

A Synthesis of International Rural Education Issues and Responses

Bonnie L. Stelmach

University of Saskatchewan

This article synthesizes problems impacting rural primary and secondary schools and describes how schools and relevant organizations have responded to the challenges. Given the context of a globally-compressed world, the focus of the literature review is on international rural education research and strategies. The exploration took the path of topical rather than regional or methodological investigation of rural education for the purpose of thematic understanding of issues. The paper opens with a discussion of the ambiguity of the definition of "rural" to reinforce an epistemological challenge with rural education research. An adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory is used as a framework for the literature review; rural education challenges are synthesized into macro-, mezzo-, and micro-systemic level issues. The paper culminates by positing that rural education issues require inter-sectoral and collaborative responses.

Key words: Rural education, international rural education policy, rural schools.

At the launch of the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (United Nations 2010a) on the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (United Nations Development Programme, n.d.), United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon argued that education "should never be an accident of circumstance" (¶ 4). Yet, the report echoed earlier concerns about rural education: Geographic isolation still plagues progress toward equitable education and rural groups continue to be overlooked. In short, the report claims "education is at risk" (p. 1), and rural areas are susceptible.

In light of the above, my aim in this paper is to frame key rural school problems impacting primary and secondary schools internationally, and to describe organizational, policy, and school-based responses to these challenges. I focused on out-migration, gender inequity, poverty, declining student enrolment, staffing of teachers, remoteness, indigenous populations and curriculum relevancy. These are presented as persistent issues in documents of international organizations committed to rural education, such as *Education for All* (United Nations, 2010a). I included research based on international contexts primarily outside of North America and pertaining to countries in transition for two reasons. First, assuming we are firmly entrenched in a global world, external factors impact upon domestic strategies. The world economic crisis has reinforced our global interdependence and the need to consider the impact of local decisions as well as a collective response to challenges. Second, developing countries in particular have conditions that necessitate innovation when it comes to rural education; developing nations continue to have the most vulnerable populations (United Nations, 2010a). Nonetheless, where appropriate, I referenced Canadian and/or American scholarship to segue into or emphasize key concepts. The world economic crisis exacerbates challenges facing rural education; thus, a synthesis of the

issues to increase understanding seems timely for reaffirming the need for rural education strategies.

Rural schools face a constellation of context-specific challenges and conditions (Provasnik, et al., 2007; World Bank, 2000), and while these issues in rural education are numerous and complex, the recurrence of the factors mentioned in the 2010 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (United Nations, 2010a) suggest certain challenges are central and most pressing. My literature exploration took the path of topical rather than regional or methodological investigation of rural education for the purpose of thematic understanding of issues. The issues identified by the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (United Nations, 2010b) guided me. I made an effort to include research focusing on most continents; however, my survey does not promise exhaustiveness. I defer to the excellent reviews conducted by Kannapel and DeYoung (1999), Khattri, Riley, and Kane (1997), and Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, and Dean (2005).

I preface this review with the section, "The Ambiguity of 'Rural'" to point out that a core issue with the research in this domain is that the meaning of "rural" rests on, to borrow Labaree's (2003) expression, epistemologically marshy terrain. In addition to the lack of conceptual consensus about what constitutes rural, the diverse nature of rural communities intra- and internationally create a barrier to true internationally relevant studies (Cloke, Marsden, & Mooney, 2006). This caveat, however, does not discount the potential to learn from how rural schools around the globe address educational problems. This section is followed by an explanation of the conceptual framework applied to organize this review. A final section entitled, "Rural Education: No Longer Only Educators' Concern" describes the increasingly inter-sectoral and collaborative ways in which rural education issues are being addressed.

