent upon the available pool of funding.

In this construction of funding, disadvantage is further defined as purely a factor of distance or small communities. The development of arbitrary cut-off points of disadvantage beyond which some form of compensation is directed (Connell, 1993) clearly shows a lack of consideration for the complexities of each place and is informed by a view that disadvantage is limited to a discernable proportion of the whole community. There is no understanding of

how distance or community size create disadvantage, just a view that they do, as educational outcomes are behind those of metropolitan communities. As with the general indicators of rural disadvantage, CAP was founded on the notion of deficit, due to distance or against standards, and the belief that allocating more resources is the remedy.

The aim of these approaches is to ensure that rural school achievement matches that of non-rural schools either by providing extra resources to ‘enrich’ learning or by facilitating cultural activities that may not otherwise be possible. As such, they typically represent the ideas of justice advocated by Rawls (1999), in seeking to facilitate equality for the least advantaged whilst also valuing individual liberty, with resources reallocated to the least advantaged, and the appropriate use of the opportunity provided being a matter of the individual agency of the student. By providing resources, the state sees itself as meeting its obligations to look after the less well off, and as, therefore, not responsible for any outcomes that may result.

Problematically, any redistribution of resources, and any evaluation of effectiveness of the redistribution, requires a benchmark and evaluation framework. In terms of CAP, and indeed most equity programs, these benchmarks are against a metropolitan ‘norm’. That rural students achieve below the state average, or that students are disadvantaged by their isolation, assumes they are missing something that others take for granted or in a measure developed by others. The very use of language of benchmarks excludes the recognition of the particularities of rural places. Consequently, underpinning this is an assumption of a deficit in the rural that can only be overcome by supplementing it with more metropolitan-type culture and material. However the falseness of this approach is revealed by the fact that the schools included in CAP and PSFP categories are not static and change over time (NSW DET, 2005a), and as such the CAP description does not accurately account for all rural and remote schools. The fluidity of the connection between CAP schools, the description of geographically isolated students and disadvantage based upon place confuses any notion of justice that underpins its existence. By itself, CAP does not account for all equity programs in these schools, as a number of

schools receive both CAP and PSFP support. Thus there lies at the heart a contradiction between the redistribution of resources and an economically-informed redistributive mechanism.

### **3.3.4.2: Review of NSW Equity Programs (2005)**

Following the more theoretical critique above, I now turn to a more specific critique of the assumptions upon which CAP was based and rural educational disadvantage assumed. I will situate this critique with specific reference to the discussion of CAP (as managed by NSW) in a 2005 report by Lamb, Teese & Helme (2005), commissioned by the NSW Department of Education<sup>14</sup>. I should note that this report was one of the catalysts for both the methodological and theoretical avenues pursued in this dissertation.

In relation to rural educational disadvantage, the report used the familiar background, though it did start to account for some of the causes:

Living in rural and isolated areas is often associated with educational disadvantage. Challenges posed by size, declining enrolment and geographic location put rural schools at an economic and educational disadvantage, making it difficult to generate funding, recruit and retain teachers, offer an extensive range of programs in the post-compulsory years and maintain school facilities. [With the] effects on student participation and achievement have been highlighted in research both in Australia and overseas (Lamb, Teese & Helme, 2005, p.16).

Importantly, the report is one of the first to not simply assume a connection between rurality, SES and educational achievement. Significantly, the report went on to question the rural-lower SES connection:

One explanation for lower rural achievement is that such communities are also characterised by being lower SES. Williams (2005) found that once SES was controlled, living in a rural area was not significantly associated with maths achievement in Australia, nor in most other nations. Therefore, part of the impact of rurality and isolation on student achievement is related to differences in social and economic contexts (Lamb, Teese & Helme, 2005, p.17).

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<sup>14</sup> The report reviewed a number of equity programs, not only CAP.

Specifically, then, the report raises the issue of ‘context’ as distinct from economic capital, albeit somewhat linked: “A key issue in research on the role of remoteness as a source of disadvantage is about the relationship between regional context and socioeconomic disadvantage” (Lamb, Teese & Helme, 2005, p.19). Though issues of participation were raised specifically, I suggest this also raises the issue of relevance and connectedness. Put another way, the cultural capital of the rural is different from the non-rural, and this difference remains when economic resources are factored out. The citation of Williams (2005) is notable here, as this is a statistical study of 24 industrialized nation using PISA mathematics data. While Williams (2005) does not specifically raise the issue of cultural capital, it leaves this as a clear implication from the study. However, a possible limitation may be that mathematics is not subject to the same cultural influence as English, though similar patterns in numeracy and literacy achievement do exist for rural communities in most of Australia.

Returning to the study by Lamb, Teese & Helme (2005), this found that, while CAP schools overall were smaller, more isolated, and had higher proportions of Indigenous students, in terms of general disadvantage:

in non-metropolitan NSW, proportionally, there are as many non-CAP primary schools receiving PSFP (low SES) funding as there are CAP schools receiving (low SES) funding. It suggests that as a group rurally-based CAP funded primary schools are no more disadvantaged in social terms than other rural schools (Lamb, Teese & Helme, 2005, p.117).

This reinforces the origin of CAP, and its dissociation in 1977 from the Disadvantaged Country Areas Program, in separating the apparent educational disadvantage of rurality and isolation from social disadvantage. Through failing to account for the production of the apparent disadvantage, the approaches of access and enrichment suggest an interpretation of rural cultural deficit. Notably, however, the review reports, through performing a regression analysis on Years 3 and 5 literacy, that all else being equal, literacy achievement in CAP schools is equivalent to that in similar non-CAP schools (Lamb, Teese & Helme, 2005) – see figure 3.2 below (NB: if there were significant differences, the green and red dots would largely be situated in different ends of the table and not overlap to the extent they do).

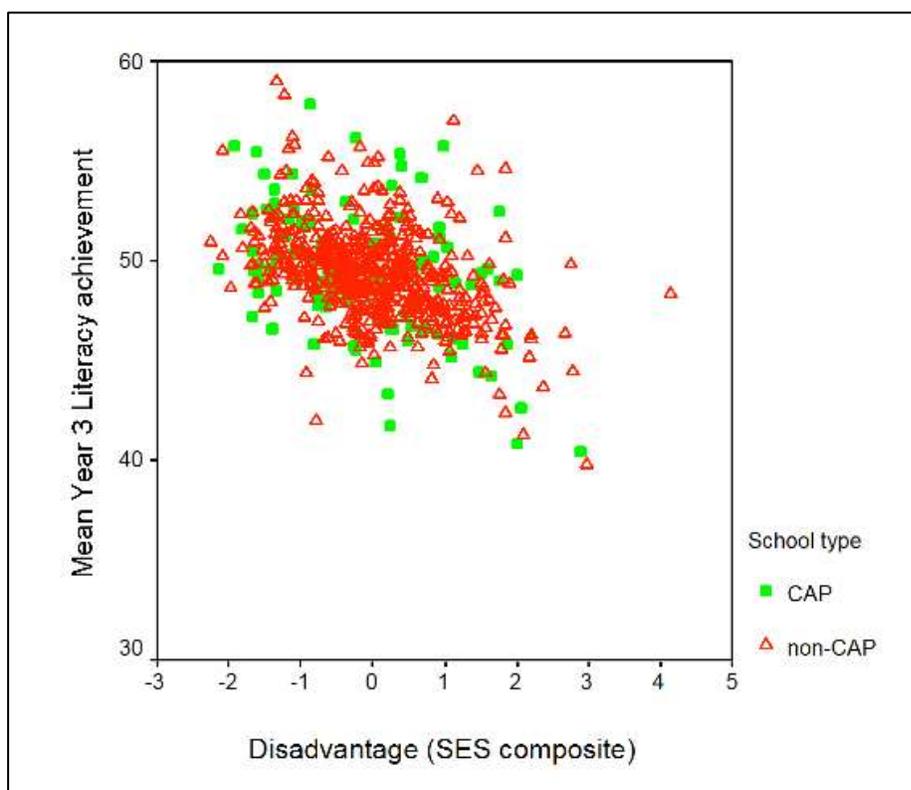


Figure 3.2: Mean Year 3 literacy achievement: CAP and non-CAP (non-metropolitan) schools compared (Lamb, Teese & Helme, 2005, p.119)

It is questionable, then, if CAP achieved any significant change in the relative achievement of non-metropolitan students. My own analysis of publicly available data in NSW by equity category (Roberts, 2008) shows, for instance, that for the period of 2000-2011<sup>15</sup> the retention rate of CAP schools remained significantly below the state average and that of schools receiving PSFP funding. It only exceeded that of Aboriginal students. Thus students in rural areas appear to have sought other pathways than school completion, potentially raising questions about the perceived value of formal education in these areas. Notably, after CAP was abolished there was no relative equity category to continue this comparison – itself raising questions about the state of recognitional and associational justice philosophies.

A further analysis of the Year 3 NSW state-based literacy and numeracy results by equity category for the period of 2000-2007 (for Year 3, to mirror Lamb,

<sup>15</sup> While initially reported in 2008 (Roberts, 2008), I continued the data set to include 2011 data, when records changed due to different reporting categories being adopted in NSW.

Teese & Helme, [2005]), before the introduction of NAPLAN in 2008, shows that CAP schools perform slightly above schools in low SES areas (PSFP schools) and Aboriginal students, but below state averages (Roberts, 2008). Notably, the trend in the data does not appear to be improving across the collection period, while it does appear to improve for low SES schools (Roberts, 2008). That CAP schools are outperforming low SES schools again questions the assumption that more remote schools are more disadvantaged, and perform more poorly. However, the persistent low level of performance again raises questions about the nature of the curriculum and its relationship to rural students. Similarly, that numeracy averages are higher for these equity groups, *and* low SES and Aboriginal students, perhaps suggests that numeracy is less culturally nuanced than literacy with its stronger cultural basis. Thus issues related to rural literacies (Donehower, Hogg & Schell, 2007; Green & Corbett, 2013) seem pertinent here, as they recognise, and engage with, cultural meanings unique to rural contexts. Notably, again for the recognition of the rural in social justice thinking, after the introduction of NAPLAN in 2008 no data was collected by relative equity categories.

#### **3.3.4.3: Erasing rural educational disadvantage from policy**

From 2009 CAP was redeployed as part of a new agreement between the Commonwealth government and the various educational jurisdictions, called the National Education Agreement<sup>16</sup>. This agreement, the government argued, provided flexibility for government-run jurisdictions and notably did not require them to continue CAP to receive support for rural educational disadvantage. Instead, national outcome targets for rural students were agreed (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012). Notably, in the government sector at least, rural educational disadvantage was actually erased, in this agreement. Instead, educational disadvantage has been reconstituted here as an issue of literacy, numeracy, Indigenous participation, or a lack of principal autonomy (COAG, 2012). These are all defined, I argue, in terms of an imagined metropolitan cultural norm. Addressing rural educational disadvantage is then narrowed to

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<sup>16</sup> <https://deewr.gov.au/information-eligibility-country-areas-program>

common issues of SES, with remedial literacy and numeracy to meet national benchmarks the only possible support program. The nature of literacy, the cultural values of education generally, or the character of these benchmarks or national tests, are not seen as issues related to educational disadvantage.

Below, I will examine the data arising from the 2013 transition in NSW from the CAP-funded model to the new model in that state. After 2013 a new model, the Resource Allocation Model<sup>17</sup> (RAM), somewhat emerging from the Gonski recommendations (see Chapter Six) was introduced in N.S.W. Initially, this new model included no recognition of geography, only school SES. However geography, using the previous definitions applied to CAP, was reintroduced in 2015.

#### **3.3.4.4: An ambiguous rural: NSW Equity funding categories 2013**

In 2012 the NSW government announced its intention to move to a new ‘needs based’ allocation of equity funds. This followed the federal abolition of CAP and the move to national partnerships to address disadvantage. Following this decision, the NSW Department of Education<sup>18</sup> released a list of government schools that would receive ‘transitional equity funding’ in the interim years before the new arrangements came into force. These arrangements were based on the funding that schools *would have* received under the previous, CAP orientated, system (NSW DEC, 2012). In this transitional arrangement the category of ‘geographic isolation’ was used to refer to those schools that would have received CAP funding. This public list has enabled a comparison of the schools receiving this funding, and their correlation with other data compiled for this dissertation.

What is immediately apparent is that there were 125 schools receiving funding for geographic isolation that *did not* receive funding for socio-economic status – schools are eligible to receive both if they meet the required benchmarks. Again this questions the belief that rural schools are more socio-economically

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.dec.nsw.gov.au/about-the-department/our-reforms/local-schools-local-decisions/reform-agenda/resource-allocation-model>

<sup>18</sup> At the time the Department of Education and Communities.

disadvantaged. Furthermore, an analysis by school type (See figure 3.3) reveals that seventeen central schools<sup>19</sup> received funding for geographic isolation but *did not* receive funding for socio-economic status. Given that central schools are (by definition) ‘remote’, this raises interesting questions. Further, linking each school to the ABS ARIA reinforces that schools’ geographical classification does not determine SES status or Geographic Isolation funding. Indeed, there are some schools located in inner regional and outer regional areas according to ARIA that receive funding for geographic isolation.

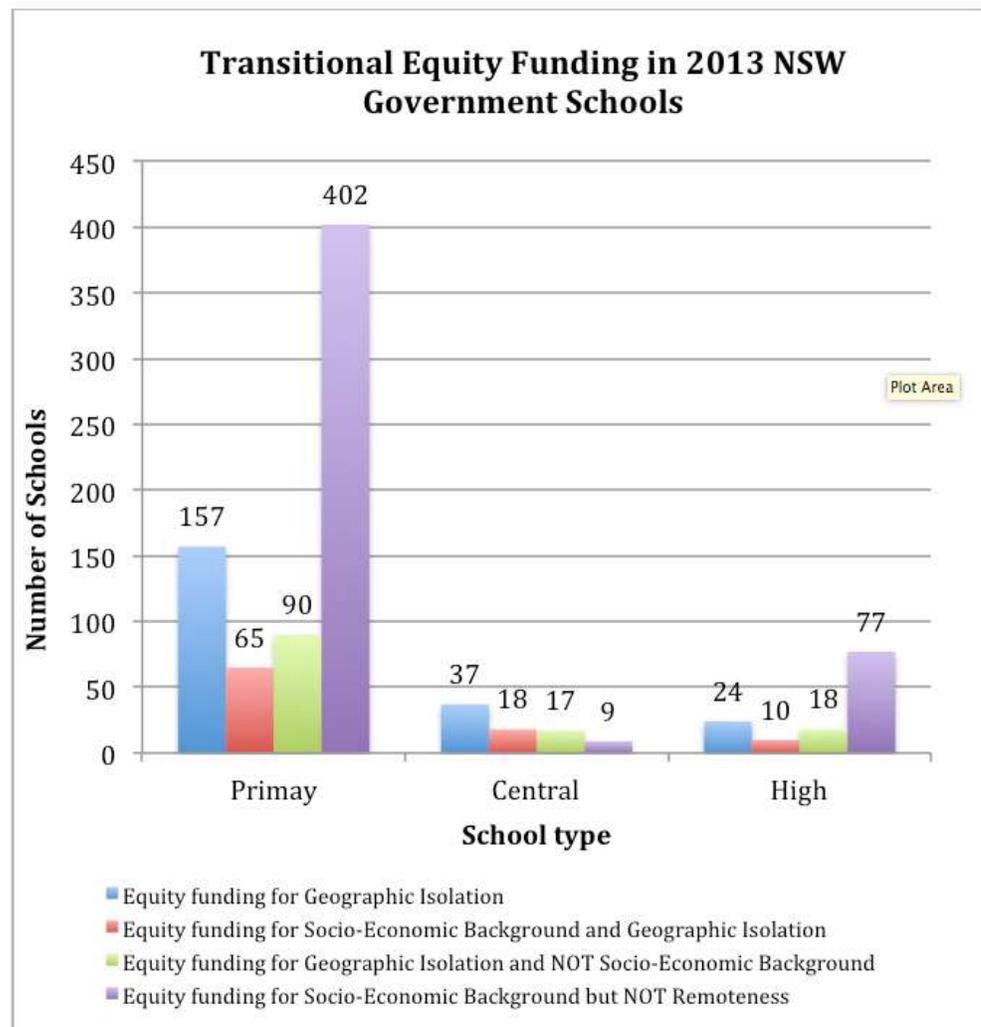
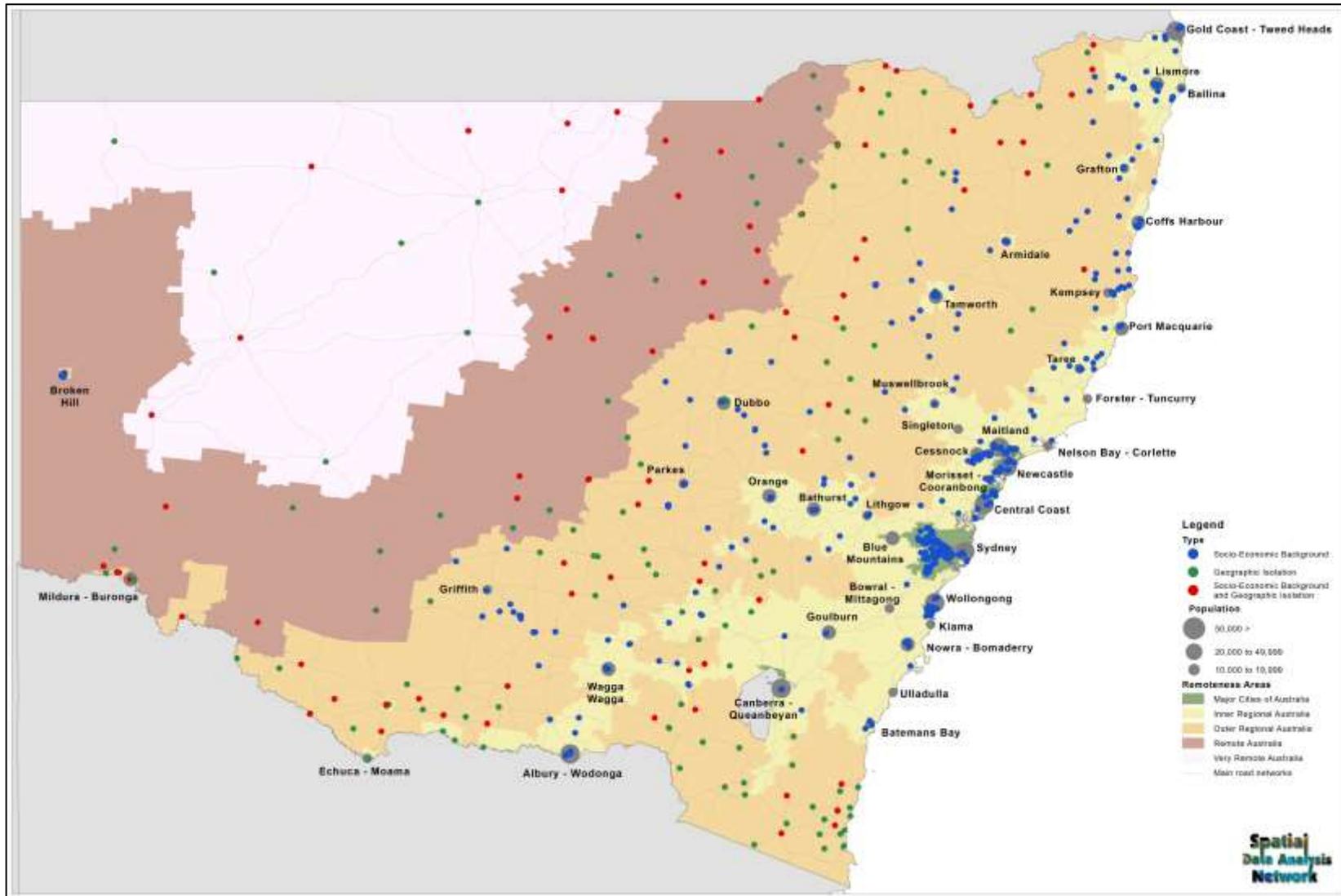


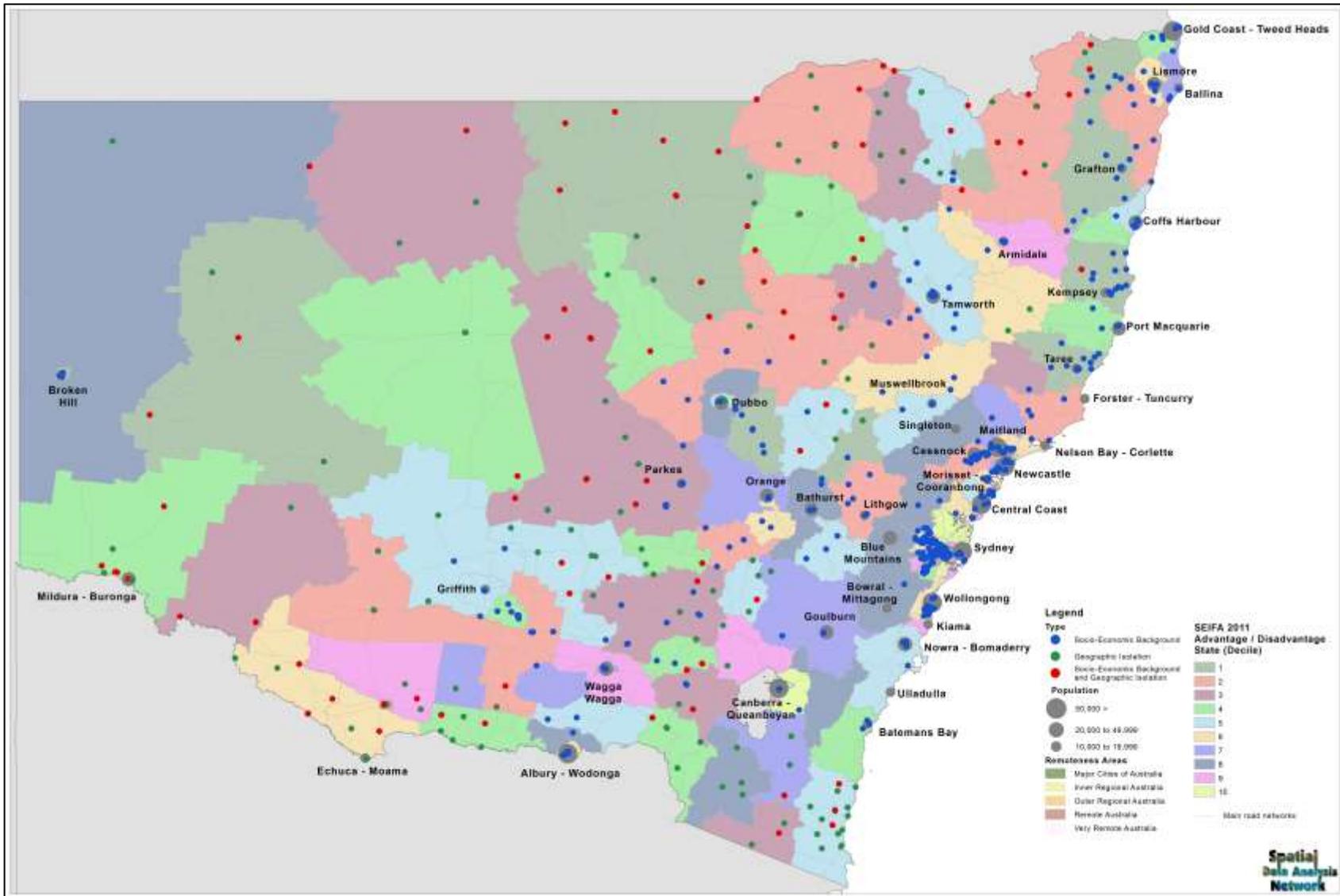
Figure 3.3 NSW Transitional Equity Funding 2013 – school type.

<sup>19</sup> In NSW, Central Schools combine the traditionally separate primary and high school into one. The rationale is historically that the towns in which they were located had adequate student numbers to justify a secondary section, but that it was too far for students to reasonably travel to access high school. Thus by definition they were geographically remote. I worked in the secondary department of these schools for ten years and was a head of the secondary department of one of these schools, simultaneously serving as the CAP coordinator and representative on two regional CAP committees.

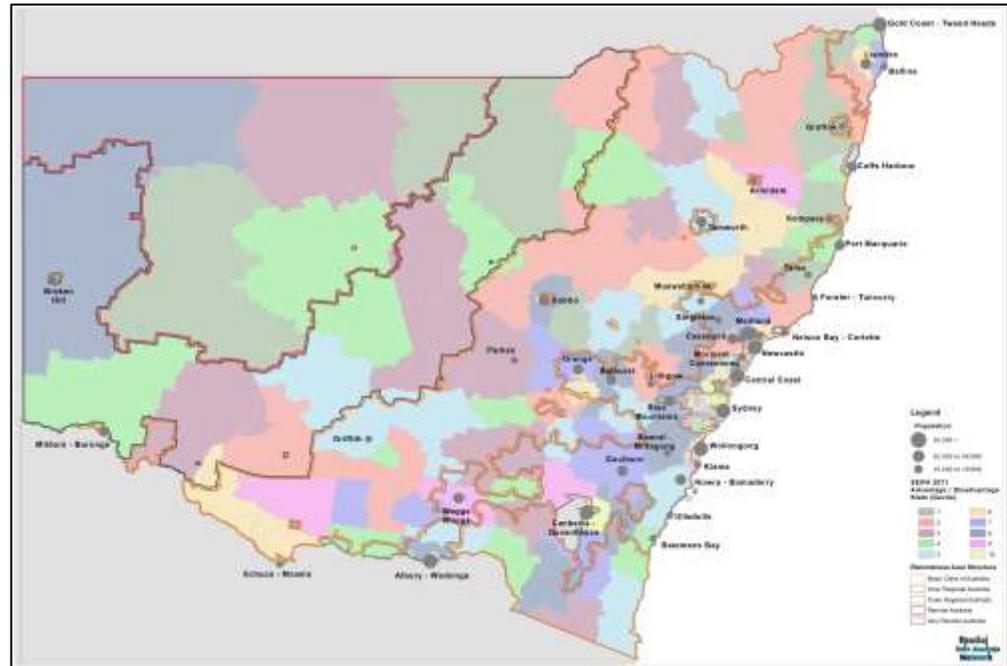
Expanding this analysis geographically, Maps 3.1 and 3.2 show the geographic distribution of schools receiving the three categories of equity funding. Each map illustrates that for non-metropolitan government schools there is no pattern based on either the remoteness of the school or the SEIFA of the school. Indeed, map 3.3 illustrates that remoteness, as per ARIA, does not determine SEIFA advantage-disadvantage.



Map 3.1: NSW Equity Funding by Remoteness



Map 3.2: NSW Equity Funding by SEIFA Advantage/Disadvantage



Map 3.3: ARIA & SEIFA Advantage/Disadvantage (Reproduction of Figure 4, Chapter One, page 37)

The unpredictable spread of schools by equity category in these maps illustrates that more local social and economic factors influence the school-make up than broad sweeping categorisations of location. Turning this analysis to NAPLAN, in alignment with the work of Lamb, Teese & Helme (2005) outlined in 3.3.4.2, I have linked school equity category, ARIA location, and 2011 NAPLAN reading and numeracy mean scores for Year 3. Referencing my argument that how the rural is represented impacts upon conclusions, I have re-categorised schools to show the distinctions within the official categorisations of the rural. As ACARA uses the older measure of provincial to report NAPLAN results, I have made this change to show that how the data is represented is significant to the insights gained. Provincial in this case is roughly a combination of inner and outer regional Australia as per ABS ARIA – while this may seem a minor issue, the findings within this dissertation show that the distinction between inner and outer regional can often be highly significant in relation to access and achievement in education. The more remote a school, the poorer its performance overall. However, as I will outline subsequently, such broad

categorisations overlook significant differences within each category. This is why examining the data from a rural standpoint is so important: it makes otherwise overlooked phenomena visible.

Figure 3.4 shows the distribution of Year 3 2011 school literacy and numeracy achievement by geo-location, as used by ACARA to report results. Each figure, and each subsequent figure, includes a line of best fit that illustrates the relationship between school background as per ICSEA and reading/numeracy achievement, and a vertical line representing the national average ICSEA of 1000. This both reinforces the logic of ICSEA that school background is a strong influence on literacy and numeracy, and allows easy identification of schools achieving results above or below the anticipated. The vertical line allows easy identification of schools below the national average ICSEA. Thus in the four quadrants created, schools in the top right quadrant are above average ICSEA and achieving NAPLAN results above expectation, whereas schools in the bottom left are below average ICSEA and achieving NAPLAN results below expectation. ACARA regards schools with an ICSEA below 850 as ‘disadvantaged’ (ACARA, 2013), however a line has not been included to avoid clutter.

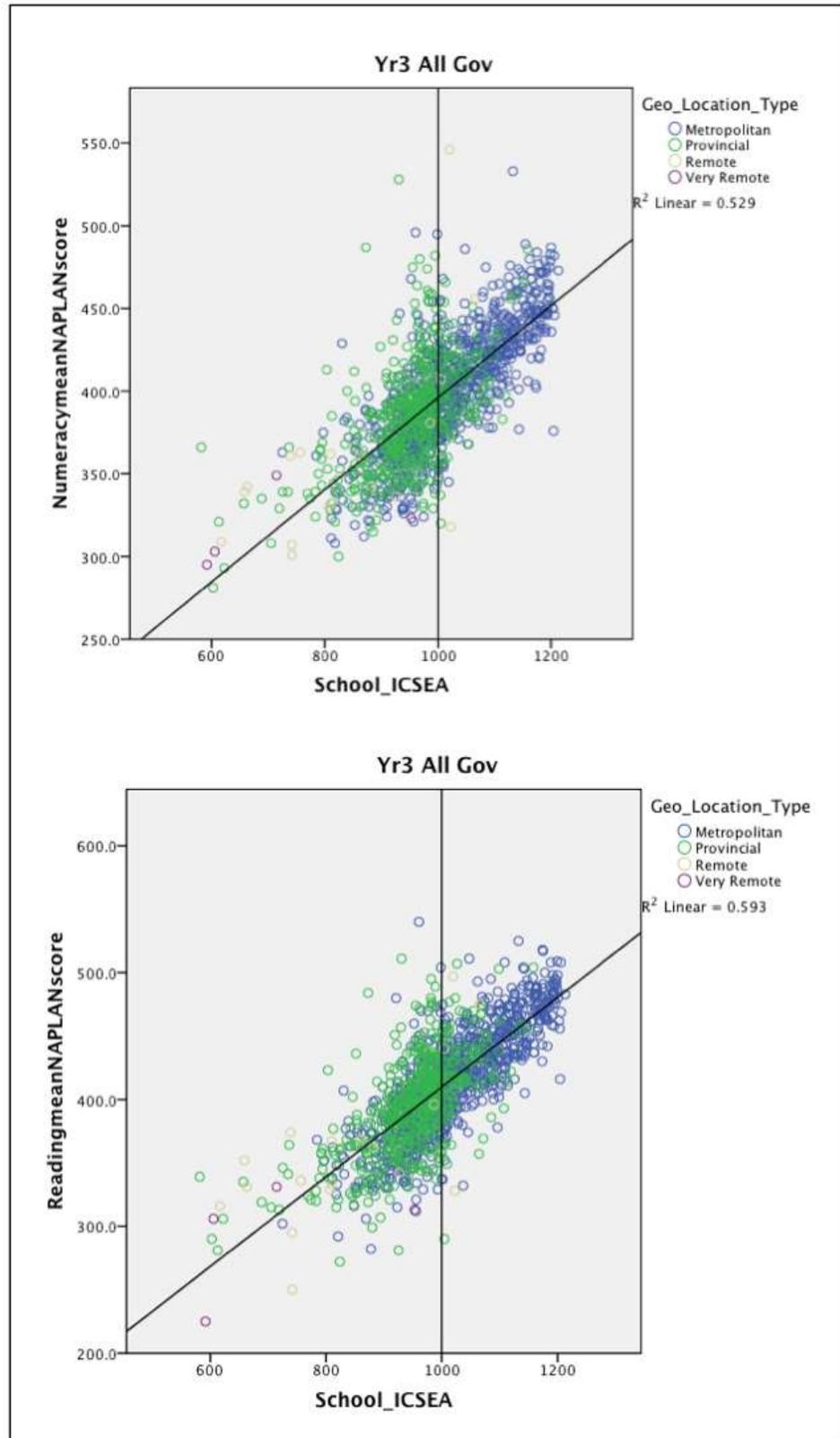


Figure 3.4: Year 3 2011 literacy and numeracy by geo-location (ACARA)

Using the ACARA geo-location in Figure 3.4 allows the distribution of NAPLAN results to be represented on ACARA's own terms. While the figure shows that, overall, non-metropolitan schools (provincial, remote & very remote) are lower on the ICSEA scale (more to the left) and lower on NAPLAN achievement (more towards the bottom) than metropolitan schools (shown in blue), it clearly illustrates a complex spread. Many non-metropolitan schools overlap with the lower range of metropolitan schools – suggesting for the purpose of this study that 'metropolitan' has been defined in terms of advantaged metropolitan schools and *not* the overall picture of metropolitan achievement. Also evident is that non-metropolitan schools span the ICSEA scale and the NAPLAN achievement scale. While a majority tends to lower NAPLAN achievement and lower ICSEA, this average clearly does not represent all non-metropolitan schools. It is the existence of this variety, and the characteristics of the diversity of non-metropolitan schools, that this dissertation explores in order to suggest a more nuanced version of social justice and educational thinking. Both reading and numeracy have been included in Figure 3.4 to illustrate the similarity in patterns, something that is common in subsequent analysis but not included here to avoid undue repetition.

Figure 3.5 shows the distribution of all government school reading means against school ICSEA by equity category. Deliberately included are schools that do not receive any equity funding. This illustrates that schools receiving funding to support low SES backgrounds are below the national average ICSEA. However, it also illustrates that schools receiving funding for geographic isolation span the range of ICSEA and NAPLAN achievement.

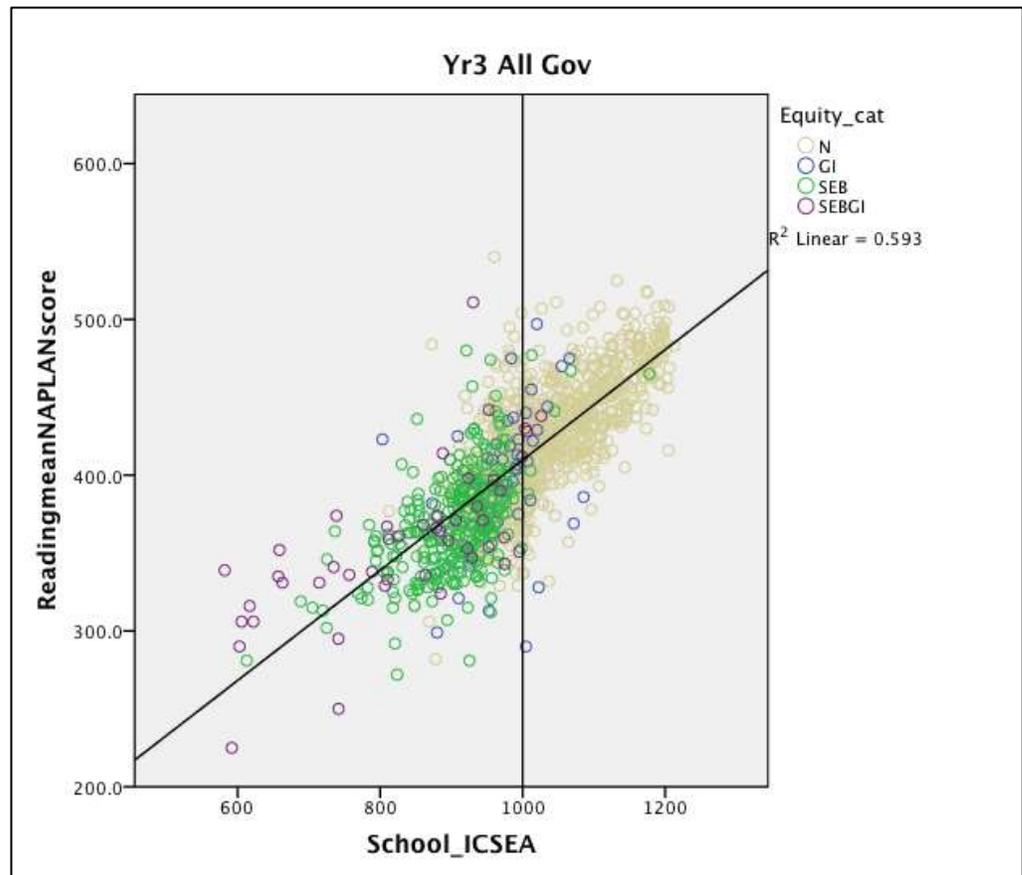


Figure 3.5: Year 3 NSW NAPLAN by equity category – All NSW Government schools.

(N = no equity funding; GI = Geographic Isolation; SEB = funding for low Socio-Economic background schools; SEBGI = is both SEB and GI)

Figure 3.6 shows the same distribution as 3.5 but for non-metropolitan schools only. A similar distribution exists for numeracy. This figure more clearly shows the large ICSEA and NAPLAN overlap between non-metropolitan schools receiving equity funding and those that do not. It also illustrates the spread of schools receiving funding for geographic isolation along the ICSEA and NAPLAN scales. Thus it questions the logic that schools in isolated areas are *necessarily* lower SES schools and/or achieve poorer results. The intention here is not to dismiss the fact that clearly large numbers of rural or isolated schools are lower SES school and receive poorer NAPLAN results, but merely to point out that this is not a universal logic. By doing so, I suggest that the nature and cause of educational (under-)achievement in rural schools is complex and not fully explained by simple explanations or existing versions of social justice.

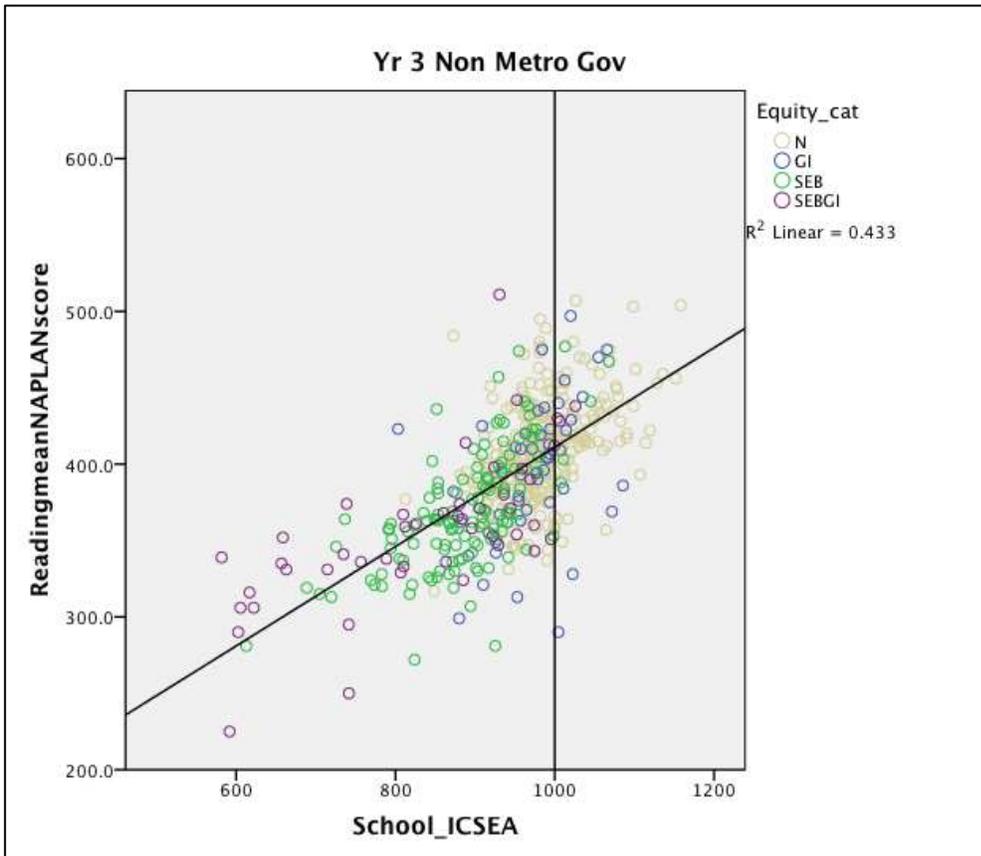


Figure 3.6: Year 3 NSW NAPLAN by equity category – non-metropolitan NSW Government schools.

(N = no equity funding; GI = Geographic Isolation; SEB = funding for low Socio-Economic background schools; SEBGI = is both SEB and GI)

The complexity of rural educational (under-)achievement and the claim that it is not explained by simple reference to location and SES is further reinforced by Figure 3.7. Here the non-metropolitan government schools that do receive equity funding have been plotted using the ARIA of the schools' postcode. Thus the pattern is identical to 3.6 (excluding the no funding category) but the key different. The key observation from this diagram is that, while there may be general patterns, *there is no clear single pattern based on ARIA category*, further questioning the logic of location equating with SES (here ICSEA) or achievement.

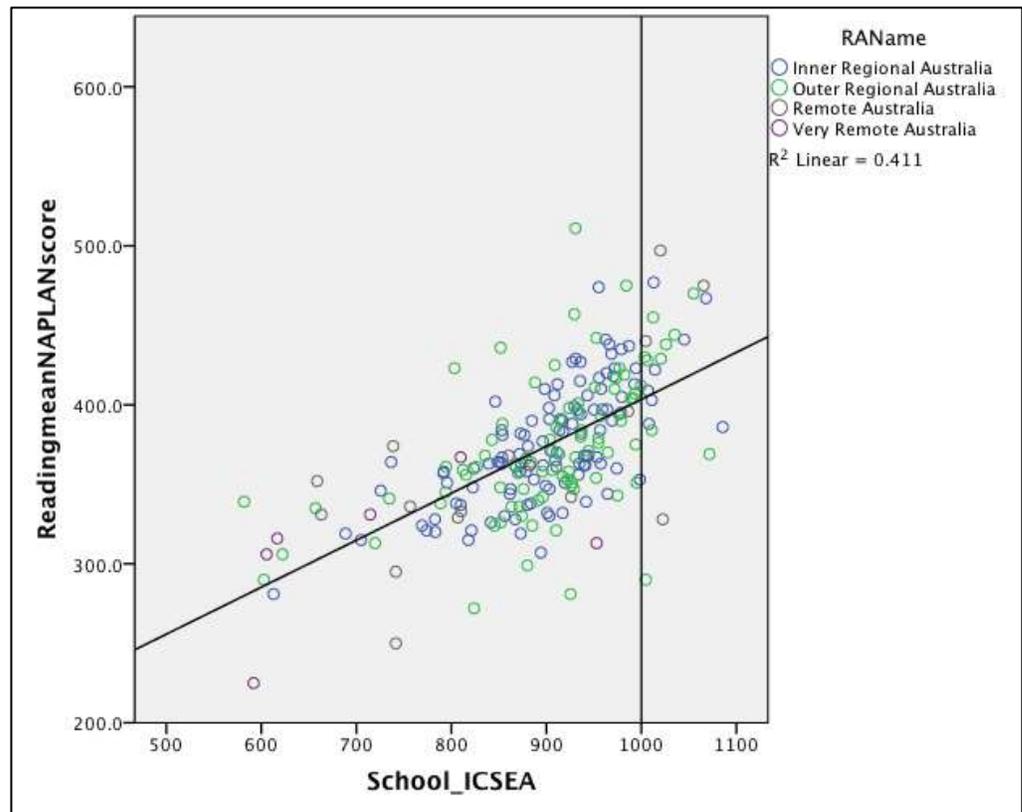


Figure 3.7: Year 3 NSW NAPLAN by ARIA – non-metropolitan NSW Government schools.

Overall the data raises questions about the central logic of rural educational disadvantage, as expressed in the rationale for CAP – historically, the main equity program aimed at addressing rural educational disadvantage. This argument is still used in NSW – that distance equates with lower SES, and therefore lower educational achievement. While that is the case overall, there are significant inconsistencies when the data is examined in a more nuanced manner.

Statistics, in the end, reduce specific cases to an average, and in so doing erase their specificity and subjectivity. By examining these statistics from a specifically rural standpoint, I have been able to shed light on the differences and contradictions therein – not to arrive at any singular conclusion, as that is not the objective of this study – but, rather, to ask further questions about the nature of rural educational disadvantage. In this instance, I am gesturing towards an explanation that there seems to be more going on in relation to the production of rural educational disadvantage than the standard explanation

allows. In so doing, I am arguing for a more nuanced consideration of social justice that considers the specifics of the rural, as an expansion on Cuervo's (2012) enlarged sense of social justice. Here I suggest that the notions of Curricular Justice (Connell, 1993) and Spatial Justice (Soja, 2010) provide helpful avenues for consideration.

### **3.3.5: Curricular Justice & rural disadvantage**

Curricular justice (Connell, 1993) regards schooling as part of the problem in the production of disadvantage and difference. It suggests that justice cannot be achieved by giving the same amount of the same good to all students, and instead it foregrounds three main principles: a focus upon the interests of the least advantaged; participation and common schooling; and the historical production of equality (Connell, 1993). In countering this system-based approach to educational disadvantage, Connell suggests a 'new geography' of disadvantage focussed upon how creation of different educational and economic fates are located within the social processes that produce them (Connell, 1993). Furthermore, education is not simply a mirror of inequities but actively involved in the production of those inequities (Connell, 1993). Such a focus upon the production of disadvantage would also focus upon the production of difference (Young, 1990) as a cycle of history rather than a cycle of poverty (Connell, 1993). Uncovering such a change would recognise how social divisions and power shape the production, organisation and distribution of knowledge (Connell, 1993; Teese, 2000; Teese & Polesel, 2003), resulting in the production of educational disadvantage.

While the recognitive approach uses many of the principles advocated by Connell (1993), it does so as a general approach partially removed from the educative context. Such an approach is pertinent to my inquiry as it enables an understanding of how place influences teachers and inevitably the pedagogy they employ, all of which is tied up with the decisions teachers make about their careers. Curricular justice is not a curriculum add-on but instead reconstitutes the entire curriculum from this perspective (Connell, 1993), and as

such, places value on different perspectives and knowledges. An element of this is evident in the component of CAP which enabled schools to ‘enhance’ or ‘enrich’ (DEST, 2007) the curriculum. It suggests that perhaps a new and innovative curriculum could be delivered, based in place to better meet the needs of each community through a stated objective of fostering relevant curriculum appropriate to the needs of its (rural) students (DEST, 2006). In reality, however, the use of the words ‘enrich’ and ‘enhance’ is interesting. Although somewhat positively framed, it is ultimately diminishing and misleading. While these terms suggest a degree of innovation, the fact that the federal guidelines for CAP refer to ‘curriculum enhancement’ (DEST, 2006, p.128) and speak of “enriching the curriculum for geographically isolated primary and secondary school students” (DEST, 2006, p.128) perpetuates the approach of addressing persistent disadvantage based upon location in favour of another, presumably richer, metropolitan, conception of schooling. CAP therefore assumes that geographical isolation equals educational disadvantage by being removed from the culture of the metropolitan. It then seeks to mitigate this effect by distributive means, even though these communities are only disadvantaged when the ‘good’ of education is viewed in a metro-centric fashion.

### **3.3.6: Spatial Justice**

Spatial Justice (Soja, 2010) is an emerging area of consideration, though at the moment not well represented in educational or broader social equity thinking. As the name ‘spatial’ suggests, this approach brings in geography, space and place as important ideas in social justice. 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. To counter this, Soja (2010) proposes ‘spatiality’ as a third way of understanding the world. Spatial justice goes beyond redistribution and associated decision-making, to the geographic distribution of justice, where space is productive and generative.

Soja's sense of spatial justice (2010) is, however, inherently urban, as he situates his discussion in relation to the city and its development as a symbol of modernity. As such, it is in some ways potentially the antithesis of the rural. However, while his argument is philosophically orientated towards discussing the city, it is readily transferable to the rural (Roberts & Green, 2013). Given that Soja (2010) defines spatial justice in relation to spatiality, and contra the historical and social interpretations of the world, the rural can readily replace the urban in its construction. This is especially the case when we consider the many definitions of the rural (see 2.2) that in themselves make it clear that defining the rural is a social and historical production.

In relation to existing forms of social justice, and CAP for instance, it is apparent that spatial thinking is not something that has been conceptualized in contemporary policy work. Instead we have, as Soja (2010) suggests, no program equating to spatial thinking or that space produces power such as either dominant knowledges of the metropolitan centre or specific knowledges' of the rural. Indeed, as Green and Letts (2007) have argued in thematising space, equity and rural education, that space matters in education has been overlooked, and locational affects generally regarded as unproblematic in Australian education policy and research.

### **3.3.7: Curricular-spatial justice**

Bringing curricular and spatial theories of justice into conversation provides a useful direction for both understanding the production of rural educational disadvantage, and for exploring possible approaches to disrupting its entrenched nature. As such, a curricular-spatial form of social justice can engage with rural educational disadvantage, as an extension of Cuervo's (2012) enlarged social justice agenda. This approach is, I suggest, the logical confluence of the issues discussed thus far in this chapter and also the previous methodology chapter. It is an approach that is arrived at when the rural is considered from a rural standpoint, and the limitations of existing philosophies are taken into account.

In arguing the justification for such an approach, it is important to note that, specifically, such an orientation questions the relevance of the existing curriculum (ala curricular justice) as it embodies dominant forms of knowledge (see 3.4 and Chapters Six and Seven) and legitimizes (see Chapter Seven) rural educational underachievement. It also recognizes that rural educational achievement, or (dis)advantage, is spatially produced and includes the lack of recognition of a form of rural knowledge in the traditional curriculum.

Traditionally, the rural is systematically and historically constructed in Australia as ‘out there’, on the fringe of settlement, categorized by economic measures, and understood only in comparison with non-rural power centres. Educationally, this means that rural students are (a) constructed as deficient (in comparison with non-rural students), (b) assumed to need, somehow, to be enhanced, to become less-rural, or something ‘other’ than they are, and (c) encouraged to master, and have their achievement measured in, a curriculum that values and prioritises metro-cosmopolitan ways of being, while remaining ambivalent with regard to rurality. Hence, existing approaches to social justice in rural education, rooted as they are in traditionally dominant historical and social perspectives, are in need of supplementation with richly informed socio-spatial perspectives. That is, such an approach requires a reconceptualised understanding of social justice, rethinking what redistribution might be, while building upon recognitive and representational approaches in drawing attention to the process of schooling and, in particular, the places or locations within which that process occurs.

The central issue then becomes what constitutes rural education. It is not simply the curriculum delivered, or the staffing of schools, or the resources made available; rather, it is the whole education project, broadly conceived, whereby the rural fits within the discourse of the nation.

### **3.4: Whose knowledge is of most worth?**

With an orientation towards a notion of curricular-spatial justice, it is necessary to consider the role of the curriculum itself. Returning to more traditional

matters of the concentration of educational advantage in some sites at the expense of others, this section will outline debates about the role of knowledge in the curriculum. For it is not simply the concentration of social advantage in some schools and disadvantage in others, but the relationship each group has with the knowledge in the curriculum that operationalizes the curriculum hierarchy, which is explored in Chapter Seven. Therefore the nature of that curriculum, as per curricular justice, is an issue of social justice itself.

Building on the reproduction thesis, Marks, Creswell and Ainley (2006) argue that the advantage experienced by high SES students is mediated through the curriculum they receive. Their arguments are similar to those of Teese and colleagues (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009) in relation to academic rigour, curriculum enactment aimed at university entrance, and the focus on excellence of the schools they attend. However, attributing success to the enacted curriculum removes consideration of that enactment from the context of its enactment. That is, the advantage is not to be located in the official written curriculum *per se*, but in that the system around it values one form of enactment over another. It is, as Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) have argued, the *way* this is enacted that reproduces the advantage of high SES students. Marks et al.'s (2006) solution – influential, given the authors' affiliation with a powerful private education research organisation itself influential in the move to the Australian Curriculum – was to argue in favour of ensuring that all students have the same core curriculum. However, such an approach only returns the nation to the centralised system already in operation in the states, and perpetuates the spatial blindness of Australian education (Green & Letts, 2007). Consequently, the question then becomes *whose* knowledge is of most worth in determining this core curriculum?

While the existing dominant logic discussed in Chapter One and above argues that it is SES that is the driving factor in educational achievement, I argue that this diminishes and overlooks issues of curricular justice (Connell, 1993) and reinforces the idea that the curriculum is neutral. This is not to discount SES as an influence in any way; indeed, the data used here shows that access is indeed mediated by SES. Instead I am recasting SES as a structuring influence of class,

to focus on the class-based nature of knowledge codified in the curriculum. To do so enables me to speak to traditional educational research, though more importantly, it also enables me to introduce spatiality and knowledge related to place as a parallel concept to class.

The issue of knowledge has been much debated in the sociology of education, for example in the work of Coleman et al. (1966), Young (1971) and Connell et al. (1982) as part of the new sociology of education, and Young's later counterarguments against his former position (Young, 2007). There was an earlier time, as Yates (2009, p. 3) recounts, when:

Claims to knowledge and authority were being questioned in the streets in May 1968 in Paris; cheap paperbacks by such writers as Illich, Freire, Holt, Kozol, Barnes were questioning what schools do and being widely read (and Illich and Freire came to Australia and spoke to big audiences about their work); new sociology of education was attacking the idea of the neutrality of curriculum, and was locked in argument with philosophers about how we might think about curriculum.

Curriculum-as-policy, a construction I advance in Chapter Six, has settled these debates, hopefully only temporarily. However, as we have seen, and will further explore subsequently, the achievement of rural students (and low SES students, for that matter) has not markedly improved. Reinforcing the notion of "curriculum as law" (Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009), Yates (2011) makes observations from her project on Australian curriculum history over the last 30 years that:

in the interviews, we have been struck by how rarely knowledge itself comes into the frame of the talk about curriculum compared with discussion of curriculum as management of resources and outcomes, politics, or values (Yates, 2011, p.8).

This shift is understandable, given the neoliberal-influenced curriculum-as-policy direction, and reflects the shift in equity thinking over the same period. Such a narrowing works in favour of a hierarchical system when the objective is to achieve in the system it legitimates. Here curriculum becomes about mastery of knowledge to achieve selection to university. Notably, however, this senior-school selection is based on sorting students in the junior years into different schools based on relative social advantage and disadvantage.

Consequently these ‘fortified’ and ‘exposed’ school sites (Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009) – a notion explored in Chapter Seven – have a different relationship to the nature of knowledge in the curriculum. In the advantaged, ‘fortified’ sites, students have a cultural affinity with the knowledge in the curriculum, whereas in the more disadvantaged ‘exposed’ sites students’ culture does not align well with the expectations of the competitive academic curriculum. The nature of knowledge, and what knowledge – and whose knowledge – should be valued in the curriculum, is the central question of curriculum inquiry (e.g. Pinar 2012; Maton, 2014; Apple, 2009). The ensuing debates around knowledge have epistemological and ontological dimensions, associated with issues of power.

From the perspective of curricular justice (Connell, 1993) comes the suggestion that the curriculum is implicated in producing unequal social outcomes. There is then knowledge that is mastered by the socially powerful, for which they have a cultural predisposition, and which confirms their social status. This perspective then implies that there are other knowledges, for instance those of the less well-off and socially less powerful, which are not valued but should be, in a reconfigured approach to the curriculum. This construction is somewhat ambiguous as to which comes first, though, the knowledge or the social power. Here Young’s (Young, 2009a; Young, 2009b; Young, Lambert, Roberts & Roberts, 2015; Young & Muller, 2016) distinction between ‘knowledge of the powerful’ and ‘powerful knowledge’ is useful. In this construction, knowledge of the powerful, or high-status knowledge, refers to who gets to define what counts as knowledge. This is similar to the ‘powerful subjects’ in the work of Teese and his colleagues (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009), and ultimately refers to those subjects that dominate the curriculum hierarchy, and whose enrolment is dominated by students in advantaged, and metropolitan, schools. ‘Powerful knowledge’, on the other hand, relates to knowledge that all citizens should have an entitlement to and that is a requirement of equality (Young, 2009a; Young, 2009b; Young & Muller, 2016).

It seems inherently contradictory however, to say on one hand that there is important knowledge, and on the other that there is powerful knowledge that some people have more access to. This knowledge of the powerful is analogous to Teese's (2012) concept of academically powerful knowledge, being the same knowledge that has dominated elite schooling and university. However, Young (2009a; Young, 2009b; Young & Muller, 2016) argues that this has been the focus of curriculum debates, but it tells us nothing about the knowledge itself. This is where powerful knowledge comes in – rather than being about access or who controls it, but what it can do, such as help explain the world. As Young (2007) points out, there are forms of knowledge that society aims to pass on and deem important and that forms part of the purpose of schooling and social advancement. Similarly, Green (2010) reinforces that curriculum also plays the critical role of representing the nation to future generations. But the question of 'which knowledge to value' or 'which representation of the nation to portray' is also a weakness of Young's critique, in that he mainly focuses on sciences and not social sciences, where power, position and status are perhaps even more implicated in the social construction of knowledge. Where Young et al. (2014) do engage with the social sciences, they do so from a perspective of the power of the global metropole, and indeed from the very position that Connell (2007) critiques as northern theory.

It is the way that knowledge is implicated in schools' success that is the real issue. In contrast to Connell (1993), that the study of, and academic success in, powerful knowledge tends to be dominated by the powerful, doesn't make the knowledge illegitimate in Young's (2009; Young & Muller, 2016) argument. While this is perhaps right, it leaves a rather complex problematic for considering the composition of the school curriculum. A key point here is that schooling has expanded to give more people access to what was once the preserve of a privileged and powerful few – but as it has expanded, it has maintained its basic structure, content and values. Its expansion has not led to a serious questioning of what schooling would look like for an entire population. Those who controlled the system have used 'economics' as a proxy, while maintaining their cultural position through subtle reinforcing shifts in the

curriculum, while for everyone else it is competition for scarce resources. That the academic curriculum has not been questioned is as much the problem as the outcomes that it legitimises. These outcomes are not the effects of the academic senior secondary curriculum itself, but of the system that situates this at its apex.

