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## Educating the Country Out of the Child and Educating the Child Out of the Country: An Excursion in Spectrology<sup>1</sup>

*A focus on rurality has been largely absent from much contemporary educational policy discussion. At best, rural education is a peripheral concern just as rural areas are increasingly considered marginal to the development of a globalized, networked, fast capitalism. In Canada rural, coastal, northern, and single-industry communities that were built around primary resource extraction are constructed as social and educational problem spaces partly because their residents are often attached to these places long after they have served their economic purpose as natural resource deposits for the interests of capital. In fact rurality and rusticity are typically seen as one face of the kind of localized social condition that formal education is designed to normalize and transform by fostering outmigration and a general orientation to urban life and to mobility. In this analysis I use Derrida's idea of spectrology to examine some images of rurality as persistent, place-attached ghosts haunting the educational project of modernity.*

*La ruralité a été absente d'une grande partie de la discussion contemporaine sur l'éducation. Tout au mieux, l'éducation en milieu rural est considérée comme une préoccupation secondaire, tout comme les régions rurales sont jugées comme étant en marge du développement d'un capitalisme mondial réseauté. Au Canada, les milieux ruraux, côtiers, du Nord ou à industrie unique et dont l'origine découle de l'extraction de ressources primaires, sont considérés comme des régions qui posent des problèmes sur le plan social et éducationnel et ce, en partie parce que ceux qui y résident demeurent souvent sur place longtemps après que le lieu ne fournisse plus de ressources primaires aux financiers. En fait, les caractéristiques rurales et rustiques sont typiquement perçues comme faisant partie des aspects de la condition sociale localisée qu'une formation scolaire doit normaliser et transformer en stimulant la migration vers les villes et, de façon générale, un penchant pour la vie urbaine et la mobilité. Dans cette analyse, je puise dans la spectrologie de Derrida et j'étudie quelques perceptions qui présentent la ruralité comme des fantômes ancrés dans un lieu qui perturbent le projet éducationnel de la modernité.*

### *Richard versus Junior*

In recent years, United States economist Richard Florida (2002, 2004) has been promoting the idea that dynamic urban areas are crucibles of creative energy and sources of growth and social development in modern economies. He argues that cities like New York, Vancouver, and Toronto contain a level of social diversity that allows ideas to bubble about unfettered by restrictions found in rural places, small cities, or larger rust-belt cities. The key component in his theory is that vibrant cities attract a "creative class" of young, single, liberally minded, ethnically diverse, and tolerant people working long hours devoting themselves to their creative labor. This class is unattached to tradi-

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tion, established social norms and to place. In *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), Florida then ranks US cities according to concentration of his creative class. Later Florida (2004) wrote,

As many have noted, America is becoming more geographically polarized, with the culturally more traditionalist, rural, small-town, and exurban "red" parts of the country increasingly voting Republican, and the culturally more progressive urban and suburban "blue" areas going ever more Democratic. Less noted is the degree to which these lines demarcate a growing economic divide, with "blue" patches representing the talent-laden, immigrant-rich creative centers that have largely propelled economic growth, and the "red" parts representing the economically lagging hinterlands. The migrations that feed creative-center economies are also exacerbating the contrasts. As talented individuals, eager for better career opportunities and more adventurous, diverse lifestyles, move to the innovative cities, the hinterlands become even more culturally conservative.

Although I endorse how Florida's ideas support diversity, tolerance, and inclusion, it seems to me that there is a problem in the argument. The problem is how nonmetropolitan places are imagined as *other* in Florida's model. If dynamic, diverse urban areas are crucibles of growth and vibrant creativity, rural places are not. The policy implications that seem to follow are that state resources be funnelled into the large conurbations that drive economic growth and vital creativity. In the context of my own region, Atlantic Canada, the argument is that the attention and resources of the state ought to be focused on the Halifax area. Something similar is argued in most Canadian provinces and at the federal level in the "cities agenda." There is a lot of hand-wringing about what to do about rural places, but it is often argued that decline is an inevitable feature of modernity and even that rural places should simply be left to die a "natural death" (McMahon, 2003).

