UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN RURAL EDUCATION

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Introduction

The concept of social justice is one of the central virtues and pillars of contemporary democracies. Nowhere are its consequences more keenly felt than in the education of each new generation of children and young people. The injustices and inequalities experienced by rural school participants, as this book will show, place the concept of social justice at the center of any discussion of education. The problem, however, is that social justice is a term that does not have the same meaning for everyone. It is usually understood as merit, need, fairness, equality, or equity, and it is in many instances used by philosophers, political theorists, sociologists, and educational researchers as self-evident and self-explanatory. One of the difficulties in conceptualizing social justice is that it is a contested term that carries often conflicting social, political, cultural, and economic meanings. Different political, economic, and social actors in society create a pluralistic agenda and each of these groups sustain their ideas and objectives through different rival conceptualizations of social justice, such as merit, need, or equality (MacIntyre 1985, 1988). These competing concepts of social justice and disparate positions do not arrive at a definitive concept of what social justice is. The same competing forces could be seen, for example, in the field of education, where different political and social groups have opposite visions of what "legitimate" knowledge or "good" teaching and learning consists of, rooted as they are in conflicting views of structural justice (e.g. gender, class, and race) in education and society (Apple 2001, p. 410). Yet paradoxically, there exists a rhetoric of consensus tied up with the implied universality of the concept—a

sense that we all understand what we are referring to when we speak of social justice—which masks these very real differences. What this rhetoric of consensus does is foreclose an ongoing discussion about how best to attend to these differences in constructing a just society.

While social justice is a contested term but usually invoked as an explicit concept, there is very little research that examines what socially just education means and looks like for rural school participants themselves.[1] This seems surprising given the different well-documented inequalities endured over time by rural schools (e.g. lack of breadth of curriculum, staffing shortages, deficient infrastructure, prohibitive cost of services, and students' educational performance) (Alloway et al. 2004; Boylan and Wallace 2007; Bradley 2008; Council for the Australian Federation 2007; Department of Education and Training [DET] 2007; Gonski 2011; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC] 2000a; Welch et al. 2007). This picture of rural education is occurring as many rural communities across Australia, and around the world, have been experiencing important structural change and, in many cases, decline, in the last 20 years (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics [ABARE] 2008; Alston 2002; Brett 2011; Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics [BITRE] 2008; Carr and Kefalas 2009; Corbett 2007; Falk 2001; Kenway et al. 2006; Shucksmith 2012; Squires 2003; Woods 2011; Yang and Fetsch 2007). It is not my intention to present yet another deficit story about schooling in rural places, but given the opportunities and challenges occurring in rural education and communities, it is timely to ask people how socially just they feel teaching and learning is in rural places. In doing so, this book responds to the educational and political challenges of theorizing social justice education (Gewirtz 2002; North 2006), by bridging a gap between the theory and practice of normative social justice and social sciences (Brighouse 2004; Griffiths 1998b).

This book examines what social justice means to participants (students, teachers, principals, and parents) in two government (public) schools in rural Victoria, Australia. Including these voices in the discussion offers an important contribution to understanding what is going on in rural schools, which dimensions of social justice are being applied, and what the real needs are. This book contributes to an understanding of how an abstract concept, social justice, can work as an effective policy guide, in an operative way, by taking it from its theoretical isolation and putting it in the immediate context of rural schooling. Exploring the subjective element of social justice can make an important contribution to

understanding how social injustices are experienced, tolerated, and perpetuated in disadvantaged settings and can assist in outlining an agenda for change. It is in this vein that the different chapters of the book aim to answer important questions: What does social justice mean to rural school participants? Which dimension of social justice is dominant in rural school practices? What are the possibilities for enacting a more plural social justice in rural schools? And, how can socially unjust discourses and practices be interrupted in rural schools? Answers to these questions open up a path to examining what is happening in rural schools, and how we can address the needs of rural school participants and analyze the different dimensions of social justice that redress or reinforce inequality in rural schools. Without this understanding, policymakers, educators, and researchers alike risk continuing to adopt an insufficient or limited model of social justice, a one-size-fits-all approach to issues of social inequality.

My analysis of social justice draws upon the theoretical work of Iris Marion Young, a political theorist, feminist, and radical egalitarian, to reclaim the discourse of social justice from the liberal dominance of the principle of distributive justice. *Distributive justice*, simply put, focuses on how major social institutions assign rights and duties, and distributes benefits and burdens through social cooperation (Rawls 1972). Like Young, I search for a position that offers a plural model of social justice—one that overcomes the shortfalls of the liberal-egalitarian model that equates social justice mostly with distributive justice at the expense of other forms of redress. This is a much needed critical exercise in a field like rural education which is dominated by analyses of disadvantage in terms of funding and material resources. The emphasis on distributive issues might seem unsurprising given the problems with staffing, facilities, and breadth of curriculum that have perennially affected the quality of rural education. In modern Australian education policy, significant documents like the *Karmel Report* and the *Schools Disadvantage Commission* in the seventies up until the current *Gonski Review* have focused on a politics of distribution to redress the poor educational outcomes evident in rural education. By pluralizing social justice I am not denying the relevance of appropriate funding and distribution of material goods—they are a critical component in the delivery of a good quality of education. This was also the case for Young, who in her seminal book, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, already stated that distributive matters in society were critically important but not the end point of an analysis about justice. In rural schooling the adequate distribution of funding, facilities, and staffing is a perennial and

major concern. But it is at this point where I believe analyses of rural schooling should be problematized by opening up the discussion of social justice to other dimensions that heterogeneize inequality and disadvantage. Here is where the work of Young (1990, 1997a, b, 2000, 2001, 2006a, b) becomes very useful to analyze discourses and practices of justice based on the elimination of oppression and domination through the recognition and participation of all actors in the process of education and schooling rather than merely on the distribution of benefits and burdens by major social institutions. Hence, in addition to distributive justice, I argue for another two dimensions of social justice: recognitional and associational. *Recognitional justice*, simply put, attends to the redressing of cultural domination and disrespect experienced by marginal social groups or individuals (Young 1990). Recognitional justice, for example, in rural schooling refers to the promotion and celebration of diversity through the inclusion and legitimation of all social groups' culture and identity but also the respect and empowerment of teachers' work as critical actors in interrupting injustices. Recognition, empowerment, and autonomy are crucial but they are not complete without participation. Thus, a third dimension that we should care about if we are interested in interrupting and subverting social injustices and inequality is *associational justice*; that is defined by the degree of participation by individuals or groups in decisions which affect the conditions in which they live and act (Gewirtz 2006). It incorporates the notions of participation and of "voice," of being able to express own needs in one's own idiom (Young 1997a, 2006a) through processes of participative dialog. Associational justice in schooling makes the *process* of education as relevant as the *products* or outcomes. In rural schooling this dimension is vital in constructing spaces for teachers and principals' participation in policymaking structures and in making decisions about their everyday working practices in relation to the curriculum.

These dimensions of social justice need to be considered in temporal and spatial contexts because justice may very well have different meanings for different social groups in different historical moments. As Gewirtz (2006, p. 78) alerts us, social justice has to be understood within the "competing norms" and "external constraints" that shape discourses and practices in schools. What happens in schools must be understood in relation to dominant discourses, power relations, and normative socioeconomic constraints. In this book, the impact of neoliberal policies on education in the last two decades and the context of rurality are critical to understand current discourses of social justice. Thus, I examine how discourses and

practices of social justice in education have shifted from progressive politics to an economization of schooling underpinned by the need to skill-up the national workforce (Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Wyn 2009). This does not mean that social justice in education is completely abandoned, but it is reframed through neoliberal policy technologies based on monitoring and auditing of school processes and outcomes, which impact on the creation of new meanings of what counts as knowledge for students, and redefine what counts as an "effective" and "good" teacher. I paid also particular attention at the radical transformation of rural spaces, placing rurality as a central component of analysis rather than as a backdrop to a study on schooling. I take up the challenge of constructing "research *in* and *for* rural communities" to disrupt the metro-centric bias of educational studies that has condemned rural education to a residual space in research (Corbett and White 2014, p. 1, emphasis in original).[2] The concept of rurality is not simply put to use as research context but sees the way people make "rural sense of, and with their lives" (Howley et al. 2005, p. 2) as central to understanding how socially just schooling is for school participants and the community at large.

THE STUDY

The book draws on data from a research study conducted over a period of four years (2006–2010) that aimed to understand the meaning of social justice for rural school participants in two Victorian schools. I visited each school four times over a period of two years. In the first couple of visits I introduced my research ideas to potential school participants and had informal conversations about schooling and living in rural Victoria.[3] The third and fourth visits entailed the collection of data, which involved focus group, semi-structured interviews, and gathering documents (e.g. school and community newsletters). The majority of people that participated in focus groups were later individually interviewed. Twenty-three members from Highland school (the pseudonym used for one of the communities and schools throughout) participated in focus groups (10 students, 8 teachers, and 5 parents), while 19 members from Lowland school (also a pseudonym) took part (8 students, 6 teachers, and 5 parents). In total I conducted 47 semi-structured interviews, including 2 interviews with each principal (In Highland, 12 students, 5 teachers, and 4 parents were interviewed, while in Lowland, 10 students, 8 teachers, and 4 parents). In general terms all participants were very supportive of the research.

Teachers were the group more inclined to be open about the sorrows and happiness of living and working in rural Victoria. Some parents who decided to participate were also eager to comment on their issues, mostly about their worries and problems. This idea of becoming an outlet to communicate their problems presented me with the delicate task of not hanging on to a "deficit" view of rural life and schooling.

The Communities

Both communities are approximately 400 kilometers away from Melbourne, the state's capital, and approximately an hour and a half away from a small regional town. Highland is located in the northwest of Victoria, in the Mallee region, and Lowland is in the southeast, in East Gippsland area. According to the 2006 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2006), Highland has a population of 448 people (300 of them living in the town and the rest in farms) and Lowland has a population of 2,252 people. They both have a fairly monocultural population, although Lowland has a stronger presence of Indigenous people (6 % are Indigenous), and they have a fairly mature median population, around the mid-forties, in comparison with a younger national median population.

Both towns share a recent history of decline in their services that have affected their social and economic lives and resulted in a loss of population during the rationalization of public and private services during the 1990s (with Highland losing approximately 18 % and Lowland approximately 20 % of their total population) (McKenzie 2006). Highland residents experience a lack of many major services, such as banks, supermarkets, or clothing stores. The last owner of the supermarket could not find a buyer for it and left the town closing its doors. The main, and only, commercial street consists of one large block with an automotive mechanic shop, a café/milk-bar/takeaway food shop, the stationery shop (which carries the mail), an abandoned shop, and the pub/restaurant/motel (which includes an ATM machine in its facilities). There is only one government school and a small health post. Many of the community facilities are shared with the school (e.g. basketball court, swimming pool, library, football ground). Unlike Highland, Lowland has a variety of services beyond the school facilities, such as library, post office, police station, health center offering a range of health services, a fire brigade, the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria, supermarkets, banks, pubs, various cafés, and motels.

Agriculture is a key industry for both towns, more so in Highland where the sheep, beef cattle, and grain farming employs 41 % of people aged 15 years and over (ABS 2006). The Mallee region where Highland is located has been severely affected by the drought (at the time of the research study), putting great social and economic pressure on the community.[4] Lowland's main commercial and industrial activities are agriculture, timber, retail trade, and tourism. During the 1990s the town suffered a major restructure of local government services and lost the shire epicenter to the nearby medium-size regional town (Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia [CRLRA] 2002). In addition to this, the traditional timber industry has experienced massive job cuts, and since then the town has tried to recreate itself as a tourist destination based on the pristine beaches a few kilometers away, the national parks, and the attraction of the famous Snowy River (CRLRA 2002; Dowling 2008).

In both communities there was a social group that was referred as "the minority" by participants. In Highland, this was the newly arrived members of the community escaping the housing price bubble: first migrating from Melbourne to regional centers and then to small towns like Highland. In Lowland, the minority group consisted of Indigenous people. Unfortunately, I was not able to interview any of the parents or students from these two minority groups.

The Schools

Both schools are the only secondary schooling option in their respective towns.[5] Highland school is a government school that educates from pre-school to Year 12 (K-12) and in 2006 had a population of 147 students enrolled.[6] The school is the hub of the community. Approximately 30 % of students received Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and very few of them come from homes where English is the second language. Highland's school enrolment has increased in the last years, mostly due to new families settling in the town and from students from nearby towns, reversing a trend of declining enrolments from 1993 to 2001. According to the principal, this is the result of the quality of education offered by the school. The school reports emphasize the "strong record of high academic achievement," which is attributed to a combination of "good teaching, small classes and a strong school-student-parent partnership." Nonetheless, challenges lie ahead with a "declining prep intake over the next few years."

While there are a couple of primary schools, government and non-government, in the town, Lowland school is the only secondary college with an enrolment of 352 students. Differently than in Highland school, there is a strong emphasis on their vocational education stream, through their "Community VCAL [Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning] course, which provides a pathway for previously 'at risk' students."[7] A school report points out to a "decline in enrolments, due to changing demographics" (losing 50 students in the last two years), which prompted the school to take an active role to design "specialized areas" to cater for a diverse population. This refers to a robust partnership between the local industry and the school focused on the senior years of schooling and the post-school pathways. This focus has been sustained with an investment in the school's vocational facilities, including a *Skills Centre* (a collaboration between state government and local industry).

CHAPTERS OUTLINE

The next three chapters provide the rural and educational context and the normative framework of justice that informs this book. In these chapters I draw and reflect on my interdisciplinary research interests: from education research and rural studies to sociology of youth and political theory, to depict the profound changes in education, rural spaces and youth lives and to offer an analysis of what a normative plural social justice can look like. Chapter 2 is divided into two parts. In the first part I problematize the idea of rurality through an analysis of the economic, political, and social changes that occurred in rural Australia in the last decades. Examining these changes is critical if we want to understand the dynamic social context of rural communities that affect the processes and outcomes of education, and the post-school opportunities for students. The analysis of rural change is based on the multifunctional rural transition framework, with its landscapes of production, amenity and conservation, and on the impact of "roll-back" and "roll-out" neoliberal policies in the creation of new rural spaces and subjectivities based on resilience and individual (regional) responsibility. The second part of the chapter looks at the centrality of rural education in educational research and a historical analysis of the place of rural education in policy. A central claim throughout this chapter is the increasingly peripheral position of rural education and rural affairs in the educational and social and economic imagination of the nation. In Chap. 3, I continue my examination of the state of rural education placing the

focus on what happens in rural schools. I do it firstly by mapping the broad changes in Australian education policy in the last few decades: from a progressive politics in the 1970s to the hegemonic dominance of the neoliberal project. This project not only has redefined the idea of social justice, through the marriage of efficiency and productivity with equity, but also transformed what it means to teach and learn in schools. In particular, teachers' work has been affected by neoliberal policy technologies of performativity, accountability, and marketization, generating boundaries of what is possible in the classroom and at school. Needless to say, this does not mean teachers are not able to transcend these boundaries but it does mean that the task has become harder. These challenges are complicated by the difficulties of recruiting and retaining teachers in rural schools, which has significant implications on the delivery of good quality education. Finally, drawing on research about the sociology of youth and mobility, the chapter analyzes the discourses that underpin the current normative idea of youth transitions associated with continuing with education well into their twenties, which for many young people in rural places means leaving their communities.

Chapter 4 provides the core theoretical work of this book. Here I explore what a plural idea of social justice might look like. I begin by explaining why universal, neutral and impartial conceptualizations of social justice are not useful to understand socially just situations, experiences or even policies to move on to three critical dimensions that pluralize the term. As mentioned earlier, I draw on the work of Iris Marion Young to overcome the shortfalls of liberal-egalitarian frameworks that presume that social justice outcomes will be attend through the proper and just distribution of material goods. I believe that focusing on the distribution of resources on schooling is just one critical dimension to attain socially just education but that rural people need and deserve other forms of justice, cultural and political, to overcome inequality and injustice. Hence, I move the argument forward toward issues of recognition and associational justice through the work of Young to encompass the different problems and solutions needed by rural schools.

The next three chapters are structured in time and space. The chapters are purposefully quite descriptive by bringing in the voices of school participants to highlight the heterogeneity of social justice claims and the economic, political, social, and environmental complexities that surrounds schooling in rural places. By temporally and spatially locating their experiences in the past, present and future, and school and post-school

pathways, I argue we can achieve a richer understanding of the context of participants' responses. I view time and space not as merely neutral objects but processes shaped by social structures and social relationships. Each social time and space is a singular process, albeit interdependent of others, which offer multiple meanings, they are socially produced and interpreted; they are a product of social relationships and take part in the construction of social relationships (Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1994; Soja 2010).

So, in Chap. 5, I examine how rural school participants understand social justice in relation to their experiences in the present institutionalized time and space of rural schooling. The meanings that participants give to social justice contribute to understanding what is going on in rural schools—the challenges and opportunities they face. In Chap. 6, I examine the post-school educational and employment options for rural young people, where a metamorphosis of social justice views is produced from the "certainty" of rural community life to the unpredictability of a future away from their local space due to the lack of opportunities. Participants' comments, however, offer a tension between the needs of youth to migrate and the sustainability of the town, and what is more challenging, a lack of recognition that some young people in both places cannot mobilize the needed resources to migrate and that in them lies the hope of the community. In Chap. 7, I highlight teachers' discourses and interventions that contribute to a more plural conceptualization of social justice and to resist, challenge and reshape the pressures and constraints of neoliberalism. I use the concept of hope as a heuristic tool to develop a narrative of change and inclusion for all members of the community and highlight different practices that show that a plural social justice is attainable. Five years after this study was carried out some of the challenges faced by rural schools and its participants continue. In the last chapter I examine these challenges and reflect on possible avenues of socially just change.

This book argues that social justice matters in the endeavor to address the disadvantages faced in rural schools. But discussion about social justice in rural education has been historically based on a narrow liberal consensus that sees leveling the playing field between urban and rural schools through more funding and material resources as the answer. In order to make it relevant in concrete ways and affect real social justice outcomes, this book presents what we can learn when we examine what social justice would look like for participants themselves and reveal it in all its rural complexity.

Notes

1. A plethora of empirical studies have looked into beliefs and meanings about the idea of social justice. These studies were developed in a wide-range of disciplines: political science, philosophy, public policy, social psychology, sociology, law, political economy, and political psychology, among others. For instance, several studies were concerned with income distribution and welfare matters, such as housing and health (e.g. Headey 1991; Hochschild 1981; Mitchell et al. 2003; Sefton 2005); others focused on the principles of equity and equality as allocation norms (e.g. Kahn et al. 1982; Törnblom and Jonsson 1987); some studies were concerned with justice in the workplace (Dubet 2009), and still others on the sense of (in) justice in the distribution of resources and grades in schools (Jasso and Resh 2002; Sabbagh et al. 2006). They, however, were based on liberal theories, mostly informed by distributive justice, focusing on the principles of equality, desert, and need.

2. A decade ago Arnold et al. (2005) already complained about the paucity of rural themes in the education literature, and only just recently Howley and Howley (2014) stressed the difficulties of rural education manuscripts to attract the attention of publishing houses and journals.

3. As an "outsider" to the environment of Australian rural schools, I had to rely on expert advice to meet potential research participants. During an annual meeting of the Victorian organization Country Education Project I was invited by a senior officer of the organization to visit several rural schools. From this trip I made a pre-selection of four schools as possible research sites. This trip to several schools and another that I undertook to a one-teacher school had a profound impact on me. I was impressed with the quality and quantity of the staff and infrastructure of the schools, which did not resemble the many impoverished rural schools I worked with in my native country Argentina (see Cuervo 2006). Principals of the four schools were contacted seeking interest and support in this project. While all principals show interest in it, I selected two research sites that reflected the variety of rural communities and schools, which have been shown to indicate differences in the experiences of rural people (Alloway et al. 2004; Kenyon et al. 2001).

4. A quarter of Highland residents are employed within the government sector—school and health post- while the sectors "other food product manufacturing" and "cafes, restaurants and takeaway food services." represent the other employment sector. Highland's unemployment rate in 2006 was below the national rate at 4.6 %, where a high proportion of the population is occupied as managers (mostly due to the high proportion of small independent businesses). The local median individual income, rent per week

and housing loan repayment was approximately two-thirds below the national figures (ABS 2006).

5. Both schools included students from families of poor socio-economic background, small business people, farmers struggling with the drought, Indigenous families and parents from professional background.

6. The school newsletter publishes and promotes news and events related to the school and to the community as well. It is common to find stories related to the drought and community events, including extra-curricular activities that involve the whole community. Interestingly, there are several stories that celebrate the anniversary of the establishment of family-owned farms with the hope that they remain in the "family name for many more years to come". According to the annual school report, the predominant parental occupation is farming (grain growing).

7. A school report also claimed there was an improvement in student connectedness with key staff receiving training in "Restorative Practices" and in "Understanding Poverty".

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Understanding Rural Communities and Education Policy

Rural schools operate within the context of their communities. Whether or not they operate in a socially just way must be seen in relation to the opportunities and challenges these communities face, both socioeconomically and within the national education policy arena. In much of the education research and policy, rurality is seen as a static notion—usually defined in terms of deficit. This ignores the dynamics that shape and change rural spaces, the social relations, processes, and outcomes for both individuals and communities as a whole. Dramatic social changes experienced in the last few decades as a result of global processes and neoliberal policies make it timely to analyze the idea and practice of rurality, its relevance within the national political and economic context and in the education policy landscape.

In the first part of this chapter I am interested in examining the spatial, socioeconomic, and political forces to help us understand what is occurring for rural communities and their schools. In the second part, I examine how from the socially progressive education policy era of the 1970s rural issues have been relentlessly decentered—from the core to the periphery of these policy frameworks.

Rural communities and their schools face very real challenges, which I will explore here. My intention, however, is not to reinforce a deficit view of rural communities and schools or hark back to some quixotic rural idyll. Both would be a misconception. My aim is to understand the complex present (and past) of rural communities and of rural education policy to

better understand the context in which rural school participants define social justice in relation to their experiences.

The Idea of Rural

In a recent effort to "re-center" rural education research, Corbett and White (2014) make a series of important considerations about how rurality is commonly understood and presented. They argue that it is viewed as a residual space outside the intellectual imagination of modernity, with an agenda shaped and set by urban interests, and usually depicted in binary terms. A great proportion of this binary construction of rurality is sustained by public policy. For example, the last two decades of Australian rural education policy have been saturated with bureaucratic definitions of rurality. These common bureaucratic definitions of rural are based on socio-spatial characteristics, such as identifying rural as localities with fewer than 1000 people, or according to the geographical distance to a major urban center of 250,000 people (BITRE 2008), or as an area with fewer than 20,000 people not receiving welfare support (Country Areas Program [CAP] funding) (Victorian Submission to Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1999). Policy reports in the 1970s and 1980s, such as *Schooling for Rural Australia*, also sustained this dichotomy, rural-urban, by establishing rural as everything outside the metropolis. While these definitions aim to define the boundaries of those entitled to distributive policies (e.g. which teachers qualify for additional monetary support for working in a rural school), they offer problematic views of what is to be rural. They continue to construct rural in opposition to urban spaces, as the disadvantaged "other," as homogeneous entities located "simply out there" (Letts et al. 2005; see also Moriarty et al. 2003; Waterhouse 2005). In their influential essay on rural development and policy, Sher and Sher (1994, p. 8) argued that government reports are largely responsible for the "deficit" view of rural Australia as a "weak periphery" of the "strong core" represented by urban areas, therefore promoting homogeneity rather than diversity. Constructions of rural life through the creation of a dichotomy continue to assume a totality or unity: either of deficit or of prosperity.

This binary view of rural as urban's "other" has also a strong place in the social sciences, where rurality's invisibility is anchored in the roots of modernity with its urban development and modernization (Bonanno and Constance 2003; Cloke 2006; Lockie 2001). This "othering" of the

rural space by modernity works in two levels: first, to portray rural places, people, lifestyles, and modes of production as backward vis-à-vis urban complex industrialization and progress. The literature on contemporary cosmopolitanism, for instance, is plethoric on this depiction of rural places and people as past-oriented, traditionally unsophisticated, and fixed in time and place. The cosmopolitan subject is urban, future-oriented, competent, flexible, mobile, and sophisticated (Cheshire et al. 2014). Second, it has also reinforced the idea of the rural idyll with its strong social cohesion and traditional values of solidarity and egalitarianism against urban chaotic and individualistic life. This common positive view of rural life is usually "rooted in nostalgia" rather than any recognition of the rural as vital, dynamic, and of the present (Vanderbeck and Dunkley 2003, p. 242). It views rural communities as a "safety deposit box" that stores a nation's most valued and fundamental ideals (Lichter and Brown 2011, p. 568). This view of homogeneous rural life rooted in moral traditional values has been lately challenged by globalization with its time-space compression and the increasing diversity in rural population, to the stability and authenticity of the identity of rural communities. As Massey (1994, 2005) and Sibley (2006) would see it, a strong sense of identity constructed around the idea of a solid homogeneous community can be used as an antidote to the rapid social and economic changes experienced by many rural communities. Massey, however, finds these ideas of spaces as homogeneous and static as problematic, given that for her, spaces and places are conceptualized in terms of their dynamic social interactions, with its multiple identities and internal conflicts. Massey is right in pointing out the problematic aspect of culturally homogeneous and tranquil rural life, as this view obscures other social realities and fails to acknowledge the diversity and many complex issues faced by rural people. In this vein, understandings of rurality are better seen through the lens of each particular social, political, ecological, economic, and cultural context and through the meaning that the rural has for people in that space.

The Multifunctional Space of Rurality

Binary constructions of rurality that presuppose a totality or unity, either romantic or deficitarian, are unable to explain important economic, social, political, cultural, and ecological transformations of rural spaces which have a direct impact on schools and communities. They tell us very little of the challenges and opportunities faced by rural school teachers

and students, and provide a limited contribution to understanding how socially just rural schooling is. The explanation of the large-scale transformations occurring in rural spaces over the last three decades needs an interdisciplinary approach to render visible how social change, and continuity, affects everyday life, including locating processes and outcomes of schooling in rural spaces.

Rural Restructuring

The last three decades have witnessed profound and complex changes in rural spaces. Rural communities in Australia, and around the world, are facing important challenges (ABARE 2008; Alston 2002; BITRE 2008; Bourke and Lockie 2001; Corbett 2007; Cuervo and Wyn 2012; Falk 2001; Johns et al. 2000; McManus et al. 2012; Squires 2003; Tonts and Haslam-McKenzie 2005; Yang and Fetsch 2007). Nonetheless, while many of these challenges are not unique to rural areas, not all non-metropolitan areas are struggling, with some coastal areas and mining towns showing a positive economic and social growth. McManus et al. (2012) correctly state that analysis of rural Australia is full of images of decline, abandonment, and despair. They point out, however, that many of these depictions are not unfounded. For example, the last decades have seen a steady decline of the share of the agricultural sector in the national gross domestic product. In addition, severe drought conditions in the first decade of this new century in the state of Victoria, where this study is based, witnessed production for the majority of the broadacre crops fall by 50 % or more and livestock numbers become lower than in previous decades (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2008b). Demographic change is another important factor affecting the position of rural. In 1911 approximately 43 % of Australians lived in rural areas compared to 12 % in 2007 (ABS 2008a). Between 1991 and 2001, almost half of Victorian rural towns and localities experienced a loss of population (Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee [RRSDC] 2006), with migration not just to urban but also regional centers and coastal areas. Advances in agricultural technology have meant that large farms can be now worked by fewer workers. For example, in the past decade there has been a trend to fewer but larger farms: from 150,000 to 130,000 (Welch 2007, p. 72). Farm employment, as a total of Australian employment, has declined from a 28 % in 1933 and 15 % in 1954 to 3.3 % in 2007 (Brett 2007; Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research [DIISR] 2007). Gill (2011)

suggests that the number of farmers in Australia will drop 30 % to 50 % between 1996 to 2021, with only one hundred thousand people stating farming as their occupation. The employment landscape of rural Australia, once dominated by farmers has shifted its gravity toward the service, and health and education sectors.