Rather soberingly perhaps, Yates (2011) notes the “continuing impossibility of resolving the tension between curriculum content agendas and curriculum selection agendas” (p.41), going on to argue that:

Neither the attempt to deny that the high status curriculum favours some social groups (and the resources they can muster), nor the attempt to declare all subjects and assessment pieces equal, are sustainable. Neither approach resolves the tension where curriculum is designed to be both a vehicle of acculturation and social induction and a vehicle for high stakes differential opportunity (p. 41-42).

My aim here is, at the risk of potentially making the issue even more complex, to add another dimension to the debate – that of its spatial distribution (Chapter Seven) and the notion of rural knowledges.

By rural knowledges I am suggesting a form of knowledge “grounded in an understanding of rural life worlds as opposed to meanings rooted in a more metropolitan-cosmopolitan worldview” (Downes & Roberts, 2015, p.81). As section 2.2 outlined, defining the rural is a complex task. Indeed it is a central pre-occupation of rural studies (Woods, 2011). However, I showed in section 2.3, the various models attempting to define the rural all emphasise that its meaning is largely socially constructed. Similarly standpoint theory (section 2.4), specifically a rural standpoint in this study, comes from the epistemological position that knowledge is situated. As Green and Corbett (2013, p.4) have noted, and as rural literacies work more generally argues (Donehower, Hogg and Schell, 2007; Green & Corbett, 2013), there is a “connection between textual practices and life practices” that has a unique quality in rural places. Taken together, I suggest these ideas recognise that a rural life-world produces different relationships with knowledge.

Drawing on the definitions outlined in section 2.2, these ‘rural knowledges’ would tend towards connections with land, a functional orientation and applied in nature. Notably these characteristics are similar to the embodied and applied knowledges that Bleazby (2015) argues have been traditionally lower on the epistemological hierarchy. Consequently, the subjects related to them in the school curriculum have also been lower status (Bleazby, 2015) (see Chapter Seven). Alternatively, the higher subjects in the hierarchy, and related forms of knowledge, are more abstract in nature (Bleazby, 2015), and thus more closely aligned to the metropolitan-cosmopolitan life world. While Young and Muller (2016) do engage with the question of the nature of powerful knowledge in their argument in favour of knowledge in the curriculum, they inherently do so from a position that cosmopolitan knowledges, and thus the global metropole, are universal. Indeed they explicitly deny the notion of the global south as an issue of knowledge arguing that ‘powerful knowledge’ is universal (Young & Muller, 2016). Such a proposition only holds however when considered pragmatically and in relation to enhancing opportunity in the globalised world order as it exists. It does not hold when considered from the position of remaking an unjust world and/or a spatial justice perspective.

### **3.4.1: Epistemic justice**

Drawing in debates about knowledge and the curriculum, curricular-spatial justice can be regarded as a form of epistemic justice for rural people and places. Epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2010; Fricker, 2007) refers to the wrong done to someone in their capacity as a knower, through a form of prejudice against certain speakers (Anderson, 2012). Epistemic injustice has been defined in terms of: testimonial injustice, when one’s credibility to know is denied; and hermeneutical injustice, a gap in collective interpretative resources which puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences (Fricker, 2010; Fricker, 2007). Moving Fricker’s (2007) individual focus to position epistemic justice as an issue for social systems, Anderson (2012) opens new ways of thinking about knowledge (and therefore curriculum) in relation to the rural. Here, the lack of representation of the rural

can be seen as a form of epistemic injustice, in that the rural is positioned outside modernity and not represented in dominant knowledge systems. A focus upon the rural, and rural knowledges, in curricular-spatial justice, then, incorporates epistemic justice.

The circle of epistemological justice incorporates the entire edifice of modern academic and social systems. It includes the social construction of the rural and the nature of the research object, the methodological orientation to valuing the rural and a resultant rural standpoint, and the methods of investigation. That is, it includes the entire system of developing and validating knowledge.

Consequently, it reinforces itself through its (non) inclusion in the school curriculum and in approaches to social justice aimed at enhancing students' achievement in this curriculum.

As has been shown in this chapter theoretically, and through the example of CAP, traditional approaches to social justice that rely on identifying groups that are performing below average and then distributing resources to lift their achievement, ignores the nature of the system producing the initial disadvantage and assumes an accepted norm. Such approaches have not valued the rural in its own right, nor have they valued the ways of being and knowing that are inherent to it. Instead, the rural has been constructed as outside, and consequently deviant and/or backward. To overcome this deficit, the rural has had to take up the valued ways of knowing that are powerful in the system, and which define performance. Such an approach only reinforces the metropolitan-cosmopolitan hegemony and its dominance over the rural. This is, I suggest, a form of epistemic injustice that is inherent in the entire system. To counter this, I have suggested the notion of curricular-spatial justice that questions the assumptions of social justice and the very nature of the knowledge of the curriculum.

### **3.5: Conclusion**

This chapter has concluded the introductory section of the study, and introduced the philosophies of social justice that inform both this study and its conclusions. The chapter has outlined the main philosophies of social justice

informing education and examined them from the perspective of a rural standpoint. In accordance with my own history and position in the field of rural education, I have grounded the discussion here in relation to the main equity program related to rural schooling in Australia – CAP. In doing so, I have been able to critique the dominant distributive approaches informing much equity policy related to education in Australia. The chapter has also outlined alternatives to these approaches to arrive at the construction of curricular-spatial justice that will inform my analysis and discussion in the remaining chapters. Notably, this construction of curricular-spatial justice highlights the issue of epistemic justice as it relates to the rural, and the knowledges embedded therein.



## **Section II: Studies.**



## Chapter Four

### Revisiting the Schoolhouse

This chapter begins the sequence of ‘data chapters’ that comprise section II of this dissertation. It builds upon, employs, and accounts for aspects of the methodology described in Chapter Two and the social justice orientation described in Chapter Three. It is at once an application of these approaches and an account of their development through a rereading of my 2005 report ‘Staffing an Empty Schoolhouse: Attracting and Retaining Teachers in Rural and Remote Communities’ (Roberts, 2005)<sup>20</sup> and a reanalysis of the data<sup>21</sup> upon which it was based. Working from the notion of reflexivity advanced by Bourdieu, I proceed by accounting for how I came to undertake the ‘schoolhouse’ study, my motivations and ideological positions at the time, and then how its conduct began to change my perspective. I then demonstrate the influence of this changed perspective by reanalyzing the data that the report was based upon from the perspective of a rural standpoint and the ideas of professionalism and place that emerged in the initial report as important, albeit somewhat overlooked, themes. As such my purpose is threefold; firstly, to reach new interpretations of the data now available because of my increased awareness of the issues and use of more sophisticated data analysis tools; secondly, to demonstrate the efficacy of revisiting previous studies; and finally, the value of using a rural standpoint.

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<sup>20</sup> This report can be viewed in full at:  
[https://www.academia.edu/3787160/Staffing\\_an\\_empty\\_schoolhouse\\_attracting\\_and\\_retaining\\_teachers\\_in\\_rural\\_remote\\_and\\_isolated\\_communities\\_full\\_reference\\_and\\_data\\_version](https://www.academia.edu/3787160/Staffing_an_empty_schoolhouse_attracting_and_retaining_teachers_in_rural_remote_and_isolated_communities_full_reference_and_data_version)

<sup>21</sup> The policy analysis and unstructured interviews with departmental staffing officials and teacher union officials are not revisited here. This is because policy has evolved since the initial publication and officials and their opinions would have inevitably changed with new policy and governments.

## 4.1: Rereading

Revisiting previous studies was an approach often practised by Bourdieu, particularly in relation to his early work on Algeria and Béarn (Grenfell, 2012; Wacquant, 2004; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu extensively used statistics and ethnographies in his work, so while his revisiting occasionally involving the physical revisiting of sites in order to update his ethnographic understanding, it predominantly involved bringing new principles, methods and insights gained over subsequent experience to the data and interpretations developed in those earlier works. These would then be used to develop and correct empirical and methodological points as a means of developing his research and sociological approach, as well as an exercise in reflexivity (Wacquant, 2004). As Wacquant (2004, p.399) describes it, by:

(re)producing the same object according to a more condensed and general set of principles each time, he [Bourdieu] gives the reader an exceptional window into the fruition of his mode of thinking: a chance to chart the emergence and the effects of the deployment of his distinctive conceptual apparatus; a concrete backdrop against which to differentiate the ‘hard core’ of his research program from its ‘protective belt’.

It is in this spirit that I revisit the influences on my earlier work, here, and reanalyse the data upon which it was based. While I did physically revisit a number of the places from my formative teaching years in the process of this research, the reanalysis is primarily related to the survey data. Just as Bourdieu was influenced by his experiences in his home region of Béarn and his work in Algeria, with much of his research related to personal experience (Deer, 2012), my years working in rural, remote and isolated schools have strongly influenced my own inquiry. Thus, as Bourdieu would turn the gaze upon himself (Wacquant, 1992), through this work I am turning the gaze upon myself. I do this to uncover the influences upon my formation as a (rural) researcher.

Equally, however, the Schoolhouse report is useful as another source of evidence to illustrate how the rural is constructed in education and social justice. The aim here is to move beyond a simple recognition that ideology,

position, and personal identity influence the research, to instead uncover *how* they influenced the research. This is similar to Riessman's (2015) rethinking of her work<sup>22</sup> to reveal her own learnings on reflexivity and the influence of personal narrative on the process and product of research. Here I outline how my work demonstrates the ways in which my thinking was acted upon by the dominant ideologies I was exposed to at the time, my position, and how subsequent learning and insight enables a reinterpretation of the same material. Central to this rereading is the notion of a rural standpoint: taken up epistemologically, it decentres the original report and provides the reorientation for this analysis.

The exercise of revisiting the Schoolhouse report has extended over some time. Initially begun as a statistical reanalysis of the data from the initial report to further explore the identified themes of 'professionalism' and 'rural difference' (Roberts, 2010), the reanalysis led to a rethinking of the nature and purpose of rural educational research and related epistemological issues. As a result I have needed to take my reanalysis further and deeper, inevitably including attention to the position of the researcher. An outcome at this stage is the perspective on rural standpoint and the accompanying notion of strategic eclecticism. When applied to the original research they begin to show the influence of the hidden factor of place, and, as I argue here, consequently challenge the dominant redistributive social justice approaches for staffing these schools, that have influenced approaches to equity in rural education.

#### **4.2: The researcher in the research**

Reanalysis of my 2005 report from the rural standpoint described in section 2.4 compels me to suggest that I was guilty of enacting the very symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) on the rural that I now criticize. I was (as I outline below) at the time using the rural as a point of difference, rather than as generative of meaning (Roberts & Green, 2013), and using the exoticism of

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<sup>22</sup> I recognize that the work in this particular example is narrative inquiry.

rural difference as convenient leverage for promoting my own ambitions<sup>23</sup>.

That said, I will now firstly introduce my own background as relevant to the development of my understanding of a rural standpoint. It is this development that allows me to begin to use reflexivity and the methodological critiques that led to my methodological commitment to strategic eclecticism. In the terms used by Sher & Sher (1994), I use the concept of a rural standpoint to approach this research from a position that rural people and communities really matter.

#### **4.2.1: Positioning Myself in the Research**

Getting away from the implied biographical authority to conduct rural research (Howley & Howley, 2014), my childhood in the iconic beachside suburb of Bondi, in Sydney, Australia is about as urban as it gets. Trained as a history teacher, and perhaps influenced by my specialisation in Russian revolutionary history and Marxist history I began my career in schools generally regarded as ‘remote’ and ‘hard-to-staff’. After several transient positions I was eventually appointed into a permanent position in the semi-arid marginal farmlands of North Western New South Wales (NSW), Australia. The school where I spent the next four and half years is universally regarded as remote and isolated in the Australian context, with the nearest town (population 2, 200) an hour away, and the nearest regional centre (population 35, 000) about four hours away. This is not as dramatic a shift from my roots as it may initially seem. My mother’s side of the family had a settler rural heritage that was central to their identity, while my father was a Sydney born-and-raised agricultural scientist. Thus, the rural loomed large within the family mythology as a connected, though always for me, imagined, other (Soja, 1996).

It was the initial position in that remote western NSW school that was formative for my subsequent work in rural education and my current academic work. Although it was one of many regarded as hard to staff, with high staff turnover rates, for some reason I immediately felt at home there. As it

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<sup>23</sup> It might be observed that perhaps I still am, given the use of this work to achieve a higher credential. At the same time, since I was a committed unionist at the time, I do not want to undervalue my political commitment as it was then, either.

transpired, many teachers came and went, while a few of us stayed on, dwelling within this community, while still others merely inhabited it during the school term. Watching this passage of transience, physically and mentally, attuned me to the qualitatively different engagement with the community of a number of my peers. There was the usual difficulty in attracting and retaining staff (Roberts, 2005), but also, the quality of the engagement of those who did remain was often deeply concerning, especially when one considered what this meant for the students. I came to see that staffing these schools was a constituent factor in the quality of teaching the students received. It seemed that the disproportionate effort of the students to get to school was not always matched by what they received when they got there. Staffing shortages, mostly teachers in their first appointment (or first leadership appointment), limited access to professional development for staff, and some staff who would clearly rather not be there, seemed like a fundamental injustice (Roberts, 2005). To be fair, many of these teachers were learning to live and teach in a social environment vastly different from where they had lived their lives till that point (McConaghy, 2005). However, that students' futures were involved quickly removes any relativistic justification.

Stirring the anger of injustice within me further was the structural disadvantage the students in my community experienced. This ranged across disadvantages to their study and leisure from the time they needed to travel to reach their nearest school each day (especially in the wet, when 'the short route' was impassable, adding another 50 minutes to the journey), to being senior students studying for competitive exams by candlelight after helping on the farm and after the generator was turned off each night. These students were battling an unjust system. Standing up to what I saw as inequality and highlighting the associated issues and challenges led me on a path of activism, punctuated by positions within the State's teachers' union. This afforded some important opportunities, such as the grant for the research project (Roberts, 2005) that is reanalysed later in this chapter. It also brought representative positions within the curriculum authority, equity funding schemes, and the teacher registration authority. However, these experiences ultimately led me away from activism

and into the standpoint from which I undertake this study. Upon reflection, I was developing a rural standpoint that was in conflict with the dominant discourse of the time. Reflexively speaking, however, arriving at this standpoint involves embracing my experience.

#### **4.2.2: Epistemic Reflexivity**

Central to my engagement with the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu has been the notion of ‘epistemic reflexivity’. Characteristic in Bourdieu’s work is a need to constantly examine himself as part of his research (Wacquant, 1992); however as Wacquant (1992, p.46) indicates, this is not about “encouraging narcissism” but instead:

epistemic reflexivity invites intellectuals to recognise and to work to neutralise the specific determinisms to which their innermost thoughts are subjected and it informs a conception of the craft of research designed to strengthen its epistemological moorings (p. 46).

Thus, the notion of epistemic reflexivity engaged with in this dissertation, drawing upon Bourdieu, is aimed at minimising my own unconscious bias towards the object of my inquiry – in this instance rural education. That is, the approach aims to get away from the three biases Bourdieu discussed: first, the commonly-recognised bias of the researcher’s own social origins (e.g. class, ethnicity, gender etc.); second, the position of the researcher in the academic field; third, the tendency to construct problems as detached intellectual issues, rather than problems to be practically solved. To this end it is important that this chapter, and indeed the approach of a rural standpoint, recognises that knowledge is always interwoven with the knower’s positioned subjectivity. As can be seen in this chapter, the work on the initial report that led to my taking up a research position in the academic field was very much the product of my involvement, and my motivations, as a teacher in rural schools.

Wacquant (1992, p.37) outlines three distinctive features of Bourdieu’s approach to reflexivity:

First, its primary target is not the individual analyst but the *social and intellectual unconscious* embedded in analytic tools and

operations; second, it must be a *collective enterprise* rather than the burden of the lone academic; and, third, it seeks not to assault but to *buttress the epistemological security of sociology* (original emphasis).

This chapter, and indeed this dissertation, engages with the issue of the implicit bias of education policy and practice towards the metropolitan-cosmopolitan world. In so doing it asks all rural researchers to engage with their work from a rural standpoint in order to value rural meanings. Indeed I set out here to uncover the “social and intellectual unconscious” (Wacquant, 1992, p.37), that has constructed my self, and my work.

Epistemic reflexivity, then, as used here, has enabled me to work with the recognition that knowledge is always produced from a *situated* research position. For this study, and indeed rural research in general, I/we need to be clear in our focus that our work, and the knowledges we engage with on an everyday basis, largely emanate from the global metropole, and bestow on us an advantaged position in that metropole. Significantly, that work has not necessarily served the interests of the rural communities we study, and the knowledges we engage with.

#### **4.2.3: Developing a standpoint through Research**

As noted above, part of the activism I referred to earlier included obtaining a Study Grant from the New South Wales Teachers Federation to research the staffing of rural, remote and isolated schools in Australia. These grants are aimed at allowing the recipient to travel and research a topic of importance to the Union in order to assist in the development of union policy. Rather than travel overseas, where the issues seemed ubiquitous and equally intractable in sparsely populated areas, I chose to fill what I saw as a policy gap in our understanding here in Australia. There seemed to be a lot of hearsay and assumption in relation to these matters that was largely unhelpful in coming to clear, definite and evidence-based policy. For example, at the time, the then-recent Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Report (HREOC, 2000) into rural and remote education was highlighting the staffing of these

schools as a significant, and perhaps the most important, factor in raising the educational achievement of rural and remote students. In doing so, it suggested the expansion of ‘incentives’ to attract and retain teachers, and better prepare them. Just what this might mean practically, however, was left unexplored and unelaborated, suggesting an assumption that this was a purely instrumental solution.

In the Report, ‘Staffing an Empty Schoolhouse: Attracting and Retaining Teachers in Rural, Remote and Isolated Communities’ (Roberts, 2005), I set out to investigate the intractable problem of the attraction and retention of staff in rural schools and propose new approaches to overcoming it. Not having any formal research training, I decided to take an evaluative approach and look at the experiences and insights of people working in the various jurisdictional staffing directorates, and also to examine the different approaches to staffing these schools around Australia and their effectiveness. In addition, I sought to directly survey teachers in these schools about their experiences and perspectives on what would work to help solve the problem. Consequently the Report comprised tables and descriptive statistics from a survey, comments from survey participants, union officials and education department officials, a policy analysis, and a basic, though somewhat limited, literature review.

Notably both personal-professional interests and those of the funder weighed into decisions of method and, equally importantly, presentation. A few assumptions come into relief here. The first is a view about ‘evidence-based’ policy. I had indeed come to a position that we needed evidence in order to make decisions about the Union’s policy positions, as well as to mount a convincing case to the media and government. Thus, the objective of achieving change was at the forefront of my decisions. Secondly, I consciously intended throughout to position myself as ‘expert’ on these matters, and to carve out an important political niche. While I like to hope that this position-taking was motivated by a genuine concern, and that I respected the values and experiences of rural teachers, I understand that any positioning as a political activist/researcher and representing the struggles of marginalized groups raises particular ethical concerns (Gristy, 2014). For instance, I arguably had more to

gain through the research, as I perhaps do now, and I risked confirming the disadvantaged position of the very places I am investigating (Gristy, 2014).

Looking back from the present time, though, it is likely that the standpoint from which I produced the Report had more to do with traditional notions of class and marginalisation than with rurality. However the inclusion of the two areas of Professionalism and Rural Difference (that I downplayed at the time because they conflicted with my unionist orientation and industrial motivation) signal a subtle shift I was undertaking<sup>24</sup>, largely influenced by my experience in rural schools and through the course of the research project. I came to understand, and have since developed the view further, that the issues impacting on rural students are at the intersection of the traditionally separate areas of policy and curriculum (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). I will examine related issues of policy in Chapter Six and curriculum in Chapter Seven.

At issue was more than just a matter of getting a teacher into each classroom: these teachers needed to be appropriate. I do not mean here the recent obsession with a standardised form of quality. Instead, I mean someone who could relate to the students and, through that relationship, make what was being taught meaningful to students. That some teachers only lived in the community for as little time as possible, and didn't mix in the community, meant that they didn't understand the students' lives or recognize the 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) they brought to school. Instead, these teachers persisted with attempting to transmit a curriculum in terms meaningful to *them* based on their metropolitan mindsets. This resulted all too often in student disengagement, their own diminishing professional satisfaction, and ultimately, regular staff turnover (see Roberts, 2013). A number of these issues emerged as researchable questions for me from this insight, and are explored in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

Overall in the 2005 Report there existed a blurring between the professional and industrial: with the idea of 'professionalism' leaning more towards an accountability to students, rather than focusing on general work practices.

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<sup>24</sup> Also, conceivably a point of distinction. It would position me at the forefront of a new form of professional unionism.

Importantly, that again references the idea of standpoint. Looking at the issue from the position of the rural necessitated recognising and acknowledging the difficult reality, for a unionist, that there was more at issue than ensuring just working conditions. Ultimately, however, the report emphasized the industrial over the professional.

My re-examination of the evidence for the Schoolhouse report, using more sophisticated statistical approaches and qualitative methods, and now more informed by research, indicates that teachers in rural and remote schools need to be able to understand place more than, I suggest, many now do, and that this is a fundamental issue of teacher professionalism.

#### **4.2.4: Using a rural standpoint**

As discussed in Chapter Two, a standpoint in research is more than an intellectual position. It embodies an epistemological dimension and predisposes an approach to research. The method used in the Report matched the intent, and this intent structured the organisation of its arguments and conclusions. It was essentially what I would now call ‘mixed-method’. This is particularly the case in that it exhibits the failing of much of what is termed ‘mixed method’ as the components were conducted independently and brought together to illustrate the main arguments that arose. The Schoolhouse report was essentially the sequential use of quantitative (often a mix of surveys and statistics) and qualitative (often interviews or survey comments) methods to investigate the same issue (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), or their simultaneous use without really influencing each component (Denzin, 2010). However, when deployed strategically, in an integrative fashion, a mixed-method approach can assist the researcher obtain a fuller and more informed picture of the issue being investigated (Torrance, 2012). However such approaches are still often limited by a predilection to put method over subject (Denzin, 2010). Such an emphasis can result in the problem remaining obscured by concerns about the independent validity of each method used.

This is where a standpoint becomes important. The Schoolhouse report was primarily concerned with impact, foregrounding traditional notions of disadvantage. This emphasis in turn obscured what I now see as the ‘real’ problem (i.e. a lack of recognition, and understanding, of rurality) and limited its effectiveness in representing and acting in the interests of rural students and communities. Instead, I suggest now that focusing on the problem to be investigated (i.e. the representation of the rural), rather than the method of investigation, should be a central tenet of rural educational research (Roberts & Green, 2013). Such an approach forms part of the philosophical foundation that should inform a mixed-method approach (Madsen & Adriansen, 2004), resulting in different paradigms informing and influencing each other, driven by the research problem. By limiting my focus to staffing policy in the initial report, and by only applying the most basic frequency statistical calculations, I missed an opportunity to deeply interrogate the influences on teachers’ motivations to work, and stay, in rural schools: something I am seeking to redress in this chapter.

### **4.3: The Initial Report**

This section provides background for the reanalysis by presenting examples of the way the data was presented and used in the initial report<sup>25</sup>. It also gives a background to the conclusions and recommendations in order to illustrate how a rural standpoint and improved methods lead to new insights.

From the point of view of exposure, or establishing a reputation, as was intended, the report was very successful. It has 86 Google scholar citations (as at 24 June 2016), numerous citations in government reports and briefings, and has seen me consulted by departments in all states and territories in Australia (excluding the ACT, which is a city-state). While perhaps not directly

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<sup>25</sup> Throughout this section I reference the 2005 ‘full reference version’. The formal version, technically published in 2004, did not contain all the data, references or the section that briefly presented the method and respondent details. The 2005 version contains all references and data appendices.

attributable to the report, a number of its recommendations are now reflected in new policies throughout the state of its origin and nationally.

The data was presented in simple frequency analysis like this example of the ‘perception of professional isolation’ below in Figure 4.1. The discussion around this, and the rest of the data, was informed by a reading of the literature with the frequency data simply used in relation to it.

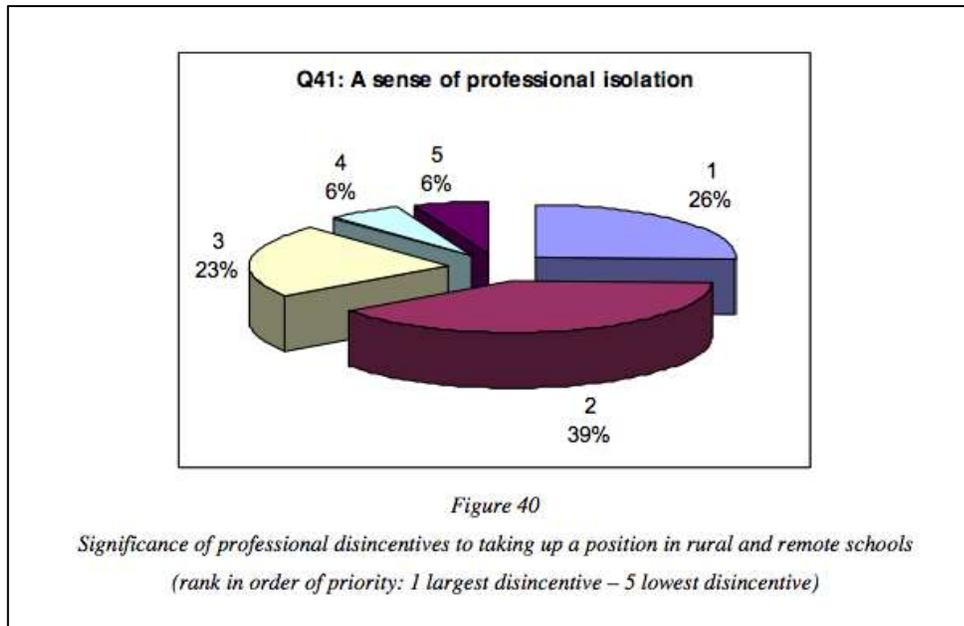


Figure 4.1: Example figure from original report (Roberts, 2005, p.150).

From the report, four broad directions for improving the attraction and retention of teachers in rural and remote areas were identified. These directions indicated a model of rural staffing that encourages professionalism, recognises rural difference, compensates for economic loss, and limits social isolation. The proposed model of rural staffing was deliberately not divided into attraction and retention, as I argued they should be seen as interlinked concepts (Roberts, 2005). Thus the conditions and professional value of rural teaching should be such that teachers who are attracted are also those that would be retained.

These four elements were then linked to specific recommendations that could be pursued in policy by the funder. The recommendations were presented as “a model of rural staffing that encourages professionalism, recognises rural difference, compensates for economic loss and limits social isolation” (Roberts,

2005; Roberts, 2007). There was a deliberate semantic ordering in this presentation order to put professionalism before compensation. On reflection, this indicates the beginning movement and orientation to a type of unionism that was not dominant at the time. Thus there were two political decisions influencing this; Firstly, the approach to professionally oriented unions advocated by ‘Rethinking Schools’ (Peterson & Charney, 1999) and the ‘Activist Professional’ (Sachs, 2003) that I was influenced by, and secondly, the looming move towards teacher registration and changed politics this would necessitate<sup>26</sup>.

#### **4.4: Re-Visiting the Data**

In this section I return to the data using the methodology outlined in Chapter Two – specifically the approach of strategic eclecticism informed by a rural standpoint. The focus of the reanalysis reported here is in relation to the theme of this dissertation, understanding rural place, and not on specific approaches related to attracting and retaining staff. Technically speaking, the reanalysis has involved the manual coding of comments, a Leximancer analysis of the comments, and multivariate statistical techniques to re-analyse the statistical survey data. In ten years, not a lot may have changed in relation to the situation of rural schools, students and their teachers. However, ten years on, a reanalysis of the data employing new theoretical frames may provide another way of viewing the initial report.

Structurally the survey was very simple, with a number of likert type questions (1-5), ranking questions, open text responses and tick box responses for respondent profile information. There was no theoretically driven methodological input into this design; instead, ease of use and the ability to present ‘compelling’ (later described as frequency) statistics were the main influences on the design. Similarly the data was not analysed in any detailed or theoretical manner – it was simply the presentation of frequencies. There was

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<sup>26</sup> As it transpired, I ended up as a representative of public school teachers on the initial council of the NSW Institute of Teachers, the state’s new teacher registration body, as an endorsed candidate of the funder.

no exploration of who responded or the relationships between respondent category and results.

Not all questions were in a format suitable for multivariate reanalysis, though all could be used in cross tabulation calculations. Consequently it is the likert-like questions that make up the bulk of the statistical reanalysis through the application of the multivariate techniques of factor analysis and correlations. However, other questions were able to be explored through cross-tabulation and revisited from a rural standpoint. The interviews and policy analysis used in the initial report have not been re-visited. This is because the interviews were not voice-recorded and all notes have since been destroyed, and a policy reanalysis is considered a separate and specific task. Finally, an advantage of the reanalysis is the ability to incorporate a further 218 responses that were logged after the initial 265 were downloaded for the preparation of the initial report, taking the total to 483 (n=483). While increasing the statistical validity of the findings these additional responses have not significantly changed any of the findings: the trends in responses have remained largely stable.

#### **4.4.1 Respondents**

The data is (was) biased to NSW respondents (71%) and thus its applicability interstate may be questionable. I would contend, however, and the report illustrated, that the issues affecting rural, regional and remote schools and the policy contexts are roughly similar across the nation. There are however significant differences in terms of 'state cultures' in relation to curriculum and school autonomy (Collins & Vickers, 1999; Yates, Collins & O'Connor, 2011) in Australia. Consequently, issues related to professionalism and pedagogy need to be interpreted in the context of the centralized and performative culture of NSW, as will be established in Chapters Five through Seven.

A large numbers of teachers in executive (including principal) positions (42%), and with significant experience in RRS (42% had been teaching in rural, regional and remote schools for over 10 years, 59% over six years), responded to the survey. Furthermore, 32% said they planned to be teaching in rural areas

for another 10 years, and 46% at least another six years. Finally, 48% were over 40 years of age, and 32% over 50, a response profile that doesn't seem to match the generally younger and inexperienced staff profile of rural and remote schools (HREOC, 2000; Green, 2008). These demographics are important as they indicate that the respondents have an interest in school leadership and demonstrate a commitment to rural schools. This parallels Boylan & McSwan's (1998) study of long-staying rural teachers and is in direct conflict with much of the literature that focuses on young staff and high staff turnover: it is also at odds with my personal experience. While this may inevitably bias the results in favour of this relatively abnormal profile, it also raises important questions about how these teachers see their rural places and their rural schools so positively. It brings their extensive, and assumedly deep personal experience, to the issue of what impacts on attracting and retaining staff in these schools – potentially, and perhaps ironically, making the results more useful than an anticipated younger respondent profile may have been. Put another way, these respondents may understand the influence of place on their practice and may have responded in order to have that recognized. This is similar to the later TERRAnova project, which looked at case studies of rural schools that had long-staying staff and achieved better than anticipated educational outcomes (Reid et al., 2012).

#### **4.4.2 A hidden professionalism.**

In the initial report, the frequency statistics were looked at in isolation or as groups of similar questions. They were not looked at for patterns or contradictions across different sections of the survey. Such a comparison across sections was undertaken as an initial step in this reanalysis. A number of new insights can be obtained; specifically, related to what I am calling a place-informed professionalism that recognizes the rural as a distinct professional context requiring particular skills.

In relation to the issue of transfer – a guaranteed move to a new school in another more 'preferable' location, that is the main 'incentive' to attract

teachers to RRS – there was a strong inclination among participants to stay or at least not return to the city. In a result supported by the R(T)EP project (Green, 2008), many staff in rural and remote schools don't actually transfer back to the city, instead preferring some form of non-metropolitan future, albeit a larger centre or coastal district. While it is possible that this finding may be influenced by the age profile and pending retirement of the respondents, it illustrates that rural teaching *is* an attractive option to many respondents. This raises further questions about the role of lifestyle (Boylan, 2010) and, for the purposes here, if lifestyle is a reaction to a perceived deficiency in metropolitan culture.

More respondents indicated an intention to apply for promotions positions in rural and remote schools than metropolitan schools. This may imply a notion of rural schools as perhaps a different career requiring a different skill set from metropolitan schools, or it may be an observation about the perceived ease of promotion in rural and remote schools<sup>27</sup> (HREOC, 2000; Graham, 2006).

Taken together, the results to questions relating to pre-service teacher education, professional experience and induction to life in rural and remote communities as provisions to attract teachers imply that respondents recognize that the rural school context is 'different' and needs differential preparation or understanding. Supporting this, results to questions in relation to the social disincentives of distance from a major centre, isolation from family and friends and limited access to cultural activities, highlight the importance of these social issues in teachers' decision-making. In so doing, they also illustrate the role of social constructions of the rural as different from, and deficient in relation to, the metropolitan. Thus an understanding of place becomes important.

Turning to professional issues, there was strong support for reducing beginning teacher workload and mentoring. In addition to the general push to support beginning teachers, this can also be suggested as supporting the need to re-skill for these areas or recognition that they are different as educational contexts.

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<sup>27</sup> 'Fast tracking' promotion is used by the NSW department as an incentivising aspect of attracting staff, see <http://www.dec.nsw.gov.au/about-us/careers-centre/school-careers/teaching/our-programs-and-initiatives/teach-rural-scholarships> (accessed 30 Jan, 2014)

Such professional issues suggest that teaching needs to foreground the local and teachers need to be prepared for differences in local conditions. The results in relation to the issue of professional isolation reinforce the idea that working in rural schools can be professionally isolating, and that there is a need to consider ways to enable teachers to connect with colleagues.

As the analysis of the survey comments (below) will show, about 15% of the survey comments can be categorized as being related to professional concerns. Together, these trends suggest that a strong sense of professionalism and commitment exists but is undermined by social issues such as isolation. Thus, when separated from social disincentives and geography, professional issues get very strong responses. In relation to the survey comments (below), it becomes apparent that once economic factors (payments, transfer, leave) are isolated, professional issues came through as the next most significant issues, even before personal issues (isolation, personal loneliness). This trend is further reinforced in the survey data reanalysis (below) when the strength of responses is looked at, rather than the frequency of responses alone.

#### **4.4.3: Statistical reanalysis**

The original survey was not designed or piloted in the way usually required of a formal survey. Consequently only three aspects of the survey lend themselves to greater statistical analysis: specifically, the sections on professional and social disincentives and views on recruiting teachers. Illustrating the lack of research acumen in the design of the initial study, the five point Likert-type scale of one question could be interpreted as the reverse of the other two. Consequently the data was re-coded for consistency of analysis. Furthermore, I would suggest in hindsight that future analysis use a seven point Likert-type scale, as such scales increase reliability and validity and tend to be preferred by users (Preston & Colman, 2000).

The main analyses used here are rotated factor analysis, and correlation coefficients. The factor analysis was created using a varimax rotation (Sass & Schmitt, 2010), while the correlation coefficients use a Pearson's two-tailed

approach (Field, 2009). As the original survey was not designed to test the causality between factors I reiterate that the correlations reported on do not imply causality, instead they indicate relationships, suggest their strength and directions in order to suggest areas of further research. This is due to the likelihood that there may exist an invisible ‘third variable’ that has not been tested in the study that is in fact influencing the results. In this work I am hypothesizing, based on a number of correlations and other research, that the ‘third variable’ that may be hidden yet influential is that of ‘place’.

A Pearson’s correlation coefficient is considered to show a small effect at  $r=+/- 0.1$ , a medium effect at  $r=+/- 0.3$  and a large effect at  $r=+/- 0.5$  (Field, 2009). Cohen et al. (2007) suggest that in educational research correlations from 0.20 – 0.35 show a slight relationship even though they may be statistically significant, but are useful in exploratory relationship research such as this study; correlations of 0.35-0.65 are more significant with a threshold of approximately 0.40 for crude, yet useful, group predictions to be made; Correlations in the range of 0.65 – 0.85 enable reasonably confident group predictions to be made. In this work I regard anything over  $r=+/- .35$  as significant enough to warrant consideration as they suggest relationship between factors that when taken together, suggest an influence of place and suggest avenues for future study.

#### **4.4.3.1: Inferential Analysis**

Table 4.1 presents selected significant results from the inferential analysis. The selection is not exhaustive, but has been chosen due to their significance and that they say something about knowing ‘place’. Significance has been determined based on the  $r$  value, and  $p$  value [a value representing statistical significance (Field, 2009)], where  $p<.005$  being regarded as a threshold for some significance and  $p<.001$  being considered more ‘significant’.

Rather than providing a comprehensive report, the intent of table 4.1 is to illustrate how approaching the data with a rural standpoint and the perspective of place, as well as employing better statistical analysis, produces new insights.

Indeed table 4.1 suggests that respondents regard rural teaching as a distinct form of professional practice. Exactly how is unclear, but then it was not part of the initial study. I suggest the hypothesis that knowing rural place, perceptions of the rural, and perspectives towards a distinct form of professionalism are what is being observed. For example, the connection between ‘professional isolation’, the ‘lack of casual relief’ for leave or professional development, and then the connection between the availability of, and access to, professional development and a number of professional disincentives, imply a strong desire for further development. I suggest this can be read as a perception about a general lack of preparation to teach in the rural context and/or a comfort with their existing practice. The strong relationships between pre-service preparation, induction, mentoring, and workloads (#21-28) reinforce this view.

Clearly, the perennial social disincentives of isolation, distance and lack of access to services (HREOC, 2000) are strongly noted, and perhaps unsurprisingly associated with each other (#13-20). This however reveals the dominance of metropolitan lifestyles and that issues of a lack of proximity to it are constructed as deficits. Notably however there is also a different strength of response to these issues depending on one’s time spent living in rural and remote areas, suggesting a social dimension to the scale (Nespor, 2004) of isolation as an issue.

Ref #	Correlated questions - Professional Disincentives:	r =	p =	n =
1	Lack of professional development opportunities – Cost of accessing courses	.66	.000	466
2	A sense of Professional Isolation – Availability of casual relief for leave	.45	.000	478
3	A sense of Professional Isolation - Availability of casual relief for professional development	.35	.000	484
4	A sense of Professional Isolation - Lack of professional development opportunities	.39	.000	472
5	A sense of Professional Isolation - Teaching outside of subject area	.38	.000	484
6	A sense of Professional Isolation - Limited support by consultants	.34	.000	478
7	Availability of casual relief for professional development – Cost of accessing courses	.46	.000	478
8	Availability of casual relief for leave – Lack of Professional development opportunities	.36	.000	466
9	Limited access to support staff – Cost of accessing courses	.38	.000	474
10	Lack of professional development opportunities – Limited access to resources	.44	.000	466
11	Cost of accessing courses - Limited access to resources	.48	.000	472
12	Limited support by consultants - Limited access to resources	.50	.000	472
	<b>Social Disincentives:</b>			
13	Distance from major centre – Isolation from family & friends	.45	.000	480
14	Distance from major centre - Access to services	.41	.000	480
15	Limited access to cultural activities – Unreliable technology	.40	.000	478
16	Negative publicity of living in rural, remote & isolated communities – Cultural challenges	.41	.000	472
17	Negative publicity of living in rural, remote & isolated communities – Cost of living	.38	.000	484
18	Raising children in rural, remote & isolated communities – Cost of living	.36	.000	484
19	Access to fresh produce – Cost of living	.37	.000	484
20	Unreliable technology – Cost of living	.36	.000	484
	<b>View on Recruitment:</b>			
21	Specific pre-service teacher-education on teaching in rural, remote & isolated communities – Professional experience in rural, remote & isolated communities	.51	.000	482
22	specific pre-service teacher- education on teaching in rural, remote & isolated communities - Induction programs about living & working in rural, remote & isolated communities	.39	.000	474
23	Specific pre-service teacher-education on teaching in rural, remote & isolated communities - Liaison/referral for community services	.38	.000	474
24	Professional experience in rural, remote & isolated communities – Mentoring of beginning teachers	.43	.000	478
25	Induction programs about living & working in rural, remote & isolated communities – Mentoring of beginning teachers	.64	.000	474
26	Induction programs about living & working in rural, remote & isolated communities - Subsidized or free housing	.45	.000	470
27	Mentoring of beginning teachers - Subsidized or free housing	.57	.000	474
28	Subsidized or free housing – Reduced HECS <sup>28</sup>	.42	.000	474
	<b>Other:</b>			
29	Years teaching in rural, remote & isolated communities - Rural, remote & isolated school promotion aspiration	.40	.000	480
30	Years teaching rural, remote & isolated communities - Metropolitan promotion aspiration	-.57	.000	482
31	More accessible professional development - Priority transfer to an area of choice	.48	.000	482

Table 4.1: Inferential analysis.

<sup>28</sup> The Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) was a scheme to allow students to repay university tuition fees after they begin earning above a threshold amount.

Reinforcing the issue of ‘rural difference’ and the existence of cultural differences that influence pedagogy, curriculum, aspiration, and potentially result in a cultural mis-match between teachers and community is the significant association between negative publicity about cultural challenges associated with living in rural, remote and isolated communities (#16:  $r = .41$   $p = .000$ ). Clearly teachers are indicating here that ‘cultural difference’ is a significant social disincentive to working in rural, remote and isolated communities. As a disincentive, such cultural difference is evidently that rural culture is seen in deficit to (presumably) metropolitan culture. Rather than working with culture as a component of place, respondents here are situating it as a feature of place to change. Within this is also, I suggest, an unspoken issue of race relations.

Finally, reinforcing the idea of rural teaching being a distinct career preference is the difference between #29 and #30. In #29 there is a strong association between the years taught in rural, remote and isolated schools and promotion aspiration in these same schools ( $r = .40$   $p = .000$ ). Responses to # 30 however show an even stronger, and indicatively negative, association between years taught in rural, remote and isolated schools and a metropolitan promotion aspiration ( $r = -.57$   $p = .000$ ). Respondents are arguably suggesting that effective teaching and leadership is a situated practice, and having taught in these communities for a period of time, they feel more confident pursuing career advancement in areas that will draw on similar skills. Equally plausible however, and perhaps interrelated, is the issue of lifestyle (Boylan, 2010). However I would argue that the analysis of the comments (below) favour the professional interpretation as a stronger influence, and that lifestyle is perhaps a secondary consideration for those interested in career advancement.

#### **4.4.3.2: Factor analysis**

Adding to the inferential analysis is a factor analysis of each of the three survey sections that were re-analysed. Factor analysis is a statistical method used to identify and group variables that have something in common. It enables the

reduction of existing variables to a smaller number of underlying factors that were previously not identified (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). As such, the factor analysis facilitates insight into the overarching issues that may be influencing responses to the initial survey.

The results of the factor analysis for each of the three survey sections I have re-analysed are reproduced in tables 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 below. In each case a principal component analysis using Varimax with Kaiser Normalization rotation was used. Each converged in more than three iterations, but was reduced to three iterations in each case to ensure strong loadings, provide consistency of three factors, and enable subsequent factor comparison (DiStefano, Zhu & Mîndril, 2009). Factor loadings range between 0 to 1, with larger numbers representing a higher relationship between the individual item and the general factor (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Variables loaded in each factor are bolded. In each case the reliability is measured by Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ), with each being regarded as acceptable reliability. Reliability of  $\alpha > .70$  is desirable, with 0.7 - 0.9 good and  $> 0.9$  excellent (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

<i>Views on Recruitment</i>	Component factor loading		
	1	2	3
• Specific pre-service teacher education on teaching in Rural Remote and Isolated communities.	.003	<b>.837</b>	.140
• Pre-service practicum experience in Rural Remote and Isolated communities.	.186	<b>.657</b>	.533
• Induction program about living & working in Rural Remote and Isolated communities.	<b>.638</b>	.433	.278
• Referral / liaison for community services	.267	<b>.684</b>	-.085
• Reduction of beginning teacher teaching load	<b>.649</b>	.331	-.092
• Mentoring of beginning teachers by experienced colleagues	<b>.801</b>	.247	.175
• Subsidised or free housing	<b>.816</b>	-.208	.259
• Reduction or fully paid HECS	.373	-.092	<b>.719</b>
• Bonded teacher training scholarships	.000	.185	<b>.797</b>

Table 4.2: Rotated Component Matrix: views on recruitment (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .798$ )

In relation to views on recruitment the three factors identified are:

1. **Transition to Life & Career.** The variables that load into this factor all appear to relate to helping new teachers find their feet. As such, learning to live in a new community, having somewhere to live, and mentoring

and a reduced workload all come together to make rural teaching an attractive proposition. It puts the responsibility on the profession to develop future rural teachers, but does so with the recognition that new teachers are experiencing other challenges at this stage in their life, such as joining communities and setting up a home.

2. **Preparation for the profession.** While on the surface seemingly related to the above factor, the variables that load here are strongly related to pre-service preparation rather than the beginning of the career. In some ways this factor suggests that preparation for rural teaching is the responsibility of ‘someone else’. This ceding of responsibility makes sense when the notion of access to services is linked here, in that referral and liaison takes the responsibility away from the individual.
3. **Mutual obligation.** The variables loaded against this factor suggest a sense of mutual obligation in that respondents indicate a preparedness to do ‘rural time’ if governments also contribute in the form of a reduction of university tuition fees<sup>29</sup> and bonded scholarships. Furthermore, that the second highest loading of pre-service professional experience also loads strongly here supports the idea that familiarity through professional experience would help make teachers ‘willing’ to do rural service. Thus the idea of service, with compensation, is strong, rather than a valuing of the rural.

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<sup>29</sup> In Australia at the time this was called the Higher Education Contribution Scheme, or HECS, a student loan where fees are paid back contingent to income.

<i>Professional Disincentives</i>	Component factor loading		
	1	2	3
• Lack of professional development opportunities	<b>.752</b>	.339	-.022
• Cost of accessing courses (including travel & accommodation)	<b>.778</b>	.341	-.160
• Availability of casual relief to attend professional development	.281	<b>.808</b>	-.122
• Teaching outside subject area	.027	.120	<b>.865</b>
• Access to resources	<b>.781</b>	-.002	.333
• Little support by consultants	.563	.056	<b>.466</b>
• A sense of professional isolation	.178	.514	<b>.475</b>
• Availability of casual relief for leave	.138	<b>.798</b>	.120
• Lack of program continuity due to high staff turnover	.081	<b>.594</b>	.320
• Limited access to support staff	<b>.382</b>	.385	.268

Table 4.3: Rotated Component Matrix: professional disincentives (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .812$ )

In relation to professional disincentives the three factors identified are:

1. **Access to Professional Development & Resources.** The variables that load against this factor all group around the issues of professional development and resources, including support staff such as teacher aides. An interpretation here may reference the earlier discussion of needing to understand teaching in rural places more than they initially do. That a number of the variables load strongly, suggests a strong sense of professionalism among respondents and a frustration at the (in)accessibility of professional learning.
2. **Casual Relief.** The variables that load against this factor all group around the problem of casual relief and associated problems. That a sense of professional isolation loads strongest here illustrates that the problem of casual relief accentuates the professional isolation. Furthermore, it would seem that high staff turnover is a frustrating professional issue related to program continuity. Though, this is perhaps something that beginning teachers may not necessarily consider – and as such, may be influenced by the seniority of respondents.

3. **Lack of expertise.** The main variables here, and a number of slightly lesser loaded variables, all point to the problems caused by teaching outside one's area of expertise, and not being able to access appropriate support staff. This in turn appears to link to accentuating professional isolation. The argument here would seem to be that by teaching outside of one's area of expertise, teachers feel unprepared and not able to acquit their professional duties, with this leading to professional dissatisfaction.

<i>Social Disincentives</i>	Component factor loading		
	1	2	3
• Distance from major centers	.031	<b>.792</b>	.133
• Isolation from family & Friends	-.101	<b>.775</b>	.018
• Limited access to services (e.g. Health)	.380	<b>.609</b>	-.049
• Limited access to cultural activities (concerts, plays, sports)	<b>.672</b>	.261	-.057
• Loss of privacy living in small town	.412	<b>.516</b>	.102
• Cost of living	<b>.558</b>	-.017	.547
• Raising children in Rural Remote and Isolated areas.	<b>.466</b>	-.071	.257
• Negative images & publicity regarding living in RR areas	.164	-.223	<b>.708</b>
• Availability & quality of housing	.186	.391	<b>.499</b>
• Cultural challenges living ATSI communities	-.029	.092	<b>.785</b>
• Employment opportunities for non-teaching spouse	.049	.242	<b>.417</b>
• Access to fresh produce	<b>.672</b>	-.029	.030
• Unreliable technology (phones, power, internet)	<b>.673</b>	.231	.162

Table 4.4: Rotated Component Matrix: Social Disincentives (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .755$ )

In relation to social disincentives, the three factors identified are:

1. **Conveniences.** The variables loaded against this factor all appear to be outcomes of the second factor of isolation. They are either social in nature, belying a preference for metropolitan lifestyles, or structurally related to proximity. The preference for metropolitan lifestyles is shown by the loading of access to cultural activities like sports, plays, concerts etc., and raising children. Structural issues such as cost of food, unreliable technology and general cost of living are caused by the costs of service provision over Australia's vast landmass. While a number of these are recognized in allowances for teachers in these schools they

clearly remain important considerations. Similarly, with the rise of social media after this initial data was collected, access to reliable technology is, and perhaps will remain, a significant consideration, as social media can work to reduce the perceived isolation from friends and family that teachers also see as a disincentive to taking up a position in a rural or remote school.

2. **Isolation.** The variables loading against this factor all point to the traditional notion of isolation as distance from a major centre, friends and family and access to services, as noted above. This factor best represents the rationale behind the ABS' ASGS definition of isolation (see Chapter One). Notably, though, limited access to services or major towns is 'normal' for rural populations, compared to those living in metropolitan areas. As such, constructing the lack of access as a negative is itself a feature of a metropolitan bias towards access. Paradoxically, included in the category of 'isolation' is the loss of privacy experienced through living in a small town. This is best explained by the idea that, in cities, teachers can live their lives separate from their work, whereas in many rural communities, lives are lived in public. Taken together, the factors of 'conveniences' and 'isolation' reflect much of what are described as the primary causes of the challenges of staffing rural, remote and isolated schools (HREOC, 2000; Roberts, 2005).
  
3. **Cultural differences.** The variables loaded against this factor reinforce the idea of a cultural difference experienced between the respondents and their rural communities. This is especially notable by the strong loading of negative images and cultural challenges living in communities with a large Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people population – itself the second highest disincentive. The former, I suggest, relates to how communities are portrayed in the media and popular culture. The latter however is as experienced by respondents and, as such, illustrates an ongoing social dislocation. Included here is

also the availability and quality of housing and spouse employment. These I suggest relate to what people are willing to accept as appropriate and as such further reveal cultural differences and different expectations of what is acceptable. Available housing and employment may well be acceptable for locals but not to teachers or their spouses.

#### **4.4.4: Reanalysis of survey comments**

The survey comments reanalyzed here were collected in the original survey but not used in any significant way in the original report. As discussed in Chapter Two, the comments were initially reanalyzed using manual researcher coding and then using the software program Leximancer. The reanalysis outlined here is more rigorous, valid and replicable than the selective use of quotes in the initial report which were selected on their ability to emphasise the pre-determined point and make an emotional impact. This shows how such ‘evidence’ can be misused, and its meaning influenced, by the researcher’s orientation and where and how such quotes are used in a report.

Manual coding remains open to researcher bias based on the perspective they bring (Charmaz, 2011). In this case I am deliberately bringing to the reanalysis a bias towards place and looking at the relationship between industrial and professional orientations. That said, bias in coding is reduced as the number of cases increases (Charmaz, 2011) such that the total of 215 individual comments throughout the survey increases the trustworthiness of the analysis. While the total comments drops to a total of 60 comments in the last ‘any other comments’ question, the percentage of industrial versus professional comments remains similar, reinforcing the robustness of the results. Furthermore, the consistency across the statistical analysis reinforces the trustworthiness of the analysis. Consistent with the approach of ‘strategic eclecticism’ and drawing on mixed-method principles the interview codes were influenced by the statistical analysis, and vice-versa. Thus while the interview analysis was conducted after the statistical analysis, both were refined and re-analysed in relation to the concepts emerging within each other. Similarly, as per the critique of much mixed-method research (Roberts & Green, 2013) outlined in

Chapter Two, these interviews excerpts are not presented to illustrate or flesh out the statistical data: they are a separate analysis that should be read *with* the statistical data, and as data itself that influenced the arguments herein.

#### **4.4.4.1: Manual coding**

Following the orientation to thematic analysis, the analysis summarized in table 4.5 started with the researchers' questions about industrial and professional orientations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These were confirmed in the analysis and are the main groupings presented in line with the philosophy of this reanalysis. Within the industrial theme, the sub categories of compensation, isolation, and conditions emerged and were confirmed in 'conversation' with the statistical analysis. In the professional theme, beginning teachers, professional development and attractiveness (including views to the rural being distinct) emerged and were confirmed in conversation with the statistical analysis. Notably, pre-service preparation did not feature strongly, and certainly not enough to warrant its own category. Cultural difference emerged in both themes but again not enough to be a distinct category, but was certainly present as an influence within the categories identified. It is, arguably, again hidden in references to 'violence' and 'safety'.

Overall the manual coding identified 84% of the comments as having a traditional industrial sentiment, with 16% having a professional sentiment. This conclusion reinforces that traditional industrial sentiments are significant but that professional concerns are still important considerations. As the survey was conducted in an industrial context, the percentage of professional comments is significant as they are deliberate and important deviations from what may be expected.

Q18: General Views on attracting & retaining teachers	
<b>Industrial</b>	<b>Professional</b>
86%	14%
‘Extra leave each year’ ‘Additional allowances’ ‘Greater financial incentives’ ‘Improve the priority transfer’	‘Definite professional Development plans’ ‘Experienced colleagues’ ‘A support network, even via email’ ‘Quality assurance of executive’
Q20: Comments on Attracting Teachers	
<b>Industrial</b>	<b>Professional</b>
79%	21%
‘Extra pay – meaningful locality allowances’ ‘reduce face-to-face’ teaching ‘you have to ask – unbelievable! Read Vinson to find out why teachers get out’ ‘scholarships, fully paid HECS’	‘strategies need to start at university to prepare teachers for different areas’ ‘develop a professional culture at the school’ ‘small class sizes or reduce face-to-face in small schools’
Q22: Comments on Retaining Teachers	
<b>Industrial</b>	<b>Professional</b>
87%	13%
‘rewards for staying like cash, leave etc’ ‘Principals incentives’ ‘all the (proposed here) require departments to seriously change how they staff schools’	‘PD in subjects you are not trained in’ ‘Mentoring or access to experienced staff’ ‘Professional support’ ‘These are short term and fluffy – make the job more attractive!’
Q45: Any other comments	
<b>Industrial</b>	<b>Professional</b>
86%	14%
‘problem of dissatisfied / violent students’ ‘safety and security is an issue’ ‘lack of job security for mobile and casual staff’ ‘A concern of not getting out or to where I want to get’	‘concern of some staff racist and prejudiced attitudes’ ‘an assumption that promotion or move to a rural school is a step backwards’ ‘greater help for first years teachers in small schools and difficult circumstances’

Table 4.5: Manual analysis of survey comments from the perspective of Industrial and professional sentiment, with excerpts.

#### 4.4.4.2: Leximancer analyses

As discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, Leximancer analyses text using a content analysis algorithm in an unsupervised fashion to provide reasonably quick and meaningful ‘analysis’ of text: this ‘analysis’ consists of a visual representation in the form of a concept map, and an associated database of connected extracts from the text. In this analysis I have used a basic setting to explore concepts and themes that emerge in the survey comments: this approach suits the grounded approach taken in this research where place is not

assumed or ascribed. Furthermore, by using this approach the subjectivity of the researcher is mitigated (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). This is distinctly different from the themed approach of the manual coding, but is used here in the spirit of ‘strategic eclecticism’ and seeing what ideas emerge. These are then interpreted through the lens of a rural standpoint and place, and tested against ideas of the industrial and professional, but the comments are not coded against these ideas.

When put into dialogue with the statistical data and the manually coded comments, this more objective computer-assisted approach works to enhance the trustworthiness of the conclusions drawn. Thus Leximancer is useful to confirm an analysis or suggest areas of further study. However, the approach is ‘computer-assisted’ as it remains the work of the human researcher to ascribe meaning to the identified themes and concepts and to account for their location, connections, significance and usefulness to the project. The Leximancer ‘dashboard’ enables the researcher to draw upon sections of text referenced for each concept and theme identified. This then enables the human researcher to interpret and build meaning from the graphic representation by reviewing the text segments that have been grouped. In the context of this research, Leximancer has been used to confirm themes previously identified and provide an initial deeper analysis than the initial report. A useful tool within Leximancer is the ability to ‘tag’ variables from the quantitative data set against the comments where the data set includes both the quantitative and qualitative entries for each respondent. In this way Leximancer allows the profile of respondents to be linked to the concepts and themes they raise.