Florida calls this migration toward creative centers "The Big Sort." It is a contemporary version of the old going-down-the-road labor adjustment migration thesis promoted for Atlantic Canada by economists like George (1970) and Courchene (1974) in years past and by politicians like Pierre Trudeau who encouraged unemployed easterners to "get off their asses"<sup>2</sup> and move. This old labor adjustment model of migration makes a great deal of sense from the level of the "command post" (Mills, 1956) high above the working surface of social life where people's experience is reconstructed as quantitative data points.

For me as a qualitative social researcher who has worked in rural communities for nearly 30 years, the perspective of rural people provides an alternative view. In this view, cities are parasitic spaces draining resources and people out of the real sites of basic production, rural communities. In this narrative, rural communities and the producers who live in them are the backbone of the society and the foundation of the economy. Urban spaces are full of essentially nonproductive people who know little about fundamental work of sustenance and who live in networked cocoons that fall apart when any component goes out of whack. Problems with the electric power grid, flooding, or terrorists carrying explosives are the most extreme examples.

I call this Junior Theriault's position. Junior is the provincial legislative representative for a rural constituency in Nova Scotia and an informant in a study I conducted on the relationship between formal education and out-migration in coastal communities in which he and others expressed the rural commonsense view that urban centers rely on rural people and places for sustenance (Corbett, 2004a). On the academic front, this position is represented in economic and social thought by farmer-philosopher Berry (1977, 2001), rural sociologists Winson and Leach (2002), and in education by Theobald (1997, 2005), Haas and Nachtigal (1999) and Shelton (2005). Berry (1977) demonstrates how the history of the US can be read as a progressive displacement of people from the land. As soon as a people settle anywhere, they become what he calls "redskins," systematically demonized and driven out. The first redskins were First Nations people who got in the way of agriculture and European settlement. Contemporary redskins are small farmers, small-boat fishing families, and others who inhabit rural land getting in the way of agribusiness, rural industrial projects like clear-cutting, offshore drilling, rock quarrying, and the corporate fishery. In other words, they are the very people Florida suggests hold back progress and the ascendancy of the creative class. They are the people standing in the way of the methods used by the creative class to "develop" rural places to fuel the engine of urban-focused development.

The logic of Junior's position is confirmed by a recent study undertaken by the Canadian Federation of Municipalities (Elshof, 2005). This study demonstrated, using the idea of the "ecological footprint," that residents of urban places in Canada require a significant rurally based, natural support system to sustain current urban lifestyles. In other words, urban dwellers require huge tracts (nearly 8 hectares of land per capita) of rural land to support their consumption. Elshof puts it this way: "The science of ecological footprinting reveals that large cities require healthy functioning rural areas hundreds of times larger than their cities area in order to sustain them, not vice-versa" (p. 2). By shifting perspective from Florida's world to Junior's way of thinking, a different set of educational questions arise. A number of rural and urban educators have begun to suggest that a place-based approach to education is superior to a generic placeless curriculum and pedagogy (Gallagher, 2004; Gruenewald, 2003; Shelton, 2005; Theobald, 1997). Communitarian philosopher Theobald and ecopedagogue Bowers (2001, 2003) argue variously that unless rural spaces are protected with people living in them, they become open for exploitation and eventual ecological catastrophe. In this model, rural people are constructed as essential stewards of the land rather than as redundant labor in a postindustrial economy. In this vision, intimate connections to place-based history, culture, and tradition and the need to protect that land as a productive, life-sustaining infrastructure is precisely what education ought to enhance rather than erode.

For the last 50 years at least, institutions of formal education have tended to support Florida's position. This broad modernist vision or what I call *learning to leave* is so well established in how we think about education that it is virtually impossible to take Junior's position seriously. Yet rural places will not go away. Rustic spaces haunt our global consumer society and our forward-looking, modernist education system (Ching & Creed, 1997; Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991).