In the Global North, particularly in Great Britain, these processes of rural change, more specifically in agricultural activities, have also been depicted (particularly in geography studies) in a dualistic way: from the "productivist" postwar years based on a sharp increase in the capitalization and cost-effectiveness of farming production (Woods 2011) to a "post-productivist" era that depicts the complex changes in agriculture policy and practice, including the decline of farming in the rural space and the national economy to open room for new social groups, different forms of production, and an increase in consumption and environmental protection.[1] In Australia, John Holmes's (2006) conceptual framework, the "multifunctional rural transition," provides a nuanced and holistic way to understand the economic, social, demographic, and political changes that have occurred in the Australian rural space.[2] Holmes's framework depicts several distinctive modes of rural occupance[3] based on three meta-purposes of human use of rural spaces: *production*, *consumption*, and *protection*. He claims that the use of rural spaces has undergone a shift from traditional dominant production goals to more multifaceted appraisal, allocation and management of land which entails a more complex, heterogeneous, and contested spatiality. These different modes of rural occupance are propelled by three forces (Argent 2011; Holmes 2006). First, *agricultural overcapacity*: where technological advances in farm production have driven agricultural intensification and the creation of large-scale farms, and the subsequent exodus of farming families in the last three decades, creating more cost-efficient units. The landscape is not only composed of larger agricultural enterprises, but it includes conversion of farms into nonfarm uses based on consumption mode and associated with counterurbanization processes. Second, *the emergence of market-driven amenity-oriented uses*: connected to the previous force demographic and production changes have led to an increasing consumption of rural spaces, which have attracted new (permanent or part-time) residents and new investment opportunities associated with the service sector (e.g. tourism), including the possibility for farming families to make an income from nonfarm activities. Third, *changing societal values*: the rural landscape is shaped by an increasing concern by the community and government

agencies with the sustainability of natural resources and the environment. In this third force concerning issues of land protection and conservation, Holmes also includes the recognition and safeguard of the rights and cultural values of Indigenous people. These three spaces provide a more complex, heterogeneous, and contextual approach to the idea of rurality than exogenous binary constructions. While some regions might be more production or amenity oriented, the different social landscapes are dynamic and in constant flux, and thus can overlap generating a variety of demands and responses from different local, national, and global actors.

The Impact of Neoliberal Policies in the Farming Industry

The creation of these different modes or social landscapes of rurality need to be understood also through the impact of neoliberal policies. This is a complex task to do with such a polylithic political project. As Peck and Tickell (2002, pp. 381–382) have put it, "neoliberalism is everywhere"; it has become the common sense of our times, the ultimate framework for all social, economic, and political explanations. They are right in pointing out that it has become a framework that has influenced a plethora of local, national, and transnational programs and policies shaping the role of the state and its relationship with individuals and communities. In Australia, a shift in agricultural policy during the last three decades of neoliberal policies established trade liberalization as a means to increase the sectors' contribution to the national economy (Dibden et al. 2009; Pritchard 2000). Like in many other countries, the policy project of liberalization of the agricultural sector included the abolishment or reduction of tariffs and quotas on agricultural products; the dismantlement of statutory marketing authorities; and the simplification of industry regulatory regime (Brett 2007; Dibden et al. 2009; Gray and Lawrence 2001, Tonts and Haslam-McKenzie 2005; Kenyon et al. 2001; Lockie and Higgins 2007; O'Neill and Argent 2005). The federal government argument supporting trade liberalization was sustained under the premise that only the large farms with economies of scale were able to profit in a competitive international market. To these significant changes in agricultural sector, the state initiated a pulling away from interventionist programs by rolling back the provision of public and basic services that were once the backbone of rural development (Brett 2011; Tonts 2000; Woods 2006).

Neoliberal reforms promoting the privatization of national companies, the deregulation of public transport, and the restructuring of traditional services, such as with the closure of postal offices or bank branches, impacted harder in rural communities, as they generally offer a lower (population) demand and rate of return for these services. This policy phase is defined by Peck and Tickell as "roll-back," based on transforming the state and social-collective institutions through deregulation processes and the disinvestment and pulling back in the provision of basic and public services by the state. These policies impacted particularly in the viability of small farms, whereas farmers struggling were encouraged to "exit the industry" (Halpin 2003a, b),[4] but also in the sustainability of rural communities in agricultural areas. The emphasis was placed on market mechanisms to promote regional efficiency and competitiveness (Tonts and Haslam-McKenzie 2005) and viewing farmers as a business class rather than in their traditional cultural and nation-builder role within the Australian identity (Brett 2011).

Peck and Tickell (2002) persuasively argued that processes of neoliberalization contain a destructive and creative phase. To the destructive "roll-back" phase that dismantled many of the protections and entitlements of the welfare state era, followed a "roll-out" phase that aimed to ameliorate some of the detrimental impacts (e.g. growing inequality and marginalization, declining communities, and a political backlash against traditional parties) experienced by rural places but also the creation of a new kind of rural subjectivity. This new subjectivity entailed the process of reshaping farmers as business owners and entrepreneurs, and individual capacity rather than structural factors as the factor for the viability of farms and towns. It involved a transfer of the responsibility and risk from the government to communities and individuals, including new roles for the state and citizens and new forms of governance and institution building through state interventions (Gill 2011). While some degree of responsibility was transferred from state to regional and local levels, this did not necessarily come with the needed financial resources to successfully manage this process (Tonts and Haslam-McKenzie 2005). Localities, communities, and regions received assistance through education and training programs to develop a self-reliant culture and approach to manage their problems regardless of the nature of these (Gray and Lawrence 2001; Lockie and Higgins 2007).

Responsibility and Resilience as the New Rural Subjectivity

This new subjectivity presupposed a change in the nature of governance in rural space with a central idea of promoting resilience and self-reliance on communities to solve structural problems. The goal was to construct endogenous leadership, underpinned by a self-help ethos in the community, to counteract the impacts of globalization and climate events (Cheshire 2006; Gray and Lawrence 2001). A critical argument here is that community actions of revitalization and sustainability should be led by those in the ground who are more acute to the diversity of the landscape and its population. The need to exit the industry if not viable, as mentioned above, is an example of the new type of citizen promoted by the state: one that is able and prepared to make rational (hard) choices in the new economic landscape. The development of this new kind of responsible subjectivity is not just part of the rural landscape but a requisite to fully participate in society regardless the structural conditions affecting the person. Managing risks individually and becoming self-reliant is mobilized as part of a new relationship between the citizen and the state and failing to do so might entail being excluded from society's membership and the benefits of state support (Cheshire 2006; Gill 2011; Rose 1992). Communities and farmers who did not adapt to these new practices were subject to policy mechanisms and pressures to correct their practices or abandon their places (Lockie and Higgins 2007; Higgins 2001). Needless to say, no top-down approach works as efficiently as its policy wish for, and examples of adoption of neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility and self-reliance (Halpin and Guilfoyle 2004) and of resistance to these changes (Gill 2011) can be found in the literature.

This notion of self-resilience as a condition *sine qua non* to make it work in the new rural landscapes appealed not only to neoliberals but also to those committed to social justice. Indeed, resilience and self-reliance is celebrated as a positive aspect of empowered social actors to produce positive change and take control of their lives. Lynda Cheshire's (2006) Foucauldian analysis of the shift in the contemporary use of political power on the discourse of self-help in rural development policy shows new individualistic and entrepreneurial approaches to rural practices coexisted with traditional practices of mutuality, solidarity, and volunteering that have epitomized the character of rural Australians. Gill (2011) agrees with Cheshire insofar relationships between citizen and state also encompass

mutuality and reciprocity, a moral contract that while fluid and contingent it continues to reserve responsibilities and obligations for both parties. This latter approach, resilience and responsibility, resonates with the strong tradition of egalitarianism present in Australian history and in particular in the rural ethos.

The Idea Egalitarianism

Important for the thesis of this book is to take a moment to look at the historical gravitas that the notion of egalitarianism has in rural Australia. Embedded in the romantic view of rural life and community sustainability are notions of social justice. The construction of rural life underpinned by the belief in strong social ties is reflected in the idea of rural towns as close-knit communities, places based on freedom and security, of certainty and predictability. The significance of this conceptualization is that it presupposes that notions of "mateship" and "egalitarianism" are strongly present in rural communities. These notions are sturdily related to principles of social justice, such as mutuality, associational and distributive justice.

Historical studies in rural values and culture trace the notions of mateship and egalitarianism to the colonial convict era (Ward 1966). Ward (1966) argues that anti-authoritarian and egalitarian notions in the Australian society were introduced with the arrival of the convicts, whom he views as Australia's "founding fathers." Social historians affirm that these values developed through the nineteenth century and became a characteristic of Australian rural people with the influx of free convicts and settlers from the towns to the bush (Davison 1978; Waterhouse 2005). Since the establishment of Federation, according to Brett (2007, p. 3), "there has been an Australian commitment to equality" with a significant place for a "commitment to regional equality," where the foundation of what meant to be Australian encompassed certain social entitlements that would guarantee a basic but dignified standard of living. This historical understanding of a regional equality was epitomized in an understanding that rural people needed to be compensated for living farther away from the comfort and services that growing urban areas enjoyed. This agreement or settlement between country and city was mediated by the state and permeated by a notion of egalitarianism and shared responsibility in the task of nation-building (Brett 2007). This, understanding, however, has been eroded with the above mentioned changes of state-citizen

relationships and the new realities of the different social, economic, and political relevance of the different spaces.

The Political Displacement of Rural Issues

Economic, technological, and demographic changes have certainly had an impact on the position of rural people and places in the public policy conversation. A greater dependence of the service and mining sectors reduced the political purchasing power of many rural sectors and communities. The decline of rural Australia's relevance does not mean it has vanished from the national agenda. For example, government relief for farming families hit by the drought or flooding is still expected by the public and the media. Nonetheless, "the balance of power between the city and the country has shifted" (Brett 2007, p. 10), where as a result, rural communities are pushed further to the periphery in the policy agenda. A Senate Inquiry into poverty in 2004 provides an example of this point. None of the 95 recommendations made by the Committee related to farm incomes and only a few referring to rural and regional areas: service delivery; infrastructure development; employment and social development initiatives; and relocation of businesses to regional areas (Senate Community Affairs References Committee 2004, pp. xxiv–xl, cited in Botterill 2007, p. 40). Even more, Botterill (2007, p. 41) argues that in the last two decades the agricultural policy differences between the Labor and Liberal parties are strikingly slight, thus denoting a low responsiveness to rural needs and/or a low effectiveness by rural interest groups in lobbying both major political parties. As Brett (2007, p. 14, emphasis in original) convincingly states, "at one time the problems *of* the country were the problems *for* the country as a whole."

The social and political changes identified by Holmes's multifunctional transition framework and by Brett's idea of the politics of displacement reflect a new arena in the political struggle in rural places. Michael Woods (2006, p. 579) identifies a shift in Anglo-speaking countries (Australia, New Zealand, the UK, the USA) from a "rural politics" to "a politics of the rural": the former refers to traditional agrarian politics, and the latter focuses on the regulation of the rural space and the central meaning of rurality. This "politics of the rural" moves the agenda beyond mere agricultural interests to include phenomena affected by neoliberal policies such as closure of schools, rationalization of public services, maintenance of infrastructure, the idea and role of community, and the rise

from invisibility of a politics of difference in rural towns. This new politics of rural means not only an incursion of rural people and interests into the vast world of social policy and away from the enclosure provided by agrarian politics in the past, but also the demonstration of the plurality of actors and voices and understandings of what the rural means. At the core of this political transformation and struggle is the very meaning of "rural identity" with its defense, from internal and external forces that aim to define it, by a fragmented and plural movement of rural activists doing a new way of politics (Woods 2006). This defense of rural identity and its way of life includes social struggle over threats to cuts of delivery of basic and public services (e.g. health, education, transport, commerce, and communication).

The point I want to stress is that as the Australian economy relies less on the agricultural sector, and as rural towns suffer population and public and private services losses, rural issues have been displaced from the center of the policy agenda to a peripheral position. This displacement makes rural communities more vulnerable to a neoliberal agenda that views rural Australia as a minor partner in the nation-building process, particularly the rural non-mining areas, dismissing its claims for its traditional special treatment—except in dire emergency, such as drought or bush fires. In sum, issues of rural decline are not just circumscribed to the social and economic sphere but to the political too.

Is Rural Education Peripheral to Research?

I want to turn now to issues of rural schooling, more specifically, to the importance of rural education in the macro-context of policy and research in education. Schooling in rural areas has usually been portrayed within the same dichotomy as rural life: rural–disadvantage and urban–advantage. Like life in rural communities, rural schooling offers advantages and disadvantages, some of these are factual and some belong to mythological or romanticized conceptualizations. However, what is important for rural schools is that in the literature and in policy, rural education still occupies a peripheral position in relation to the field of education studies which is dedicated in the main to generic themes or urban schooling.[5] As Brennan (2005) argues, a search in educational conferences and academic journals highlights the "invisibility" of rural themes in education research.[6] What is palpable is a paucity of research regarding rural schooling and a metro-centric bias in research that reduces rural education to a

specialist but discrete area. This problem is not unique to Australia but is of international concern (see Howley and Howley 2014). A literature review of rural education research studies between 1991 and 2003 in the USA found the same kind of invisibility for rural issues, with scarce funding available for research in rural education spaces (Arnold et al. 2005). In Australia, while there is a plethora of government and academic research, for instance, into the demand and supply of teachers and many of them covered issues that might be relevant to rural schools, but very few of them are solely dedicated to the study of in-depth issues concerning rural schooling. For example, the inquiry into pre-service teacher training in Victoria offers 44 recommendations to improve the education of future teachers (Parliament of Victoria 2005). While some of these broad recommendations have resonance to rural schools no specific recommendation is provided for improving the conditions of teachers working and living in rural areas.[7]

What persists in almost any issue around researching rural schooling is a "fixed binary opposition"—disadvantage/advantage—compared to metropolitan issues. The view of rural education as in decline and in need resembles the same aforementioned homogenization of rural life. In opposition to this negative or deficit views of rural education, researchers have showed that there is a history of innovation and overcoming barriers, for example, circumventing the physical barrier of distance that the Australian landscape offers, through the creation of the *School of the Air*[8] and other educational services (Moriarty et al. 2003; Wyn et al. 2001). Moriarty and colleagues believe that far away from the urban bureaucratic gaze has enabled rural educators to experiment with new initiatives tailored a curriculum that resonates with the ecological space of students. Researchers have also argued that innovation in the delivery of education for rural and remote schools is the product of an interconnection between rural and urban spaces; which even questions the notion of remoteness in an era of globalization (Evans 2003). Corbett (2013) makes a similar point when arguing that rural youth and communities are plethoric of innovative capacity which can be traced to improvizational traditions of the frontier man and agricultural practices. In other words, creativity and innovation is hardly an exclusivity of urban qualities. Beyond a few positive views and many negative portrayals of rural schooling, the undeniable issue is the low profile that it has in that broad world of education research—because much of what passes as "generic" education studies really refers to "urban" education or education for urban spaces.

The Place of Rural Education in Policy Documents

Even though rural education remains a "poor cousin" within the research education field, since 1970s state and federal policies have aimed to improve the condition of rural schooling. Foremost, what these policies share is a view of rural education that faces different challenges from urban education and a need to improve the access and quality to school and post-compulsory education and training for rural people. By the mid-1970s, a number of research studies and government reports had documented several disadvantages embedded in rural education, including a lack of access to schools faced by rural students; an inferior quality of rural school facilities to those of metropolitan schools; a lack of access by students to careers counseling or work experience; meager advisory and auxiliary educational services; poor motivation of students and lower levels of achievement than their urban counterparts; a more restricted curriculum (especially for secondary level); a high proportion of inexperienced teachers and a high turnover of teachers; poor or limited accommodation for teachers and students; and limited work opportunities for school leavers (Connell 1993b). In addition to this long list of problems, curricula were found to lack relevance to rural people. Rural schools were mostly "carbon copies of urban schools," neglecting the needs of rural communities (Brown and Maisey 1980, p. vii).

One of the first federal reports to look into rural schools' disadvantages, and needs, was the *Report for the Triennium 1976–78* (Commonwealth Schools Commission 1975). A year later, a federal inquiry looking into the relationship of poverty and education, *Poverty and Education in Australia*, recognized "that success in school and in the competition for rewarding careers" was dependent on factors such as social class, ethnicity, and geographical location (Fitzgerald 1976, p. 227). The report was explicit in identifying the importance of a school's geographic location in the competition for post-school rewarding careers and argued that this disadvantage was aggravated by a schooling system that contributed to maintain the social reproduction of power and status. In 1977, on the advice of the Schools Commission, the federal government reflected its objectives of social justice and equity with the launch of the *Disadvantaged Country Areas Program*. The program focused on equalizing educational opportunities by increasing access for rural students to relevant educational resources and curriculum options. It was differentiated from other programs, such as the *Disadvantaged Schools Program*, in that whole areas

rather than individual schools were identified. In addition, it was intended to reverse the priority, mostly in terms of grants, given to metropolitan schools by the *Disadvantaged Schools Program* (Connell 1993b). The program promoted innovative strategies and programs to reach rural and isolated schools, thus improving access, participation, and retention rates, while also taking into account the size and remoteness of the rural community at the time of allocating funds (Connell 1993b; Share et al. 1994). In other words, it focused on providing more and better services for rural schools, including upgrading school facilities, access to specialist programs in music, physical education, technical education and special education and vocational guidance.

However, many of these rural programs were short-term projects. According to Connell (1993b) many programs implemented in the 1970s and 1980s, like the *Country Areas Program*, were valuable and interesting formulations for reform but they failed to have any significant impact because they were not given the appropriate time to develop their full potential. These programs were subject to the political and economic short-term interest of their administrators who preferred immediate measurable outcomes, overlooking the fact that many programs need several years to take effect. In other words, incrementing resources in a school is not a measure of improvement, "but only of *potential* for improvement" (Connell 1993b, p. 499, emphasis added).

As a consequence of the report *In the National Interest: Secondary Education and Youth Policy in Australia* (Curriculum Development Centre 1987), which accounted for the inequalities in educational outcomes confronted by rural youth, a further report, *Schooling in Rural Australia* (Commonwealth Schools Commission 1988) became the first study to exclusively focus on the needs of rural Australians (Share et al. 1994).[9] The report also focused on broadening the limited access to educational material and a comprehensive curriculum for a greater number of people living in rural areas, including Indigenous people in remote communities. It also drew attention to what is still a pressing issue: the continuity and quality of teaching. Some of the recommendations of *Schooling in Rural Australia* were also adopted in subsequent federal educational policies, such as: *Strengthening Australia's Schools* (Dawkins 1988) and *A Fair Go: The Federal Government's Strategy for Rural Education and Training* (Dawkins and Kerin 1989). While the policies advocated and looked to promote social justice and equity principles, and a better quality of education for all Australians; they had as a paramount idea providing

access to disadvantaged sectors of society. The whole premises of these reports and policies of the 1970s and 1980s focused on disadvantage, chiefly in terms of access to resources. In other words, the main objective was providing rural people with an "equality of provision" as the one enjoyed by the metropolitan population rather than focusing on a higher level of quality of education or the relevance of education for rural communities. What they ignored is that rural schools face a more complex mission than metropolitan schools, such as equipping their students for a post-school career both in their local and in an alien (the urban) environment. Although the authors of the 1970s reports would have hoped differently, this complex mission is even more relevant nearly 30 years later, deep in the twenty-first century.

FROM EDUCATION TO TRAINING

It is important to note that while in the 1970s and 1980s the focus of *disadvantage* and *access* were placed at the top of the list of priorities in the 1990s the focus shifted to the promotion of *further and higher education and training*. This could be explained by two factors: first, schooling in rural Australia had been greatly improved, in terms of resources, access, and even in quality, in comparison to previous decades. Second, the federal and state governments began to put the accent in restructuring the economy and responding to the changing labor market and the competitiveness of the international market, through the development of high-technology industries in manufacturing and services. As stated by Wyn et al. (2001), in the late 1980s and 1990s federal and state governments fostered and strengthened access to training for rural Australians to meet Australia's economic development needs. One of the pursued avenues was by the implementation of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes in regional and rural areas where rates of participation were still relatively low and there was room for improvement. The federal government report, *Toward a National Education and Training Strategy for Rural Australians* (National Board of Employment, Education and Training [NBEET] 1991), looked at the participation in education and training of rural Australians. It reported that rural students were disadvantaged in terms of access, quality, and appropriateness of post-compulsory education and training while recommending a national education and training strategy for rural Australians. A subsequent report, *Provision of Post-compulsory Education and Training in Non-Metropolitan Australia* (NBEET 1994),

argued for the need for a spatial dimension to the approach of resource allocation if the gap of participation rates in higher education between metropolitan and rural students wanted to be closed. The report advocated for a strong emphasis on the diversity of rural communities and its needs.

Late in the 1990s and in the early years of this new century, rural education appeared to slowly move out of the peripheral position to occupy a more prominent place in the national education policy agenda. A *National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education* was set by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) across the Australian territory (HREOC 2000a). Together with this relevant study, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs established in 1999 a taskforce into Rural and Remote Education which developed two years later a *National Framework for Rural and Remote Education* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA] 2001).

In addition, in 1999 the federal government commissioned a study to look into *Rural and Isolated School Students and their Higher Education Choices.* Like its previous study almost a decade before, it also found a lower participation of rural students in higher education (James et al. 1999). Even though the participation of rural Australians in universities increased throughout the 1980s and especially 1990s, the relation of urban to rural students was four to one. The reasons were primarily socioeconomic, followed by location issues, that is, the place of residence and distance from home to the nearest campus. Socioeconomically, the main reasons were the cost of attending university for a rural students and their families–including moving to a metropolitan center, a lower belief that university could offer rural students the chance of an interesting and rewarding career and that a university qualification was not necessary to obtain the job they wanted or needed.

Rural Education: As If It Matters

The national inquiry by the HREOC has been arguably the most important study into the state and needs of rural education in Australia and into possible strategies for its improvement. The premises of the inquiry were to look at different interrelated issues: availability and accessibility of schooling, quality of educational services, and whether schooling complied with people's human rights (HREOC 2000a). It established a

multidimensional framework of free access to education involving normative, physical, and economic dimensions. It argued that for the provision of education to be effective in rural areas, there should be a sufficient quantity of functional and healthy educational institutions and programs that can cater to the diversity of rural population.

The inquiry found that many of the same issues policies and studies documented in the last three decades (e.g. Edgar 1979; Matthews et al. 2000; State Board of Education 1990; Sturman 1997) were still relevant for rural people. For example, distance was a critical rural education problem. Distance brings an economic cost that tends not to be covered by government funding programs or the busing system (HREOC 2000a). In terms of educational outcomes, school retention rates were lower for rural schools than metropolitan and the school performance of rural students lagged behind that of their metropolitan counterparts. Only 17 % of tertiary students were from rural and remote areas (HREOC 2000a, pp. 8–10). Other issues included the difficulties in attracting and retaining teachers, the lack of continuous and relevant professional development for the school staff, the lack of material resources, breadth of curriculum, and availability of information technology and extracurricular activities.

Thus the key issues for rural school people were provision, access, and quality of education, and within the access issue, cost, transport, and income support were important matters to parents and teachers of rural areas. People in rural and remote areas felt disadvantaged because they have to pay more for cost of travel and school boarding, loss of income and excursions to gain access to education (HREOC 2000a). Furthermore, matters of access are interrelated to issues of quality, where the monetary and temporal costs in gaining access to resources impacts on the quality of education that is possible to deliver. Students across Australia were also critical of the facilities they had in rural schools, such as libraries, sporting facilities, and technology provision. In sum, the feelings and perceptions of belonging to the periphery and of living and studying in disadvantage were very well represented in the inquiry.

However, not all views about rural schooling were positioned in terms of disadvantage by the Inquiry. Despite the sense of frustration about the daily barriers rural students, teachers and parents feel there is an appreciation of what rural schools can offer. Students, parents, and staff believed that their schools offered some advantages in school organization which led to a higher degree of individualized attention for students; a stronger cohesion between students and parents with the school and its staff;

easiness and flexibility in the implementation of innovations; and lower levels of student discipline problems (HREOC 2000a). Other schooling advantages reflected by rural people and in the rural literature have to do with growing up and learning in a caring environment and the development of a greater autonomy and responsibility by students. The HREOC inquiry reflects some of the advantages, in terms of students feeling that they are "listened" to by their school, and that in rural schools it is "easier to learn," and there is "more opportunities to learn and teachers do really care about if you pass or not" (HREOC 2000a, p. 6). These feelings of being considered were due to the class size, where in smaller classes there were greater opportunities for "one-on-one teaching" (HREOC 2000a, p. 30).

A Framework for Rural Schooling in Australia

The *Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education* (HREOC 2000b) produced a set of recommendations in the face of the disadvantages it found in rural schooling in Australia. In it, the Inquiry established a framework with five necessary features for rural schooling: *availability*, *accessibility*, *affordability*, *adaptability*, and *acceptability*. Today, these features still encapsulate some of the most prominent issues for rural schools and people. Most importantly, they provide a useful framework to improve the quality of rural schooling and redress social injustices.

The first three features point out to a distributive need for change in the provision of rural education. *Availability* of education signified that government has a responsibility to facilitate adequate provision and maintenance of basic infrastructure, including school buildings ("a place to learn"), staff ("teachers and support staff"), curriculum ("subject matter"), and students ("learners") (HREOC 2000b, p. 37). The Inquiry emphasized that rural and remote schools have poor educational facilities, staff and specialist teachers are difficult to attract and retain and that students are offered a limited curricula. For *accessibility* the Inquiry referred to practical issues of access such as school transport with issues attending to safety and access, the good condition of roads, and availability and quality of regional school term hostels (HREOC 2000b). Furthermore, the Inquiry established that accessibility of education has also to do with a universal access to good quality of information and communication technologies, such as broadband access to Internet and satellite technology for distance education; increasing the numbers and accessibility of health

and disability support services; and introduction of regional Indigenous languages to be available as Language as Other Than English (LOTE) options. Finally, *affordability* of education is one of the main issues for rural people. The greatest disadvantage faced by rural people is cost to access education (HREOC 2000b). Issues of affordability permeate all areas of rural education and higher costs to pay limit the range of experiences and activities students can enjoy (Alston and Kent 2006). The financial assistance that rural parents receive is in many cases not enough to cover the additional costs of attending rural schools.

The other two features emanating from the Inquiry were related to a politics of recognition and participation for all students regardless of their social, cultural, economic background and interests, and a celebration of their social particularities. The Inquiry found that *acceptability* of school education was primarily an issue for Indigenous children and their parents (HREOC 2000b, p. 70). It recommended enhancing Indigenous content (including languages, culture, and history) in school curricula and incorporating Indigenous learning styles in delivery modes, thus making schools welcoming places for Indigenous children. *Adaptability* of school education meant that schools needed to be responsive to "individual needs and learning styles, local conditions, parent and community expectations and each student's aspirations and future prospects" (HREOC 2000b, p. 76). The Inquiry argued that school education has to be adaptable and responsive to local conditions in respect of "timetable," "curriculum" content, and "vocational education and training" (HREOC 2000b, p. 76). These five features represented a vanguardistic approach to a rural schooling that was usually mono-dimensional in its focus of better distribution of resources but not in a greater awareness of the need for diversity in schools.

A Return to the Periphery

The *National Framework for Rural and Remote Education* set by MCEETYA (2001) can be seen as the culmination of an effort to overcome many of the endemic problems attached to rural education. The Framework was a response to "Recommendation 4.5" of HREOC national inquiry and its purpose was to establish a framework for the development of nationally agreed policies and support services. The idea was to develop consistency in the delivery of high-quality education services and

to facilitate partnerships building between government and nongovernment providers of services and support in rural schooling.

The MCEETYA Taskforce followed the recommendation of the HREOC national inquiry into the need to "develop a national rural education policy" (MCEETYA 2001, p. 3), that is, to remove rural education from the place of "poor cousin" into the center of education policy. However, despite the promises to ensure a broad provision of access to a high quality of education for rural and remote students the framework delivered few results to address the endemic problems. According to Pegg (2007), the framework was never positioned as a priority policy area to generate action but as a supplementary framework within the vast work of MCEETYA through its multiple taskforces and working groups. Furthermore, the MCEETYA Taskforce on rural education was disbanded, as has its successor, the *Taskforce on Targeted Initiatives of National Significance*. In sum, the momentum created to relocate rural education in the center of the national education policy has been lost. As a result, rural and remote education continues to be a peripheral area of educational policy.

The National Inquiry by the HREOC confirmed the perennial conceptualization of rural schools and students as disadvantaged. While some researchers (e.g. Boylan and Wallace 2007; Brennan 2005) are right to affirm that rural education is not only about deficit and disadvantage, different schooling outcomes across the board show that rural students still lag critically behind their metropolitan counterparts.