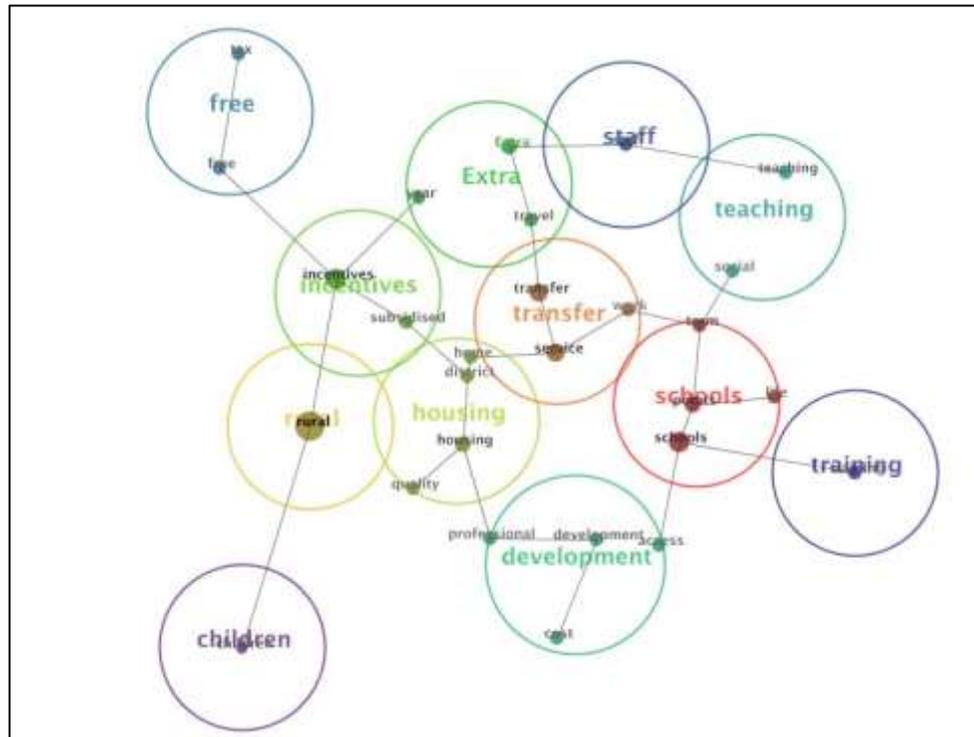


Figure 4.2: Leximancer Concept map for all survey comments

The Leximancer concept map (e.g. figure 4.2) is organised on a spatial plane with the main concepts and themes being located near the centre (Leximancer, 2011). In the display concepts are displayed by the dot, with the overarching themes delimited by a circle. Related concepts and themes are spatially organised in relation to other concepts or themes: therefore concepts and themes separated by more space are further apart than concepts or themes nearby or overlapping. The relationship between concepts is illustrated by the unbroken line. For example, in figure 4.2 the concepts of ‘service’, ‘transfer’ and ‘work’ are identified centrally and grouped in the theme of ‘transfer’. The unbroken line connects the concept of ‘service’ with ‘home’, and the related themes of ‘transfer’ and ‘housing’ overlapping. As an exercise in testing the trustworthiness of this computer-assisted approach this brief example of walking through one small aspect of figure 4.2 is instructive: that these concepts and themes are interrelated makes intuitive sense, is backed up by the statistical reanalysis and supported by the literature (HREOC, 2000; Roberts, 2005).

Leximancer also develops a separate output in the form of a table that identifies the key themes and then show how each theme is connected to that as a percentage (figure 4.3). In this example, this output identifies ‘schools’ as the primary theme in the survey comments, with the concepts of ‘schools’, ‘points’, (being transfer points) ‘life’ and ‘term’ (being school term) being identified. Notably, the theme of ‘children’ is ranked at the bottom. While ‘rural’ is ranked highly, an investigation of the text related to this theme shows that it is used as an identifier of location and not in the sense of rural meanings.

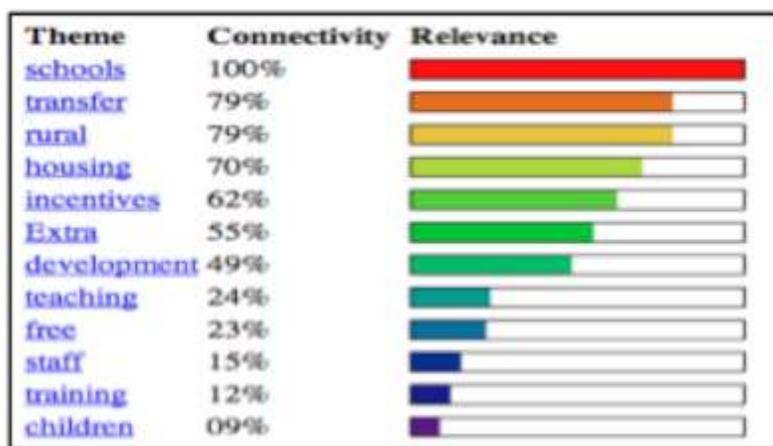


Figure 4.3: Thematic Summary for all survey comments

Putting these two outputs together, we can see that ‘schools’ dominated the survey comments. The concerns then looked at transfer ‘points’ and the period of the school term linked to ‘work’, and in turn to ‘service’ and ‘transfer’ and ‘home’. Clearly teaching in these communities was talked about as work that needed some form of compensation and only existed in the temporal space of the school term. Here service is used in terms of a ‘service’ period leading to transfer and not in the sense of mutual obligation. Notably, issues of race are absent from these concept maps. This is a significant omission, given the interrelationship of Indigenous issues within rural social space (Reid et al., 2010).

Overall, the comments show an industrial emphasis. Indeed, the pre-occupation with the industrial issues of transfer, would be expected given the nature of the survey and the question stems, which asked for views on improving staffing.

This linking of 'schools' to 'points' shows that schools are being conceived of in terms of their transfer rating and thus their relative location to 'home', assumedly the metropolitan 'centre'. Thus place is playing a role, but primarily in a deficit geographical sense and not as an affordance for teaching and learning. Indeed the theme 'teaching' includes comments about 'challenges of teaching in these schools' and the great 'social' environment of this teaching in that 'we all work together to make do' or 'teaching in these schools is a great social time as we all hang out together'. But again, given the construction of teaching as (challenging) work this social aspect comes across as being a means of surviving the school term, before assumedly teachers return 'home' for the holiday. As such, rural teaching is constructed as a temporal separation from normal life, needing some form of compensation.

As Leximancer software has the ability to 'tag' the concept map in relation to a chosen variable it is possible to re-analyse the survey comments based on position and years of experience similar to the statistical data. As the software has been asked to develop a concept map in relation to the tags of position the overall concept map is altered; this is because, rather than developing the map from all the comments, it is developing it in relation to the identified tags (Leximancer, 2011). Furthermore, using the settings on the Leximancer software I have reduced the number of identified themes, simply to create a less 'cluttered' visual image.

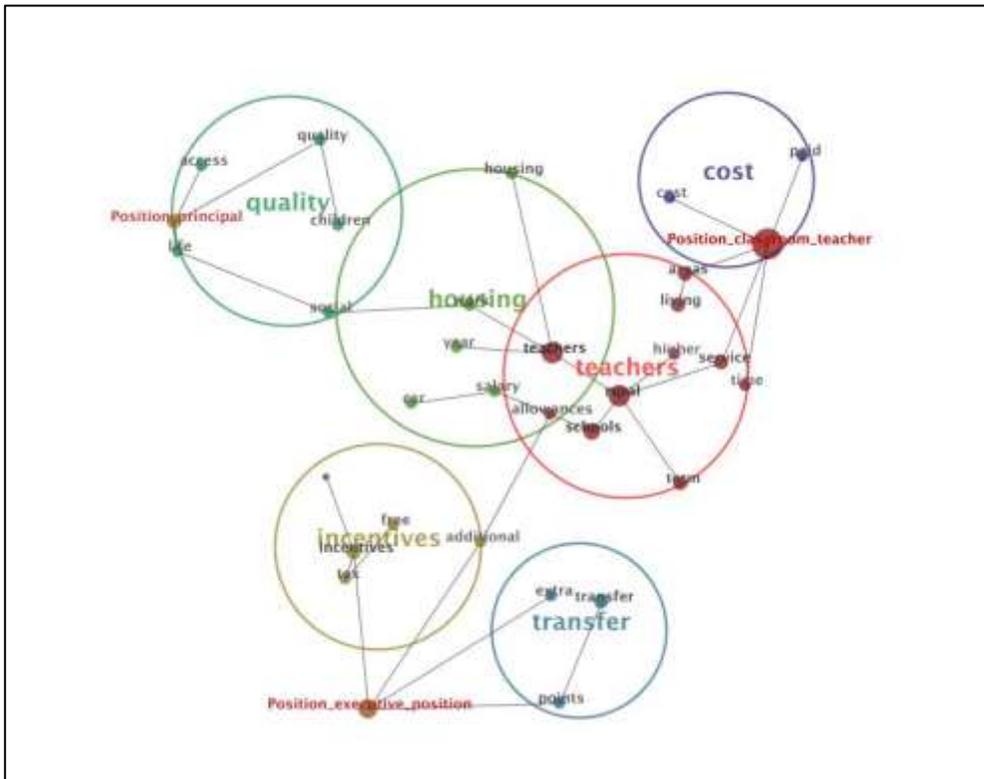


Figure 4.4: Leximancer Concept map for comments tagged by position

The analysis of comments by position (Figure 4.4) reveals a distinct pattern of themes based upon position. Principals are linked to comments about the theme of ‘quality’ with this seemingly in relation to the quality of life of living in these communities and access to services. They are referring to the social aspects as important for new teachers, though they do distinctly refer to the need for ‘quality teachers’<sup>30</sup> to be attracted to service the needs of the children in the schools. It could be classed as a dual concern for ensuring a good experience for teachers, while also having an equal concern for the students in the school. This interpretation is supported by the statistical reanalysis and shows recognition that poor conditions and limited access to professional development magnify isolation. It also recognises that teaching in these communities is a distinct form of professional work, and that these communities have an equal right to a quality education. Classroom teachers

<sup>30</sup> This is a significant policy reference in NSW, where the language of ‘quality teachers’ is linked to school improvement.

seem overly concerned with the extra costs associated with living in these communities and express a strong interest in what are termed 'cash bonuses'. Again these associations seem to reflect those of the statistical analysis, especially that principals' concerns are very different from those of non-principals, and that indeed professional concerns are significant, at least in this instance for principals.

Executive teachers appear more concerned with incentives and transfer, suggesting that they may well have seen a rural position as an easier promotion opportunity and are aiming to transfer using their promotion position (HREOC, 2000; Roberts, 2005). Checking such a conclusion is where a genuine mixed-method approach comes in useful. Drawing in a cross tabulation from the initial survey of responses to the question about promotion intention and respondent position (table 4.6) suggests that the interpretation based on the literature may not be totally accurate. Table 4.6 shows that respondents in executive positions ranked highly the possibility of applying for a future promotion position in rural, remote or isolated communities, more so than principals and certainly much more so than classroom teachers. It may well be that the hypothesis about easier promotion opportunities is playing out in this perspective. However, an alternative interpretation may be that executive teachers are closer to classroom teachers and are reflecting the concerns of the staff they supervise. Indeed staffing problems immediately impact upon executive teachers who are responsible for the day-to-day teaching in their areas. Furthermore, executive staff in these schools tend to be younger than in metropolitan schools (HREOC, 2000; Roberts, 2005), and more likely to be socializing with classroom teachers who are their age peers. For this reason, executive teachers may well be better sources of information about conditions and approaches to rural schooling. As this reanalysis indicates, they do seem to balance professional concerns and the more industrial concerns of new staff.

Question Rank	School Position			Total	
	Classroom Teacher	Executive	Principal		
After min service period I intend to -	1	16	40	20	76
apply for promotion in rural, remote or isolated area	2	16	12	2	30
	3	46	28	6	80
	4	38	10	2	50
	5	32	12	2	46
	6	94	10	20	124
	7	44	10	6	60
	8	0	4	4	8
Total		286	126	62	474

Table 4.6: Cross tabulation of intention to apply for promotion in rural, remote or isolated communities and respondent position.

Finally, turning to the analysis based on respondents' years of teaching in rural, remote or isolated communities (fig 4.5), we again see a distinct pattern of themes based on length of experience. Once again, this is not simply explained by principals being older, as the statistical analysis revealed they are not necessarily any more experienced than other teachers in terms of years in these communities: in fact there is a distinct trend towards experienced rural teachers who are not principals responding to the survey. Thus, the notion that rural schools are hard-to-staff is not necessarily universally true. Indeed this was the premise of the recent TERRAnova project (Reid et al., 2012).

The category of ten years plus experience is clearly linked to comments around the theme of 'quality'. However while a couple of comments relate to getting quality teachers, there are more, as shown by the link to the theme of 'social', that relate to quality of life in rural, remote and isolated communities. However there is a distinct concern about 'children' 'accessing' opportunities including quality education. This again raises interesting questions about how these teachers see the quality of the education being provided by their own workplace and its appropriateness for their own children. This is a worrying trend in the data about separating what is provided and deemed acceptable in these communities from what is regarded as appropriate for the education workforce. There seems to be a trade-off here between perceived benefit in raising children

in a small town and concern for them possibly ‘becoming rural’, rather than maintaining the metropolitan sensibilities of their professional parent/s. This again echoes the TERRAnova case studies, where teachers teaching their own, and their colleagues’, children were regarded as being good teachers who provided a quality education, by the broader community (Reid et al., 2012). As a serendipitous measure of the trustworthiness of the Leximancer software, the theme of ‘salary’ is well placed in figure 4.5, as teachers of 10 years career experience reach the top of the salary scale, other than increases through promotion. This is an ongoing industrial issue and that it is closely linked with these respondents is understandable.

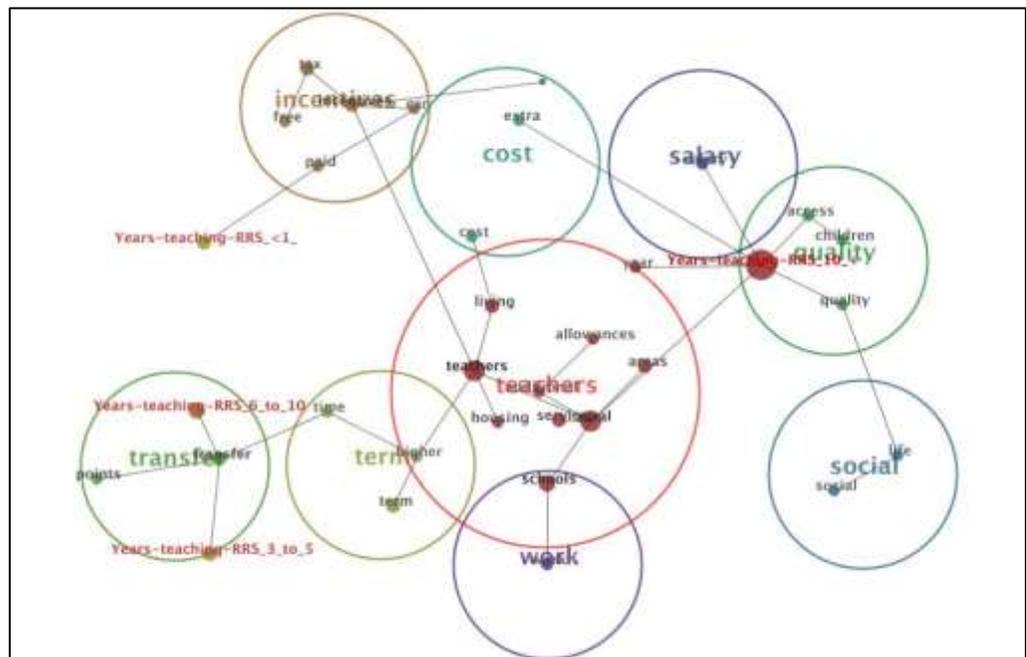


Figure 4.5: Leximancer Concept map for comments tagged by years teaching in rural, remote or isolated communities.

Respondents with more years experience in these communities expressed a clear preference to apply for promotions positions in rural schools rather than metropolitan areas (table 4.7). This may suggest a recognition of a specific form of professional practice, as well as comfortableness with the social conditions. Put another way, they have learnt how to teach and live in a particular, rural place, and have become part of a broadly defined ‘rural’ place, and are beginning to associate more with that form of professionalism than a

metropolitan-like professionalism. Notably, respondents with less experience working in these communities referred more to the themes of ‘incentives’ and ‘transfer’ (fig 4.5) and showed less desire to seek promotion in these contexts (table 4.7). For them a form of compensation was predominant, which suggests an ongoing separation from the communities they are living in and a desire to leave.

Question Rank	Number of years teaching rural, remote or isolated schools					Total	
	0	1-2	3-5	6-10	10+		
After min service period I intend to - apply for promotion in rural, remote or isolated area	1	8	16	8	16	24	72
	2	2	0	0	0	24	26
	3	12	14	6	16	32	80
	4	8	0	16	10	16	50
	5	8	6	14	4	18	50
	6	16	22	22	16	52	128
	7	10	14	6	4	26	60
	8	0	2	0	6	0	8
Total		64	74	72	72	192	474

Table 4.7: Cross tabulation of intention to apply for promotion in rural, remote or isolated communities and respondents years teaching in rural, remote or isolated communities.

#### 4.5: Observations from the reanalysis

The reanalysis suggests that a recognition of the particularities of rural place is a powerful factor in understanding rural education: both as a positive force for situating policy and practice and as a negative force reinforcing cultural divides and geographic distance. While not as strongly evident in my reanalysis of the comments as in the statistical analysis, there emerges a clear warrant for further investigating professionalism and place as important components of rural schooling, and for reconsidering social justice approaches from this perspective. Most importantly, this reanalysis has shown the value and utility of approaching rural research from a rural standpoint and of rereading previous research, data and analysis, from a new perspective.

The reanalysis suggests that in many instances many teachers conceive of the rural differently from the popular deficiency view, and that this difference leads

them to pursue rural careers at the exclusion of other places. Equally, place, and how it is constructed, is a significant influence upon the career decisions of many teachers. It would appear that perception of place, and how it aligns to professional and social aspirations, influences these decisions. Consequently, I suggest that rural education should be considered a distinct, and perhaps specialist, career, and be recognized professionally, both within the system and in educational research.

In the factor analysis the issues of rural cultural ‘difference’ come across strongly. This is significant when we consider that place is constructed socially and through personal experience; furthermore, the rural is a socially constructed space and seen differently depending on one’s location. According to Brett (2011), rural communities have distinct cultures and social outlooks and are synonymous with aspects of the imagined national character. However Brett (2011) also points out that the cultural place occupied by the rural has been changing and rural lifestyles now represent a very different cultural space compared to the modern multicultural and cosmopolitan Australia of the metropolitan areas. The fact that rural schools have historically been characterised as difficult to staff (HREOC 2000, Roberts 2005) can in part be attributed to their difference in relation to what teachers, predominantly from metropolitan centres, aspire to both socially and professionally. To this end, issues of social, cultural and professional isolation (Collins, 1999, Hudson & Hudson, 2008) and strong cultural difference (Watson & Hatton, 1995) have a long history in the literature.

How these issues play out in relation to the broader practice and experience of rural schooling remains largely unexplored. They do suggest, though, that teachers typically experience rural place differently from other residents of rural places. Other professionals working in rural communities, for example health and police, may be more like them. Indeed, there may be lessons here that can be drawn from the other professions that also experience issues in relation to the transience of the rural workforce. The data here cannot speak to other professions. Nevertheless, it does suggest that notions such as a capitals approach, where the rural is often a distinct professional sub-field, such as in

health and law enforcement (Carson & Stehlik, 2012; Jervis-Tracy et al., 2016), may be instructive. From the data reanalysed here, it would appear that in time, many rural teachers come to see rural teaching as a distinct professional field. That such a perspective is lacking, goes some way to reinforcing Green and Letts' (2007) notion that Australian education does not take space into consideration as a constituent factor.

#### **4.6: Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the series of chapters providing the 'evidence' supporting my argument for the benefits of a rural standpoint. It has presented the rationale, method and results of the reanalysis of my 2005 report, 'Staffing an Empty Schoolhouse: Attracting and Retaining Teachers in Rural and Remote Communities' (Roberts, 2005). It has done this to show the utility of rereading previous research, and to highlight the importance of the orientation to research, and motivations, of the researcher to the conclusions reached. Here I have used the notion of a rural standpoint to look for rural meanings in the data, as well as an intention to look at how rural place is understood and the role of professional and industrial perspectives. This changed perspective has shifted the interpretation of the 2005 report, from the initial deficit framing it was constructed in, to one that values rural place.

The use of a rural standpoint in reanalysing the data has allowed new insights to be achieved, particularly that there appears to be a distinct positive professional disposition to the rural. This then raises important considerations for rural education that need to be explored: specifically, rural schooling as a pedagogical practice, rural schools in policy, the curriculum, and general educational equity discourses – aspects of which are taken up in this inquiry. The position of a positive rural professionalism is different from that taken up in the initial report. Rather than a deficit perspective, it puts the ideas of professionalism ahead of the redistributive focus on incentives. It also repositions social justice in relation to rural students' education, towards valuing diversity rather than defining and overcoming (a socially constructed)

deficit. Consequently, the reanalysis reported here has been the genesis of Chapters Five through Eight, to which I now turn.



## **Chapter Five**

### **Negotiating the Curriculum in Place**

This chapter examines teachers' relationship with the curriculum and the rural. In this chapter I draw upon the interview data to illustrate the changing nature of teachers' work in rural areas and the construction of rural places in the minds of those leading the education debate in NSW.

This chapter illustrates the power of the curriculum in mediating one's work – and one's identity as a curriculum worker. Building upon Chapter Four, I argue here that time spent in rural locations, and to a degree position in the education hierarchy, has an influence on how teachers understand, and engage with, the rural. Looking ahead to Chapter Six, it is teachers and educational leaders like the ones discussed here who mediate curriculum policy in their enactment of it. Similarly, it is the professional leaders, such as those discussed here, who either develop or influence curriculum policy. Thus, the dominant equity discourses discussed in Chapter Six can be seen to be playing out in these interviews. That the curriculum is central in these interviews illustrates the power of curriculum in NSW; and as argued in Chapter Seven, the unequal spatial organisation of access and achievement has a direct impact on how teachers in rural schools get to see themselves as professionals in their subject. If subjects of high status are not offered by schools, or if achievement is comparatively poor, a system organised by curriculum hierarchies positions those teachers as having less status. Finally, this chapter also provides insight into how place is understood, how teachers come to know place, and how this relates to their curriculum work.

The discussion takes place in the context of the secondary school subject History. This is because I taught secondary History in NSW schools for 13 years, leading the subject department for nine of those years, and was a representative on the NSW Board of Studies<sup>31</sup> subject committee during a re-write and revision of the syllabus – all of course before I had any real

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<sup>31</sup> The NSW Board of Studies (BOS) is the state curriculum board. It was renamed the New South Wales Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) in 2014.

appreciation for curriculum inquiry. Consequently I have an understanding of the syllabus and the particular way that History teachers talk about their subject and its related curriculum.

School History is a subject through which a valued perspective of the nation is conveyed, and is often the site of much contestation and debate, as the representation is inevitably political (Macintyre & Clark, 2003). Consequently there has been in recent years much social and political preoccupation in Australia with the way the nation is represented in the history curriculum (Clark 2006). By focusing upon the *Australian Curriculum: History* I am also able to explore a perspective on how the rural is positioned in the national story.

### **5.1: Situating the research**

To provide a context for this chapter, this section briefly paraphrases relevant details from Chapter Two, on methodology. For this aspect of the project a series of semi-structured interviews was conducted: eighteen with current teachers and eight with educators working in educational support roles or administration. The interviews were conducted in school term 3 of 2011 and revolved around the central ideas of:

- understanding place,
- curriculum in rural areas (including subject offerings)
- recognising situated knowledge,
- using situated knowledge,
- negotiating the relationship with curriculum, standards and pedagogy models,
- linking situated knowledge with curriculum, standards and pedagogy models, and
- the messages contained in curriculum, standards and pedagogy models.

The eighteen practising teachers were recruited through open invitation in the form of an email to non-metropolitan members of the History Teachers Association of New South Wales. As such, they identify as history teachers and it was in the context of history teaching that the interviews were conducted. While the invitation to participate was explicitly aimed at teachers in their first three years of teaching, a significant number of experienced teachers also expressed an interest in participating. Consequently two categories of participants emerged: ten ‘new scheme teachers’<sup>32</sup> (NST) in the first three years of their appointment, and eight experienced teachers (EXP), either Heads of Department or classroom teachers with more than six years experience, most with over fifteen. These ‘experienced teachers’, as I have called them, all had similar characteristics in that they have chosen to stay in rural areas and consequently identify both as *rural* teachers and as *History* teachers. These emergent categories begin to mirror the categories of experience and position used in Chapter Four, with the exception of principal.

The issue of experience potentially raises a problem for analysis and interpretation, as there is no measure of the nature of experience and what practices are valued as experience in this study. Furthermore, experience is itself a complex part of the field of professional practice research. Thus ‘experienced’ is not a straightforward description, by either the researcher or the subject, and is inevitably constructed differently by each, and by each in different points in time (Davies & Davies, 2007). Simply being exposed to experience does not necessarily equate to learning (Bradley, 2009) or influence professional practice. For example, Britzman (2003) notes that practice has a tendency to become self-perpetuating, with that practice forming part of the subjective identity of the teacher. However, experience is indeed seen as a distinct form of learning compared to the more technical-rational approaches (Bradley, 2009) that are increasingly valued as the basis of policy. Indeed, and as will be seen in this chapter, balancing the demands of a technical-rationally

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<sup>32</sup> New Scheme Teachers’ was the collective name given to beginning teachers who were subject to new teacher registration requirements from 1 August 2008 in NSW.

informed professional accreditation system, and experience, becomes a complex negotiation.

In understanding professional practice, Green (2009) outlines the three interconnected principles of; *phronesis*, *praxis* and *aporia*. Here *phronesis* is a form of embodied knowledge, as opposed to a technical-rational form. *Praxis* refers to moral and ethical action, generally orientated towards social justice (however defined by the individual). Finally, *aporia* references the unresolvable problematics that ‘practitioners’ are faced with, and where they ultimately have to make a judgment. While this study is not directed at understanding the particularities, or details, of practice, it does focus on the issue of experience and practice more broadly defined. Thus, referencing Green’s (2009) interrelated principles, this chapter will examine *phronesis* in relation to the teachers’ knowledge of the rural, *praxis*, as each has a social justice informed approach to their practice, and *aporia* as they make judgments about their practice informed by both *phronesis* and *praxis*, and in the context of often competing views of the rural within dominant forms of professionalism.

Experience, as used here, does not necessarily equate to a teacher’s effectiveness in educating students – something that is perhaps mediated by their understanding of the rural, as described in the previous chapter. In the subsequent analysis, then, how the teacher engages with rural place, and the notions of justice informing that, become important. As such I am suggesting that experience needs to be problematized as a concept, and not necessarily seen as the source of the most appropriate knowledge regarding rural teaching. For the purposes of this study I use the term ‘experienced’ to mean no more than that a participant has spent extensive time working in rural settings. Definitionally, the teachers categorised as experienced have worked and lived for more than six years (most over fifteen) in rural areas, and have a longtime engagement with rural life and people. As will be shown, some of these teachers have learnt new approaches, attitudes and skills over this time. However, this study cannot account for the cause of this being ‘experience’, pre-service training, personal disposition, or any other factor. For my purposes

here, the focus is on an understanding of rural place and its relationship to curriculum, pedagogy and professional standards.

In addition to the eighteen practising teachers, a number of ‘professional leaders’ (PL) working in various support roles and educational administration were approached to participate in this study. These participants were individually identified, or nominated by their organization, due to their role in providing support for History teachers, having a personal background of rural teaching, or supporting teaching generally. The group comprised academic experts, History curriculum officials, senior bureaucrats or leaders of professional associations. While the same broad questions were covered, this latter category often discussed rural teaching in the broad context of views of effective teaching. The majority of these professional leaders also had experience working in, and in some cases leading, rural schools.

Each category of respondent brings a unique insight into the issues explored in this study. The ‘new teachers’ are in the first generation of teachers accountable to new teacher registration processes linked to showing competency against the NSW professional teaching standards (BOSTES<sup>33</sup>), and working in a climate of strong discourse of quality teaching in relation to the NSW model of Pedagogy. This can be evidenced for example through the 2008 document published by the NSW Department of Education and Trainings’ Professional Learning Directorate, which manages the induction of new teachers and their progress towards competency, and explicitly linking the professional standards with the elements of quality teaching (NSW DET, 2008a; NSW DET, 2008b). Many are also new to working, and living, in rural areas. As such, their perception of the rural will be fresh and distinct. The ‘experienced’ teachers have not been subject to the same level of registration having completed their training, and begun teaching, before these requirements came into force<sup>34</sup>. Hence their understanding of effective teaching is not mediated by such powerful documents as standards and pedagogy models. As

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<sup>33</sup> At the time it was the New South Wales Institute of Teachers. However this was amalgamated with the NSW Board of Studies in 2014 to form the New South Wales Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES).

<sup>34</sup> These changes came into effect on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2004.

‘experienced’ teachers in terms of working in rural schools and living in rural communities, they have a deeper lived understanding of rural schooling, especially as all have chosen to remain in rural areas. Finally, the ‘professional leaders’ provide valuable insights into how the rural is perceived by those influencing educational decision-making in the period of these interviews.

### 5.1.2: Interview subject coding used in this chapter

In the table below, interview subjects are identified by a code. I have chosen to use a code rather than pseudonyms to enable the reader to focus on the level of experience and position of the respondent. As these roughly align with years of experience used in Chapter Four, and draw attention to the problem of experience, they are more useful for the purpose of this study. In doing so I recognize that I have sacrificed a level of insight relating to issues such as class, race and age, and perhaps even obscured gender. While gender is noted in the table below, it is not a category of analysis in this chapter.

<b>New Teachers</b>	<b>Context</b>
NST1:	Male, a classroom teacher in his first year of teaching in a small remote central school.
NST2:	Female, a classroom teacher in her first year teaching in a small remote high school.
NST3:	Female, a classroom teacher in her first year of teaching in small mid western high school.
NST4:	Female, a classroom teacher in her second year of teaching in a large regional centre.
NST5:	Female, a classroom teacher in her first year in a large regional high school. Previously taught for 2 years in more remote schools.
NST6:	Male, a classroom teacher in his first year in a small north-western central school. A career changer with a young family.
NST7:	Male, a classroom teacher in his first year in a small mid-western high school.

NST8:	Female, a classroom teacher in her second year in a larger north-western central school.
NST9:	Female, a classroom teacher in her first year in a small mid-western central school
NST10:	Male, a classroom teacher in his second year in a north-western central school.

<b>Experienced Teachers</b>	<b>Context</b>
EXP1	Male, classroom Teacher in a central school in a small agriculture community in the NSW western plains. Approximately 20 years teaching in the rural.
EXP2	Male, Head Teacher in a mining town, approximately 25 years teaching in rural areas.
EXP3	Female, classroom Teacher in a remote western NSW high school, Approximately 15 years in rural areas.
EXP4	Male, Head Teacher in a large regional High School in a Large regional centre. Approximately 13 years in rural areas.
EXP5	Male, classroom Teacher in a High School in a medium-sized regional centre. Approximately 18 years in rural areas.
EXP6	Male, classroom Teacher in a remote high school. Approximately 10 years in rural areas.
EXP7	Female, classroom Teacher in a central school in the central tablelands of NSW. Approximately 25 years in rural areas.
EXP8	Male, classroom Teacher in a remote western NSW high School. Approximately 14 years in rural areas.

<b>Professional Leaders:</b>	<b>Context</b>
PL1	Male, a former teacher and senior bureaucrat now working in research.
PL2	Male, former teacher who holds a senior position in a professional association. Experienced curriculum writer.
PL3	Female, former teacher. Senior curriculum position.
PL4	Male, former teacher. Senior bureaucrat with a curriculum authority

PL5	Female, former rural teacher, Senior curriculum position.
PL6	Female, former teacher and subject academic, Senior position in curriculum authority and professional association.
PL7	Male, former rural teacher and rural principal, former position in curriculum authority, formerly a senior position in professional association.
PL8	Female, former rural teacher and Principal, senior bureaucrat in state department, involved with new teachers.

### 5.1.3: A note on participants' motivations

In this study, it was evident that engaging teachers in their first few years of their career in research was significantly more difficult than engaging experienced teachers. It seemed that many new teachers perceive a deficiency in their practice in rural schools, and that experienced teachers also perceive the need to help these teachers adjust to their new position. In the recruitment period for this project, the number of initial expressions of interest from new teachers was only about one quarter of that from experienced teachers, and then a majority of these eventually chose not to participate. In choosing not to participate, they mentioned issues such as: they 'don't quite know what they are doing yet', 'don't feel they are really meeting their students' needs, or don't think they are yet able to make the curriculum relevant to their students'. While of course this would be appropriate evidence in support of the hypothesis that when teachers are not conscious of place in their pedagogy it manifests in dissatisfaction, it would be ethically inappropriate to advocate participation on these grounds. This raises a number of important questions and highlights an important area for future research, for if participants are opting out of telling their stories, their struggles with place are not being told, and these struggles conceivably have a strong connection to their retention and professional satisfaction, as suggested in Chapter Four.

Conversely the new teachers who did accept the invitation all have strong views, both positive and negative, about the places they teach in and their students. Consequently it could be argued that a place-consciousness, of either

positive or negative affect, equates with greater self-efficacy in relation to knowledge of teaching. Furthermore, in the recruitment for this project a significant number of experienced teachers responded positively to being involved. These experienced teachers saw some importance in helping new teachers in rural schools by either recalling their personal experiences of being a new teacher or having worked with other new teachers and recognising the issues of adjustment they face.

The interviews suggested a subtle motivational difference for participation between the experienced and new teachers. The experienced teachers tended to suggest an interest in giving something back and helping prepare new teachers for rural areas. For them, comments like *'I've been doing this for a while'* (EXP4) or *'just hope what I've learnt can be of use'* (EXP1) were common. The motivation for participation was divided between having seen many teachers not succeed or having concerns, in their opinion, for the quality of new teachers. Thus comments like *'too many teachers turn up here and get freaked, the more they know before they come the better for everyone'* (EXP3) or *'all they teach at Uni is QT (NSW Quality Teaching Model, 2003), so they don't really know how to teach children when they arrive'* (EXP6) were equally common.

Building upon the quality theme, the new teachers pointed to a perceived deficiency in their pre-service preparation for teaching in rural schools, as evidenced by comments like *'I didn't learn anything about these places or teaching these kids at Uni'* (NST2) or *'yeah, whoo, what a culture shock, this place is insane. Where was that in the degree?'* (NST1). Consequently most of these new teachers seemed to reject research into effective teaching largely because of their experience of a gap between their preparation and the reality of teaching. Clearly there is a stark difference between the comment above, and: *'well the QT (NSW Quality Teaching Model, 2003) model is pointless as it has nothing to do with teaching kids in places like this. It's ok for those nice city schools'* (NST7). One in particular, however, seemed to value research and saw how it did relate to their teaching context. *'yeah, when I get stuck or can't figure out what's happening I'll go back to the model or what we were taught*

[in pre-service teacher training]' (NST10). Unfortunately the latter comment was much less common. Accounting for these stark differences is an important future research focus, as while it might be tempting to suggest a form of personal disposition, such a conclusion would be problematic as it would reinforce the stereotype of the 'born teacher' and question the effectiveness of pre-service teacher training. Clearly his preparation and training have developed a deep understanding of research and a cycle of thinking and reflection that informs NST 10's practice.

## **5.2: Teaching in place**

Following Gruenewald's idea of a critical pedagogy of place (2003b) and the importance of place-conscious education (2003a), this dissertation argues that education has become increasingly placeless and instead focused upon normalization in the form of standardized curriculum and assessment, teaching standards, and even official models of quality pedagogy. The narrowing of education and the accountability regimes that accompany these developments undermines teachers' self-efficacy and professional commitment, and subsequently limits professional knowledge. This narrowing of professionalism redefines teachers' professional identity to that of an accountable actor who regulates her or his behaviour and seeks validation against external criteria (Ball, 2003). I argue that this new self-regulating regime of performativity (Ball, 2003) impacts in particular ways in rural settings by transforming the curriculum *away* from recognizing rural knowledges, and as a result effectively separating teaching from rural places.

Coupled with the growing focus on teacher quality and the idea that what the teacher does is the single most important in-school factor in improving educational achievement (Hattie, 2003; 2009), many Australian states have implemented models of effective pedagogy, for example the NSW Quality Teaching Model (NSW DET, 2003). While these models of effective pedagogy are to be used in relation to the curriculum, and indeed are developed with this curriculum connection explicitly intended (Ladwig, 2009), I argue that their

implementation and enactment in the existing performative environment (Ball, 2003) can have the effect of separating curriculum and pedagogy. This is particularly the case given the state culture of NSW (Collins & Vickers, 1999; Yates, Collins & O'Connor, 2011), with its focus on a high-stakes external assessment exam at the end of secondary schooling.

A separation of curriculum and pedagogy works against place-conscious teaching, in that it places knowledge on one pedestal and teaching upon another. The separation also suggests that knowledge is fixed and uncontested, and that teaching is a set of skills that can be enacted regardless of context. Furthermore, this separation removes any need for an informed and responsive professional educator who seeks to understand their students and the places they come from, and who plans lessons related to their particular circumstances: as such, it undermines teachers' professionalism and self-efficacy. Pinar (2005) argues that this separation results in a shallow focus on teaching and learning as opposed to deep and meaningful study; the curriculum becomes a series of things to remember and recite at a given time, and pedagogy the facilitation of this curriculum form. Such an approach works in a neoliberal and neoconservative construction of schooling and equity as it is through a common curriculum and common testing that student achievement can be compared and measured (Apple, 2006). As Reid (2011) points out, this shift to a national scale is at the expense of teaching with, and for, the "particularities of the place[s] where they [teachers and students] are teaching, learning and living" (2011, p.22). A National curriculum is a new construction, different from how the 'curriculum' used to be understood, as "embracing situated enactments of teaching and learning and assessment in the classroom" (Yates, 2009, p.18), towards an impersonal and placeless curriculum in which the key question of 'what knowledge is of most worth?' has been definitively answered, and the question of how to teach it codified and packaged.

While such approaches are informed by notions of equity and justice, and indeed argued as being a justice imperative, my argument is that such approaches more accurately characterize a form of social justice that is placeless. They inherently regard all places as requiring the same pedagogy

and curriculum and as such render *place* inconsequential. Equity and social justice then revert to the traditional focus on the ‘knowledge question’ in curriculum (Luke, Woods & Weir, 2013) and access to this knowledge. Similarly, pedagogy is redefined as a set of technical skills to be observed and mastered and that are inherently context-free. At question then are ‘what values inform curriculum and pedagogy’, and ‘what place does the rural have in these values’. Here I suggest that metropolitan-cosmopolitan values linked to what Rizvi and Lingard (2010) call the ‘neoliberal social imaginary’, a socio-political perspective based on the ‘necessity’ of neoliberalism, are influential. These ideas are informed by a global outlook, seek economic advancement, and value mobility in a globalised world (McLeod, 2012; Popkewitz, 2008). Combined, the neoliberal social imaginary and cosmopolitanism forms the basis of the dominant system of ideas and reasoning that influences the development of the curriculum (Popkewitz, 1997). Such cosmopolitan outlooks tend to marginalise the rural (Corbett, 2010a) by positioning it as embracing old, unproductive, inefficient and inward-looking ways (Brett, 2011).

In terms of social justice and place, a metropolitan-cosmopolitan orientation defaults to traditional distributive justice perspectives of access to knowledge through the curriculum and effective teaching. These approaches render place as either neutral or merely a context of enactment that, at best, can be engaged with as a starting point before moving away to more valuable ways of knowing. Alternatively, a curricular-spatial justice informed approach recognizes all places are *equally valuable*, and seeks to validate knowledge of place. Re-engaging with place, and valuing rural places in education, is not simply a matter of pedagogy (Gruenewald, 2003a), as such a singular focus reinforces the problematic separation of curriculum and pedagogy discussed above. Instead, I suggest that it involves returning to earlier views of curriculum as encompassing the broad educational experience (Pinar, 2012; Yates, 2009) and the “nuanced complexity of educational experience” (Pinar, 2012, p. 42). In such a view, curriculum is subjective *and* social (Pinar, 2012), necessitates a responsiveness to places, and a re-articulation of the professionalism of teachers “as students’ interests and teachers’ knowledge and judgement converge in

determining, in any given situation, what knowledge is of most worth” (Pinar, 2012, p.22). Such a place-conscious curriculum builds upon Gruenewald’s (2003a; 2003b) foundations of place-based education, while also explicitly connecting them with matters of curriculum.

In a place-conscious informed approach we have more of what Schleicher (2008) describes as a form of ‘informed prescription’, where teachers have freedom to make the curriculum relevant to their students and their communities. This is reinforced by an OECD study (Karkkainen, 2012) of centralized versus local curriculum that found that, while a balance between the two is needed to ensure comparable standards, a more decentralised approach to curriculum led to more equitable outcomes. It is on this basis that I am exploring how practising teachers and professional leaders see the rural in contemporary schooling in NSW: whether it is through a metropolitan-cosmopolitan lens, a more place-conscious approach, or a mix of the two - and the notions of equity and justice informing such perspectives.

### **5.3: Two dispositions to engaging with place**

The most significant finding to emerge in relation to the hypothesis of this dissertation is the emergence of two dispositions among the (History) teacher participants: those who locate their practice in place and those who value a more bureaucratic approach to their work (fig 5.1). This is not to suggest that these dispositions are either/or categories; they are, instead, two ends of a continuum, with the subjects sitting along this continuum.



Fig 5.1: Two dispositions of practice

These dispositions are not aligned with whether participants were new teachers, experienced teachers or professional leaders. But because my purpose is to describe current practice, I have focused here on the descriptions given by the new teachers and experienced teachers working in rural schools rather than those of professional leaders. This orientation is evident in the subsequent sections in the way the rural is positioned by a number of respondents. Finally, while this chapter uses selected quotes to illustrate the argument, there was broad agreement across the interviews with the issues illustrated through them.

The respondents in this study had distinct perspectives on rural schooling: either they considered rural schools to be different and that teachers need to be prepared for this difference, and recognize it in their pedagogy and approach to the curriculum, *or* they believed that all schools are the same regardless of location, and that what matters is the quality of the teaching. Consequently I have chosen to label one extreme ‘bureaucratic’, in recognition of dominant influence of external policy descriptions, and the other ‘place-conscious’, to recognize the disposition to engage with, what this study calls, place. Each orientation also engages with considerations of equity and social justice in distinct ways. The more bureaucratic orientation had a distributive understanding, in that it valued a metropolitan-cosmopolitan form and regarded the written curriculum as a source of social justice. Alternatively, the more place-conscious orientation aligned with more curricular-spatial forms of justice. Another way of looking at these dispositions might be to suggest that those teachers who locate their practice in place are rejecting the identity accompanied by Ball’s notion of performativity (2003), while those that tend to a more bureaucratic view embody such an identity. Thus there comes through an alignment with embodying performative identities, valuing a centralized curriculum, separating curriculum and pedagogy, and a semantic orientation to distributive justice. This orientation reflects the language of equity in curriculum reforms over the last two decades that will be outlined in Chapter Six.

Alternatively, the more place-conscious orientation tends to regard the curriculum as being negotiable, while pedagogy is seen as a vehicle through

which to enact this negotiation. Hence I use the term place-conscious to describe this orientation in line with the notions of *decolonization* and *reinhabitation*<sup>35</sup> proposed by Gruenewald (2003b). In this usage, ‘place-conscious’ is an expansive term for educational processes that reference and build from local place in the process of education. It is preferred to the term ‘place-based’, which tends to be used more as a referent for educational processes that only look at the local (Gulson, 2014). In equity and social justice terms, a more place-conscious orientation values place and rural knowledge, values connecting with students, and builds out from place (local knowledge) in a way that more aligns with notions of curricular-spatial justice.

A place-conscious orientation does *not*, however, come over as a rejection of, or form of resistance to, the curriculum as it exists. Instead, it tends to reject codified professional standards, pedagogy models, and elements of standardised high-stakes curriculum accountability and testing, on the rationale that they don’t reflect the realities of teaching their particular students, in their place. Teachers with a place-conscious orientation valued the existing curriculum and knowledge therein, and wanted their students to have meaningful access to it. The issue was more around what they regarded as core to the curriculum, and how negotiable it was to meet the needs of their students. For example, was the focus of subject History a form of historical literacy or was it pieces of information such as dates, people, events or certain interpretations of their significance. To question the curriculum did require an initial disposition that recognizes difference as a positive. It is difficult to account for the origin, or bias of this, in the relative respondents, except to say that they appear to have had some ‘whispering in the heart’ that made them resist standardized approaches and engage productively with place. This is not to suggest a ‘born critical teacher’, though; it is just that no particular variable determining this disposition was clearly evident in this particular study, partly because it was factored into the research design.

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<sup>35</sup> Here Gruenewald (2003b) is referring to *decolonization* and *reinhabitation* as twin social and ecological objectives of changing the way we live in, and then finding new ways of living, in, and with, places.

Notably, none of the subjects was familiar with the concept of ‘place’ as used in the academic literature, although the more ‘place-conscious’ subjects described practices and beliefs that align with the literature. Within this alignment there was an acceptance of forms of rural knowledge as inherently valuable and a subtle resistance to the universalizing tendencies of metropolitan cosmopolitan knowledges. There was, however, no particular rationale.

Indicating the all-pervasiveness of the performative agenda, however, the more place-conscious subjects used a language of subversion and resistance and the semantics of guilt – as though they were doing something not quite right. In de Certeauian (1984) terms, they would use the strategy of referring to the curriculum and engaging with it, whilst employing their own tactics to reshape the curriculum. In social justice terms, as described by Swalwell (2013), the more bureaucratic-orientated tended towards a meritocratic perspective of justice – there was a natural order of things and these students were just not up to it; or a resigned perspective – recognizing a degree of injustice in the system but feeling overwhelmed and cynical and not believing they had any ability to change things. The more place-conscious orientation tended towards seeing the teacher as either a benevolent benefactor, who recognizes injustice but doesn’t see they are implicated and hopes for progressive social change, or an activist ally, who understands the injustice and their potential role in reproducing it, yet is working to overcome it (Swalwell, 2013).

Turning to the data, how the subjects engaged with place was linked to the language they used in relation to their professional satisfaction. Specifically, those that recognized the ‘rural difference’ tended towards language of greater satisfaction which suggested a more positive professional outlook and more positive student engagement than those who did not. For example, one new teacher very quickly identified the challenges associated with her remote location:

of course we’re totally isolated here, pretty much all inexperienced and it’s hard to get teachers ... and the kids face lots of challenges, there are big literacy issues and getting to school for a whole week is pretty tough for most of them (NST 8).

However, she did this as an aside, saying *'we can't change that, we've just got to work with it'* (NST 8), before quickly moving to excitedly talk about what she is doing in her classroom and the great work her students are doing on a unit related to the local area: *'they're [sic] really got into that, it was so good to see and work they produced was fantastic, well beyond what I hoped when I started'* (NST8). Contrasting with this, another new teacher talked about how *'there's really not much you can do when they reach Year Seven and can't read or write, they don't give a toss about school and would rather be down the river'* (NST1). Expressing a sense of helplessness, he further mentioned things like *'we get into trouble if we make too much of an issue'* (NST1) and *'it's hopeless but you can't let it get you down, you've just got to do your time'* (NST1). In these excerpts, and more generally in the research, the references to contextual factors for those teachers using negative language tended towards foregrounding limitations that made teaching difficult. Within these, though, there is also a tone of injustice and a desire to 'do good' apparent, along with a sense of resignation or lowered aspiration.

#### **5.4: Place-conscious enactment**

While teachers who used more positive language also tended to note contextual factors as limitations, they were also able to connect their teaching to their context, and find opportunities within their challenges, as in the example of NST1 above. Notably here, the teachers who used context in this negative manner were also the teachers who were most critical of 'the state of education' and recent reforms, whilst also using language which begins to suggest a separation between teaching (pedagogy) and what is taught (the written curriculum). Those who used more positive language, however, kept pedagogy and curriculum in close relation, and spoke of the ways in which they use context as an opportunity to engage students. This separation between 'teaching' and 'what is taught' mirrors the separation of curriculum and pedagogy in dominant education reforms, such as the situation in many jurisdictions where a mandated curriculum focused upon content to be covered

sits alongside, but separate from, a preferred jurisdictional model of effective pedagogy (or, nationally, an Australian Curriculum distinct from Professional Standards of Teaching).

It is not as simple as saying that those teachers who locate their practice in place suggest a more positive self-efficacy than those who do not. Instead, the mediating factor appears to be their perception of place and its relationship to the curriculum. However, there is also a complicated further interrelationship between this place-consciousness and the teachers' attitudes towards students. For example, the following two excerpts show distinctly different attitudes towards students and place; however, as it is unclear which causes the other, all that can safely be assumed at this point is that they are related and impact upon teacher self-efficacy. In the excerpt '*the kids just aren't interested, they can walk out of here once they turn 16 into an unskilled job in the mine earning more than their teachers*' (EXP3), there is no cultural superiority or a view that an educated person is inherently better than one who leaves school early; instead, there is genuine concern and frustration at short-sighted policies. The participant went on to say:

but what happens when the boom busts, or new technology, or those driverless trucks come in? They're not going to have any skills or education to fall back on and that won't be good. We need to at least get their literacy up so they stay safe down there and have options in ten years time (EXP3).

Clearly this teacher is concerned about the students' futures, and determined to do something for them. Contrasting with this attitude is that of a new teacher who says:

seriously they just don't care, all they want to do is go piggin' and shoot stuff. They'll do some farm work or the dole, grow dope perhaps. What can ya do? Just make the most of it and try to at least give them something (NST7).

Here there is a degree of resignation and hopelessness, both for what the teacher, and education, can achieve, and a somewhat negative attitude towards the students and their culture.

Compared to NST7, another new teacher in a similar context took a very different stance to similar challenges:

wow what a culture shock, I didn't know anything about hunting, piggin' they call it, or shooting or that sort of thing. So I got the kids to tell me about it in class and we went on an excursion to some of their favourite spots. Then we looked at the history of farming and its impact on the environment, the environmental movement and the role of the Shooters Party in parliament. The kids did some great work, it was really fun and I learnt heaps. We did meet the syllabus in history and geography as well (NST10).

Here the teacher sees the students, and the local environment, as a resource and has an inherently positive outlook to the students and their culture. She recognizes and uses their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and not in any relativistic or tokenistic form. It is genuinely linked to topics in the history and geography courses in NSW that she teaches in an integrated and authentic fashion linked to their environment. Such an approach certainly fulfils the definitions of 'Quality Teaching', but as will be shown, how quality teaching is understood as related to place becomes the issue of contention.

This example illustrates how a place-conscious curriculum can use the students' community and local environment to build towards broader topics in the curriculum. It also illustrates the attributes of authentic learning outlined by Hayes et al. (2006), in that the learning is genuine, deep, structured, and gives value to cultures otherwise marginalized. There is an important subtle contrast here to a place-based approach that stays local and parochial. Take, for example:

I get the kids to look at the (early pioneer of the town), there's a plaque to him on the old building in the main street. It's important for them to know who the important people in their town are, I guess it gives them a sense of place (EXP1).

This activity is isolated and self-contained; the purpose is to know an important local identity. However other identities and alternative narratives to Eurocentric viewpoints are not ventured, nor is the activity placed in the context of settlement, development, or other historical trends or themes.

Implementing a place-conscious curriculum requires teachers to have a thorough understanding of the written, mandated, curriculum, in order to ensure students can access the important and powerful cultural knowledge it embodies.

Besides totally reforming the curriculum, ensuring students have access to and can use powerful knowledge is an important outcome of the educational endeavor and, if not addressed, leaves students perpetually positioned outside the domains of power (Connell, 1993). Teachers need to be able to negotiate the complex territory of performance and expectations, of themselves and their students, whilst also facilitating student learning. It is here that a knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy as promoted in the neoliberal reform discourse is important, as well as an understanding that curriculum is much more than the content contained in a centralised curriculum with an external high-stakes examination. This tension is illustrated by concerns that:

in the end they sit the same test as everyone else, they've gotta be able to say it in a way the marker understands, there's no point using an example that makes sense to them but the marker doesn't understand so it's a fine balance (EXP4).

To understand this implication fully, it is important to recognize that the majority of markers for standardized tests in NSW come from metropolitan areas or locations that can access marking centers in major regional cities<sup>36</sup>. Thus the vast majority of markers are metropolitan. In negotiating this tension, the teacher needs to be able to connect with students, which I am arguing is best done through a curriculum responsive to place, whilst also providing access to other constructions of knowledge. The separation of curriculum and pedagogy actively hinders such an approach, and as such, works to keep rural students on the periphery of educational achievement.

In curriculum terms, the group of teachers that was place-conscious tended to see the formal curriculum as a guide they could manipulate and creatively interpret, whereas the more bureaucratic saw it as a guide to follow. In terms of History teaching, this generally resulted either in an approach where local history was used as a hook to learning and the basis through which the rest of the curriculum was taught, or as a subsequent example to the history that 'matters'. This is significant for valuing place as, when the local is used and valued, it is effectively written into History for the students, and the students

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<sup>36</sup> Numbers are not reported for this. I draw here upon my professional experience, including marking these examinations where I had to 'transfer' to another city school and cover my classes at my base school. This was also confirmed by PL4 and PL7.

are subtly told that they matter, as does their community. For example, collaborating with local Aboriginal elders to co-teach significant events, or using records of local servicemen, many related to the students, as the window through which to teach early twentieth-century history are approaches in which the students' town is valued and seen as significant, connected to and actively involved in other important events. However, when the local is used as an example to merely illustrate global events, such as when early twentieth-century history is taught from the perspective of European conflict and the local an afterthought of 'now let's look at people who came from here to fight', it is positioned as at the behest of larger forces and written out of History. This supports the findings of Somerville and colleagues' (Somerville, Plunkett & Dyson, 2010; Somerville & Rennie, 2012) study of new teachers learning about place and community, where teachers either saw their community as a valuable learning resource to be integrated into their teaching or as an example to be addressed.

### **5.5: Recognising place**

As Ball (2003) describes, the accountability regimes that surround teachers also exert significant pressure on their identities, and also, I argue, on their ability to develop a place-conscious curriculum. Here I will look at respondents' perspectives on the pedagogy models (here the NSW Quality Teaching [QT] Model, 2003) and how they influence their predilections to engage with place. While I have already mentioned some of the respondents' concerns about pedagogical models, and their applicability in some of the contexts that participants are working in, I should note, it may well be more an issue of how such models are used, and the view of place employed in their use. As a general model, the NSW Quality Teaching Model implies a necessity to situate and interpret its use in context, and as one expert working in professional learning expressed: *'you can't understand quality teaching until you understand the context'* (PL8). As can be seen in the following excerpt, how the place is imagined has a significant influence on how the model is used and interpreted,

and therefore exerts a strong influence on how teachers are valued and supported to situate their practice:

we've got this new head teacher from the city who is running around measuring us all against the QT framework to 'improve quality', yet their class is chaos as the kids just see him as a blow in from the city, it's frustrating because the he wants us to be like his former north shore HS, but hello this isn't the north shore of Sydney (NST8).

Clearly here, the imagined place of the Head Teacher and the place NST8 has come to know are different, and as such the application of the 'QT' model to determine the teachers' quality becomes a point of significant conflict. While this suggests a misunderstanding of the model from both parties, it also shows how such models can be re-purposed. Here the model is being used as a checklist to measure quality, and assumedly justify some consequent action to improve that quality. The approach separates the pedagogy being 'observed' from both the curriculum it is occurring in, and the place of its enactment.

Similar to the Quality Teaching model, the same expert argued that another avenue of accountability, The Professional Teaching Standards (NSWIT, 2004), needed to be considered in context:

it's the same as the Quality Teaching Model, you've got to know the context, the school the community, otherwise you really can't use them properly as the basis of a conversation (PL8).

In addition to the explicit reference to 'context' here, this expert's orientation to using the standards as the basis of 'conversation' reinforces the importance of subjectivity, and consequently a place-consciousness, in effective professional learning. Whether such an approach is widely used and valued is questioned by a new teacher, who states:

'know their students and how they learn' is one of the elements – but we all learn in relationship to our environment and experiences, but if I put that in it contradicts what 'they' say about what is important in learning (NST8).

Notably here the teacher evokes the image of an imaged 'they' overseeing education and the determination of their effectiveness as a teacher. Such a statement also indicates an acceptance of the power and pervasiveness of a cosmopolitan view of education, against which teachers in rural schools

constantly struggle.

As noted earlier, across the interviews it was evident that ‘place’ was not a familiar term. None of the interviewees understood the term; instead their responses kept anchoring back to ‘context’. ‘Context’ however tends to be used in the literature (Seddon, 1993; Mills and Gale, 2011), and by these subjects, as a catchall phrase for the social and economic circumstances of a school and its community. That is, it tends to reference notions of community socio-economic status, and draws a somewhat deterministic link between economic and cultural capital, and the social power that results. For example, using context, Mills and Gale (2011) conclude that economic and social factors influence the stances that teachers and schools can take in relation to students. There is no real sense of how geography is positioned, other than as limiting access, or as proximity, to favourable resources. As I have argued, this risks falling into deficit thinking, and is semantically distinct from a focus on the affordances of place.

As the following excerpt will show, context is seen as interchangeable with place by PL8, who also uses it as a substitute for ‘rural’. I have chosen to focus on PL8 here, as this subject had a senior role working with new teachers across rural, regional and remote NSW. She also worked with their mentors as they progressed towards professional competence. As such, her view was particularly important and, for a period of time at least, very influential. Note that when asked about what she believed ‘place’ referred to, she immediately rephrased the question in her response:

I guess to me (pause) context is really critical and I think you know within that you have a place or you find a place to belong. So I think place in terms of context, like where you are teaching, who you teach with, what you teach and who you teach are really critical so in terms of where you teach the size and location of that school or context are really critical in terms of looking at your place in it (PL8).

Notable here is also the use of ‘place’ as personal and teacher-centred, and therefore subtly orientated towards a sense that the teacher needs to belong in a new ‘place’ rather than learning from that place. Building on this theme, PL8 went on to describe the role of the teacher in the

community as an issue of place:

Then your place in that community can be a lot bigger than just you and that school. It can actually have an impact on what you do out of the school like you might be, if I think about one place at (town name) ... I was a classroom teacher in the school but I was also an assistant principal in the school and I was also the swimming coach and I was also involved in rugby, you know for a whole heap of things you know, in the supporters club so your sense of identity in the town stems back to sense of community in the school so it is bigger than the size and location of that school where we impact on your relationship bigger than just the one fences and walls of the school if that makes sense (PL8).

Significant in this excerpt is the reference to those ‘extra’ roles a teacher performs in many rural communities. They are positioned here as important in helping the teacher both feel at home and to become accepted by the community and not as helping her in knowing what constitutes place. Missing is any orientation to the knowledges and aspirations of the community or the development of cultural capital. They are instead linked to the social capital of the teacher and building her credibility in the community. Recognising, though, that not everything about a community can be described in terms of ‘size and location’, congruent with the notion of ‘context’, PL8 went on to recognize that, even though she lived in one rural town, it wasn’t until she moved to work in that town that she came to know it:

I thought I knew place but you don’t. You don’t know it until you are there, until you are working in it and people can’t write that in a book (PL8).