They lower provincial and national test scores (Gallagher, 2004). Yet as Saul (2005) and Castells (2004) point out, the large panoptical dreams of a networked, coordinated, corporatist, managed, and efficient urban society (in both its capitalist and socialist forms) are met with multiple forms of localized resistance identities. "When the world becomes too large to be controlled, social actors aim to shrink it back to their size and reach. When networks dissolve time and space, people anchor themselves in places and recall their historic memories" (p. 69).

### *Spectrology*

I would like to shift focus from Florida's vision of modernity to another that has been gaining momentum since the late 1980s. Commenting on what was considered to be the death of Marxism, communism, and socialist dreams more generally in the heady days after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Derrida (1994) invoked Marx's own use of the image of the specter in the opening lines of the Communist Manifesto written in the equally heady days of the late 1840s in Europe. "A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of communism." The lurking specter would put capitalism to death, catapulting humanity into a new age.

By the early 1990s, the US press and the US academy were proclaiming the death of communism and the rise of liberal democracy. The collapse of the Soviet Union and most of its satellite states, democratic movements in China and in other totalitarian regimes, and liberalization of global trade all seemed to point toward what Fukuyama (1992) called the end of history. In Fukuyama's vision, all significant social struggle was over and every nation state would eventually be drawn into the vortex of inevitable democratization and enhanced individualism represented by the US. For Fukuyama and many others, it was just a matter of time before every place started looking a lot like an affluent suburban dreamscape.

Derrida (1994) argued that whenever we think we have arrived at the end of history, whenever we have the final solution to key human problems, the ghost of human unpredictability and resistance inevitably arises. In the mid-19th century, when it looked as if industrialization, urbanization, mechanized production, and the intellectual tools of the natural sciences could control both nature and people, Marx evoked the shadowy, forgotten ghost of the class of common workers that would rise up collectively and transform everything. After the euphoric days of the early 1990s, it turns out that Derrida was right and that the allegedly posthistorical, happy, integrated world of global capitalism is still haunted by a growing pantheon of spectral others. These new ghosts include Islamic terrorists and the Black underclass in the US described by Žižek (2005) in an analysis of the false reportage of atrocities in New Orleans following the August 2005 flooding as "subjects supposed to loot and rape." It is easy to make up stories about specters because their alterity fits into a hysterical, media-driven narrative of fear.

Derrida (1994) argued in *Spectres of Marx* that philosophers, historians, and social theorists should actually create a new discipline he called *spectrology*. Specters, like Marx's specter of communism, are those persistent elements in a society that are not easily drawn into line, that may not behave predictably, and that most disconcertingly refuse to die when they are supposed to—like

rural communities. Ghosts present risk because we never know what they are going to do. Ghosts travel in a third space between the known and the unknown generating unpredictable outcomes in their wake. The purpose of Derrida's discipline of spectrology would be to examine the ghosts that resist and even threaten the hegemony of world views that seem at a particular time to be so powerful and so ordinary that they frame fundamental truth in discourse (Foucault, 1972; Gee, 1990).

A key discourse in education these days is to be found in the ubiquitous "call to account" (O'Neil, 2002) and mobilized in the language of standards and mass assessment, outcome-based learning, and data-driven decision-making (Cochran-Smith, 2005). The discourse of accountability is larger than education, and it is a generalized response in societies where risk management has become a central feature of institutional process. It cuts across public and private domains as the state (e.g., the 2004-2005 sponsorship scandals in the governing Canadian Liberal party) and private enterprises (e.g., the Enron scandal) are called to become more transparent. Accounting is no longer dull as Marx himself might have predicted in his analysis of the relentless, incremental process of commodification. Everything must be counted and weighed.

Key public services like education have to some extent been able to dodge the juggernaut of commodification and its fixation with accounts, but it is clear that appeals to child development, democratic entitlement, social justice, and even to public service no longer suffice. In what policy analysts call tight-loose accountability frameworks, public servants and professionals find their professional practice defined in terms of an apparently transparent calculus that can be shared easily with "stakeholders." To speak against the core idea or to challenge its importance appears as irresponsible.