School completion rates show a disparity between the achievement of metropolitan and nonmetropolitan students. National studies have found that the social groups most likely to be early school leavers are, among others: those from nonmetropolitan areas; those whose parents were from lower socioeconomic strata; and those who were from government schools (Curtis and McMillans 2008; Department of Education and Early Childhood Development [DEECD] 2008).[10] Within Victorian regions apparent retention rates data depicts government schools in rural regions are lagging behind metropolitan ones and students from the most socioeconomic advantaged groups participate in education at much higher rates and for longer periods of time than the other groups (DEECD 2008). Results from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2006 reveal inequities throughout the Australian education system. The scientific, reading, and mathematical literacy levels of Australian 15-year-olds were significantly above the OECD average (Thomson and

De Bortoli 2008). However, when assessing the performance of an entire education system, "we should consider not only the quality of students' performances but also their equity" (McGaw 2009, p. 16). Students from rural and remote areas, from Indigenous backgrounds and from the lowest socioeconomic quartile performed below the OECD baseline.

The importance of years of schooling is also reinforced by the fact that completion of secondary school and participation in higher education are often linked to improved employment prospects, life opportunities, and higher incomes (Bradley 2008; Wyn 2009). The importance of rural schooling outcomes and post-school pathways is even more important in rural education since it is often seen an extractive activity, as a ticket out of the community where the smartest students are encouraged, and celebrated, for leaving (Alloway et al. 2004; Corbett 2007; Long et al. 2003). Schooling outcomes are generally measured in terms of not only the benefits or disadvantages for individuals but also the productivity of the national economy (Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2005) and local communities. Research in rural studies identifies that individual schooling outcomes also crucially impact on the communities themselves (Kilpatrick et al. 2003). Students' educational disadvantage translates into a disadvantage for the entire community. Education is a critical component of rural people's ability to respond to changing economic and social conditions and to the strengthening of rural communities' resilience and its vitality (Black 2005; Black et al. 2000; Dibden and Cocklin 2005). Furthermore, occupations in rural areas are becoming more dependent on the use of technology and of higher levels of education than of the manual labor skilled worker. This is true particularly for sectors such as mining and agriculture, where, for example, six of the seven most demanded agricultural occupations require trade-level qualifications or above (National Farmers Federation 2008). Thus, a poorer quality of education has a significant impact not only for individuals but also for their communities.

CONCLUSION

A key idea underpinning this chapter is the necessity to abandon dichotomies, static and deficit views of rural life. The point is not to homogenize the experiences of rural schools and communities. Rural landscapes have dramatically changed in the last quarter of a century offering and demanding new opportunities and challenges to its inhabitants, particularly to young people. Nonetheless, it would be naïve or romanticizing to neglect

that the broad scenario in which rural school people are inserted is, one of diversity but also of disadvantage. Rural education faces challenges both on account of the socioeconomic status of rural communities they are part of; the marginalization of rural schools within education policy; and the demonstrable lower educational outcomes. It is important, however, to state that I do no adhere to a "deficit" view of rural schooling, where everything and everybody is lacking. Rural schooling offers positive issues, including a long history of innovation, and leadership in education, and where strong notions of caring permeates teaching and learning relationships. In analyzing the last three decades of rural education policy it becomes clear that these policies have predominantly focused on "equality of provision" rather than the quality of education. Further, many of the disadvantages identified in policies and reports, especially the HREOC report are still prevalent in rural schooling today, a scenario that is difficult to redress if rural education continues to occupy a peripheral place in the research and policy arena. The significance of this marginalization of rural schooling is that it fails to raise the standards and quality of rural education—a quality that has ramifications for the future sustainability of rural communities and prospects of people in an age of rapid change. This raises critical issues for a socially just rural education.

NOTES

1. For discussions and critiques of post-productivism, see Halfacree (1997), Ilbery and Bowler (1998), McCarthy (2005), Shucksmith (1993), Wilson (2001).
2. It is important to note that geographers have also analyzed the concept of multifunctionality, with its strong and weak versions, but mostly concerned with agricultural issues (see Dibden et al. 2009; Wilson 2009).
3. These modes of occupance are: productivist agricultural occupance (production values dominant); rural amenity occupance (consumption values dominant); small farm or pluriactive rural occupance (mix of production and consumption values); peri-metropolitan occupance (intense competition between production, consumption, and protection values); marginalized agricultural/pastoral occupance (potential integration of production and protection values); conservation occupance (protection values emphasized); and Indigenous occupance (protection values emphasized). See Holmes (2006) for a detailed description of each mode.
4. Through the 1990s, farmers were offered assistance through different support programs such as the Rural Adjustment Scheme. Later, in 2007, the

Howard government offered farmers struggling to survive the drought taxable grants up to $150,000 to leave their land (for those farmers with assets less than $350,000), with a further $20,000 for retraining and relocation expenses (Topsfield 2007). According to the government, the aim of the package was to allow farmers to leave farms with dignity. Interestingly, the National Farmers Federation welcomed the package. Less than a year later, with Victoria having the greatest number of farmers in all states applying for the grant, only 411 applications were received of which only 8 % were approved for an average of $138,927 (Gray 2008).

5. Similar claims have been attributed to the neglect of rural youth within the field of youth studies (Cuervo and Wyn 2012; Kraack and Kenway 2002).

6. This invisibility was acknowledged by rural education researchers in the 1970s and 1980s nearly 30 years ago (e.g. Brown and Maisey 1980; Edgar 1979).

7. Furthermore, there is only one specific recommendation for Indigenous education (Recommendation 4.14).

8. The impossibility of face-to-face education in some isolated areas of Australia promoted innovative alternatives of distance education, such as: the *School of the Air* and *Correspondence School.* These services used technologies such as radio transceivers to communicate students and teachers (Wyn et al. 2001).

9. Previous reports focusing on schooling usually accounted for a chapter or a section of the general report, for example: the national report *Poverty and Education in Australia* (Fitzgerald 1976), the Tasmanian report *Tasmanian Education Next Decade* (Tasmanian Education Department 1978).

10. Other reasons include being from an Indigenous background, students from nonnuclear families, students who were low academic achievers, and those born in Australia (Curtis and McMillan 2008).

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Rural Teaching and Learning in Neoliberal Times

The last quarter of a century in Australian education policy has seen a significant shift from progressive social justice politics to an economization of schooling underpinned by the need to increase national productivity and skill-up the workforce to perform in a competitive international environment. This overarching theoretical and ideological framework is commonly referred as the neoliberal education project. The alignment of education policy with economic goals guided by neoliberal values and sensibilities does not entail abandoning the pursuit of socially just education but rather marrying efficiency and productivity with equity.

The significance for this book of the neoliberal project lies in the direct impact it has for rural teachers—and by extension the quality of rural schooling—as well as for rural students themselves. Teachers are now measured through policy technologies of accountability, managerialism, performativity, and the marketization of education, which has strong implications on what counts as a "good" teacher. The added pressure this imposes on teachers is a major factor in the delivery of quality rural schooling and on the recruitment and retaining of staff—a perennial issue in rural education that impacts the quality of schooling. These issues are analyzed in detail in the first two sections of this chapter.

In the final part of this chapter, I examine the impacts the neoliberal project has for students themselves—in particular their post-school pathways. Neoliberal policies have also shaped youth transitions and new ways of being for young people. Underpinning this is the idea of mobility and a naturalized view that more further and higher education is needed if

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young people are to have a future in the precarious labor market. As this chapter shows, for many young people in rural places the transition from secondary school to further and higher education demands a reconstruction of their belonging and forging new identities in urban spaces, due to the lack of local educational institutions and employment opportunities. If challenges in their schooling can be seen as the "first disadvantage," the need to become mobile and migrate to gain the necessary skills to make it work in the employment market can be seen as a "second disadvantage."

THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATIONAL POLICY SHIFT: TOWARD THE "OPPORTUNITY" SOCIETY

An examination of education policy since the 1970s reveals a shift from an ideal pursuit of social justice to an idea of education conceptualized in market terms in search of efficiency and excellence in education processes and outcomes. The 1970s saw a significant concern by the Whitlam Labor Government with social justice issues, symbolizing education as a progressive force in society. Australian educational policies, beginning with the Karmel report (1973) and with the creation of the *Commonwealth Schools Commission*, addressed the issue of equity and equal educational opportunity to promote the development of different disadvantaged groups, such as girls, Indigenous, and rural and remote students, through compensatory education programs, mostly focused on a politics of distribution (Haynes 2002; Henry et al. 1988).[1] The 1980s, however, marked the transition from "social engineering to economic restructuring" (Haynes 2002, p. 118).[2] This new radical educational focus was based on the need to restructure Australia's economy to make it competitive in the international market, including the production of a more flexible and multiskilled workforce. During the 1990s, the federal government, both Labor and Liberal, deepened its vision of restructuring the Australian economy amid a financial recession and the irreversible change to a service-industry economy (Clarke 2012; Cuervo and Wyn 2011; Keating and Klatt 2013; Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Seddon 2008). The aim was to shift government expenditure from traditional social welfare and education to training, to upskill the workforce and combat unemployment, particularly youth-focused after the demise of the full-time youth labor market, traditionally based on the primary and secondary sectors of the economy.[3]

This shift since the 1980s in Australia, as in many developed countries, has been seen as an economization of education policy to adjust to the "New Times." This represents a societal shift from a welfare to a neoliberal state or market-oriented society. Davies and Bansel (2007, pp. 251–252) correctly depict this shift from the "social state" to an "enabling state," where the goal is to provide individuals with the knowledge and tools to foster an entrepreneurial and resilient culture that can move away from traditional reliance of the welfare state apparatus. Political discursive and symbolic representations of this "New Times" argument became a prominent feature in major political parties' discourses, speeches, and electoral platforms. For instance, in his address to the *Coalition Campaign Launch* in the 2007 Federal election, Prime Minister John Howard summarized with one phrase the policy shift that occurred in the last three decades in Australia: "I want to complete the transition of this nation from a welfare state to an opportunity society" (Howard 2007). Howard's political philosophy was embodied with a neoliberal sensibility of freedom of choice, individual responsibility, personal self-reliance and enterprise. The 11 years of his government saw an increasing depoliticization of schooling materialized in the production of an education policy strongly linked to the production of human capital, the tight control and monitoring of teachers' work, and the dominant focus on high-stakes testing as a way to achieve innovation capacity and labor productivity to compete within the global economy.

The Labor federal governments of Rudd and Gillard, which succeeded Howard's, deepened the neoliberal project in education. Their policy discourse was framed by the then Federal Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, as "the school reform opportunity," under the banner of *A New Progressive Reform Agenda For Australian Schools* and with a rationale that married individualism and opportunity for all, efficiency and equity in education (Gillard 2008). It reaffirmed the centrality of many of the policy technologies of previous governments, such as managerialism, accountability, performativity, and marketization. The then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, for example, affirmed that his government will make no apology for giving parents every information they need to choose their children's school: "The whole idea is to make sure that schools are accountable for their performance. And part of accountability means that the parents and the students know how that school is performing against agreed standards" (Preston 2010, pp. 27–28). In the words of the Federal Education Minister (and Deputy Prime Minister), Julia Gillard, "we are kidding

ourselves if we say we are living in a world without league tables": the objective and result of "comparing" will "help governments better allocate resource and give parents more information about schooling options for their children" (Gordon et al. 2008, p. 12). In order to be able to identify underperforming schools the Federal Minister of Education called for greater transparency in schools by providing information about teachers' and students' performance to be compared, albeit between similar socioeconomic populations of students. Furthermore, as minister Gillard claimed, for parents "choosing the best school is little more than guesswork" (Ferrari and Nason 2008, p. 1).

This new agenda labeled by the last Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard as the *Education Revolution* aimed to place equity at the heart of social justice in education and with the goal of marrying it to the economic productivity of the nation. The commitment to equity and productivity had a number of implications for education policy and schooling. First, like their predecessors, the Labor government made in-roads through policy action into the space of authority of provincial states on matters of schooling with the introduction of a national system of accountability through the creation of the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), and My School website.[4] Second, differently to the previous federal government, it sought to redress an absence of a social justice approach in education with the introduction of a redistributive agenda based on needs through, first, the National Partnership Low Socio-Economic Status Schools and later the Gonski Review. A central quest was to redress what the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) PISA results were showing about Australia's education system: one of high quality and low equity (see McGaw 2009). The problem of low equity, or "pockets of disadvantaged," as Gillard put it (Gorur 2013), was to be operationalized, challenged, and solved through the creation of national uniform and comparable sets of (testing) data and socioeconomic index of students and schools. The introduction of these programs and education agency manifests the strengthening of the national presence in schooling through the construction of national space of measurement which enables "the possibility of governance across distances" (Lingard 2010, p. 132; see also Gulson 2007), resembling already in place global spaces of measurement and control through high-stakes standardized tests like PISA, which are

capable of providing parents and society at large with comparable metrics and information of students' progress.

The Pursuit of Equity and Excellence Under a Neoliberal Paradigm

In his analysis of the close relationship between British and Australian education policymaking of the last two decades, Savage (2011, p. 34, emphasis in original) argues that in both countries schools "are being imagined as *learning communities,*" a space where human and social capital can be constructed simultaneously through unfettered principles of productivity, competition, and enterprise together with notions of equity and equality of opportunity. However, Savage ultimately affirms that this marriage of excellence and efficiency (capitalism) and equity (social democracy) is doomed not due to an ontological opposition between excellence and equity but because societies are driven primarily by market demands privileging an ethos and praxis of competitive individualism over ideals of equity and care. In tracing the political discourse that promotes the false hope of assembling excellence and equity, he notes that the rearticulation by neoliberalism of a social democratic mantra (e.g. equality of opportunity for all) is based on the production of a highly skilled and flexible workforce rather than on human rights principles inherent to all individuals. This commitment to equity represented a deepening in the enactment of neoliberal policies that sustain systems of accountability and new ways of understanding, discussing, and representing social justice in education.

Implicit in Savage's analysis is, over the decades, the critical success of the neoliberal project in education in its ability to rearticulate its policies through social democratic discourses of social justice and equity. In contemporary education policy, national and global testing regimes and data infrastructure and the right to acquire and use capital to participate in economic markets are framed around the notion of equity (Lingard et al. 2014). Multiple layers of information are collected through testing regimes, such as NAPLAN and PISA assembling an infrastructure of big data that is meant to help parents choose school and to collaborate with governments' ability to know which students and schools are struggling and needing to be supported to lift their performance to the level of their successful peers. I agree with Lingard and colleagues that philosophical discourses about socially just schooling are being eroded,

while social justice is being rearticulated through the concept of equity by numbers and in the pursue of equal educational outcomes (see also Thomson 2013). Equity is practiced through the monitoring and auditing of groups portrayed as needing intervention and is being represented through graphs, rankings, and a multiplicity of correlations that are meant to contribute to determine how socially just schooling is. Gorur (2013) argues that traditional concepts in education studies such as "disadvantaged" and "advantaged" (students and schools) are deemed ambiguous and unclear and in the need to be reconfigured and translated into visible practices that can be compared such as national standardized tests and indexes of community socioeconomic disadvantage respectively to provide quantifiable certainty on who is progressing and who is falling behind in the education race. The key is the reconstruction of a (supposedly) chaotic and disorganized field of education and schooling into an organized space (market) through the development of national infrastructures of data that are now easily available through information technology. High-stakes testing regimes are a central component of the reconfiguration of social justice in education as equity by numbers, where inequalities and disadvantages can be ameliorated through the production of comparable information to track those that are performing and those that are not. In the creation of this quasi-market of education, where some government regulation still exists, equity is pursued through the "distribution of knowledge-as-a-thing," where the product of education, which can be audited and measured, is more important than the process and where teaching and learning are homogenized and proceed at the same pace for all students (Thomson 2013).

The Impact of Neoliberalism on Teachers

These regimes of high-stakes testing and the marketization of education also work to redefine the notion of "good teacher," while at the same time increases the pressure on principals and teachers to improve their results. Tests not just measure what constitutes but what produce "effective" and "good" teaching, which includes changes in pedagogy, curriculum, and the well-being of school staff and students (see Klenowski 2011; Mockler 2013; Polesel et al. 2012a, b; Senate References Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace 2010; Thompson and Cook 2014; Wyn et al. 2014). In what has become a classic in the analysis of teachers' work Stephen Ball (2001, p. 210) showed that these issues have been the pillars

to "a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation … that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change." Over the years, Ball's (2003, 2013) work has showed that the introduction of a culture of performativity has direct implications on what counts as a "good school," and a "good teacher," and a valuable, effective, and good-quality performance. It presents an apparent objectivity and hyperrationality, and changes the organization of the classroom and school goals and, most importantly, the very nature of what it means to be a teacher.[5] Of particular importance is the constitution of a new subjectivity for teachers, of "a particular set of practices through which [teachers] act upon [themselves] and one another in order to make them particular kinds of being" (Rose 1992, p. 161, cited in Ball 2001, p. 214). This "new teacher," adaptive and flexible, has to carry the responsibility of students' educational outcomes, and managing and promoting the school reputation, while also being attentive and responsive to her community.

Following Foucault's (1977) concept of "compulsory visibility" (which Foucault argues is a means of controlling individuals), teachers are made more visible through practices of surveillance and performance, constantly assessing not only students but also the teachers' own work. Thus, one of the most important implications of the neoliberal education project for teachers' work is a greater control of their work through a corporate managerialistic methodology, which produces a tension between the traditional ways of teachers knowing, talking about and enacting their work and managerial control. This control is rather indirect than direct; the idea is to "steer from a distance" through monitoring, testing, and reporting rather than through traditional, bureaucratic, line management approaches (Thrupp 2006). Admittedly, there are differences in the management regimes and styles across different schools. Further, teachers are not policy-proof or ideology-proof. Nonetheless, while teachers are not policy-proof, I would also like to raise caution toward a "celebration of indeterminacy" of teachers within education research. As Gewirtz (2002, p. 16) alerts us, there is a general optimism in education research founded in the belief on the capacity of teachers to contest powerful dominant ideological frameworks. It is correct to assert that teachers do have a history, experience, and their own values and vested interests and that they do not approach a policy as naïve readers. However, a belief that every single teacher is prepared or able to overcome systemic pressures can work toward legitimizing this culture of control, while neglecting patterns of domination and oppression occurring in schools.

Further, reports emanating out of the data from the first OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (OECD 2009) claim that what teachers want is more evaluation that recognizes their effectiveness and innovation in the classroom (see Jensen 2010). The OECD study surveyed lower-secondary school teachers to find that Australian teachers feel that evaluation is usually done as part of a bureaucratic routine demand and randomly to construct feedback toward developing better teaching practices. Like many other reports that call for reform, it starts from the premise that education and teaching is broken and a better evaluation and scrutiny on teachers' practices will conduct to more effective teaching (whatever "effective teaching" might entail). Nevertheless, different research studies reveal that teachers express being increasingly worried with the technical aspects of meeting targets and with a sense of loss of control over the goals and objectives of their work resulting in feelings of disempowerment, and the school as a competitive, divisive, and stressful workplace, including difficulties of balancing life and work and a lack of recognition of the increasingly demanding responsibilities placed on them by society (Australian Education Union [AEU] 2007a, 2015; Klenowski 2011; Polesel et al. 2014; Saulwick and Muller 2004; Thompson and Cook 2014; Wyn et al. 2014).[6] Polesel and colleagues, for instance, affirm that current high-stakes testing in Australia replicates similar experiences found in the international research literature (see Au 2008; Darling-Hammond 2010; Hout and Elliott 2011; Hursh 2008): the capacity of this testing regime to alter teacher practices, limited the curriculum and, thus, the learning experiences of students. The authors do point out that some high-stakes testing regimes enjoy support as a diagnostic tool and a mechanism to enhance consistency in teaching and comparison in learning (see Australian Education College [ACE]; Anderson 2009; Santiago et al. 2011); however, it is the narrow definition of education through tests scores and the relentless pressure and control on teachers' work that encounters opposition in a great part of the education sector. Further, some of these worries about teachers' work also extend to principals, where managerialistic practices produce a tension that can be summarized as "carer-versus-manager": between what they consider to be their primary responsibility (the learning and well-being of students) and the increasing demands placed upon them by the Victorian Department of Education, which led to a sense of being undervalued (Saulwick and Muller 2004). This is an issue of particular relevance in rural areas, where principals claimed to be affected by the withdrawal of other professional

services (e.g. banks and hospitals), "leaving them as the sole 'authority figure' in the area" (Saulwick and Muller 2004, p. 11).[7]

While it is correct to emphasize that teaching has always had to do with some elements of performance, the role of the teacher has been significantly altered in neoliberal times. My point, following Ball's (2001, 2006, 2013) argument, is that different aspects of performativity and accountability (e.g. comparisons and commodification) have become a sought type of information by parents and others involved in the education market, an official knowledge or truth that cannot be disputed, resulting in the commodification of knowledge. As Michael Apple (2006) convincingly argues, these policy technologies have strengthen the state through the production and control of knowledge, the redefinition of what counts as good education, and the empowerment of principals as managers and transforming teachers' work and lives to adopt an entrepreneurial ethos. In an even deeper sense, it has transformed how we talked about education, teaching, and learning and the production of knowledge.

In the following section, I move from a macro to a micro level of schooling. Thus, I will focus in the difficulties to staff rural schools and its implications on the quality of education delivered to students. Difficulties of staffing rural schools have a direct impact in the post-school pathways possibilities of young people.

Staffing Rural Schools

Two consistent pictures often emerge from policy and research studies on teachers in rural schools. First, the confirmation that teachers are critical in the quality of the educational experience of rural students; the quality of educational outcomes in the continuity and success of school policies and curriculum implementation; and in the development of a supportive professional community (Barley and Beesley 2007; Kline et al. 2013; Sharplin 2002; Welch et al. 2007; Wilkinson 2008). Second, many rural schools across Australia experience difficulty in recruiting staff, especially at secondary level (Boylan 2010; Frid et al. 2008; Hudson and Hudson 2008; Kline et al. 2013; Lock 2008; MCEETYA 2005; Owen et al. 2008; Preston 2005). The difficulty in attracting teachers to small rural towns is described in the efforts undertaken by this community in East Gippsland to impress a candidate teacher:

> The day [the teacher] arrived for her interview, community ambassadors had organised her accommodation, a spot sightseeing, introductions about town and a cheery counter meal with locals at the [pub], where they watched the sun sink into Bass Strait. (Mitchell 2005, p. 6)

In addition to the difficulties in attracting staff, rural schools also have problems in retaining teachers. A national study in over 1,400 rural and regional schools found that teachers in regional and remote areas were respectively twice and six times as likely as their metropolitan and provincial city colleagues to report high annual staff turnover (Lyons et al. 2006, p. vi). Finding specialist relief staff is another critical concern for rural schools. Rural school authorities repeatedly claim that they had programs being taught by teachers unqualified in the curriculum area (the areas most in need are: maths, special needs, health and physical education, English, society environment, LOTE and information technology) (AEU 2007a; Australian Secondary Principals Association [ASPA] 2006, 2007; MCEETYA 2005).[8] This issue raises serious concerns for the quality of rural schooling.

Mills and Gale's (2010) Bourdieuian analysis of schooling in a rural disadvantage community provides a powerful account of the importance of teachers as carriers and distributors of dominant cultural capital which is generally difficult to access in small rural and remote communities (see also Thomson 2002). Highly valued skills, knowledge and modes of expression became even scarcer in rural and remote schools that perennially suffer from teacher turnover. This generates a transient nature of rural teaching where discontinuity and a weak relational nexus between teacher and student becomes the constant feature of the schooling experience. For the school, and one would argue the community at large, this high turnover creates a lack of school's "institutional memory," where daily practices and community dynamics have to be constantly reintroduced to new teachers, posing a social and economic burden on to rural schools. This environment of uncertainty and instability generated by high teacher turnover is exacerbated by the difficulty of finding specialist relief staff. Different studies have consistently showed that once rural schools lose a teacher from a subject area, it is unlikely to be immediately reinstated, generating a loss of curriculum diversity and a poorer quality of education that can generate anxiety for students in their quest to reach their desired post-school destination (Alloway et al. 2004; ASPA 2006; Boylan and Wallace 2007).

The Reasons for Teacher Shortages

Reasons for why rural and remote schools have historically faced a harder challenge to fill their staff run along the lines of macro and micro explanations. For the former, a lack of enticing incentives associated with poor employment conditions (e.g. work overload, additional responsibilities, poor pay) do not attract teacher graduates to rural areas and draw those in rural schools out of them (AEU 2007a, b; ASPA 2007; Stokes 2005, 2007). Employment uncertainty also plays a significant role. In the Victorian teaching service, for example, staff under contract and part-time employment is one-sixth and one-fifth, respectively, in the government teaching sector (Teacher Supply and Demand Reference Group 2006).[9]

Micro explanations refer to issues that have a particular rural character. To the already noted above negative aspects of accountability and performativity in teachers' work and life, the issues of "proximity" and "transparency" that they encounter in rural environments can exacerbate a feeling of being observed and scrutinized inside and outside school hours (Halsey 2006a; Miller et al. 2005). It is true and important to mention that, on the one hand, the proximity and transparency between the school staff and the community can contribute to increase sense of connectedness and a stronger personal network of support that might result in a better quality of education—a more robust education community. On the other hand, this proximity and transparency makes the lives of school staff more visible to the community resulting in a higher level of accountability in their teaching and their time out of school than in urban schools because fading into the background is not an option in rural communities. As a consequence, rural teachers can be trapped in a "fishbowl" that contains scarce spatial potential for professional and personal movement (Kline et al. 2013; Miller et al. 2005). These highly transparent environments can be particularly detrimental for beginning teachers, new school leaders, and staff coming from a more anonymous urban environment. This beginning teacher summarizes some of these aspects of the experience of working and living in a small rural community:

> It's not for everyone … this community-centric life where your relationship with students and their families extends beyond the classroom and your extracurricular activities are open to inspection. It's quite interesting to go down to the local supermarket … you see kids with their parents and have a mini-conference. They get to see you as a person instead of a teacher and they respect you more. (Mitchell 2005)

The scenario of teachers' lives in rural towns is not clear-cut. While some teachers might resent a lack of anonymity others are more acutely affected by excessive isolation. Roberts's (2004, p. 54) study on rural teachers identified isolation from family and friends as one of the "biggest and most difficult social disincentives" in retaining rural school staff. The significance of teachers' isolation has propelled researchers to suggest that it should be studied in teachers' pre-service courses, including exposure to rural communities (Halsey 2006a; Sharplin 2002, 2009). These feelings of isolation can be exacerbated by a lack of educational and employment opportunities for the teacher's family, which has been revealed as an important factor for teachers leaving their rural postings in favor of a metropolitan one (Lyons et al. 2006). On the other hand, it is important, and fair, to state that not all teachers feel isolated or stagnated in rural schools. Anecdotal evidence is also available showing examples of beginning teachers enjoying the country life (Mitchell 2005). Nonetheless, the feeling of being socially, physically, and psychologically isolated has a significant impact in teacher's morale, which has a direct correlation with teacher's quality of work and on the quality of education received by students (Cresswell and Underwood 2004).

The Impact of Pre-service Teaching Courses for Rural Schools

A great proportion of the complex issues occurring in rural schools do not actually start in the transparent context of these communities. Any success in recruiting and retaining staff in rural schools begins with their preparation. This premise has been acknowledged by different policies and researchers in the past 20 years. For example, two decades ago, the report *Schooling in Rural Australia* stated that university courses inadequately prepared teachers to teach effectively in rural schools (Commonwealth Schools Commission 1988). The National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education (HREOC 2000b, p. 42) found a lack of adequate training "with the skills and knowledge needed for teaching in rural and remote Australia" (HREOC 2000b, p. 43). It recommended that:

> All teacher training institutions should require undergraduates to study a module on teaching in rural and remote communities, offer all students an option to undertake a fully funded practical placement in a rural or remote

school and assist rural and remote communities in the direct recruitment of new graduates for their schools. (HREOC 2000b, p. 45)

While there has been some progress, several years later this recommendation has not been fully taken up with research revealing that there is a paucity of pre-service education programs of rural education subjects and a lack of teaching practicum in rural schools during their pre-service training (AEU 2007b; Green and Reid 2004; Halsey 2006a; Kline et al. 2013; Parliament of Victoria 2005; Sharplin 2009; Wallace and Boylan 2009). This paucity of the rural component in pre-service teacher education programs contributes to the unfamiliarity to life and work in rural communities. Experienced rural teacher educators Wallace and Boylan (2009) argue that most pre-service and in-service teachers hold a "challenge" or "deficit" view about rural appointments, schools, and communities. They maintain that the focus is on what rural schools and communities do not have or cannot offer to teachers. However, those perceptions are often based on scarce personal experience (Hudson and Hudson 2008; Roberts 2004). In other words, there is a gap between their expectations and what rural communities can offer. On the other hand, pre-service teachers that experienced rural life through rural practicum placements were more likely to consider taking a rural appointment (Halsey 2006a, b; House of Representatives 2007; Lock 2008). They believe rural teaching offers a variety of advantages, such as deeper knowledge of staff and students, opportunities for increased responsibility, and a broader range of teaching experiences.