Conceptual Framework

To organize the remainder of the literature, I have adopted Frisby and Reynold's (2005) modification of Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological theory. Ecology systems theory combines elements of systems theory and social systems theory. The premise of ecology systems theory is that different 'levels' are always influencing each other (Rothery, 2001). Schools operate at the nexus of socio-cultural, political, and economic events, which also interact at myriad levels of community that impact on and influence schools. Systems theory suggests that it is impossible to comprehend or relate to everything in a system; therefore, we arbitrarily draw boundaries (Rothery). Similarly, social systems theory explains that even although levels in a system have an interdependent relationship, it is helpful for the purposes of analysis to separate levels conceptually (Rothery).

In Frisby and Reynold's (2005) ecological framework, exo- and macrosystemic issues pertain to the larger sociopolitical and cultural forces that influence education. Poverty emerges as a macrosystemic issue, for example. Mezosystemic issues, such as teacher recruitment and retention, have school and community impact. Finally, factors such as curriculum and technology in classrooms are microsystemic issues, which impact the daily lives of children, teachers, and families. Although the issues that challenge rural education interact to create "mutually reinforcing disadvantages" (United Nations, 2010a, p. 9), and may operate at many levels, separating them provides a useful orientation for understanding the demands made and supports required with respect to each issue. Where useful in the following section, I highlight the multi-systemic nature of the factors reviewed.

The Ambiguity of Rural

Cloke (2006) argues that the meaning of rural has been examined primarily through three theoretical lenses. Rural has been thought of in functional terms, in which identifiable elements such as land use, population density, and behavioral qualities of living are the foci. Political-economic concepts "clarify the nature and position of the rural in terms of the social production of existence" (p. 20). Regional boundaries are eroded in this conceptualization, and the focus is on how a territory interacts with the political economy on an international scale. Finally, social constructions of rurality invoke postmodern and poststructuralist (Taylor & Winquist, 2001) ideas about the "role of culture in socio-spatial distinctiveness" (Cloke, 2006, p. 21). Common, historically entrenched idyllic images of rural areas exemplify a socially constructed understanding (Short, 2006; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2007). Importantly, perceptions of rural are multiple and shifting (Wallace & Boylan, 2006).

Most definitions of rurality rely on some form of geography, although there is lack of consensus around rural typologies as well. Nomenclature seems to vary by country and inconsistencies in application of classification systems abound because of diversity in settlement patterns. Attempts at simplicity in definition tend to caricature rurality, such as the one provided by The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD, n.d.).

There are two main rural characteristics. First, rural people usually live on farmsteads or in groups of houses containing perhaps 5 000 – 10 000 persons, separated by farmland, pasture, trees or scrubland. Second, the majority of rural people spend most of their time on farms. (¶2)

Rural discourses are reconstructed over time and through political shifts (Shubin, 2006). For example, following Perestroika and Glasnost in the former Soviet Union, the historical definition of rural as agrarian was viewed as immoral and backwards. In the era of globalization where local spaces become homogenized and commercialized as sites of production and consumption, Kearney (1995) posits the potential disappearance of distinct communities. Technology, enterprise and similar architectures of globalization fashion schools similarly to shopping malls and restaurants; thus, the supplanting of local villages by the so-called global village may create the impression that, in fact, the unique features of the rural school are attended to by virtue of globalization strategies. Lyson (2006) has articulated these concerns within the European context. The fluidity of defining "rural", as exemplified in these examples, emphasizes the importance of for whom and why "rural" takes on certain labels (Juska, 2007), and how these labels inform rural policy.

Thus, "rural" is conceptually evasive. Lack of consensus around the meaning of rural is problematic because "the way rural is defined and specified... is likely to yield different portrayals of rural students, which can affect educational policies and practices" (Arnold, Biscoe, Farmer, Robertston, & Shapley, 2007, p. iv). Ambiguity of definition makes transferability of rural education research difficult; defining rural is a critical first step in research in this area (Coladarci, 2007). Inevitably, my review may be limited because of the lack of consensus around the term.

Macrosystemic Challenges and Responses

Out-migration, gender inequity, and poverty constitute the central macrosystemic challenges facing rural communities and their schools. Although these may seem like distal variables with respect to rural school challenges, they are persistent forces that rural educators must consider in their efforts to maintain and/or improve their schools.