The discourse of educational accountability is founded on the basis of a narrative about how education has limped along from one set of ideologically driven theory to the next (Ravitch, 2000; Ungerleider, 2003) and that this went on until we discovered that speculation really gets us nowhere (Levin, 2005). The story of accountability then takes the high road away from both theory and politics, as well as from qualitative analysis, toward a clear-eyed focus on hard data that ostensibly measure learning objectively so that practitioners and administrators can learn to use data to support higher levels of educational production. We can debate about how to do this, but we cannot debate whether it is possible and desirable to do.

However, the more powerful a discourse becomes, the more it starts to look like Stalinism. And the more it looks like Stalinism, the more ordinary people will try to resist, particularly in contemporary Western democracies, which Foucault reminded us contain a remarkable level of freedom notwithstanding increased surveillance, normalization, and hegemonic capacity (Rabinow, 1997). Derrida (1994) argued that it is more interesting to look at untamed specters, how they form, what shape they take, and where they are going rather than to focus on the ever-present edifices of social control that are always rising up and falling down. Take, for example, the long and inglorious history of school reform. It is much more interesting, and instructive, to look at how teachers, students, parents, and communities have resisted these reforms and

brought most of them crashing down (Tyack & Cuban, 1996). Hence Derrida's discipline of spectrology.

*Spectral Images of Rurality*

At this point I work through a problem in spectrology. Getting back to Richard Florida and Junior Theriault, I argue that rural areas and the people who live in them are specters haunting contemporary education systems. These places and the people who live in them are constructed in neo-classical economic discourses like Florida's as other, as failures, as throwbacks, as primitives, as uncultured, and as economically unproductive. Not surprisingly, rural schools are constructed as launching pads for the academically able. The rest are those perennially at risk—at risk of being stuck in hinterlands with brains unfit for the drain.

I started to think about this as a young teacher in Northern Manitoba. This was barely 20 years ago, but the nature of the state educational project in that First Nations community was still explicitly formulated in colonial terms. As teachers we were explicitly told that the job was more or less to "civilize" our students. We would do this in a number of ways ranging from the standard normalization work of teaching control of the body, punctuality, and standard English and by nurturing and supporting an elite cadre of students who were considered to be "able" enough to "go on" and to "make it" outside the cocoon of the community. We would in short teach them to leave and in the truest Platonic sense *lead them out*.

Despite our best efforts, massive expenditures, and full high school programs run for the benefit of a small proportion of the population, the ghost of the young person who did not want to leave haunted teachers. Drop-out rates hovered around 90% (mirroring the percentage of southern White teachers on the school staff), and most of those who managed to survive high school stayed in the community living lives that were not significantly different from the lives of those who dropped out in grade 7.

The community seemed to have power over these young people that the school could not penetrate. Most teachers and school administrators could not understand why. Full scholarships were available to our graduates for university, community college, or whatever training they wanted. Yet few students accepted these scholarships, and top students often ended up as waitresses or fishermen. This was incomprehensible to southern educators because we only understood culture and place as the target object in the crosshairs of our curriculum. We were stuck in our salvationist discourse, and as a result we considered our school (and it was our school) to be a dismal failure because we lacked one fundamental ingredient: a clientele that wanted out.

This is one educational specter, but there are many others. In Nova Scotia virtually no attention is given to rural education in provincial education policy documents although Nova Scotia's population is 44.2% rural according to raw 2001 Census data available on the Statistics Canada Web site, more than double the nation average of barely 20%. It has been argued that a more realistic estimate is between 60% and 75% (Rural Communities Impacting Policy Project, 2003). Although many teachers educated in my own university end up working in rural communities, no specific training in rural education is available to them or mandated provincially. So why does this gap exist?

I do not think that this is either a mistake or an oversight. Rurality is powerfully associated with the past, with place (which, it hardly needs to be said, is nonstandard), with stagnation, and with a kind of vague shame. Rural is the place we are supposed to have left behind in the march of history. The history of rural education, particularly since World War II, is a history of educating the country out of people and educating people out of the country. Yet it turns out that half of the earth's people continue to live in rural places (Davis, 2004). Despite the ever-increasing pace of urbanization, the labor of masses of rural people is still necessary. Global capitalism brings the rural and the urban together in strange and unequal combinations (Williams, 1973). Roy (2001) provides us with the eerie, out-of-joint image of rural Indian laborers working in hand-dug, water-filled trenches laying fiberoptic cable by candlelight.