In sum, these difficulties in attracting and retaining teachers for rural schools hinder the quality of education students and their possibilities of further education and employment in their post-school pathways, be that in or outside their local communities. Teacher shortage often represents a vicious cycle type of problem, where those schools that become unattractive to teachers will find harder to be properly staffed and offer newcomers and potential teachers a solid educating community. One of the most recent and exhaustive study into this issue, the *Rethinking Teacher Education for Rural and Regional Sustainability—Renewing Teacher Education for Rural and Regional Australia project* (TERRAnova), established that all the factors mentioned above are critical to redress this perennial problem (see Kline et al. 2013; White et al. 2010). What is needed is a more rural-centric teacher education focus in universities, better government incentives to take up rural posts, and greater collaboration

between universities, schools, and communities. As the researchers state, at the heart of this issue is the well-being and survival of rural Australia. Related to this latter point, in the next section, first, I will explain the discourse of "New Times" and its implication for rural students; and, second, look into the "real" options of further education and employment for rural young people.

"New Times" Discourse: Implications for Rural Students

The difficulties on staffing rural schools have a significant impact on the quality of education and post-school transition for young people. In the last two decades, in the fields of education and sociology of youth there has been a consistent documentation of the belief that there is an imperative need to gain further educational qualifications post-school to make it work in an increasingly precarious labor market (Cuervo and Wyn 2012; Dwyer and Wyn 2001; McLeod and Yates 2006), which for rural young people, due to a lack of post-school services and infrastructure, requires often migrating from their communities to regional and major cities. This notion, sometimes encapsulated as "New Times," is accentuated on this need for educational credentials, more knowledge, to adapt to new and precarious forms of work, to become an entrepreneurial self (Kelly 2006) in order to manage one's future amid the weakening of traditional social structures and pathways to adulthood. As with teachers, neoliberal policies and sensibilities have promoted new ways of being, a new subjectivity for youth—anchored mostly on participation in education and work through an ethics of self-responsibility and entrepreneurialism. As Davies and Bansel explain:

> [t]he so-called 'passive' citizen of the welfare state becomes … [an] active entrepreneur of the self … This is not simply a reactivation of liberal values of self-reliance, autonomy and independence as the necessary conditions for self-respect, self-esteem, self-worth and self-advancement but rather an emphasis on enterprise and the capitalization of existence itself through calculated acts and investment combined with the shrugging off of collective responsibility for the vulnerable and marginalized. (Davies and Bansel 2007, p. 252)

Sociologists of youth have depicted this shift from a "collective identity" to a "personal autonomy" where there is an increasing pressure for young people to construct their own portfolios for living and drawing upon their individual resources (Dwyer and Wyn 2001; see also France 2007; Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Woodman and Wyn 2015). It is true that young people have to negotiate their options in a more unpredictable and individualized world, where traditional support structures of a social, local, or workplace kind have been weakened. Hence, it is unsurprising that amid rapid social change and uncertainty they hold on to neoliberal sensibilities of "responsibility," "choice," and "entrepreneurialism" as a way of adjusting to these times. This has been seen as problematic by Furlong and Cartmel (2007), as this increasing focus on individual choices makes young people view their own crises as individual failures or problems rather than the outcomes due to the erosion of structural processes (e.g. cuts in education spending, closure of government programs, precariousness of labor market). Indeed, despite increasing proof on the weakening link between education and work (Brown et al. 2010; Chauvel 2010; Cuervo et al. 2013), young people continue to accept a high responsibility for their precarious position in the labor market. Nonetheless, education has never been more necessary and less sufficient to achieve security in a tight and precarious labor market. Youth and education researchers are increasingly using the work of Berlant (2011), *Cruel Optimism*, to explain this attachment to education as the guarantor of the "good life," despite the increasing uncertainty that this tool (education credential) has in delivering its promises (see Cuervo and Wyn 2016; Woodman and Wyn 2015; Zipin and Dumenden 2014). Berlant's point is that continuing to be attached to that relation (education) that has become deficient is inevitable as its presence represents the possibility of happiness, a sense of achievement, which without it (the relation), the mere reason of existence would disappear. I will return to Berlant's work in relation to participants' discourse and experiences later in the book. For now, the point to restress is that youth decisions and choices, see education as valued pragmatically in terms of its credentials and as an instrument to gain some control over an uncertain future—this is ever so more for young people in rural places facing structural limitations in terms of tertiary education and employment.

In their extensive analysis of rural youth aspirations in Australia, Alloway et al. (2004) found out that young people have taken for granted the fact that more education is needed after school and that traditional pathways to work are scarce or not available in their communities. This naturalized

discourse was voiced as their "personal infrastructure," a "ticket out of town," to broaden their opportunities and escape the limited possibilities offered in their towns. Young people are conscious that the predictability enjoyed by previous generations is now being questioned or not guaranteed (Cuervo 2011; Cuervo and Wyn 2012). Embedded in the principle of "more education" there is a belief of individual effort, hard work, and self-realization to achieve their end (Alloway et al. 2004; McLeod and Yates 2006). This "New Times" discourse is, of course, not universal and some parents or teachers do not ascribe to it. Some students might be subject to parental discourse based on the idea that no further educational qualifications is needed beyond Year 10 or 11 (as done by their parents) to obtain a job. However, for rural communities impacted by limited structural opportunities, the depletion of public and private services and the technological transformation in the agriculture industry, in addition to climate phenomenon (e.g. the drought), the discourse of "New Times" acquires a significant importance: the youth out-migration.

The Imperative of Mobility

The notion of youth out-migration, in my view, needs to be understood within the relationship of the concept of mobility, the conditions of rurality, and the intersection of education and youth policies, including what kind of knowledge is taught in schools. The concept of mobility has become critical to understand the relationship between the transformative spaces of multifunctional rural communities, schooling and young people's lives, in which the normative idea for youth is to increasingly become mobile in an interconnected world. Researchers concerned with the relationship between global and local phenomena have raised caution around the apparent endless possibilities that the ideas of global interdependence and mobility offer to contemporary youth by affirming that in many instances the resources needed to act upon these possibilities can exacerbate current inequalities. Mobilities theorists have emphasized the need not to assume the current epoch an era of endless mobility and liquidity but to be attentive to who and what is mobilized and demobilized, investigating the construction of social inequality and the relationship between local and power relationships (Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry 2007). For Mcleod (2009, p. 280), for example, understanding the interdependence between the global and the local is not as clear as education and youth policies would suggest and the creation of a "utopian sense of open pos-

sibilities" for young people based on "discourses of mobility, translocality and hybridity" can be detrimental for young people that lack the different forms of capital to follow that pathway. Nayak (2003, p. 5) argues that this relationship between local and global is not a one-way traffic, where powerful global forces shape local youth lives but where local cultures and practices also have an impact on global processes and "young people in different places negotiate change in different ways." Aware of reductive positions that view the local as powerless against global forces, Dolby and Rizvi (2008, p. 5) and Nilan and Feixa (2006) emphasize that even for those young people that are "stuck" (Popkewitz 1998) in their local places, the mobility and flow of global ideas, images, discourse at fast pace through new information technologies impacts youth identities by linking them to the "currents of modernity that flow across the world." This has generated in young people around the world a new social imagination, a capacity to aspire to new kinds of beings, new subjectivities that influence their daily decisions and options (Appadurai 2004). Appadurai's "capacity to aspire" speaks to the possibility for people to imagine different forms of life that are worth living for, the ability to read "a map of a journey into the future" (2004, p. 76). Needless to say, Appadurai understands, and I agree, that some social groups, "the better off," have greater resources and capacities to aspire, greater facility to read these navigational maps to their aspirations, to link "material goods and immediate opportunities to more general and generic possibilities" (p. 70). Tied to the capacity to aspire and the possibilities of being mobile, the latest federal higher education report, the Bradley Report, recognizes that rural and remote students continued to be underrepresented in higher education institutions, and that a significant aspect hindering them is the lack of awareness of the benefits of higher education, "particularly if they are the first person in their family to aspire" to it (Bradley 2008, p. 40). And while not all young people in rural places lack this awareness, as they do not represent an homogeneous population, education and youth policies have built a discourse of aspiration centered on continuing with further and higher education which for many rural youth equates to leave their community.

In his qualitative study of high school graduates and dropouts decisions to stay or leave a coastal fishing town in Nova Scotia, Canada, from early 1960s to late 1990s, Corbett (2007) has produced a fascinating research that challenges many of the assumptions and imperatives that lie at the heart of the intersection between youth and education policies, including the need to be mobile for young people. Corbett turns the rural deficit

equation upside down by reframing if the active youth choice of remaining rural and distancing from the education system can be thought as a rural resistance to formal education and an awareness of their spatial social capital rather than young people failing to continue with the policy prescribed normative youth transition to adulthood. Drawing on the work of Castells, among other theorists like Bourdieu or Foucault, Corbett sees in youth resistance to formal education, identities that construct a community of resistance that challenge the meta-community of civil society and the notion of rural entrapment so prevalent in modernity and capitalism narratives (the latter epitomize in his research on the transformation of fish industry from local to global scale). This is not to say that his study is just another romantic celebration of the rural idyll, the reaffirmation that the most pure moral values can be found in rural communities. On the contrary, Corbett believes racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination and violence can be found in many rural communities, and for that matter in rural pedagogy. But ultimately, he believes, and I agree, that reductive and standardized education, often presented via central curriculum and high-stakes testing, that aims to construct an idea of youth based on a subjectivity that should be active, calculating, mobile, where success is located somewhere but in a rural space, and that is detached from its own roots denies the possibility, for those that wish to, to "choose how and where to construct an identity and to discover where one belongs" (p. 273). To return to Appadurai, the capacity to aspire in rural schooling has been for too long constructed as the capacity to migrate, the need to belong somewhere else, an opposition of culture to economy, the enhancement of human capital over other forms of values of education. Against this idea, Corbett (and other important rural educators, such as Paul Theobald, Craig Howley, Bill Green) would argue, and again I agree, that education should always incite young people to discover new ideas and spaces, to challenge themselves to the unknown, but at the same time to enable them to stay or return and thus choose where to belong.

The Second Disadvantage: Rural Youth Out-Migration

The naturalized discourse of seeking post-school education means the need to migrate for many rural students that do not enjoy local tertiary education institutions. This is one of the main reasons for the long-established

pattern of rural youth out-migration. In Australia, annually more than 10,000 people from nonmetropolitan areas move away from home for tertiary education (Godden 2007).[10] High school students living in rural and remotes areas compromise almost a third of the total population; nevertheless, only "17% of tertiary places are taken up by rural students" (Alston and Kent 2006, p. 21). As noted by Alston and Kent (2006), while in the last two decades the proportion of young people entering tertiary education increased, the proportion of rural people attending higher education declined. Lower rates of participation of rural youth in higher and further education have been attributed to lower rates of school completion (Hillman and Rothman 2007) and to financial and social barriers (Bradley 2008; James et al. 1999, 2007; James 2002; Polesel et al. 2012a, b). A recent longitudinal analysis on post-school destinations for young Victorians found out that while students for urban areas the rate of participation in university rises as the level of socioeconomic status rises, but for students from nonurban spaces the participation stays very similar across the four different socioeconomic status categories (Polesel et al. 2012a, b). In relation to TAFEs, studies into rural youth experiences and aspirations have found several limitations that undermine their attendance chances. Some of these have to do with the need to travel long distances for training; rising costs of petrol; a lack of public transport to cover these distances; the need for high levels of parental support to access courses; and a lack of access to living away from home allowance (Alston and Kent 2006, p. 18). For young people from remote communities, attending TAFE signifies living at a considerable distance from their home.

A lack of employment pathways is another powerful reason. From the decline of public and private services that traditionally supplied with entry levels of works to the fact that intergenerational transfer of family farms have become more complicated due to technological changes, farmers retiring later and the need of more capital to compete with big multinational farms (Cuervo and Wyn 2012). Alston and Kent (2006) argue that young people who decide to remain in their communities, especially those who leave school early, undergo significant unemployment and underemployment. The few jobs available in rural towns are generally casual or part-time; these include work in the few grocery stores or during the harvest.[11] Coupled with these structural factors, it has been recognized an array of secondary factors for this out-migration, such as a willingness to experience a different lifestyle; a lack of appropriate housing; negative experiences about life in rural communities; and the impact

of the drought on farm production and on the sense of the future of the viability of the community (RRSDC 2006).[12] Hence, cultural issues, such as a lack of privacy, a view of youth as problematic, and a constant adult gaze, can be as negative experiences for young people and determinant forces in their migration to regional and metropolitan centers (Geldens 2007; Kenyon et al. 2001). On the other hand, a Victorian inquiry found that "a large proportion of rural young people wish to remain in a rural community" and the ability to do so is "closely aligned with the range of available educational and economic opportunities, and youth-appropriate services as well as community decision-making structures which include young people's participation" (RRSDC 2006, pp. 52–53). In sum, young people in rural places confront an array of discourses and pressures about their role and needs in their post-school life and a series of structural limitations that make leaving their community not only their "only" but their "best option."

Conclusion

Mapping the state of rural schooling within the dominant neoliberal context is an ambitious task. This means closely relating the normative and ideological influences of policy and the "real" experiences of teachers and rural students. In particular, the kind of new subjectivities that neoliberal policies, ideas and sensibilities create for teachers and students. At the core of these new subjectivities is a human capital orientation toward education that underpins the economization of schooling toward the goal of creating a highly competitive and trained workforce of today and tomorrow. This does not mean that social justice ideals that permeate 1970s policies are abandoned but they are rearticulated through a marriage of equity with excellence and efficiency.

In rural schools, however, these issues are complicated by the perennial challenges of staffing that impact the quality of education and post-school opportunities for youth. If poor quality of rural school staffing is an initial disadvantage for rural youth, the "New Times" (the imperative of becoming mobile to access the needed education to make it work in the labor market) discourse and structural barriers to further study and employment become a "second disadvantage."

Notes

1. One of the most important initiatives of the Commonwealth Schools Commission toward providing equality of educational opportunity was the *Disadvantaged Schools Program*, which was originally conceived as a poverty program. This program was original and progressive because it changed the focus of attention from the disadvantaged child towards the school and it compromised local initiatives by schools and communities through the promotion and creation of programs (Connell et al. 1990). However, this program has been criticized for not having produced any significant change in Australian educational structures of inequality and for targeting some social groups on detriment of others, stressing that "compensatory programs" should not be a zero-sum game (Taylor et al. 1997).

2. This is a shift from social engineering to economic restructuring that has important consequences for the education of the rural students. In analyzing the relationship of an education tied to the interests of a competitive economy, Kannapel and De Young (1999, p. 72) claim that school reforms intended to prepare students to participate in the American economy and that generic reforms pursuing national economic goals are short-lived because they are not meaningful for local rural people. Howley and Howley (1995) believe that school reforms aiming to improve the economic competitiveness of a country tend to homogenize schools by trying to obtain the same results from all of them and, therefore, undermining and neglecting local issues and interests that should be the core of the rural schools curriculum. This vision views children as "national human resources" in the pursuit of economic development and international competitiveness (De Young 1991, p. xv).

3. The need to create a new "productive workforce," based on the idea of dealing with a more competitive international economy, the decline of the youth labor market, and an emphasis on the transition from school to work, was also stressed by different reviews and inquiries commissioned by the government, such as, Young People's Participation in Post-Compulsory Education and Training (Finn 1991), Putting general education to work: the key competencies report (Mayer 1992), The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System (Carmichael 1992), and the Adelaide Declaration (MCEETYA 1999).

4. In 2008 the Australian government introduced the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) which tests every year students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9. The answers to the multiple-choice questions of these literacy and numeracy tests are sent to a central authority (ACARA) to analyze and record results in a database, which compares a school result against 60 like-schools across the nation on a socioeconomic scale devel-

oped by ACARA. Students get a report while schools can access the data analysis five months after the tests have been conducted, while results appeared online in the government reporting website called *My School* (introduced in 2010) (see Chap. 8).

5. The introduction of the performance-based pay scheme, for instance, to establish the basis of teachers' salary, has been depicted as a strategy to reward "good" teachers and an example of the attempt to curb teacher's power and autonomy by undermining the bargaining role of teachers' unions and teachers' rights (Robertson 2007). Critics of this scheme believed that an underlying idea behind the performance-based pay scheme is the attempt to generate in teachers a consensus of what means to be a "good" and "effective" teacher from a dominant official view (Thrupp 2006). The last federal Labor government "favours a system of performance pay for quality teachers," and as stated by the Federal Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, the aim is "to make sure that excellent teachers are valued" (Patty 2008), and "rewarded for their contribution, through comprehensive and trusted assessment and performance management against those standards" (Australian Teaching Magazine 2008).

6. Over 85 % of Australian teachers agree that what teachers need is more support for staff, fewer student management issues, reduced workload, fewer changes imposed on schools, and a more positive public image of the profession (McKenzie et al. 2008). Principals offered similar arguments to possible strategies to attract people into the leadership role.

7. According to Saulwick and Muller (2004, p. 3, Appendix 2) as rural communities are becoming "refuges for the urban poor or the socially displaced," where cheaper housing, for example, is available, small and often underresourced communities are facing traditional urban problems, such as substance abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse of children, and the consequences of welfare dependency. These challenges exacerbate the leadership vacuum and resources, thus turning people for help to the school. Within this scenario, principals felt a lack of support or care from government educational authorities deepening in some cases a feeling of isolation (Saulwick and Muller 2004).

8. Teacher shortages are often "hidden" as schools and schools systems use different strategies to cope with this issue (McKenzie et al. 2008). Some of these strategies include combining classes across year levels; recruit less qualified teacher; place teacher in teaching positions outside their field; sharing programs with other schools; or reducing the curriculum.

9. According to Roberts (2004, p. 26), during the 1990s the conservative government in Victoria embarked in a policy strategy that resulted with teachers "moved from tenured appointments to contract positions, with teachers being forced to sign contracts if they wished to continue employ-

ment." It is fair to mention, that in schools with difficulties to staff, teachers were offered ongoing employment (Roberts 2004). Nevertheless, the radical overhaul in teachers' employment position in Victoria created an environment of uncertainty that did not contribute to attract graduate teachers.

10. Annual living costs for a regional young person studying away from home are estimated between AU\$15,000 and AU\$20,000, in addition to a relocation and start-up costs of AU\$3,000 to AU\$6,000 (Godden 2007).

11. Youth aged 15–20 years are eligible for *Youth Allowance*, which is means-tested against parental income. Young people seeking *Youth Allowance* must satisfy conditions in order to receive payments. Many young people who cannot find employment are denied access to welfare benefits. For example, some young people do not qualify for Youth Allowance because of the "means-testing associated with this award causing significant hardship and placing them at risk" (Alston and Kent 2006, p. 18). Further, students from nonurban areas were four times more likely to defer tertiary study than urban counterparts because they had been waiting to qualify for Youth Allowance (Polesel et al. 2012a, b).

12. It is important to notice the gender divisions in rural youth out-migration that has been stressed by different research studies, symbolizing rural communities as "males spaces" (Alloway et al. 2004). Other research studies also found strong gender divisions, including the belief that rural jobs were male-oriented, at the time of staying or leaving town, with females more likely to leave the community (see Alston and Kent 2001; Argent and Walmsley 2008; Hillman and Rothman 2007).

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The Idea of Social Justice

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the relevance of different dimensions of social justice (i.e. distribution, recognition, and association) as the basis for assessing whether education and educational practices are as socially just. In schools and society at large, fairness and equality have become the popular expressions by which we define and understand social justice. However, members of a society will have differing views of what fairness and equality means, or what is just and unjust. One of the problems with defining social justice is that it is a contested term, where its meaning is contentious and heterogeneous—every person defines it according to his or her values and social context.

To achieve some clarity about what constitutes socially just education, I draw on the extensive work of Iris Marion Young and examine the different dimensions of social justice. Like Young, I want to overcome the shortfalls and blind spots of the liberal-egalitarian position, which equates social justice with distributive justice. Rural education research and practice emphasize the distribution of resources as the way of ameliorating inequities. Drawing on Young's extensive work, I argue that the singular focus on distributive justice is too narrow to achieve social justice outcomes, and make the case for the dimensions of recognition and of association. Young does not explicitly develop these three dimensions (as later done by Nancy Fraser (2008), or as developed by educational researcher Sharon Gewirtz (2006). But her prolific analysis of oppression and domination as the key elements of a heterogeneous injustice are permeated by

issues of power, self-respect, self-determination, voice, and participation that are all encompassed in the politics of recognition and association.

Like Young, I do not aim to provide a full definition of justice, which might overlook other injustices, but I want to draw out a plural conceptualization of the term in relation to education and rural schooling. As Miller (2014, p. 4) recently argued, the aim is to highlight certain dimensions of justice that can work as "action-guiding" in the search for justice in a specific setting or institution (i.e. rural schooling). Even Rawls believed that if we want to assess how socially just a situation was in a small-scale example (e.g. school, workplace), we needed to expand his theory into other realms of the theory of justice (see Miller 2014). But before entering the discussion of the three dimensions, I stress some important points that allow us to better understand why social justice needs a pluralist framework. First, I look at the problem of viewing social justice as a universal, impartial, and neutral concept; and then at the necessity to contextualize and situate social justice rather than focus on abstract conceptualizations with little practical application.

Social Justice as a Universal, Impartial, and Neutral Concept

The concept of universality in theories of social justice is underpinned by the idea that independence of social institutions and relations is needed if we want to reach a reliable and objective normative standard for assessing a social order. That is, the benefit or value of a universal, impartial, and neutral theory of social justice is that it can provide normative criteria for identifying injustices in society. Its moral significance is given by the need to respect and protect the intrinsic moral worth of each and every individual in society regardless of their social position, viewing people as equals. It is also believed, for example, that liberal theories of social justice offer neutral principles to mediate social relations between people who might disagree on some fundamental values (Kelly 1998). This disagreement over how to conduct social relations and institutions is set as the reason why a society needs an objective normative standard that does not advance the position of, or favor, any one social group.

Barry (1995, pp. 160–164) invokes an "agreement motive" to justify why different people will willingly accept sacrificing or limiting their own pursuit of the good and abide by overarching rules of justice and its

applications by major institutions, characterized by their neutrality. The key lies in the neutrality at the time of designing these major institutions and the application of the rule of law, where "no conception of the good should be given a privileged position" (p. 164). Liberal political theorists claim that a major task for theories of social justice is the construction of abstract impartial principles that allow the regulation of the distribution of the benefits and burdens and social cooperation. Equating social justice with impartiality has its foundations in liberal theories of justice, where individuals are of equal worth with rights and duties being distributed impartially (Barry 1995). The problem with Barry's position is that it seems more plausible in the field of theory than in practice. In many cases, institutions and laws are written and rewritten by political parties and stakeholders that hold specific core values which are not subscribed to by the totality of a society's population. In contemporary Australia, the "work choices" legislation (later scraped), favoring business and employers over employees' rights, was a paradigmatic example that weakens Barry's position. Following Young (1990), the problem with adopting the liberal belief in the existence of an impartial point of view as the basis of our moral and political reasoning is the elimination of the particularities of different perspectives including passion, emotion, personal knowledge and experience, and thus the real differences among the people, resulting in the removal of distinctions of all but the dominant group. Young is right in categorically rejecting the ideal of impartiality and universality in social justice because it reduces "differences to unity" (p. 97). It intends to appropriate a correct moral reflection and the negation of people's differences by reducing them to abstract individuals, thus banishing the subjectivity of particular members of social groups (such as, gays, blacks, women, among others) for whom partiality and particularity define them and their struggles. Young sees in this ideal normative sustained by an impartial and universal view compatible with a politics of distribution and problematic insofar a supposedly universal and neutral moral standpoint serves to legitimize the bureaucratic control and the process of distribution or *who gets what*. This legitimization serves to homogenize a view of the world by sustaining the moral point of view of dominant groups as the normative one. Further, this homogeneity is not only blind to difference, one of Young's primary concerns, but it also contributes to the development of a negative view of themselves by the oppressed groups as they fail to construct a self that aligns with the normative imposed by institutions.

Echoing Nagel's (1986, 1991) position, impartiality is a "view from nowhere" that constructs a utopian argument about a just society. Thus, for Young (1990, p. 103) political theorists that support impartial and universal conceptualizations of justice are actually supporting a utopia, expressing "in fact an impossibility, a fiction." By seeking abstract consensus on the meaning of social justice we are repressing difference and eliminating heterogeneity, decreasing the plural space of subjectivities to one. The point is not to deny the need for moral reflection, the capacity to step back from our impulses, intuitions, and interests in order to consider other people's interests in relation to our position (see also Miller 2014). However, this moral reflection does not require one to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach that is the same for everyone, an abandonment of our particularities and a universal view of the social world. Theories that presuppose a universality that stands independently of a given social context have little capacity to measure social institutions and practices. Theories and principles that intend to be a useful measure of actual social (in)justice must have a certain relation to the social issues, practices, and institutions that they wish to have an effect on. Social justice is not therefore a timeless or static concept, but open to fierce contestation.

Thus, a central idea in this book is that social justice in education cannot be defined or understood as an abstraction but within specific contexts of interpretation and enactment. As Miller (2014, p. 7) puts it, a theory of justice "needs to be sociologically informed," thus not only paying "attention to the ways in which people actually think about justice, but it needs to understand what motivates them to practice it , and towards whom." Echoing Gewirtz (2006), abstract conceptualizations of social justice are of little use in discovering and analyzing unequal social relations. Social justice needs to be contextualized, where discourses are not just an abstract concept or policy rhetoric but they are lived or embodied by people (in this research the rural school participants). It needs to be understood not just in terms of those who are not just applying them but by the individuals who are in the receiving end and by those it intends to benefit (e.g. students). Social justice is forged to a great extent by the setting at which it is working, producing a level and context dependency of justice. The "mediated nature of just practices," Gewirtz argues, involves "norms that are not concerned with justice but which might in practice compete or conflict with justice concerns," and "constraints over which agents have little or no control, for example, dominant discourses or power relations, or legal or economic constraints" (p. 70).

The enactment of socially just practices in classrooms then is constrained by external forces such as the strong pressures on schools by government policies of target-setting performance. The performativity culture present in schools becomes an external force that can potentially limit teachers' freedom, and space and time. For example, in Gewirtz's (2006) study of the English school system, lack of resources and external pressures obliged the school to exclude some students to avoid disturbing the learning of others students. That is, assessments about what counts as socially just in education cannot be separated from assessments about what is possible. Therefore, to define and understand the idea of social justice, it is important to investigate "the circumstances of social justice" (Miller 1999, p. 2), the social context where social justice is enacted.

In what follows in this chapter I want to introduce the three dimensions of social justice. I will begin with the dimension of distribution because it is the one that has predominated within the argument of social justice in rural schools and communities. I will afterward move beyond it to provide a plural framework of social justice with the dimensions of recognition and association.

DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

In the last four decades, issues of distributive justice have predominantly dominated the Anglo-American discussion on social justice (e.g. Carens 1981; Dworkin 1981a, b; Miller 1999; Nozick 1974; Rawls 1972; Roemer 1996; Sadurski 1985).[1] This prominence of the distributive dimension is reflected in social justice and distributive justice often been used interchangeably, with the latter being applied as a pseudonym of the former (Miller 1999). In other words, social justice has been predominantly understood as the fair distribution of benefits and burdens, including in the sphere of education (Walzer 1983), where education is defined as a "good," the more of it an individual receives the better (Connell 1993a).