Here the use of ‘place’ becomes more ambiguous. It would appear as though PL8, and indeed the other interview subjects, lacked a language to describe place and instead gestured toward the feel or sense of a place or reverted to objective descriptions of context. Interestingly, even descriptions of size, location, social advantage-disadvantage lacked any specifics in relation to their educational affordances or implications. They instead worked as signals for a shared understanding that would remain unstated.

Juxtaposing PL8’s description of the rural teacher as being intimately involved

in the community, XPT2 was particularly keen to share his observations about how this has changed over the duration of his experience in rural schools. Given the importance of access to telecommunications as an issue in Chapter Four, the following excerpt raises significant questions about whether knowing place is important to being able to develop appropriate pedagogies to negotiate the curriculum as per the more place-conscious orientation discussed earlier:

the other thing I have noticed with the teachers coming out, because I have been here 20 years, is they are engaging in the local community less as well... They now have the ways and means to still constantly be part of their old social group whether it be via Facebook or Skype or mobile phone text messaging that - where before you came out here... You know, the first year I was out here I didn't even have a phone ... so we had to embrace the local community. Now there are kids who come out here who come to work, go from work. They might go to the shops, buy something for tea and they go home hop on their computer and then they are in their Facebook community and their Skype community and they never see anything but here and their house. Every opportunity they are out of here (XPT2).

At issue here is the role of virtual space, and its effect on teachers knowing place. In this excerpt, teachers may physically live in one place but they virtually inhabit another. This shows another side of the affordances of technology that may in fact undermine communities, as teachers do not come to know the place they teach in and as such the task of connecting to the students is more difficult. Technology here isn't directed towards making learning more meaningful, but about making the teacher more comfortable.

While the majority of subjects had difficulty describing place as anything other than context, most were able to describe 'rural' – however, such descriptions were really just another layer of detail on the categories of context. As such, explanations of the rural related to distance from the city and between towns, agricultural landscapes and industry, size and climate. As will be seen in the following section on curriculum, this knowledge was described as being more about engaging students, that is keeping them 'on task', than as a form of knowledge in and of itself. This can be seen even in the more place-conscious orientation described earlier where, even though local knowledge has been engaged with, more often than not it has been as a vehicle to teach the

curriculum as written. Only a few of the respondents took the opportunity to challenge the assumptions of the curriculum.

As a different perspective, again notable given her position, PL8 suggests that *'you can never know the rural and that is what you need to understand'*.

Therefore she suggests preparing rural teachers shouldn't be about knowing place or understanding the rural, but instead should focus on the knowledge in the curriculum, *'otherwise you are never teaching these kids'*. The focus therefore is on the powerful metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledge and 'teaching' this to the rural students, presumably on the teacher's terms, rather than on the teacher learning about, and teaching to, and with, rural knowledges.

### **5.6: Curriculum engagement with the rural**

At this point I pick up the issue of the rural, and its representation and engagement in the curriculum. In so doing, I highlight the different knowledge assumptions of the mandated curriculum and the lifeworld of many rural students. In this way I am referencing back to the arguments in Chapter Three about social justice and knowledge in the curriculum. In the context of this study, the focus is on school History and the way History is understood and related to rural places.

Pondering how the topics regarded as important to know have changed over his lifetime, an expert with deep knowledge of the History curriculum noted that:

When I was at school our history in some ways tended to be about Australia's rural development. We did the merinos, the sheep, Macarthur and so on. We ended up coming away somewhat well versed in the development of Australia's pastoral industry and squatting and so on, and with a sort of an historical geographical knowledge of rural Australia and an awareness of that heritage and legacy. It is almost reversed. It is almost the case now that the history heritage and so on that we look at tends to be city based with the exception of Indigenous. And Indigenous of course, when I was at school, just simply wasn't in the story at all - and now it is being rightfully inserted in the story and that is fine but it is almost at the expense of the broader rural heritage (PL2).

Accounting for this changed emphasis, the same expert suggested:

now we are looking at Australia's heritage through the eyes of educated city people, and I suppose right wing people might even call them Balmain elites or whatever, but if you look at what some of the preoccupations are: sustainability, multiculturalism, civics and citizenship, and the development of rights for Indigenous people and so on. ... they tend not to include the experience or heritage of rural kids and I am thinking of rural kids who do not have that experience perhaps of multiculturalism and so on (PL2).

The shift described here by PL2 reflects the shift described by Reid, Edwards and Power (2004), and Brett (2011), of the changing relationship between the country and the city over the last two decades. Previously, Brett (2011) argues, there was an acceptance that the state compensated people for the costs of remoteness and sparse settlement in return for the contribution of agriculture to the national economy. This broad acceptance that rural residents should be given a fair share of Australia's resources has been undermined by the neoliberal economic policies of the last 20 years and the relative decline of agriculture in the national economy. Consequently 'regions' have needed to pull their own weight. Linked to this, the role of the rural in the national imaginary has been replaced by a metropolitan-cosmopolitan image and a global outlook (Roberts, 2014), as noted by PL2.

The emphasis of the curriculum on cosmopolitan pre-occupations can cause tension between schools and communities, as expressed by a very experienced teacher referring to a Geography topic:

I had been teaching topics such as climate change in a geography classroom [in a rural school] and of course the whole basis of the community is sheep and wheat farming and that kind of thing, and I think that part of the difficulty in that situation is teaching aspects of that, but in a way where students won't think that you are actually criticizing the way in which they live and the way that they do things and I think that you need to adopt ... a kind of go slowly approach and that you are not going to change the world overnight (EXP8).

Here there is recognition that teaching such topics can be controversial, but the orientation is also towards 'changing' the way communities 'do things', presumably to be more in line with metropolitan-cosmopolitan values with regard to the environment. Reinforcing the different

understandings in operation here about how a topic like the environment is approached, and the tensions that can result, is this rather confronting recollection:

I was bailed up on the main street, with people all around, and absolutely abused by a students' father because of the greenie bullshit I was apparently teaching his son. He was absolutely wild, I thought he was going to punch me (EXP6).

In this context EXP6 was actually teaching a History unit on the Green bans and not any particular focus on existing environmental issues.

Similar to examples described by Comber, Nixon and Reid (2007), as a result EPT6 no longer felt safe in the community, didn't feel welcome in the local pub, or playing again in the football team with the person who confronted them. As a result, he took leave and transferred back to the city – after having taught in the community for ten years! A teacher with less experience and resilience, and without transfer rights, may have had another outcome (with resignation the only likely alternative).

Curricular-spatial justice, as evidenced in the place-conscious orientation, involves a balance of valuing place but also enabling students to achieve in the existing curriculum. This orientation can be seen in EXP8's reflections:

I felt it was important that students recognized there is a big world out there but I also felt it was important that there was the recognition that there is a lot about the community which they lived in that, well, I guess, needed to be valued and recognized (EXP8).

The 'big world' echoes the concern for a curriculum that is responsive to the local community while also providing opportunities beyond the community. However, if the curriculum itself privileges one way over another it effectively closes off the opportunities for rural students. Referring to this tension, an expert with high-level bureaucratic and academic experience suggested:

It is not an either-or, I think there is a dynamic tension between the two because if ... we move to very much localized school based curriculum which happened in the 70s particularly the danger ... is you can also disenfranchise kids from the broader society. So one of the constant tensions in curriculum is to have a balance between participation in the full society while also being

responsive to place and person. ...The fact when you centralize curriculum, as we are currently doing, and it is such a gigantic step for Australia to do, the curriculum as a necessity will be quite a conservative curriculum as we've got (PL1).

PL1 refers there to the challenge in reformulating education along the lines of any curricular-spatial perspective, for it cannot be only a relativistic place-based curriculum that results. Instead, a curricular-spatial perspective needs to enable participation in the full society for all, regardless of location, while promoting a more place-conscious approach, where place is not a barrier to achievement. Noting the barriers of place, another expert with experience in school leadership in rural areas and advocacy recounted a problem they experienced with the assessment process in the centralized NSW system. While focused upon the representations of the rural of some teachers, it also shows the centrality of thinking of subjects in relation to their contribution to the university entrance grade:

I am very conscious of almost an anti-rural nature of a lot of metropolitan teachers and in some way of the education system. I used to be very conscious that the higher school certificate exams were written in a metropolitan context, written with an understanding that students went to metropolitan schools. I remember an argument at one stage, quite a heated one, between a senior officer from the Department in a rural area and an officer of the Board who had been responsible for the remarks written after the HSC exams where that officer had written that it was obvious that students who had attended the University Study days prior to the exams were better prepared. Now the senior officer from (regional centre) absolutely slammed this guy because that meant that the exams were in fact biased in favour of those who were able to attend University Study Days, which meant rural students missed out to begin with. I also see it possibly not as much as it used to be, but, I tend to think that English literature is, and the study of it, and the exams of it are biased towards those who have the cultural experiences of metropolitan areas and that in fact discriminates against the students from rural areas doing as well, regardless of their ability level (PL7).

He further went on to recognize similar biases in the topics studied in the History curriculum, as well as raise the point that universities now tend to offer rural bonus schemes to top up university entry scores of applicants from rural schools. That this is deemed necessary by universities reinforces comparative levels of achievement of rural students, as explored in Chapter Seven, but also

suggests a recognition that the students are no less able than their metropolitan counterparts, just that the context of assessment is skewed.

Referring to the ability to re-interpret the curriculum in context, an expert in curriculum development, referring to the Australian Curriculum generally, suggested that:

I certainly think it has been designed for that. I think one of the things that for me is a real benefit of the Australian curriculum ... is that [the curriculum hasn't] pinned everything little thing down. That it is kind of a bit more open than say the NSW curriculum or the VCE is in Victoria where say in NSW we are used to having every single little thing dot pointed. In a sense the fact that [the Australian Curriculum doesn't] do that I think does make it more open. I think what [the Australian Curriculum is] trying to do ... is say ok here is the stuff which absolutely kids need to know about and here are some suggestions as to the ways you can go about it but they are not the only ways you can go about it (PL5).

This provides a significant insight into the justice perspective of a leader involved in the development and management of the new Australian curriculum – for them, it is not the centralized high-stakes knowledge of NSW, and as such, it is a significant departure from the equity orientation that will be discussed in Chapter Six. Notably, NSW has a syllabus form of official curriculum: that is, it specifies detailed points to be covered. However there is still a core of ‘essential’ knowledge that forms the backbone of the official curriculum. The ability to approach this flexibly gestures to notions of pedagogy and curriculum negotiation not familiar to the NSW context at least. From this perspective, teachers are seen as curriculum workers: however there was a recognition that this is not necessarily simple:

I think the trick is to get that across to teachers is going to be the big trick. You don't have to tick these off in the way you that you had to once upon a time tick off all the dot points in the syllabus documents (PL5).

Here there is a recognition that such an approach may indeed be new to many teachers. The curriculum work implied necessitates a deep understanding of the communities one works in and an ability to draw from, and connect to, relevant pieces of knowledge. Indeed, as this same professional leader suggests:

imaginatively and creatively there is enormous scope to pick up on what is happening in the local area and to work with it... Yes there

is some guidelines but you look at who is in front of you and where you are and take it from there (PL5).

The previous discussion about place and the rural suggests that this may indeed be difficult as it entails a form of curriculum work that values places over dominant metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledges. Furthermore, as will be discussed shortly, the performative context of teachers' work will conceivably exert pressure to conform to these dominant values.

Of course, such decisions rely on an understanding of the curriculum and subject area, as an expert in the History curriculum suggested:

The curriculum certainly is the basis but then if you don't know what to do with that stuff then you are buggered. So I suppose it comes back down to, again, your pedagogical content knowledge, and how you apply the curriculum, if you know what to do, and the possibilities of what you can do with it (PL6).

As important, however, is the knowledge of the students and community to ensure the choice of appropriate 'elaborations' and which possibilities to pursue. On this topic, another expert involved in curriculum development with curriculum responsibilities said:

I would say the Australian Curriculum is open ended. For example in history there is four content descriptions for a year and they are very broad – you know – understand what families – how families are different. Well I can look at rural families in my community with that content description. I don't have to do what New South Wales does ... I think the framework approach is far more suitable for diverse communities. You know communities where you want to make – keep learning relevant (PL3).

While there is a genuine care for responsiveness to communities, it is, as will be mentioned in the next section, somewhat misleading, as the 'community relatedness' perspective in the Australian Curriculum: History is in the early years of primary school alone. Furthermore, NSW only gives its teachers access to the NSW 'syllabus' version of the Australian Curriculum. More importantly, what is largely missing from these concerns, but is crucial to the decisions in relation to the curriculum implementation made by teachers, is their view of the rural in Australian society and which knowledge they believe students should value. Perhaps more pervasive is the performative context in which teachers work, and the pressures this places upon their decision-making.

### **5.7: Performative pressures on rural curriculum workers**

The curriculum form envisaged above by PL5 and PL6, both of whom work to implement and develop the Australian Curriculum, reflects the notion of informed prescription advanced by Luke, Woods and Weir (2013). However, many curriculum scholars have suggested that the level of detail contained in its elaborations predisposes it to being more a syllabus than a curriculum (Brennan, 2011). More specifically for the context of this study, as noted above NSW has a syllabus form as the official curriculum and has rendered the Australian Curriculum to this form. As such, what may be argued as a sense of informed prescription informing the Australian Curriculum is rearticulated into a more centralized official curriculum document. Indeed, this centralization of curriculum is a distinct part of the NSW educational culture (Yates, Collins & O'Connor, 2011; Collins & Vickers, 1999), as explored in Chapter Six.

Chapters Six and Seven will explore notions of equity dominant in NSW, predisposing that jurisdiction to a more centralized model of curriculum and a *curriculum hierarchy* in which the availability of 'powerful subjects' in rural schools (and access to the knowledge therein in a high stakes environment) is highlighted. Choosing which subjects to offer can be difficult for rural schools and provides a window into perceptions of rural students and communities in relation to a hierarchy of knowledge. As a second-year teacher put it: there are 'subjects we just don't offer' (NSW4). NSW4 explained that some subjects are 'really not important for the kids', or when suggested as important, 'just end up in arguments with families – like suggesting plumbing isn't a good job' (NST4). Here we can see a two-way pressure being exerted, in a high-stakes hierarchical system. Success in some subjects provides a form of mobility, however to encourage children's participation in them can be at odds with families' values. Alternatively, not to offer such subjects equates to a deficit orientation by the school towards rural students and their families.

Furthermore, achievement in these higher stakes subjects (often the proxy for school quality) is a significant focus of attention. As an experienced teacher in

a rural high school explains: 'I feel it is a numbers game ... the beginning of each year we are drilled about how many students received what band, state averages and what we are going to do about it' (EXP7). It is not just what futures communities want for their children, then, but where the school sits in relation to the rest of the state. This creates a particular climate that constrains the scope of teachers as curriculum workers.

While all the teachers I interviewed are indeed curriculum workers, the more place-conscious teachers saw this as a more significant part of their role than the more bureaucratically orientated. For the more place-conscious orientation, the language revolved more towards words like 'relevant' 'adapt' 'connect' and 'with', whereas for the more bureaucratically orientated, words like 'implement' or 'teach' dominate their descriptions of practice: indeed 'students' and 'children' are more often used by the former than the latter. Teachers (and leaders) with a more place-conscious orientation also come across as taking a more activist intellectual tack in their discussion and displacing the official documents from the centre, and at times not taking them too seriously at all. However, the more bureaucratically orientated use language more aligned with neoliberal perspectives on standards and pedagogy models.

The absence in the Australian Teaching Standards (AITSL, 2011) of any explicit connection to teachers as curriculum workers is potentially a significant constraining factor on this form of curriculum, and professional, work. For while the developers of the pedagogy models, and professional standards, would always argue that they are only implemented in relation to a curriculum, the evidence from this study suggests that this is not always the way they are received and enacted. For some there is certainty, provided by the curriculum, professional standards and pedagogy models. They together provide a solid foundation for their professional practice. For others, however, these do not provide certainty: instead, they highlight what is to them a lack of understanding of rural schools and rural teaching.

As Luke et al. (2103) argue, the knowledge valued in curriculum has been the key battlefield for debates around equity in education. They suggest that a more

useful focus may be the technical (meaning here structural) form of the curriculum. This is not to dismiss debates over the nature of knowledge in the curriculum, best typified by the work of Michael Apple, or the important concerns about what knowledge, or whose knowledge (Apple, 2004a), is of most worth (Pinar, 2012). Indeed I would hope that my inquiry will form part of those debates arguing that a recognition of rurality, and place, in curriculum knowledge is necessary. Both Apple (2004a) and Pinar (2012) see such debates as inherently ideological and likely to go on endlessly, so that while we will continue to engage in such important debates, we can still have an immediate impact on improving equity by focusing upon the form of the curriculum (Luke et al., 2013) in any time, location or instance.

However, as Connell (2009) demonstrates, the notion of the ‘good teacher’, and related teacher identity, has changed over time in relation to changing socio-political contexts. Central to the present era is what Connell describes as an “apparatus of certification and regulation” (2009, p.214), a conclusion mirrored by Clandinin, Downey, & Huber (2009). This insight is a key pivot for the present study, in that it provides a structure of analysis for the interviews and one of the key findings: that the way teachers see the curriculum influences their engagement with it in rural places. Perhaps more so that it is through structure that teachers see the knowledge issue, and that when structure is reinforced by the technologies of the audit society, and when that society values one world view over another, teachers’ freedom to be curriculum workers is diminished. This finding also enables the connection between the knowledge question and the issue of technical form. However, disrupting such ideologies and imageries of the place of the rural is not likely to be simple, as generations of teachers internalise the present state of being as part of their identity. Indeed as Leonard and Roberts (2014) observed in relation to a cohort of pre-service teachers, the specifications of a standardised performativity do not seem to *cause terror*, but rather, define their professional identity.

Here the rural may either become seen as the new terror (as it sits outside this identity), or as a place of comfort and safety from the terror. While half the new teachers I interviewed indicated they would not seek to remain in rural

schools, the other half valued their experiences and indicated they would stay, possibly skewing the data. Interestingly, their reasons for staying, and those of some experienced teacher participants, related more to personal lifestyle choices, supporting Boylan's (2010) thesis in relation to 'tree-changers' and rural staffing. However, participants citing lifestyle as a reason to remain in their rural school didn't always describe their practice in terms of what I am calling an authentic 'place-conscious curriculum', and were often highly critical of what they referred to as the 'state of education' today, and the increased expectations they perceived teachers to be subject to. For these teachers (predominantly experienced teachers in this study), the smaller class sizes, a perceived reduced workload, fewer parental demands, and 'less expectation to achieve' (sic) were all seen as positives that allowed a better work-life balance, particularly when coupled with the open spaces, proximity to nature for recreation, and housing affordability. In this context, the privileging of lifestyle and criticism of the education reforms being explored in this study – professional standards, pedagogy models and centralised curriculum and assessment – can be seen as a retreat from the pressures of performing in neoliberal assessment regimes. Worryingly, both stances continue to position the rural as an outsider.

## **5.8: Conclusion**

In raising this point of concern, I have drawn upon a series of semi-structured interviews, which have allowed me to examine the relationship teachers have with the curriculum in rural places from a theoretical perspective on teaching in place. The interview data has shown that in the context of a performative public culture and the particular state culture of NSW – characterized by a high degree of centralization, a syllabus form of curriculum, and high-stakes external assessment – teachers often do not consider themselves as curriculum workers. Their curriculum practice has often still been organized around the two dispositions I have contrasted for teaching in rural place: a bureaucratically informed disposition, and a more place-conscious informed disposition. While a

perspective towards social justice informs both, the nature of this in the more bureaucratically informed is oriented towards a distributive disposition, and in the more place-conscious towards a curricular-spatial disposition. Referencing Boomer's (1992) 'Negotiating the Curriculum' in the title to this chapter, I argue that negotiating the curriculum in place is a marker of the professionalism of rural educators informed by curricular-spatial justice. This idea will be further explored in Chapter Eight in relation to situated teaching.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Curriculum as Equity**

In this chapter I bring the rural standpoint to curriculum and equity. Informed by a sense of spatial justice and the orientation to a spatially informed curricular justice, I outline how a particular approach to curriculum has been adopted nationally, and specifically in NSW, in the interests of equity. I then build on the background in Chapters One and Three to further illustrate how this equity has not been achieved, how rural meanings have been marginalized, and curriculum hierarchies maintained. I have again employed the methodology of strategic eclecticism to examine relevant policy documents and re-analyse a recent study looking at school leader attitudes to the Australian Curriculum. In Chapter Seven I build on the background provided in this chapter to undertake original statistical analysis of the NSW senior secondary curriculum. Entwined with the substance of this material is a move to federalism in education policy in Australia, and the rise of neoliberalism. While I will reference this briefly, the policy context of which this is part forms the substantial content of Chapter Seven.

#### **6.1: Introduction**

While in Chapters One and Three I focused upon primary and to a lesser extent junior secondary, I focus more in this chapter upon the senior secondary curriculum in NSW and the junior secondary Australian Curriculum. This focus upon the junior secondary Australian Curriculum is because it embodies the philosophy of the National Goals of Schooling to pursue equity and excellence (MCEETYA, 2008), as well as revealing a perspective on curriculum and important knowledge. In this chapter I draw on an example from the Australian Curriculum: History, but also discuss the curriculum more broadly – as it is the overall representation of the rural that I am examining here.

The Australian Curriculum is also the context of an earlier study by Drummond, Halsey & van Breda (2012) that I briefly re-analyze here, in order

to illustrate how staff view the curriculum from a rural context. In Chapter Seven I turn the gaze to original research on the NSW senior secondary curriculum to illustrate the spatial distribution of access to and achievement in the curriculum. I take this senior secondary focus as these years are traditionally seen as the end-outcome of schooling and social mobility through educational achievement, a key educational equity aim (Teese, 2000/2013). By mixing national scales and state scales, I am responding to Yates and Collins' (2008) point that curriculum "Studies are usually done within states, not across states; or alternatively focus on commonwealth but not within state developments" (2008, p.4) to illustrate how federal policies influence state education. The use of different scales also reflects Nespor's (2004) arguments about educational scale-making, specifically how scale obscures educational processes.

There is here also an intention to disrupt the discourse that has developed around the 'teachers matter' thesis of educational equity. While I am not dismissing 'teacher quality' as an important and valid area of reform, and indeed would support Hattie's broad argument (2003; 2009), and perhaps suggest future research into its applicability in rural contexts, I suggest there is more to be considered than this alone (Thrupp, 1999; Snook, O'Neill, Clark, O'Neill & Openshaw, 2009; Teese, 2013). Indeed much of the political and media attention to Hattie's work appears to overlook the very basis of his thesis, that is, *within* school settings teachers have the biggest influence on student achievement, but that factors *outside* school have an even bigger influence (Hattie, 2003; 2009). Indeed within his study a number of the highly effective strategies are successful because teachers actively work *with* and *from* students and their contexts. It should be noted, though, that Hattie himself makes clear what his work is *not* in the preface of his 2009 book 'Visible Learning'. Perhaps informed by the policy misuse of his 2003 paper, he writes:

It is *not* a book about what cannot be influenced in schools – thus critical discussions about class, poverty, resources in families ... are not included – this is NOT because they are unimportant, indeed they may be more important than many of the influences discussed in this book (2009, p.ix, original emphasis).

Thus, in this study I am not looking at specific teaching and learning strategies, but at the broader social context in which education in rural schools, and communities, happens.

In this chapter I aim to bring a number of the issues identified in Hattie's (2009) preface back into the policy conversation. Thus, building on the evidence from the teachers discussed Chapter Five, the question remains *how does an understanding of context help teachers situate their practice, and how is effective teaching related to place?* – something that will be taken up again in Chapter Eight, in relation there to the notion of 'situated practice'. In terms of the overall dissertation, this chapter illustrates how looking at equity and curriculum changes from a rural standpoint raises issues of curricular-spatial justice.

This position is built on Teese's (2000/2013) argument that focusing on teachers and the ranking of schools, funding debates, and standardized tests takes no notice of the role of the academic curriculum in the equity debate. Teese (2000/2013) goes on to argue that the economically informed ranking and measuring of school achievement on the basis of basic literacy and numeracy, without reference to specialist areas of school performance, is problematic. Assessment of academic performance at the end of schooling to determine access to university entry and social power, regardless of how much a child improves over schooling, does not change long-term patterns of social inequality. Instead it misleads the community by distracting attention from issues of significance, and abrogates government's responsibility in other areas of social policy, and in this case curriculum.

### **6.1.2: Curriculum context of the study.**

At the time of writing, Australia is transitioning from state- or territory-based curriculum to a national curriculum – the Australian Curriculum (AC). Complicating this is the constitutional position education as a state or territory responsibility, with federal funding supplementation. As such, the AC has been arrived at through consultation, negotiation and financial leverage, where

federal funding for education is tied to the State or Territory implementation. It is the responsibility of state or territory curriculum authorities to tailor the AC to their particular structures and systems, and to approve it for adoption in their jurisdiction (ACARA, 2014). This allows for the influence of the particular ‘state culture’ (Yates, Collins & O’Connor, 2011; Collins & Vickers 1999) and for implementation based on state political needs. For example, NSW phased in the Foundation-10 Curriculum over the last four years (NSW BOSTES, 2014) and is presently consulting on revisions to the Years 11 and 12 curriculum, partly in response to the AC (NSW BOSTES, 2016). The ACT however, implemented the Foundation-10 Curriculum four years ago and trialled the senior secondary curriculum three years ago (ACT BSSS, 2014). Similarly, NSW has re-written the AC into its own syllabus format, including a selection of mandatory content; whereas WA has also re-written the Curriculum and included other content relevant to its position on the opposite side of the continent (WA BOS, 2014). It is therefore somewhat rhetorical to genuinely call the AC a ‘National Curriculum’, given these jurisdictional differences and associated assessment regimes.

Given this complex curriculum situation, in what follows I switch between discussing the AC and the NSW senior secondary curriculum – known as the Higher School Certificate (HSC). I do this firstly because NSW is the specific site of this study, and secondly, because the new AC-aligned courses in the senior secondary curriculum had not yet been endorsed and had not been taught at the time of my data collection – only data from the existing courses were available. Additionally the NSW state culture is very much directed towards maintaining the HSC, as evidenced by statements by the Minister (Piccoli, 2013). I use the AC to discuss curriculum and equity discourses as it is the most up-to-date example of the national conversation around curriculum and equity, and these recent national discussions also align with the evolution of thinking in relation to curriculum and equity that also underpin, at least in theory, the HSC. It is to a discussion of the evolution of this thinking that I now turn.

## **6.2: Evolution of the curriculum as equity**

Curriculum in NSW has evolved through several major reforms in the last half-century<sup>37</sup>. In this section I will outline a number of these major reforms, with particular focus on the NSW senior secondary curriculum. Though, in this section, I will also examine related Federal interventions. A chronological approach is used for ease of reading.

### **6.2.1: The Wyndham Scheme**

A starting point for my overview of the NSW state evolution is the Wyndham Scheme, which began in 1962<sup>38</sup>. This Scheme involved a move towards the comprehensive high school, broadly reflected nationally, based on the idea of ‘a local high school’ that admitted all students without selection. Regarded as a major democratic reform for education (Hughes, 2001), the Wyndham Scheme abolished the segregated state secondary schooling system that had characterised education in the previous century. It instituted a common ‘comprehensive high school’ for the first four years of high school, with the idea that separating students into different schools with different programs was inequitable (Vickers, 2011). Previously many children were denied access due to earlier selection based on primary school achievement and intelligence tests, with those not making the grade accessing vocationally orientated high schools of fewer years’ duration, and which did not facilitate entry to further education (Campbell & Sherington, 2006; Vickers, 2011). The Wyndham Scheme also raised the leaving age and introduced two upper years available at all schools, and while benchmarked towards university entrance and based on traditionally academic subjects (Vickers, 2011), they were ostensibly open to all students (Campbell & Sherington, 2006). ‘Equity’ in the Wyndham Scheme construction is inevitably equated with *access*, with access implying a

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<sup>37</sup> Indeed the most recent reforms were announced, somewhat unexpectedly, on 21st July 2016 (NSW BOSTES, 2016). On first reading, this most recent announcement appears to reinforce the argument made in this study.

<sup>38</sup> The Committee which recommended the subsequent scheme was chaired by Harold Wyndham (Hughes 2001).

redistribution of ‘powerful’ knowledge to others who previously were denied access to its benefits, and unable to command its power.

As Reid (2011) emphasizes, the idea here was a ‘neighbourhood’ school. Quoting Vickers (1999, p.1), Reid further emphasizes that “at its best, the comprehensive public school offered all students in its surrounding neighbourhood a ‘fair go’ at completing a full secondary education”. To this Reid adds the important rejoinder: “to what is still the HSC standard in NSW” (2011, p. 21). This was then the beginning of the idea of a common curriculum in NSW, though it still maintained an academic hierarchy for selection into university (Campbell & Sherington, 2006; Vickers, 2011). The Wyndham Scheme is then arguably the beginning of mass secondary education as a strategy aimed at alleviating broad social inequities (Connell et al., 1982; Campbell & Sherington, 2006).

The approach was popular in the country, where access to selective schools that enabled university access had not been available<sup>39</sup> (Hughes, 2001). Indeed the conservative parties that dominate regional electorates in NSW supported the Scheme, as the Country Party (now the National Party) had long maintained a vision for a rural high school model that provided access to high school and university for rural children (Campbell & Sherington, 2006). Implied herein is a recognition that rural students historically have not had equal access to the top of the curriculum hierarchy and the further education that it facilitated – an important contextual consideration for this study.

A second important contextual background for this study is the notion of a historical division in secondary schooling between academically selective secondary schools and vocational secondary schools (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Campbell & Sherington, 2006), and the argument that historically advantage always protects itself (Teese & Polesel, 2003). In this case, political compromise saw the retention of pre-existing academically selective (entry on academic merit) schools and powerful independent (entry on social/economic background) schools (Campbell & Sherington, 2006; Vickers, 2011). Thus,

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<sup>39</sup> Harold Wyndham’s family had moved from the country to the city to enable him to finish school (Hughes, 2001).

while the Wyndham Scheme had a philosophy of equitable access, there remained concentrations of pre-existing advantage in its implementation. Furthermore, as more students attended school and stayed on to compete for university entry, selective and fee-paying schools became the discriminator, providing a culture, and the resulting capital in Bourdieu's sense, of academic excellence and competition above other comprehensive schools (Teese & Polosel, 2003).

### **6.2.2: The beginning of Federal intervention**

Around the time of the implementation of the Wyndham Scheme, with increasing enrolments due to the expansion of secondary education and population growth, and a concern about national competitiveness in science, the Federal Government tentatively entered debates on school funding (Wilkinson et al., 2006). After their establishment in the 1880s only state governments had funded state schools, as education was not a federal responsibility (Campbell & Proctor, 2014). However this began to change with the Menzies government (1949-1966), and with it the character of Australian education. The Menzies Government, using the basis of need and an even redistribution of resources, began to fund specific resources in both government and non-government school (Wilkinson et al., 2006). Suddenly the Federal Government was funding schools, and more importantly non-government schools began receiving government funding, a change that was quickly followed by state governments (Campbell & Sherington, 2006).

### **6.2.3: Karmel and the evolution of economic thinking**

The new federal involvement in education took another significant step with the Karmel Report of 1973, with the response of the Whitlam federal government (1972-1975) marking the beginning of systematic federal involvement in education (Lingard, 2000). Until that point, federal involvement had largely been ad hoc and based on specific short-term programs. The Karmel Report, named after the chair of the related inquiry, Peter Karmel, also marked the

beginning of explicit economic rationales in education policy (Ryan, 2012). In introducing economic thinking, the Karmel Report advocated the notion of ‘equality of opportunity’, with the principle that students should have access to schools of roughly equal quality (Campbell & Sherington, 2006): recognition that the advent of mass schooling hadn’t in itself achieved equity.

The Karmel report rejected the idea from Coleman<sup>40</sup> that there should be an expectation that students should all do equally well on average, on the grounds that this was “unrealistic or at any rate prohibitively expensive” (Teese, 2011, p.16). Its notion of ‘equality of opportunity’ rested on the idea of roughly equal achievement across all social groups so not as to reproduce inequality (Marginson, 1997). However, as discussed in Chapter Three, social groups needed to be ‘recognised and sanctioned’ to factor in this equation. Perhaps more problematic, though, was that rather than resulting in any form of positive discrimination in favour of the less powerful, as the text of the Report suggested, in the end the recommendations used a basic view of equality resulting in the equal distribution of resources to all schools (Marginson, 1997).

In relation to curriculum, the Karmel Report (Commonwealth of Australia, 1973, p.23) considered that all students had a “right to be initiated into the culture through a comprehensive core curriculum”. Curriculum was then seen as a positive force in equity, as long as everyone had access to it. The powerful knowledge that students had to be given access to, suggested a content focus and a privileging of the dominant academic curriculum. There was, after all, no engagement with the nature of curriculum in any deep way. However the Karmel Report did instigate the development of the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP), which was aimed at making schooling as equal as possible, and throughout its life, did in practice lead to curriculum and equity innovations, as well as to the Country Areas Program itself. According to Marginson (1997), the Disadvantaged Schools Program was the high water mark of trying to alleviate poverty through education. However its programs worked to provide access to the mainstream curriculum through innovations in contextually relevant curriculum enactment, rather than a new curriculum.

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<sup>40</sup> That is, the Coleman et al. (1966) Report, a seminal report on educational equity in the USA.

The Karmel Report's economic emphasis coincided with increased federal concerns about the national economy and national competitiveness (Wilkinson et al., 2006), and shifted federal intervention in education from ad hoc social concerns to the national economic need to create workers in a new economy (Lingard, 2000). The shifts signalled by Karmel coincided with the new economics, which came to be known as economic rationalism (Pusey, 1991), a pre-cursor to neoliberalism. These policies resulted in the rural needing to "pull its own weight" (Brett, 2011), and ultimately shifted perceptions of the rural from being understood as the economic base to national development, and a romantic sentimental national character, to being regarded as not "pulling its own weight".

Marginson (1993) categorises the two main economic theories impacting upon education as human capital theory and economic rationalism, and explores their impact in education. Put simply, education was clearly positioned as a technology to build the capacity of human capital in the economy, and as such 'humans' were treated as any other capital, needing to be developed to meet the needs of the economy and profit generation. Indeed, Human Capital Theory has come to be the main theoretical basis of Australian educational policy (Buchanan et al, 2009). In terms of economic rationalism, there was to be open competition where reward would be dependent on effort and innovation, thus competition and choice would encourage innovation and efficiency. These policies paved the way for neoliberalism, essentially an extension of economic rationalism as "the agenda of economic and social transformation under the sign of the free market" (Connell, 2013, p.100).

Ball (2003) argues that neoliberalism is a class strategy in education that operates by providing a 'free' market that reinforces the advantage of the powerful. In educational terms, and as per the Karmel Report, this is mediated by access to a common curriculum that theoretically everyone has equal access to. Notably for this study, Connell suggests that "[n]eoliberalism has its central dynamic not within the metropole, but in the relation between metropole and periphery" (2013, p.101). While referring to the relationship between the 'metropole' in the traditional sense (of European centres of power in a

globalized world) and its ‘peripheral’ nations, there is a clear parallel between Australia’s dependence on the rural, while maintaining its position outside dominant metropolitan culture (Brett, 2011). This culture is then encoded in the common curriculum that ‘everyone’ has equal access to, and which success in mastering, determines educational achievement and social reward.

#### **6.2.4: Boomer and recognizing the rural**

Garth Boomer was one of Australia’s most innovative curriculum thinkers, among other things advocating a strategy of negotiating the curriculum that was socially-critical and contextually-sensitive (Green, 1999). Boomer resisted the idea that the curriculum itself facilitated equity and instead saw the enactment of the curriculum as the key event. It is not surprising, then, that the first focus on the rural as having specific needs in education was a federal inquiry chaired by Boomer, resulting in the 1988 ‘Schooling in Rural Australia’ Report. The Report outlined the challenges for rural schools of small enrolments and restricted curriculum offering, the challenges of accessing broad curriculum offerings, and achieving as well-rounded an education as students in urban areas (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988).

Importantly, undoubtedly influenced by Boomer’s philosophy of curriculum, the Report for the first time emphasised the differences between the urban and rural in terms of schooling environment, and raised issues related to the relevance and nature of the curriculum. However, even after raising these issues, the Report generally came down on the side of a general education, while suggesting schools should make this locally relevant (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988). In this way it was suggesting a form of situated enactment of the curriculum, while still supporting the idea of a core curriculum. In the terms of the Report this is: “A curriculum which meets the needs of rural students, but which also broadens their educational, social and employment horizons” (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988, p.203). While wanting students to have experiences beyond where they live, the Report

overlooks its own implied warning that a curriculum that renders the rural irrelevant will discourage participation.

### **6.2.5: Interlude – the rural and the curriculum after Boomer**

The relationship between the official curriculum and its ‘relevance’ or ‘acceptability’ for rural communities has been raised at least twice in reports since ‘Schooling in Rural Australia’ (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988; McKenzie, Harrold & Sturman, 1996; HREOC, 2000); however these are now mostly dated, and the issues they raise seen to be irrelevant under the neoliberal ideologies that dominate education today. Together these reports have raised issues about: the nature of the secondary school curriculum; its perceived lack of relevance to a rural community background; the importance of making curriculum relevant; concerns about tertiary pathway assumptions of the curriculum; and concerns about possibly streaming students away from tertiary pathways.

Referencing concerns about the staffing of rural schools (HREOC, 2000; Roberts, 2005), the problem of staff expertise in school subjects and the curriculum expertise to make them relevant, was perhaps a greater concern in these reports. In an important semantic shift, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission inquiry (2000) used the term ‘acceptable’ to describe the form of schooling required in rural areas, as well as emphasizing the place of a ‘relevant’ curriculum in this acceptable education. This construction shifts the emphasis from the curriculum to the people studying it, implicitly challenging the knowledge assumptions of the curriculum. Building upon these ideas, and recognising that “the knowledge base from which rural students operate is different” (Higgins, 1993, p.ix-xi), the former CAP operated from a rationale that rural disadvantage is associated with inappropriate curricula and teaching strategies (DEST, 2003). Consequently schools could use CAP funding to develop curriculum resources, although such programs have since been abolished under the national partnerships and the focus on ‘equity and excellence’.

Equally noticeable, though, is that these are the sum of concerns in these reports about relevance or appropriateness: while it was an issue, it was not *the* issue. Instead, supporting Cuervo's (2012) argument that distributive justice concerns dominate rural equity policy, the findings of these reports are in relation to: a reduced range and breadth in curriculum offerings due to staffing allocations being linked to enrolment; less face-to-face classes to attempt to compensate and provide a broader subject range; compensatory distance education enrolments for some subjects, and staff often teaching in areas outside of their expertise and inexperienced in the level of teaching (Schools Commission, 1987; McKenzie et al., 1996; HREOC, 2000). Like the default position of CAP (of re-contextualising the curriculum rather than changing it), these issues are essentially structural and related to staffing and funding. While they impact significantly upon the enacted curriculum, they do not look at the nature of the curriculum or teachers' views in its enactment.

These reports demark a period in the 1980s through to the early 2000s, arguably influenced by Michael Young's *Knowledge and Control* (1971) and Connell, Ashenden, Kessler & Dowsett's *Making the Difference* (1982), that raise significant questions about the politics of knowledge in the curriculum. More generally, this period is associated with recognition of, and concern, for the effects of poverty in education that saw the establishment, and influence, of the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) and CAP, and that sought to improve equity in education by making curriculum and school more relevant and accessible to traditionally disadvantaged groups. However, while major academic works were showing the influence of society and culture in education (e.g. Coleman et al., Bourdieu, Connell et al., Boomer, Young), the political and policy sphere was moving further towards economically determined approaches (Marginson, 1993).

Except for a brief period of overlap in Boomer's review, which had no significant policy outcome, and the practices of the DSP, the dominant academic ideas of the time do not appear to have impacted on public policy. With the exception of the work of Teese and his colleagues (e.g. Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009) and Luke,

Woods & Weir (2013), much work in disadvantage and schooling focuses more on the process of schooling and pedagogy (e.g Munns, Sawyer & Cole, 2013; Smyth & Wrigley, 2013; Gorard & See, 2013; Smyth, Down & McInerney, 2010; Commonwealth of Australia [Bradley], 2008) than on the role of the curriculum. It is then curriculum enactment rather than the curriculum itself that is the driver of equity. There is a subtle shift here towards seeing equity (in subtly economic terms) as access to this curriculum, and looking to teachers' practices as the element to modify disadvantage. Against this backdrop, the new Australian Curriculum can be seen as returning to the long-standing tradition in relation to Australia's rural regions of ensuring equity through standardization; there is, as Green and Letts (2007, p. 61) argue, a "view, deeply enshrined in the Australian system, that location is of no consequence to the delivery of education, that distance can be effectively annulled".

#### **6.2.6: The Carrick Review and the reform of NSW secondary schooling**

In response to the global economic challenges of the mid 1970s, curriculum review in NSW was, for a brief period, influenced by the needs for greatly increased student retention and curriculum relevance to all students, articulated in the Swann-McKinnon Report of 1984 (Vickers, 2011). Implemented in 1987, this Report sought to introduce options relevant for the greatly increased number of students in secondary school who were not aiming at university entry and suggested the reintroduction of vocational learning in response to the economic restructuring of the 1980s (Vickers, 2011). However this was short-lived, as the election of a new conservative government brought the most comprehensive review of schooling in NSW since the Wyndham Scheme— the Carrick Review of 1989<sup>41</sup>. This review reinforced the dominant characteristics of the NSW state culture of education, particularly, a focus on 'academic excellence' and an aversion to the idea that students with different post-school destinations should complete different programs (Vickers, 2011).

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<sup>41</sup> So called after its chair, John Carrick, a former conservative NSW Senator and federal minister for education in the late 1970s (Starr, 2012).

According to Vickers (2011, p.137), the Carrick Review “sharply re-focused the discourse that dominates most discussions of the NSW senior secondary curriculum from this time on”. It introduces ideas of private-sector management and competition so that “the shift was clearly away from a focus on retention, breadth and relevance, towards greater academic rigour and higher performance standards” (Vickers, 2011, p.137). While seeing education as central to economic development and ‘allowing’ individuals to control their own lives, the Carrick Review was particularly focused on the need for a higher quality education for all and the maintenance of the academic standards of the HSC (Committee of Review of NSW schools, 1989). Again, access to a high-quality and rigorous curriculum was central to achieving equity.

The Carrick Review constructed equity as the ability to choose; arguing that “freedom of choice means little if the child cannot access choice” (Committee of Review of NSW schools, 1989, p. 205), though this choice was additional to a common core that all students were required to access (Committee of Review of NSW schools, 1989). In assisting this ability to ‘choose’, the Carrick Review sought approaches to enhance the mobility of disadvantaged groups (of which he included rural and remote schools) but did not propose any specific measures. Instead, while the Carrick Review recognized disadvantage it criticised a deficit view that blames backgrounds, instead arguing that diversity exists, and advocating the centrality of an academic curriculum:

An alternative approach sees the disadvantaged as not culturally deficient, but simply culturally different. There is a view that by eliminating the notion of failure, children’s varied backgrounds are valued and respected, their different learning styles recognized, and their self-esteem strengthened. Problems are noted, however, if the response to such a conceptualization is an alternative curriculum which, although giving children successful learning experiences and reflecting the child’s immediate world, lacks rigour and does not offer the skills and knowledge necessary to expand the child’s world and give access to economic and social power and mobility. It is suggested that, while the curriculum should be related to the interests and experiences of the child, this should be seen as the beginning point rather than a goal. The aims of education are seen as applying to all students and thus the issue becomes the use of alternative means, such as changes in content and teaching method, to achieve the same ends (Committee of Review of NSW schools, 1989, p.216).

Here the curriculum is seen as helping achieve equity if it is rigorous and academic. This seems a direct repudiation of the work of Connell et al. (1982), whose seminal study of educational disadvantage highlighting the connection between culture, school and the curriculum was also situated in NSW. Similarly, Connell's work on curricular justice (1992; 1993) is seemingly partly motivated as a retort to this position.

Perhaps most importantly, the Carrick Review recommended the establishment of an independent Board of Studies, separate from the NSW Department of Education, which was adopted (Campbell & Sherington, 2006). Furthermore, the Carrick Review's ideas of choice and the independent Board of Studies were enshrined in legislation in the form of the revised Education Act in NSW (1990)(Campbell & Sherington, 2006). Importantly, though, through this new Act curriculum leadership was taken from the Department and given to the Minister for Education, thereby explicitly politicising curriculum and paving the way for the Australian Curriculum reforms we now have (Riordan, 2011).

Overall, the Carrick Review reforms took debates away from funding, the needs of disadvantaged groups and students not aiming for university, and redirected them toward rights, responsibility, quality and excellence (Starr, 2012). As part of this, more selective and specialist schools were established, which consequently reduced the academic range of local comprehensive schools (Vinson, 2002; Vickers, 2011). This particularly affected low SES high schools, where the senior secondary cohort shrunk as students of more relative advantage sought places in the selective and specialist schools, leaving greater concentrations of disadvantaged students for whom access to the academic curriculum would be difficult, and for whom enhancing access to the curriculum had squarely become the responsibility of teachers (Vinson, 2002; Vickers, 2011). Thus the Carrick review's mantra of quality and excellence arguably began the move to focusing on the teacher, and on pedagogy, and foreclosed consideration of other factors such as the curriculum in achieving equity.

### **6.2.7: The McGaw Report and strengthening the NSW HSC**

By 1995 a feature of the NSW Senior Secondary system was a series of courses for all ability levels (Vickers, 2011). However, there was increasing concern that students were not studying, what were regarded as, “advanced-level courses” (Vickers, 2011). The President of the Board of Studies argued that there was “abundant evidence that students have become more concerned with ‘playing the game’, choosing subjects to maximize tertiary entrance scores, rather than gaining deeper knowledge” (Stanley, 1995 in Vickers, 2011, p.140). This led to the 1995 review, chaired by Barry McGaw, aimed at strengthening and retaining the HSC as a rigorous credential (New South Government, 1996). Specifically useful in the context of this study for the analysis in Chapter Seven, the McGaw review showed declining participation in advanced-level courses, differentiated HSC courses, and that students in the more advantaged metropolitan suburbs were studying higher-level subjects and achieving better results than students in the country and less advantaged suburbs (New South Government, 1996). This was particularly the case for Mathematics and English (New South Government, 1996), and for that reason I will re-analyze the data relating to these same subjects in Chapter Seven. The Government’s response in relation to equity was to assert that:

Equity is not achieved by watering down the curriculum to meet the needs of students who are perceived to be of lower ability. The curriculum for the Higher School Certificate must be able to cater for the interests and abilities of the full range of students, without compromising standards or lowering expectations (NSW Government, 1997, p.4).

The NSW Board of Studies had also, the year before, released a statement of equity principles (that still applies) which recognized that some groups are traditionally disadvantaged in gaining access to, and fully participating in, the curriculum (1996). “Students who live in isolated rural communities” (NSW BOS, 1996, p.5) were included here amongst the usual identified groups, with the “pursuit of excellence without discriminating” (p.5) so as to “enable [ling] all students to develop to their full potential” (p. 5) the objective of the principles.

According to Vickers, the McGaw review can be seen as an appeal to parents that the Government was requiring the highest possible standards. The review led to the elimination of subjects that were considered to be less academically demanding (Vickers, 2011). The McGaw review also strengthened the Year 10 School Certificate credential by mandating increased disciplinary skills in History and Geography – a nod to the Wyndham Scheme’s vision of disciplines and the shared heritage that all students are entitled to (Vickers, 2011), and a heritage that, again, I would argue privileges cosmopolitan-metropolitan ways.

In this move to raise the intellectual demands of the HSC, coupled with the growth of selective and non-government schools, we essentially see the end of the Wyndham vision of a comprehensive high school (Campbell & Sherington, 2006). On the one hand, the HSC was for ‘all students’, but the principles of rigour enacted through maintaining examinations and a centralized curriculum ensured a splitting of school populations and a divide between comprehensive and selective schools. Academically selective schools, promoted by the state as key policies of choice, as well as schools in the non-government sector, needed to find ways to maintain the ‘excellence’ that provided their status (Campbell & Sherington, 2006). As a strategy of class maintenance, the expansion of access to rigour is seen as an equity principle; however, as we will see in Chapter Seven, this access, and subsequent achievement, is socially structured and spatially organized to work *against* the expansion to ‘all students’.

### **6.2.8: An Australian Curriculum**

It is worth noting at this point that Barry McGaw, the chair of the McGaw review, was also subsequently charged with overseeing the development of the Australian Curriculum. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the notion of equity underpinning the Australian curriculum (ACARA, 2011) is similar to that which led to curriculum reform in many state and territories in the late 1980s and beyond – removing formal streaming in the curriculum and ensuring that everyone has ‘access’ to the same subjects. I discussed this in Chapter Three in relation to equity discourses of distributive justice, where resources are

redistributed to ensure everyone has the same access and where access to knowledge, or the metaphorical redistribution of that knowledge, is the goal.

As I will go on to look at the AC in more detail, I simply want to point out here that one of the main rationales for moving to a national curriculum in Australia is the ongoing pursuit of equity in Australian education (ACARA, 2011).

Following on from the Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals of Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008), the pursuit of ‘equity and excellence’ through “world class curriculum and assessment” will depend on the ability to “compete in the global economy on knowledge and innovation”(MCEETYA, 2008, n.p.). Where disadvantage is recognized, it is to be addressed through targeted programs, to ensure that SES is not a determinant of educational outcome (MCEETYA, 2008). For ACARA, which was responsible for developing the Australian Curriculum, and federal policy, curriculum is itself not an issue in the pursuit of more equitable educational outcomes: access to, and achievement in, the curriculum remains the primary equity concern.

### **6.2.9: Gonski**

Confirming the view that curriculum has no bearing on equity, the biggest federal review of education and achievement for a generation, colloquially known as the Gonski Review (Australian Government, 2011), totally overlooked curriculum in its deliberations. To be fair, the terms of reference of the Review were explicitly in relation to funding and resourcing to achieve equity (Australian Government, 2011); however, this only reinforces the dominance of distributive justice thinking in terms of equity and a centralized curriculum. For example, of the 35 times the word ‘curriculum’ appears in the text of the Gonski report, only two imply any link to disadvantage. The majority (22) are references to the resources needed to meet curriculum requirements, with the remaining eleven referring to ACARA or naming the AC. Regardless, given that accessing a curriculum is a primary object in education and that achievement in it is the benchmark against which equity is measured, that it was virtually ignored in this review further reinforces the

dominance of the metropolitan-cosmopolitan values that informed and guided it.

In relation to the curriculum as an issue of equity, the report, citing Perry and McConney (2010), stated that one way in which “schools with high concentrations of disadvantaged students differ from schools with high concentrations of students from more advantaged backgrounds” is through “a less rigorous curriculum” (Australian Government, 2011, p.124). However, access to the curriculum is assumed as the key determinant of equity. As the report notes, the “National curriculum is being developed to set clear achievement standards for all students” (Australian Government, 2011, p.xiv).

The report goes on to note that:

The commitment to develop a national curriculum is another example that reflects a willingness of the Australian Government, state and territory governments, and the non-government sector to work together across geographical and school sectoral boundaries to deliver a high-quality education for all young Australians (Australian Government, 2011, p.48).

Reinforcing the view of the curriculum’s role in equity, the report noted:

Another way [to minimise differences in quality between low and high socioeconomic status schools] is to ensure that core curriculums and program offerings are relatively similar across all schools ... The panel recognises that ... Australia has made significant progress towards ensuring core curriculums are similar across all schools through the introduction of the Australian Curriculum (Australian Government, 2011, p.127).

This is a far cry from the complex view of educational equity and the link to the curriculum explored in the academic field (e.g. Connell et al., 1982; Coleman et al., 1966; Young, 1971), or the ideas of relevance or acceptability prefaced by Boomer and occasionally raised, and admittedly overlooked, in other federal and state reports. Similarly, it is far removed from practices in the Disadvantaged Schools Program and recent research into educational equity that, while not focusing on the curriculum *per se*, seek to make the curriculum more meaningful to marginalized communities through the pedagogy employed

(e.g. Munns, Sawyer & Cole, 2013; Smyth & Wrigley, 2013; Gorard & See, 2013; Smyth, Down & McInerney, 2010)<sup>42</sup>.

Instead, the report continued the theme of recent times of placing the responsibility for achieving equity squarely in the hands of teachers, noting:

High-quality teachers develop personalised practices to cater to the variety of learning needs, and are flexible in adapting and applying the curriculum in a way that is relevant to disadvantaged students (Australian Government, 2011, p.140).

### **6.2.10: Summary**

In this section I have detailed the evolution of equity policies in NSW in relation to the curriculum, and the place of the rural in this thinking. I have shown that, both federally and in the state of NSW, there exists a long-standing perspective among policy makers that curriculum is neutral when it comes to equity. Where curriculum is foregrounded in equity policies, it is overwhelmingly as a force of equalization associated with some form of distributive justice for groups who traditionally struggle to succeed in schools. Economic thinking that sees education as developing human resources for the economy and employs ideas of choice and efficiency has dominated policy in this regard (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), even while socially critical research has formed the academic consensus on similar issues of educational equity.

In the remainder of Chapter Six, I set out to show that the curriculum is indeed implicated in creating unequal outcomes, and that these unequal outcomes are determined based on social background and location. In advancing this argument I will proceed in two ways: firstly, I will show how the AC embodies metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledges and has been implemented as a new form of curriculum-as-policy. Then, in Chapter Seven I introduce the notion of curriculum hierarchies and show how they exist in relation to the NSW HSC. As I will show, the differentiated access and achievement patterns observed by

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<sup>42</sup> As the ultimate evidence of the persistence of failed discourses, the newly elected Australian Federal Government instigated a review of the AC after it had only been implemented for one year. They did this based upon the argument that the Australian Curriculum was not rigorous enough (Australian Government, 2014).

McGaw, and that led to a strengthening of the HSC, still exist. Similarly the access and achievement of rural students still reflects patterns outlined in federal and state reports. While I draw on the same (critical) academic work that has not been influential in policy formation, I argue that the persistence of such stratified achievement indicates that economically informed policy positions and distributive justice approaches clearly don't work. As Connell (1993; 2011; Connell et al., 1982) has consistently argued, the failure to change the curriculum has done nothing to redress social inequalities through schooling.

### **6.3: Curriculum-as-policy**

On one level it may seem self-evident that curriculum is education policy; after all, I have highlighted how the dominant discourse of education in Australian policy has been based on the economic philosophy of human capital development. However, other than being described as 'world class' or 'rigorous', curriculum itself has been marginal in education policy decisions, which mainly relate to resource allocation, credentialing, and school structures. The 'content', 'form' and structure of the curriculum has been taken for granted: an academic curriculum that prepares students for work, directly or via university.

Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p.93) point out, whilst arguing that curriculum is policy, that "education policy studies and curriculum studies have usually been considered as separate arenas of theory and practice". Traditionally curriculum has revolved around questions of what 'knowledge is of most worth' (Pinar, 2012), while policy has been concerned with the allocation of values and, from that, the distribution of scarce resources (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Echoing the Australian experience outlined above, Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p.93) point out that policy studies have "addressed issues of funding and equity, but have not usually linked them to their effects on practices of curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation". In response, in this section I use the strategy of a rural standpoint to also advance the perceptive of curriculum-as-policy, as I argue that the AC,

and also the NSW HSC, embody metropolitan-cosmopolitan values and distribute resources in pursuit of them. The curriculum question of ‘what knowledge is of most worth’ is implicitly answered as ‘metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledge’. Because of this, the traditionally separate fields of policy (the distribution of scarce resources) and curriculum (the knowledge we pass on to future generations) have been conflated such that curriculum has been repositioned as an instrument of policy (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Brennan, 2011; Luke, Woods & Weir, 2013). Perhaps even more problematic is that the dominant policy discourse of at least the last decade, of which curriculum is now a part, sees education in human capital and economic terms.

### **6.3.1: Curriculum-as-equity, and the marginalisation of the rural**

One of the main rationales for moving to a national curriculum in Australia is the ongoing pursuit of equity in Australian education (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2011). However, in order to achieve this I argue that the new Australian Curriculum, influenced by the dominant discourses of the last decade, considers all schools as the same, and all students as needing the same education. As I suggested in Chapter Three, ‘equity’ in contemporary Australian education is measured against a metropolitan-cosmopolitan norm. Dominated by distributive justice approaches that seek to allocate resources where they are needed most, this version of equity seeks instead to allocate knowledge where it is most needed, in the form of a standard national curriculum. In the process, the uniqueness of each school, indeed each classroom, becomes more an issue of curriculum enactment than any recognition of the distinctive ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll et al., 1992) of students and their communities. The resultant marginalisation of rural knowledges in favour of a dominant metropolitan-cosmopolitan form of knowledge creates rural educational disadvantage by positioning the rural on the periphery of a ‘normal’ education. At issue here, then, is that education has become ambivalent with regard to place, reinforcing that equity has overlooked the role of the official curriculum in causing injustice rather than overcoming it.

It is to uncovering this process in the Australian Curriculum that this section is directed.

This analysis is also informed by the perspective, outlined in Chapter Three, that in order to achieve equity in rural schooling Australian education needs to re-engage with issues of curricular justice through considering the affordances of *place*. Such a focus resists standardized metropolitan-cosmopolitan values and associated knowledges, and instead brings attention to the values and knowledges of different places, such as, for my argument here, rural places. Without such an orientation, the curriculum encourages students to value other ways of being and prepares them to leave their communities in order to ‘succeed’ (Corbett, 2007). As discussed in Chapter One, curriculum is a window on the nation; what it values about its past and what it hopes for its future. In that chapter I described the concept of ‘a cosmopolitan nation’ as, the dominant value system of the present time. How the rural fits in that, and its related equity discourse, is the concern here.

