

Book Review

Schulte, A., & Walker-Gibbs, B., (Eds.) (2016). *Self-studies in rural teacher education*. New York, NY: Springer.

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Self-studies in Rural Teacher Education provides audiences with an engaging, international perspective into the use of self-study in research and practice in rural settings. Researchers will find the volume useful in its description of the current state of self-studies in educational practice; the citations in each chapter offer a wealth of resources. Teacher educators will find the book useful for the case studies of teaching in rural settings; the descriptions provide discussion points for classes engaged in teacher education. The book emerged from a desire by the two editors to expand the body of research in rural teacher education, and the chapter authors are knowledgeable in both rural research and self-studies. It connects well with White and Corbett's (2014) edited volume, *Doing Educational Research in Rural Settings*, introducing researchers to rural settings in which the authors present their paths to doing educational research in rural places. There are parallel themes between the two texts, as authors in each work have a deep commitment to research in rural environments and the students that these rural schools serve.

The introduction to the book, co-written by the editors, lays the groundwork for the text. It provides a much-needed overview of self-studies, offers a brief overview of rural studies, and follows up with a section discussing the combination of rural and self-study research traditions. Self-study is "disciplined and systematic inquiry into one's own teaching practice" (Zeichner, 1999, as cited on p. 3). Further, Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015), in their systematic review of self-studies, define the practice as "making explicit and questing their tacit knowledge of practice through systematic investigations of their practices" (p. 509). A self-study as defined in Kline and Soejatminah's

chapter in the text contains five elements: "it is self-initiated and focused; it is improvement-aimed; it is interactive; it includes multiple, mainly qualitative methods; and it defines validity based on trustworthiness" (p. 162).

The introduction concludes with a short section on the backgrounds of the authors and summaries of the chapters in the book. As the editors explain, the authors of each chapter were selected specifically because of their role in working with marginalized populations in rural settings. The introduction provides a steady, well-voiced road map for the book and demonstrates the significance of the essays which follow.

The book is then divided into three sections: rediscovering rural identities, notions of rural as heaven or hell, and impact of international identities on understanding rural places. The three sections of the book encompass ten chapters, each written by researchers with first-hand knowledge of rural educational settings and expertise in self-studies. The case studies contained in each chapter focus on work with individuals who are often excluded from the general education narrative.

The two editors, Schulte and Walker-Gibbs, are active in preparing teachers for service in rural communities, while the chapter authors are engaged in teacher preparation and researching rural applications for educational practice. Specifically, White and Hope-Rowe both orient their research and practice toward rural teacher preparation and research. Brubaker, Mooney, and Hickey have served as educators in rural environments and seek to prepare teachers who serve in rural settings. In addition, Corbett discusses his teaching and research experience with rural communities. Kenny, Danaher, Harreveld, Kline, and Soejatminah bring international rural educator perspectives to the text, using their first-hand knowledge to describe a number of best practices to overcome barriers to preparing teachers for rural settings.

In the first section, "Rediscovering Rural Identities," four essays provide the reader with a backstory of how the researchers came to embrace rural identity as a researcher. Together, these contributions provide a guidance document

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of sorts for young scholars who are searching for their identity in rural and self-studies research. Each of the four essays describes the systematic nature of the author's work in both self-studies and in recognizing and using their rural identities as a focal point of study. The essays also offer additional context for the teacher education needs of rural communities. The four authors, all who serve in teacher education programs, discuss how their own education practices support the needs of educators who will work with rural populations. A common theme of the four essays is the identity of the authors as rural-focused. Schulte's essay describes how her identification as rural has fostered a sense of "hope" (p. 32) in teaching for rural education preparation. Schulte's teaching examines the possibilities of rural life, not focus on the deficiencies. In a powerful essay, White describes her desire to "disrupt the one size fits all approach" (p. 39) to teacher education. Walker-Gibbs' chapter reflects on her identity as a rural individual and how that identity impacted her PhD studies and teacher preparation work (p. 69). Hope-Rowe's chapter describes the confluence of work in a rural setting with efforts to promote examination of diversity in teacher education (p. 94). By examining the intersection of rural identities and teacher preparation, the authors describe a conscientious way for higher education institutions that serve non-metropolitan areas to improve teacher education.