John Rawls's book, *A Theory of Justice*, revitalized the social-contract tradition through a detailed vision of egalitarian liberalism in opposition to utilitarianism.[2] He begins from the premise that all individuals have a fundamental value and worth. Rawls (1972) aims are: first, to find a balance between the principles of equality and liberty with a special interest in the needs of the "least advantaged" in society, and second, that the primary subject of social justice must be the basic structure of society: "the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights

and responsibilities and determine the division of advantage from social cooperation" (p. 7). Rawls opens his argument by stating that a person who hypothetically did not know her social position would always choose to be fair to the most disadvantaged. Drawing on this hypothetical situation, Rawls (1972, p. 60) contends that social justice entails two main principles: (1) each person in a given society has "a right to the most comprehensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others"; and (2) "social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage and attached to positions and offices open to all." The first principle recognizes the prominence of basic liberties and individual rights which can be associated with classical libertarian doctrines of political liberty (e.g. freedom of speech and conscience). The second principal addresses aspects of the basic structure that influence the distribution of opportunities, income, wealth, offices and in general social advantages, touching upon the idea of equality of opportunity for all, with suggestions that the state has a special responsibility for the redistribution of goods. Rawls's principles oppose utilitarianism by asserting that inequalities in the distribution of primary goods are only acceptable if they work to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged and ensure that persons with similar skills, abilities, and motivations enjoy equal opportunities. This latter part of the second principle is his famous "Difference Principle," which favors the least advantaged in society.

Rawls's theory of justice combines a defense of individual liberties with a commitment to fair equality of opportunity. This commitment is underpinned by policies such as affirmative action programs, which intend to ensure the participation of disadvantaged social groups. In Australia, especially since the 1970s, distributive justice approaches in schooling have intended to produce a more equitable and accessible education system, for example, for females, Indigenous and rural students, through a distribution of resources and allocation of secure places in education (Connell 1993a).

Rawls's theory has animated much of the debate around egalitarianism and social justice, including its fair amount of criticism. One of the most important critiques came from Nozick (1974) who advocated for a notion of social justice based on libertarianism. Libertarians claim that liberty and freedom have priority over other political ideals, such as redistribution of social goods. For libertarians, unequal results cannot be used to justify redistribution of resources from one individual to another. Even

though libertarians do not endorse the notion of equality of opportunity, respect for equality is respect for liberty, including defending individuals' freedom to choose any form of education they wish to for themselves and their children (Howe 1997). According to Nozick (1974, p. 334), a libertarian society treats individuals not as "instruments or resources" but "as persons having individual rights with the dignity this constitutes." His central argument against Rawls and a distribution of goods by the state is that it ignores people's entitlements to what they produce, neglecting the processes by which holdings were acquired. Nozick endorses a minimal state, sometimes called the "nightwatchman state," which is justified as long as it protects people against fraud, force, theft, and enforcement of contracts. The state exists to safeguard individuals' rights and possessions and by engaging in more extensive programs, such as the redistribution of property, it violates the rights of individuals. Thus, his entitlement theory claims any transfer of holdings should be left to the market and not the state because property transfers, which he doesn't *per se* oppose to, are morally justified only if they are entirely voluntary.

This voluntary arrangement between individuals, however, cannot be the single criterion to decide if a distributive pattern is just because viewing social processes as individual agreements tends to overlook the influence of structures and social background that affect precisely many of these societal relations (Young 2006b). Young, like communitarians such as Sandel (1982) and Taylor (1985) criticized both Rawls's and Nozick's approaches to justice because it supported the idea of people acting in their own self-interest, outside a social milieu or group. For Sandel (1982) and Taylor (1985), a major problem with Rawls's theory was viewing individualistic liberty before any consideration of community attachments and communal views of social justice. Taylor (1985, p. 190) thought that atomistic views of the self by Rawls and Nozick neglected that "man is a social animal … because he is not self-sufficient alone, and in an important sense is not self-sufficient outside a polis." He critiqued both Rawls and Nozick for overemphasizing individualism in a person's decisions and choices and neglecting individuals' attachments to society by presuming that the social group they belong to has not an effect on them. This emphasis on individualism has been at the center of the critiques against Rawls's theory. However, Rawls has also been criticized for a ahistorical and a asociological approach to justice by failing to acknowledge is the complex historical and political circumstances in the production of social inequalities.

Throughout her work, Young (1990, 2001, 2006b) has critiqued Rawls's position. While she sympathizes in broad terms with his notion of equality of opportunity, or the need to provide it for those most disadvantaged, and agrees that the basic structure of society is critical for any analysis of justice, she has some reservations about the depth and direction of his theoretical inquiries. Young argues that, like many other liberal egalitarians, Rawls focuses mostly on the distributive side of justice failing to pay attention to the processes which produce these distributions. Drawing on Karl Marx's critique, particularly in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, that distribution has been treated as independent of production, Young (2006a) wants us to pay attention to three nondistributive issues: the division of labor, structures of decision-making, and processes that normalize values, behavior, and attributes of persons. Before delving into these critical points raised by Young, I want to touch upon the principles of desert, equality, and equality of opportunity. These principles have been at the core of many Western societies and its education systems, striving to be guided by equality and merit. They are standards upon which institutions and members of a community or society measured themselves and their policies and actions. By introducing these principles I want to contextualize and relate the abstract concept of distributive justice to the educational realm.

Desert

When looking at issues of redistribution in society, the concept of desert gains relevance in the quest for how resources should be distributed. To put it simply, desert entails the view that a society is just when the benefits and burdens are distributed to each according to his or her due (Lamont 1994; Miller 1999; Sadurski 1985).That is, people should receive what they earn by talent or effort: thus, to each according its due. In contemporary societies desert works not only to reward certain attitudes and behaviors but also incentivizing them (Miller 2014), being the term then attached to the concept of responsibility where individuals are rewarded or punished according to their actions. The concept of desert has to do with the notion of fairness of distribution and how to give to each person its due according its merit. Desert, then, takes a perspective of the individual rather than the social group (Sturman 1997; Young 1990), where individuals are rewarded or punished according to their choices and actions. In this vein, some moral philosophers believe that if benefits and burdens

need to be distributed according to each individual's merit, then arguments about strict and pure equality among people are not justifiable (see Kristjánsson 2006). That is, inequalities are justified as long as they are based on effort and ability, and participants start from the same position. In other words, some theorists of justice (Miller 1999; Sadurski 1985) accept that benefits and burdens should be rewarded attending to some specific social tenets or frameworks but overall agree that if all things are equal then people are entitled to what is due to them. Hence, the notion of merit is popular because when individuals are coming from an equal starting point, then reward is based on merit.

My interest in desert derives from the notion that in education contexts, it is often associated with academic merit. Gale and Densmore (2000) offer an interesting example, where students will deserve a grade in a group school project according to their contribution to the task: to their effort or their cost. With a desert-based principle, a just distribution of grades will result if the teacher follows the premises of these categories. However, they argue that it can be difficult for a teacher to identify who made what and what counts as an effort, a contribution or a cost, and with which resources or cultural capital each student had to do the task. Even more, it is problematic because learning processes can be quantified narrowly through productivity indexes, and by homogenizing how students learn and what they should learn. In her critique of the notion of merit and how it structures the division of labor, Young (1990) argues that advocates of meritocracy sustain it by claiming that it is value-free and impartial, based on the effort and talent of an individual. It also presumes everybody begins on an equal playing field. For Young criteria of evaluation usually is accompanied by normative and cultural presumptions about ways of life, styles of behavior, and values "that derive from and reflect the experience of the privileged groups who design and implement them" and deny group difference (1990, p. 205). In education, she argues that standardized tests are cultural and partial and that generally work to construct those that are different as being of less value than the dominant group. In a similar vein, Baez (2006, p. 1002) asserts that in education (he is concerned with American college admissions), standards are "culturally biased" and that stratification in society owes much to standardized tests that work to sort out those worth of some form of rewards and those not deserving. Radical egalitarians like Young, and Phillips, do not completely disregard that effort, ability, and merit play to certain degree a role in who gets what in society but they claim that while accepting some

form of arbitrariness from these, we need to make sure of democratizing the idea of merit and evaluating injustices through the prism of social groups. Decisions on the construction of knowledge, ability and talent for which individuals or social groups occupy these positions are not neutral but politically charged. In sum, critiques of merit as a way of allocating resources and rewards argue that justifying social differences due to, primarily, effort, and ability ignores the impact that family background social context and cultural values (e.g. of a school), among other factors, play in educational attainment.

Equality

Debates around egalitarianism are far too extensive to be covered in this book. For instance, discussions about the relevance of luck egalitarianism to sufficientarian would be enough to create several handbooks on the matter. In this book, I want to concentrate on social justice concepts that are relevant and poignant to contemporary issues on rural education. One of them is equality, which is usually used as a proxy definition of social justice due to its accessible meaning, almost by intuition, by the greater public. In Australia, it is an important concept because the notions of egalitarianism and a *fair go* are terms that are commonly associated with equality and a way of life, and are relevant to the national social imagination and identity. In education, equality plays an important role in discourses and practices around students' aspirations with schools commonly portrayed as critical actors to redress, or reinforce, patterns of inequality in the broader society and to enable access for children and young people to economic, social, political, and cultural opportunities. Despite its abstract and contested character, equality provides a powerful standard to analyze the variety of educational arrangements that impact on young people's lives. Drawing on an impartial view of justice and following Dworkin's (2000) lead, Macleod (2010, p. 156) argues that educational equality is based on principles of equal concern about just institutional arrangements that will advance the interest of each person in living a good life and that would prevent them from facing any disadvantages in resources and opportunities due to factors (e.g. class, race, and gender) that are outside their individual responsibility. Contrary to some narrow analyses that place the entire responsibility of redressing societal inequalities in schools, egalitarian theorists recognize that exogenous factors (e.g. poverty, dysfunctional family circumstances) impact on the work schools (can) do and

on the educational opportunities and life chances of children and youth (see Rawls 2001; Satz 2007). But most importantly, they agree that arbitrary sources of disadvantage should not function as a barrier to enjoy access to education. This kind of concern for educational equality has a strong tradition in contemporary Australian education policy. Consider, for example, education policies, from the Adelaide Declaration in 1999 to the Federalist Paper 2 in 2007, that affirm that every child in Australia should be entitled to benefit from the same high-quality school education and that schooling should be free from differences arising from students' socioeconomic backgrounds or geographic locations (Council for the Australian Federation 2007; MCEETYA 1999).

Equality, however, offers some problems—particularly as it is in many instances used as a descriptor of "sameness," where, for example, every student should have access to the same resources and opportunities, without ever examining the social background of the group or individual in need. This is a common understanding, and claim, in social justice education from social groups, and their advocates, that do not enjoy the access to same resources as other groups, for instance, many parents, teachers, principals, and students from rural schools. It is based on a concept of having the same material goods and services to access opportunities to participate in different activities (see Lynch and Lodge 2002; Young 1990). This material and distributive view of equality has also a prominent place in education policies that argue for a level playing field for all students regardless of their social condition.[3] But this idea of equality as "sameness," driven but distributive notions that view all individuals and social groups as having the same basic needs, overlooks people's social particularities; it is too simplistic and denies the increasing heterogeneity of many societies (see Walzer 1983), including the Australian. In education processes, for example, it has been argued that nondistributive issues are of significant importance in the construction of justice. For example, Connell (1993a, p. 18) affirms that while the distribution of resources to socially disadvantaged groups is an important part of achieving social justice in education, the theory of distributive justice is indifferent to other aspects of schooling, such as the content of the curriculum. Therefore, achieving social justice in schools is not just about distribution of materials goods and it is not possible without addressing structural inequalities within the curriculum that arise from issues of class, gender, and ethnicity and affect specific social groups.

Equality of Opportunity

Within the broad hegemonic concept of equality, the idea of equality of opportunity occupies a significant role. The concept of equality of opportunity has gained prominence in debates about egalitarian theory and political practice around the world (Armstrong 2006; Callinicos 2000). In Chaps. 2 and 3 I showed how the notion of equality of opportunity to engage in education and work has been a centerpiece of both major political parties in Australia for the last few decades. This hegemony of the idea of "opportunity" as the main argument for social justice has been used in struggles for equality in gender, race, and ability spheres, as well as a justification for the dismantling of welfare services for those most vulnerable in society. It seems an ideal difficult to argue against it. Advocates of the idea of equality of opportunity see it as a way to expand the basic rights granted to any human being within the notion of ontological equality (i.e. the essential concept that all human beings are inherently equal). Equality of opportunity seeks, in its basic conceptualization, to eliminate the impact that different factors such as social class, race, or gender can have on a person's chance to succeed in different spheres of life (Lynch and Lodge 2002; Howe 1997; Macleod 2010). It starts with the guarantee of civil and political freedoms with the elimination of any discriminatory legislation that prevents individuals from accessing positions in society and extends to the creation of different policies to ensure that socially disadvantaged groups are represented in different institutions. Advocates of equality of opportunity are mostly concerned with access to resources and creating a level playing field to compete for different positions in society rather than questioning societal arrangements (e.g. division of labor). They view the distribution of resources as the key concern in redressing disadvantage.

However, radical egalitarians, such as Young and Phillips, criticize what they consider this narrow view of equality opportunity for its infatuation with a redistribution of resources to ameliorate the inequalities that individuals inherit by luck or accident of the social background they were born to.[4] Young's (2001) argument, for instance, points to the need to focus on how institutional arrangements are at the core of the (re)production of inequalities, where structural injustices (e.g. racism and gender) are constructed and sustained by everyday practices promoted by social institutions through norms, regulations, and values. Throughout her rich body of work, Young's concern has been with unearthing and proposing ways of dismantling the systematic inequality suffered by certain social

groups (e.g. women, African Americans) by locating a "plausible structural story" about how inequalities, domination, and oppression is constructed through the work of institutions (Young 2001, p. 16; see also Phillips 1999). The point here is not to think that radical egalitarians deny the significant burden that the social circumstances can have on an individual's life chances but to acknowledge that these social circumstances are not just the product of bad luck, fate or choice and individual preferences (as luck egalitarians would have it) but the work of social institutions that continuously tend to favor the same social groups. As Phillips (1999, pp. 57–59) puts it, abstracting social relations and institutions from the process of production of inequality and concentrating on choices and personal preferences as sources of unequal opportunities and resources in life sustains the focus of the social problem on the victim of the injustice rather than on the advantages of the dominant groups.[5]

Recognitional Justice

In the last three decades, claims for recognition of group difference have been gaining prominence within several currents of political and social theory, such as: liberalism, communitarianism, post-structuralism, post-Marxism, feminism, post-colonialism, and queer studies (e.g. Cooper 2004; Fraser 1997; Honneth 2003; Phillips 1997; Taylor 1994; Young 1990). There has been a shift from redistribution to recognition as the central problem of justice, characterized by Fraser (1997) as a relative eclipse of social politics by cultural politics. This shift has been pointed out by Phillips (1997, p. 143) as a "displacement," where "the cultural [is] displacing the material; identity politics [is] displacing class … Difference, in particular, seems to have displaced inequality as the central concern of political and social theory."

The recognitional dimension of social justice emphasizes the need for recognition of different cultures and values, which form the core of their dignity, self-esteem, and self-respect. Recognition has been understood as a critical component of an individual's construction of the self, on the assertion of their particular identity. The production of identity is always strongly shaped by our relationship with others. Taylor (1994, pp. 25–26) argues that identity is a relational concept, thus shaped by other people's recognition or misrecognition of it. The latter, the misrecognition of an individual's identity, cultural position and values, has the capacity to produce harm and generate forms of oppression with the subsequent effect of

diminishing a mode of being. Taylor concludes that recognitional justice is not some right or prerogative "we owe people" but it becomes "a vital human need" (p. 26).

My conceptualization of the recognitional dimension of social justice in education is mainly informed by Iris Marion Young's theory, especially her seminal work, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Young (1990) focuses on transcending the distributive dimension of justice through the politics of difference (sometimes also labeled by theorists of recognition as "identity politics"). Her vision of social justice differs from the traditional distributive dimension by looking and giving preponderance to issues of gender, race, sexuality, and ethnicity. Young puts the accent on issues of oppression, domination, and marginalization as the focal point of the analysis of social justice.

Iris Marion Young: Oppression as a Source of Injustice

Young (1990) begins with a critique of distributive justice followed by her pivotal argument: a theory of oppression based on how the contingencies of social group identity might engender oppression. She claims that there are some particular groups that have been systematically underrepresented in political systems throughout history (e.g. women, African American, Indigenous people). Her thesis is that we need to move from the distributive dimension that reduces social justice to distribution of resources, to a recognition of social differences and a political analysis of "procedural issues of participation in deliberation and decision making" (p. 34). In other words, oppression and domination are sustained through processes and structures, through the silent work of institutions. Therefore, social inequality is structural in the sense that it is reproduced by social processes and the role of institutions, which privilege some social groups over others. Young develops the concepts of oppression and domination not as grand theory, or with the intention to provide a theory of justice, but rather as neglected social issues due to an overemphasis on the distributive paradigm. To view the ubiquity of injustice through oppression and domination is for her the proper alternative to the distributive paradigm, which only reinforces structural inequalities. As Young (1990, p. 16) claims, by critiquing distributive justice the aim is to expand the limits of social justice beyond a "possessive" model to view individuals mostly as "possessors and consumers of goods" to include issues that have to do with action, practice, and "decisions about action." One of her key contributions to

social justice is her analysis of the subtle forms that injustice takes, by providing a clear and strong conceptualization of social justice through the identification of "five faces of oppression," which are best summarized by Harvey (1993, pp. 106–107), as *exploitation* (the transfer of the fruits of the labor from one group to another), *marginalization* (the expulsion of people from useful participation in social life), *powerlessness* (the lack of that "authority, status, and sense of self" which would permit a person to be listened to with respect), *cultural imperialism* (stereotyping in behaviors as well as in various forms of cultural expression such that "the oppressed group's own experience and interpretation of social life finds little expression that touches the dominant culture," while the latter imposing on "the oppressed group its experience and interpretation of social life"), and *violence* (the fear and actuality of random, unprovoked attacks, which have "no motive except to damage, humiliate, or destroy the person"). The construction of these five faces of oppression reveal that Young's project is not to eliminate the politics of distribution as a pillar of social justice struggles but to expand this fight to issues that have to do with the recognition and participation of marginalized social groups. As Harvey (1993, p. 107) argues, Young's framework of oppression emphasizes the "heterogeneity of [the] experience of injustice." A pluralization of social justice enlarges its agenda, thus contributing to amplifying the many issues that might have fallen outside the concerns of liberal forms of social justice.

A Radical Egalitarian Critique of Distributive Justice: Toward the Politics of Recognition

For this book, Young's critique of distributive justice is central, as it underpins the plurality of social justice. As I have mentioned above, many processes and polices anchored on the distributive dimension encourage universalization of the individual through the ideal of impartiality, of reducing all people as the same, to unity. Discussions about social justice in rural education are often informed by the distributive dimension, which overlooks institutional analyses of domination and oppression based on social differences by placing the emphasis almost exclusively on distribution of resources. The distributive dimension fails to critically examine social structures and institutional arrangements, such as the division of labor in society, and the content of curriculum (or what knowledge is valued) in rural schooling. For Young (1990, p. 8) we need to overcome the

limits of distributive justice; moving beyond "an approach to social justice that gives primacy to having" to one that "gives primacy to doing." The liberal focus of social justice on "having," through the distributive dimension, places individuals as possessors of goods, and as such, as it conceives "individuals as social atoms, logically prior to social relations and institutions" (Young 1990, p. 27). This is a critical problem of the distributive dimension, with its measure of what constitutes a just society or institution ingrained in its ontological standpoint, which is individualistic and atomistic. Such an atomistic ontology presents the problem of overlooking or obscuring the relevance of social groups for understanding issues of justice because it denies individual identities, and its capacities, the procedural and relational constitutive element of it. By pluralizing social justice and heterogeneizing the different forms of injustice, it generates an understanding of individuals not as social atoms but as a product of, and a focus on, their social relations, and beyond justice boundaries that are define by distributive measures or *who gets what*.

According to Young (1990), when social justice is reduced to how, for example, wealth, jobs, and resources are distributed, it tends to: first, neglect the institutional context and social structure that usually determines the patterns of distribution. Second, when distribution is considered for nonmaterial goods, for example, in the case of power, self-respect, these are viewed as static, rather than a function of social relations and processes. Young has been usually seen as taking side with a politics of difference or recognitional justice over a politics of distribution (see Fraser 1997). But she does not really reject the need for better distribution of resources, goods, and status in society, although she does oppose to the mechanisms and the institutional context and process in which distribution takes place.

Iris Marion Young and Social Justice in Education

As in schools, the distributive dimension subverts and reduces issues of rights and power into mere distribution of resources. It fails to ask about the scheme of distribution (who decides how and what resources are to be distributed) and overlooks the particularities of different social groups. Most importantly, social justice is not something to be handed down to passive recipients; it is not a "thing." It refers "to doing more than having, to social relationships that enable or constrain action" (Young 1990,

p. 25). In other words, social justice is relational rather than static; it involves processes and actions entirely related to social context.

In looking at two essential aspects for education, the concepts of "opportunity" and "self-respect," I agree with Young's notion of opportunity as a condition of "enablement" rather than of "possession."

> Opportunity … refers to doing more than having. A person has opportunities if he or she is not constrained from doing things, and lives under the enabling conditions for doing them … Being enabled or constrained refers more directly, however, to the rules and practices that govern one's action, the way other people treat one in the context of specific social relations, and the broader structural possibilities produced by the confluence of a multitude of actions and practices. It makes no sense to speak of opportunities as themselves things possessed. Evaluating social justice according to whether persons have opportunities, therefore, must involve evaluating not a distributive outcome but the social structures that enable or constrain the individuals in relevant situations. (Young 1990, p. 26)

I do not intend to claim that distribution of material resources is irrelevant to schooling but more issues are at stake than distribution of resources in schools related to social justice. Certainly, all schools should be given a variety of resources that provide the opportunity for a good quality of education (e.g. facilities, books and computers, appropriate staffing and good breadth of curriculum). The problem with the distribution of equal educational opportunities lies in its conceptualization: opportunities are not to be possessed but enabled, and the possibilities to enable these opportunities are shaped by the values, norms, principles, practices, and social relations embedded on the social space (society) in which we live in. But just as stated in the field of sociology of youth (see Chap. 3), a rhetoric of merit and equality of opportunity dominates youth transitions to adulthood and educational discourses, where any young person can aspire to reach their potential as long as they are prepared to work hard. Here is Young eloquently stating that:

> [t]oday equal opportunity has come to mean only that no one is barred from entering the competition for a relatively few privileged positions. There remains the shadow of a rhetoric which suggests that actual opportunities are available to anyone who works hard, but it does not fully obscure the certainty that most people are bound to be losers. (Young 1990, pp. 214–215)

Young's work is helpful when looking into issues of social justice in education.In rural schooling, equalizing educational opportunities should not be just about constructing a "sameness" to urban counterparts, both in terms of resources and students' aspirations, but welcoming differences that can begin with what Connell (1993b) view as curricular justice: a curriculum that pays attention to the cultural and social specifity of the people and landscape it is supposed to interact with. This project of radical equality of opportunity will require the democratization of process, structures, and institutions that determine the distribution of resources but also what counts as knowledge, and by opening channels of communication and decision-making that are meaningful to rural participants.

As for the concept of "self-respect," advocates of distributive justice call for distributing self-respect as a means to achieve a just society. Even though Rawls does not argue for self-respect as something to be distributed, he speaks of distributive arrangements as the background for conditions for self-respect (Rawls 1972, pp. 148–150). Young (1990, p. 27) is right in pointing out that "self-respect is not an entity or measurable aggregate … it cannot be detached from persons as a separable attribute." It is hard to deny that material possessions contribute to positive self-respect but it involves other nonmaterial conditions that are beyond the distributive paradigm. Self-respect has to do with a persons' autonomy, decision-making power, with how one is regarded by others. Young's conceptualization of "opportunity" and "self-respect" are relevant to the advancement of social justice in schools by extending to every student and teacher the chance to construct and exercise self-development and self-determination. To achieve these goals, Young (2006a) encourages us to look into education in the context of structural injustice: (1) what is the role of schooling in the division of labor (the allocation of jobs and how they are defined); (2) who is being disadvantaged by dominant norms; and (3) which are the structures and actors involved in decision-making determined. In other words, equalizing resources (e.g. government funding for schools) does not address all the different forms of injustice suffered by socially disadvantaged groups. Overcoming the distributive dimension in schools entails, for example: reflecting the values and perspectives of different social groups in the curriculum, and promoting decision-making power for socially disadvantaged groups in the different school structures.

Assessing Social (In)justice Through the Lens of Social Groups

Central to Young's theory and to the politics of recognition is the idea that to promote social justice we should view people as members of a social group and not as individuals, and the necessity to celebrate and stimulate difference within a community. Young (1990) defines social group as a collective of individuals that present an affinity and commonality in their way of life, experiences, and daily practices (e.g. be this cultural or as a product of the division of labor), which is different from at least one other group. Social and political theorists have argued that focusing on groups draws individuals into group averages and generalities, neglecting many differences within individual members of a group, such as ethnic minorities and gender groups, negating those individuals what they deserve or have worked for (Dworkin 1981a; Rae 1981; Temkin 1993). As Young (2001) explains, the argument in favor of individuality stresses that within disadvantaged groups there are some members that are better off than the rest of the group and that by taking the group as a whole and unique unit, differences within the group will be neglected. Even more, in political terms, claiming justice through group consciousness tends to create zero-sum games, where issues such as race, ethnicity, and gender are "fixed immutable identities" and fostering political divisiveness in society (p. 4).

On the contrary, I believe that assessing social inequality through the lens of social groups allows us to avoid reinforcing structural inequalities by introducing structural changes in society rather than individual palliatives. The argument in favor of assessing inequalities by comparing groups is based on the idea that:

> the causes of many inequalities of resources or opportunities among individuals lie in social institutions, their rules and relations, and the decisions others make within them that affect the lives of individuals compared, [where some individuals] in their social positions have more options or easier access to benefits. (Young 2001, pp. 8–15)

Nevertheless, it would be too simplistic to overlook individuals' actions and reasons and view oppression purely structurally. Once more, Young has been misunderstood as a theorist that reifies the metaphor of structure, where individuals lack of any agency and are at the hands and will of structures and institutions. On the contrary, she affirms that if anything makes structures what they are is the action and interaction of people. Young's

conceptualization of a social group is relevant because it allows us to view the multiplicity, relationship, and hybridity of group membership. Social groups, be that construct from spatial, racial, or gender issues, emanate from social processes that construct particular predispositions and affinities and relationships among individuals. The quest for recognition does not entail eliminating social group differences by redistributive policies but celebrating and respecting social differences. And as societies become more diverse and heterogeneous, to presuppose that communities, such as small rural (schools) communities, have clear and defined common interests and boundaries is an inclination to establish uniformity and negate difference, a yearning for the rural idyll. Better than uniformity in a community is a democratic cultural pluralism, based on a plural understanding of social justice where difference is not only respected or tolerated but reaffirmed for all those that do not fit within the dominant group.

Critique of Iris Marion Young and the Politics of Recognition

Critics of Young's analysis affirm that a politics of difference might inadvertently promote a fragmentation of social movements and undermines social solidarity (Eisenberg 2006; Fainstein 2007); thus undermining the advancement of causes of social justice. They warn that assessing injustice through the lens of social groups strips individuals of agency or decision-making power about which group they want to belong. It appears to leave little room for "free individual choice of affiliation," allowing for coalition formation but not for "strong inter-group solidarity" (Fainstein 2007, p. 383). Furthermore, Barry (2001) criticizes Young for emphasizing difference for difference's sake, thereby contributing to overlooking issues of unfair distribution of resources and thus promoting further social inequalities. Finally, Eisenberg (2006, p. 18) raises the question of whether Young's theoretical approach accommodates insular minorities, for example, religious difference. She questions the viability of the recognitional dimension to provide guidance in how to deal with insular minorities that choose to live away from social diversity and modernity. Young (1997b, 2000) responds to these criticisms with the need to affirm social groups' cultural specificity, particularly at a time where late capitalist hegemony is anchored on "family values" and where programs and policies that serve minorities (e.g. affirmative action, reproductive rights) are being undermined in the public realm. Focusing on individuals' rights and opportunities rather than on social groups' only serves the position of the

hegemonic group by naturalizing discourses and behaviors. It contributes to normalize dominant norms and values that keep structural injustices unchallenged by emphasizing that any unequal process and/or outcome lies on the individual and has no structural explanation.