At this point in curriculum history, the politicization and centralization of curriculum, entwined with the economic rationales of education, have produced a curriculum with an explicit global and economic orientation (MCEETYA, 2008). This explicit orientation towards the 21<sup>st</sup> Century<sup>43</sup> (MCEETYA, 2008) is based on the values of the global metropolitan-cosmopolitan world and, consequently it positions any other values as outdated, undesirable, and of the past. Equity is constructed as access to the globalized economy and, following the trend of recent Australian curriculum history, facilitated through access to a singular curriculum. So universal are these values that to not provide access to them, and the future they promise, is itself seen as an injustice.

Through this shift, education has become a tool in what Rizvi and Lingard (2010) call the “neoliberal social imaginary”, a socio-political perspective based on the ‘necessity’ of neoliberalism. As both the neoliberal imaginary and the national goals for schooling have a global outlook, seek economic

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<sup>43</sup> Notwithstanding the irony that we were nearly a decade into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century when the National Goals of Schooling were agreed and some 14 years in as this curriculum is being implemented.

advancement, and value mobility in a globalised world, they are inherently cosmopolitan (McLeod, 2012; Popkewitz, 2008). Combined, the neoliberal social imaginary and cosmopolitanism forms the basis of the system of ideas and reasoning that influences the development of the curriculum (Popkewitz, 1997) and the ideology of education (Apple, 2004a). In terms similar to those used by Apple (2004a), this ideology is valued in the curriculum and instilled at the expense of other values – and justified in the interests of ‘equity’. The move to boards of education, such as the NSW Board of Studies, under a Minister, has facilitated the politicization of curriculum and its co-opting into national economic policy. This inevitably produces a certain form of curriculum: not one that encompasses the broad educational experience advocated by Pinar (2012), but a more instrumental form directed to the principles of policy as the allocation of the values (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) of the imagined nation (Green, 2003). It is in this context that the Australian Curriculum has been developed as a curriculum for a nation, and as such, the nation it imagines and represents to students — and the freedom it allows to explore these perspectives — is of immense importance (Luke, Woods & Weir, 2013).

As Luke, Woods and Weir (2013) point out, curriculum debates have traditionally focused upon the knowledge question, and not what they term “the technical form” of the curriculum. They recognise the centrality of this as a form of recognitional social justice, but suggest that perhaps the curriculum form is *more* important. Drawing on their own work and others, such as Schleicher (2008), they posit that a form of ‘informed prescription’, where teachers have freedom to make the curriculum relevant to their students and their communities, provides more equitable outcomes than an overly prescriptive syllabus-style curriculum.

Driven by a neoliberal version of equity, the Australian Curriculum has been described as “a syllabus document, specifying content and sequence of content by year level of schooling” (Brennan, 2011 p. 264) to ensure that everyone learns the same thing, which can then be regulated through testing, measurement and accountability (Lingard, 2010) in order to achieve its equity

goal. Positioning curriculum as policy, especially its stated role in helping achieve equity (ACARA 2011), predisposes a disposition to standardisation, regulation and accountability as per broad neoliberal governance. Through this process, curriculum is separated from pedagogy, itself codified as skills in Department-sponsored models of pedagogy, such that curriculum is no longer a situated enactment (Yates, 2009) that is responsive to students and their communities and, instead, is abstracted, powerful knowledge to be mastered. In the case of the rural, the Australian Curriculum becomes an example of the way in which the mediated nature of just practices that involve norms, such as those dominant in Australian education, end up working against it in practice (Gewirtz, 2006). Against the backdrop of the comparatively poor educational achievement of many students in rural areas, compared with many students in metropolitan areas, these ‘equity’ justifications take on significant weight.

### **6.3.2: The rural in the Australian Curriculum**

I turn now to the representation of the rural, and the space for non-cosmopolitan knowledge, in the new Australian Curriculum. In doing so, I have looked for any representations of non-cosmopolitan spaces, especially rural areas, or for any references to linking the curriculum to local contexts in the AC. Notably there are *no* specific references to rural communities or issues in the AC, something that is interesting given the comment by PL2 in Chapter Five about curriculum once including rural development, and also Brett’s (2011) observations about changing national priorities.

As a secondary analysis, then, I have also examined instructions to look at local contexts, as such instructions would encourage dispositions more aligned with the place-conscious teacher orientation described in Chapter Five. Such instructions act as curriculum guides for teachers and, are symbolically powerful in encouraging teachers, particularly those in non-metropolitan areas, to look at the local community. Specifically I examined the Australian Curriculum: History P-10 and the Australian Curriculum: English P-10, in line with the focus on History in Chapter Five. The Australian Curriculum: English

has been included to ensure breadth of analysis. I restricted the formal analysis to P-10 as there are the mandatory years of instruction where all students must study these subjects.<sup>44 45</sup>

The most significant insight into the nature of the curriculum comes from the *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: History* (ACARA, 2009), a guiding document that directed the subsequent development of the curriculum. This document contained a strong statement about including local contexts in curriculum. Specifically, it stated: “The national history curriculum will provide flexibility and choice for teachers. The factors that influence this choice include school and community contexts, local history learning opportunities, contemporary and local issues and available learning resources” (ACARA, 2009 p.12). Notably this statement was included in a section titled ‘equity and opportunity’, and presents a view that curriculum needs to relate to students and their communities. However, in the subsequent curriculum document, this view had slipped to simply asserting that “[t]he curriculum provides opportunities for the content to be taught using specific local contexts” (ACARA, 2013a, n.p.), and upon further analysis, this is essentially contained in the Foundation to Year Three curriculum. Thereafter, the history represented becomes more abstract<sup>46</sup> and removed from students’ communities (fig 6.1), as the type of history represented shifts from understanding historical processes to representing the nation and its place in a global world. Indeed as the rationale for the Australian Curriculum: History states: “The curriculum generally takes a world history approach within which the history of Australia is taught. It does this in order to equip students for the world (local, regional and global) in which they live” (ACARA, 2013a, n.p.).

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<sup>44</sup> However I would note that including the senior secondary years does not change the conclusion, as there are similarly no links to the rural or local context.

<sup>45</sup> An examination of Mathematics and Science for references to local context, rather than substantive content points, as a direction of enactment, was also conducted and found no relevant references.

<sup>46</sup> This move towards abstraction is also conceivably linked to notions of psychological development as for Piaget and Vygotsky.

F: Personal and Family Histories	Learning <i>within</i>	Learning <i>about</i>	Increasingly 'High Stakes' ->
1: Present and Past Family Life			
2: The Past in the Present			
3: Community & Remembrance			
4: First Contacts			
5: The Australian Colonies			
6: Australia as a Nation			
7: The Ancient World			
8: The Ancient to the Modern World			
9: The Making of the Modern World			
10: The Modern World and Australia			

Fig 6.1: The AC History 7-10

The shift from the local to national history, and national development, begins mid-way through the Year Three content descriptors – focusing upon national and international days of significance (e.g. ANZAC, Bastille Day and Ramadan). Thereafter history moves from learning *within community* to learning *about* peoples, ideas, events and significant movements. Put another way, as the curriculum moves from foundational to higher stakes, the knowledge that is privileged becomes more abstract and more powerful. Year Four for example has a focus on learning about first contact and Australia’s first peoples (as expressed in the curriculum), Year Five about the Australian Colonies, and so forth. Increasingly, as students develop they learn about other ‘places’ and that ideas and events driving national and global developments are centred elsewhere. This is similar to Corbett’s (2010a) suggestion that, as school progresses in the rural Canadian community he studied, schooling increasingly becomes about other ‘places’.

Structurally, other problems arise at this point, as mentioned by Brennan (2011). Firstly, the curriculum that is promoted as being ‘open’ consists of a number of syllabus-like content descriptions that need to be covered within an uncertain time allocation. Secondly, the movement to learning about events begins to demand a greater degree of historical knowledge from the teacher, something that may be problematic, especially in the primary school curriculum and jurisdictions where history does not have a strong independent tradition. While learning about some of the primary topics has opportunities to include the local, the structure of the Curriculum acts to privilege the implied meanings. Linking to the local (rural) relies on a disposition of the teacher to do so, and

this furthermore relies upon a valuing of the local in relation to the powerful knowledge of elsewhere.<sup>47</sup>

Briefly broadening the theme of curriculum as related to national development, the rationale for the Australian Curriculum: English (AC: E) states that: “The Australian Curriculum: English contributes both to nation-building and to internationalisation” and that “The Australian Curriculum: English also helps students to engage imaginatively and critically with literature to expand the scope of their experience” (ACARA, 2013a). Importantly it is up to the school’s curriculum leader and class teacher to decide which texts to use, from a prescribed list, in their study of the *AC:E* and, as such, it is their view of what is important to know and how they understand the Australian nation that influences these decisions. It would appear that, in contrast to the *AC:H*, it is only in Year Eight that students are pointed to: “Explore the interconnectedness of Country and Place, People, Identity and Culture in texts including those by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors” (ACELT1806). However, here the elaborations that suggest what teachers may include are within the 'context' of Aboriginal literature and not any other representation of the rural.

Returning to the overall structure of the Australian Curriculum, it is clear that, as Luke et al. (2013) suggest, the real curricular decisions have been made by bureaucrats through structural issues, consistent with Green’s (2003) argument that Australian curriculum reform has traditionally had a bureaucratic-administrative character. Perhaps the clearest evidence that the needs of rural schools are not understood, or considered, is that the Australian Curriculum is structured in chronological year-based order. As Brennan (2011) suggests, the year-by-year structure is problematic as many rural schools are small schools,

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<sup>47</sup> Bringing this disposition to perhaps seeing the local (rural) as backward, compared to cosmopolitan knowledge and subject content knowledge, is a further concern for school textbooks and the way they represent the curriculum, and therefore the rural. When faced with a new area of study, in a subject they may not be overly familiar with, and within a social and political concern for the nation’s history, teachers often rely on the support of school textbooks. However, as one expert with experience in rural schools and supporting new teachers succinctly put it in the interviews outlined in Chapter Five: *‘the mad scramble is on to be the first text[book] out, as the first one becomes the default curriculum ... but when you teach from a textbook you are not focusing on the community you work in’* (PL8). Supporting this concern is the finding from the interviews generally that many new teachers, particularly those who struggled with their rural placement, reported a heavy reliance on textbooks.

with students grouped in staged classes. Previous syllabus structures in most jurisdictions allowed for this; for example, New South Wales has staged curriculum documents, and as such, students can learn coherently in mixed-age classes. However the Australian Curriculum doesn't appear to have an overarching stage structure. Furthermore, the chronological structure creates difficult demands on teachers in small schools to meet the needs of students of different ages in the same class.

### **6.3.3: Consultation and non-recognition**

As Cuervo (2012) has suggested, drawing on Fraser (2008), the ability to be involved in deciding matters that impact upon you is a critical element of recognitional justice. This I argue is also an element of curricular justice (Connell, 1993) as the curriculum can only be remade from the interests of the least advantaged if they are, firstly, recognized, and then, secondly, involved in the reformation. However as discussed in Chapters One and Three, the rural is often not-recognised as an equity group, or when it is, it is considered to have the same values as metropolitan-cosmopolitan communities, and thus not afforded the same re-contextualisation in education. As suggested in previous chapters, a spatial justice perspective implies recognition of space in justice considerations, and for this project, the recognition of the rural as having a distinct perspective to be considered and included.

It is therefore instructive to examine the way that feedback from rural schools is valued and used in the curriculum development process, and as part of this, how much recognition is given to the feedback from a smaller part of the educational community. The example used here centres on the inclusion of local (rural) knowledge in the curriculum, and issues raised in a previous study by Drummond, Halsey and van Breda (2012), which demonstrates that the perceived lack of adequate consultation is a concern for rural communities.

Writing from the position of an insider, Kiem (2011) reinforces the centralised and bureaucratic tendencies of Australian curriculum development and raises the concerns this raises for (History) curriculum development, in particular

effective consultation. Supporting these concerns with specific reference to rural communities, Drummond, Halsey and van Bredar (2012) demonstrate that the absence of adequate consultation is a concern for rural communities.

Interestingly for the argument here, Drummond et al. (2012) also show that where respondents to their survey feel there has been more consultation, the curriculum allowed for the importance of local knowledge. This point raises a number of important possibilities for rural schools, whilst also highlighting the centralised cosmopolitan character of Australian curriculum concerns.

Drummond et al.'s (2012) survey was conducted in June 2010, and therefore in relation to draft curriculum version 1.0 (ACARA, 2010). The first consultation version of the Australian History Curriculum<sup>48</sup> included in Years 7-9 a "school-developed study". For example:

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 (ACARA, 2010, p.156)

The inclusion of this school-developed study provided opportunities not normally afforded in curriculum as a distinct study. Usually the inclusion of local material is a pedagogical decision made by the teacher, linked to student engagement in relation to a pre-determined topic. The power of this inclusion is reflected in the support of teachers and leaders in remote, predominantly Aboriginal communities who saw this aspect as allowing them to connect kids to the curriculum by beginning with a local study in local languages. However, the consultation report on the Australian Curriculum recommended that these options be removed:

Delete school-developed studies in Years 7-9. These are unnecessary in an 'essential learning' curriculum and will free up time for the essentials (ACARA, 2010, p.157).

This is in stark contrast to the view of the relevant teacher professional association, the History Teachers Association of Australia, who stated in their submission that "the school developed options in Years 7-9 provide some scope

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<sup>48</sup> I acknowledge that Drummond et al.'s [2012] paper does not include a variable for which curriculum area respondents are familiar with.

for local history” (HTAA, 2010). Regardless of this official response from the professional association, it appears that many teachers in the feedback were unsure of what to cover here and to what standard. The wording that the school-developed options were not essential illustrates two important considerations: firstly, for all the rhetoric, the curriculum is clearly an essential learning focus, and secondly, this essential learning must be directed to a view of the national image created through the History curriculum – one that doesn’t recognise the importance of local places, let alone rural places.

Furthermore, the use of ‘consultation’ by the official ACARA document needs to be considered in light of Kiem’s (2011) criticism, Drummond et al.’s (2012) findings about consultation, and Cuervo’s arguments about associational justice and rural teachers’ abilities to have a recognised voice. Without this, the rural is decidedly at a disadvantage, as through a spatial justice perspective the weight of consultation will favour metropolitan concerns, even when rural representatives and consultation are included, *unless* they are given greater individual weight. This once more reveals that the models of justice and equity in existence in the curriculum development process take no account of ‘space’, fail to recognize the voices of the marginalised, and, instead, are overshadowed by the voices of the cosmopolitan-metropolitan centre.

#### **6.4: Reconsidering teachers’ perspectives**

This section builds upon section 6.3.3, using the ideas and techniques of re-analysis used in Chapter Four. In this section I bring the rural standpoint to a re-analysis of survey data from a previous study by Drummond et al. (2012)<sup>49</sup>, as well as introducing excerpts from the interviews in Chapter Five as relevant to the issue of curriculum perceptions. Through this approach I have again deliberately foregrounded rural meanings (Howley, Theobald & Howley, 2005) in order to reveal how they are represented, or obscured. This is necessary as

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<sup>49</sup> The original data was kindly provided by the authors and re-analysed with their permission. Aspects of the reanalysis were presented as Roberts & Drummond (2012) at the 2012 AARE conference. The reanalysis reported here is my own work.

the focus on ‘excellence and equity’ removes any reference to places in favour of overarching achievement standards, representations, and a universalised cosmopolitan view of important knowledge for the nation. As with any study, the methodology and assumptions informed the conclusions that were arrived at.

The initial report by Drummond et al. (2012) approached equity and excellence from a position of accepting its assumptions in order to test the provision of support to rural schools. Here I adopt the more problematic view of equity and excellence that is the orientation of this study, to explore its assumptions, benchmarks and interpretations. The initial report looked at aspects of the statistical data collected in the survey to identify a problem on a larger scale, and as such presented one version of the truth. Informed by the philosophy of strategic eclecticism, in this reanalysis I looked at relationships between the questions, the qualitative data also collected, and other interviews on a related topic in order to gain a more nuanced version of how the rural is represented. The same statistical and qualitative approaches, including a Leximancer analysis, as were utilized in Chapter Four were used in this reanalysis.

For example, in the initial report Drummond et al. (2012) found that school leaders were, on average, undecided to mildly negative about how worthwhile they perceived the Australian Curriculum to be, and that there was general agreement with the statement that “a degree of autonomy in the curriculum implementation was important”. Furthermore, a number of respondents also used the section about the potential benefits of the Australian Curriculum to raise further negative issues, with noteworthy responses indicating that “remote schools had little to gain from the introduction of a national curriculum framework”, and that “the curriculum was a backward step for education” (Drummond et al., 2012). By looking at the relationships between questions and the qualitative data by respondent variables, we can begin to develop a picture of the influences upon these views, and consequently begin to understand how they impact on students’ educational achievement.

#### **6.4.1 Statistical reanalysis**

The statistical reanalysis revealed an overall belief that the national curriculum did not allow for the importance of local knowledge and that participants were largely undecided about whether the Australian Curriculum would marginalize rural, regional and remote schools. There was slight disagreement that it was important for all schools to teach the same curriculum, but notably, relatively strong disagreement was also observed regarding the idea that rural, regional and remote schools had received adequate consultation about the national curriculum. However, those who believed that consultation was adequate also tended to believe that the Australian Curriculum would marginalize schools less.

There was a tension within the statistics between a belief that linking to the local was necessary or desirable and attitudes to the Australian Curriculum – suggesting a similar continuum as observed in the interviews in Chapter Five of more bureaucratically oriented to more place-conscious perspectives. Notably, the less participants believed that local curriculum would be allowed for by the Australian Curriculum, the less they believed rural schools would be marginalized. This may reflect the irony of rural schooling – by teaching a localized curriculum, one may ensure that local knowledge is given importance, but doing this may marginalize the school from mainstream education (Corbett, 2007). There are two possible explanations for what I am suggesting here. Firstly, the national educational discourse, and much existing practice in curriculum, does not raise questions about the nature and purpose of the knowledge encoded in the curriculum. Questioning its use and purpose is not something that educators have expertise in. Secondly, these questions were asked within a survey with a different focus. The inferential statistics revealed slight associations between a number of the questions tested, and while by no way used here as conclusions, they do suggest a potential ambivalence requiring further investigation. Combined with the insights from the re-analysis in Chapter Four and the interview excerpts in Chapter Five (and below), it seems likely that place is again an untested variable, thereby adding weight to the hypothesis of my study.

#### 6.4.2: Qualitative reanalysis

Turning to the qualitative reanalysis, it is important to note that the survey was completed by school leaders, as this position has been shown to have a strong influence on school culture (Hattie, 2009). These responses were initially analysed and reported by Halsey et al. (2011), who identified a concern that communities may be marginalized by the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. Drawing upon the work of Gruenewald (2003a; 2003b) and Moriarty, Danaher and Danaher (2003), Halsey et al. (2011, p.5) asked “will the Australian Curriculum contribute towards a continuation of deficit thinking of rural and remote contexts when it comes to high stakes matters like national curriculum?”. This supplementary analysis looks at this question and explores different influences on how these school leaders view the curriculum. In this analysis, the open-ended comments were combined by variables similar to those used in Chapter Four.

In the reanalysis, a theme emerged in relation to the value of a national curriculum in providing alignment for students moving between states and the notion of a level playing field. This perspective is very closely aligned to the view (promoted by ACARA) of the equity arguments justifying the development of the Australian Curriculum. Furthermore, concerns about a level playing field were expressed in relation to the requirements of assessment and a concern that there is no assessment linked to the Australian Curriculum. These responses suggest that a dominant view of providing opportunities for rural students relates to a perception that they should be treated the same as metropolitan students, and that the main focus is end-of-school achievement (as discussed in the next chapter).

Notably here, there was a strong focus on *how* curriculum is taught, rather than what is taught, with the knowledge issue being notably absent. Echoing the findings in Chapter Four about access to resources and professional development, there was also a strong focus by respondents on ‘time’ and the work teachers would need to undertake to prepare for the Curriculum. Finally,

the focus on ease of mobility as an equity issue suggests a pre-occupation in rural areas about the ability to leave, or an assumption that students will leave. Thus there is potentially a subtle curriculum message, similar to that identified by Corbett (2007) in Canada, that to ‘succeed’ in schooling, students need to come to terms with the thought and the prospect of leaving their communities, and with valuing the ways of other places.

Supporting Connell’s (2009) notion that popular public views of the ‘teacher’ have changed over the last few decades, and the idea that teachers have internalized these changed identities (Leonard & Roberts, 2014), is the analysis of age in this sample. In this reanalysis, the main age groups of respondents were 30-39 and 40-49. While both of these age groups have broadly similar concerns they are in fact approaching them from different perspectives, with the 30-39 group viewing centralization as a positive and as natural, and the 40-49 group accepting centralization yet concerned about how to achieve it. Thus reflects the shift traced by Yates (2009) in Australia, from a view of curriculum incorporating a role of the teacher and a concern for how and whom the curriculum is taught to, to a more recent a view that separates what is taught from how it is taught, virtually erasing the nature or context of the learner. This can be seen in the continuum described in Chapter Five.

In the reanalysis, there was also a distinct pattern based upon distance from a major centre, similar to that observed in Chapter Four. The further from the regional centre, the more respondents were concerned about the relationship of the curriculum to their communities and the role of the school in the community. Here concerns were divided between two views; the first, that providing consistency between schools would lead to a level playing field and enable mobility for students, and the second, that attracting staff and adequate resources would ensure that the school can be responsive to local needs. There was a particular trend in the ‘schools’ theme to suggest that, without ensuring appropriate staffing and meeting the resource requirements, the schools would continue to be disadvantaged. Considering the theme of ‘time’ and its relationship to distance, it appears that those closer to a regional centre are more concerned about the time to develop programs, obtain adequate resources, and

be supported in transitioning to the new curriculum. It may be that proximity to a regional centre relates to greater affinity with the knowledge of the metropolitan areas, as the closely related theme of ‘understanding’, as evidenced by the comments, suggests a concern to ensure they are meeting the intent of the curriculum and ensuring a consistent interpretation across schools. Notably, the further from the regional centre, the more that local concerns and the ability to take into account the schools’ context and particular needs emerge. It should be stressed that a number of respondents also focused on national consistency and ensuring students have opportunities to ‘leave’, as raised above.

These findings suggest an interesting avenue to explore in relation to “educational scale making” (Nespor, 2004) and the role that relative location has in relation to both implementation and systemic concerns versus the concerns of the local. This scale issue conceivably also creates a point of tension for staff in rural areas as they are forced to confront two views of society: that of the rural, and that dictated by metropolitan elites. Similarly this analysis raises issues related to Reid et al.’s (2010) Rural Social Space model, as each location constitutes a different spatial relationship to the curriculum and draws upon a different social space. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Seven in relation to curriculum hierarchies, schools with greater distance from large towns seem to be achieving better outcomes than those close to such towns, which appear to be impacted by ‘competition’ and the values-gravity of larger centres.

## **6.5: Conclusion**

In this chapter I have shown how, through a discourse of neoliberal necessity, the idea of a standardised curriculum as a technology to enhance equity has taken hold. Such an approach rests upon distributive justice assumptions, in that it regards knowledge as a ‘good’ to be distributed, with its absence to be compensated. Furthermore, while ideas of associational justice influence equity approaches with regard to traditionally supported marginalised groups, the rural

has not achieved such a status of recognition. This lack of recognition of rural place leads to two fundamental problems: firstly, the idea that knowledge is situated, or that rural students operate from different funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), is excluded; and secondly, the rural is not given a voice in curriculum design and development. Rather, a view of a cosmopolitan-neoliberal nation is promulgated through the curriculum.

In highlighting these concerns I have evoked the idea of place, and revisited the ideas of curricular justice, to suggest that there is another way to look at the new curriculum and its equity implications. Specifically, I suggest that the failure of the Australian Curriculum to take into account the needs of rural schools, students and communities is a fundamental injustice. In countering this failure, I suggest that through a curricular justice approach rural meanings can, and need to, be advocated and included (Howley, Theobald & Howley, 2005) in the curriculum. This proposal necessitates a definition of the rural that does not pre-determine the rural as either singular or a unity, but rather recognizes the particularities and differences of rural place(s), something that can only be achieved if rurality is put back on the educational agenda (Brennan, 2005).



## **Chapter Seven**

### **Curriculum as Hierarchy**

In this chapter I turn to the issue of a *curriculum hierarchy*, as referred to in previous chapters. Specifically I argue that the NSW Higher School Certificate (HSC) curriculum is organized into a hierarchy of subjects; that access to this hierarchy is spatially organized; and that achievement in it is also spatially organized and therefore socially inequitable. I am explicitly building from the work of Teese and colleagues (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009) here, whilst adding a further spatial perspective to their work. While Teese and colleagues have extensively examined the Victorian senior secondary education system, no such analysis has been done of the NSW HSC until now. Through original statistical analysis of the NSW senior secondary curriculum, informed by a rural standpoint, I am extending the work of Teese and his colleagues (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009) by reproducing their thesis in relation to the NSW senior secondary curriculum, expanding it in relation to a spatial analysis, as well as illustrating how curriculum and knowledge, and access to them, are not neutral, but spatially organized.

#### **7.1: Background**

The idea of a curriculum hierarchy is predicated on the NSW version of equity, as discussed in the previous chapter, and the persistent culture of excellence in an academic curriculum. As argued earlier, this is organized within a highly centralized curriculum culture (Yates, Collins & O'Connor, 2011) that is 'spatially blind' (Green & Letts, 2007). Thus while the NSW BOS statement of equity principles (1996) and the Education Act (1990) both recognise geographic isolation as a disadvantage to be overcome, they both position this within access to a 'high quality' curriculum. This curriculum is perceived to exist to facilitate access to social status through university entry and work (Yates & Collins, 2008). As Teese and colleagues (Teese & Polesel, 2003;

Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009) have consistently argued, university entry remains the organizing principle of high school credentials. Such organization must contain a mechanism to ‘sort’ students in order to be effective. As such, arguments that access to a high-quality academic curriculum facilitates equity become hollow, due to the associated rationing of status through access to university<sup>50</sup>. As noted in Chapter Three, the discussion about the nature of the academic curriculum occurs in the context of the discussion of powerful knowledge / knowledge of the powerful. As Teese and colleagues (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009) have illustrated, building on earlier work in the sociology of education (e.g. Young, 1971; Bourdieu, 1977; Connell et al., 1982), the curriculum is intimately connected to culture and social power.

Students from advantaged backgrounds pre-possess a cultural capital that is valued in this hierarchy and which consequently places them at an advantage in the competition for status. As I am arguing, this social capital is not only based on status or class, but is also predicated on metropolitan-cosmopolitan forms of knowledge. The previous chapter discussed a number of reports that cite the acceptability and appropriateness of the curriculum in rural schools for rural students, given their different lifestyle, culture and prior learning (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988; McKenzie, Harrold & Sturman, 1996; HREOC, 2000). That metropolitan-cosmopolitan values are privileged in the curriculum (and therefore the hierarchy of schools and subjects) places rural students at a further disadvantage, and acts as a spatially organising aspect of the hierarchy. Furthermore, the focus on access to this curriculum as an equity approach (as per 6.2) does not take into account the pre-existing advantage of some students due to the prior learning, ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll et al, 1992), or cultural capital, they have gained from living in the metropolitan culture.

Arguably more common than the appropriateness of the curriculum argument in accounting for poor achievement, is the problem of *curriculum breadth* (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988; McKenzie, Harrold & Sturman,

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<sup>50</sup> While university entry has expanded with the move to a demand driven system in Australia in 2012, there remains a status differential between degree programs and institutions.

1996; HREOC, 2000; Green, 2008). That rural schools have a reduced curriculum offering compared to their metropolitan counterparts, and that this offering exists within a curriculum hierarchy, further complicates rural educational achievement and/or encourages out-migration from rural schools (Corbett, 2008; 2010a; 2010b). The issue here is that school size impacts on the ability of a school to offer a full range of subjects in the senior secondary years. This is because schools are staffed on the number of enrolments (Roberts, 2004) and, even with weightings for size, a comprehensive curriculum becomes inaccessible. While efforts are made to alleviate this via distance education, this only highlights the lack of access in the school site. The problem is further magnified, when in small cohorts of students, the school has to decide between the subjects it can resource. Here the average lower SES of rural schools creates a double equity hit, as less powerful subjects (in terms of the benefits they bestow in rationalising post school opportunities) are often taken by these students and, unlike larger schools, small schools cannot afford to offer both powerful and less powerful subjects (Young, 2009a) due to staffing efficiencies (Roberts, 2004). Thus school size, as an issue of educational scale (Nespor, 2004), is implicated here as low student numbers reduces the capacity of rural social space (Reid et al., 2010) to effectively engage with diversity within the student group. Rather than engage with the complexity of community diversity, the allocation of staffing and resources based on enrolments reduces the issue of curriculum breadth to the natural consequence of geographic isolation and average school SES. Contradictorily, even though access to a high-quality curriculum is persistently regarded as the central tenet of educational equity, it is rendered irrelevant by geography and community SES.

The persistence of school and community social advantage in determining senior secondary curriculum offerings is consistently reinforced by Teese and colleagues (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009), and also by Smyth, Down and McInerney (2010), Mills and Gale (2010) and Smyth and Wrigley (2013). To date, however, this work has primarily focussed on social advantage and has not explicitly linked this to rurality and

geography. A notable recent<sup>51</sup> exception is Bonnor's (2008) work, which suggested that rural school students are offered a different curriculum, often less academic, than their metropolitan counterparts. Notably, though, for critically examining the influence of space, Bonnor (2008) also showed that schools relatively isolated from nearby towns outperformed those closer to other larger towns. Similarly, Green and colleagues (2008) showed a geographic dimension to student achievement, and the influence of geography on student achievement in NSW; however it did not look specifically at curriculum. Reports from their research incidentally contained evidence of differential access to and achievement in Mathematics and English linked to location (McConaghy, Maxwell & Foskey, 2008). Taken together, the work of Bonnor (2008) and Green [Ed.] (2008) suggests that there is a connection between curriculum, SES, and geography, that influences student achievement in different ways than SES alone. As such, attention to a spatial perspective on the curriculum, access to it, and achievement in it is overdue.

## **7.2: The existing research on the curriculum hierarchy**

The notion of the *curriculum hierarchy* draws on the work of Teese and colleagues (e.g. Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009). Theoretically it draws on the work in the sociology of education that I have already noted has had only marginal influence in the economically-dominated curriculum-as-policy perspective of recent decades. For while the academic curriculum has been widely seen as a source of social injustice in the thinking of sociologists of education (e.g. Coleman et al., 1966; Connell et al, 1982; Bourdieu, 1977), such thinking has not had a significant impact on policy. However, while the argument regarding curriculum hierarchy relies on this theory to explain its operation, it is objectively observable in the data on school achievement.

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<sup>51</sup> Recent as traditionally lack of access was regarded as a feature of rural schools, e.g. HREOC (2000) and *Schooling in Rural Australia* (1997).

Teese and colleagues (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009) have shown, with reference to the Australian State of Victoria (fig 7.1), how school subjects are organized into a hierarchy based on the nature of their academic demands and the rewards that result from achievement in them. This pattern has also been observed by Lamb, Hogan and Johnson (2001) in Tasmania, and in the Perth metropolitan area by Perry and Southwell (2014). In the curriculum hierarchy, subjects with a ‘history’ – ones that deal with the world of the ‘old past’ – are ranked higher than newer subjects. These older subjects (such as Literature, Physics, Advanced Mathematics etc.) have a well-established theoretical bias, and involve abstract thinking, drawing relationships between concepts, ideas and principles, and are related to developed fields of scholarship. They are linked to long-standing university subjects and faculties. Conversely, the lower ranked subjects – ones that deal with the world of the ‘recent past’ – are oriented to applied knowledge, and are practical in nature, problem-based or collaborative. Where they are linked to university subjects they are newer subjects, generally found in newer institutions, such that the hierarchy is maintained by the prestige of older universities and their disciplines.

Teese (2000/2013) summarises three features of school subjects as they move up the hierarchy: first, applied knowledge and problem-solving skills move towards abstract reasoning; second, university admission is more easily gained on the basis of equal grades; and finally, the characteristics of the students enrolled in the subject changes. Bleazby (2015) supports this, arguing that the hierarchy of academic subjects is epistemologically organised; where the subjects of lower status are those most associated with concrete experience, practicality and the body; and those of higher status being more abstract, theoretical and ‘objective’. Figure 7.1, below, shows the distribution of the curriculum hierarchy in Victoria, as described by Teese, Lamb and Helme (2009). In it, the ‘higher status and powerful’ subjects occupy the top right quadrant, whereas the ‘lower status and less powerful’ subjects occupy the bottom left quadrant.

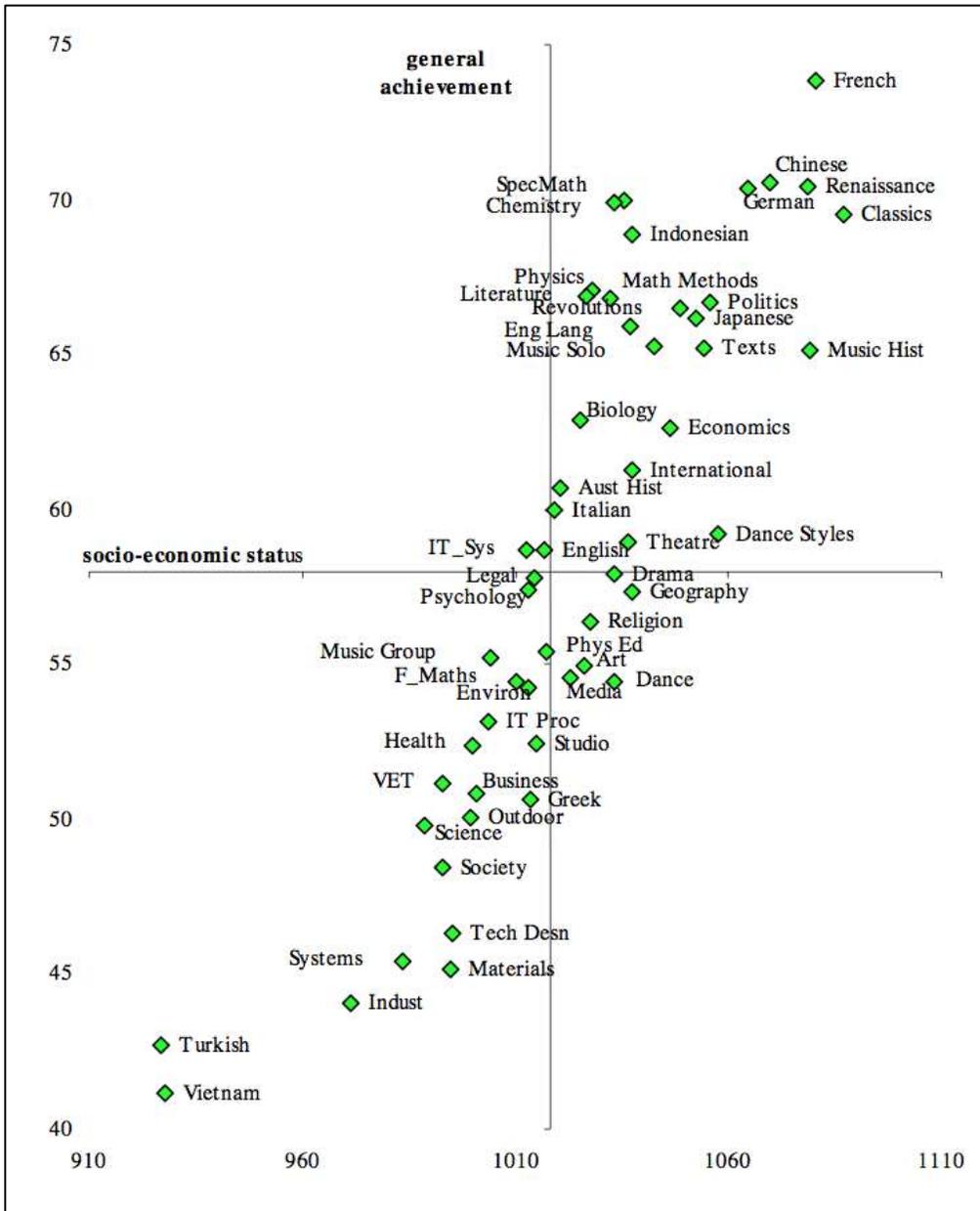


Figure 7.1: The (Victorian) Curriculum Hierarchy (Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009, p.12 ‘figure 6: The social and academic hierarchy of the curriculum of upper secondary schools in Victoria, 2000’)

Reinforcing the reproduction thesis (Young, 1971; Bourdieu 1977), students of university-educated parents are likely to succeed in this system, whereas the children of non-university educated parents are not, given the relationship between SES and parental education. The habits developed in the homes of professionally qualified families, such as reading, use of elaborated language, and greater understanding of language use, pre-dispose them to better manage the culturally rich tasks of the more powerful subjects (Teese 2000/2013).

Building on the ideas of Bernstein (1996), there is a mis-match for non-professionally qualified families between the discursive requirements of the academic curriculum and their environment. As the cognitive demands of the curriculum increase into senior secondary schooling, those without the requisite capital fall behind. When we consider this argument from a rural standpoint, and add the notion of metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledges, we further complicate the relationship to include more than family background – specifically, the dimension of rural knowledges.<sup>52</sup>

The curriculum hierarchy works on two propositions, or as Teese, Lamb and Helme (2009) suggest, ‘vectors’: the type of curriculum (academic or vocational) and the type of schools (public, selective, private), with the combination of both resulting in social selection. For example, in figure 7.1 (above) the subjects differentiate on the vertical axis from high power university entry subjects at the top to less powerful work-orientated subjects at the bottom. On the horizontal, we have less advantaged students on the left and more advantaged on the right: the less advantaged students overwhelmingly attend government schools and the more advantaged students are from non-government or academically selective government schools (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009). While there are no formal academic or vocational schools in Victoria or NSW, the profiles of students in schools and the subjects they enrol in effectively creates this differentiation (Teese, 2000/2013), exposing the myth of comprehensive schooling and the equity that the Wyndham Scheme hoped to achieve through curriculum access. However, in many rural and remote areas there is no option other than boarding schools in the city for families seeking an ‘academic curriculum’ for their children. These are only accessible to the well-off, thus maintaining the SES thesis<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> For example, a number of students I was teaching in remote NSW came from families with low levels of education, so the SES reproduction thesis would seem to ring true. However not all families could be categorised as such. It was just that their occupation, leisure and known experiences, i.e. their rural life-world, were different from those of city students. Thus even students striving to break out of the SES reproduction thesis had to struggle against the weight of history to comprehend an unknown world.

<sup>53</sup> The NSW Department of Education has recently launched an ‘online’, ‘virtual’, selective class to give ‘access’ to the academic curriculum in all schools. This will inevitably need to be

In contrast to the argument that equity is achieved through access to a high-quality curriculum, the linking of social power to academic achievement intimately connects the curriculum with the transmission of social status. In the face of the reforms discussed in Chapter Six, designed to make schooling more equitable through universal access to a comprehensive curriculum, the maintenance of academic values and selectivity in schooling has nonetheless enabled powerful families to maintain their position (Teese, 2000/2013). As Teese (2000/2013) argues, a hierarchy of curriculum requires a hierarchy of schools, and there can be no hierarchy of schools that is not based on curriculum. Further, as Teese and Polesel (2003) and Campbell and Sherington (2006) show, there has always been a division in schooling. The Wyndham Scheme reforms attempted to counter this with the introduction of comprehensive school, but in the end, as shown in Chapter Six, political compromise saw selective schools remain, along with a large and increasingly well-funded independent schools sector.

Selective schools, Teese & Polesel (2003) suggest, are the strategy by which advantage protects itself. As more students attended school and stayed on and competed for university entrance, following the Karmel and Carrick Reports discussed earlier, selective and fee-paying schools became the discriminator in social selection, creating a culture of academic excellence and competition – a process accelerated by increased subsidies for non-government schools of recent decades (Teese, 2000/2013; Teese & Polesel, 2003). As a consequence of these policies, Watson and Ryan (2010) concluded that 40% of Australian students attend a fee-paying non-government school; that high-status independent schools have more funding per student than government schools<sup>54</sup>; and that most high SES students attend non-government schools, while most low SES students attend government schools. Social advantage is concentrated in non-government schools or selective schools, and as Teese (2011) showed, in 2006, 78% of lowest SES students were in public schools, 9% in Independent

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the subject of further study, though, the idea of access via a ‘virtual’ classroom would appear, initially at least, to privilege a content-based curriculum. This conceivably, then, reinforces the argument here about the dominance of forms of knowledge embedded in such a curriculum.

<sup>54</sup> Including their fees, though they also receive up to 70% of their budget from public funds.

schools and 13% non-government/Catholic schools. For the highest SES group, these percentages were 47% in public schools, 30% in Independent schools, and 24% in non-government/Catholic schools (Teese, 2011).

The idea of a curriculum hierarchy is deeply entrenched in the push for equity – as there is only inequity when a hierarchy exists. Indeed choice, or ‘competition’, as a driver of equity requires winners and losers, i.e. those who have access but not the cultural capital to succeed (Teese & Polesel, 2003). Competition also requires a field upon which the competition can ‘fairly’ take place. The promotion of competition, and choice, in policy, under the guise of economic efficiency, has in fact allowed the creation of advantaged school sites and the residualisation of less advantaged sites. As with the reform of the NSW HSC in the interests of ‘equity’ discussed in Chapter Six, in Victoria:

the reforms of the 1980’s and 1990’s successfully carried forward the most discriminating demands – codified in the oldest subjects and also the most highly resourced subjects – even while opening up space for less demanding and less socially discriminating demands in the form of newer subjects, dating from the ‘comprehensive’ years (Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009, p.11-13).

That is, high-stakes subjects remained, and with them their long history, greater teacher and student resources, better prepared teachers (who arguably see themselves as disciplinary custodians), and links with more university professors and departments in their oversight, design and examination.

Teese (2000/2013) and Teese, Lamb and Helme (2009) describe the resultant concentration of advantage and disadvantage as ‘fortified’ and ‘exposed’ school sites, respectively. Here, ‘fortified’ sites are rich in the financial and cultural resources of students and the expertise and experience of teachers, whereas ‘exposed’ sites are poor and struggling with competing academic and social demands. The issue then becomes how each site deals with a curriculum that is for all intent and purpose identical. Using the example of the subject English, Teese, Lamb and Helme (2009) illustrate that at fortified sites there is an emphasis on texts that favour personal differentiation and intellectual challenge.

Teachers echo Bourdieu when they describe the subject in the language of personal distinction, implying that studying hard texts equals higher marks, and

provide rich material for students to display their strengths. At exposed sites, there is 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. Put another way, they argue that distinction is the key in fortified sites, adaptation in exposed sites; History is an asset at fortified sites, a liability at exposed sites (Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009). Students at exposed sites tend not to already have the requisite historical knowledge for success in powerful subjects, and so teachers need to spend time on developing the required contextual understanding – in most instances, this is knowledge of the metropolitan-cosmopolitan world reflected in the powerful subjects. Furthermore, students' literacy skills tend to be weaker at exposed sites and do not always support the complex tasks of analysis, interpretation and communication (Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009).<sup>55</sup>

Fortified and exposed sites are therefore increasingly differentiated by the social space they occupy, and the impact this has on the forms of pedagogy and curriculum that can be enacted. In the language of the old DSP and CAP, exposed sites involve teachers working to 'link the academic curriculum to students' life-worlds', something that is a slower pedagogical progression than in fortified sites, where this is not required. In this, the example of CAP (Chapter Three), where students were assumed to need a form of cultural enrichment due to their lack of access to the culture of the curriculum, highlights the metropolitan-cosmopolitan dominance in the academic curriculum. Reinforcing the issue that the cognitive and social demands of the academic curriculum are socially discriminating and resource-sensitive (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009), Teese argues:

It is not the intellectual demands of the curriculum as such that are problematic, but their imposition without parallel improvements in how the weakest students learn and without controls over how power is exercised by the strongest students and their institutional patrons. Without reforms to the conditions under which working

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<sup>55</sup> So it was for a number of the students I was teaching in rural and remote schools; in History for example I would need to develop their understanding of work life in industrial cities before being able to teach them about the impact of the depression – a type of work that was unknown to them in their agricultural setting.

class, rural, migrant and Aboriginal children learn and to the structures that split curriculum control from pedagogical responsibility, even the most thorough revision of syllabus and assessment methodology will tend to reproduce social inequities and subordinate individual development to social domination (Teese, 2000/2014, p.7).

Teese (2000/2014, p.36) argues that: “Context matters greatly. For curriculum and pedagogical choices are conditioned by who is taught and to what end”. Fortified sites exploit what they can by focusing on specialisation in the curriculum and restricting the school population to similar students; at exposed sites, the focus is on how to adapt to the curriculum, not how to dominate it (Teese, 2000/2013). Rather than designing pedagogies that bring rural life-worlds into the curriculum in a curricular justice approach, the discourse of access equating to equity forces teachers in exposed sites to adapt to the curriculum by selecting topics and themes to reduce cognitive demand. They are in effect dominated by the curriculum, rather than exercising control over it (Teese, 2000/2013). Conversely, too, the original fortified sites of selective schools, as well as older independent schools, have historically played an important role along with the universities in developing and defending the academic curriculum in Victoria (Teese, 2000/2013), as in NSW (Vickers, 2011; Campbell & Sherington, 2006).

The universities, to which fortified sites are linked through success in the academic curriculum, apply pressure on all schools by maintaining control over curriculum content: They have no responsibility for teaching and results, leaving both the responsibility and accountability to those who have no say in the content. This ultimately subordinates teaching to the prestige of universities and values academic discrimination, not intellectual growth (Teese, 2000/2013). As a result, the less powerful exposed sites are: “unable to succeed [in it] at globally high levels, they exercise no authority [over it]. They can neither attack [it][this system] nor defend it politically. Their rights under it are neutralized by their poor performance under it” (Teese, 2000/2013, p.40).

It is clear that while much of the analysis of Teese and colleagues is based on the example of Victoria, much of the general history of schooling is shared with

NSW. As shown by the long-standing centralised focus on a rigorous curriculum aimed at university entry in NSW, it would seem likely that a similar curriculum hierarchy and social selection exists in NSW too. Indeed, universities, and academics, have exercised as much influence in NSW (Vickers, 2011; Campbell & Sherington, 2006) as in Victoria. It could perhaps be suggested, further, that the particular centralised state curriculum culture in NSW (Yates, Collins & O'Connor, 2011; Collins & Vickers 1999) and its traditional focus on rigour, may produce a more pronounced hierarchy and division between fortified and exposed school sites. It is to exploring this point that I will shortly turn.

To argue that the rural is marginalised in the curriculum, however, one first needs to establish that a hierarchy indeed exists, and then to examine the spatial organisation of any hierarchy. Finally, it is worth noting that, Lamb, Hogan and Johnson (2001), and Perry and Southwell (2014) both found similar curriculum hierarchies and associations with SES in different jurisdictions. However, Perry and Southwell (2014), working in Perth, Western Australia, did not find a strong link to school sector (i.e. government & non-government). Given NSW's long history of selective and independent schooling (Campbell & Sherington, 2006), this finding may well reflect Perth's history as a relatively new, more egalitarian, 'frontier' city.

### **7.3: Spatialising the curriculum hierarchy**

The analysis of the curriculum hierarchy by Teese and colleagues is spatial, though not specifically spatially informed. That is, while their work refers to disadvantaged areas, and incidentally notes that these are geographically located on a gradient away from the centre (the city and advantaged suburbs), the work is not theorised spatially. Thus they describe areas in which nearly all students succeed in the hierarchy, and areas where virtually no students succeed. Indeed the evocation of fortified and exposed sites brings forth images rich with geographic metaphor. Specifically for my analysis of access to, and achievement in, a curriculum hierarchy in rural areas, there is scant

reference to the rural *per se* in existing discussions of curriculum hierarchies. Importantly, Perry and Southwell (2014, p.2) deliberately limited their study to the Perth metropolitan area to explicitly avoid “confounding factors to access such as geographic location”. This reinforces that, often, geography is assumed to be a problem, and hence should be factored out. What is more striking about this, though, is the assumption that background and location should not impact on access as a rationale for the study. It seems such a concern is seen as inherently relative, and, that different urban locations or backgrounds should not have any impact on access/success. At least in relation to studying curriculum hierarchies, it is clear that educational research is still, as Green and Letts (2007) have argued, ‘spatially blind’ and that geography is denied first-order significance (Roberts & Green, 2014).

While Teese *does* specifically address geography in two papers (1992; 2007) in relation to the physical location and distribution of selective schools, advantaged suburbs and successful schools, he does this as a form of distribution rather than as a generative influence. In these works (Teese, 1992; 2007), the ‘rural’ is mentioned as a broad location experiencing lesser achievement, and not in terms of there being any specific form of rural knowledge or difference. Thus, I suggest, Teese is using geography as *context* in that it accounts for the economic characteristics of an area as they relate to fortified and exposed sites. This is not to discount Teese’s contribution to the geography of education, merely to point out the different uses of geography. For example, his observation that “Children from these (advantaged) families thus exploit both space and time – the geography of home, neighbourhood and school, and the history accumulated in the curriculum which unites multiple generations in a culture of academic domination” (Teese, 2007, p.19) is extremely powerful. It explains how fortified public school sites in advantaged neighbourhoods bring together, by virtue of co-location, the two axes of the curriculum hierarchy: and how exposed sites do not. That fortified sites are above, or outside their, geography, whereas exposed sites can not escape their local area geography (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb

& Helme, 2009), reinforces that (school) place is *produced* – here by the two axes of the curriculum hierarchy.

In this sense, Teese and colleagues (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009) refer to public schools<sup>56</sup> as “space-bound”, and non-government schools as “unbound”, due to the restrictive enrolment zones of the former and the open choice enrolment of the latter. However, in the NSW context, public selective schools that occupy the most advantaged position in the hierarchy (see below) are also “unbound”, as they are theoretically open to students from any location. Given their high school ICSEA value, though, it would appear that they merely enrol students in advantaged suburbs, or siphon the children of advantaged families who may live in less advantaged suburbs – though analysis of enrolment by postcodes would need to be done to test this. Either way, less advantaged suburbs, and less advantaged families, continue to be limited by geography and concentrated in exposed sites. Even more pertinent for this study is that this concentration has no real influence on the curriculum that is taught, in terms of final exams and the rationing of achievement in the set curriculum.

Geography is still the backdrop upon which curriculum takes place. However, even in fortified sites, socially aspirational students must gain access by meeting the academic benchmark, which is kept high by there being only seventeen fully selective high schools in NSW. This limited number reinforces the need for students seeking entry to be mobile. In rural areas of the state in particular, there are only two selective agricultural high schools, which implies a need for even greater physical mobility due to the requirement for students to board. As will be outlined subsequently, what comes out in the analysis is that this mobility also correlates with the average higher ICSEA of students in these schools, compared to other schools, such that mobility equates to social advantage on traditional statistical measures.

Explicitly spatialising the curriculum hierarchy is part of the project of restoring context to educational research (Mills & Gale, 2011; Roberts & Green, 2013),

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<sup>56</sup> “Space bound” here refers to both the students and the institution they attend.

though not in a limiting local environment fashion that accounts for phenomena, but more in the generative sense of the meanings and possibilities of social space (Reid et al., 2010) and the affordances of place. Here Teese's (2000/2013) concern for the conditions under which students learn takes on a spatial perspective. The conditions of learning in fortified sites can be positioned as desirable, and can potentially come to define what is normal, desirable, and enviable in education. The binary thinking that can define much education research (Mander, Danaher, Tyler & Midgely, 2003) then positions exposed sites as deviant, undesirable, and in need of change. When context is used to explain the advantage of fortified sites, it implicitly accounts for the disadvantage of exposed sites: poverty, poor literacy, limited parental education and so forth. This deficit view of these contexts does not recognise the affordances of the "virtual school bag" (Thomson, 2002) that students bring to schools with them – their experiences, what they have learnt at home, and their ways of living in the world. Alternately, the funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992; Zipin, 2009; Zipin, Sellar, & Hattam, 2012) students bring are confirmed as not being those valued by the curriculum. The resultant mismatch between student and curriculum becomes the school's or the teacher's (or indeed the students') problem, rather than a curricular problem (Connell, 1993).

Importantly, the contents of the virtual school bag, and origin of the funds of knowledge in it, always come from *somewhere* – a community and a social space. Keeping communities together, and educating for the whole community, was the idea behind public education and the Wyndham Scheme. However the political concession to social elites of maintaining selective schools and old independent schools saw this vision fragmented from the outset. Consequently it is difficult nowadays to think of schools as "in communities" (Reid, 2011), especially in the case of the senior secondary schooling examined here. In a retreat from the Wyndham Scheme, policies of competition and choice, facilitated by transport, makes some communities mobile. Equally, others are fixed. This roughly correlates with fortified sites that, rather than being 'fixed' as the name suggests, are more often populated by mobile populations (always with the exception of the more elite advantaged suburbs that Teese and

colleagues describe). Perhaps, to stretch the metaphor, they are so well fortified that populations need to move to them to seek protection. This mobility of student population aligns with the mobility implied in cosmopolitanism, and further reinforces the metropolitan-cosmopolitan culture of the curriculum that is mastered in these sites. Alternatively, exposed sites are not mobile, and not cosmopolitan; they are, so to speak, exposed to the elements and vagaries of their location. They are not mobile because their populations are not mobile, and, in the new market of choice, unable to exercise choice. However, this difference is a necessary pre-condition of choice and competition for academic advantage: there must be winners and losers to make it effective. As Teese (2000/2013) suggests, the cosmopolitan game is about exporting failure, or even buying failure, in order to protect the advantage of some.

Following the 'spatial turn' in social and cultural theory, described by Crang and Thrift in 2000, spatial studies in education is a new and emerging field (Gulson & Symes, 2007). Bringing these ideas together in the purpose of critical education, a broad field in which I would place my own predilections, Ferrare and Apple (2010) argue that spatial theories of education can reveal new insights while cautioning against simply adopting them as the latest 'fad'. Adopting fads is not something geographers appear to be susceptible to, for as Painter (2000) points out (in Gulson & Symes (2007)) geographers have been slow to pick up Bourdieu, and have really not engaged with his work in any sustained way, apart from perhaps gestural references. A notable exception here is the work of Barbara Pini (e.g. Pini & Leach, 2013).

Given that Teese's work is heavily influenced by Bourdieu, this may indeed account for the instrumental approach to geography in that work, rather than more generative spatial theorising. As Teese's work was one of the two pathways through which Bourdieu's theories entered Australian educational research (Rawolle & Lingard, 2013), subsequent researchers have not been quick to take up the more spatial elements of Bourdieu's theories. While Bourdieu's sense of geographic space can be seen as limited and narrow, compared to that of geographers (for example, in his work he took France as one geographically-bounded space or focussed upon specific localities like his

work in Bearn), Painter (2000) argues that Bourdieu potentially offers some rich ideas for spatial theory. This critique is made particularly powerfully by de Certeau (1984), and reprised by Painter (2000), who critiques Bourdieu in explicitly spatial terms, in an attempt to spatialise his work. However, given that Bourdieu makes clear that his notion of social space is *not* aligned to geographic space (Painter, 2000; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), even though these may often overlap, he provides a clear foundation for the spatial theorising of social space, and in the case of this study, *rural* social space (Reid et al., 2010), which needs to be expanded upon.

Discussing Bourdieu, Reed-Danahay (2005) use the notion of ‘situated subjectivities’ to describe his approach. This notion is valuable for my study, as it evokes the idea of *place consciousness* and resists the more universalising tendencies of globalised theory, that my method also seeks to resist. In describing Bourdieu’s understanding of social space, Reed-Danahay (2005) focuses upon the issue of the translation of Bourdieu’s work, to point out some important semantic choices. For this study, Bourdieu’s *field* in the original French (i.e. ‘lieu’ rather than ‘champ’) is a relational term rather than the more literal idea of a physical and defined field: if this was his meaning, the word *terrain* would have been more apt in the original (Reed-Danahay, 2005). *Field* then has a social structure across space, with location in the field being always relative. In this way, “the term location or *lieu* thus refers to both social and physical location” (Reed-Danahay, 2005, p.135), where social power can occupy physical location, as it can command prestigious physical locations, through the amassing of the economic capital that social capital enables. Consequently, location in the social field enables physical distance, which in turn, through the exposure to this new social space, itself exposes one to particular social capitals (in the curriculum context, e.g. critical thinking, cultural history, powerful literature).

Relating these ideas to this study, this suggests that from a Bourdieuan perspective, the curriculum field is relational and subjective, rather than fixed or objective. By being assumed as neutral and objective, and being able to be applied regardless of location, it fixes students in their pre-existing relative

locations, and maintains the relative distance between them. This is further reinforced where the curriculum values one social field over another, as argued by the sociology of knowledge theorists (e.g. Connell et al., 1982; Young, 1971), or those writing on cosmopolitanism and rural knowledges (Corbett, 2007; 2010b) as discussed in Chapter Three. For my purposes here, the notions of *relationality*, and *subjectivities*, are useful frames for considering explanations for differential achievement in the curriculum hierarchy.

#### **7.4 Establishing the existence of a NSW Curriculum Hierarchy**

In section 6.2.7 I outlined the McGaw review of the NSW HSC (New South Government, 1996). This report highlighted that there was an unequal distribution of students studying what were deemed to be ‘harder’ and ‘easier’ subjects. It was found that in more advantaged areas, a greater proportion of students was studying ‘harder’ subjects, compared to less advantaged areas, which had a greater proportion of students studying so called ‘easier’ subjects. A similar pattern was found in relation to metropolitan students and non-metropolitan students, with metropolitan students in their fortified sites, studying the harder subjects at greater proportions than non-metropolitan students (New South Government, 1996). In both cases, achievement, in the form of the greater proportion of higher grades, also followed this pattern (McGaw, 1997). As discussed previously, the McGaw review’s approach to remedy this was to ensure that all subjects were to be considered of equal value, that access to all was to be encouraged in schools, and that an outcomes-based standards referenced approach to assessment was to be adopted (New South Government, 1996; NSW DET, 1997)<sup>57</sup>.

