EDUCATION’S ROLE IN RURAL-REGIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Associate Professor Philip Roberts, PhD.
Leader, Rural Education & Communities Research Group
Australian Institute for Sustainable Communities
• Modernity can be defined as the move from the rural to the urban.
  - 1948 this happened in Europe, USA etc.
  - 2012 in China.

• What does this mean for how we understand and interact with the world?
  - The knowledges we value in education (curriculum).
  - What we assume as normal or standard (benchmarks/averages).
  - Potential loss of cultures, values & knowledges.
  - Research: Methodologies, epistemologies.
Education for Rural-Regional Sustainability

Education:
- Skills & Credentials.
- Cultural, Value laden.
- Abstract v embodied.

Rural is defined:
- Demographically
- Geographically & Economically
- Socio-Culturally

- Curriculum ‘relevance’ or ‘acceptability’
  - Country Areas Program
  - Learning to Leave (Corbett 2007)
- IRRRRE (Halsey, 2018)
BARRIERS TO SCHOOL-COMMUNITY LINKS

• Viewing education instrumentally
• Focus on the outcome and credential, not the process
• Teachers (from the city) not knowing about ‘rural’ ways of being
• Everyone has ‘done school so is an ‘expert’
• Lack of familiarity with what is studied
• Lack of awareness of administrative issues (forms, permission, timetables, OH&S)
• Short term v long term thinking
• Who is the community?
• Time
UNDERSTANDING ‘SUSTAINABILITY’

• Approach:
  - Surveys, focus groups, community workshops & case studies.

• Difference between communities & schools understandings:
  - School responses focus very strongly on the environment perspective.
  - Whereas community responses are very much aligned to a TBL perspective.
  - Schools responses are closely aligned with the perspective dominant in the enacted curriculum and policy.
  - Communities want education about the broad issue using a TBL approach, schools want to educate about environmental concerns.

• Community partnerships:
  - ‘we never knew they thought that way’
  - Local experts, examples, opportunities
  - Knowledge sharing – knowledge development
  - Knowledge brokering, local knowledge
ENHANCING ASPIRATIONS FOR (STEM) CAREERS IN RURAL, REGIONAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

• Approach:
  - Survey of students, teachers, parents & industry.
  - Focus groups of students, Teachers & Industry.
• How do school subjects relate to rural (STEM) careers?
  - Subject histories:
    ▪ Linked to academic disciplines = ↑ ATAR
    ▪ Situated & subjective = ↓ ATAR
  - What do students study to prepare them to work in rural related industries?
  - Values of modern education
GAPS IN LANGUAGE AND KNOWLEDGE

Faculty of Education

Fig. 1: Language/knowledge gap

- Teachers
  - Students – University orientated
  - Students – locally orientated

- Industry

- Local industry & Local Economy
AGRICULTURE’S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

RIRDC 2016 Cross-Industry Innovation Scan
‘We advertise for ‘experts’ to work on an identified problem, however when they come they don’t understand the nature of the problem, but tend to find a new problem we didn’t know we had and then sole it, rather than the problem we still have’
OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCHOOL-COMMUNITY LINKS
OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCHOOL-COMMUNITY LINKS

- Knowledge exchange
  - New teacher integration
  - Community forums
  - ‘Subject’ breakfasts
- Get to know schools – be specific in offers to link.
- Skills / knowledge audit – what does your sector use?
- VET, work experience, internships & apprenticeships.

- It takes a village...
- Beyond credentials and towards community

• Last issue: Much focus on post-school transitions. Need to improve focus on transition to school.
FURTHER DETAILS

e: philip.roberts@canberra.edu.au