Out-migration

Canadian scholar Michael Corbett claims that rural students “[learn] to leave” (Corbett, 2007). By emphasizing and promoting post-secondary education and professional careers, well-intentioned teachers perpetuate a hegemonic assumption that students who do not leave their rural lives are failures—educationally and socially. This attitude prevails in the international context. The privileging of certain lifestyles through mass media, especially television, played a large role in determining the views of 13-18 year-old students in Russian villages in Sillaste’s (2005) study. Rural schools in the developing world are less impacted by media influences because of reduced frequency of television, Internet, and radio; thus, out-migration may be understood as a challenge for industrialized and modernized countries, though globalization is quickly necessitating the need for technological devices everywhere.

In industrialized environments, neighborhood decay or poor economic development can discourage youth from taking up a life in the rural communities in which they were raised (Jimerson, 2006). Parental attitudes are also a factor. In the United States, Arnold, et al. (2005) found that parents were ambivalent about wanting their children to stay in the rural community. Australian farm parents share that ambivalence, as Gray (1991) notes: “While [country people] want to retain the country lifestyle and its valued attributes for their children, they know that city education and careers offer potential for a relatively high income, which appears increasingly unlikely on the farm” (p. 153). Out-migration from rural communities is essentially caused by and causes economic problems. In a causal sense, whether perceived or real, lack of economic opportunities forces an exodus of youth from rural communities. The emigration of a tax base depletes the necessary financial resources for the school to function, often leading to school consolidation or closure, which is a common practice all around the world (Jimerson, 2006). In-migration of retired population (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2004) can also have a negative impact on the health of rural schools: first, because of the economic disadvantage of the elderly, and second, their potential lack of support for social institutions, such as schools, which may not affect them directly.

Gender Inequity

Data from case studies in rural New South Wales indicated that retention rates for lower secondary school boys were lower than for girls (Wallace & Boylan, 2006). One possible explanation for this imbalance is that rural boys may see their futures on the family farm and not perceive the need for formal education. Referring to

Alston’s research in Australia, Wallace and Boylan (2006) confirm this idea:

Hegemonic masculinity dominates rural communities. Gender negotiations in rural areas occur...against a backdrop of gender order that subordinates women...[Alston] backs up this claim by citing many rural practices such as the patrilineal inheritance of land and the power and prestige that goes with ownership and control of the resources of agriculture; of male dominance of such organizations as the local government, the pubs and livestock saleyards, and even in institutions such as the law and religion; and of the grossly disproportionate amounts spent in country towns on sporting facilities for the males such as football fields. (p. 147)

Wallace and Boylan (2006) highlight the idea that gender inequalities are entrenched in history, community infrastructure and social relations. Deeper theoretical concerns are associated with this. Specifically, studies conducted during the 1970s and 1980s in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and Europe drew attention to gendered division of labor and the devaluing of agricultural work associated with women. Women were seen as domestic laborers confined to the farmhouse. Feminist analyses of women’s agricultural labor show the patriarchal nature of both farm work and ownership (Little, 2006). Over time women have taken up entrepreneurial roles in rural contexts, such as operating bed and breakfasts, which suggests a transformation of gender to some extent. To continue a paradigmatic shift toward social justice for women and girls, however, it is critical that rural educators be cognizant of the gendered construction of rural work.

Gender equity is compounded by the combination of rural and socioeconomic status: “The gender gap in rural areas in many low income countries is often two to three times higher than in urban areas” (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2005, p. 3). Statistically, poverty is more prevalent among rural citizens; thus, gender equity issues tend to hone in on education as a means to helping women and girls improve their economic situation. The type of research conducted on international rural educational issues is contingent upon the economic circumstance of the region being studied. For example, Seaton (2007) focused her American work on teachers’ roles in adolescent girls’ identity formation. In less-developed regions of the world, however, research focuses on basic educational opportunities for girls.