*Rural as Primitive: Rusticity and Illiteracy*

The image of the rural as a primitive space distinct and isolated from modern and developed urban spaces is an enduring theme. Ching and Creed (1997) explored the notion of *rusticity* as a cultural marker of alterity from the Western civilizing project. Ching and Creed's rustic sits outside modernity, rooted to place and concrete experience rather than abstracted, schooled, academic knowledge (Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991). The word *urbane* denotes cultivation and refinement. The notion of the backwardness of rural places takes many forms, not the least of which includes the separation of rurality from higher education. This theme has been a staple for Atlantic Canadian fiction from Frank Parker Day to Charles Bruce and Ernest Bucklet through Alistair Macleod and on to David Adams Richards and Lynn Coady.

One powerful personal encounter I had with this idea occurred in an urban graduate school (is there any other kind?) in fall 1997. When I met my fellow graduate students, I was struck by how they all seemed to assume that I had left my home in rural Nova Scotia for good when I began doctoral studies. The working assumption for my peers was that Atlantic Canada was a rural backwater that one escaped through the window of higher education. What, they wondered, would I do in rural NS with a PhD, as if holding a PhD and living in a rural place were somehow incompatible.

Another current example is how people in the small communities of southwest Nova Scotia's Digby Neck have been portrayed by the US-based proponents of a mega-quarry. These rural radicals, who now count among their numbers a highly educated group of come-from-aways, are presented as trying to hold back the tide of industrial progress. Those who oppose the quarry project are also said to cling to nostalgia and declining "sunset industries" that no longer provide much employment: industries like the small-boat fishery (and unlike rock quarrying!). Those with even a passing familiarity with the number of people employed in Nova Scotia's \$427 million/yr. lobster industry (most of which is located in rural southwest Nova Scotia), understand how it is not nostalgia, but cold economic rationality that is standing in the way of the quarry project. Increasingly, small-boat fishing families are spectral others facing mounting pressure to sell out to corporate interests intent on harnessing control of marine resources.

Historian McKay (1994) finds echoes of this vision of rural Nova Scotians in the work of the much loved and celebrated folklorist Helen Creighton. It is McKay's argument that rural Nova Scotia continues to be defined as a backward space outside modernity, in part because of how folklorists and cultural intellectuals chose to represent the "real" Nova Scotia in terms of rustic folk stereotypes uncontaminated by modernity. Creighton's noble savages lived in backwaters happily singing sea chanties and living a simple, pure life removed from the stresses and strains of modernity. This idyllic image was presented as the essence of Nova Scotia, but as McKay points out, real rural Nova Scotian workers were (and continue to be) very much part of modern industrial capitalism in the fishery, in mines, and in the forest, more like Roy's fiberoptic workers than like carefree Arcadian balladeers.

In the work of Creighton we encounter the rustic whose culture is deficient because it has remained oral (hence the wealth of folk songs). It has remained oral because it was isolated from the larger cultural movements of its time and was bypassed by the march of time that elapsed elsewhere, particularly in the cities. Rural culture was defined by Creighton by its isolation and separation from formal education and other institutions of modernity. For Creighton, the rural folk were atavistic museum pieces, the antithesis of the educated, literate culture.

By the 1950s and 1960s, with the introduction of social programs, mass media, and roads, Creighton's unspoiled "real Nova Scotia" was coming to an end. Or was it? I think we need an educational history of this period and particularly a history of its language pedagogies. We also need to explore honestly how linguistic difference, particularly in working-class, rural, and minority communities is mobilized in the form of an ever-present literacy crisis. This will require the kind of poststructural investigation of the discourses of accountability and literacy as well as an analysis of how modern forms of the folk are constructed as other under the auspices of these discourses.