##### **7.4.1 Subject scaled means**

One way that McGaw (1997) expressed the ‘hierarchy’ of subjects was with

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<sup>57</sup> Theoretically at least, in an outcomes-based standards-referenced system all students should have equal access to achieving in the curriculum, as the standards of achievement are known: however, the intricacies of such a debate are not the purview of this study.

reference to their value to a student's university entry, in terms of each subject's scaled mean. Put simply, this scaled mean takes into account the characteristics of different cohorts of students studying different subjects, with results 'scaled up' if a strong cohort studies a subject, and 'scaled down' in the case of a weaker cohort. As the McGaw review (New South Government, 1996, p.102) noted, "The scaling is not based on any judgement about whether courses are 'hard' or 'easy' but solely on the basis of the students who enrol". However he conceded that a subject's history will influence expectations about difficulty and that a hierarchy can develop, especially in the case of hierarchically organised courses within a subject (e.g. in 1996 English Related and English General, or nowadays Advanced & Standard English) (New South Government, 1996). This idea of subject history fits well into Teese and colleagues' sustained arguments about subject histories in the development, and maintenance, of the academic curriculum and the curriculum hierarchy. This is particularly true for subjects that have traditionally mediated university access, and thereby encompass the cultural capital of more advantaged students. Combined with the idea of a scaled mean grade, the result is that more valuable subjects for university entry are seen to be harder, and studied by stronger cohorts of students, who in turn achieve higher grades.

The first step in establishing if, as Teese and colleagues suggest, a curriculum hierarchy exists, and exists historically, is to look at the scaled means for subjects contained in the McGaw report (1997) and today. Table 7.1 below shows this comparison, with the scaled mean for subjects selected by the McGaw review (New South Government, 1996) on the left-hand side and the scaled mean for subjects in 2012 on the right-hand side.

1996		2012	
Course	Mean Scaled mark (/50)	Course	Mean Scaled mark (/50)
		Mathematics Extension 2	42.7
		Mathematics Extension 1	39
		English Extension 1	35.5
		English Extension 2	35.5
		Music Extension	35.2
		History Extension	34.5
English Related	32.7	Music 2	33.6
Music Related	30.3	Economics	31.8
Chemistry	30.2	English (Advanced)	31.7
Physics	29.4	Chemistry	31.6
Economics Related	28.8	Mathematics	30.9
Modern History Related	28.1	Physics	30.6
Maths Related	27.6	Studies of Religion I	27.6
Studies of Religion	27.2	Studies of Religion II	27.2
English General	25.8	Modern History	27
		Biology	26.5
		Engineering Studies	25.6
		Geography	25.5
		Legal Studies	25.3
		Ancient History	24.5
Drama	24.3	Drama	24.3
		Software Design and Development	24.1
		Earth and Environmental Science	23.9
		Business Studies	23.8
Society & Culture Related	23.6	Society and Culture	23.7
Computing studies Related	23.3	Personal Development, Health and Physical Education	23
Visual Arts Related	23.2	Visual Arts	22.7
Personal Development, Health & Physical Education	22.3	Dance	22.5
Food Technology Related	21.3	Textiles and Design	22.3
		Design and Technology	22.2
		Music 1	22.2
		English as a Second Language	21.9
		Information Processes and Technology	21.4
Mathematics in Society	20.9	General Mathematics	21.2
Modern History People & Events	19.6	Agriculture	20.7
Ancient History Personalities & Times	19.0	Food Technology	20
		Senior Science	19.2
		Community and Family Studies	19.1
Contemporary English	17.7	English (Standard)	18.8
Science for Life	15.9	Industrial Technology	16.8
Mathematics in Practice	13.3	Aboriginal Studies <sup>58</sup>	15.8

Table 7.1: Comparison of scaled units. (1996 data taken from New South Government, 1996, p.103; 2012 Data from 2012 Scaling Report, UAC).

<sup>58</sup> Although I have examined the issue of Indigeneity in this dissertation, it is important to note the clear social change by the inclusion of an 'Aboriginal Studies' subject in the NSW HASC curriculum – *and* the place of this subject at the bottom of the scaling hierarchy.

What becomes immediately apparent is that the subject hierarchy has remained very stable over this period. While this was predictable, given the historical nature of the hierarchy as described by Teese and colleagues, its reproduction in light of the rhetoric of ‘access to subjects’ and ‘outcomes-based assessment’ as avenues for equity underlines its robustness. Notable as well is the insertion of a new group of even more valuable ‘extension’ subjects, that clearly are attracting strong student cohorts and being positioned as powerful new subjects. Languages are not included here in order to reduce clutter in the visual presentation; however the analysis for languages showed a similar pattern as per the McGaw review (New South Government, 1996) and Teese & colleagues (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009), with ‘old’ European languages (e.g. Latin, French) and north Asian (e.g. Chinese, Japanese) languages at the top and the languages of non-European, more recent European migrants and southern Asia, further down.

#### **7.4.2 Subjects and school ICSEA**

Ranking subjects based on scaled mean is one way of illustrating the existence of a hierarchy. However, to start to draw stronger parallels with Teese and colleagues I need to assess if social advantage-disadvantage and school exclusivity are related to curriculum access and achievement. What we would expect to see here is a pattern similar to what McGaw described (1997), of more advantaged areas studying ‘harder’ subjects, and less advantaged areas ‘easier’ subjects, given that the areas he was referring to had higher and lower average community SES. Alternatively, in Teese’s (2000/2013) terminology we need to explore the ‘vectors’ that result in the establishment of fortified and exposed sites. Taking both ideas further, however, we also want to explore the spatial distribution of access and achievement to establish if rural schools have equitable access to the powerful curriculum, in order to then theorise the role of cosmopolitan-metropolitan knowledges in rural education (dis)advantage.

To establish the possibility of a NSW Curriculum Hierarchy (see figure 7.3), I have used the scaled means for each HSC subject from the 2012 University

admissions scaling report (UAC, 2013) for the Y (vertical) axis. The scaled mean, I suggest, is a proxy for subject strength, as subjects are scaled according to the strength of their candidature, and this strength then determines the value of a subject to a student's Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR). The ATAR is a numeric score from zero to a maximum of 99.95, that is expressed as a rank of all students who apply to receive an ATAR. As such, the highest possible ATAR of 99.95 indicates that the student was ranked higher than 99.95 percent of applicants, thus in the top .05 of applicants. Given that rationing access to university is the organising logic of the academic curriculum, it seems logical to use the value of subjects to a student's ATAR. Furthermore, if the logic holds true, higher value subjects will be studied by more advantaged students at fortified sites. The connection between ATAR and SES was most recently confirmed in a report by the Grattan Institute<sup>59</sup>, which concluded:

There is a strong link between SES and ATAR ... High SES applicants dominate the 80-plus ATAR group. Below 60, low SES applicants outnumber high SES applicants. An ATAR cut-off at 60 would inevitably hit low SES university applicants hard. In 2012, it would have wiped out of contention more than 30 per cent of an already small pool of low SES applicants (Norton, 2013, p.11).

Given the general cultural critique of the academic curriculum to date, it is pertinent to highlight at this point that there is considerable debate about the value of the ATAR in predicting university success once a student has gained university entrance. For example, Palmer, Bexley, and James (2011) found that a middle-band ATAR rank is not a useful predictor of university success. Similarly, Marks (2007) found that while ATAR is correlated with SES, SES does not negatively affect a student's chance of course completion. Consequently ATAR can be seen primarily as a sorting mechanism.

Returning to my analysis: For the X (horizontal) axis in figure 7.3, I have used the 2012 ICSEA (outlined in Chapter One) as provided by ACARA under their data protocols. While a potentially imperfect measure, ICSEA is the proxy used by ACARA to publicly report the social and educational advantage of

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<sup>59</sup> The Grattan Institute is a think-tank, partially funded by the Federal Government, the Victorian State Government and the Business Sector. It could be described as having conservative, neoliberal, economically informed leanings.

students who attend a particular school. An ICSEA rating is also publicly reported for each school, making the calculations developed here reproducible over time. Reinforcing that ICSEA is a suitable proxy for SES, and that the approach taken in this study is valid, Perry and Southwell (2014), in their study of curriculum hierarchies in metropolitan Perth, used ICSEA to group schools and subjects, even going as far as to refer to ICSEA as SES throughout the paper.

For the subject data points plotted in figure 7.3, I have taken 2012 subject enrolments for schools as per data provided by the NSW BOSTES. I have then calculated the average ICSEA of students taking a subject by: multiplying each school ICSEA by the number of students in each subject at each school; summing the total enrolment of each subject state-wide; summing the total multiplied ICSEA state-wide, and finally dividing the total state-wide ICSEA by total state-wide enrolment. In this way I have arrived at an average ICSEA for subjects (see figure 7.2). These have then been plotted using the scatterplot function in SPSS 21 to graph the data.

$$\frac{\text{Total students in subject in STATE}}{\text{Total state wide ICSEA}} = \text{Av ICSEA for Subject}$$

(Students in subject in each school) X (ICSEA of each school)

Figure 7.2: Curriculum Hierarchy Formula

The resulting scatterplot is reproduced below as figure 7.3. For the sake of the calculation, the scatterplot is organised into a hierarchy similar to that produced by Teese and colleagues (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009) (see figure 7.1), and it clearly confirms the existence of a curriculum hierarchy in NSW. Clearly identifiable in figure 7.3 are the features described by Teese and colleagues. At the top right are ‘old’ subjects similar to those in the Victorian study, linked to university departments. These subjects are both overwhelmingly studied by more advantaged students and are more powerful in terms of a student’s ATAR. The  $R^2=0.6$  reinforces the strong

connection between school ICSEA and subject studies, suggesting that school ICSEA is a good predictor of curriculum access. Compared to table 7.1, figure 7.3 stretches the scaled means against student background. The resulting ‘angle’ of subjects reveals a strong association between average student background and subjects studied, reinforcing that students from more advantaged backgrounds study the more powerful subjects, and also comprise stronger student cohorts. It can confidently be concluded, then, that an academic hierarchy based on student social background, is in existence in relation to the HSC curriculum.

It is expected that the numbers will skew upwards and towards the right, due to higher average ICSEA of cities overall and the greater student numbers in metropolitan schools. Given this caveat, figure 7.3 illustrates that, overall, subject offerings are related to ICSEA state-wide. However, this only reinforces the evidence that space, and scale (i.e. school and community size), as well as community social dis/advantage, are structuring access to powerful subjects. After all, students cannot ‘improve’ their social position if powerful subjects, that provide access to social mobility, are not offered in their school. Reinforcing this, recent research has begun to question the value of academically selective schooling for social cohesion, by suggesting that students, as a group, achieve better by having more able peers in their class, and that these more able peers do not achieve any less than they might otherwise (McVicar, Moschion & Ryan, 2013).

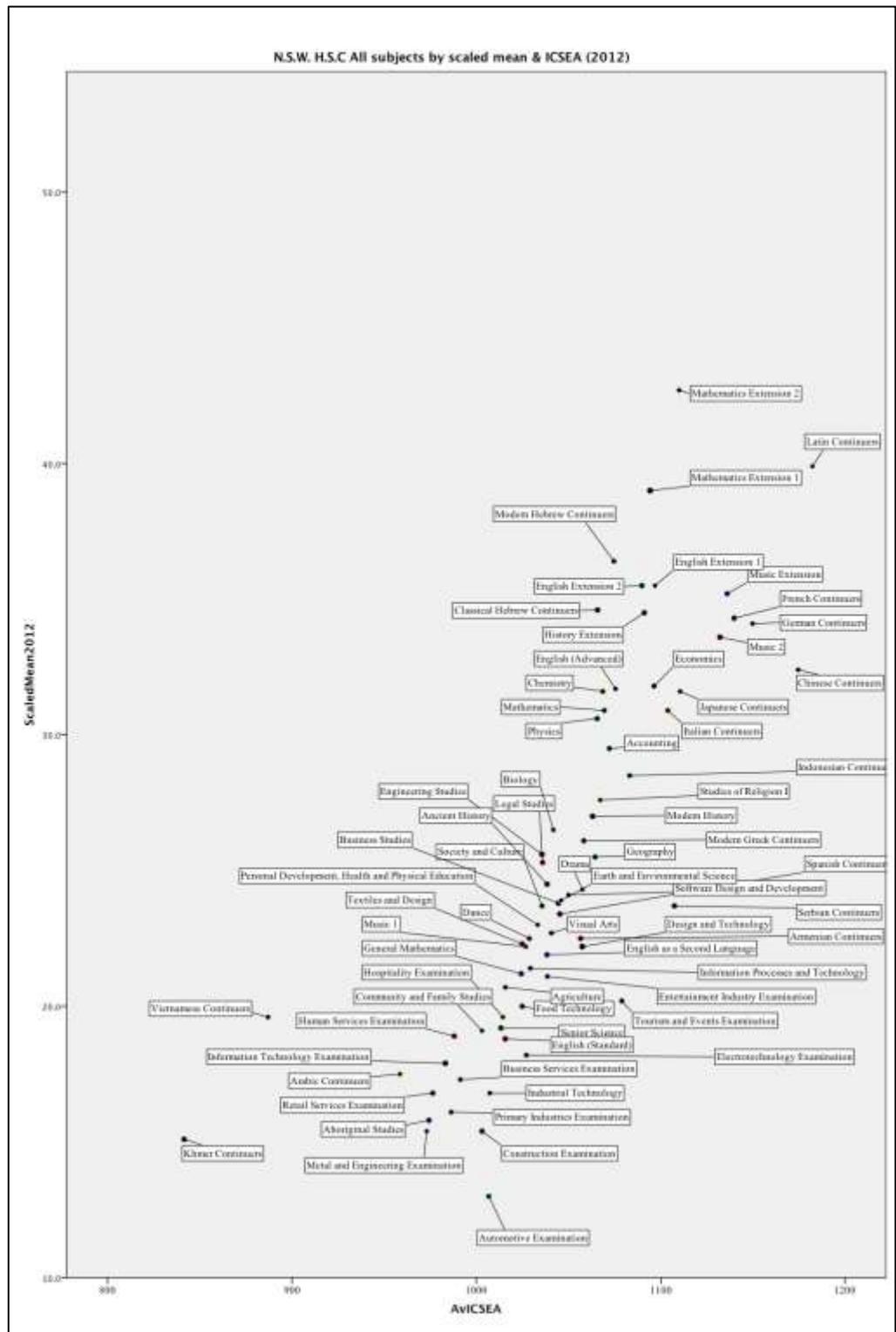


Fig 7.3: The NSW HSC Curriculum Hierarchy. NSW HSC All subjects in all schools (2012) Scaled Mean by ICSEA (2012 data)  $R^2 = 0.6$

## 7.5: A Spatially Organised Hierarchy

The next step, then, is to ascertain that an academic hierarchy *is* spatially organised. For the purposes of this study, I am using the spatial characteristics of ‘metropolitan’ and gradations of ‘rurality’, rather than using within-metropolitan organisation, based on the spatial organisation of the city itself. The spatial references employed are ‘Remoteness Area’ as described in Chapter One. This is deliberately different from the categories used by the McGaw review (New South Government, 1996) of ‘inland’, ‘country’, and ‘coastal country’, as, following Nespor (2006), scale matters – by using large categories to describe the rural, I am hypothesising that differences in access were compressed by the McGaw review (New South Government, 1996), in such a way that space becomes overlooked as a factor.

To conduct the analysis, schools have been tagged by the Remoteness Area of their location, and then the analysis has been run for each Remoteness Area. These are presented together in figure 7.4. To assist in ‘placing’ these categories, map 7.1 is provided as a reference point<sup>60</sup>. In interpreting these analyses, it is important to note that between figures 7.3 and 7.4 the *structure* of the hierarchy remains the same. To ease comparison, the representations in figure 7.4 have been compressed and subject labels removed – and a non-labelled version of figure 7.3 included as a visual reference. The only difference between the two figures is that the horizontal scale in 7.4 is bigger, as subjects not accessed are mapped against an ICSEA of zero with their ‘power’ maintained on the vertical axis. One final note: many of the subjects not accessed by students in inner regional and outer regional areas are Languages. It is when we get to remote and very remote schools that subjects other than Languages begin to be not accessed at all. This is not to devalue Languages, especially given the significance of many, as shown by their place on the vertical axis, and their role in a cosmopolitan education. But it indicates that these subjects are not accessed by students in non-metropolitan locations.

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<sup>60</sup> This is a reproduction of figure 4 in chapter 1.



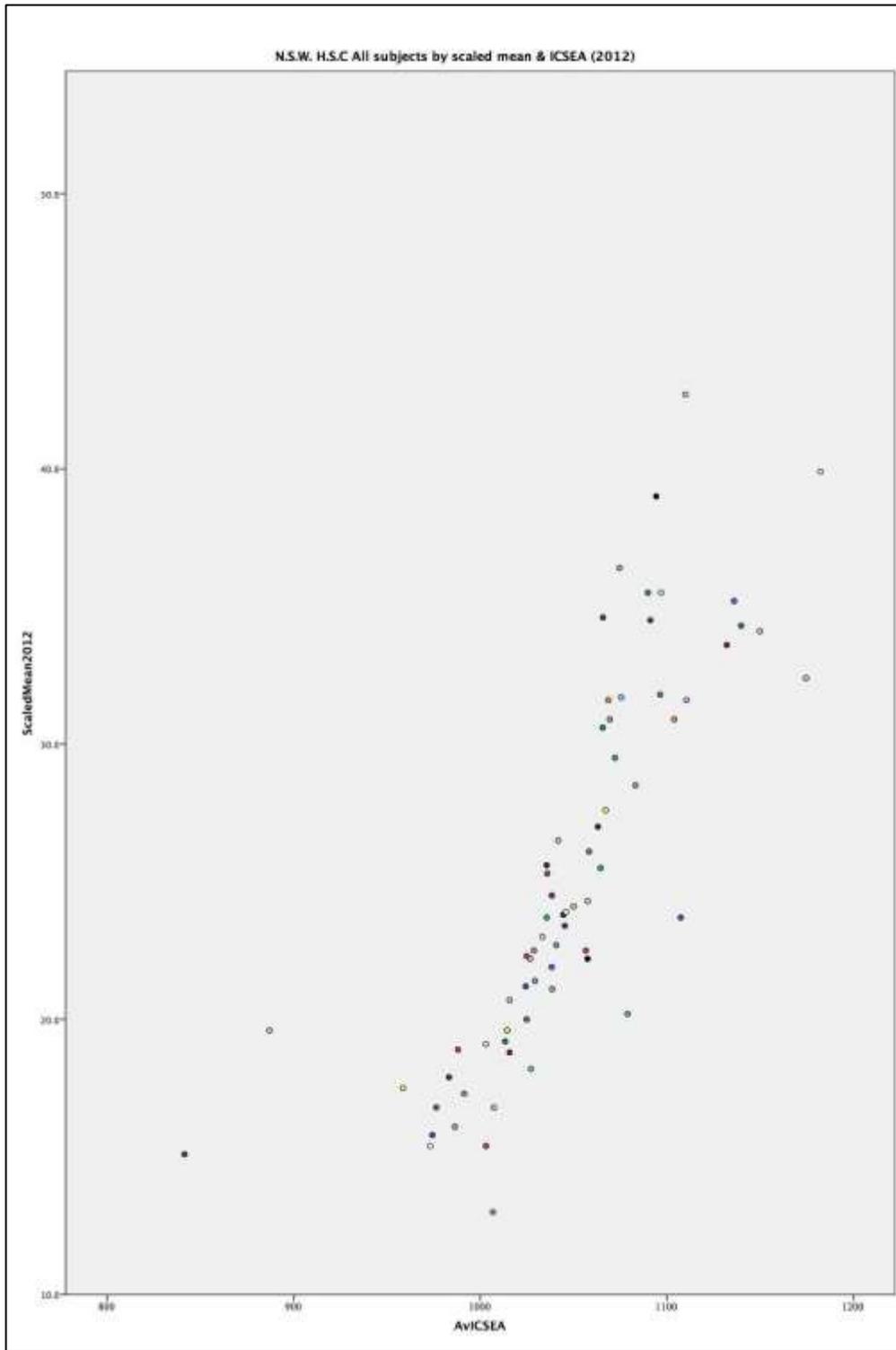


Figure 7.4 Part I: Access to the NSW Curriculum Hierarchy by RA comparison (i.e. figure 7.3 without labels)

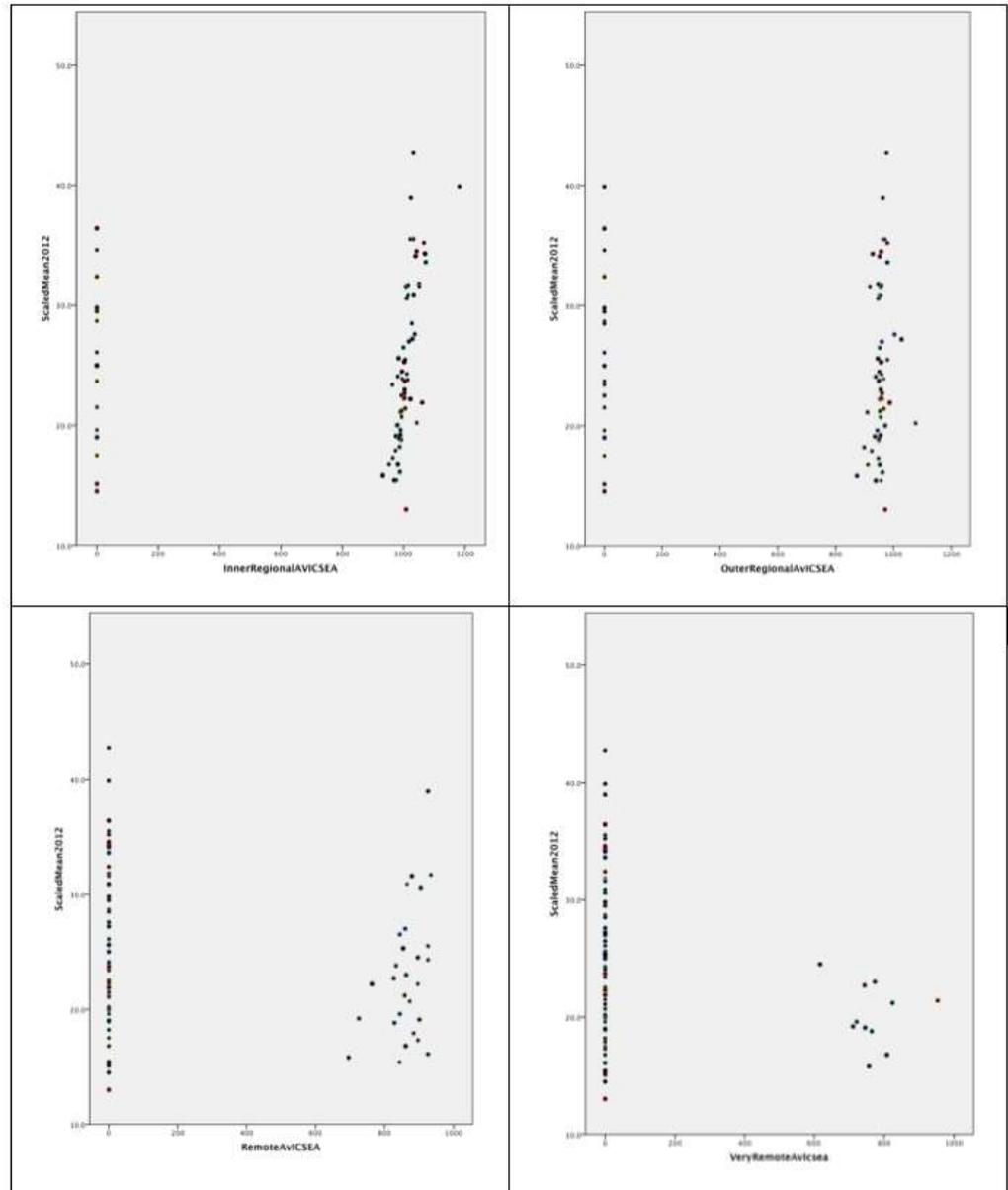


Figure 7.4 Part II: Access to the NSW Curriculum Hierarchy by RA (dots on the left hand side are subjects not accessed)

Immediately noticeable in figure 7.4 is the reduction of access to subjects as schools become more 'remote' from the metropolitan area. While, as I have just explained, these are initially Language subjects, they accelerate to include large numbers of the more powerful academic subjects. However it does need to be noted that we are referring here, even in outer regional, to significantly fewer schools than in the city. We are referring to a total of 13 remote schools and six very remote schools, with much smaller school size. The data does include subjects studied via a distance education centre, classified by the school the student is normally enrolled in. As such, we can only take these figures to be indicative as they change based upon demand. An analysis of the publicly available annual school reports of these schools does suggest that the patterns of subject offerings are comparable to previous years, however. Given the related issues of statistical validity for such a small sample, a longitudinal study of these schools' data can now be seen as a more robust approach; however such data could not be accessed for this study.

Noting the limitations, I use the results to suggest that, rather than simply accepting the standard argument that size determines offering, we need to question if this is indeed acceptable. If we accept that size determines access, and that school/community SES determines offering, we are in fact undermining the very arguments about access that have underpinned curriculum reform for the last four decades in NSW.

Limited access to a powerful academic curriculum in turn limits other opportunities, such as access to higher education. This is because, as the Bradley review (2008) illustrated, participation in higher education from rural/regional students is 18.1% even though such students comprise 25.4% of the population. Similarly low SES students comprise only 15% of the university population whilst comprising 25% of the overall population (Bradley, 2008). Perhaps more concerning is that, as Bradley (2008) noted, while the participation of low SES students is increasing, the participation of rural students is declining. Returning to Teese's hierarchy, the 'Group of Eight' (Go8 – the eight oldest and most powerful universities in Australia) has

the lowest enrolment of low SES and rural students across the Higher Education sector.

One final limitation that needs further investigation is the social and educational segregation within rural communities according to race and class. While I have already noted that this is not within the purview of this particular study, its possible influence, and seeming invisibility, must be mentioned. Anecdotally, many more advantaged rural families access boarding school. Indeed many of the large city-based independent schools have a long heritage of patronage by wealthy rural families. This would be borne out in the results, with their curriculum enrolment being linked to their SES via the school they are boarding in and achieving in. This in turn raises questions about the respective values of wealthy rural families, who generally own the large agricultural enterprises, and the rest of the rural population, and the role of school in reinforcing this difference. As Reid et al. (2010) argue, rural social space in Australia cannot be discussed without reference to the question of Indigeneity, and the long history of segregation and exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children. This has limited these children's access to the educational advantages, partly, perhaps, resulting from the 'fixed' nature of their location in 'exposed' school sites.

While a number of schools in the outer regional, remote and very remote share teaching and connect via technology, they are included in considerations of curriculum access here. However, given that access is deemed to be at the school delivering the subject in these situations, there may be some formal slippage between inner regional, outer regional and remote in figure 7.4. Manual checking, however, has confirmed the overall curriculum access as per 7.4.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> There is however a more substantial point in relation to distance education and provision 'across schools'. It changes the teacher-student relationship and reifies curriculum as content knowledge to be transmitted and then reduces (or reinforces) pedagogy as only a mode of transmission. That many rural schools have access by distance or across schools then conceivably affects the way pedagogy and curriculum is constructed and understood. Secondly, if this was truly an equal educational experience it would bring into question the very structure of modern schooling, and would be acceptable in fortified metropolitan sites. That neither happens suggests that it is, in fact, not an equal form of schooling. This also links to place and

Finally, a note on school ICSEA, and school location. As many arguments previously outlined, and figure 7.4 itself has established, there is an association between SES and rurality. This would be expected to reduce access in a scenario where we accept the SES-access association as natural and therefore acceptable. The way such ideas are represented removes the ‘reality’ of the schools represented. To reinforce this, and illustrate Lingard’s (2011) point about single numbers masking social complexity, figure 7.5 shows the range of school average ICSEA for each RA category. While clearly the major cities skew to the higher ICSEA and the more regional and remote skew to lower ICSEA, I have chosen this representation rather than a correlation figure, to visually reinforce the fact that each does significantly overlap and consist of a *range*, with some above the average ICSEA of 1000.

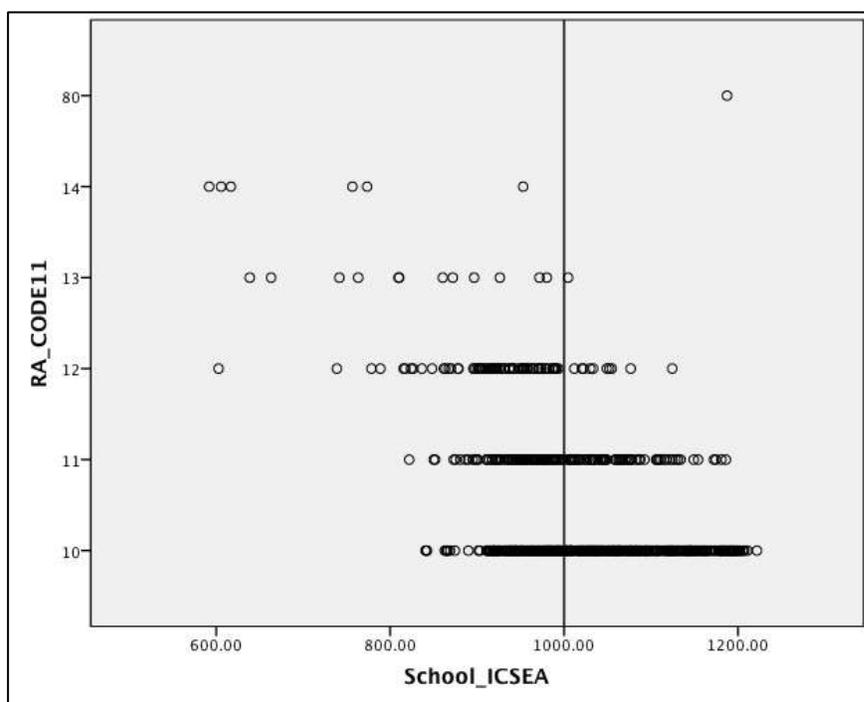


Figure 7.5: School ICSEA by Remoteness Area (10 is city, 11 inner regional, 12 outer regional, 13 remote, 14 very remote, 80 is an anomaly – a school not physically in NSW studying the NSW curriculum)

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placeless teaching ala Chapter Five and what Sellar (2009) talks about in terms of pedagogy and relationships.

## 7.6: Selectivity

One of the key axes of stratification identified by Teese and colleagues (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009) is the *selectivity* of schools. As discussed above (section 7.3), selectivity in secondary schools was maintained in NSW – both through academically selective public schools and the independent sector. Furthermore, social selectivity has, arguably, been accelerated by federal school funding policies. Theoretically, access to selective secondary schools is open to all students, with the most academically able gaining entry via a selective schools test (typically at Year 6). However, as Vinson (2002) identified, students from disadvantaged schools had a 17% success rate in gaining entry to selective schools compared to 22% for all schools, and only 11% for the most disadvantaged schools. The conclusion emerges, then, that *academically* selective schools are in fact *socially* selective, as entry is skewed towards more socially advantaged students. Indeed it has become socially accepted that socially advantaged families aim for entry to a government selective school and, if not successful, then opt out of the public sector and choose a non-government school (Campbell & Sherington, 2006). Reinforcing this, Bonnor (2011) showed that government selective schools have a significantly higher ICSEA than non-selective government schools. Further, only two of these academically selective schools are situated in the rural regions this study is concerned with, raising issues of genuine access. In response to these issues, and the scarcity of places compared to demand, ‘partially’ selective schools were developed by the NSW Department of Education. These schools have a selective ‘stream’, though other than in metropolitan areas they are only located in large rural centres.

To test the axis of selectivity, I have applied the filter of school sector and selectivity to the analysis of Year 9 NAPLAN results for 2011. I have started with Year 9, given Teese and colleagues’ (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009) point that the academic curriculum becomes increasingly abstract and discriminating as students move through schooling. If, as they suggest, a hierarchy is beginning to be developed

between school sites in middle secondary school, then this is likely to influence students' senior subject selection and post-school aspiration.

Figure 7.6 shows the results of this analysis, with the average ICSEA indicated by the vertical line and the average NAPLAN mean by the horizontal line.

Clearly apparent is the separation of the fully academically selective schools, indicated by the red dots. These schools have a significantly higher average ICSEA than other government schools, as well as a significantly higher mean reading achievement than virtually all schools. Secondly, the patterning overall clearly shows a correlation between school ICSEA and mean reading levels (reinforcing the results for Year 3 in Chapter One). Taken together, these analyses show that there is clearly a segregation of students into school sectors, suggesting the strength of the entrenched formation of exposed and fortified school sites.

Interestingly, the two *rural* fully selective schools fall significantly below their metropolitan counterparts. Perhaps difficult to discern in figure 7.6, they are located in the bottom left-hand corner of the top right-hand grid. This suggests that while they have a slightly lower ICSEA than their peers', they are achieving mean reading results marginally lower than many non-government and government schools. Further analysis suggests that while they are generally outperforming most non-metropolitan schools, they are an interesting example of the relationship between rurality and literacy, (or metropolitan-cosmopolitan education) outcomes, generally.

### **7.7: Hierarchy of Achievement**

Moving on from this discussion of *access* to consider student *achievement*, I turn here to examine the patterning of achievement both socially and spatially. I argue that achievement is similarly spatially organised. The data used to produce figure 7.8 is 2012 ICSEA for schools and a figure referred to as HSC 'success'. Initially calculated in December 2013 by Fairfax media (and publicly reported on their website), the figure shows the proportion of students who scored 90% or above in any subject (McNeilage, 2013). I have linked data for

schools' ICSEA, this HSC 'success' calculation, and other variables for each school such as sector, selectivity and location. By using this notion of 'success', I am again echoing the argument of the academic hierarchy structuring social advantage, and legitimating social segregation, in the form of university entrance and access to the professions (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009). While I recognise that university access is not the sole objective of schooling, and that alternative pathways are available to prospective students throughout their lives, I am using the idea that university structures the secondary curriculum in NSW, and is often seen as its major purpose (Teese, 2000/2013; Campbell & Sherington, 2006; Yates & Collins, 2008).

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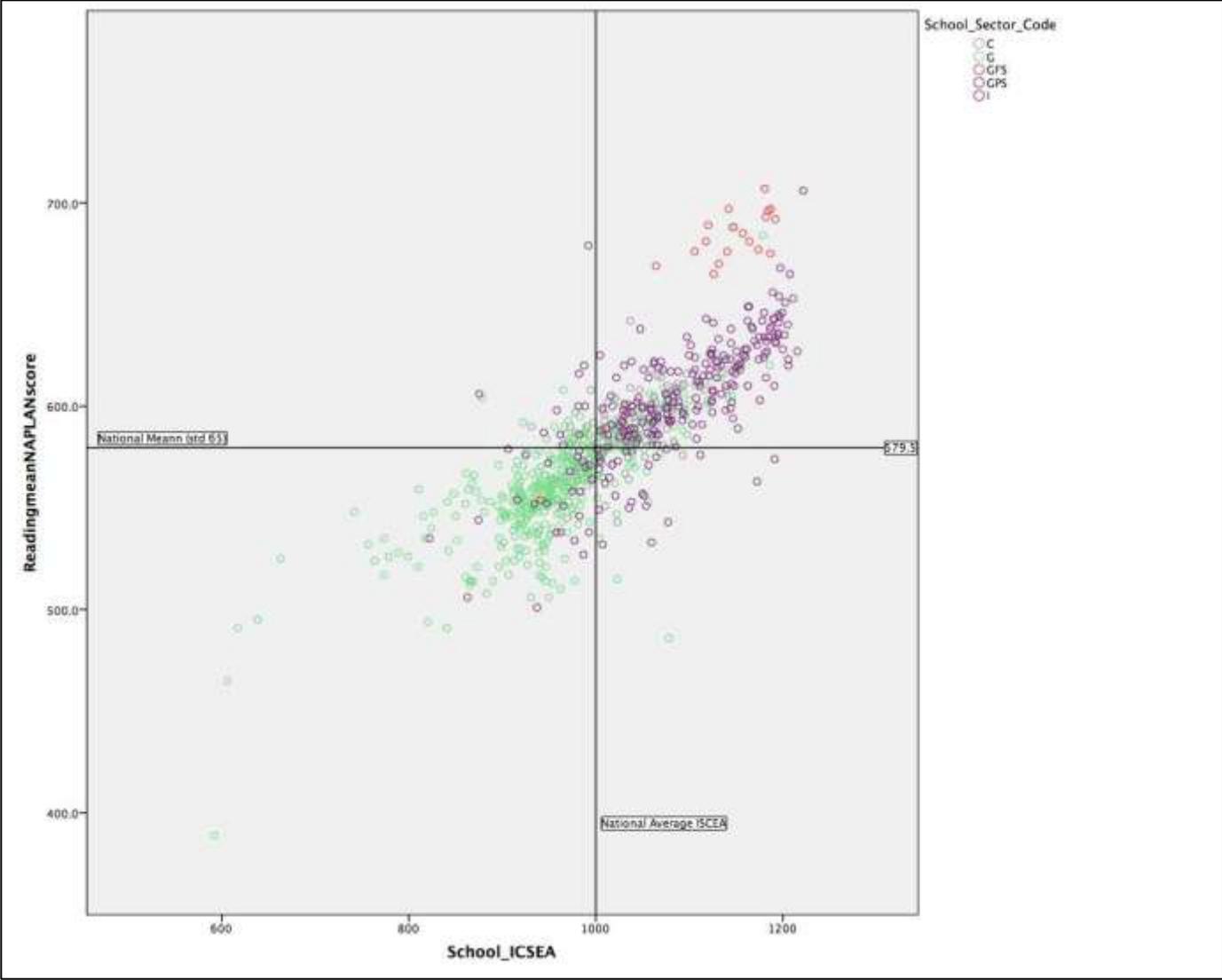


Figure 7.6: Year 9 NAPLAN Reading (2011) by school ICSEA and selectivity.

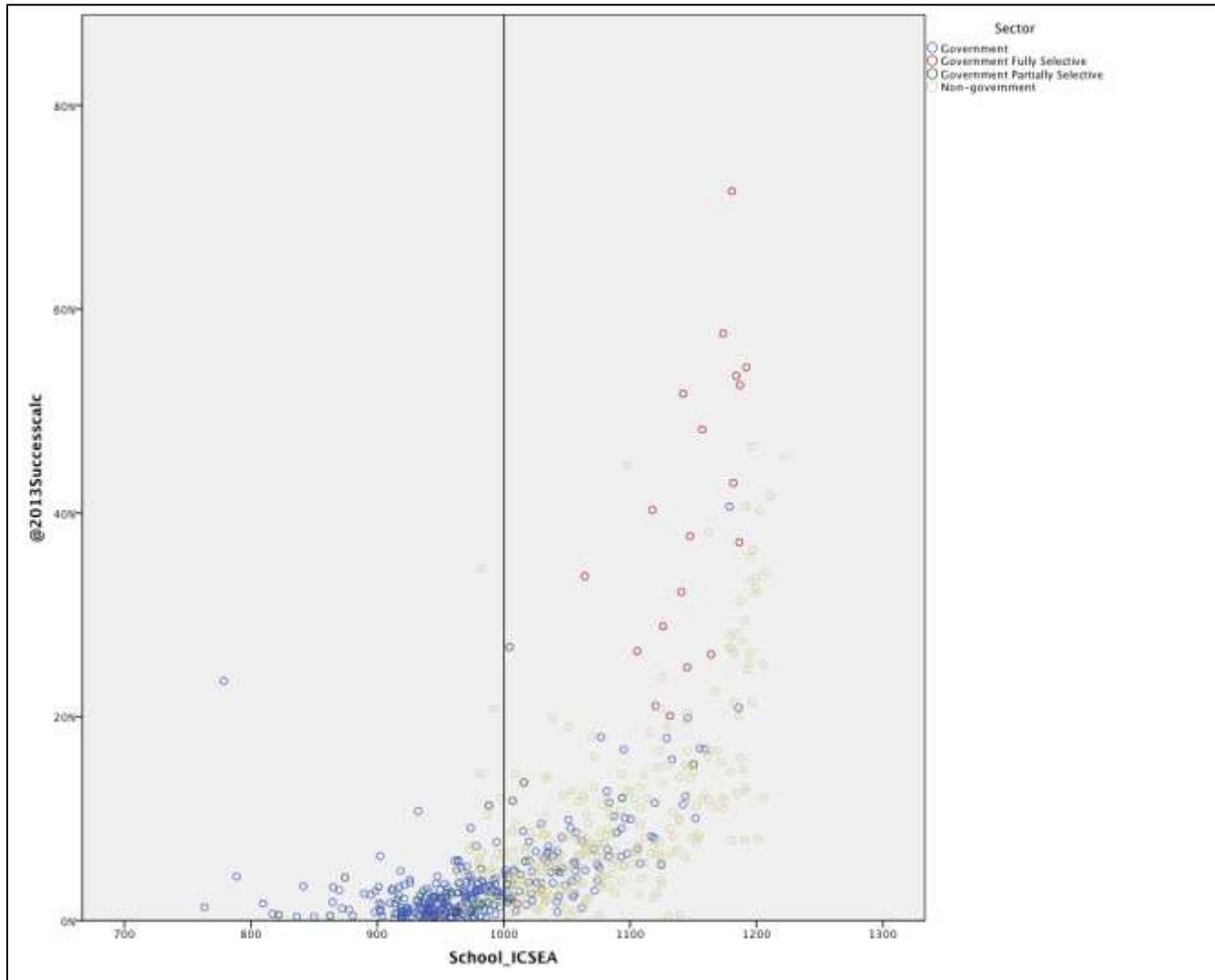


Figure 7.8: HSC 2013 ‘success’ by school sector – proportion of students who scored 90% or above in any subject.

Figure 7.8 clearly illustrates that fully selective government schools are producing by far the highest proportion of students, with grades over 90%, in any subject. These are then closely followed by non-government schools (not divided in the data accessed into independent/Catholic). Of the top ten places, the first seven were fully selective government schools, with the other three being non-government schools, reinforcing Teese and colleagues' notion of fortified sites. Of the top twenty, eleven were government fully selective schools, with one government school (which in fact was 'musically selective', and so arguably selective), and eight non-government schools. Taking a wider view of the 'top 100 schools' by rank, on this calculation only nine are non-selective government schools (10 including the music selective); of the top 200, this increases to 36 (or 37 including the music selective). This analysis reinforces my key theme in this chapter: the axis of the curriculum hierarchy, the development of fortified sites, and their corollary, of exposed sites at the other end. Picking up on the place of the rural selective schools, they are again situated away from the other selective schools, at approximately the five-percent mark, near the average ICSEA line.

Twisting this analysis spatially, figure 7.9 shows the same data as figure 7.8 but this time coded by location. Given that the results here represent proportions of school enrolments achieving 90% or more, school size should not be a significant influence. Of the top 200 schools by rank in this measure, only *seven* are designated as rural for the purposes of this study, coming in at 48, 64, 129, 162, 182, 185, and 190. Five of these are located in large regional towns, and only two being central schools<sup>62</sup>. Prefacing a later discussion about location, one of the top ranked non-selective government schools (48) is a central school and has a history of achieving such results, as it has been similarly noted in previous studies (Bonnor, 2008; Reid et al., 2012).

Finally, to bring the notion of spatial justice and curricular justice back into the broader discussion, the same data has been coded here by government school equity funding, as discussed in Chapter Three (Figure 7.10). It is worth remembering here that schools classified as geographically isolated received

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<sup>62</sup> Kindergarten to Year 12 schools in NSW, located in rural areas distant from larger towns.

funding under the CAP program. This reinforces the finding in Chapter Three, using NAPLAN data, that geographically isolated schools were no more socially disadvantaged, and often more socially advantaged, than many low SES schools. This further reinforces the critique in Chapter One, and Chapter Three, of the standard policy disclaimer that rural students perform poorly due to their average lower SES. It is more problematic however to conclude that the equity funding is enhancing achievement, as we have no basis of comparison. All that can be observed is that most schools do not achieve to the extent of their more advantaged competitors. Secondly, we can see that schools receiving geographic isolation funding, and funding for socio-economic disadvantage, are performing marginally poorer than those only receiving geographic isolation support, suggesting SES is interacting in curriculum achievement, but is not necessarily significant. Clearly, equity funding is not having a significant impact on assisting these schools, and their students, in achieving success in the academic curriculum, or facilitating the social mobility it enables.

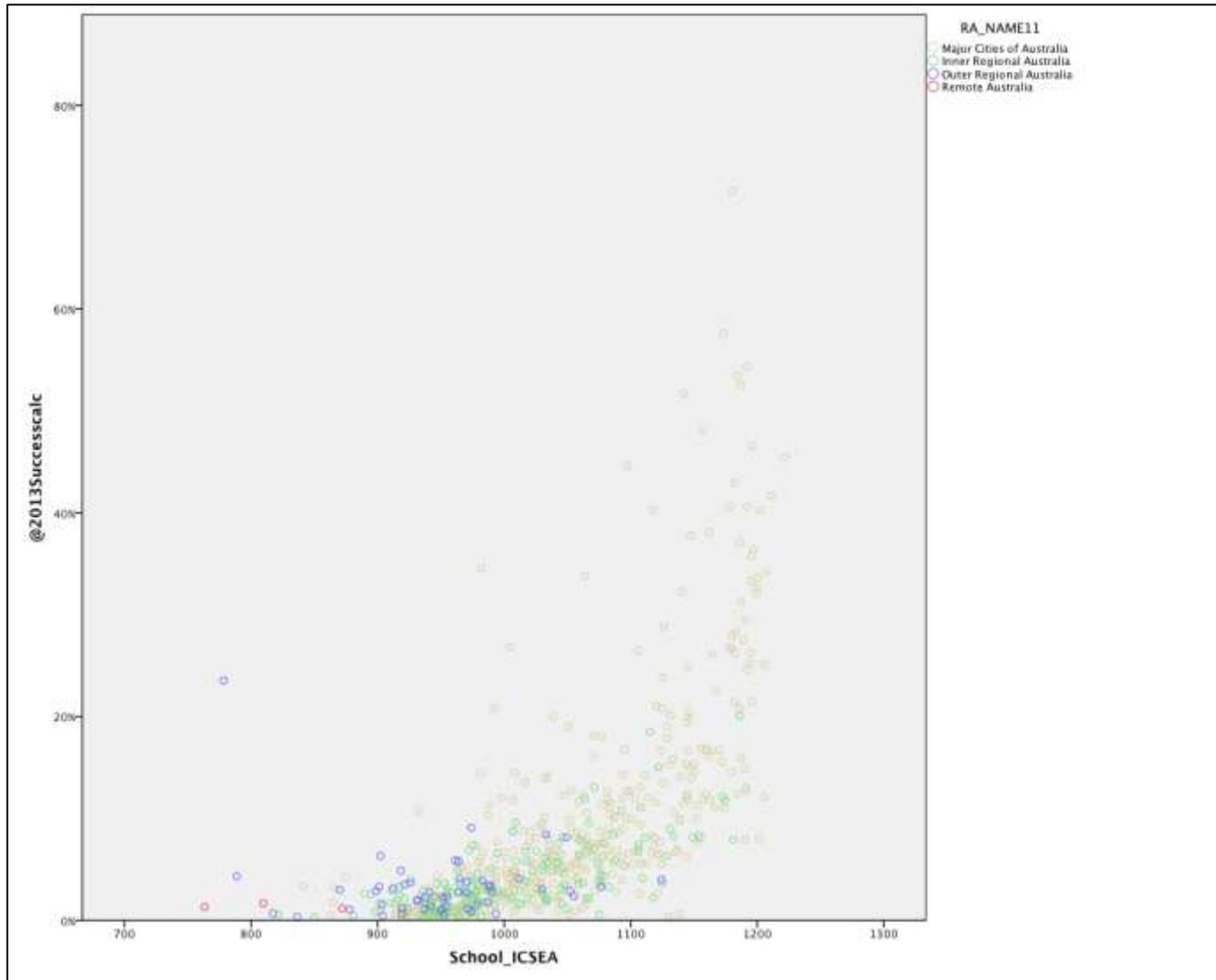


Figure 7.9: HSC 2013 ‘success’ by location – proportion of students who scored 90% or above in any subject.

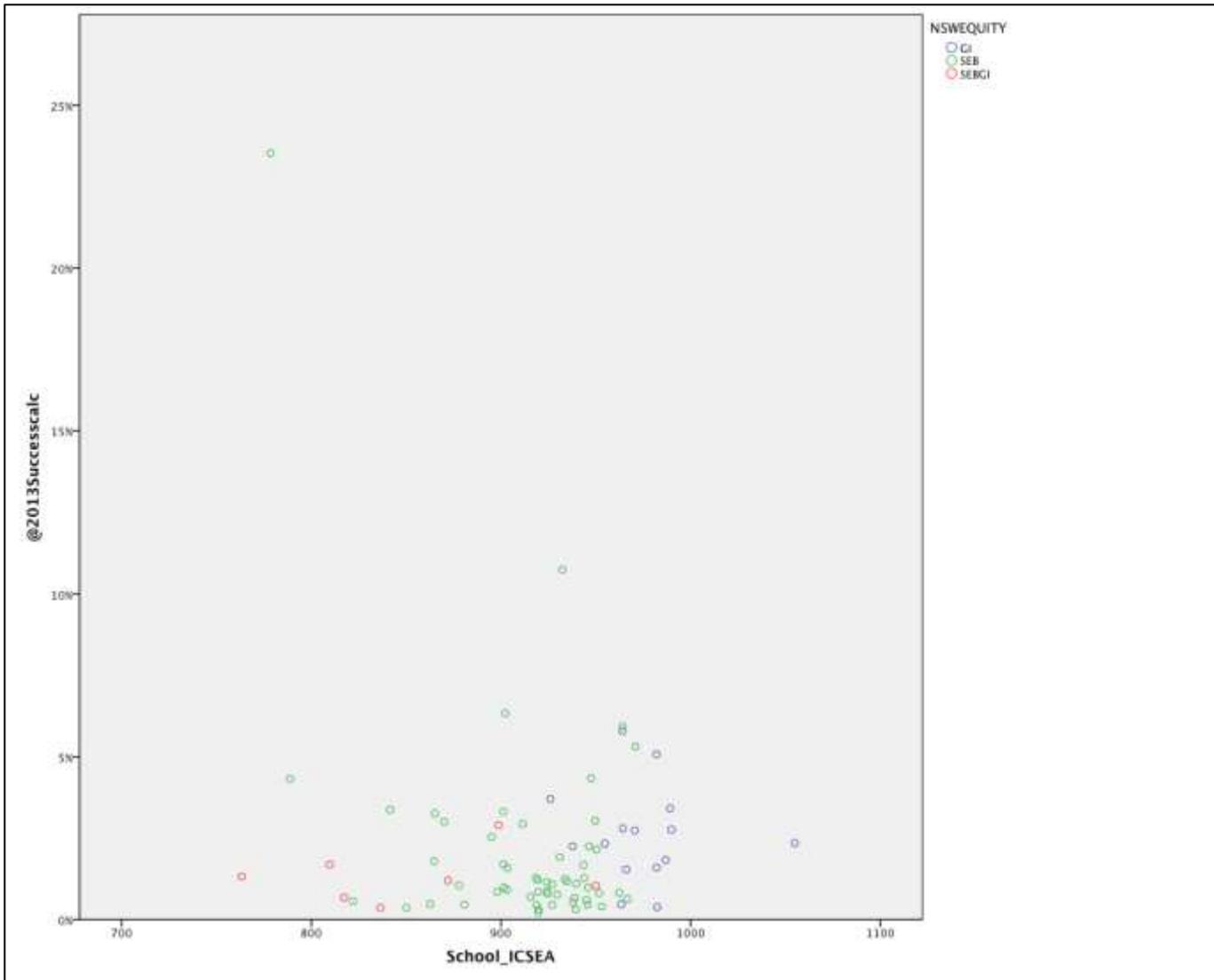


Figure 7.10: HSC 2013 ‘success’ by government school equity funding – proportion of students who scored 90% or above in any subject.

## **7.8: The Hierarchy of Access & Achievement in HSC Mathematics & English**

In this section I focus on achievement in the HSC subject areas of English and Mathematics. Given that English is the only mandatory subject in the NSW HSC, it provides a powerful snapshot of the entire student cohort, and while Mathematics is not mandatory, it is a historically powerful subject linked to access to university and a number of technical trades. These are two historically important subjects (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009), and discussed in detail by the McGaw review (New South Government, 1996). Importantly, English as a subject is an important site for cultural transmission.

Each subject is divided into its own internal hierarchy: English into Advanced English and Standard English, and Mathematics into Mathematics and General Mathematics. As figure 7.5 revealed, Advanced English and Mathematics are very powerful for university entrance and are studied by more advantaged student cohorts than their less valued alternatives. Additionally, each also had two ‘extension’ subjects that sit atop the entire subject hierarchy. Finally, English recently had a third option of ‘English Studies’ introduced. This option does not count for university entry and is aimed at students who have historically struggled with the Standard English curriculum.

In this analysis I have looked at both the access to these subjects by the gradations of location, and achievement. I have not included the ‘extension’ subjects because, as figure 7.5 illustrates, they are predominantly studied by more advantaged students in metropolitan schools. While this is itself significant in terms of access to the curriculum hierarchy, they are, in many unfortunate ways, self-evident. They are also studied by smaller numbers of students, whereas either English Advanced or Standard is compulsory for all NSW students, and Mathematics is studied by large numbers of students. Finally Mathematics, or Advanced English, are pre-requisites to study the extension unit in either subject.

### 7.8.1 Hierarchy of Access

Figures 7.11 & 7.12 show the percentage of students in each geographic area enrolled in the two levels of English and Mathematics. Figures 7.13 & 7.14 plot these enrolments against school ICSEA. Figures 7.11 & 7.12 clearly show that access to the curriculum hierarchy is spatially mediated. There are decreasing numbers of students studying the more powerful version of each subject, the further they are from major metropolitan centres.

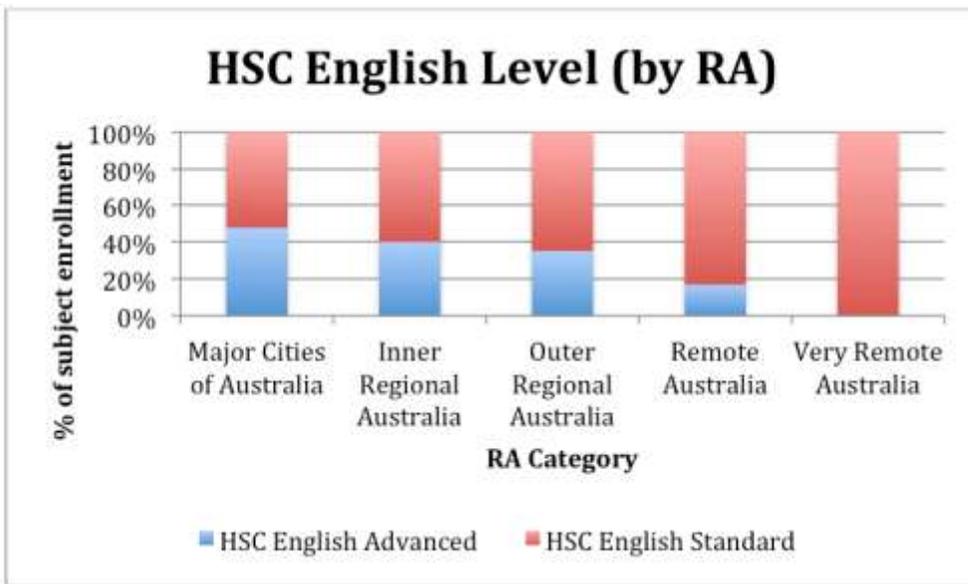


Figure 7.11: Access to HSC English by location (2012) – proportion of enrolment.

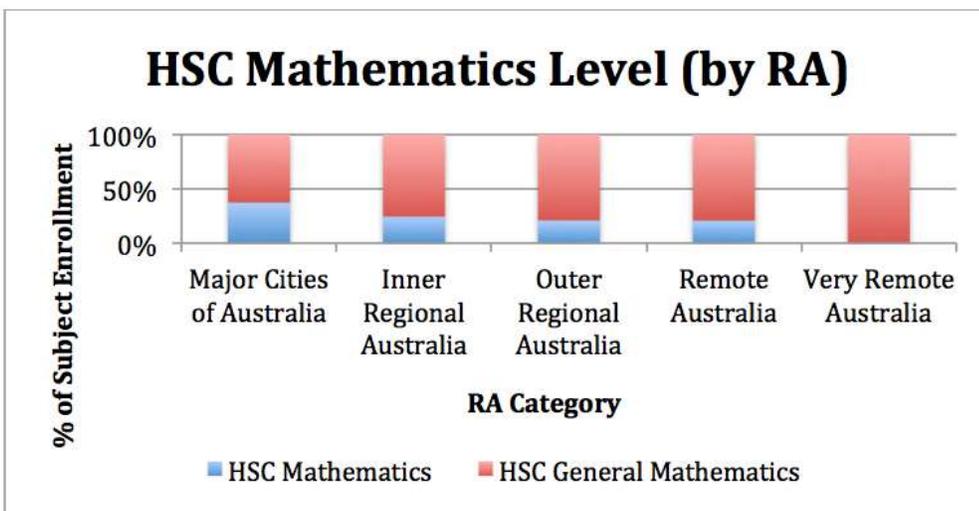


Figure 7.12: Access to HSC Mathematics by location (2012) – proportion of enrolment.