Further, amelioration of gender inequity occurs through a combination of economic, educational, and value assessment strategies in some cases. Referring to rural China, Seeberg and Zhao (2002) point out that “remote villages are more prone to cultural maintenance to carry on traditions” so overturning time-honored assumptions about gender is difficult. Educational

programs in rural India, such as the Lok Jumbish project (literally meaning People's Movement), focused on community engagement to empower local people to change their communities. In this program, priority was given to the needs of women and girls. Strategies such as hiring women, providing gender-sensitive teacher training and preventing sexual harassment of women were implemented to elevate women's and girls' status (World Bank, 2000). Programs in South Africa, Bangladesh and China employ similar strategies.

In cases of economic impoverishment, simply getting girls to school is often the key objective (Liu, 2004; World Bank, 2000), but addressing economic and social issues are central. Food security, agro-biodiversity, irrigation, and technology connected to land use form part of the approach to gender equality in places such as Thailand, Laos, Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Lesotho (FAO, 2006). FAO's web pages on gender equity with respect to land use turned up 68 documents, which indicate that gender equity for rural girls and women is deeply macro-systemic. These examples in no way suggest that developed nations have no cause for concern for rural girls' education; clearly countries like the United States and Canada have economically depressed rural communities. That the United Nations and its sub-organizations (e.g. ECOSOC) have prioritized gender equity through policy and programs poignantly demonstrates gender inequity is endemic to all nations. As stated in the *Education for All* (United Nations, 2007) "over 80 countries are at risk of not achieving gender parity even by 2015" (p. iii). This negative forecast may unfortunately be realized, not because of a lack of conscious effort from national governments and international organizations to address gender disparity, but rather because gender issues intersect with social, cultural and political forces. Graham-Brown (1991), for example, points out that girls and women in some countries view education as both liberating and threatening. While on the one hand, education makes it possible for women to explore their own interests and exercise their potential, on the other hand, in doing so, they may threaten traditional family and/or community values. This reiterates Seeberg & Zhao's (2002) finding that Chinese women and girls seeking education must confront gender-biased social traditions. Thus, personal gains emerging from educational attainment may paradoxically bring about social loss for women whose education renders them to be perceived as dangerous or irrelevant according to traditional community values. Furthermore, women who have internalized traditional community standards may experience anxiety over re-forming their identity as educated women vis-à-vis the expectations of their community. Indeed, girls and women facing such dilemmas may reject education. Particularly in developing countries, education has been viewed as the silver bullet

for solving macro-systemic social ills such as gender disparity, but clearly, the matter is not simply resolved by giving females access to education and economic opportunities.

Poverty

Rural poverty is a persistent macro-systemic issue related to rural education. Although Bankston & Caldas (2002) describe it as non-discriminatory, rural poverty intersects with geographic location, race, and ethnicity (United Nations, 2010a). Nonetheless, education is implicated in three ways with respect to rural poverty. First, education is used to address antecedent conditions of poverty. Pakistan's move to universalize primary public education (World Bank, 2000) exemplifies an attempt to equip future generations with an escape from poverty. Second, where poverty is deemed to be responsible for absenteeism from school, attempts are made to eradicate conditions that require children to take up paid work instead of studies. Joint partnerships, such as the "Education for Rural People" between the Food and Agriculture Organization and UNESCO under *The Global Action Plan: Improving Support to Countries in Achieving EFA Goals* (United Nations, 2007) exemplify comprehensive approaches to improving "the specific learning needs of rural people, in terms of access, quality, the environment and outcomes of learning... and to improve institutional capacity in planning and implementing education for rural people" (p. 21).