This sort of analysis in rural education has yet to attract much interest in North America. In Africa, though, the connection between colonialism, cultural capital, language, and rurality has a more central place in educational thought. For example, Nigerian essayist and novelist Thiong'o (1998) demonstrates how standard English came to be associated with civilization, formal education, enculturation, and the Western colonial project designed to elevate an allegedly primitive, rural Africa to European standards. He writes, "the rural, the oral, and the ahistorical were identified with Africa" (p. 108).

Respecting the specific and pronounced historical injustices suffered by African Nova Scotians, I think it is possible to characterize rural and especially coastal communities as Nova Scotia's Africa. Neither do I think it is any mistake that most of Nova Scotia's Black and First Nations populations were concentrated historically in rural communities or in marginal, unserved urban spaces like Africville (Clairmont & McGill, 1974).

Of course, grammar, inflection, and dialect are powerful markers of space. They provide clues to a person's location both social and geographical (Bourdieu, 1984; Delpitt & Dowdy, 2002; Heath, 1986; Hicks, 2002; Rose, 2004). How many rural people use language has functioned as an important part of the colonial educational project aimed at educating the country out of the child and



educating the child out of the country. In my own ethnographic work in coastal communities in southwestern Nova Scotia, this was powerfully evident. Despite widespread school failure (which seldom translated into an unsuccessful life), my informants learned one thing very well: that their language was substandard (Corbett, 2001, 2004a, 2004b).

*What We Need to Know About Education in Rural Canada*

In some ways the continued existence of rural communities in Nova Scotia and beyond is a bit of an embarrassment as well as an administrative inconvenience. As Popkewitz (1998) shows, in modernist educational discourse, rural has come to be constructed as a deficient essence of character. For Popkewitz, rural is a problematic space in educational discourse, the country cousin of the problem space of the inner city. The irony in Popkewitz' work is that he goes on from this theoretical statement to write a book about inner-city schools virtually ignoring the rural.

Many popular images of rurality are rustic, historic, sometimes nostalgic, sometimes pathetic, always in need of reform and modernization. Rural is the space left behind and the space our education systems have worked unsuccessfully to elevate and erase. The "rural school problem" of the late 19th and early 20th century persists. The ghost endures in the policy shadowland of small schools defended by parents around rural school board tables. Because the power bases of several Canadian provincial governments are firmly rooted in rural regions, many of these small schools remain relatively safe for the moment. For me, questions worth pursuing in rural education have to do with finding out what is going on in rural schools and leaving behind glosses like the vague notion of *brain drain*. We need to understand better the educational realities, challenges, and successes in those communities that contain a large part of the population of places like Atlantic, northern, and western Canada. I conclude by pointing to a series of tensions that I think can animate and inform productive policy discussion about rural education in Canada.

The fact is that we do not know a great deal about rural schools and how they operate in their communities, partly because they are largely absent from most Canadian educational policy discussion. We suspect that the relationship between school and community is ambivalent because schools educate many rural youth to leave. *This is the tension between community development and out-migration*. It is fairly clear that formal education is understood and experienced by most school-successful rural youth as a ticket to elsewhere and that formal education correlates powerfully with out-migration from rural communities (Dupuis, Meyer, & Morissette, 2000; Tremblay, 2001). It is probable that this connection has a significant effect on educational engagement and outcomes in rural communities.

Neither do we understand the effect of globalization and the recent manifestations of fast capitalism on rural communities (Winson & Leach, 2002). Something else we do not know is how to connect schools and communities, or how schools connect to communities now in ways that are not well understood. In the Canadian context, Wotherspoon (1998) cautions that what is considered to be educational improvement by educators and bureaucrats may not be understood in the same way in rural communities struggling for survival. Finally, we have never understood the persistent space between the

mobile, data-driven, outcome-based, individualistic culture promoted in the grand neoliberal educational project and the cultures of diverse communities that may have different ideas about what counts as education and a life worth living (Haas & Nachtigal, 1999; Theobald, 1997). One important feature of Junior Theriault's position is that it raises traditional dependency theory questions about what a relatively wealthy urban metropolis might "owe" the rural periphery it exploits for resources.