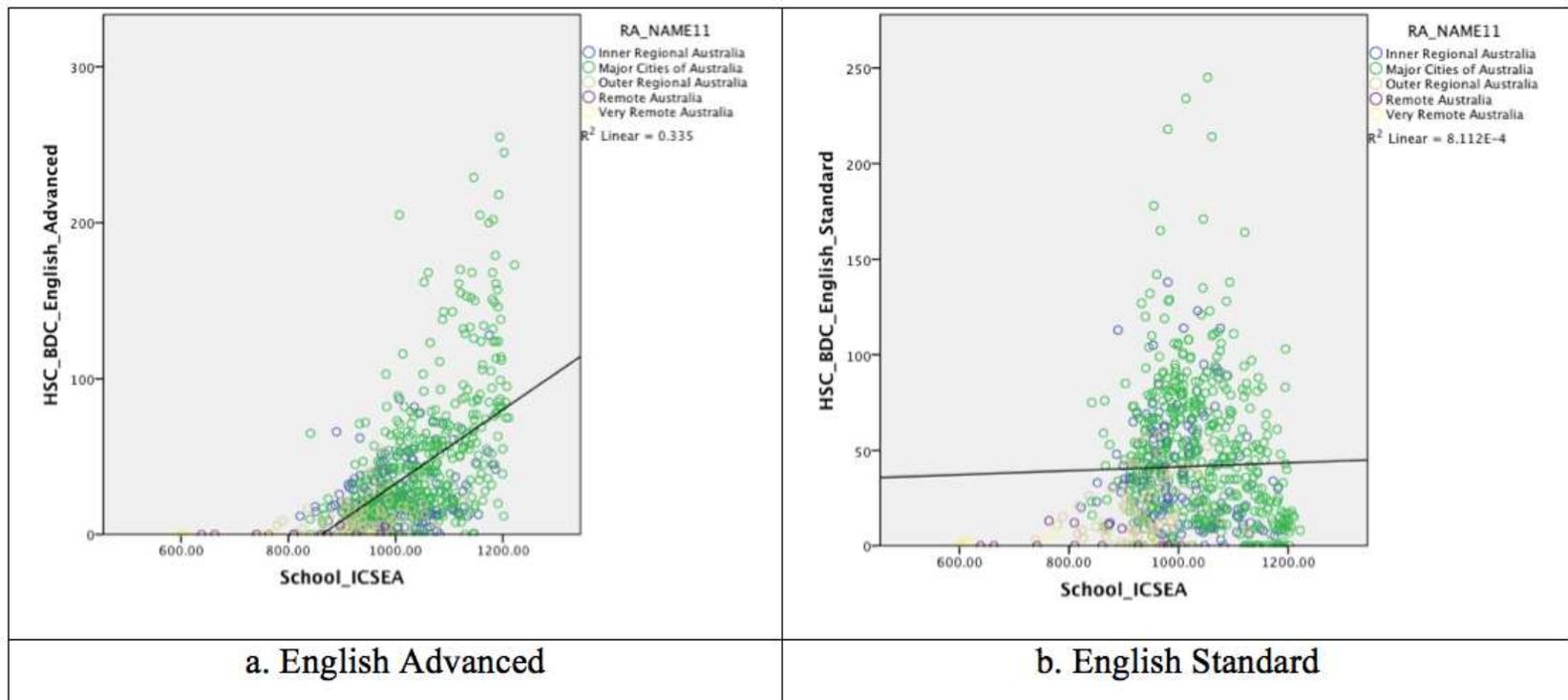


Figure 7.13: Access to HSC English by Remoteness Area and ICSEA

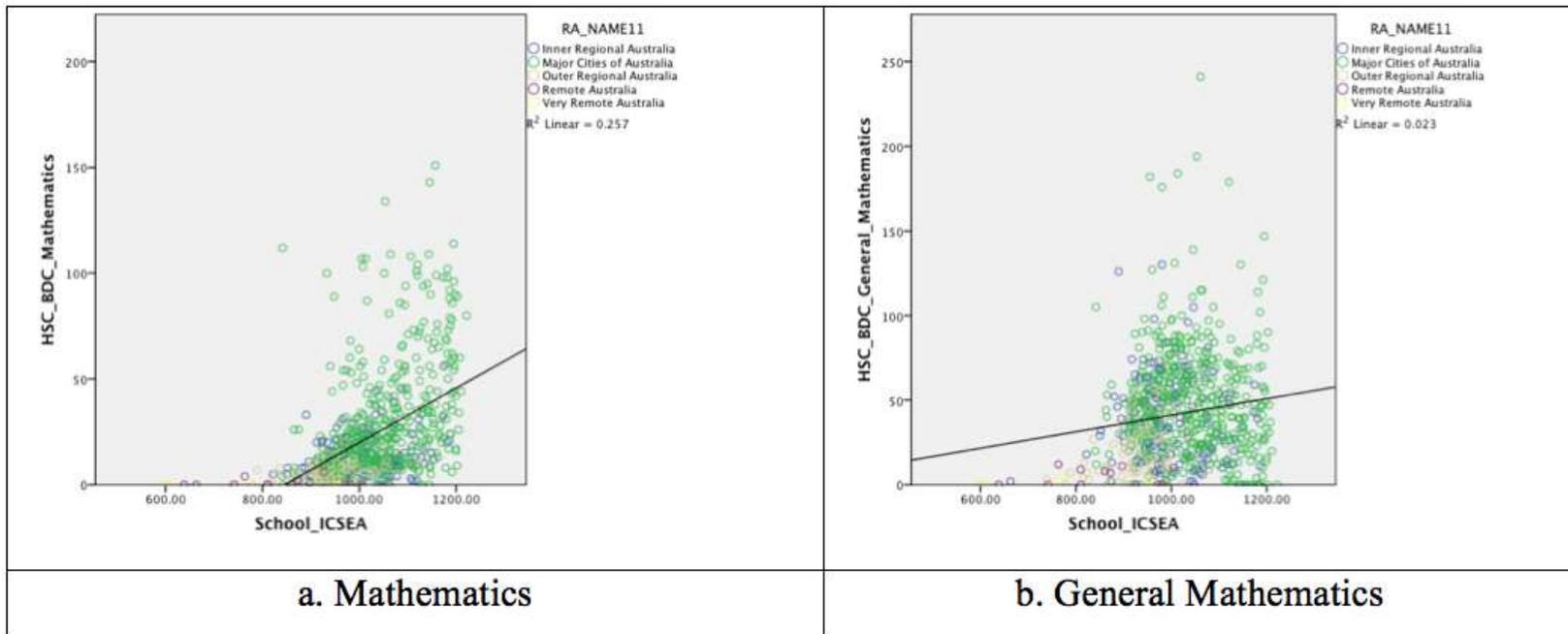


Figure 7.14: Access to HSC Mathematics by Remoteness Area and ICSEA

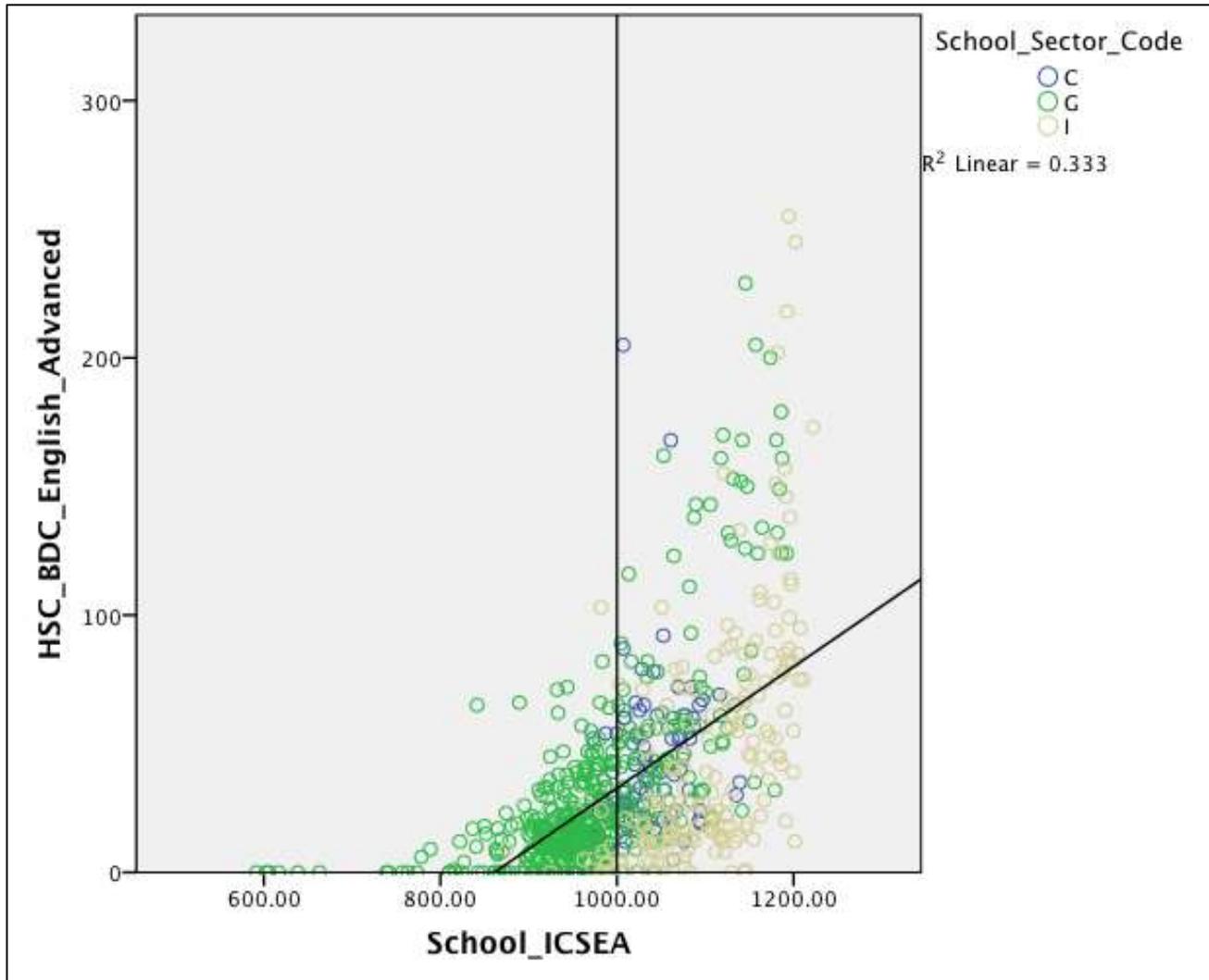


Figure 7.15: Access to HSC English Advanced by ICSEA and School sector (C = Catholic Schools, G = Government Schools, I = Independent Schools)

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Confirming similar conclusions in Victoria (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009), in Tasmania (Lamb et al., 2001) and in metropolitan Perth (Perry & Southwell, 2014), figures 7.11-7.15 show that the NSW curriculum hierarchy is geographically and socially structured. Both the axis of segregation identified by Teese and colleagues, a curriculum hierarchy, and a link between access, social background and exclusivity, are clearly present in the NSW system. Students in more advantaged schools are studying the more powerful subjects at higher rates than students in less advantaged schools. Spatially, while outer regional and remote schools *are* accessing both versions of subjects they are accessing them at a lower rate than schools of similar ICSEA. This suggests that while school advantage is indeed an issue, rurality is exerting some influence on subject selection. This may be influenced by rural students' generally lower aspiration to further study (Dalley-Trim & Alloway, 2010) and, I hypothesise, it is linked to the metropolitan-cosmopolitan nature of the curriculum. Worryingly, in the context of the domination of a curriculum hierarchy in schooling, the introduction of English Studies has led to more schools of lower ICSEA offering this subject to their students. This reinforces the exact concerns raised by the McGaw review (New South Government, 1996) of less powerful, often seen as easier, subjects being studied by students from less advantaged backgrounds.

### **7.8.2 Hierarchy of Achievement**

Figures 7.16-7.19 show achievement in the four Mathematics and English subjects by location. Moving on from the issue of curriculum access, I am testing here if achievement is related to the hierarchy, and if it is spatially organised. This is again influenced by the work of Teese and colleagues (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009), who found clear links between achievement in the academic curriculum, social status and school selectivity.

In the NSW HSC, subject achievement is graded from band 1 (the lowest) to band 6 (the highest). While not a strict correlation, due to the nature of

standards-referenced assessment, band 6 usually relates to marks of 90% and higher, band 5 80% and so forth, with band 1 generally relating to grades below 50%. While not organised in a bell curve, generally most students achieve around band 4. Students aiming to achieve a university entry rank high enough to access high status courses generally need mostly band 5 or above in their subjects, such that a student aiming for the most prestigious courses would need to achieve high band 6 across all their subjects.

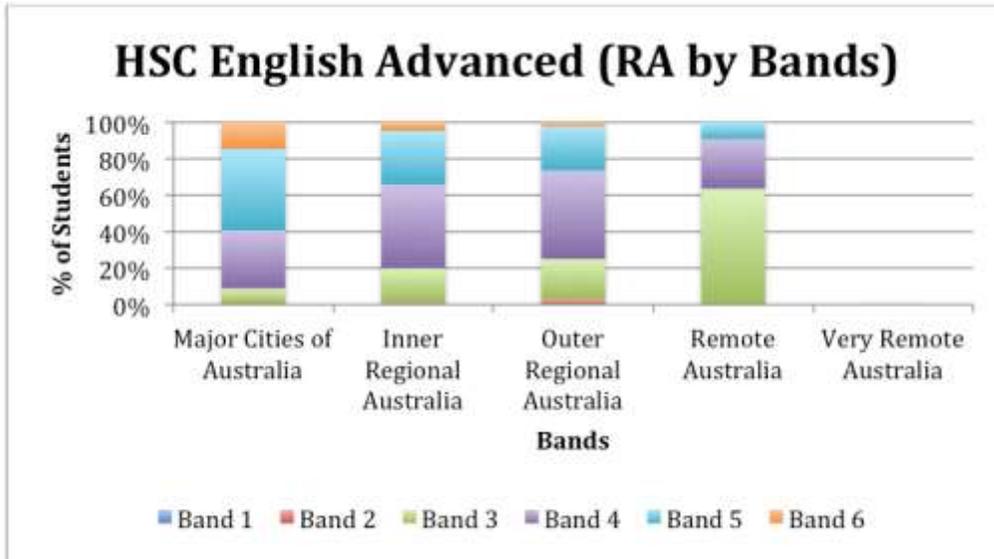


Figure 7.16: Achievement in HSC English Advanced (2012) by band - proportion of students by location.

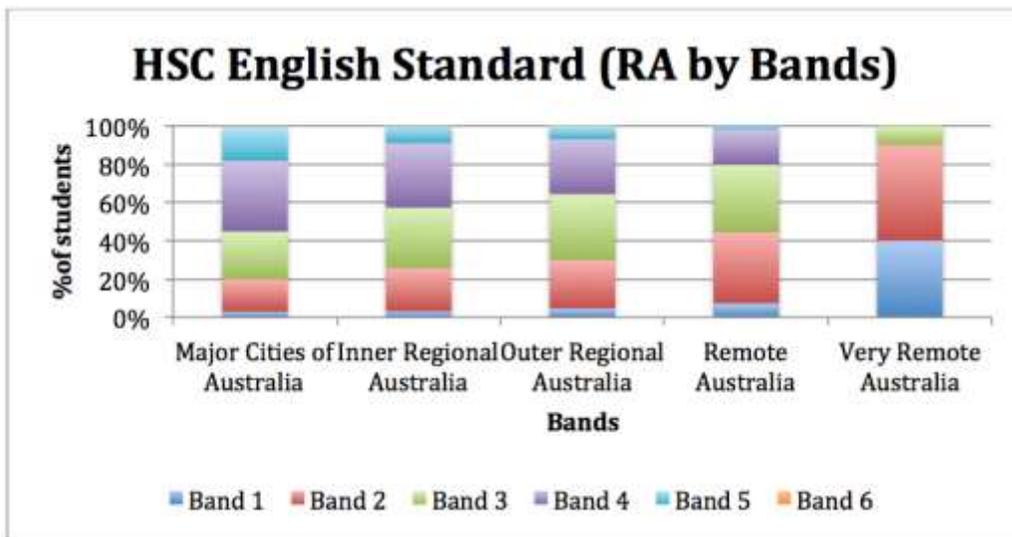


Figure 7.17 Achievement in HSC English Standard (2012) by band - proportion of students by location.

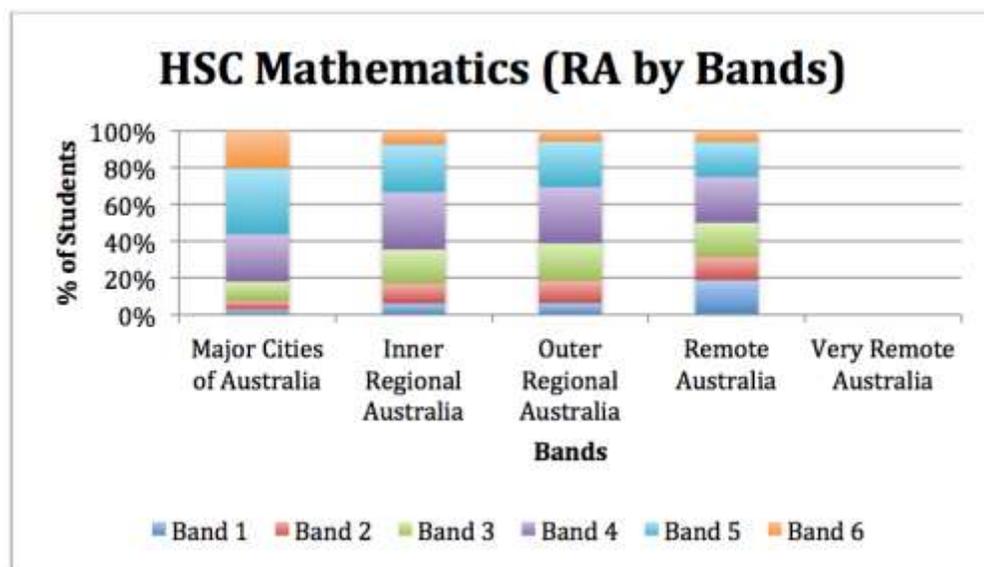


Figure 7.18: Achievement in HSC Mathematics (2012) by band - proportion of students by location.

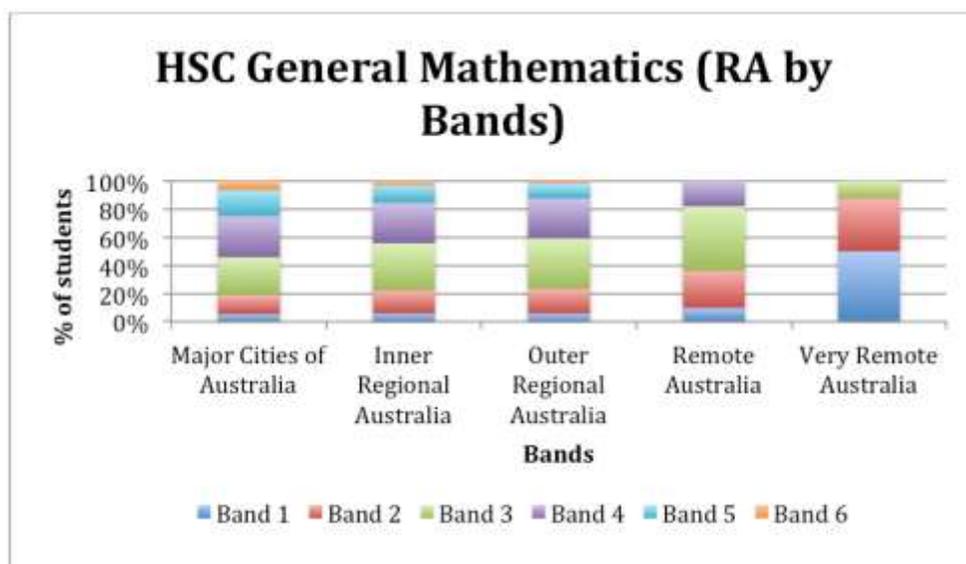


Figure 7.19: Achievement in HSC General Mathematics (2012) by band - proportion of students by location.

Again, figures 7.16-7.19 confirm that a greater proportion of higher achievement is found in the metropolitan areas. As we move further away from the city, the proportion of students achieving high bands reduces. Secondly, higher bands are achieved in the harder subject options, which are also, as noted in the previous section, studied proportionally more often by city and inner regional students. From this, we can conclude that the curriculum

hierarchy in terms of achievement is once again spatially organised in favour of the city and is influenced by the level of subject studies in the hierarchy.

Combining this with the distribution of HSC 'success' presented in figures 7.9 and 7.10, and the position of the various Mathematics and English subjects on the hierarchy in terms of power and social background, and bearing in mind that low achieving students in Standard English appear to be filtered off to English Studies, we see that achievement is indeed structured, both by social background and, through this analysis, and (relative) by location, or *spatially*.

Turning specifically to achievement in Mathematics and English, Figures 7.20-7.23 show the proportion of students in each schools enrolment that achieved a band 5 or 6 result. This is tagged by school type to test the idea of fortified sites. The horizontal line is set at 75% of students achieving band five or 6, with the vertical line representing the national average ICSEA.

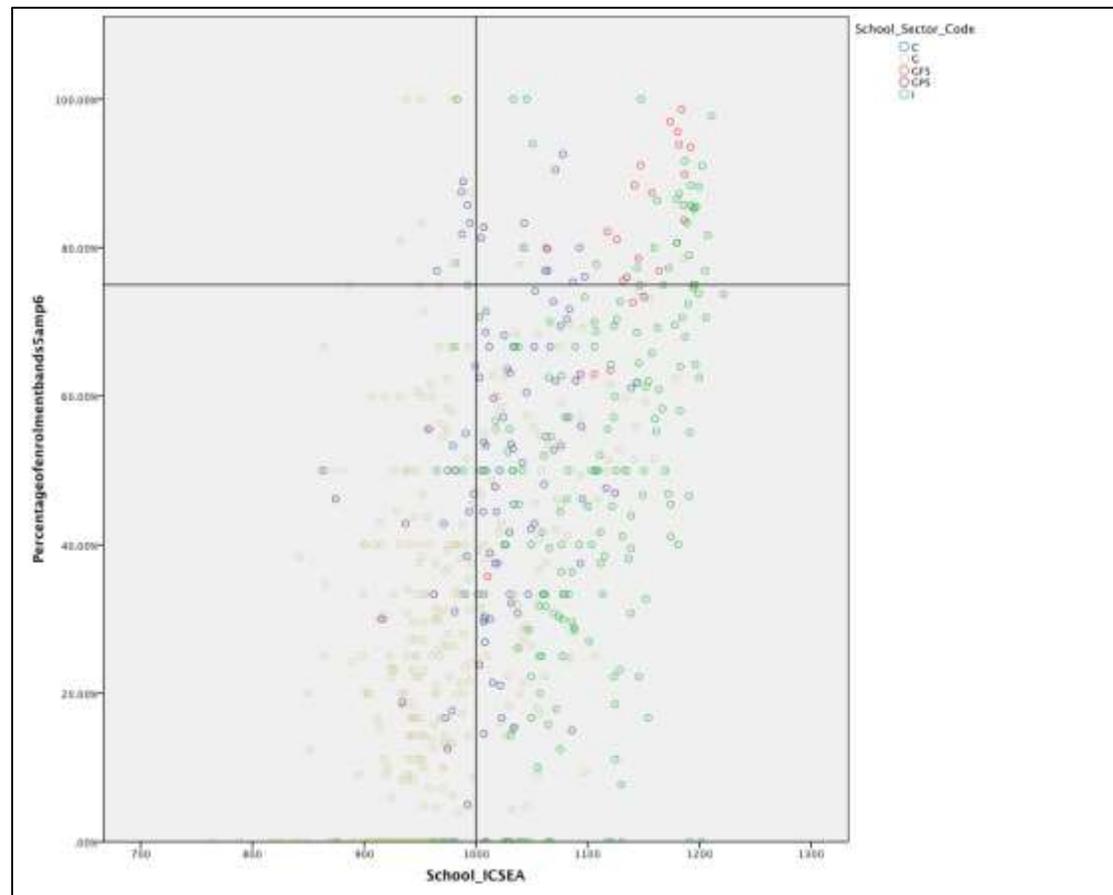


Figure 7.20: Percentage of enrolment achieving band 5 or band 6 (2012) – Mathematics (C = Catholic Schools, G = Government Schools (non selective) GSS = Government Selective Schools, GPS = Government Partially Selective, I = Independent Schools).

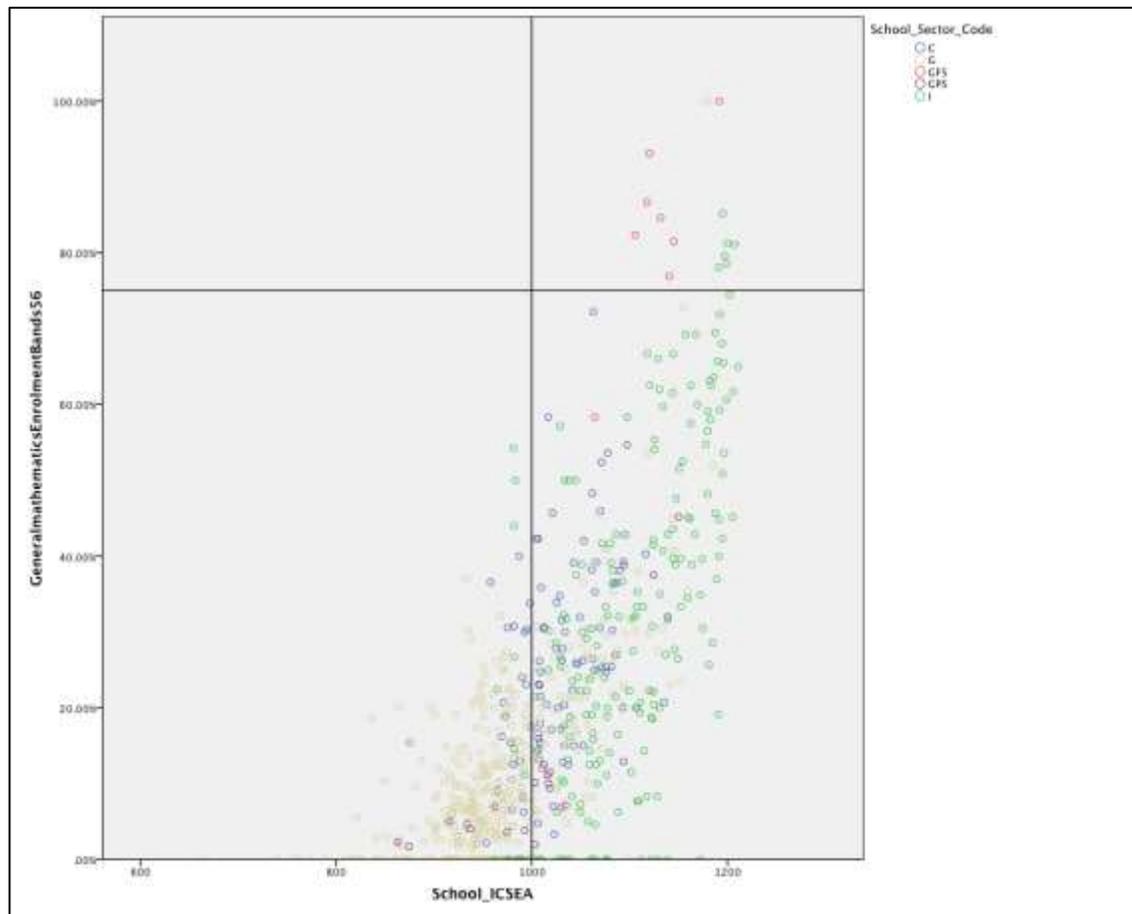


Figure 7.21: Percentage of enrolment achieving band 5 or band 6 (2012) – General Mathematics (C = Catholic Schools, G = Government Schools (non selective) GSS = Government Selective Schools, GPS = Government Partially Selective, I = Independent Schools).

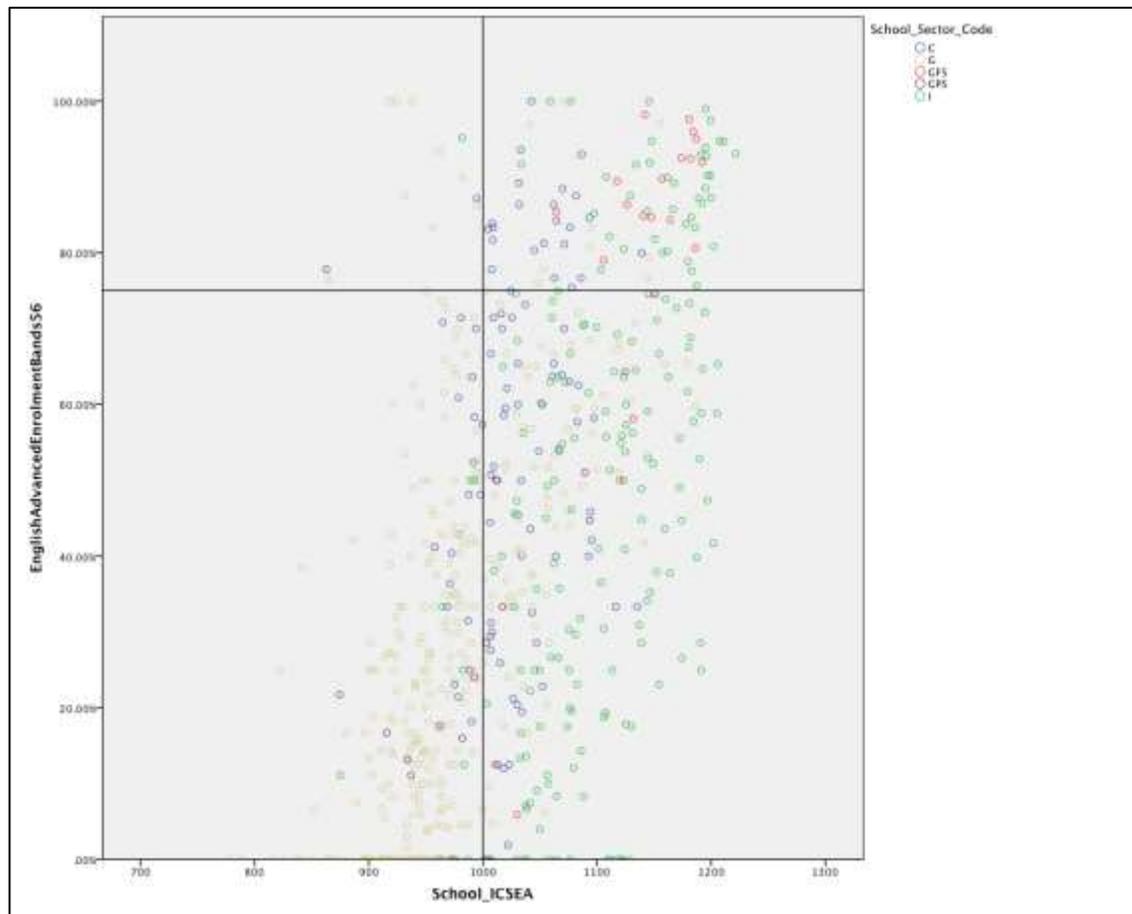


Figure 7.22: Percentage of enrolment achieving band 5 or band 6 (2012) – Advanced English (C = Catholic Schools, G = Government Schools (non selective) GSS = Government Selective Schools, GPS = Government Partially Selective, I = Independent Schools).

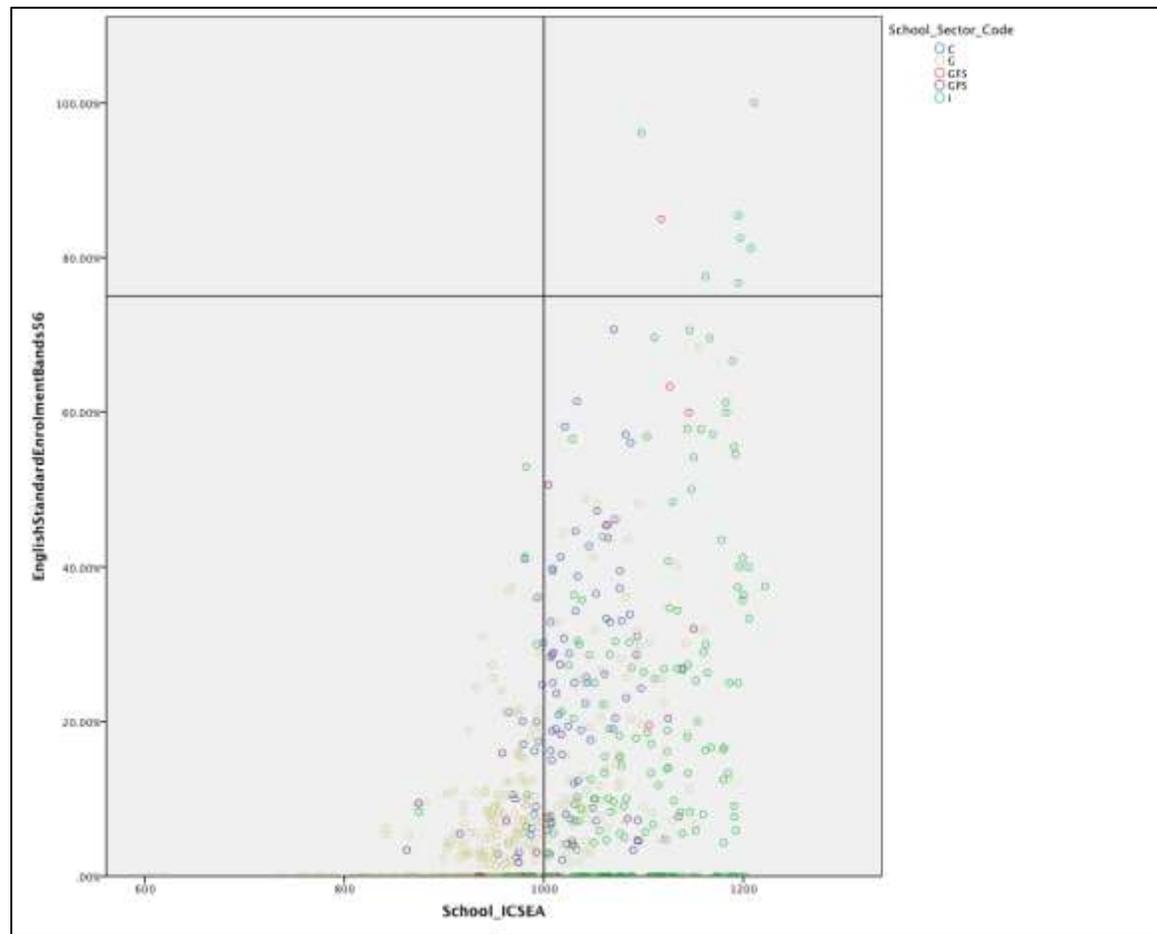


Figure 7.23: Percentage of enrolment achieving band 5 or band 6 (2012) – Standard English (C = Catholic Schools, G = Government Schools (non selective) GSS = Government Selective Schools, GPS = Government Partially Selective, I = Independent Schools).

Figures 7.20-7.23 again confirm that the axis of selectivity and exclusivity in educational segregation, described in Victoria (Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000/2013; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009), is equally strong in NSW. Overwhelmingly it is the government fully selective schools, and their high ICSEA cohorts, and Independent schools, and their high ICSEA cohorts, that dominate the high proportion of enrolled students achieving bands 5 and 6. This is especially the case in the powerful subject options, but it is also prevalent in the less powerful options. Further reinforcing the strong association between school ICSEA and achievement of bands 5 and 6, are the significant Pearson's correlations for the power subject options:  $r=.55$  ( $p=.000$   $n=662$ ) for Mathematics and  $r=.59$  for Advanced English ( $p=.000$   $n=622$ ). This clearly indicates the existence of fortified school sites in NSW, just as the bottom left of the distribution graphs reveal the exposed sites that are overwhelmingly low SES government schools. Importantly for social mobility, there are a number of lower SES government schools achieving a good number of band 5 or 6 results in the powerful subjects. This is not enough to change the general trend, but enough to offer sites for further investigation to uncover the successful approaches they are employing.

### **7.8.3 Spatial Hierarchy of Achievement**

In figures 7.24 & 7.25 the same graphs as figures 7.20-7.23 are reproduced, but this time tagged by location. Only the powerful subjects of Advanced English and Mathematics are represented, as 7.16 and 7.18 suggest that few rural schools achieve bands 5 or 6. Secondly, given their position on the hierarchy, they are not contributing greatly to social mobility.

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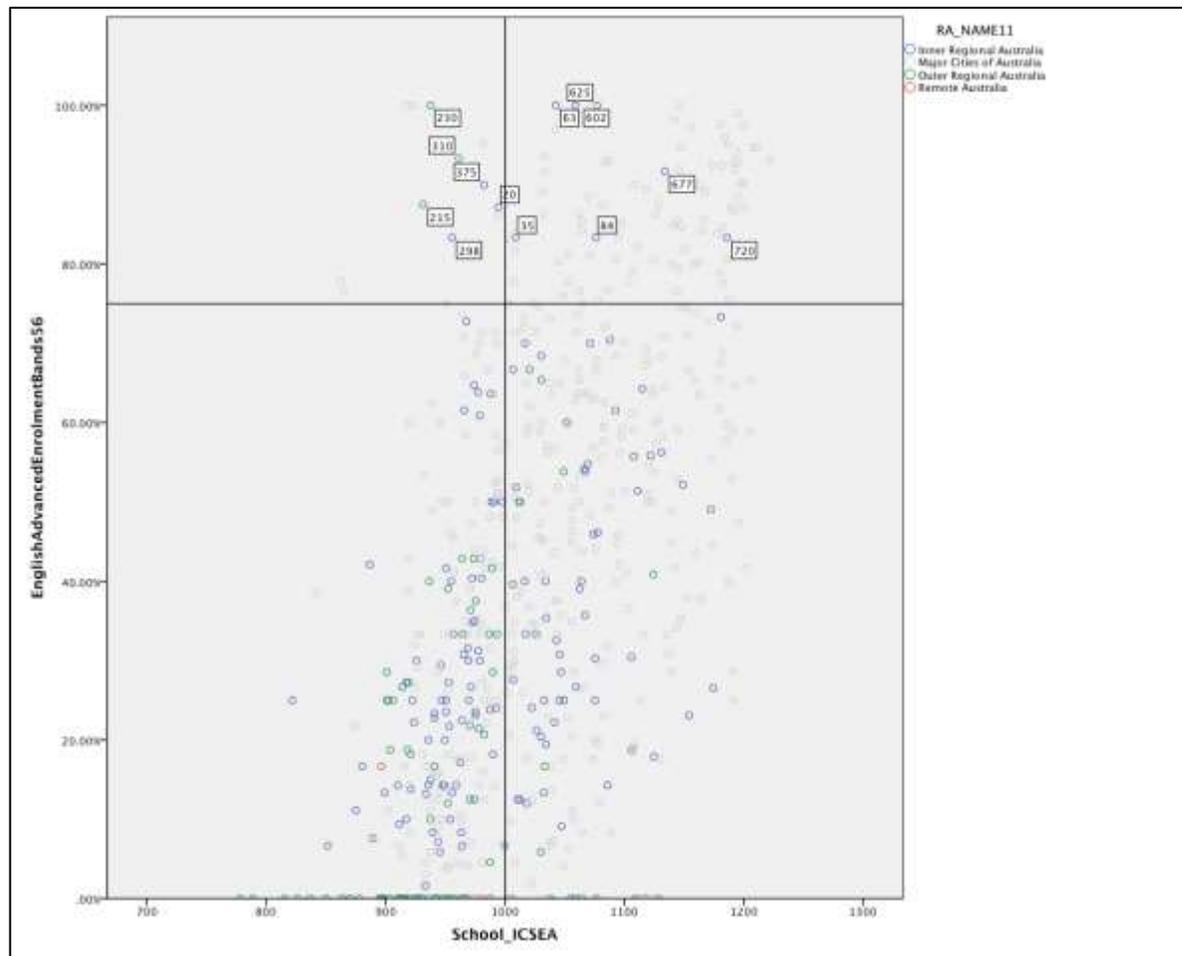


Figure 7.24: Percentage of enrolment achieving band 5 or band 6 (2012)– Advanced English by location

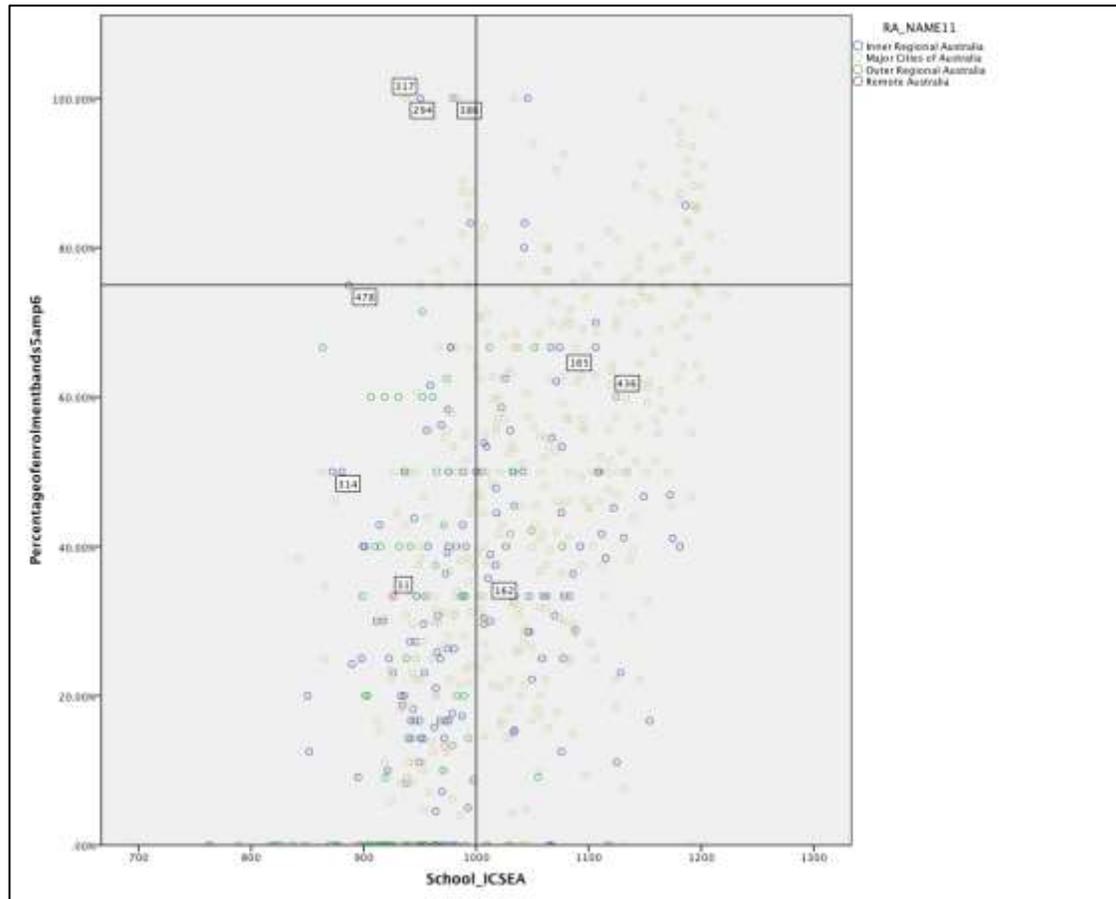


Figure 7.25: Percentage of enrolment achieving band 5 or band 6 (2012) – Mathematics by Location

The tagged sites in figures 7.24 and 7.25 are high-performing outer regional or remote schools. Bonnor (2008), in his analysis of HSC results in a selection of NSW high schools and the impact of school choice, noted that schools that are located outside an easy commute from a nearer larger town tended to achieve better results than those within easy commuting distance. This suggests, as I have noted before, that isolation may in fact be a strength in some instances, whereas proximity magnifies issues of school choice for those more likely to achieve higher grades, as students move to larger towns and the axis of social selection and exclusivity impacts on schools.

Taking this idea, it is notable that while many of the outer regional schools achieving high proportions of band 5 or 6 results are in large regional centres, a number of the state schools achieving these grades are in towns that are outside of an easy commute from nearby centres, and often do not have a ‘competitor’ for students. Thus their geographic positioning as *more* isolated than some other schools is creating conditions that are resulting in comparatively high performance. I would hypothesise that the schools ‘in an easier commute’ may be affected by some ‘draw of the metropolitan’ in which they are positioned poorly, whereas those further away engage more effectively from the position of their rurality. Notably, a number of these schools were identified in the TERRAnova research (Reid et al., 2012) as achieving consistently strong student outcomes and as having high levels of local community support. Here I suggest that engaging with the Rural Social Space model (Reid et al., 2011) is an observable influence on the way in which the school structures, and enacts, the curriculum.

## **7.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the idea of the curriculum hierarchy, and established the existence of a curriculum hierarchy in NSW. It has shown that access to powerful subjects in the NSW HSC is organised by both social position and location. Importantly, for the context of this dissertation, it has shown that access to powerful subjects is limited in non-metropolitan areas of NSW,

Furthermore, it has shown that even where access is available, achievement is also lower than in metropolitan areas. However, rather than highlight only deficit interpretations, the analysis has also shown that a number of non-metropolitan schools beyond a commuting distance to large towns are performing well above expectation.

The discussion in this chapter is positioned within the overall dissertation argument for a form of curricular-spatial justice. The very existence of a hierarchy, as proven, assumes the epistemological value of some subjects over others. How these relate to, what may be called rural knowledges, is an important consideration. It is the argument of this dissertation that the powerful subjects, with a high status and high value, are based upon a form of metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledges.

### **Section III: Learnings**



## **Chapter Eight**

### **Situated Teaching, Rural Schooling**

This chapter begins the third, and final, section of this dissertation. In this chapter I bring together the key ideas of my argument around the idea of *situated teaching*. Given my central assertion that examining rural education from a distinctively rural standpoint allows new insights into rural educational (dis)advantage as socially, and spatially, produced, situated teaching explores both this production and ways to disrupt it. As described in Chapter Two, definitions of the rural entail a degree of recognition of the social production of the rural, and its connection to land and place. Chapters Three and Six explore the lack of recognition of place, along with space, in examinations of social justice and policy pertaining to rural education. The remaining chapters all examine this lack of recognition, and the idea of a spatially informed rural difference, through the related examples of staffing, curriculum, and curriculum enactment. Throughout, the theme of the difference between dominant metropolitan-cosmopolitan values in education, competing with more spatially-nuanced, place-informed values, has been developed. In this chapter I examine how these come together to produce the existing circumstances of rural education, and, more importantly, how situating teaching could, theoretically at least, work to disrupt the influence of the dominant discourses.

A central issue within the views of social justice discussed in Chapter Three is the question of who the disadvantaged are and how they come to be so. This, the processes and influences on making certain groups disadvantaged in terms of access to, and achievement in, education, is secondary to the ability to recognise, and categorise, them as disadvantaged, in the first place. With the exception of rurality, the general categories of disadvantage (e.g. class, Indigeneity, gender, disability, etc.) accurately label the accepted disadvantages, while also acting to either include, or exclude, people from the label of disadvantage, and any distributive benefits that such identification can bring. This exclusion often follows the logic of Mishra's (1996) idea of postmodern racism as systems consider the rural as already read and known,

such that any attempt to try to identify, and categorise, it as different only perpetuates the stereotype of difference and disadvantage. This then disqualifies any discussion of situated knowledge and excuses systems from the need for any real knowledge or intervention based in place. This logic results in a form of ambivalence (Ang, 1996) where rural difference, and associated forms of situated knowledge or rural knowledge, is not talked about and consequently invalidated. The notion that we are all the same and need the same thing prevails, which as I have argued earlier is in itself a more powerful form of exclusion.

The failure to conceive of place as a factor in advantage, or disadvantage, has made policy blind to the multiplier effect that this has on already understood processes of marginalisation. Thus, while it is recognised that schools perpetuate disadvantage, through their institutional practices and curriculum, (Hayes et al., 2006; Teese & Polesel, 2003; Teese, 2000; Rizvi & Lingard, 1993; Connell, 1993; Connell et al., 1982; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1973), the reproduction of social advantage/disadvantage has still remained within the expected lines of difference. Even more concerning, is that the disadvantages created and recognised continue to exist (Rizvi & Lingard, 1993; Hayes et al. 2006), thus multiplying the impact of place-less-ness in a centralised provision. The centralised model of education, in NSW for instance, has led to the ideal of the urban school being mythologized, with rural teachers being forced to ignore their differences (Boylan et al., 1992), and their contexts. To counter this, a curricular-spatial social justice framework, which incorporates a differentiated approach that recognises situated knowledge is needed. Only a framework such as this has the potential to incorporate ideas of place within rural education contexts. How the failure to acknowledge place is produced, and more importantly how it may be disrupted, in relation to the preceding chapters, is the focus of this chapter.

### **8.1: The arbitrariness of pedagogy**

The ideas of a curriculum hierarchy, of exposed and fortified school sites, and of student mobility, as discussed in Chapter Seven, undermine the standard policy logic, discussed in Chapter Six, that curriculum is neutral in relation to inequity. It remains necessary, however, to disentangle the hierarchy, and the structure of exposed and fortified sites, from their correlated social advantage and disadvantage. That is, if we are to argue that inequity is produced through the curriculum, it cannot be understood as a natural outcome of students' pre-existing position in the social hierarchy. To believe so would be to argue that certain forms, and practices of, knowledge are the natural privilege of some classes or places. It would also mean saying, to the students like those I taught in my rural schools, that they have no place aspiring to participate in society beyond the circumstance and location of their childhood. Instead, we need to see these forms of advantage, and disadvantage as *produced*, both historically and spatially: historically, through the development of mass education, and spatially, through the centralisation of schooling, and its apparent spatial blindness. Such an approach helps us understand the production, and maintenance, of the curriculum hierarchy, discussed in Chapter Seven, as well as connecting up the influences upon it, explored in the preceding chapters. As Foucault (1980) has argued, such an understanding means that existing relations of power and knowledge are therefore susceptible to being produced *differently*.

Teese (2013/2000) argues that the development of academically powerful institutions are as much the result of mass secondary education as the public high schools built in towns and suburbs. This is because, as the education system expanded, there was a more pressing need to justify and 'fortify' social advantage, as seen in the political arguments since the Wyndham Report, to maintain selective schools and support powerful non-government schools. It enabled student populations to be differentiated based on pre-existing social background, while not differentiating at all for rural communities. To make such a move on the basis of 'class' would be obvious and open to criticism, given that the move to comprehensive high schools was based on arguments about inclusiveness, and equality of opportunity. Beneath the surface, however,

my analysis in Chapter Seven has shown how an academic hierarchy in the curriculum obscures the social organisation, and goes as far as justifying it as ‘given’. Indeed an academic hierarchy in curriculum, and the social organization of schools, go hand-in-hand (Teese, 2000/2013).

The need to seek, and maintain, pre-existing advantage is underscored by the increasing influence of neo-liberal ideologies, as applied to education, which have transformed education from a social good to a positional good, used by individuals in a competitive globalised economy (Reid, 2011; Yates, 2013; Wrigley, Lingard and Thomson, 2012). In this context, and with the advent of accountability measures such as NAPLAN and the MySchool website, Yates (2013) asserts that “equity (or at least disparity) of what is being achieved by different social groups on particular measures, is now more publicly and politically visible” (p.40). Such visibility reinforces individual competition; with parents seeking the best outcome for their child and making choices to ensure this occurs. This increases the inequity, as the extent of (comprehensive) inclusion in classrooms decreases (Reid, 2011) due to schools serving increasingly narrow ranges of student backgrounds. As a positional good, education, and the knowledge embodied in the written curriculum, becomes increasingly reified, linked to and geared towards achieving competitive credentials. For these purposes, it must have an underlying structure upon which to determine relative positions. Rather than focusing on young people learning about the world they will inherit and have stewardship for, education is a sorting process. For most rural students it is not about education for their communities, or life in their communities, it is about competition for access to the opportunities the outcome of their schooling rations. Not seeing this as relevant to their lives, many choose not to compete. There is, though, a potential contradiction here, in that the development of comprehensive schools after the Wyndham Scheme was good for many rural students, who had previously limited access to the curriculum. However the subsequent social reorganization of privilege into selective schools soon worked to maintain their previous limited access.

The risk inherent here is that addressing disadvantage becomes merely pedagogical, and linked to the teachers' apparent skill as a pedagogue. Such a move lets 'curriculum' off the hook, as it is up to the teacher to maximise student learning, and enhance their achievement. Indeed this is what I would argue is behind the 'teacher quality' obsession in education policy, that is, a misguided outcome of seeing curriculum as neutral.

Granted, there is evidence to support the teacher quality thesis, within reason (Hattie, 2003; 2009). However it is not conceivable that there is such an extensive failure of quality, and therefore pedagogy, across an entire national population. Instead, such an argument only reinforces the marginal position of many schools, especially rural schools, as they are handed the unfair task of bridging home and school cultural differences (Connell et al., 1982; Young, 1971). Their task is hampered by the generally smaller size of schools in low SES communities, and rural areas, which limits what they can offer and their resources in comparison to larger schools (Campbell, Proctor & Sherington, 2009). Furthermore, the physical and intellectual effort required to bridge the cultural gap (Teese & Polesel, 2003), is much more – not only is the teacher required to cover the curriculum, they also need to make it understandable, and overcome literacy limitations, as discussed earlier.

Such universalism and over generalised pedagogical approaches to achievement in the curriculum are essentially acts of symbolic violence, whilst the underlying structure of the curriculum remains unaddressed. As I elaborate further below, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) observed that exclusion from the academic curriculum happens through the symbolic violence in which the culture of the dominant class is imposed on all others. This exclusion is all the more powerful when it is effectively rendered as 'self-exclusion', and when schooling makes it appear legitimate and natural, through the discourse of the equality of opportunities provided by a common curriculum. The outcome is simply 'up to you'. Indeed my rural students, theoretically, had as equal an opportunity to achieve in their subjects as students elsewhere in the state. As Teese, Lamb and Helme (2009, p.41) summarise:

this illusion of equality of opportunity rests on two fictions which have really only come into their own since the growth of mass secondary schools and where unsegregated systems have been created. The first fiction is that curriculum offers equal chances from any where in the space it constitutes, and that it is not hierarchical and selective in its action. The second fiction is that the school system itself—the delivery system for the curriculum—is equitable in the mix of students and teachers and the fund of financial and cultural resources it offers at every site.

This illusion is maintained by the reification of knowledge, and the fiction of equality of opportunity, so central to the placeless ideologies influencing curriculum-as-policy.

More problematic, though, is that the illusion of equality of opportunity is enacted by way of the cultural arbitrariness of the demands within the academic curriculum (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Teese, Lamb & Helme, 2009), such as the expectations of teachers and examiners. It is in this arbitrariness, against the context of the social position of rural Australia, and the power of metropolitan-cosmopolitan forms of knowledge, that the rural is marginalised. For example, Apple (2004b) showed how school textbooks are powerful mediators of dominant culture. While not analysed in this study (but a worthy future study), I certainly remember the problem of textbooks for my rural students. Many of the examples or illustrations provided were so foreign to their background that we unable to use them, and instead developed our own materials. Perhaps more concretely, the re-analysis of school leaders' views on the curriculum in Chapter Six, the interviews in Chapter Five, and the staffing reanalysis in Chapter Four, have all illustrated social perspectives towards the position of rural schools in a centralised educational, and social, system. Notably, and perhaps of most concern, these perspectives are those of the people who are enacting the curriculum, and making arbitrary judgments day-to-day, in ways that reproduce the system.

In 'Reproduction', Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) outline two key ideas through which unequal relationships are reproduced and made to appear legitimate in the process of schooling: *symbolic violence* and *arbitrariness*. Situated within the idea of pedagogic action, or as discussed here, making equity pedagogical

rather than structural, these concepts help illuminate how the curriculum hierarchy is imposed and legitimated. From this perspective, symbolic violence refers to how knowledge is representative of the culture and heritage of a particular group, and reflective of that group's ability to impose their definition of what counts as legitimate knowledge. Grenfell and James (1998) suggests this follows a perspective of knowledge drawing on the founding 'fathers', something that can be seen in the resilience of traditional subjects and disciplines in the hierarchy discussed in Chapter Seven. It gains its legitimacy in that the state sanctions, and legitimises, the education system, and in so doing, imposes particular ways of knowing and acting – through which all groups are (theoretically at least) free to compete. Rather than openly perpetuating direct violence by sidelining, or excluding some people, the actions of symbolic violence are obscured. Arbitrariness is part of this obscuring, as it is the process through which all pedagogic action risks becoming symbolic violence.

Put another way, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue that pedagogic action is inherently symbolic violence, and arbitrary in content and form. Its aim and outcome is to reproduce the power relations it is based upon (Grenfell & James, 1998). Any knowledge or process that does not meet the needs of the dominant groups will not be sanctioned by them, and given their power and influence socially, they are able to exercise this as a mechanism of control. It is in this way that education contributes to class reproduction, and for my argument here, metropolitan-cosmopolitan power. Importantly, however, this reproduction is not static, it is constantly being re-made and re-positioned, as we can see in the example of the changing ideas of educational equity and the corresponding stubbornness of disparity in educational achievement along class, and rural, lines. For example, while my rural students had access to equity CAP funding based on their geographic isolation, its pedagogic logic was to help them understand metropolitan-cosmopolitan culture, and to come to value it over their rural culture. They were given 'opportunity', but it was violence against their own way of life, and it was achieved through the arbitrariness of what was valued in the curriculum. We could, for instance, easily study the Depression

from a rural perspective, but implied in the curriculum, and related textbooks, was that it was understood as primarily an urban phenomenon.

Part of the arbitrariness here, then, is the assumed cultural knowledge and life experience of the teacher, and importantly in the competitive academic curriculum, the examiners. As one experienced teacher responded in the interviews discussed in Chapter Five: ‘There is no point country kids using examples that the markers in the city don’t understand’ (EXP4). Similar ideas were referred to more obliquely by other interviewees, from each category. The idea here, about different cultural assumptions and expression, reflects Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) arguments about the linguistic competence assessed by examiners as a form of arbitrariness. In light of arguments about rural literacies (Donehower, Hogg & Schell, 2007; Green & Corbett, 2013) and work on the development of rural pedagogies (McConaghy et al., 2005), the arbitrariness of language is the discursive process through which cultural norms are reproduced, and valued, in the curriculum.

The broad categories of ‘place-conscious’ and ‘bureaucratic’, referenced in Chapter Five, and the sense of risk and undermining evident in the teachers’ responses, reinforce the existence of a certain cultural expectation. Similarly, the descriptions in relation to teacher assessment, and the pressures of situated interpretations of standards, shows the way that expectations are expressed, and pressure applied to acquiesce. That teachers expressed a sense of being subversive when situating their practice, along with feelings of guilt, suggests the pressures entwined with the positional identity of the teachers themselves. Alternatively some teachers simply rejected situated practices.