The second section, "Notions of Rural as Heaven or Hell," examines two areas of rural educational research that reflect some of the opportunities and challenges of working in a non-metro environment. The two essays in this section are case studies of some of the traps that a new teacher can fall into while working in a rural community, exploring the role of politics and community norms while working in a rural community. The first chapter describes unspoken rules shared by school staff members, and the author explains how he, as a novice teacher, experienced the older staff members asserting their dominance (Brubaker, p. 109). The second chapter discusses gendered interactions between a female teacher and her entirely male student population in a physical education classroom (Mooney & Hickey, p. 125). The self-reflective nature of self-studies emerges in these chapters, as the authors reflect on their own practice and how they could change for the future. These case studies are useful for teacher education classrooms to investigate early career concerns many teachers face as they enter the classroom.

The third section, "Impact of International Identities on Understandings of Rural Places," provides the reader with an international perspective on teacher education and

offers the authors' self-reflections on the rural nature of their teaching experiences. The contributors to this section are from North America, Australia, and Europe. The first essay of the section, written by Corbett, a leading scholar in the field of rural education, asks the reader to view rural locations as social constructs and social spaces through the use of Lefebvre's theories on the production of space (p. 141). The second essay pushes the reader to examine his or her own identity and how that identity can be located and reflected within a rural environment (Kline & Soejatminah, p. 166). The final essay (Kenny, Harreveld, & Danaher) weaves self-study with shared autobiography in comparing teaching in Ireland with Australia. It is a compelling chapter that allows the reader to see commonalities across countries in terms of rural teachers' professional learning needs.

This well-organized text provides powerful personal examples that are useful for graduate students and researchers looking for ways to give voice to rural communities. Teacher educators will find the text helpful for students seeking examples of experiences within a variety of rural environments. Each essay describes its author's research methodology for self-studies, providing new scholars with a roadmap for the practice of self-studies. A wide range of qualitative research methodologies are included in the text, adding to the book's value as a text for graduate studies. As Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015) point out in their review of self-studies research, self-studies often employ qualitative methods, and this text includes examples of research using dialogues (p. 19), narrative inquiry (p. 44), dialogue transcripts (p. 57), critical discourse analysis (p. 81), grounded theory (p. 105), reflective interviewing (p. 129), collaborative semi-structured conversations (p. 163), and autoethographies (p. 185).

The editors of *Self-studies* were concerned that they "may be critiqued by those who marginalize both the rural and the self" (pp. 5-6). Their concern stemmed from the state of rural education research in more mainstream academic presses, which Howley, Howley, and Johnson (2014) discussed in the introduction to their book, *Dynamics of Social Class, Race, and Place in Rural Education*. Schulte and Walker-Gibbs' work does, however, give voice to those who have experienced marginalization (Tieken, 2014).

This diverse set of authors provides a well-rounded resource for both researchers and teacher educators who work with rural populations. The book's organization offers a user-friendly approach for a graduate seminar on rural research or for the scholar engaging with self-studies or rural communities. Teacher educators will find the structure easy to navigate and could select the chapters most pertinent

to their courses. Each chapter provides the reader with a critical viewpoint of an aspect of working in or with rural research while engaging in self-studies.

This book is destined to serve as a much-cited text in the field of rural educational research. It will provide newer scholars with a strong starting place for inquiry into rural education; the citations alone are worth reviewing for information about the state of rural research and the inclusion of current research in rural studies will ensure the text is useful for a significant number of years. The volume weaves a story of rural educators and researchers working in rural settings and would work well with recent texts by Schafft and Jackson (2010), Tiekens (2014), and White and Corbett (2014). These four volumes provide a strong foundation for researchers wishing to tell rural educational research stories, discussing the efforts by researchers to place their own experiences into the wider range of rural research. *Self-Studies in Rural Teacher Education* will be useful for all levels of rural researchers and teacher educators.

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