Young's argument that social justice has been reduced to the distributive dimension has received its strongest challenge from social theorist Nancy Fraser. Fraser (1997, p. 11) claims that political and social theories have reversed this tendency by privileging the recognitional dimension over the distribution of goods and the division of labor. In her important work, *Justice Interruptus*, Fraser (1997) wants us to acknowledge the tension between the distributive and recognitional dimensions of social justice and to be alert to how identity-based struggles have essentialized difference and coopted social justice issues and movements at the expense of class-based struggles that, according to her, have a strong capacity to resist capitalism's effort to eliminate claims about social inequality (see also debate between Fraser and Butler in Olson 2008). Fraser argues that Young has not resolved the tension between redistribution and recognition and that while those two dimensions are present in Young's analysis they are not successfully integrated and sometimes interfere with each other. Fraser identifies a tension between a politics of redistribution and a politics of recognition which leads to the "redistribution-recognition dilemma." This dilemma occurs because recognition claims often take the form of calling attention to the specificity of some group and the affirmation of its values. On the other hand, redistribution claims call for abolishing economic arrangements that underpin group specificity. In other words, where a politics of recognition promotes group differentiation, a politics of redistribution undermines it. Therefore, central to Fraser's (1997, p. 12) argument is the idea that social justice still "requires *both* redistribution *and* recognition." In addition, she argues that Young fails to recognize the redistribution-recognition dilemma by accommodating all collectivities into the category of "social group." According to Fraser (1997, p. 196), Young privileges social groups that are culturally based, overlooking the political-economic based groups. To address this tension between redistribution and recognition, Fraser constructs an analytical framework that conceptually puts the political economy and culture at opposite ends of the spectrum, in where "socioeconomic injustices are rooted in the political-economic structure of society while cultural injustices are rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation and communication" (see also Fraser 1997, p. 15, 2003, 2008).

While these two distinctive injustices are analytical, Fraser believes that they are in practice intertwined. Instead of occupying different dimensions or spheres, economic and cultural injustice are "usually interimbricated so as to reinforce each other dialectically," resulting "in a vicious circle of cultural and economic subordination" (p. 15). For Fraser, to achieve real social justice there cannot be recognition without distribution *and* distribution without recognition.[6]

In a reply to Fraser's criticisms, Young (1997b) acknowledged that both Taylor (1994), and to a lesser degree, Rawls (1993) in his later work give predominance to a politics of recognition over distribution as a central claim in social justice issues. However, she believes that critics of a politics of recognition from the Left, like Fraser's, exaggerate this shift and that, for example, in her work she states that African American or women's groups struggles for recognition are also a base to claim for better material lives in terms of services, jobs and incomes–that is, recognition functions in many instances as a means to economic justice. For example, claims for gender equality at work and home are not just about equal status and cultural meanings enhancing self-respect but also about income inequality and opportunity to access same jobs. Young provides another example where struggle for recognition, for cultural symbols and meaning, by Latin American peasants over the exploitation of their work and land by local governments and international finance is also a struggle for material survival. Young believes that Fraser polarizes the argument and strategy to resolve social injustices and she does not understand why one (Fraser) would construct an ideal theory that dichotomizes economic and cultural justice to only assert that in practice these two forms are intertwine.[7] Constructing analytical categories to identify contradictions in reality can be a useful exercise, as long as we also create practical strategies to resolve these contradictions. Thus, Young (1997b, p. 157) proposes not only to examine how institutions distribute resources but also paying close attention to how the division of labor is structured, the organization of decision-making power, and if cultural meanings empower of all members of society. This multidimensional approach to social justice better guides action and shows how struggles to redress injustices can be directed to multivalent of policies and goals. It also introduces the political aspect to the work of institutions and the impact of norms on everyday practices of social groups; an aspect that according to Young is missing in Fraser's work (Fraser will come around to issues of political participation or a politics of participation in her later work—see

Fraser 2008). In the next section, I will address the last dimension of justice that informs this book.

ASSOCIATIONAL JUSTICE

The third dimension of social justice that I want to examine is associational justice. This dimension includes issues of participation and voice. It is a critical aspect of social justice in education in terms of whose voice is heard, who gets a chance to participate in the decision-making of state educational and school policy design. It deals with issues of counter-hegemony in the sense that allowing for meaningful participation disarticulates dominant discourses and opens the door to different voices in schools. Issues of decision-making power are also not reducible to liberal theories of distributive justice (Young 2006a). Here too democratic processes must ensure for all school participants that their voice will be heard and respected, even through conflict and difference, without having to sacrifice their particularities. In other words, it is about not eliminating diversity among social groups and about democratic participation. In her book, *Inclusion and democracy*, Young (2000) expands her idea of democracy by proposing a normative model of democratic process, "communicative democracy," which holds the idea that people in politics should aim to communicate with one another about their interests, preferences, experiences through arguments, claims, gestures, stories, among other mediums.

Some political theorists (e.g. Benhabib 1992) view relations and communication as perfectly symmetrical and reversible, where people are capable of adopting the positions and perspectives of others, which becomes a stance of moral respect. Benhabib (1992, p. 136) following Arendt's interpretation of Kant's notion of "enlarged thought," envisages the need to see "each person as one to whom I owe the moral respect to consider their standpoint." Her point is that the more we try to put ourselves on somebody else's shoes, the more we can understand the narrative histories of those people. Young (1994, p. 167) finds problematic Benhabib's position, in so far by "identifying moral respect and reciprocity with symmetry and reversibility of perspectives" one tends "to close off the differentiation among subjects that [she] wants to keep open." This adoption of someone else's standpoint might by conducive to eliminate difference in the name of agreement. Following Young (1994), there can be social justice in asymmetrical relations if particular differences in a person are morally respected. As opposed to consensus and symmetrical relations,

people have to take into account different social and cultural positions of the other. Furthermore, as Galea (2006, p. 185) affirms, the idea of reciprocity does not deny the affirmation of difference between individuals, where acknowledging difference can contribute to an understanding of the diversity of needs and experience in society and the necessity to generate dialog among different people. Galea, working in the space of philosophy of education, argues for instance that a teacher can listen to their students but can never put herself in their place (p. 90). Like Griffiths's (1997) metaphor of traveling, we can open up our imagination to places we can see but not inhabit them. Young extends this:

> A condition of our communication is that we acknowledge the difference, interval, that others drag behind them shadows and histories, scars and traces, that do not become present in our communication. Thus we must be open to learning about other person's perspective, since we cannot take the other person's standpoint and imagine that perspective as our own. (Young 1997a, p. 53)

Looking at the relationship between a teacher and a student, Galea (2006, p. 90) draws upon Young's (1997a, p. 56) "sense of wonder that instigates serious listening to the other and a desire to question," where wonder is the "openness to the newness and mystery of the other person." This sense of wonder brings out the possibility to listen to every student, to every teacher and every school and community, which has very real practical application. To give them voice while acknowledging their particularities, their needs, their historical, social, and cultural position. This sense of wonder is critical in education, and other societal realms, because to take someone's standpoint in decision-making structures and process might in actual fact be denying it. As Young (1994) alerts us, to think that believing that we know what the need and preferences of others are might hinder our capacity to listen to their perspectives. The point is that assuming that we know what their perspective is disables the possibility of letting ourselves being confronted by our own prejudice. On the other hand, allowing other to express their needs and desires in their own voices is a form of institutionalizing them. In sum, Young (2006a, p. 100, emphasis in original) acknowledges that "differently situated persons *can* understand one another," so far they do not assume they are *like* one another. To ensure social justice in education, all school participants must be able

to express their needs, experiences, and opinions in specific circumstances where people situated in different positions can hear them.

Beyond Recognition: A Theoretical Approach to Participation

The above discussion between Benhabib's and Young's positions opens the debate about the notion of "participation" and "voice" in decision-making in schools. In a sense, from the second dimension we arrive at the third: a politics of recognition argues for successful group representation in decision-making processes, as an element and a condition of social justice in democratic societies (Young 1990). The third dimension of social justice, defined by Gewirtz (2006) as "associational justice," looks into the right for individuals or groups to fully participate in the decisions that affect their conditions of life. It can be seen as both an end in itself and a means to the ends of economic and cultural justice.

Radical liberal-egalitarians propose that as we move beyond issues of redistribution to include issues of recognition, the same has to be done from "the virtue of tolerance" to the "participatory interpretation" of social justice (Howe 1997, p. 68). Howe asserts that merely tolerating alternative and dissenting views is not sufficient because once these voices are heard they can be easily dismissed. In the discussion about economic and cultural justice, Gewirtz and Cribb (2002, p. 503) add that to achieve them oppressed social groups need to be able "to participate fully in decisions about how the principles of distribution and recognition should be defined and implemented." The idea is that individuals and social groups have not just a voice but control of the conditions in which they live and act (see Power and Gewirtz 2001).

Associational justice is strongly tied to issues of participation in democratic processes in the construction of the purpose and content of education. It is relevant in the setting of the education agenda, especially in issues regarding what kind of curriculum is taught in schools and what is the degree of participation of different societal actors in decision-making spheres. Young does not explicitly construct an associational dimension of social justice, it is Gewirtz's formulation; however, she is committed to democratic processes of representation that include socially disadvantaged groups. Early on in her work, she argued for a democratization of the institutional process that determines patterns of distribution and the recognition of different cultural experiences. In her seminal work she already argued for institutional enablement of collective discussions and

decision-making processes in different spaces such as schools, workplaces, and local assemblies (Young 1990, p. 191). The processes of representation for those marginalized groups entailed not just formal representation, for instance in the sense of nondiscrimination to access certain services, but in the possibility of ensuring their capacity to have a voice. Enabling those at the margin in society a voice is a form of understanding them as actors rather than just mere victims of social injustices (see Craig 2007). Through "voice," those who are the most disadvantaged can challenge how they are *Othered* by policies, social institutions, and other individuals and groups, where what is at stake is not just genuine participation of powerless groups but also the redistribution of power (Lister 2004a, b). Participating in decision-making processes does not mean the formal opportunity to voice your opinions but the ability to express them in your own idiom in ways that others differently positioned can hear (Young 2000, 2006a). For any person to be empowered, they must "have the institutionalized means to participate effectively in the decisions that affect her or his action and the conditions of that action" (Young 1990, p. 251). Democratic processes that intend to redress, not reinforce, social injustices must allow marginalized groups to organize and put forward their needs and preferences and enable institutional channels and processes that take these viewpoints seriously rather than as tokenistic expressions that serve to legitimize policies constructed from the viewpoint of dominant groups. Allowing disadvantage groups to voice their interest and concerns might not guarantee that policy outcomes will be more just; however, it is a necessary condition to affirm their social perspectives, opinions, and critical voices.

Learning from and Not About Socially Marginalized Groups

Participation, as well as recognition, become "code-words" for the idea that injustices encompass more than distributive aspects and that issues, for example, of gender, ethnicity, and place matter (Phillips 2003). Struggles for recognition are claims for equal participation, whereas without this recognition and participation social groups will have a constrained influence on policy formation. In schools, the struggle to give voice to those groups underrepresented should be encouraged as a learning process that is to *learn from* rather than *learn about*, even if one has to acknowledge that to challenge "our deeply internalized colonized knowledge" (Gordon

2006, p. 17) about social life can put learners into "an emotional crisis" (North 2006, p. 527).

Critical educators for social justice attempt to work across difference by deconstructing center and margin, inclusion and exclusion, self and other; thus making the discourses of marginalized people more transparent (Todd 2001, p. 68). However, Sharon Todd is apprehensive of curricular and pedagogical initiatives that help to learn *about*, rather than *from*, those who have been *Othered*. As stated by Levinas (1998, p. 120), "knowledge of the Other—that is, learning about the Other—is not the aim in any ethical relation" because it based in "pre-originary" positions of knowledge of the Other. Todd is concerned with the idea of "hope" that the more we learn *from* Others the better we will be able to understand them and the more responsible we will be to them. Therefore, she encourages teachers to teach from a place of ignorance, where teachers do not impose their knowledge on the Other and where knowledge is not an end but a means in itself. In sum, the struggle for participation and voice is a struggle for the possibility of a particular social group to participate as political and social actors in their own right, discussing their own specific interests and goals; without having to celebrate or assimilate group identity and differences they might not necessarily share. In other words, it returns to the value of recognition and participation, of different social groups as they contribute to the enrichment of political and educational debate in society, and not a celebration of difference and participation per se, to fulfill some formal democratic procedure.

CONCLUSION

I want to reiterate that this pluralization of social justice offered in this chapter is not an elimination of the usefulness of redistributive policies or movements that struggle for a fair distribution of resources in society. It is rather a conceptualization of social justice that seeks to enlarge the social justice agenda in schools. Further, for social justice to be a useful concept for schools and for research in education we need to move from abstract conceptualization into concrete social contexts.

The redistribution of resources is critical for schools, and especially for rural schools; however, I believe that the concept of equality involves more complex issues than presenting a level playing field, as argued by liberal egalitarians. It goes beyond providing similar access to similar resources. It demands more than distributive justice; it requires recog-

nition of power structures, cultural and institutional arrangements, and democratic participation. The problem with focusing solely on an equal distribution of resources is that we normalize, and materialize, values of what is to be distributed (e.g. access to post-school destinations) without discerning: who has access to what and how, and which one? In doing this, we risk reproducing rather than redressing social inequalities. Nevertheless, recognition and participation should not be taken as tokenistic concepts, written in a policy to conform to formal democratic procedures. The three dimensions should be part of what it means to deliver and receive socially just education. Social inequalities present in schools, and society, have many roots and they cannot be reversed only by one dimension. There exists interdependence between different dimensions of justice, across distributive, associational and recognitional domains. The idea of social justice is of a multidimensional nature and those different dimensions of justice can be in conflict, but ultimately must be taken into account.

NOTES

1. The dimension of distributive justice has a long tradition in Western political theory. The discussion around distributive justice can be traced as far back to Aristotle and Aquinas's allocation of public funds and benefits, and honors and wealth, respectively.
2. A major problem of utilitarianism for Rawls was that it is often incompatible with social justice on the grounds that to obtain the greatest benefits for the greatest number of people may sometimes sanction or indeed require violation of the rights of one or a few individuals or a social group.
3. There are a variety of claims against the idea of educational equality. An important area of disagreement is on the quality of schooling that the principle of education equality can provide students. Sufficientarian theorists, which advocate for sufficient level of resources for all persons to enjoy a reasonable decent quality of life, worry that due to the finite amounts of resources in society, a transfer of these to ensure that all students have the highest possible quality of education risk the provision of excellence in education (see Anderson 2007; Satz 2007). This objection to educational equality is often referred as leveling-down. To put it simply, they argue that jeopardizing excellence in education restrains the possibility of building sustainable economic growth and technological innovation that results in a beneficial for those well off as well as those worse off. In addition to this claim, sufficientarians also affirm that equalizing resources unduly

constrains parental choice to promote the educational opportunities of their children (Macleod 2010). Advocates of educational equality argue that its objective is to eradicate inequality in education, particularly that which is institutionally sanctioned, while sufficientarians aim to mitigate and reduce educational inequality (Macleod 2010). Casal (2007) nicely sums it up: The idea of sufficientarians is not to have the same but that everybody has enough (see Frankfurt 1987; Crisp 2003; Walzer 1983).

4. See Armstrong (2006) for an excellent comparative analysis on the positions of Iris Marion Young and Anne Phillips on equality.

5. However, Phillips (1999, 2004), going a step further than Young, affirms that if true equality of opportunity exists, then this should lead to an equality of outcome. In particular, no inequality of outcome between groups is sustainable without considering that there are systematic biases towards this production.

6. For Fraser (1997), some of Young's five faces of oppression are rooted in the political economy (exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness) while others (cultural imperialism and violence) are rooted in culture. However, powerlessness, for example, belongs to both dimensions, as social groups can suffer discrimination in terms of division of labor and in terms of lack of respect.

7. Young (1997b, p. 153) calls a section of her response to Fraser: "Why theorize with a dichotomy?".

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Social Justice in Rural Schooling

This chapter focuses on how rural school participants understand social justice in relation to their experiences in the present institutionalized time and space of the school. Through their explanations of the challenges and opportunities, they illustrate how socially just schooling really is in rural places, and what kind of processes and outcomes schools are creating and perpetuating in a particular time and space. As I have stated in the introduction of this book, time and space should not be understood as neutral objects but as processes influenced by social relations and structures (Massey 1994). The intention is to render space and time visible so we can gain a deeper understanding of rural school participants' social positions and relationships toward schooling and social justice, thereby overcoming abstract conceptualizations that are detached from the social context.

The chapter is structured in two major parts. First, I briefly examine how students come to define the term in the abstract before looking at their experiences and the obstacles they identify as being a barrier to their learning and post-school pathways. The idea is to analyze the quality of education and how socially just participants believe it is. Then, in the second part, I examine teachers'—including principals' and parents'—views of the most pressing issues for rural schooling and how these views shape their understanding of social justice. In this and the next two chapters the narrative is deliberately more descriptive to allow the participants to speak for themselves and paint a truthful picture of what is happening in rural schools and communities.

The Abstract Conceptualization of Social Justice

In the in-depth interviews, I asked rural school participants to define in abstract terms social justice. The purpose was to begin a conversation about the concept of social justice and to make participants reflect on the concept from outside themselves, looking at the many. By asking participants to see themselves within the social milieu, to detach themselves from their own specific interests, I was following, in broad terms, Rawls's experiment of seeking people's view of what justice means from a veil of ignorance. An overwhelming majority of participants defined social justice through the distributive dimension (84 %), predominantly as equality of opportunity in access to material goods, whereas only few participants defined it through, rough, notions of the dimensions of recognition and association. Students were the group that mostly defined it as distributive justice, including half of them identifying it as equality of opportunity. For instance, a typical comment by students defining social justice as simple equality (Walzer 1983; Miller 1999) is offered by this young person who argued that in rural communities social justice related to "if you want to do something being able to access it, making sure that everybody is equal," while another student thought "people over-use it a bit … because it's an Australian term, but I think it's everybody being equal and everybody getting the same opportunities." Teachers and parents also overwhelmingly defined social justice within the distributive dimension—as equal access to resources and opportunities; while both principals argued for a better distribution of resources for rural schools and defined the concept as fairness, which they understood as giving each person his or her due.

Rural school participants' responses exemplify the argument about the interchangeability of the terms "social justice" and "distributive justice" in a significant part of the literature around theory of justice (see Miller 1999). The implications of these abstract definitions, however, also point out to a view of social justice as *equality for all*. These definitions resonate with Jasso's (1980, p. 9) comment that people's "universal longing is for equality," "justice is equality." Like social justice itself, "equality" is a contested term. People who might choose the principle of equality as the social descriptor of social justice may also disagree among themselves about what that means in real terms. Equality for whom? What is to be equalized? What is the objective of equalization? What opportunities they are missing out on? What are the barriers that need to be torn down? Most importantly, a lack of contextualization in the notion of social justice

muddies the terrain. The point is that in order to contribute to the project of understanding rural education more effectively within a plural social justice framework we need to embark on a deeper analysis of the different discourses and practices occurring in rural schools. A deeper knowledge of the meaning of social justice can only be attained through digging in the social context, for instance, in relation to students' experiences in rural schooling, in the quality of teaching and learning. When asked about it, at least two-thirds of the students claimed that there were barriers to a high quality education.

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR RURAL SCHOOLING EXPERIENCE

The abstract conceptualizations by students and school staff draw attention to a persistent longing for educational equality amidst a rural schooling environment of sustained disadvantages. At the beginning of this century, the most complete study on rural education in Australia, the *National Inquiry on Rural Education* (HREOC 2000a, b) stated that a lack of educational programs and courses was detrimental to the quality of education provided in rural schools. The inquiry established that this lack of breadth of curriculum was accompanied by a lack of material resources and availability of information technology and extracurricular activities. I discovered that these issues were still relevant in both schools. For instance, Emma, a student who was in Year 12 at Highland school, was focusing on "doing well at school at the moment, especially with the VCE," and thinking of going to university after finishing school, either in Melbourne or in a regional center. Her interests were varied: science, languages (Indonesian), music, netball, and making friends. When it came to the quality of her schooling experience, Emma believed that the lack of breadth of curriculum, tied to a lack of broader teaching expertise, was a critical disadvantage:

> The courses are sort of limited here. I am thinking what my cousin in Ballarat is doing, he is doing English Literature; something nobody is interested in here. There is one thing for me, I wanted to do music at school but they couldn't offer it to me in the VCE subjects because of a problem with the teachers,[1] so now I do it after school, separately. I play piano, mainly. So I have to do a separate exam … and I have to travel more than an hour away to play the piano.

Like Emma, the majority of students constructed limitation and disadvantage in educational opportunities through a constant comparison with a norm based on urban experiences (which they were cognizant through the flow of messages, stories, and experiences from relatives and friends' and from their own experiences attending opening days at urban universities). Students thought their urban peers were given broader choices in the curriculum which amplified their post-school opportunities. Claire was in Year 10 at Lowland school, and like many of her peers in the school (and students at Highland school) she had intellectual and cultural concerns and curiosities that are sometimes only associated with students living in the big metropolis (Corbett 2013). Claire played "the violin in the school band, in the string ensemble" and was planning to go to university in Melbourne and study journalism or Japanese (to possibly live in Japan and teach English). She tied the lack of breadth of curriculum and the "solitude" that rural school participants have to confront in terms of sharing common experiences that increases the volume and quality of education. Claire wanted to study media in the last years of high school but the school could not offer such a course. Like many rural students in Australia she had to do it by distance education (Crump and Twyford 2010), something that she viewed as "a sort of a disadvantage because I didn't have anyone to speak to or talk about what I was reading."

Distance and time are perennial daily themes faced by rural communities. Distance usually brings an unavoidable cost of time but also a financial and emotional cost, becoming a lived experience and not a semantic or conceptual matter of clarity (Brennan 2005). Thus, a great proportion of the longing for these students was for institutions and resources that could enrich their lives. Sebastian, for example, expressed that "I reckon we would be disadvantaged because if you are in the city you have access to big public libraries or university libraries." As he argues, a lack of access to educational institutions hinders their educational development. Valued cultural capital that can be obtained from schools, teachers, and libraries acquires a sensitive importance for students' future because of its scarcity in rural towns (Gale and Densmore 2000; Mills and Gale 2010). Norman grew up in Lowland, where he lives with his parents and a younger brother. His parents are both professionals and have motivated him to continue with higher education after school. Norman wants to "go to university (to) study literature, I'm really into writing." Despite the four hours driving to Melbourne, he has attended universities' "Open Day" during the weekends. For Norman, distance is Lowland's major challenge

as they "have to drive a long way just for extension studies." Like many other school participants, Helen, a student at Highland who grew up in a farm 10 kilometers away from the town, makes the state responsible for any provision of material goods hindering the quality of their education. Helen claimed that distance is a barrier for rural students to enjoy the activities they would like to pursue. She believed that being a rural student "there probably is some disadvantage" and called for government assistance: "I would like the government to give us rural people a fair go, like extra costs to travel or go to university." Emma, Claire, Sebastian, and Norman's account of the lack of breadth of curriculum offers a distributive view of justice as equality but overlooks the nondistributive aspect of education processes. Little is said by these students about common curriculum's blindness to issues of gender, class, or race and the ways that it denies group differences (Young 1990) and postpones curricular justice (Connell 1993a). Challenges to the way that school curriculum structures values and norms and which social groups are reflected on these were not strongly voiced by the majority of students in both schools.

Nonetheless, this curriculum scarcity was not just significant for the "academic" but also for the "vocational" students, that is, those who either choose not to continue with higher education (or could not afford it), and therefore opt for an apprenticeship or employment after school. David was in Year 10 at Highland school and planning to take an apprenticeship in engineering in the same town his mother worked (in an army base). He affirmed that "my parents are pretty excited that I want to get an apprenticeship." However, David encountered a void between his aspirations and the curriculum offered and had to campaign to obtain more relevant courses: "I had to put up a pretty big fight to get an engineering class. Now I am in VET engineering and I will later take an apprenticeship, I am the only student." Interestingly, students following an academic pathway (VCE subjects) also pointed out the lack of VET (vocational) subjects. For example, Sebastian, who was planning to continue to higher education after Year 12, acknowledged that there were some "kids at school that won't like what they have … like the school doesn't offer certain VET subjects because we are in a more agricultural area." It is important to stress that his school, Highland, mirrors VCE scores (university entrance exams) with school success and while Sebastian might be part of this success he still acknowledges that others are not well catered in their educational interests.

These students' comments are representative of almost all students' view of the curriculum choice offered in both rural schools. Moreover, as stated in Chap. 2, these students depict issues of disadvantage and of belonging to a periphery in terms of school resources. They touch upon issues of lack of "availability," "accessibility," and "affordability" exposed by the national inquiry more than a decade ago (HREOC 2000b). Availability or lack of courses has a direct impact on the quality of education and on future employment possibilities. Education is well understood as a gateway to future rewards in society (e.g. income, status, wealth) (Brighouse 2010; Wyn 2009), and recognition, and redress, of their spatial disadvantage is demanded. Students' claims sit within an egalitarian view for an educational equality based on the preparatory dimension of schooling—preparation of children and youth for adult life (Macleod 2010). These egalitarians claims are perceived as structural injustices, though mostly focused on better distribution of resources. There are, however, liberal egalitarians claims on educational equality based on the intrinsic dimension, where students claim for activities and experiences that are challenging and stimulating (Macleod 2010), which might not represent a mean (a skill) to an end (a job)—such as playing piano or immersing oneself on English literature. These intrinsic views of education reaffirms Corbett's (2013) claims that a view of rural education and spaces as uncreative and gear toward vocational studies is a view constructed from the metropolis rather than from local places. Most importantly, throughout this chapter, and the following ones, students reveal a strong identity as the "Other" in the education sphere, an identity constructed on the basis of their rural social group positioning (Young 1990, 2000). Thus, within the comments above and below, all along students recognize their *otherness* in contemporary society, where the normative (urban) is central to their claims for educational equality. Students' claims, however, present some important limitations. A strong focus on leveling the playing field between urban and rural schools, as an enabler of personal independence for individuals (students) to participate in society's institutions (e.g. labor market), obscures the impact of institutional arrangements in the construction of normative youth transitions, as well as a recognition of (rural) values and participation in process of decision-making for rural students (Young 1990, 2001, 2006a). Indeed, as I mentioned above, very little is said by students about the content of the curriculum in relation to their local community. I will return to these limitations later in the book.

"We Have to Start All over Again": The Impact of Teacher Shortage

The second concern expressed by students was related to issues of staff turnover, with the consequent loss of teaching expertise, and teacher recruitment. The responses from students highlighted that staffing is a key component of a good quality of education. High staff turnover makes it hard for rural students, parents, and the community to construct a relationship with teachers, thus weakening the collaborative partnership needed in any successful learning project. It also has an impact on the functioning of the school, where the loss of a teacher represents a loss of the institutional memory for the school.

Daniela was in Year 10 at Lowland school, planning to continue with university studies in horticulture at a regional university campus. She believed rural schools are advantaged in that "there's more one on one (interaction) in the classroom" with the teacher but acknowledged "fewer subjects of choice and less people to talk to." For her the majorities of teachers "come in and just go and (are) basically fill-in teachers and stuff like that … usually they stay for about two or three years. And we get like six new teachers a year or something like that." Michael, also a student at Lowland school, asserted that "every year we have a new teacher starting in the middle of the year … changing things … we have to start all over again." Students related the lack of staff with a lack of resources. Stuart's comment illustrates a general observation made by other students. He was in Year 10 at Highland school and looking forward to entering an apprenticeship in mechanics. He enjoyed how "easy it is to get along with the teachers" and the special "one-on-one attention we get." Nonetheless, he claimed that Highland school does not have the appropriate "technology" and "enough teachers" for him to study "mechanical work," nor does the town offer spaces where he can "experiment and practice mechanics." Stuart knows he will have "to leave the town yes or yes."

Teachers as transmitters of valued cultural capital acquire a significant relevance in small rural schools and communities (Gale and Densmore 2000; Mills and Gale 2010). The recruitment and retention of staff has important social justice implications regarding the quality of education in terms of access to different forms of cultural capital by rural students, especially regarding their post-school pathways. Cultural capital, as valued by the labor market or by further and higher education institutions can be scarce in rural towns, especially since teachers are becoming one of the

few professionals remaining in rural areas affected by neoliberal policies depleting local communities of public services. Moreover, the transmission and accumulation of cultural capital requires an investment over time (Bourdieu 1998; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), which high staff turnover only damages.