Many teachers are, by virtue of gaining university entry and entering a profession, aligned to the socially powerful, and have an interest, albeit subconscious, in maintaining and protecting their social progression and metropolitan-cosmopolitan identity. Such arbitrariness plays out for example when a teacher describes a concept using examples, and assumed knowledge, from their cultural world that is in fact foreign to their rural students – something I often observed my colleagues unintentionally doing, or something

that is, from my experience, standard in commercially produced teaching resources, as noted above.

It is my contention thus far, then, that in the curriculum-as-policy era, and the neoliberal influences on education as a placeless positional good, knowledge becomes reified. Through unequal power relations this reification serves the interests of the socially powerful. Consequently, the curriculum becomes an avenue of symbolic violence against the less advantaged, and the rural. It legitimises the marginal position of the rural, and the less advantaged through its implicit pedagogy and the arbitrariness of what is valued. Whereas teachers are positioned as the agents of equity through their pedagogy, justifying the emphasis on ‘teacher quality’, in the policy discourse, teachers in fact enact symbolic violence towards their students through what they arbitrarily value. This situation in turn obscures the role of the curriculum in the production of inequality.

Aiming to counter this reification, Teese (2013, p.xvii) argues that the:

narrow focus in educational and economics research itself, reinforces the need to restore context to the analysis of educational outcomes. Schools have a history and a geography. We cannot hope to improve outcomes if our theory of success rests on abstracting teachers and students from their location in the social and institutional space of the school system.

Teese’s call for the restoration of *context*, and his reminder that schools have a history and *geography*, comes from the revised introduction to the second edition of his 2000 text. While this edition includes additional chapters not included in the original, it does not include any new theorization. For these reasons, and even though supporting his aim in this passage, I stand by my critique of Teese’s use of spatial theory, outlined in Chapter Seven, and suggest that the emphasis here is a symptom of the increasingly placelessness of education, that I am engaging with here, as I aim to bring a spatial, and particularly a rural standpoint, to the task that Teese outlines.

## 8.2: Situating pedagogy as curriculum work

To illustrate what such a standpoint involves, I draw on a selection of three pertinent studies that highlight the difference that place produces. Implicit within many of these examples is that references to pedagogy inherently encompass curriculum work, and refers more accurately to curriculum inquiry than to technical matters of instruction. As such, I am using the term ‘pedagogy’ to bring back together curriculum and its enactment, rather than separating them (Yates, 2009). Thus, the perspective here is that what things are taught, and how they are taught, are all part of the larger whole of the educational experience for teachers, students and communities.

To begin, I refer to the seminal work of Gruenewald (2003b) in relation to a ‘critical pedagogy of place’. While this was discussed in Chapter One, I want to reinforce here Gruenewald’s (2003b) notion of critical pedagogy as *decolonization* and *reinhabitation*. Gruenewald (2003b) argues that pedagogy produces socio-spatial relationships, and can therefore be used to remake these same relationships. His approach is predicated on combining “critical pedagogy’s sociological focus, and place-based education’s ecological emphasis” (Gruenewald, 2003b, p.9). It has the goal of “ground[ing] place-based education in a pedagogy that is socially and ecologically critical” (Gruenewald, 2003b, p.9). Evident here is Gruenewald’s position that the social and ecological are fundamentally linked. As noted in Chapter One, I shift slightly here away from the particular notion of *place-based* education, given its specific local and environmental focus – not in any way to dismiss the importance of both, as I have argued their importance elsewhere (e.g. Roberts & Downes, 2016), but more because my focus here is not ‘environmental’ in Gruenewald’s sense.

The notions of *decolonization* and *reinhabitation* are generative in thinking about the relationship to place of teachers, the curriculum they teach, and the models through which their ‘effectiveness’ is measured. For, if the rural is not recognized there is a need to decolonize and reinhabit the curriculum and its enactment in rural places as a form of situated pedagogy. This is a

decolonization from the metropolitan-cosmopolitan assumed norm, and a reinhabitation with regard to a more place-conscious meaning, drawing upon rural knowledges and informed by a rural standpoint. For the purposes here, I nuance ‘environment’ in Gruenewald’s argument that:

A critical pedagogy of place aims to contribute to the production of educational discourses and practices that explicitly examine the place-specific nexus between environment, culture, and education (2003b, p.10).

to gesture towards ‘place’ and the historical and political assumptions naturalised in rural social space (Reid et al., 2010).

This, I would argue, is congruent with Gruenewald’s (2003a) own use of place-conscious education, where he argues that:

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 reconceptualized 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 (p.621).

Indeed part of becoming more conscious of places, and reconceptualising contemporary education in rural areas, is to be aware of the dominance of metropolitan-cosmopolitan assumptions, and to work against them where necessary. This work is *both* curriculum work and pedagogical work– in the sense that pedagogy is curriculum work through the situated enactment of the curriculum (Yates, 2009). In the terms of the teachers’ engagement with place in Chapter Five, the more place-conscious teachers were engaged in a form of decolonization and reinhabitation, and consequently used more positive affect in their language. Equally, a number of the experts discussed the need for removing some of our assumptions (decolonization), and making the enacted curriculum more meaningful for students (reinhabitation). Given that I have outlined how dominant discourses of equity informing the curriculum pay little attention to rurality in Chapter Six, and established a spatially distributed

curriculum hierarchy in Chapter Seven, that there is an urgent need to think differently about education in rural areas has been clearly established. I argue then that recognising, and then engaging with, place is central to any critical place-based pedagogy. Without this, changing practice, and achieving social change for rural places, is not possible (Somerville, Power, & de Carteret, 2009).

My second example is found in the context of the NSW Rural (Teacher) Education Project, exploring rural schooling in NSW (Green [Ed], 2008). Here McConaghy (2008) discusses the notion of ‘*situated pedagogies*’ and positions rural pedagogy as social action. The research is predicated on the importance of place, and the existence of a relationship between the social dynamics of rural communities and learning in rural schools (McConaghy, 2008; Green, 2008). The notion of situated pedagogies values the work leading to the NSW *Quality Teaching Model* (NSW DET, 2003), its precursor, the Queensland *Productive Pedagogies* model (Hayes et al., 2006), and the Wisconsin work that it drew upon (Newman & Associates, 1996). However, while it recognizes the positive contribution of the resultant models, McConaghy (2008) advances a number of criticisms. Among them, she argues that the models are designed to be generic, assume a generic teacher, and do not account for ‘difficult’ (curriculum) knowledges – such as those produced in, are that are effects of, particular constructions of rural social space. As part of her argument, drawing upon the findings from the larger project, and initially outlined in 2004 (McConaghy & Burnett, 2004), McConaghy (2008) contends that there needs to be a greater focus on place through attention to socio-spatial dynamics and difficult knowledges.

For McConaghy (2008), difficult knowledges relate to the place of the rural in the modern world, and the place of rural knowledges, in that world. Specifically, she refers to circumstances that make knowledges ‘difficult’ – while also referencing psychoanalytic ideas of place and identity often associated with particular forms of rural social space. It is clear that globalization, and its associated forms of knowledge and ways of being, make ‘being rural’ problematic by virtue of its implied backwardness. While not

specifically naming it, recognizing that some knowledges related to the rural are difficult in the modern world implies a recognition of rural knowledges as a distinct form of what in this case has become *marginalised* knowledge.

The need for a greater focus on place, in general, and specifically in models of pedagogy, is certainly an idea that is supported by the preceding chapters of this dissertation. Chapter Five, for instance, explores teachers', and experts', engagements with the NSW model of pedagogy in relation to engaging with the rural. That chapter demonstrates that there is little engagement with the rural, and little recognition of the *specifics* of place-conscious enactment, apart from the teachers whose practice (unknown to them) tends towards a place-conscious enactment (or those who have lived and worked in the rural and led rural schools outlined in Chapter Four). For example, McConaghy (2008), and Novak, Green and Gottschall (2008) in the same volume, discuss that effective leadership was situated and related to engaging positively with rural place. While the detail of this claim could not be tested in this study, what Chapter Four does show is that rural leaders had a distinct relationship to place when compared to newly appointed teachers. Furthermore, in Chapter Six, rural leaders were able to articulate a distinct view of the relevance and role of the curriculum in rural areas, and some experts in Chapter Five (some of whom had been principals) also discussed the importance of engaging with rurality.

Reinforcing the idea of a spatially produced curriculum hierarchy, and the pedagogical production of fortified and exposed sites as discussed above, McConaghy's (2008) situated pedagogies concept argues that pedagogy is linked to social-spatial stratification. McConaghy (2008) positions this as distinct from Bernstein's (1996) notion of pedagogy as cultural production and reproduction. More importantly, however, R(T)EP (Green [Ed], 2008) ultimately reinforces the argument that the production of social-spatial stratification cannot be separated from the overall project of schooling in rural areas and its engagement, or lack of, with place. As such, my inquiry has explored the foundational ideas of social justice as they relate to contemporary education in the rural, the nature of research, and how this hides, or allows, the rural to be considered. It has done this through the specific examples of

staffing, teaching, equity policy, and the curriculum, to support my argument here that when the rural is not made visible as distinct and inherently valuable, the system of schooling, in NSW at least, produces social-spatial stratification.

My claim builds on, and reinforces aspects of the R(T)EP study (Green [Ed], 2008), which found that schooling practices were linked to the ability to read place (McConaghy, 2008), and that places and spaces matter. In bringing this finding together with the notion of situated pedagogies, McConaghy (2008) proposes a typology for situated pedagogies, comprising: the social production of space, cultural politics and privilege, subjectivities, and 'libidinal economies'. All of these elements have been reflected in my argument to this point, regarding the dominance of metropolitan-cosmopolitan values, and the production of privilege through the curriculum and the knowledge it values and marginalizes. And while I haven't used the language, or the theoretical frame McConaghy (2008) brings to her studies, ideas analogous to libidinal economies are also explored, for instance in Chapter Five through the notion of performativity and its influence on satisfaction shown by the negative affect in the language used by the more bureaucratically-inclined teachers. Here it was observed, and unpacked further by the respondents' discussion of pedagogy models, that technologies intended to enhance quality caused conflict when implemented through the values of a metropolitan-cosmopolitan form of schooling. Similarly in Chapter Four, a relationship was observed between 'not recognizing a rural difference', or with 'not regarding the rural positively', and a preference to leave teaching in rural areas sooner rather than later. Such ideas link with those discussed by Kelly (2009; 2013) in relation to the loss of identity experienced when people are displaced, and the struggles for meaning in a new place that result.

Moving to my third example, Walker-Gibbs, Ludecke and Kline (2015) begin to conceptualise a notion of a 'pedagogy of the rural', an idea which "focus[es] on what the rural brings to the teaching and learning in a rural context" (p.87). In this work, they gesture towards spatial theory and postmodernism, to reinforce that the rural is socially produced. This idea of social production is

then used to problematize the idea of size, and identity, as they relate to perceptions of the rural, and consequently pedagogy in the rural.

For the present study, the notion of a ‘pedagogy of the rural’ recognizes the influence of personal histories and the social production of space on the work of teachers – in particular, how the rural is perceived and experienced. This notion echoes the ideas explored in Chapters Four and Five where it is observed that how the rural is understood has a distinct relationship to how it is engaged with. In Chapter Four, for instance, a distinct pattern emerged of recognizing the rural as ‘different’, and as having certain unique characteristics and perspectives on staffing. In Chapter Five, the recognition of the rural as ‘distinct’, and valuable, was a central factor in the teachers’ orientation towards a more place-conscious orientation to teaching, while a negative perspective was linked with a more bureaucratic orientation. Linking these issues to identity, and then identity to practice, the notion of a ‘pedagogy of the rural’ is analogous with Pinar’s notion of *currere* (2012) in relation to curriculum, with McConaghy’s (2008) *libidinal economies*, and with Kincheloe and Pinar’s (1991) *curriculum as social psychoanalysis*.

Furthermore, Walker-Gibbs, Ludecke & Kline (2015) suggest that ‘official’ knowledge production is situated outside the rural. As they write:

knowledge of, and about, the rural and what is valued within these contexts is not shaped by those at the heart of the setting. Commodity ‘ownership’ [referencing here knowledge] is linked to the industrial models of education and understanding that is traditionally thought of as belonging to cities (Walker-Gibbs, Ludecke & Kline, 2015, p.84).<sup>63</sup>

While they do not go on to develop any notion of rural knowledges, they are noting, in such references, that there is something the rural brings to education that is not traditionally recognised. Whether this is a particular pedagogy, or curriculum, remains undeveloped, as they appear to be referencing pedagogy as a separate form or practice, as critiqued in this dissertation, and not as a form of situated curriculum negotiation. However, the idea of pedagogy, even if separate from curriculum, still links to pedagogy as the production of

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<sup>63</sup> Here, they are referencing the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991).

knowledges. This is because it is through acts of teaching and learning that students develop new understandings, or receive complex psycho/social messages about, the value of their (rural) place. *Not* drawing on what the rural has to offer, as described by Walker-Gibbs, Ludecke and Kline (2015), or rejecting the value of the rural, is characteristic of the more bureaucratically inclined perspective described in Chapter Five. Similarly, the production of the curriculum hierarchy, and the production of fortified sites, also discussed in earlier chapters, relates to a form of knowledge that does not see the rural as having much to offer.

Together, Gruenewald (2003a; 2003b), McConaghy (2008), and Walker-Gibbs, Ludecke and Kline (2015) provide some productive directions for thinking about engaging positively with the rural, and rural knowledges, as a form of curricular-spatial justice. Rather sadly, such perspectives have remarkable similarity to the arguments of Dewey (1938), nearly a century ago, that children's learning occurs in relation to their experience of their environment, or Boomer's (1992) notion in the Australian context of a negotiated curriculum. While not related to the rural *per se*, Boomer's notion of negotiating the curriculum draws on an understanding of power, and that much knowledge in the curriculum is related to this power – as described by Young (1971), Connell et al. (1982) and Connell (1993).

In his negotiation model, Boomer (1992) argues that the traditional curriculum model involves the teacher determining what content is to be taught, and planning this within the constraints of the system, and societal expectations. This has a limited role for student input in decision-making, and as the 'planned' curriculum may not relate to what the students are interested in or are familiar with, their motivation to learn it is often diminished. Consequently, it remains up to the teacher to 'motivate' students to learn, and students to respond to this motivation. Consequently, as Boomer argues (1992), there is often at best a limited degree of overlap between the interests of students and teachers, with the learning that results only partially satisfying each of them. In the context of the present study, the issue of motivation, and interest, reflects concerns for the inclusion of the rural in schooling and teachers' understanding

and recognition of rural place. I have developed a strong theme throughout the preceding chapters that some teachers recognize rural place and value it, whereas others do not. Some, the more bureaucratically orientated, value a more structured form of curriculum and pedagogy that, as I have argued, is influenced by metropolitan-cosmopolitan values. Yet I have also shown that there are a number of voices, from new teachers through to professional leaders, speaking about the difference of the rural 'context' and the need to come to know rural place, and engage with it, in order to effectively teach students in rural schools. Indeed, the theme of a positive 'rural difference' was strong even in the data outlined in Chapter Four, indicating that this has held true over time.

The example of NST10 and the story of 'piggin' in Chapter Five are instructive here. Rather than the more bureaucratically-orientated teachers, who seemed to value the official knowledge and its metropolitan-cosmopolitan assumptions, NST10 engaged positively with the student's experiences. Rather than attempt to change the students' perspective, rendered invalid by their values, NST10 responded positively with an approach of, rhetorically speaking, "I don't know anything about 'piggin', tell me about it and let's see where it takes us". From this orientation, NST10 was able to work with students to meet their responsibilities within the Geography, History, English and Science curriculums.

While I have shown that a perspective of social justice informs both orientations, and that the teachers represented in each category are doing ethical work, the more bureaucratically-orientated are coming from a distributive justice-informed orientation, which sees achievement in the existing structure as the desired outcome. Alternatively, a curricular-spatial justice perspective, which implies a predisposition to negotiate and value the students' world, informs the more place-conscious orientation. This reflects Boomer's (1978/1992) preferred model of a negotiated curriculum, somewhat reconceptualised.

In Boomer's (1992) negotiation model, the teacher remains accountable to their system requirements and those of the official curriculum. However, in

developing the unit and planning the curriculum that will be enacted, the teacher discusses with students what they already know, their interests, and interests in learning the material, as well as possible ways to progress the intended learning. That is, the teacher negotiates the enactment, and the overall goals of the learning, with students *and* with reference to systemic requirements. Innately, NST10 recounts doing just this. In Boomer's (1992) argument, this approach ensures that both students and teachers are engaged in curriculum enactment, and that there is a greater overlap between each other's intent. 'Motivation' is then situated in the shared interest of teachers and students. Boomer (1992) also notes that this approach allows unforeseen, and incidental, learning to be taken into account as the unit progresses. I certainly recall from my experience in rural schools countless incidences when the assumed starting point for curriculum had no relevance, or interest, to students. The ability to negotiate this situation and connect what was programmed to be taught to the students' lives was, in my recollection, a central cog in the ability to engage students and experience a positive teaching environment. As NST10 recounted, "the kids did some great work, it was really fun and I learnt heaps". Notably, this negotiation entails the recognition, and valuing, of what has been discussed in this dissertation as place, and related situated or rural knowledges.

Interestingly, there is a link here (through their psychological/emotional biases) to McConaghy's (2008) libidinal economies in relation to motivation, and I would suggest, knowing and accepting rural place. The data and the account of *affect* in Chapter Five, and the valuing of knowledge forms discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, all contain a sub-theme of either valuing rural knowledges, or metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledges. That feeling 'at home' in the rural, or 'out of place', impacts one's 'motivation' is certainly a notion that is familiar from my experiences working in rural schools. Indeed, in my recollections, it would be a factor related to one's ability to negotiate effectively. For instance, I have recollections of teachers who absolutely did not want to be in the community, and were there only to gain subsequent employment in their chosen, usually coastal, location. It is not that they were unprofessional in any way, but this 'feeling' related both to their willingness,

and ability, to engage with place and the energy they would put into their work. I began to explore such notions elsewhere (Roberts, 2008b), bringing together place, satisfaction and stress. Building on McConaghy's (2008) attention to the *unconscious* dimension of teaching and 'being' in place, it would certainly stand out as an area of further research.

### 8.3: Engaging rural social space in curriculum negotiation

The framework I propose using here to situate curriculum negotiation, in the interests of a curricular-spatial justice, is the Rural Social Space model (Reid et al., 2010). Through its connection of people, place and economy (figure 8.1), the model provides a resource to help teachers come to know place – something that the respondents in Chapter Five found difficult to describe, and therefore achieve, or so one would assume. Importantly, such an approach also entails introducing a new expansive language of 'space' and 'place', and displacing the limiting notion of 'context', as used by respondents in Chapter Five.

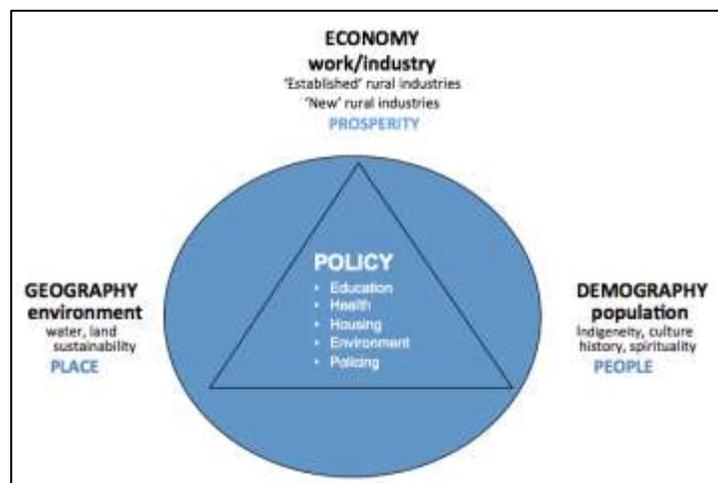


Figure 8.1: Rural Social Space Model (Reid et al., 2010, p.266)

The Rural Social Space model (Reid et al., 2010) conceives of 'place' as marked, and shaped, by geographic, economic and demographic histories. These are then overwritten by policies "produced elsewhere". Furthermore, the rural social space produced in any particular location, and time, is always an

effect of “practiced place” that accounts for the specific complexities, or ‘thisness’ (Thomson, 2002), of any rural location. Using the Rural Social Space Model (Reid et al., 2010) as a tool for curriculum negotiation, encourages teachers to situate their curriculum planning within an understanding of the social space of the community they are working in. In so doing, it displaces the dominant logic of metropolitan-cosmopolitan values. As with curriculum negotiation, situated, or rural, pedagogies, there is an inherent risk in doing so, as teachers’ professional identities are entwined with the metropolitan-cosmopolitan value system and its technologies of accountability. However, as I have argued, not to do so, in the context of curricular-spatial justice, and the critique of more traditional distributive justice, is to enact a form of (symbolic) violence upon rural schools and communities.

The approach I am arguing for draws upon the work of Bourdieu (1977), Connell et al. (1982) and Teese and Polesel (2003), to mention but a few, which recognizes the implicit power, and cultural assumptions of knowledge in the curriculum – assumptions to which I have argued ‘metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledges’ should be added. The resultant curriculum would be a form of socially-critical curriculum (Smyth & Wrigley 2013; Smyth, Down & McInerney, 2010), which recognizes issues of relevance (Smyth, Down & McInerney, 2014; Mills & Gale, 2011), and what students bring with them to school from their home cultures (Moll et al, 1992). Such an idea uses students’ “virtual schoolbag” (Thomson, 2002), extending the notion to include their rural culture and knowledges.

As Thomson (2002) notes, the incongruence between student background and curriculum becomes a school problem, or a problem of pedagogy, similar to that described by Teese (2000/2013) in the development of fortified and exposed sites. Using a more expansive view of curriculum and pedagogy, this also becomes a problem of curriculum. As Anyon (1981) and also Luke (2010) show, social background plays out pedagogically in the way that students relate to knowledge, and how teachers work with students in relation to knowledge. Thus the explorations in this study related to curriculum hierarchies, rural knowledges, the dominance of metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledges, and the

dispositions of teachers to engaging with rural place, are issues of *social background influencing a relationship with knowledge*. I also reference here the work in relation to rural literacies (Donehower, Hogg, & Schell, 2007; Green & Corbett, 2013), which examines the tensions caused by a conflict between rural literacies and dominant (metropolitan-cosmopolitan) school literacies.

Negotiating the curriculum with reference to rural social space does, as noted, entail certain risks in the existing environment. I have argued that teachers can respond by either implementing the dominant strategy of schooling, or employing their own tactics to reshape the curriculum (de Certeau, 1984). The teachers in this study tended to fall into two categories: those who locate their practice in place, and those who exhibit a more bureaucratic approach to their work. In curriculum terms, the group of teachers who were place-conscious tended to see the formal curriculum as a guide that they could manipulate and creatively interpret, whereas the more bureaucratic saw it as a guide to follow. The more bureaucratically oriented accepted the necessity of the neoliberal strategy, whereas the place-conscious employed tactics of resistance by reshaping the curriculum in relation to their students and their communities. This difference was similarly echoed in the statistical reanalysis in Chapter Four, and can be seen in the discourses examined in Chapter Six in relation to equity, and in relation to curriculum hierarchies in Chapter Seven.

Together, these echo the argument in favour of a *rural professionalism* developed in Chapter Four, one that engages with rural social space. In this vein, Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p.93) note that “there have been real tensions between the statutory authorities that oversee curriculum and examination and departments of education that focus more on policy and staffing matters”. Structurally, then, decisions regarding the curriculum are separate from the training of those who teach it. We now also have separate frameworks for professional competence (AITSL, 2011) and models of pedagogy (NSW DET 2008a; NSW DET 2008b). As shown in Chapter Five, this creates tension around their implementation with reference to rural social space, and impacts on teachers’ perceptions of their own professionalism. However, a number of the professional leaders interviewed in Chapter Five, and the re-analysis in

Chapter Four, have clearly suggested that these are all intertwined. It is important to note, though, that secondary teachers are defined by their subject-discipline and tend to relate to children through that discipline (Teese, 2007). Thus, any consideration of rural professionalism needs to relate to the nature of the disciplines and their realization in rural regions, and their availability within the spatial curriculum hierarchy. It is to this problem of curriculum that I now turn.

#### **8.4: the problem of curriculum**

Rural education in NSW is characterised by a curriculum hierarchy that is spatially organized, and which is implicated in the identity of secondary teachers (Teese, 2007). The curriculum hierarchy, with its focus on abstractions, theory, remote meanings, and technical ‘print’ literacy (Bleazby, 2015), is the opposite of a place-conscious negotiated curriculum. It also ignores the connection between ways in which the rural is understood, and the potential for the recognition of forms of rural knowledges.

That the curriculum hierarchy allows the production of fortified and exposed sites produces opportunities for differentiation, and the spatial organization of rural schools. In Chapter Seven, for instance, I have identified the existence of a number of rural school sites achieving exceptional results within the context of the existing curriculum hierarchy. The temptation here is to examine these sites and learn from their experiences, with the intent of sharing their successes. What we don’t know, however, is how well, or if at all, these sites value the rural. However the *ÆSOP* study (Pegg et al., 2004) would suggest that, at least in NSW, understanding the rural is not well developed in considerations of school success. They may well be exceptional at playing the game as it exists – that is, they may have sophisticated approaches informed by a traditional distributive justice philosophy. In this way, they may contribute to the phenomena that Corbett (2007) describes of encouraging students to leave.

For example, Reid and colleagues (Reid et al., 2012) discuss a number of rural school sites identified as exceptional in retaining teachers – among the reasons

noted being a positive environment, and positive student results that appear related to teacher satisfaction. One of the NSW case-study sites is identified in Chapter Seven as achieving exceptional senior secondary results (while another was the school where an interview subject in Chapter Five worked). At one of these sites that appear in both studies (this dissertation and Reid et al., 2012), the school principal discusses the schools' success in providing entry to further education as an important factor in both retaining staff and generating community support. This highlights the pervasiveness of the values within the curriculum hierarchy and informing equity, which down-play the critical issue that students needed to leave the town to experience the fruits of this success.

Excelling in the system as it exists creates additional tensions for rural schools, in the context of this dissertation. The site studies reported by Reid et al. (2012), and the school site identified above, can be discussed using the language of exposed and fortified sites (Teese, 2000/2013). That particular site, for instance, is described as a fortified site. It is described how the school has been able to develop an approach that ensures success in the senior secondary curriculum over many years, with the school being able to draw on the rich financial and cultural resources of the community (Reid et al., 2012). This is in contrast to the many rural schools that are not as fortunate as this example. The problem then becomes that some schools, by the confluence of the elements of rural social space, may be rich in social and economic capital that is transferable in the competitive academic curriculum, whereas others may not.

The particular site in question has fertile lands and a strong agricultural sector, along with other industries, and as such it enjoys the benefits of strong social and cultural capital (also partly through teacher retention). Other rural schools occupy a social space produced through arid lands, poor agriculture, large Aboriginal populations, and poor social and cultural capital (along with high teacher turnover). Thus, the affordances of place make a significant difference in a schools ability to succeed in the existing system – or perhaps to be a little less rural, or a more acceptable rural<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Linked here is the issue of class. While not the focus of this dissertation, rural areas are equally socially structured through the traditional notion of class. See for example Pini and

As Reid et al. (2012) argue, ‘rural’ schools cannot be categorised as a unity – the particularity of place matters in almost every way. The use of fortified and exposed sites in this context challenges my overall characterisation of metropolitan schools as fortified and the rural as exposed – indeed, I would not contend that that is a truth in itself, but rather a rhetorical structure to highlight the differences for the purpose of this dissertation. The question then becomes, what is the equivalency between fortified metropolitan sites and fortified rural sites? Are they indeed the same, or similar, or would a fortified rural site perhaps align more with an exposed metropolitan site? And, does the existence of fortified rural sites create further marginalisation of exposed rural sites? These I suggest are questions of scale, as they ultimately depend upon the scale of comparison (Nespor, 2004).

Perhaps most significantly for this dissertation, though, is the issue of how fortified rural schools operate in and engage with their rural social space, if at all, if their success is in a curriculum hierarchy characterized by dominant metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledges. The school is *either* doing the exceptional pedagogical work described by Teese (2000/2013), *or* their rural social space is constructed in a metropolitan form. That is, they may well be fortifying a metropolitan outpost against the rural. While I note here that Reid et al. (2012) did not examine the nature of the curriculum and its enactment, my characterization does highlight the challenges inherent in thinking about a curricular-spatial justice agenda. Some rural sites, such as the one in question, clearly have a lot to lose. This should not discount, however, that there may well be another construction to be uncovered – that of a hybridity encompassing elements of both construction, rather than a binary.

As mentioned in Chapter Seven, geography – specifically, distance to a major town – is an important element in how schools engage with the curriculum. Exactly how can only be speculated, but I have contended here that it may relate to the need to engage effectively with its rural social space in its

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Leach (2013). For instance, in many regions it is not uncommon for the owners of capital to educate their children in elite boarding schools in metropolitan centers. Exploring this is the task of future research.

curriculum. It may even be a type of ‘forced’ curriculum negotiation and curricular-spatial justice engagement. Indeed, as Reid et al. (2012) note, this particular school had the advantage of distance, as did most of those identified in Chapter Seven as exceeding beyond the trend, and by Bonner (2010) in achieving NAPLAN success. Referencing this schools’ difference from a nearby school closer to the major centre, Reid et al. (2012, p.66) note that there “the ease of travel means teachers and students focus on the larger centre rather than the community itself”.

As has been argued, a hierarchy of schools is a necessary feature of the marketization of education. As Campbell and Proctor (2014) put it: “It is difficult to see how a consumer-driven allocation of enrolments can operate without creating hierarchies of schools, children and youth” (p.260), adding that the attempt to do so represents “a major challenge facing those policy-makers ... concerned with both equity and choice” (p.260). Notably, however, many rural students have no ability to access (or challenge) this hierarchy, due to location or the need to pay fees to access boarding schools. In some ways the very existence of low-status rural schools in a topological system (Lingard, 2011) serves as a marker of status and position for advantaged metropolitan schools, and those in large centres, without ever risking the students in those schools to the extremes of competition. In the process it normalises the knowledge of the metropolitan-cosmopolitan centres, as they are the location of the powerful sites at the top of the hierarchy. Metropolitan-cosmopolitanism effectively becomes part of the hidden curriculum, and the arbitrariness described by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). Taken from the perspective of Grundy’s (1987) pedagogical view of the curriculum, students need to be able to see themselves in what is taught, otherwise it is foreign and not something they can engage with. This was indeed the experience of many of the students I taught in rural settings – and perhaps this is the time to ask, rhetorically, how metropolitan students would respond if the cultural arbitrary of education was geared towards the rural.

Curriculum-as-policy privileges economic thinking over social and cultural thinking. This construction privileges curriculum as a commodity to be

obtained, and rationed through a hierarchy, rather than the complicated conversations (Pinar, 2012) necessary to situate learning. Without these complicated conversations, students are unable to remake their world or find their place in it (Grundy, 1987), and as such they are merely positioned as subservient to the existing social structure. This is especially problematic in a rural context where, as I have argued, the rural is by definition situated outside the centres of power, and to experience success students have to ‘learn to leave’ – both physically and metaphorically (Corbett, 2007). In highlighting these issues, there is an implied position that teachers, and students, should be able to change the world by understanding the processes and forces that structure it, and valuing knowledges other than the socially powerful (Connell, 1993). While such a perspective has Freireian overtones, my purpose here is to explore how these structures work and what they produce.

Any counter to curriculum-as-policy would benefit from keeping in mind the criticism that Young (2007) points to, in his own re-thinking of his founding work in the new sociology of education, that the possible end-point of relativism, and a concern for ‘voice’, may descend into nihilism and the position that there is no knowledge at all. To be clear, I am not implying some form of generalised ‘rural voice’, or that *all* knowledge is situated in experience, just that there needs to be room for situated knowledges and perspectives in the curriculum conversation. For, as a curricular justice perspective implies, there are other knowledges – for instance, those of the less well off – and it is simply a matter of which knowledge is powerful. As Young (2007) points out, there are forms of knowledge we would want to pass on and deem important, and part of the purpose of schooling and social advancement (e.g. physics and flight, perhaps). Similarly, Green (2010) emphasises that curriculum plays a critical role of also representing the nation to future generations. But the question of which knowledge to value or which representation of the nation to portray is also a weakness of Young’s critique (2007; Young & Muller, 2016), in that he mainly focuses on sciences and not social sciences, where power, position and status are perhaps even more implicated in the social construction of knowledge.

We want schools, rural or otherwise, to contribute to ongoing social advancement and to metaphorically take students beyond their own experiences, and provide expanded opportunities for an unknown future. However, this should not be at the expense of devaluing their experiences. According to Norris (2000), and building on Habermas, social advancement is the unfinished project of modernity. At issue here is the perspective that modernity is characteristically urban and involves moving away from the rural (see Chapter Two), and thus as a condition, modernity values a metropolitan-cosmopolitan orientation. In these ways, modernity and social progress have overlooked other ways of being, and the rural in particular, as sources of ideas and innovation.

An uncertain future, Young (2009) suggests, necessitates teachers with specialist knowledge, and therefore implies a structured authority relation between teacher and student. This is exactly what Connell et al. (1982) have criticised in relation to the hegemonic curriculum. None of the specialist knowledge Young values, of course, is knowledge of place, or more specifically rural place – it is all Western-scientific knowledge, where knowledge of place, and arguably rural knowledges, are marginalised. This may well be where engagement with Connell's (2007) notion of 'Southern Theory' could be useful, given much of what she describes relates to engagement with lands and environments (and therefore places).

### **8.5: Conclusion**

In this chapter I have brought together the key ideas, and related findings, of my inquiry into the idea of situated teaching. The chapter has explored what this idea implies and referred to recent studies suggesting related concepts that can be engaged with in this task. I have also identified and described a number of related challenges and obstacles to implementing any systematic approach to situated teaching.

I conclude this chapter, however, with a short ‘call to arms’, so to speak. As Smyth and Wrigley (2013) argue, the value of binary thinking is limited. We do not *need* to think in dichotomies; academic or vocation, relevant or abstract, or (as I would add) rural or metropolitan. I am cautious of the pragmatic approach, typified for example by Mills and Gale (2010), who work from the position that it remains important for students to have access to the cultural capital of the dominant, but I agree that this should not be dismissed or ignored.

As Hayes et al. (2006) argue:

the challenge for teachers is to teach the academic skills and competencies required to enable students to succeed in mainstream societies, while also ensuring that they acknowledge and respond to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the communities they serve (cited in Mills & Gale 2010, p. 87).

Given that sociologists of education have been arguing similar positions for at least four decades, and nearly a hundred years in relation to education in rural communities, I wonder if it is finally time for more determined action. The pragmatic position seems, given its history of non-achievement, unattainable, and perhaps can be seen as setting students up to fail. I agree nonetheless with Mills and Gale (2010), recognizing the redistribution-recognition tension, that we need to problematize and restructure the frameworks that create disadvantage through radically revisioning pedagogy and curriculum. Though where many shy away from the idea of curricular justice as unattainable, I am proposing a *curricular-spatial* alternative that is informed by a disposition to curriculum negotiation. Furthermore, I suggest that, at least in the context of rural educational disadvantage, a rural standpoint and a curricular-spatial justice approach can help to achieve the radical revisioning of pedagogy and curriculum that Mills and Gale (2010) advocate. The result would likely include elements of socially critical curriculum, which Smyth and Wrigley (2013) suggest incorporates place-based approaches, bringing learning closer to the community, while also allowing broader perspectives to be explored. However, such approaches rely upon knowledge of, and appreciation for, the local (and the rural, in this instance) – and it is here that the Rural Social Space model (Reid et al., 2010) provides an import curriculum resource.



## Chapter Nine

### Conclusion: Curricular-spatial justice for rural education

In this dissertation I have examined education in rural areas of New South Wales, Australia, from a rural standpoint. By doing so I have been able to offer new insights into how rural educational disadvantage is socially, and spatially, produced. Through engagement with the ideas of ‘place’ and ‘rural social space’ (Reid et al., 2010), I have shown that how the rural is positioned in both research and policy influences the appropriateness of the resultant considerations. Specifically I have applied this perspective to a consideration of social justice and curriculum politics, arriving at a position of *curricular-spatial justice* informing a renewed turn to curriculum negotiation.

Given its long history of persistence, rural educational disadvantage has become a ‘wicked problem’ (Rittel & Webber, 1973). To allow new insights to attempt to disrupt this persistence I have found a new perspective necessary. Developed reflexively through my reanalysis of a study of staffing in rural schools I produced in 2004, discussed in Chapter Four, I have called this resultant perspective a *rural standpoint* (Roberts, 2014). This is a perspective that works *in, for* and *with* the rural to value rural people and communities and the knowledges they produce. This perspective works against what I have shown to be the dominance of metropolitan-cosmopolitan values.

#### 9.1: The philosophical frame

These metropolitan-cosmopolitan values privilege knowledge produced in and from the metropolis and which values globalisation, mobility and economically informed perspectives. That is not to say they are inherently bad, just that they regard all places as the same and, in particular, they do not engage with knowledges produced in the rural and of rural place. This is indeed part of modernity where to be ‘modern’ is to no longer be ‘rural’ (Woods, 2011). This perspective forever positions the rural as outside of contemporary society. Ironically, though, rural industry, commerce and culture is both a producer and

consumer of the disciplines at the pinnacle of the modern knowledge economy – particularly science and technology. Epistemologically, modernity tends to regard abstract knowledges as higher status than applied knowledges, generally associated with rural life and work.

When the nature of the research problem, in this instance the production of rural educational disadvantage, is examined, it becomes apparent that our ability to gain new insights is limited by very paradigms within which we operate. The measures that we use to assess (dis)advantage, and the research methods at our disposal, are all informed by a metropolitan-cosmopolitan norm (Roberts & Green, 2013). A rural standpoint allows us to shift perspectives, and in this instance leads to the approach of strategic eclecticism (Roberts & Green, 2013). Similar perhaps to mixed-method research or bricolage, in that it deploys a number of methods simultaneously, it is yet distinct. This distinction exists due to its leverage from a rural standpoint, and a predilection to put the problem before the method, to disrupt the commonly assigned position of the rural ‘as read’ or inconsequential.

The wicked problem of rural educational disadvantage is equally a significant social justice concern as it is an epistemological one. There is real concern about the future opportunities for rural children and communities, and the sustainability of rural communities and rural places. There is equally the philosophical concern that all people and places are inherently valuable, and that some are being marginalised by the apparent placelessness of globalisation. As Somerville, Power and de Carteret (2009) note: “The fate of the local in the age of the global has emerged as a key theme in contemporary social science research” (p. 5.). Thus the motivation for a rural standpoint also comes from a concern about the place of rural Australia in contemporary Australian society.

When applied to social justice, the rural standpoint helps highlight the inadequacies of existing approaches to thinking about, and disrupting the wicked problem of rural educational disadvantage. As such, distributive justice can be seen as assuming the value of redistributing access to dominant metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledges and not challenging the nature of this

knowledge itself. Recognitional and associational justice rely upon being recognised and allowed to speak for ‘oneself’ as a disadvantaged group – something the rural has largely been unable to achieve, due to assumptions that it strives to be more ‘modern’. To counter these limitations I have drawn upon the notions of *curricular justice* (Connell, 1993) and *spatial justice* (Soja, 2010). Curricular justice focuses on the interests of the least advantaged, in this case the rural, and the role of the curriculum, and knowledge, in perpetuating an unjust system. As such it is particularly useful to examining the role of knowledge and the curriculum in perpetuating rural educational (dis)advantage. Spatial justice (Soja, 2010) explores how space helps produce injustice. Bringing these together, I have developed the formulation of curricular-spatial justice to highlight both the spatial production of disadvantage in the rural and the role of the knowledge assumptions in the curriculum in perpetuating this.

Combined, a rural standpoint, its application through an approach of strategic eclecticism, and the notion of curricular-spatial justice provide the theoretical insights of this dissertation. They have allowed a novel exploration of rural teaching and curriculum politics that highlights the lack of recognition of the rural in contemporary education, in Australia and particularly NSW, Australia.

This approach has allowed me to highlight the limitations of the main equity program aimed at addressing rural educational disadvantage for the last forty years, the Country Areas Program (CAP). Specifically, CAP has been shown to favour a distributive justice approach aimed at helping rural students connect to the dominant metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledges in the existing curriculum rather than making the curriculum more relevant to them. The analysis here has shown, consistent with Lamb, Teese and Helme (2005) that rural schools are not necessarily more disadvantaged than similar socially-economically-located metropolitan schools. This draws into question the basic logic of rural distributive programs, that rural students are disadvantaged due to location which is in turn linked to lower socio-economic status, and raises the spectre of ‘something else’ causing this disadvantage. Furthermore, the analysis has shown that the NSW government’s logic for their new equity program replacing CAP, based on the same assumption, is questionable, as a number of rural

schools do not qualify for funding based on socio-economic status. Thus, if these schools are performing on average below similar metropolitan schools there must be another factor involved. I suggest this factor is linked to rural cultural capital and rural knowledges, which are missing from the curriculum and make it difficult for students to connect to their learning. Reinforcing this point is the fact that the recent major review of Australian schooling aimed at improving equity, the Gonski Review (Australian Government, 2011), focussed on funding with scant reference to the curriculum. Similarly, a review of equity in Australian education (Reid & Reynolds, 2013) did not theorise curriculum in any significant way, or engage with the rural as a point of difference.

Implied in this critique is a reliance on the ability of teachers to understand rural contexts and their affordances for negotiating the curriculum, as well as a predisposition to do so. Both, however, cannot be simply assumed, as, per dominant policy discourses, others may well argue there is no difference between rural and non-rural contexts for the purposes of curriculum enactment. Perhaps I have invented the ‘difference’ as a rhetorical tool to prove my hypothesis. To test this, I reflexively reanalysed a previous report I compiled in relation to the staffing of rural schools and conducted a series of interviews with teachers, and professional leaders.

The reflexive reanalysis showed a persistent theme within the data, previously not recognised, of ‘a rural difference’. Importantly, the approach also highlighted the utility of *repositioning* the researcher’s gaze from a rural standpoint, and of undertaking a reanalysis of previous research. The data revealed that many respondents recognised that the rural was qualitatively different, and that engaging positively with this difference was important for a satisfying career in rural schools. Notably, recognition of this difference seemed to be stronger when respondents had lived and worked in the rural longer, or were in leadership positions. This notion of a rural difference also coalesced around what I have termed a *rural professionalism* – a recognition that there is a way of doing things that pertains specifically to rural schools. It also showed that as researchers we can often be influenced by our motives and

predispositions, but that with the ‘will, intellect and imagination’ (Green, 2009) of a rural standpoint we can also move ourselves from our initial positions.

A key factor then that emerged in the reflexive reanalysis was teachers’ knowledge of the rural, and their willingness to engage positively with their rural location as part of their professional role. Because the original study was conducted in order to address the problem of staffing schools, the reanalysis could not address teachers’ perceptions of the key policy reforms related to professionalism and the curriculum. To address this problem, a series of semi-structured interviews around the themes of; the rural, place, professional standards, pedagogy models, and the curriculum was conducted. Again the interviews reinforced the hypothesis that rural place matters. Emerging from the interviews with practicing teachers were what I categorised as a continuum to teaching in rural areas, with attitudes ranging from a bureaucratically-orientated position at one end to a more place-conscious orientation at the other. The bureaucratically-orientated saw teaching as governed by the syllabus, professional standards and pedagogy models, whereas the more place-conscious engaged with their place and negotiated everything else in relation to that. The curriculum was seen more as a flexible guide to the more place-conscious, with professional standards and pedagogy models to be reinterpreted in relation to place. In relation to understandings of rural place, the bureaucratically-orientated tended to have a more deficit perspective and used language indicating a lack of professional satisfaction. The more place-conscious spoke more positively of the rural and used more positive language.

Notably, the professional leaders interviewed tended towards a much more place-conscious perspective and regarded re-interpretation in place as a natural part of professionalism. However, ‘place’ was not a familiar concept to either the teachers or professional leaders. Each rearticulated place as ‘context’ and used it to delineate the backdrop to teaching, and not in the generative multifaceted sense it has come to be understood in the literature. In contrast to the professional leaders’ recognition that teaching is situated and renegotiated in ‘place’, was its absence in the experiences of a large number of new and experienced teachers. Somewhere, the message from those shaping policy in

NSW has not been effectively translated. This I suggest is the influence of public discourse, and particularly the neoliberal imaginaries that ascribe little value to the rural for non-rural Australians.

This discourse, which regards the curriculum as inscribing right and proper social values, and neutral in equity, positions the individual as responsible for their success in it, while abrogating the system of any responsibility in reproducing inequity. In the interviews the curriculum was almost universally positioned as positive and neutral, with participants describing their motivation for giving students access to it as an equity and social justice issue. Thus, a distributive justice perspective, where the good to be distributed is powerful knowledge, appears to be dominant.

The notion of a neutral, or inherently just, curriculum has been shown here to be the dominant perspective in relation to curriculum and equity reform for at least the last forty years in Australia, and NSW particularly. While Connell (1993) has written about curricular justice during this time, the notion has been largely absent from the major reforms of this period. However, my reanalysis of data collected in previous work by Drummond et al. (2012) shows that rural principals recognise that the knowledge inscribed in mandated curriculum may not be relevant to the lives of their (rural) students. Methodologically, the reanalysis reinforces the utility of revisiting secondary data from a rural standpoint to obtain new insights, and illuminate rural meanings.

Behind the apparent neutrality of curriculum in achieving equity is the curriculum hierarchy identified in Chapter Seven, where some subjects are more powerful than others and confer benefits on those who succeed in them. Because, ostensibly, everyone has access to these subjects, achievement in them becomes an issue of social mobility. Access becomes the main equity consideration, with an equitable distribution of access the intent of equity policies. However, as I have shown here, access to these subjects is also organised by social advantage and location. The more powerful subjects are studied by students from more socially advantaged backgrounds and are less accessible the further one moves from the metropolis. Equity of access is not

being achieved, and social background is persistently a pre-determinant of success in an apparently neutral curriculum. Notably, even in more socially advantaged rural schools many of the powerful subjects are not being accessed – an observation that raises questions about the perceived relevance of these subjects to students in these schools. Such an observation echoes questions about the ‘relevance’ or ‘acceptability’ of the official curriculum for rural communities (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987; McKenzie, Harrold & Sturman, 1996; HREOC, 2000). It could also be read as a response to the fact that success in powerful curriculum leads students to leave their communities (Corbett, 2007). Though caution must be exercised here, as pragmatically students should be given every opportunity and not have their motivations assumed either.

In response to the issues described above, I have suggested a *curricular-spatial justice* approach to rethinking education for rural regions. This approach looks at the curriculum from the interests of rural students and communities, and the influence of place and rural social space in education. This necessitates empowering teachers to negotiate the curriculum (Boomer 1992) in response to their engagement with rural social space (Reid et al., 2012). Such an approach is congruent with many of the aims of critical pedagogy, described by McLaren (2005) as:

a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state (83).

In putting the needs of the rural first, however, a curricular-spatial justice approach is distinct from other critical paradigms. Given I have argued that the rural has been positioned outside modernity and often marginalised from full recognition in contemporary society, it is conceivable that relations with the nation-state may well need to be reconstituted. I have also taken up the link here with the feminist idea of standpoint, critiquing curriculum and suggesting hidden agendas as feminist curriculum scholars did (Yates, 2009) in previous generations.

## 9.2: Limitations

While the breadth and depth of analysis (and re-analysis) supporting these claims I have made here are strongly indicative of the general merit and utility of the need for curricular-spatial justice in rural education, my study has a number of limitations that need to be noted as caveats for the overall conclusions. Primarily, the relationships established between rural place, rural knowledge, metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledges, teachers' satisfaction and rural educational disadvantage cannot be regarded as causal – there has only been shown to be an association. Furthermore, the study has been situated primarily with data from NSW only, and while this undoubtedly adds strength to the existing knowledge about rural access and success in this state, NSW is a jurisdiction with a particular state culture (Yates, Collins & O'Connor, 2011) typified by centralisation and high-stakes curriculum and assessment practices. Its relevance to other Australian states, and internationally, must be acknowledged as indicative and suggestive, rather than predictive.

The use in this argument of an implicit binary between metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledges, and rural knowledges may be somewhat unhelpful. I would acknowledge that the nature of knowledge is indeed more complex than that used at times in this discussion: to do justice to the complexity of this topic would have significantly expanded the scope of this project. I note, however, that much metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledge clearly is useful, both in a practical sense and in enhancing peoples lives. Thus, to speak of 'rural-knowledges' is not to suggest the absence of metropolitan-cosmopolitan knowledges in rural areas, or to suggest that they have no utility. It is more a rhetorical device to reinforce the lack of engagement with rural knowledges in modern society.

I have also been unable in this inquiry to develop a consideration of class or gender (see for instance Bryant & Pini, 2011 and Kenway, Kraack & Hickey-Moody, 2006). These exercise influence on socially constructed roles in the rural in ways that are unique to rural contexts. However they add an extra

dimension of complexity that has exceeded the purpose of this study. For instance, I have not elaborated evidence that the nature of subjects studied appear to have a gender organisation, the more one moves from the city: there are more males in manual trade vocational courses and more females in service orientated vocational courses.

Similarly in relation to class, as school ICSEA declines it would appear that more students move into vocational courses and/or subjects that do not result in the award of the Higher School Certificate. Finally, it needs to be noted that many students in from large agricultural properties or rural industries often leave town to attend boarding schools in the metropolitan area. Thus the owners of capital tend to often not attend the local school – reinforcing the importance of cultural capital for success in the curriculum hierarchy. Students from these advantaged backgrounds are gaining, and achieving in, a system of metropolitan-cosmopolitan values and, as such, their social position is being reinforced in rural communities.

Finally, as I have noted throughout this dissertation, matters pertaining to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, politics and education have not been examined or engaged with in this dissertation. While I recognise that in Australia rural education often overlaps significantly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, I note there are issues specific to indigenaity that are not explored here. The often large Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations in many rural communities make up a significant social context for the issues explored here impacting as they do on any consideration of rural social space (Reid et al., 2010). This means that any future consideration and elaboration of curricular-spatial justice from a rural standpoint will of necessity move in this direction.

Necessarily, given the engagement with epistemic reflexivity, this study has been undertaken through the prism of my experiences; specifically, living in rural communities, working in rural schools, and more recently researching in, and with, rural teachers and communities. As could be seen in my re-analysis of my previous staffing report, my knowledge of research and understanding of

the issues I was/am investigating are limited. Consequently, this study is also limited by my present understandings, and skills, and the methodological and theoretical tools I have at my disposal. Inevitably I, and scholars who follow this work, will bring new insights to work undertaken on the matters explored here, as the years progress.

Finally, the aim of this study has been to establish the utility of a *rural standpoint*, and its associated approach of *strategic eclecticism*, to open up new insights into rural education. As such, an aim of this study has been to establish the warrant for further research into the issues discussed here, and others raised through this inquiry. This includes the limitations discussed above, as well as the further areas of research outlined below.

### **9.3: Future work**

The most significant openings for future work are studies establishing a more sturdy relationship between rural knowledges and rural educational disadvantage. While this dissertation has suggested that engaging with local knowledges is beneficial, it has done so from a philosophical perspective and with reference to ‘suggestions’ in the empirical data. This creates a clear need for further, more empirical, study to examine if focussing on local knowledge the curriculum does improve student achievement, however defined. Noting of course the limitations imposed on such a study by the social positioning of the rural in the society such a study may be undertaken in.

Another Possible extension includes a detailed study that would track students, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, subjects studied, and place, in rural schools and elsewhere. As the curriculum data examined in Chapter Seven was school-level data, a detailed analysis of individual students, including regression analysis, is possible, and would illuminate trends in greater detail. This would be usefully connected to an ethnographic study of student, family and community aspirations and values as they relate to living and working in rural regions. Downes (2014) and Downes and Roberts (2015) have

already identified the influence of rural values on parents' educational decision-making and gestured towards the notion of rural knowledges, and this work could be substantially extended.

The data examined here looks at inland rural NSW. There exists an often overlooked category of 'rural coastal' which has similar issues of intergeneration social disadvantage and educational (under-)achievement. However, because of our new understandings of the importance of rural social space, what it is linked to may or may not be similar to the areas studied here. Ethnographic studies of issues pertinent to class, gender and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education are certainly necessary in order to further our knowledge about the practices of teachers in negotiating the curriculum, and enacting curriculum in place. Both of which are important aspects of education in these rural locations. Insights have been obtained here through interviews, however a more detailed observation and lesson analysis, perhaps similar to those undertaken by Anyon (1981) and Luke (2010) in relation to metropolitan practices, would be valuable. While exceptional sites have been identified here, a detailed study of practices and values at these sites would provide valuable insight into what they do to achieve success.

Equally, a study of sites not achieving success would help provide a valuable understanding of practices and attitudes in the rural – most studies of this sort have not been situated in the rural or have not engaged with rurality as a constituent factor. As it has been used here, 'place' can be seen as generative beyond the rural. Its utility as a metaphor for the local in any context remains open to investigation. Exploring the ways that teaching is 'situated' in any place would indeed be valuable work in showing that 'place matters' in the modern world.

#### **9.4: Final reflection**

The argument of this dissertation is, in many ways, particularly straightforward: if we don't consider education from the perspective of the rural, we are complicit in the production of rural educational (dis)advantage. The theoretical, and methodological, moves that result are similarly simple – they merely start from the position that the rural, and rurality, actually matters. In the end this is, to me at least, quite a simple prospect of valuing children in, and rural communities. But it is not to do so in a manner that condemns them to only a local existence. It is instead to equip them with genuine opportunity to remake their world, as they see fit. To do anything else is, I suggest, unconscionable. And thus I end where I begun, with a resolve to see this work as only the beginning. To do anything else is to do an injustice to the children, and communities, that taught me so much, and continue to do so.

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## Appendix



UNIVERSITY OF  
CANBERRA

AUSTRALIA'S CAPITAL UNIVERSITY

COMMITTEE FOR ETHICS IN HUMAN RESEARCH

**APPROVED - Project number 11-108**

12<sup>th</sup> October 2011

Mr Phil Roberts  
Faculty of Education  
University of Canberra  
BRUCE ACT 2617

Dear Phil,

The Committee for Ethics in Human Research has considered your application to conduct research with human subjects for the project entitled *Place, rural education and social justice: A study of rural teaching and professional identity*.

**Approval is granted until 01/11/12 the anticipated completion date stated in the application.**

The following general conditions apply to your approval.

These requirements are determined by University policy and the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007).

<b>Monitoring:</b>	You, in conjunction with your supervisor, must assist the Committee to monitor the conduct of approved research by completing and promptly returning project review forms, which will be sent to you at the end of your project and, in the case of extended research, at least annually during the approval period.
<b>Discontinuation of research:</b>	You, in conjunction with your supervisor, must inform the Committee, giving reasons, if the research is not conducted or is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
<b>Extension of approval:</b>	If your project will not be complete by the expiry date stated above, you must apply in writing for extension of approval. Application should be made before current approval expires; should specify a new completion date; should include reasons for your request.
<b>Retention and storage of data:</b>	University policy states that all research data must be stored securely, on University premises, for a minimum of five years. You and your supervisor must ensure that all records are transferred to the University when the project is complete.
<b>Changes in contact details:</b>	You should advise the Committee of any change of address during or soon after the approval period including, if appropriate, email address(es).

Please add the Contact Complaints form (attached) for distribution with your project.

Yours sincerely  
Committee for Ethics in Human Research

**Michaela Dalgleish**  
Ethics & Compliance Officer  
Research Services Office  
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E [Michaela.Dalgleish@canberra.edu.au](mailto:Michaela.Dalgleish@canberra.edu.au)

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Provider Number ICRC053 80212K

5 December 2012

Mr Philip Roberts  
SC10  
Faculty of Education  
University of Canberra ACT 2617

Dear Mr Roberts,

The CSU Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) operates in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans*.

The HREC has reviewed your report requesting an extension for your research project "*Place, Rural Education and Social Justice: A study of rural teaching and professional identity*", protocol number 2011/127 and I am pleased to advise that this request for an extension meets the requirements of the *National Statement*; and an extension for this research is granted for a twelve month period from 5 December 2012.

Please note the following conditions of approval:

- all Consent Forms and Information Sheets are to be printed on Charles Sturt University letterhead. Students should liaise with their Supervisor to arrange to have these documents printed;
- you must notify the Committee immediately in writing should your research differ in any way from that proposed. Forms are available at [http://www.csu.edu.au/\\_data/assets/word\\_doc/0010/176833/chre\\_amrep.doc](http://www.csu.edu.au/_data/assets/word_doc/0010/176833/chre_amrep.doc) you must notify the Committee immediately if any serious and or unexpected adverse events or outcomes occur associated with your research, that might affect the participants and therefore ethical acceptability of the project. An Adverse Incident form is available from the website: as above;
- amendments to the research design must be reviewed and approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee before commencement. Forms are available at the website above;
- if an extension of the approval period is required, a request must be submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee. Forms are available at the website above;
- you are required to complete a Progress Report form, which can be downloaded as above, by 5 December 2013 if your research has not been completed by that date;

Version 2

[www.csu.edu.au](http://www.csu.edu.au)

CRICOS Provider Numbers for Charles Sturt University are 00002F (NSW), 01947G (VIC) and 02993B (ACT). ABN: 61 678 708 551

PRE

- you are required to submit a final report, the form is available from the website above.

You are reminded that an approval letter from the CSU HREC constitutes **ethical approval only**.

If your research involves the use of radiation, biological materials or chemicals separate approval is required from the appropriate University Committee.

Please don't hesitate to contact the Executive Officer: telephone (02) 6338 4628 or email [ethics@csu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@csu.edu.au) if you have any enquiries about this matter.

Yours sincerely,



**Julie Hicks**  
Executive Officer  
Human Research Ethics Committee  
Direct Telephone: (02) 6338 4628  
Email: [ethics@csu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@csu.edu.au)

Cc: Professor Jo-Anne Reid Professor Bill Green