Poverty shapes attitudes toward school. Since race and ethnicity often intersect with socioeconomic status, poverty rates are higher among ethnic minorities. This is the case for African American families in America, and Maori families in New Zealand, for example. Mills and Gale (2003) argue that the dominant values of school misalign with some students' cultural values such that they start to identify themselves as outcasts and reject the legitimacy of school. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) found that African American students viewed schooling as a subtractive process; African American students experience one-way acculturation with an unachievable expectation to "act White." South African rural children, and even rural children from China, where ethnicity is relatively homogeneous, may experience schooling in this way (Gordon & Wang, 2000; World Bank, 2000). Canada's First Nations communities physically and geographically share these experiences of being "outside" the dominant culture of schooling (Agbo, 2007). Given that poverty is arterial to multiple factors that impact education (e.g., health, and gender equity), the proliferation of goals targeting the elimination of poverty among international social, economic, and political agencies is unsurprising.

Mezoesystemic Challenges and Responses

Declining student enrollment and staffing issues are two key challenges that rural communities and schools face. These issues are not isolated at the mezoesystemic level, and indeed, they often emerge from macrosystemic conditions.

Declining Enrollment

The neediest children attend the most poorly funded schools (Urban Teacher Collaborative, 2000). Rural schools are more likely than urban schools to be poorly equipped, under-staffed, and under-funded (Frisby & Reynolds, 2005); as in many countries school funding is tied to student numbers, declining enrollment exacerbates the deficits in resources allocated to rural education. Because schools are perceived as a lifeline in rural communities, rural schools are especially vulnerable.

Rural schools are disadvantaged by demographics. Movement to urban centers where opportunities for employment are more favorable leaves rural schools with a financial shortfall. Chronic declining enrollment often results in school consolidation or closure, neither of which is optimal from rural citizens' points of view.

Creative financing and structural arrangements offer viable alternatives to school closure. Yarbrough and Gilman (2006), in a study of a rural Kentucky school division, found that implementing a four-day school week yielded unexpected benefits. Besides reducing financial costs, the Webster County Public School System measured increases in student achievement and positive returns to teachers who enjoyed more time for lesson planning and professional development. Student fatigue resulting from an extended school day, an expected undesirable outcome, did not prove to be an impediment to students in this location. Other cost-saving approaches include sharing administrators among schools and replacing school principals with head teachers, creating multi-grade classrooms, partnering with other schools to share specialized services, such as school finance officers, and implementing distance learning (Johnson & Malhoit, 2004).

In the US, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) includes policy aimed specifically at rural education. *The Rural Education Achievement Program* (REAP Flex) injects additional funds into rural schools through the *Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) Grant*, and provides for more flexibility in the use of existing funds (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). These federal funds not only prioritize rural school challenges, but also afford local leaders the opportunity to be innovative and context-specific.

Inevitably in some countries, particularly underdeveloped ones, school financing problems must be handled with macrosystemic measures. Specifically,

economic stimulation and diversification of rural communities are necessary for a healthy rural resource base. In Northern Ireland, the LEADER program engages state government and local actors in diversifying agricultural economies (Scott, 2004). Similar practices have been tried in Mexico and Spain (OECD, 2004). Economic diversification like agro-biodiversity is an *idée fixe* of international solutions, but is highly dependent on geography, demographics, and a skilled labor force. Schools only impact the latter. Financial shortfalls caused by declining enrollment forces school districts into partnerships. Their success depends on the geographic spread between partnering schools and communities, collegial relationships among partners, and the extent to which autonomy is valued over keeping a rural school alive. Local community vitality may not be the priority of international organizations whose globalization mandate centers on economic competition and development (Apple, 2006; Graham-Brown, 1991; Rizvi & Lingard, 2006). What is clear from research is regardless of where a rural school is located, multiple supplementary channels of funding are needed for rural schools to succeed (Gordon & Wang, 2000). The *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (United Nations, 2010a) stresses international cooperation and monetary contributions.

Staffing

Recruiting, retaining, and supporting teachers present special challenges for rural schools. Teacher shortages are characterized by lack of teachers willing to work in rural schools, lack of highly qualified or certified teachers, and lack of teachers representing ethnic minority groups (Frisby & Reynolds, 2005).