However, it would misrepresent the picture to claim an overwhelmingly negative experience of rural students. They believe small rural schools can provide a better environment to learn due to small class sizes and a closer relationship with the teachers (see Ayers 2000). Small classes allow for teachers and students to spend more time on tasks and to have more interaction and feedback rather than applying time to classroom control, housekeeping, and routine supervision (Thomson 2002). Furthermore, students expressed that they have received adequate attention in class and extra attention out of school. For instance, David liked the small size of the school's population: "we are few people, have small classes, you get more one on one with teachers." Tamara also appreciated the small class sizes and knowing the "teachers out of school," having "a close relationship." Their views exemplified almost all students' opinion of the close relationship between students and school staff; including the possibility in many rural communities that the boundaries of the school and the community can be porous due to the continuation of the relationship between students and teachers outside school time. This was the case especially with the smaller school, Highland school. Emma, for example, reaffirms this idea of porosity: "You get good one-on-one time with the teacher. And if you don't understand something you can ring them up. Even during the holidays with LOTE I could ring up Ms. Smith and go to her house." These examples and experiences reveal the dialogical and relational nature of teaching and learning and, most importantly, the central position of "care" in any educational process. Surely, the visibility and proximity offered by rural communities might enhance this relational and dialogical nature, which by no means should be seen as absent in regional and urban settings. But in rural settings, close relationships and dialog inside and outside the school contribute to enhance caring by developing a frame of reference, mutual understanding, and receptivity of an individual's aims and needs (Noddings 2012). Noddings is right in finding a common ground between an ethics of care and Levinasian ethic of alterity, where learning *from* the Other is crucial to build a meaningful and respectful two-way flow relationship that advances the interests of both parties. As Noddings have put it, in education to build this caring frame of

references, trust and continuity in student-teacher relationships are critical (p. 240). Unfortunately, as shown above, staffing continuity is not a constant in rural education.

The Pervasiveness of the Idea of Equality

So far students have articulated important concerns and challenges to the quality of education they receive. Rural students in the main said they suffered disadvantages in terms of breadth of curriculum, shortage of staff, lack of resources, and distance to different forms of cultural capital, all of which have been largely documented in the past (Boylan and Wallace 2007; Cuervo 2011; HREOC 2000a, b; Welch 2007; White et al. 2008). These claims presuppose a construction of social justice around an idea of educational equality, which is profoundly influenced by their "situated practices" (Gewirtz 2002), by the particularities of the rural social context. Further, this disadvantage is exacerbated by the comparison with the "norm," represented by metropolitan schools, which, in their opinion, have abundance contrasted with rural scarcity. The implication is that in regards to social justice issues rural schooling is still situated in the periphery of the government educational agenda. This is not surprising since every time policymakers, and many researchers, want to know about contemporary youth they look to the metropolis for it (Cuervo and Wyn 2012). Elsewhere, I have showed how young people are aware of their social position as the *Other* and go to great length to explain their decisions and actions while youth in urban places take for granted many of their practices (e.g. doing a higher education degree) (see Cuervo and Wyn 2012, 2014). This risks demanding an equal education opportunity that is constructed as "sameness" to urban needs—thus vanishing all the social circumstances of rurality and other structural inequalities as class, gender, and race (Connell 1993a). Further, what this "sameness" also presupposes is the need for an education level playing field that can guarantee youth mobility, out-migration to the metropolis, which has been a constant solution for rural problems in modernity (Corbett 2007) and which has been adopted as the normative youth transition in contemporary societies (Cuervo and Wyn 2014). This normalization of youth transitions should also be understood in the rural context of radical restructuring and transformation of forms of productions presented in Chap. 2; which has diminished local pathways to adulthood for young people—particularly for those (males) interested on an agricultural future. Nonetheless,

drawing on Young's (2006a, p. 96) definition of "normalization," the universalization of youth lives based on processes that create "experiences and capacities" of urban youth as standards against which *all* young people are measured contributes to privilege certain social groups against others that have it harder to accomplish it and are found deviant or at-risk. These processes of normalization can result in stigmatization and further disadvantaged for those that cannot achieve the standard (Young 2006a, p. 97). For rural students, then, parity in educational resources understandably becomes paramount to achieve the normative standard.

In the temporal and spatial sphere of rural schooling a lack of adequate resources inclined students to express a desire for the distributive dimension of social justice, which bestow primacy on the "concept of having" resources and materials goods, such as more staff, a broader set of subjects and other resources are needed to receive a good quality of education. The comments revealed that a significant majority of students associated social justice with an educational equality that opens up opportunities regardless the social space one occupies (that is, rural and nonrural people). Interestingly, students' comments align with an educational equality that does not claim for an equality of academic outcome but resources that mitigate the unfair and arbitrary limitations that the rural space, and for some of them the lack of action of political institutions (government), offer to them (see Casal 2007; Macleod 2010; Satz 2007). Students offer an intuitive case for educational equality based on more and better resources that can serve as a key to open the gate to future societal rewards (e.g. income, wealth, status) (Brighouse 2010). This hegemonic place of a politics distribution obscures the other dimensions of justice and accords with other contemporary sociological and educational studies on secondary school students in Australia (see McLeod and Yates 2006). I am not denying the importance of resources for schools that are understaffed or lack of appropriate facilities. They are critical for any good quality of education, and as I have shown before, an endemic problem for rural schools. The point is that adequate resources are a necessary condition to achieve a good quality of education but not a sufficient one.

I want to make another point that focuses on the question of *who* should be made equal. Here the work of Young (1990, 2001) is particularly useful. Drawing on Young's argument, social justice is best served by treating people as members of social groups rather than individuals because institutionalized relationships do not involve individuals but social groups. She argues, as individuals are disadvantaged not because of their individuality

but due to their belonging to a social group it is critical that we see injustice through the lens of those groups. That is, examining social inequalities through the lens of social groups rather than individuality contribute to the enhancement of structural changes rather than individual palliatives. The comments of rural students depict a concern for social rather than individual inequality, a mutuality and reciprocity with each other in terms of better distribution of resources. For example, Helen's comment introduced an explicit notion of state responsibility toward rural people, in particular a primacy of their status as rural inhabitants as a social group. Further, while some students are aware that their access to their educational needs is well covered, it is not the case for some of their classmates. Thus, students conceptualize the problem as structural and lying beyond individual positions and possibilities. In the present students identify themselves first and foremost as a social group defined by rurality and are aware of structural barriers that hamper their educational possibilities rather than individual failures due to a lack of effort or talent.[2] This is especially important due to the influence of neoliberalism in education, which is rooted in individualistic rather than a collective understanding of schooling and educational achievement. In that sense, they make *spatial structural* inequalities visible, which as Young (2001) alerts us, is a necessary condition to redress *social* inequalities.

Teachers' Perceptions of Their Rural Schooling Experience

In this second part of the chapter I focus on teachers' experiences of working in a rural school. Through their comments teachers portrayed a workplace environment of constant change tied to demands of performance and accountability, and a lack of time to reflect on their work. In this neoliberal environment these rural teachers felt the increasing monitoring of their work; pressure of increasing workload; a lack of participation in decision-making processes; and a feeling of abandonment by the state. These critiques have been offered elsewhere in the education research literature over the last decade (Ball 2003; Clarke 2013; Gewirtz 2002; McInerney 2007; Thrupp 2006), albeit more commonly through an urban lens or experience. The implications of this environment is a focus on auditing teachers' performance through schooling outcomes that can be constantly measured and quantified—such as scores in university

entrance exams—which tends to alter the role of teachers (see Ball 2003, 2008). The following comment by this teacher illustrates the general view of the majority of teachers in both schools. Fred, teaching social science in Lowland school, believed that

> the government is concerned about creating an accountability system that can be measured by the community. Now the focus is on the measurement and the accountability and you have all these standards and you have to rank kids, whether they were established or consolidated or beginning, which really make no sense to parents. And parents will call us and say what does 5.2 mean? Level five, consolidated. What does that really mean when my kid comes home with their report? And really, it is a way of them putting schools on some sort of equal scale. But when you spend so much energy and time and effort getting people to become accountable, they become almost like business managers in a classroom. And that's a contradiction to learning.

Fred's comments resonate with Ball's (2003, p. 215) analysis of neoliberal policies on teachers' work: these policies not only change what educators do but "it changes who they are." The changing nature of teaching with its pressure to accommodate different roles and adapt to different tasks in the school was a concept widely commented by staff. From traditional notions of teachers embodying an ethics of care, many teachers concurred that their role was changing to facilitators of skills and business managers (the latter in particular for principals), and thus displaying Ball's notion of struggle between the demands of neoliberal policy technologies of accountability and performativity and "teachers as ethical subjects" (p. 216). Implicit in Fred's opinion was a construction of "effective" and "good" teaching underpinned by an objective and neutral rationality of what counts as knowledge. In addition to these increasing pressures of accountability and performativity teachers pointed to a lack of participation in decision-making processes and a feeling of abandonment by the state. Contrary to the idea that experienced teachers might resist *change*, they generally embraced it by acknowledging that pedagogical practices and curriculum content have changed over time. Oscar's views were a faithful mirror of teachers' responses across the board. He has been teaching history for a couple of decades and in Highland for some years. Oscar was aware that changes bring new pressures but also that "times change and you have to keep up with changes." However, he stressed the importance of time in the implementation of new policies, as "you

cannot cope with so much change so quickly, some things are always a recipe for disaster because they bring uncertainty." Oscar asked for more direction, as "you don't get that much guidance from the state." Seasoned teacher Diane also pointed out that the pace of change was "too quick … often the changes come before the resources are available and that is very frustrating." Laura has also been teaching for more than two decades with retirement looming. Her comments supported Oscar's views and the implications that change has on staffing without adequate time to adapt:

> I think this constantly changing the curriculum expecting us to re-write all the time is very hard and maybe is more difficult in a school where you are the only one teaching in your faculty. It is always trying to recreate the wheel … It is crazy and I think it is driving people out of teaching … Yes, there is a consultative phase but I know we have submitted lots of different things during different consultative phases and we haven't seen anything implemented from them. So I don't know what happens to them, if they actually read them or not. But I really think that it is one of the biggest things that are driving teachers out of the profession.

This situation concludes, as theorized by Young (1990), in a feeling of powerlessness and marginalization. These feelings were not just related to the scarcity of resources but a deprivation of the possibility to have a voice in policymaking decisions and the lack of "authority" and recognition of "status," which allows teachers to be listened to and respected (Young 1990). As argued by Young in her pluralization of justice through her articulation of oppression in five faces, through these neoliberal policy technologies (Ball 2003; Thrupp 2006), teachers are emptied of power, authority, and status that enhance a respected and consulted voice by educational bureaucracies. On the contrary, what neoliberal policy technologies are constructing is a more disciplined subject that is more concerned with measurable outputs rather than processes of classroom pedagogy (Ball 2003; see also Clarke 2013). In these rural schools, a politics of distribution and of recognition and participation are paramount. What these teachers' comments are expressing is a need for a recognition, and trust, of their position as experts, to have a greater participation in what teaching entails. Inequalities and injustices, as Fraser, and I will argue also Young, view it, need both redistribution *and* recognition—but as important is the call for a stronger and meaningful participation by teachers in policymaking processes. Thus, at a first glance teachers construct a more

plural view of social justice that includes the idea of having a "voice" in their professional role and an empowerment that allows them to conduct their role as they see fit.

"We Haven't Got Anybody Else": Challenges to Rural School Staffing

These increasing pressures on teachers' work through greater accountability and performance were tied to concerns and claims of fewer resources for school staff. For example, there were strong concerns about the capacity of schools to recruit and retain staff and the level and quality of resources to teach and learn. The perennial shortage of teachers and teachers working in fields they are not trained for was commonly identified as a problem by parents and by teachers in both schools. A significant concern is that this creates barriers in the process of transmission and accumulation of valued knowledge by the labor market. For instance, Corinda, a teacher and a parent of a student at Lowland school, claimed that

> It's been hard to get maths teachers in here, for example. We've got a couple here, but a lot of people, who taught in maths area, are really, teaching somewhere else and maths is a sideline. But now, they've been put into maths because we haven't got anybody else. So from a parent point of view that's not good either, you want your child taught by a sort of specialist person, because I think maths is pretty important.

The principal at Lowland school presented a critical account of his relation with the government in terms of the distribution of resources. One of his main concerns was the recruiting and retaining staff, which had direct implications for the quantity and quality of courses that the school can offer: "There are a lot of areas [for improvement] but the main one is I don't think that we receive nearly enough money for staffing … we can't offer some of the subjects to small numbers of students, which I'm told we can't afford at times, [so] we lose those students often to private schools." The problem of staff recruitment and turnover was more present in Lowland school. According to Highland principal, his school did not suffer this problem only because the majority of teachers coming to Highland, generally females, "have married local farmers," thus being able "to settle down faster and better than it might happen in other towns." Nevertheless, he did acknowledge that this stable period was about to

be challenged by the retirement of several teachers in the next five years, which opens a period of renewing the teaching staff. In this, the school faces a challenge common to many schools across Victoria (AEU 2007a).

In addition to these difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff and increasing work pressure, teachers described experiences of isolation and loneliness. In both schools teachers felt the "curriculum loneliness," a lack of teaching partnership or an integrated professional culture. Laura, a teacher in Highland school, best summarized it: "everybody at school suffers a little bit about that … you feel a bit little isolated being the only teacher in your faculty." Mary agreed:

> Sometimes there is no one else doing the same that you are doing to discuss things. If there was another arts teacher to share the load, we could discuss the curriculum, we could write it together. Where here you have to do everything on your own and when you want to clarify something you don't have somebody to turn around and say "what do you think of this picture". There is no one to consult, you have to do it all yourself. It is hard.

Research shows that feeling professionally and personally isolated has an impact on teachers' morale and the efficacy of their work (Squires 2003; Young 2000), and it also has consequences for recruiting and retaining staff (McClure et al. 2003). Studies have demonstrated that schools that promote professional collaboration between teachers, especially between veteran and novice teachers, and where student learning success is a shared responsibility, have improved teacher retention and satisfaction (Futernick 2007; Kardos and Johnson 2007). The idea of an integrated professional culture entails different dimensions of social justice: it has to do with a politics of distribution with schools being well served by having different teachers in one subject area, which serves as a means to an end of empowerment and respect of teachers' work through the idea of participation and support from colleagues. It represents an understanding and supportive community for educators. There is a nurturing of ideas and actions that creates collaborative work instead of individual work, replacing individual for social responsibility, an intellectual and practical mutuality and reciprocity. An "integrated professional culture" therefore provides teachers with a "pervasive mode of professional practice" that overcomes teachers' professional loneliness or "relying on a single teacher in their school who served as confidante, savior, or friend" (Kardos and Johnson 2007, p. 2088). The need for peer support becomes paramount for rural

teachers and the quality of teaching. What these teachers are expressing is a concern about not being able to associate and collaborate with other teachers and reflect on their work, their teaching. Their work becomes individualistically compartmentalized and progress and variety in the subject format and content are dependent on their willingness to do research privately.

"That's an Area That They Could Improve": Principals' Claims for More Resources

A crucial issue emphasized by both principals was the belief that the schools were being asked to do more with fewer resources. In their opinions and experiences, a politics of distribution underpinned by the idea of fairness is critical to provide students with the tools they need to be active social, economic, and political citizens in society. The Highland school principal, Ernest, also finds that current times are becoming financially more difficult than in the past. The school budget presents an area of social injustice for the principal:

> I am satisfied with our school budget at the moment. However, it is decreasing over time and that's because in the past we were fortunate (sic) enough to basically be given an extra teacher because of another program that was introduced … and that teacher is being taken (financially) off us over the next two years, so effectively we have to reallocate the funds to fund another teacher.

Highland school is eligible for additional funding under the "Location Index." This Index compensates a school for its distance—and its associated cost—from Melbourne and regional centers and nearby schools. The principal, Ernest, is not satisfied with it.

> There is a (Location) "Rurality Index" that gets into the "funding formula" … (but) it's insignificant, really it is. Our phone bill compared to a city school will chew up the "rurality funding." That's an area that they [the government] could improve but I don't think it will happen [because] there is no push for it. There is no political interest from the state. And this money is from the state (i.e. provincial government).

The need for more resources was also important for Kurt, the Lowland principal: "I wish more money was put into facilities." In conversations

over different research trips, principals usually implicitly stated a view of a peripheral position of rural schools in government educational policy agenda. This did not mean a feeling of being completely abandoned but a lack of understanding by state authorities of what teaching in the rural space entails of.

"We Are a Little Bit Lucky at the Moment": Grateful Subjectivity and Rural Schooling

The above quote by Ernest, the Highland school principal, reveals a notion of being "lucky" or "fortunate," a grateful subjectivity that is present in many teachers' discourse and predominant in environments where professionals are asked to be more "efficient," that is, to do more with less. The participant teachers were aware of having to work in a neoliberal context, where rural economies were being restructured, public and private services are shrinking (Brett 2011), and with the perennial concern that rural and public education are the poor cousins of urban and private education.

The precariousness of their community and school context exacerbated in teachers a view of difficulty but of also being "fortunate" to work in a school that has been adequately resourced in a specific area or when they have been judged to be performing well. Diane provided a very explicit example of the notion of *grateful subjectivity* within the terrain of "curriculum loneliness" that was shared by many teachers: "We are a little bit lucky at the moment; there are four of us that teach maths in all the school." For Kate, at Highland school, they were "fortunate" because "every three years we get a computer up-grade." Edward argued that in Lowland "there are far better resources in the school than the ones I had in the other school." In neoliberal times where the concept of the public is impacted upon by notions of privatization, consumer choice, and individual responsibility, for many of these teachers fortune played a role in the availability of resources of rural public schools. Thus, what is normalized in these responses is scarcity of resources and the possibility of "luck" rather than a provision of resources as part of the state obligation toward public education. Being a recipient of something that other peer schools lack creates a sense of uncertainty and reinforces the feeling of being powerless when the fortune wheel does not favor them and resources dry up. The problem here rests in the potential creation of dependent relationships between an institution (the state) that awards "fortune" to a subject (rural

teacher and/or student) that constructs a grateful subjectivity toward a body that unequally and arbitrarily distributes this "luck." This notion of "fortune" implies a shift from the normative idea of social rights to the concept of a voluntary help/contribution of an institution (in this case the state but it can well be a philanthropic organization) to the grateful subject. But it also implies a "normalization," as Young (2006a) would put it, of the relationship between schools and state, where "doing more with less" becomes the standard by which staff are measured. Those schools and staff that cannot adapt or perform to this standard are construed by the system as being deficient and failing parents and students, without ever revisiting how fair or unfair the game they have to play is (i.e. the lack of resources rural staff and schools teach with). The problem is, as mentioned above, that processes of normalization entrench disadvantage and stigmatization for those not achieving the norm. It is unsurprising then that grateful subjectivities arise when school participants feel they have more resources at their disposal than what they commonly have or what other peers can access. Drawing on Ball (2003, p. 216), in an educational landscape dominated (and saturated) by managerial discourses of "productivity," "cost-effectiveness," and "policy outcomes," coupled with rural schooling perennial challenges, any surplus in resources that one school receives above the norm, understandably can be received as a matter of "luck" rather than rights.

"We Can't Compete with Them If We're the Poor Relatives": The Marketization of Rural Schooling

Staff feelings and views of being underresourced were tied to a belief that rural schools were not free of the current educational market competition. This competition was not always viewed in the classic public-private tension paradigm, as for example Highland school was the only school in the community but competing with nearby towns' public and private schools. Nonetheless, staff in both schools believed competition was a factor that impacted on their work and that they were in an uneven playing field competing with nearby private schools. For instance, in the case of the Lowland school, the lack of funding contributing to a discontinuation of some courses poses the threat of losing more students to the private schools and in effect creating a "brain drain" for the school and a process of residualization of public schools (Mills 2015). This is a trend that Lowland school principal is familiar with:

Kurt: There's more federal money going into private schools than there should be. We're mainly funded by the state (provincial government). Obviously private schools don't get as much money as we do but the argument is whether they are still getting far too much. Every dollar they get is a dollar we don't get. And it's all political; it's a balancing act. Governments try to keep the appearance with independent school students … Independent schools would probably see that differently.

 Hernán: Have you been losing some students to independent schools?

 Kurt: Yes, not many but we do. It will escalate if we don't spend. I think money on some of those things that I've mentioned … we can't offer the programs that the independent schools are offering. Inevitably we're going to lose some of our better students to independent schools … There's a feeling an independent school can offer more than we can in some areas. And that is true, they can. And again it's mainly financial … there's got to be a lot more money spent in government schools, if we are going to compete with independent schools on a level playing field. We can't compete with them if we're the poor relatives.

The process of "brain drain" and residualization of public schools has the potential of exacerbating the concentration of "pockets of disadvantage" of students from low socioeconomic status generating ghettos of education (Brighouse 2010; Gorur 2013; Mills 2015). In both schools teachers have increasingly experienced this competition in terms of an increase in parental and societal demands, where stronger market-style dispositions, such as a user-pay attitude, could be seen in parents and students. Kate, a teacher, believed that a customer identity is correlated with the "greater choices that the kids now actually have" that "make them shop around more." The risk for her is the possibility of losing students to other nearby schools; even though Highland is considered a "good school" and is the recipient of students from a nearby school. She recalled the principal saying "a couple of times this year that parents believe that this school doesn't offer them what they want so they are going to send their child to (the nearby small regional center)," which she viewed as "a threat and sometimes is regardless of the fact that the student is happy here."

Teachers agreed that parents have become more "demanding," in part due to social anxieties toward the increasingly complex nexus between education and work that their children (will) face. According to Valery, from Lowland school, parental expectations are focused on the skills their children acquire, where issues related to political and social information did not rate highly in parents' interest: "They don't care about the

political and social because they think they can cover that." She added, "parents place too much responsibility on teachers when really it's a whole community that educates the student." Fred suggested that it is hard to look beyond the idea of promoting broader ideas of social justice when for student "their whole focus is geared around gaining skill acquisition for employment." As mentioned above, teachers' identity also mutate in this market-organized landscape, where, for instance, Ephraim argued that the role of teachers has become that of a "facilitator": "so we're facilitators more than anything else, helping in the learning, rather than teaching at them. So it's more an individual process than before … Facilitators I'd think of us as." For the majority of parents (and also for students) schooling first objective was to prepare students to continue with further and higher education and to enter the workforce. The common denominator of parents' expectations for their children's future was the notion of opportunity—the idea that education, as a guarantee of offering more employment opportunities, is a necessary condition to their future lives. The notion of "giving opportunities" based on a human capitalist view of education embodies a conceptualization of life which calculates advantage over others and understandably implies a social anxiety to secure their children's future in an uncertain labor market (Ball 2006; Jordan et al. 1994; MacLeod and Yates 2006; Wyn 2009). This notion ties to the rearticulation of social justice examined in Chap. 3 with its strong shift to an economization of schooling through the delivery of skills and tools to employ in an increasingly precarious and competitive labor market–an articulation of education as property rights rather than human rights (see Rizvi 2013). My intention is not to criticize parents' predisposition to make sure that their children enjoy the best opportunities toward a complex future—that is one of their parental roles—but to point out the tensions to the interior of the idea of social justice education within the different participants in a school and look for avenues how we can reach a plural social justice agenda.

Teachers' Version of Social Justice

In contrast to students' position who predominantly argued for an educational equality anchored on equality of opportunity to access resources similar to those of their urban counterparts, teachers argued not only for greater distribution of resources but also for a greater participation in the decisions that affected their work and life. Teachers were cognizant of

their changing roles due to pressure from policy technologies that construct their work as facilitators of skills or business managers, thus claiming for recognition of their traditional status and power as educational experts and the ultimate purpose of education. These notions of plural conceptualizations of social justice in education entailed self-respect for their work—including how they are regarded by others (mostly parents and the state), empowerment, autonomy, and decision-making power. As Young (1990) would see it, teachers, and principals, were aware of the need to dismantle structures that entrenched disadvantage for their schools, and that some of these injustice were not reducible to mere distribution of material goods.

Nonetheless, the distribution of resources still predominantly commanded the argument. Following Young (1990, p. 8), teachers gave "primacy to having" rather than giving "primacy to doing," which does not express a strong enough recognition of the "heterogeneity of (the) experience of injustice" (Harvey 1993, p. 107). As stated in Chap. 4, the pluralization of social justice enlarges the educational agenda by making visible many issues that reinforce social inequalities in society and disparities between schools, such as a lack of respect and recognition of teachers' work. The significance is that how teachers view social justice will determine how they apply it. Thus, if the focus is solely on the distribution of resources, then there is a risk that issues of respect and participation will be overlooked. My point is that this is especially important since teachers are one of the main agents in the transmission of values and knowledge to young people. However, this is not due to an inherent selfishness or problem with teachers; rather, it has to do with a climate, neoliberal, which has changed the role of the teachers by making them "multitask" and "facilitators" of skills—in teachers' own words—and pressuring them to deliver the outcomes that society needs from them: the renewal of a capable workforce to compete in a tougher global economic environment (Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Wyn 2009). For instance, Valery, a teacher, claimed that Lowland school is "primarily a technical school" and that the government funding is focused on the so-called hands-on curriculum "because it combats the unemployment rate"; thus "the focus on these vocational subjects is enterprise and employment." As teachers' responses show, a functionalist discourse of education is dominant which has been strongly present in the last two decades of Australian educational policies (Dawkins 1988; Haynes 2002; Rizvi and Lingard 2010). The problem with this functionalist view of education is that education and social justice are not

"things" to be handed down to passive recipients (Young 1990, 2006a); rather they are better understood as social processes that involve respect and participation from all its participants. Further, the introduction of the concept of "luck" or "fortune" by the school staff reveals the perversity of this neoliberal project, including a "normalization" of working with insufficient resources and respect for the profession and where "luck" rather than social rights defines the state of public education. The provision of this luck constructs a grateful subjectivity that overlooks institutional arrangements in society, such as who decides who gets what (Young 1990, 2001). While claims to the state for better resources are amply made, less evident is a challenge of the type of education is given at school and to macro structural settings in society. This is not a criticism of teachers but an acknowledgment of the power of systemic forces that pressured teachers to a degree that sometimes only short-term palliatives are seeing as a possible answer to entrenched inequalities. Against emancipatory utopias that make teachers responsible for resolving all the maladies of society, these teachers' voices present a cautionary tale to the celebration of indeterminacy (Gewirtz 2002) and reflect Young's (1990) and Fraser's (1997) argument for the need for a politics of redistribution *and* recognition to solve persistent inequalities.

Conclusion

The different material challenges presented in Chaps. 2 and 3 and in this current one through the voices of school participants make unsurprising a strong understanding of social justice as equality in the distribution of resources for all schools. In the institutionalized space and time of schooling students, for example, believed that what is to be equalized is an opportunity to enjoy access to different material resources, as their (norm) urban peers do. The desire for an educational "level playing field" is the commonality of students' comments. Thus, addressing scenarios close to them, students have a capacity to argue for an egalitarian view of social justice, albeit a limited one. Their conceptualization of social justice in a spatial and temporal context does not reach a fully developed plurality but nevertheless presents traits of taking into consideration not just their personal standpoint or interest but the needs of others too, whose needs they recognize might not be served as well as theirs. Situated in the present, they have a collective understanding of social injustice, where the boundaries expand to include the social over individual interests. Contrary to

studies in sociology of youth that claim that young people seek individual solutions for structural problems, these students see injustices as structural (e.g. lack of breadth of curriculum, cost of travel) and so they do their solutions. This claim for structural solutions does not eliminate the idea and possibility of agency in young people, but it does identify structural barriers that rural students need to overcome to fully enjoy their lives. This is a promising sign in the search for redressing social injustices or inequalities, success or failure is not valued in individual terms of achievement but rather in terms of structural constraint.

Teachers offered a more plural view of social justice, mostly based on a need for more participation in decisions that affected their work (associational justice) and rough notions of recognitional justice based on the idea of greater respect for and empowerment of their work. Interestingly, teachers offered a view of justice demanding *both* redistribution and recognition (Fraser 1997). However, teachers'—and principals' and parents'— positions were similar to that of students, immersed mostly in an urgent need for a better redistribution of material goods. In sum, in terms of looking into the normative descriptor of social justice in the present the most favored was the dimension of distributive justice, expressed as equality of opportunity or access to resources. This position limits rather than enlarges the notion of social justice in schooling, creating an illusion that redressing social inequalities can be solved solely by a greater distribution of resources without including issues of respect, participation, and recognition of structural and subjective injustices. A good quality of education that contributes to redress issues of social injustice in society needs a better and greater distribution of resources, but as I have argued above, it also fundamentally requires an understanding of issues of recognition and participation in areas of schooling, such as policymaking, curriculum issues, and teachers' professional needs.

