

Guest Editors' Introduction to Special Issue: Bush Lessons Down Under

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One of the consequences of living in an increasingly globalized and internationalized world is that there are often striking similarities—at least superficially—in how particular educational (and also cultural, economic, political, social, and technological) phenomena are manifested in countries (certainly in developed nations) around the globe. At the same time, these similarities should not blind researchers to the heterogeneous variations on local manifestations of global phenomena.

This tension between globalization and localization helps to provide the rationale for this special issue of the *Journal of Research in Rural Education* focusing on contemporary developments in Australian rural education. The editors and authors of the issue hope that their respective examinations of particular trends and innovations in Australia will stimulate dialogue, and provide a framework for useful comparison, with their American and other international counterparts. We believe that readers of this issue will be able to provide many points of similarity with, as well as some important areas of difference from, their own experiences as rural education researchers.

The process used to produce this issue should be noted briefly. The common link for the authors of the articles is that they currently or have recently work(ed) as staff members and/or study(ied) as postgraduate students at Central Queensland University, an Australian regional university. These people participated in three meetings in 2002 to discuss this project (April 26, July 8, and October 18), and on November 26 in that year they participated in a half-day symposium at which they presented and received feedback on their developing article drafts. Professor Terry Evans from Deakin University, Australia, was the obvious candidate to invite to assume the role of respondent, given his nationally and internationally recognized research into Australian open and distance education.

The guest editors wish to dedicate this special issue to their beloved grandparents: Maurice Edmond Danaher and Annie Elizabeth ("Lily") Danaher (*née* Gibson), and to George Edward Studman and Daphne Ernestine Studman (*née* Gillett).

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We have outlined this process for three reasons. First, the practices underpinning a successful collaborative research enterprise such as this are too often left invisible, yet we are convinced that the need for such enterprises is growing all the time, and making explicit some of their working parts might help others to bring them to fruition. Second, any collection such as this is partial and restricted to the frames of reference of its participants; clearly a different group of Australian researchers writing about contemporary rural education research would focus on different priorities and themes. Third, and conversely, the process described above, plus the rigorous editing and refereeing of articles engaged in by the issue's editors and the journal's management team, have helped to make this issue as coherent and rigorous as possible.

A word or two about the issue's title is appropriate at this point. *Bush Lessons Down Under* was designed to evoke very quickly images of Australia, perhaps leavened by experiences of readers of this journal who have actually visited that country. One risk, of course, is that those images can readily slip into stereotypes; this risk certainly concerned a number of contributing authors to this issue. We believe that the desire to communicate quickly and vividly, and the associated potential for miscommunication, are also evident in rural education research, where evocations of small groups of children using limited educational resources shade all too readily into a replication of the urban-rural binary that is analyzed and contested in the opening article in this issue.

Yet *Bush Lessons Down Under* was intended to evoke something else that is strongly ingrained in Australian cultural memory and that we suspect also figures prominently in American national consciousness. This is the reputation of Australians who live in the bush or the outback for being tough, resilient, innovative, and able to make do with scarce and sometimes inadequate resources. A recent Australian Broadcasting Corporation television series called *Bush Mechanics* featured a group of Indigenous Australians using all manner of substitutes for mechanical parts, as well as highly developed powers of lateral thinking and problem solving, to keep their families' and friends' vehicles on the road—or more usually off the beaten track.

So the other way in which *Bush Lessons Down Under* is designed for use is to highlight what is a major theme of this issue: the proposition that educational innovations are

not restricted to urban settings, and that indeed being on the geographical margins often provides both the impetus and the opportunities to think differently about educational provision in ways that would be unlikely to be conceived in those urban settings. From this perspective, rural education research—in Australia as much as in the United States—has much of value to teach other educational sectors.

The seven articles in this issue begin with the editors' necessarily selective overview of contemporary Australian rural education research, as a framework for both reading the articles that follow and maximizing opportunities for dialogue with readers of this journal. The next two articles bring to our attention different dimensions of the roles and influences of teachers in and on rural education. First, Lucy Jarzabkowski presents an account of teacher collegiality in an isolated Aboriginal center in northern Australia. Secondly, Carmen Mills and Trevor Gale delineate the responses of a rural community to the transience of the teachers at the local secondary school.

The two following articles focus on developments within the Australian university sector. Jo Luck examines the development of an innovative approach to videoconferencing that enables staff members and students to communicate synchronously across multiple and geographically very distant campuses of the same university. Beverley Moriarty and Brian Gray explore the processes and benefits of an inter-systemic partnership underpinning a distinctive postgraduate program in education.

In the penultimate article, Patrick Alan Danaher, Geoff Danaher, and Beverley Moriarty argue that occupational

Travelers such as mobile circus and fairground people emphasize the politicized constructedness of geographical margins by virtue of their role as space invaders in Australian regional and rural communities. The issue concludes with Terry Evans' article synthesizing and responding to some of the major themes canvassed in the preceding articles.

We hope that you find the articles in this issue enjoyable and instructive reading. We invite you to continue the dialogue that they are designed to initiate; we have a great deal to learn from one another. After all, educational innovations in rural locations have much in common, whether they occur down under, in the land of Uncle Sam, or elsewhere.

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