Retention of rural teachers has been understood as a matter of pre-service teacher development and ongoing support. Boylan's (2004) review of the literature of rural teacher education identified four key strands that would address preparation and ongoing support for rural teachers, including: offering reciprocity scholarships to rural students to pursue teacher education; creating courses in teacher preparation programs that focus on the conditions of living and teaching in rural places; setting up rural internships; and, establishing mentorship programs to help teachers cope with the social and personal adjustments associated with living in a rural location. Preparing, retaining, and supporting rural school teachers involve psychological preparedness as well as pedagogical skill. The Alaska Remote Rural Practicum created opportunities for teacher candidates to complete a limited internship in a rural, remote school. Munsch and Boylan's (2005) research with teacher candidates who completed this program found it had varying effects on teachers' perceptions of rural education. Some teachers consequently sought employment in a rural, remote school, but others confirmed they did not aspire to be a

rural teacher. All teachers, however, reported appreciation for the rural, remote context.

Common findings from the research on recruiting and retaining rural teachers suggest mature teachers are more successful in rural school placements (Mills & Gale, 2003; Moana & Selby, 1999; Rosenkoetter, Irwin, & Saceda, 2004); and strong professional and social relationships among teachers and staff in rural schools are essential to job satisfaction in rural schools (Jarzabkowski, 2003). While teachers with some rural upbringing are more likely to stay in rural schools (Munsch & Boylan, 2005), interning in rural schools can also support successful teaching (Rosenkoetter et al.). An additional contributing factor in teacher retention in remote areas is the innate sense of rural rootedness that impacts teachers' decisions to stay in rural schools (Rosenkoetter et al.).

Microsystemic Challenges and Responses

Microsystemic challenges impact the daily operations of school and teachers' practices. Remoteness and curriculum relevancy are overwhelmingly identified in the literature as rural education concerns. Because of their immediacy, educators and policy makers may feel the most responsibility for and influence over these issues. They are challenging as they require deep understanding of community perceptions and values.

Remoteness

Although a school's location is beyond the purview of teachers' and rural educational policy makers' control, remoteness requires their attention because it colors students' and their families' (de)valuing of education, teachers' understanding of the goals and possibilities of rural education, and the day-to-day pedagogical practices. Remoteness can be conceived of in two senses—as a real or an imagined concept. In an obvious sense, remoteness refers to the physical distance of rural communities relative to urban locales. How educators understand the value of education for rural communities compared to parents' and students' interpretations is another type of remoteness, which creates discrepancies between teachers' and families' prioritizing of schooling.

Physical location creates barriers for rural education. In many rural communities around the world students must walk long distances or over tough terrain to reach their schools (United Nations, 2010a; World Bank, 2000). Furthermore, nomadic cultures require mobility (United Nations, 2010a). Technology initiatives attempt to address some of the barriers created by location. These initiatives include laptop classrooms in Alaska (McHale, 2007), Video Compact Discs (VCDs) in China (John & Jiayi, 2005), Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) in New Zealand (Wright, 2003), E-strategies in India (Misra,

2006), and distance education, which is widely used across the United States (Hannum, Irvin, Banks, & Farmer, 2009). Other strategies include mobile vans transporting learning resources to remote areas, independent study, telephone hot-lines, itinerant teachers, summer seminars, correspondence lessons, summer residential institutes, telelearning, electronic bulletin boards, and video exchanges (Clark, 2002). In some areas such as the Australian outback, schools do not exist at all. Programs such as School of the Air (SOTA) and School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) use radios and computers to deliver curriculum. In Australia parents, particularly mothers, act as pseudo-teachers, and certified educators take on an itinerant role (Tynan & O'Neill, 2007). Importantly, infrastructure and cost in remote areas hinders the application of technology. Thus, Marshall (2001) argues that rural policy must regulate telecommunications.