This tension is obviously exacerbated by the recent movement toward standardized visions of educational accountability because it calls for a contextually-based rural education. *A second related tension is, therefore, found in the space between the movement toward the development and comparative measurement of international standards for education and the Deweyan idea of an education that is founded in the experience, language and social context of the child/youth.* This tension played out in a number of areas and in a number of ways. I allude above to the persistent tension between the vernacular knowledge, language forms, and literacies. This tension is not easily resolved. Nor is the tension between teachers' desire to accept the child *where he or she is* and the expectation that the child *will* achieve particular outcomes at particular age-stages in a school career.

It is my strong suspicion that teachers readily perceive that their practice will be evaluated, both in the court of public opinion and in professional circles, by the quantitative de facto bottom line of standardized test scores. Many Canadian jurisdictions are now publishing results at the school level, and the transparency of the balance sheet will undoubtedly drive pedagogical practice toward the kinds of generic, quantifiable "knowledge" found in the standardized tests. If rural education is to be meaningful though, I suggest that it must be contextual and connected to the particularity of place. It is my sense that place-based education is becoming much more difficult in the present climate. How this tension is resolved in Canadian classrooms and in rural schools is something about which we need to know more.

One final tension questions both the place-based and the standards-based frameworks for education. *This is the tension between imagination and relevance.* In several books, Egan (2002, 2005) has questioned the legacy of progressive education. Egan's argument is complex, but one key feature is the idea that by locating education (particularly in its earliest stages) squarely in experience, we effectively cut off imagination, which is the most important hook that we have for helping children learn and grow. Through a carefully developed curriculum that is aimed at developing and working with what he calls "cognitive tools," Egan argues that we scaffold children's learning through narrative engagements that proceed from story, through literacy, and on to more abstract theoretical work. The attraction to learning is found not in the mundane so much as in the imagination. Children are drawn to literacy by wizards and princes and princesses and heroes whose lives, exploits, and settings are anything but rooted in ordinary experience.

However, I am still convinced by practitioners like Shelton (2005), who shows how a project-focused, place-based education can engage children in what he calls consequential learning. This learning is consequential because it is relevant to the young people involved in it and to the audiences of local citizens who play an important part in evaluating it. Shelton also shows how

relevant projects to which young people are committed lead to imagination and serious problem-solving.

Interestingly, most of Shelton's examples of place-based learning come from secondary school. It is more difficult to engage young children in place-based projects precisely because they inhabit such an imaginative landscape, a landscape that schools seem intent on replacing with a more rational model predicated on predetermined outcomes, partly through an appeal to relevance. It might be said that young children are dragged kicking and screaming out of their imaginary worlds into generic spaces of relevance. On the other hand, youth in secondary school whose development inclines them toward the concrete and relevant world of adult life in authentic communities of practice are deposited in the moratorium space of adolescence (Lesko, 2001) and drawn into increasingly abstract and distant forms of curriculum.

This final problematic is presented as an illustration of the tension between an education that focuses on relevance and the concrete on the one hand and abstraction and the imagination on the other. It seems to me that the collective and individual intellectual power of rural adolescents might be focused on working through some of the vexing, pragmatic problems facing the community rather than giving the most able of them an abstract toolkit for elsewhere. By the same token, young children in rural areas, particularly those in low socioeconomic subcommunities, would be much better served by an approach to literacy and learning that allowed them to exercise their imaginations, develop the kinds of cognitive tools Egan identifies, and fly away from the boundaries of the known (Hicks, 2005).

Can we then imagine the emergence of a new rural creative class that is steeped in a deep, stewardship-oriented, place-sensitive knowledge, yet that is just as imaginative and generative as the urban cohort that Florida celebrates. If we can imagine this new educational space, then the larger policy issues facing rural communities (e.g., the degradation of rural ecosystems, the difficulty of attracting immigrants and youth outmigration) may become more manageable. Do creative people have to be placeless and bereft of attachment to any particular piece of earth? Can we learn from both Richard and Junior? I hope so.

#### Notes

1. This text is a revised version of an address presented to the Nova Scotia Educational Leadership Consortium, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 18 December, 2003
2. Margaret Thatcher expressed a similar sentiment some years later encouraging England's rural citizens to "get on their bicycles."

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