Physical remoteness complicates rural education, but psychological remoteness exacerbates the challenges. Some rural students and parents have different opinions about the value and purpose of education compared to teachers. Whereas teachers have an intuitive commitment to education based on their own experiences, some rural parents and students who have not benefited from education and who face pressures regarding basic needs, respond by not insisting on school attendance. Liu's (2004) description of Chinese rural parents' responses to education is most instructive in this regard. Despite compulsory schooling in China, Liu explained that rational choice trumps legislation. Parents reported being relieved when their children wanted to quit school because of the financial burden (in China compulsory schooling is not equated with public schooling). For some rural Chinese, education offers remote possibilities, as exemplified by the following reasons Chinese parents offered for not supporting their children's attendance at school:

cannot afford the money for schooling; little hope of entering university; cannot [sic passim] afford the money for university even if one could enter university; cannot find jobs even if one graduated from university; school life is too hard; school is no fun; ...admire the youngsters who are making money by working in the city. (Liu, 2004, p. 10)

Liu demonstrates that "remoteness" relates to parents' and students' pessimism about education as a sine qua non to creating future opportunities. Truancy and early school leaving are common in every country where poverty is ubiquitous (World Bank, 2000). Because rurality intersects with poverty and ethnic minority status, Mills and Gale (2003) contend, "The reality is that time in school is a luxury and/or an irrelevance for many poor, ethnic minority students" (p. 146).

Curriculum Relevancy

Overwhelmingly, the literature reports the importance of making curriculum relevant for children in rural communities (FAO, 2005; Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1999; OECD, 2004; Siddle Walker, 2000; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995; Wright, 2003). Moreover, if parents are unconvinced of the relevance of schooling, they do not encourage attendance (United Nations, 2010a). Consequently, place-based education has become an important strategy for improving rural education (Bryden & Boylan, 2004; Budge, 2006; Hodges, 2004). Its grassroots philosophy relies on local expertise and decision making, embraces flexibility and innovation, and has as its goal the development of an appreciation for and commitment to one's surroundings.

An emphasis on place in curriculum requires teachers to engage with local culture and community, and to incorporate its values and resources into the curriculum. Premised on "community-identified forms of knowledge" (Frisby & Reynolds, 2005, p. 380), curriculum developed around a sense of place alerts students to the importance of developing personal identities within the context of their lives and confirms their value and worth in relation to where they come from. Curriculum relevance is fundamentally important to improving education for rural Indigenous populations because ethnically marginalized groups also tend to be most impoverished and least engaged in formal education. Place-based education may be a powerful tool for dealing with the macrosystemic cycles of poverty and out-migration, which stem from lack of schooling and have egregious effects on Indigenous groups.

In many countries Indigenous peoples have endured a history of colonization, marginalized status, geographic isolation and economic dependence on government funding (Torres & Arnott, 1999). The failure of Western schools to provide appropriate education for Indigenous children is well documented (Comboni Salinas & Juarez Nunez, 2000; Johns, Kilpatrick, Mulford, & Falk, 2001; Traa-Valarezo et al., 2001); thus, the literature underscores the importance of revising and preserving Indigenous language in schools, as well as consulting with Indigenous communities to design educational programs that meet the learning and cultural needs of Indigenous children. When curriculum heeds local needs and circumstances, and is tailored to Indigenous worldviews, student attendance, students' self-identity, and ownership improve. A central finding in the literature is that capacity building is the heart of education among rural and Indigenous groups because collective learning and collective problem solving is prioritized.

Rural Education: No Longer Only Educators' Concern

The *Millennium Declaration* (United Nations, 2000) identified the need for globalization to benefit all regions of the world, not only those most developed and populated, or easily accessible. In reviewing the literature on rural education in international contexts, one thing is unequivocal: rural contexts require more attention. The question of under whose responsibility rural education is placed in a global community is increasingly answered by the notion of partnership. Partnerships with parents, community members, religious groups, national associations, state government, non-profit and international organizations are driven by the need for financial and human resources, expertise, and policy. OECD countries' shift from central to regional government and local support has engaged non-educational entities in rural education.

Formally and informally, parents and caregivers are encouraged to participate in their children's education (Ho, 2006). Some rural parents, such as those in Australia, assume most of the educational responsibility. Though socioeconomic conditions and ethnicity factor into the degree of rural parents' involvement, it is increasingly expected that all parents contribute to their children's educational development (Frisby & Reynolds, 2005).

Where possible, rural schools have clustered together for mutual benefit (Ribchester & Edwards, 1998). Such arrangements, often legislated into local school authorities, have been successful in rural England and Wales (Ribchester & Edwards, 1998; Williams & Thorpe, 1998). Clusters create advantages through resource sharing, increased curriculum offerings, more professional development opportunities, and increased staffing and student enrollment. Teaching groups that share curriculum have been successful in South Africa, Guatemala, and the Middle East (World Bank, 2000).

To compensate for lack of expertise and human resources in rural schools, they may also develop partnerships with community-based organizations and local universities and colleges (Gordon & Wang, 2000). For example, in Australian communities, Aboriginal Cultural Centers provide cultural resources, host activities, and assist educators with planning culturally-appropriate curriculum (Wallace & Boylan, 2006). Unique arrangements with regional educational institutions in New Zealand have been established, such as the removal of teacher education from the College of Education to develop Minister-approved teacher preparation programs at the Wanganui Regional Community Polytechnic (Moana & Selby, 1999).

The Alaska Pacific University developed the Remote Rural Practicum to support internships in rural Alaskan school districts (Munsch & Boylan, 2005). The FAO (2005) also supports Community Learning Centers (CLCs) as important sources of education in remote and economically disadvantaged rural communities. The perceived advantage of partnering with CLCs is their holistic and place-based approaches to learning, coupled with their acknowledgement of the need to develop rural educational policy in relation to economic policy. Importantly, community partnerships with schools are not always uni-directional from the school's point of view. The Ngati Raukawa Maori tribe of New Zealand, for example, successfully advocated for the provision of at least one Maori teacher in all schools (Moana & Selby, 1999). The involvement of regional and community-based educational institutions and other associations in teacher preparation and support sometimes also means that these organizations contribute to decisions about teacher certification and qualifications. Again, collaborative arrangements are context-specific.

Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work together at the regional, national, and international level in a variety of ways. For example, the Zimbabwe Integrated National Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC) was established by an NGO (World Bank, 2000). Mobile training units in China have had similar sponsorship (World Bank, 2000). Though collaboration is often driven by lack of resources, advocacy is also the root of collaborative endeavors. For example, in Australia the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission wrote a National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education report focusing on teacher education and

staffing concerns in rural areas (Boylan, 2004). Social support by educationally interested associations is as critical as resource support for rural schools.

Inter-sectoral partnerships, and partnerships at all levels of government, such as the ones mentioned previously, have been formed to address rural educational issues. The key point is that there is increased recognition that not all agencies or organizations have the same information; therefore, sharing expertise is as important as sharing financial and human resources. Furthermore, technologies of globalization have created new access points for rural institutions which support a philosophy of inter-dependence and innovation.

From community-based events to teacher preparation programs to educational qualifications and standards, rural education is increasingly characterized as a multi-sectoral enterprise. Necessity has driven it in this direction. This trend toward collaboration presents its own conundrums for rural education. The infusion of external values and loss of autonomy is one potential area of concern for rural schools that typically boast the advantage of greater local engagement and control compared to many urban schools. In addition, some argue that shifting increasing proportions of financial responsibility to local areas conditions educational inequality (Hannum, 2003). These concerns must be measured against the alternative of allowing rural schools to atrophy.

Seen in this light, shared responsibility offers exciting alternatives for rural education, and in some instances, has made it possible. In the Zeitgeist of globalization, it is likely and apropos that rural educators and policy makers subscribe to a revision of the African proverb: *It takes a global village to raise a rural child.*

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Bonnie Stelmach is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan. Her research interests include policy on parents' participation in secondary/post-secondary schooling and in rural and northern contexts. Prior to her professorship, Bonnie taught secondary school in rural and northern Alberta and Thailand.