Notes

1. There was no teacher to teach music at VCE level.
2. As stated by Miller's (1992, p. 570) review of empirical studies about the meaning of social justice, "where people have warm relations with one another and feel a sense of solidarity with their group, it is likely that they will also feel committed to advancing one another's welfare."

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The Metamorphosis of Social Justice in the Present and the Future

Young people in rural places experience a lack of opportunities for further and higher education and employment that often means they have to leave their communities. Unlike their urban counterparts, the transition between secondary school and further education and work demands that many young rural people dislocate their ways of being from their local roots. Contrary to beliefs in the rural literature that parents and other adults in the communities want young people to stay and ensure the sustainability of the town, the adult participants in this study encourage young people to migrate in search for educational and job opportunities elsewhere. This encouragement is a response to the structural limitations presented to younger generations. It is also a strong incorporation of the normative youth transitions discourse that says further and higher education is needed to make it work in a competitive labor market. This decision to migrate generates different tensions for individuals and rural communities, including issues of sustainability for rural towns and those social groups who have the capacity to mobilize different resources to access educational and employment opportunities and those who do not. This chapter examines and problematizes the different decisions and tensions for individuals and the community, including identifying social divisions within the community.

I argue that a fundamental shift occurs in how school participants view social justice in the present and in the future. In the present institutionalized time and space of rural schooling they articulate a discourse of equality—based on the provision of resources and material goods as

those enjoyed by the norm (urban schools). But then, without the security of rural schooling, the narrative shifts and participants adopt a discursive position more aligned with neoliberal sensibilities involving the ideas of choice, self-realization, and individual responsibility. This metamorphosis of social justice enables them to confront a competitive educational and complex labor environment away from their local knowledge and habitat. There are, as I argue, problems with that.

Rural Youth Out-Migration and Structural Limitations for a Local Future

A plethora of studies have already shown that young people feel compelled to leave town when there are few further and higher education and employment opportunities for them (e.g. Carr and Kefalas 2009; Corbett 2007; Cuervo and Wyn 2012; Kenway et al. 2006). In Highland and Lowland communities, all interviewed students expressed their plans to move out of their communities after finishing Year 11 or 12.[1] Together with a lack of further and higher educational institutions, there is a scarcity of full-time ongoing jobs, related to the deep social and economic changes in rural communities, stated in Chap. 2, for young people in rural towns, making them having to rely in most cases on local social networks rather than on formal job strategies (Alloway et al. 2004; Cuervo and Wyn 2012; Kenway et al. 2006; RRSDC 2006). In Highland, some young people are able to work in seasonal jobs or casual jobs, like the harvest, while in Lowland, a few of them will gain casual positions in the incipient tourist industry—which provides the possibility of gaining some skills but also to save money for a future away from their parental home and community. These structural limitations were widely acknowledged by young people. For example, Tamara reported on a key issue for rural towns in a globalized world, the decline of employment as a major concern for rural people: "It is really hard to get a job. We are lucky to get summer jobs." Daniela affirmed that in Lowland there is a "lack of opportunities because there's no jobs you can do, not many specialized ones," while Norman argued that apprenticeships can be found but in nearby towns requiring travel of least an hour. The interviewees also stressed the need to expand their social networks. Through many of their comments, students mentioned the necessity of interacting with other people, the lack of privacy and anonymity, and the lack of people to interact in their school and community.

Leaving their town is not just a matter of a lack of educational and work opportunities but an interest in experiencing other lifestyles and expanding their social lives (Geldens 2007).

Both Highland and Lowland have experienced important changes to their economic productive life. Several years of drought have dramatically undermined Highland's farming production, while Lowland has seen a steep decline of its primary source of employment: the timber industry, producing a slow shift from a landscape of production to one of consumption. Changes in the social and economic conditions have had a significant impact on the availability of employment opportunities for adults and youth. Diane, a teacher from Highland, describes the social change: "There is no employment for young people; that is an issue." She believes that beyond casual work in farms it is "understood you have to move away." Diane notices the generational changes by stating that when she started working in the school in the late seventies "most of the boys that came from the farm left school at a much younger age and went back to the farm." In the present, "only kids that stay are those from what we called before 'the minority.'"[2]

In Lowland there are also few employment and further education opportunities. This results in youth out-migration, which has significant implications for the town. Ephraim, a teacher from Lowland, gives a view of the implications for rural communities when they lose so many of their young people:

> There's still a fairly large majority of the students that see that there's not much for them here and go on to university or move to larger centres to try and get work, and I guess that it's one of the things that a rural community needs to be looked at: we need to maintain our young people. We don't want to risk becoming just a retirement place.

As mentioned earlier (see Chap. 2), not all Victorian rural towns attract new residents. Even though almost four out of ten (39 %) of the regional workforce is composed of so-called baby boomers, many of them are attracted to the possibility of making a lifestyle change that coastal and regional towns have to offer (Regional Australian Institute 2014). Lowland's proximity to the sea gives it the possibility of attracting metropolitan people looking for a sea change. However, this is not the case for Highland.

In both communities, participants felt that public and private services had worsened over the years, in Highland even the local supermarket has

closed, with the nearest one now more than an hour away. In some rural communities, despite the decline on services in the last few decades (Brett 2011), employment can be found in traditional institutions, such as the local health center. In Lowland, some participants, like Charles, a teacher, affirmed that some social institutions still provided services and employment opportunities: "The hospital, the secondary college and the department of sustainability of environment are probably the main factors in Lowland that are keeping people here, in positions in work." Awareness of nearby towns missing on public and private services brought to the conversation subjectivities of gratefulness. For instance, Valery felt that they "are lucky in [Lowland] in that [they] have a very good health service." However, she affirmed that the state government is "letting the infrastructure go in small towns":

> We don't have a train station anymore where we had a train station thirty years ago. And I think public transport is very poor in this area. Certainly the services for low income earners, retired people and the very young aren't very good, which is a real shame because that's most of our population, most of the people down here come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and they require that support which just isn't there.

This grateful subjectivity underlines the sense of precariousness and lack of entitlement to resources and infrastructure for rural people.

"It Is So Exciting to Know That They Have All These Opportunities": Parents' Views of Students' Future

The social and economic implications of youth out-migration (i.e. loss of different forms of community capital, see Dibden and Cocklin 2005) did not deter parents and other adults in these towns to advice students to migrate. In Highland, parents realized that there were no opportunities for their children after leaving school. Miriam, a parent, commented: "I would like them to go right through school, to finish Year 12, here is not much around here …. I think if they want an apprenticeship they would have to leave the town." And Olivia, another parent from Highland community, said, "it is so exciting to know that they have all these possibilities." She could not imagine her children "hanging around" because "they need to go away and learn." For Olivia, "you have to be lucky to get a job here. It is sad but it is true." While Margaret did not want her

children to stay on the farm because "there are too many issues, it's too stressful." Her aspirations for her children also had to do with migration: "I like them to go away, at least, and have a look and see what else is out there. They can come back after 10 or 15 years, after they had a look and don't find anything out there."

Parents' comments resonates with the language of youth and education policies that set as normative transitions the need to be mobile and flexible, keeping options open (Dwyer and Wyn 2001; Wyn 2009). This idea of further education did not necessarily involve only the pursuit of a university degree. Some parents valued other avenues, such as vocational studies; however, the general concept remained the same: more education is needed for a better quality of life in the future. Mabel, a parent from Lowland community, illustrates this point:

> Get an apprenticeship, an apprenticeship would be nice, my daughter is looking for a hairdressing apprenticeship at the moment, my son wants to get into electronics. Both were going to go to university but with the money situation and with university fees going up all the time they didn't think it was available to them, so they both decided they weren't going to go to university and going to get apprenticeships, so if they get an apprenticeship that's all we can ask. My daughter was going to get a job before she gets an apprenticeship because there's nothing around; that doesn't bother us, as long as they can get a career and do better than what we did we're happy.

Longitudinal studies of Australian youth pathways to adulthood reveal that aspirations of future social and spatial mobility mirrors the complexity of the social, economic, and cultural lives of young people (Cuervo and Wyn 2012; Skrbis et al. 2014; McLeod and Yates 2006). In a globalized world with abundant flow of images, ideas, and people, it will become increasingly difficult to answer the question where do young people belong (Wyn 2015). In the comments above, notions of becoming mobile and seeking migration are to a large degree circumscribed or driven by the lack of educational and employment opportunities closer to home. Parental and community influences played a significant role in youth decision to become mobile. Present in these parents' comments is a complex message of hope and despair, involving a discourse of aspirations to a social and spatial mobility (Bok 2010; Zipin et al. 2013) and a raw realism to the future of their community attached to ideas of rural decline and hopelessness (Alloway and Dalley-Trim 2009; Kenway et al. 2006).

The paradox is that this encouragement of youth out-migration has the potential to undermine the sustainability of rural towns. Nonetheless, it would be hard to blame parents for putting their children first and desiring for their children what is often taken for granted in urban places.

"It Could Make a Little Bit of a Difference": The Importance of Further and Higher Education

As students start to consider their future there is a common belief that more education is needed to take up the opportunities society has to offer or to be able to navigate the different life transitions. Further and higher education is particularly seen as a critical tool to increase certainty over their future (Wyn 2009). Students, and parents, also voice a strong emphasis on education as a marker of status, a sign of social differentiation for which the core of family resources will be mobilized. Thus, different parental decisions and choices are confronted and met with different forms of capital (cultural, financial, social) to be invested or exchanged in this educational race (Ball 2006; Brighouse 2010). This is more apparent with those parents that are heavily financially investing in their children university education, including the costs of moving out of their community, for which they are prepared to fall into debt, work long hours, or sell their business. Education as a "field of distinction and identity" (Ball 2006, p. 8) is understood by participants as critical in maintaining (and reproducing) social and cultural capital. As Ball and many others affirm (see Brown et al. 2010; Cuervo et al. 2013), the irony is that while further education has never been more significant in post-school transition processes and at the same time more marginal in determining employment outcomes. Different Australian youth studies show that strong strategic investment in further and higher education is met with a cruel optimism (Berlant 2011) by young people, in their awareness of the possibility of intergenerational downward mobility due to complex and precarious labor market and a rampant crisis in housing affordability (Cuervo et al. 2013; Foundation for Young Australians [FYA] 2013; Zipin and Dumenden 2014). Nevertheless, students in this study offer signs of top-down message from parents and teachers on the value and importance of further and higher education in their post-school lives. Beatrice, for example, was one of the more academically oriented students in Highland school. During the interview she said that she is pressured by her father to continue all the way to Year 12 and afterwards to university under the idea that the

higher the educational level achieved the higher the economic reward, even though attending university represented far greater financial cost for her and her parents:

> Hopefully I will be doing year 11 and 12 here at the school and then I'll study vocational or university studies. I am not sure about the cost-side of it … If you finish all the way to year 12 and then go to university, you will have a better education that someone that has dropped out probably in year 10 or year 11. I will go to Melbourne or Bendigo. I am basically no fuss where I live but I prefer Melbourne than here because all my relatives live down there.

The need to acquire more and new educational qualifications was raised in various forms. Some students believed that with a higher education degree they will be "respected" and "valued," and that it would "make a difference" in their careers. Susan deemed education as a vehicle for social change and mobility: "I think education is definitely a key to levelling things out, because I think a lack of education is a trait of racism and discriminative [*sic*] people. And I think education is a key to a more equal society."

Young people are aware of the complexity and difficulties of accessing meaningful jobs and conscious that schooling did not signify the end of study but the beginning of new forms of education—vocational or otherwise. In this environment, gaining as much education as possible has become the norm in young people's transitions (du Bois-Reymond 2009). This normative transition for youth has long been accepted as an individual expectation and responsibility (Andres and Wyn 2010; Woodman and Wyn 2015), sustained by neoliberal sensibilities and discourses that elevate the primacy of the individual over the social (Davies and Bansel 2007), including the preeminence of liberal individualistic values of autonomy, self-reliance, and resilience to endure what has become a very competitive education journey that is prolonged well into people's adult life. As I will show later in the chapter, this emphasis on individual responsibility and self-reliance has a profound impact in participants' understanding of social justice.

"I Did Not Want to Have a Debt in My Life to Pay Off": The Cost of Further and Higher Education

The migration to urban and regional places to continue with further and higher education and employment represents a significant financial and emotional cost for young people in rural communities. In both communities, parents and students set in motion plans and strategies years before having to migrate. Terry, for instance, is looking forward to move out of Lowland and start her apprenticeship in Bairnsdale, a nearby regional town. She has her parents' support to continue on to university: "they were going to help me pay up if I wanted; dad was trying to make me go to uni (university)." Terry felt that higher education studies gave people a higher status. She asserted that people that have the opportunity to attend university "then they look back at all the rural kids." She has looked into scholarships to go to university but she "didn't know if I could pay my way." The main reason she was considering changing from university to an apprenticeship was: "I did not want to have a debt in my life to pay off. I don't want to pay off the debt, because I know that my parents are still paying off debts. I find it too expensive." Scholarships are one of the ways rural students can afford to go to university. However, some students like Michelle believed that "there are not enough of them," while Sebastian made a strong claim about lack of information about the availability of scholarships: "It is difficult to locate them and access them due to the lack of publicity about them." Michelle hoped her parents would "help her out" but like many rural students she has been doing casual work in hospitality and in farms to earn many to pay for her higher education studies.

Students, as well as parents, work hard to mobilize different form of resources to access post-school destinations. In many cases, moving out of town is a costly experience that requires a social network to support a young person in the new place. The responses of students revealed that all the young people were moving out to a regional or urban place where they have a family or a friend with whom they can share accommodation and other financial and emotional costs. Only a few were staying in a university residence that their parents were paying for. Relocating in a place that guarantees an existent social network meant an emotional and financial security, including a sense of belonging by surrounding oneself by rural likeminded people and constructing communities of affection that can work as a surrogated home (see Cuervo and Wyn 2012). Linking with

a new social network was seen by participants as essential to obtain advice, guidance, and support in an unknown space.

Nevertheless, the "relative" or "friend" factor presented a form of spatial social exclusion for these young people. That is, students would not move to bigger rural towns, regional centers, or metropolitan areas that might present interesting alternatives to their career and life pathways if they did not have the emotional and financial support there. For example, Michelle plans to move out to a regional center after finishing Year 12 to study nursing, although she also likes "business." Michelle has not decided where she will study after graduation; her choice is partly dependent on others: "it depends on my sisters; I really want to be close to my three older sisters, so it will depend where they are." Emma thought Adelaide University offers more scholarships for rural students but she did not know anybody in Adelaide. She decided to attend a university in Melbourne where her aunties live. Terry had to choose between a greater variety of apprenticeships in Melbourne or staying around the area of Gippsland where she has a friend. She decided to move out to a nearby regional town and shared a flat with her friend while doing a hairdressing apprenticeship. Terry's friend, Michelle's sisters, and Emma's aunties provide an emotional support and also a reference of experience and knowledge on many issues that they will have to confront in her new place.

"The Hard Part of Being 'Rural' Is The Cost Factor": Parental Concerns of the Cost of Further and Higher Education Experience

The cost of relocating to urban and regional centers to continue with further study was one of the main sources of stress for these rural parents. Some parents, like Bronwyn (also a teacher in Lowland school), felt they needed to continue working and postpone retirement and make sacrifices to send their children to university: "Well, I suppose you keep working and give up things yourself." The owner of one of the few remaining shops in Highland asserted that they "work to save" to send their two daughters to university, and contemplated selling their business to pay for their children's education. Meanwhile, Edward, a farmer, "hopes" her son "goes to university" but claimed that "the hard part of being 'rural' is the cost factor." Marion affirmed that "things got tougher" for younger generations:

What I have heard is that HECS (university loan scheme) and things like that, you go paying that off sometimes for years. Ten years sometimes after they've finished university which I guess puts them in the hole if they want to buy their own home, you know. We bought our first home when we were eighteen, there's no way that these kids would be able to do that because they've already got such a big (tertiary education) debt.

Fred's comments exemplify the sacrifices rural parents make for their children's education:

Fred: My wife would much rather not work. She's got a senior management position in Bairnsdale. It costs us thirty thousand dollars to keep our two kids in Melbourne at university, and that's just for accommodation, each year. So her job effectively pays for their lifestyle in Melbourne, and their opportunity to study.

Hernán: How did your children react to your sacrifices?

Fred: Well they appreciate it, and they're trying to become self-sufficient, they've got part-time jobs in Melbourne and they want to contribute to their own independence. They're doing it hard with their own part-time jobs and fairly much living in poverty. You know, in order to study, and that's a disincentive to study, a huge disincentive to study. I mean, my daughter rang us up earlier in the year and she said, "Dad, I've run out of money that you've given me, I've had to buy books and they're more expensive; and I haven't got any money to eat." I said, well, you have access to my account, just take some money out. She didn't feel she could take money out and told me "'A lot of my friends they don't eat for a couple of days sometimes when they run out of money." Well, you don't have to do that. That's how kids have to exist and that's a sad fact of our society.

Ernest, the principal of Highland school, found his job rewarding at a personal level but highly demanding at a professional level. Two of his children were already in Melbourne at university; one was one year away from that path while the last two "are too young to think about it." He wants his children to "become as well qualified and well educated as possible." Against public calls (in his view by politicians) that rural people should relocate in search of opportunities, Ernest thought "that's probably fine for me because of my profession but I don't think that's fair to say to a local farmer because he can't relocate his farm into Melbourne." Besides the cost of university fees, the majority of the parents argued that accommodation was the second major cost for them and their children.

If lacking off a local or nearby good quality of further and higher education institution is the first disadvantage, the cost of relocation becomes for many youth and their parents the second disadvantage.

This cost of further and higher education coupled with the cost of relocating are forms of discrimination for rural young people that want to continue their post-school pathway outside their communities. It is again, unsurprising that a politics of distribution commands the center of participants' post-school scenario of social justice argument, while issues of recognition and participation appear only through viewpoints of feeling marginalized and disempowered, a lack of respect and status of their social identity and their experiences as members of a social group called "rural." That is, their claims relate to views that rural issues are placed in the periphery of government's policy agenda (Brett 2007, 2011). But these opinions also reflect the creation of processes of inequality in the need to become mobile in contemporary rural life. Researchers working in the spaces of mobility (Sheller and Urry 2006) and youth studies (McLeod 2009; Skrbis et al. 2014) concurred that "mobility" can also be a resource that reflect an unequal relationship between social groups and warn against optimistic accounts of its potential to secure the aspirations of all young people regardless of their social position. In Australia, youth in remote and rural spaces have unequal possibilities to mobility aspirations than their urban counterparts (Alloway et al. 2004; Cuervo 2011, 2015; Cuervo and Wyn 2012, 2014; Skrbis et al. 2014). This unequal relationship demands a distribution of resources but also the recognition that discourse of mobility can work against the processes of empowerment and positive self-esteem in so far some young people cannot achieve them and view themselves as "failures" as they are left behind in their communities (see Geldens 2007). While at prima facie the politics of distribution commands the stories of rural inequality, embedded in these injustices are also, as Young (1990) will see it, elements of the dimension of recognition in the marginalization and disempowerment of youth, but particularly in the lack of the possibility of remaining "rural," which reflects one of the five faces of oppression, cultural imperialism, with its lack of cultural respect of certain "lifeworlds" (i.e. rural) replaced by a policy encouragement to enjoy what a globalized world has to offer by becoming mobile (i.e. urban).

STAYING OR LEAVING HOME: THE PLACE
OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS

It is important to state that not all rural young people leave their communities. To migrate requires mobilizing financial and emotional resources to take a journey full of new experiences and uncertainties. In both towns, Highland and Lowland, a small portion of young people will remain in the communities, mostly seeking seasonal or casual work. These young people belong to the socially marginalized groups in the community, with little social, financial, and cultural capital that is demanded for a young person to seek post-school pathways outside their community and, thus, are unable to negotiate that transition. In Lowland, it is the Indigenous young people who usually do not finish school and stay in the town. However, poverty in Lowland is widespread, encompassing other social groups than the Indigenous group. Teacher Ephraim observed that many people in the town belong to the have-nots and that some "kids that are coming to school without breakfast and though it is not the majority there are quite a few that are under those circumstances." Valery affirms around 70 % of students are in education maintenance allowance and "there are a lot of Koori (Indigenous) students who don't go to school; they sometimes work in casual jobs."

In Highland, it is the children of those receiving welfare assistance (mostly unemployment benefits) that generally stay in town. This group is fairly new to Highland, having migrated from urban to regional to then rural towns to find affordable housing. Laura, a teacher stated that "some of them are mostly staying here and trying to get work, more perhaps unskilled work, like in the farms and in the horticulture area along the river." Adults in the community affirmed that young men will leave school early and engage in seasonal work, while some of the young women might get pregnant before turning eighteen. Teacher and parents commented that these young people often replicated their parents' pathways to poverty by making a living through welfare assistance, such as unemployment and parental benefits. There were no available statistics to corroborate this, only the testimony of the local members of the community and observations done during my visits. Most importantly, what was present in Highland was an open division between the "unemployed" social group and some members of the community. Olivia, a parent, explained: "There seems to be one main group and then there is this smaller group and that tends to hang out together, the children too … The trend that I noticed

is that they generally hang out together around town, they have a kid just after they drop school … and they then live on the dole like the parents."

This division was usually expressed in terms of the lack of participation of the former in community activities, especially in voluntary ones. However, embedded in the social division in Highland is the attachment to farming as the core component of what means to belong to the community, which is a common "social signifier for rural communities" and can be used as an indicator of who is a "good community member" and who is not (Bryant and Pini 2009, p. 53). Thus, class divisions, not as income but defined by occupation, are intersected by issues that have to do with tradition (i.e. longevity in the community) and common moral elements of rural life, such as mutuality and solidarity in everyday practices. Most importantly, what this social division brought up is an "othering" of certain sector of the community and the idea that employment opportunities do exist in the town but that some are not willing to take them. For example, Diane, a teacher, believed that "there are a lot more opportunities there that people don't want to take." Her perception of members of the minority group was that "a lack of motivation, laziness" prevented them from having the right attitudes—"working hard"—to take advantage of available opportunities. She concluded by affirming: "it is easier to stay at home and watch television all day."

This notion of lack of responsibility was also present in Lowland, where it was mostly attributed to the Indigenous sector of the community. As mentioned above, members of Lowland school community were cognizant of issues of poverty affecting many of their members but discourses of "othering" were mostly applied to those from Indigenous backgrounds. Charles, the Indigenous liaison for Lowland school, affirms that Aboriginal people need more support but ascribes to them a lack of individual responsibility and hard work: "they've got to get themselves off their backside to better themselves and if they're not going to do it they'll go nowhere." In the same school, his peer Belinda believed discrimination flowed from parents to students, with the latter mimicking their parents in their negative portrayal of Indigenous people: "students say 'oh, government gives them houses and cars and they just smash them up, and they get money all the time and whatever they do they spend it on alcohol'. So there are really strong stereotypes, really difficult to break down or to even start discussing."

Traditional values that sustained the romantic view of rural life such as responsibility, hard work, and solidarity serve to create a strong social

division in both communities. Through the idealization of these rural values some members of these communities, perhaps inadvertently, construct a "normalization" (Young 2006a) of what means to belong to each place. This "normalization" of values, experiences, and capacities run the risk of further increasing the atomization and divisions within the communities. These marginalized social groups are placed on the periphery of a periphery, experiencing all dimensions of social injustice: few resources, little recognition or possibility to participate in setting their own agenda in a way in which best serves local interests. Here *both* recognition and redistribution become critical to redress this social division, insofar "no one should be stigmatized in status or disadvantaged in their access to resources … because of socio-cultural attributes" set by some social group as a standard against which other members of the community cannot relate or find hard to meet (Young 2006a, p. 97). Further, a positive social inclusion of the "minority" groups in both communities goes beyond distribution and recognition to include issues of associational justice. In her book, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Young (2000) states the need to build coalitions and solidarities from differences of status and value that so often divide communities. As stated in Chap. 4, Young does not argue that differently situated people cannot understand each other but to comprehend the injustices suffered by a certain individual or social group is critical to interrupt the notion that they are like one another and create spaces for those marginalized to express their concerns in their own idiom.

Tensions in Rural Communities

In this section I want to pause to reflect on the different tensions that occur in these communities. First, there is a tension between youth needs and aspirations and the sustainability of rural communities: that is, between the individual and the community. As mentioned above, the loss of young people and the incapacity to attract young professionals (due to lack of employment and services) condemn rural towns to becoming either "retirement communities" or ghost towns. Some towns might thrive, like those in amenities spaces (Holmes 2006); however, for rural communities such as Highland, based on agricultural-intensive capital business, with no tourist attraction and at the time severely hit by the drought, the prospects of reinvention are harder. In addition, research in rural studies shows that young people's level of education is a critical component in the resilience and vitality of rural communities (see Dibden and Cocklin 2005; Roberts

2014). The incapacity to retain or attract young people to rural areas is a critical disadvantage toward their sustainability. This incapacity is given not only by the lack of post-school opportunities but also by a curriculum oriented toward becoming mobile and urban (where opportunities lie) and decentered from any local rural meaning (see, Gruenewald and Smith 2008), supported by prescribed normative youth policies that demand youth to study well into their twenties (Cuervo and Wyn 2012), working against the construction of a socially imagined future occurring in their home communities.

Second, there is a tension in the unequal intergenerational transfer of resources. Part of this can be explained by changes in social and economic conditions where the possibility of intergenerational transfer of family farms is closed or harder to achieve due to competition with global actors (Cuervo and Wyn 2012; Holmes 2006). Beyond this barrier, there is a community imbalance where some young people have an unequal capacity to mobilize resources (emotional and financial) from their families. This happens in different temporal and spatial scales. To begin with, family background, status, and reputation play critical roles at the time of accessing employment or participating of social activities in their town (Alston and Kent 2003). Moreover, some young people are able to draw on higher levels of financial and nonfinancial resources when doing the post-school transition into further education and employment outside their communities. This unequal transmission of resources becomes of special relevance during periods of uncertainty and vulnerability, such as in financial recessions, when youth employment is scarce or when young people are making the transition from the family home to independent living. This is more significant for those young people that have to move out from their communities to continue studying or working in a new place. Those young people that have fewer family resources at their disposal are further socially marginalized.

Third, there is a tension in terms of the way the community understands (and practices) social justice. There is a strong claim by the majority of the community for redistribution of resources and better delivery of services. This includes claims for equality of opportunity in accessing further and higher education positions and the resources rural youth need to achieve this (e.g. claims for subsidies in accommodation for rural youth in metropolitan centers or a greater number of scholarships). These claims based on distribution and the recognition of rurality as a structural factor that disadvantages them is not so strongly present toward minority groups in

the community—thus sentiments of mutuality are weak, mostly based on an idea that both groups share different values and commitments toward the community as a whole. Thus, the community and its view of social justice become atomized, with some members socially excluded. Young's work becomes important: the idea of community sustained by the majority of the community might entail an idea of uniformity and conformity; which tend to negate the possibility of diversity. For Young (1990, p. 227) the view of an ideal community is the "desire for the fusion of subjects with one another which in practice operates to exclude those with whom the group does not identify." Social relations should sustain individual and group difference rather than a totality and unity. It is disagreement rather conformity that generates a vibrant and socially just and democratic society. Both individualism and community entail a "denial of difference and a desire to bring multiplicity and heterogeneity into unity" (Young 1990, p. 228). Even more, an ideal community expresses a "desire for social wholeness, symmetry, a security and solid identity" (Young 1990, p. 232) and denies the asymmetry, the ontological difference of each member of a community. Young (1990) warns us about homogeneous constructions of community based on mutual identification with one another that serves to exclude, or oppress, those that do not share the same value. This commitment to an ideal of community, or how life should be lived, reinforces, sometimes inadvertently or in subtle ways, processes of systematic exclusion or aims to assimilate those that appear different. This process is not unique to Lowland and Highland communities; the work for example of Bryant and Pini (2009) and of Youngblood Jackson (2012) shows that is unfortunately not uncommon in rural communities (and for that matter one would argue in urban spaces). A significant implication of these tensions is that social justice is not completely understood and practiced in a plural way. The dimension of distribution (of resources) has a higher appeal and is favored (toward the need of the "majority"), while recognition and participation are foreshadowed, especially if for the social groups that do not conform to the values and practices of the majority (and which experience all three dimensions of injustice). The ultimate irony in these community tensions is that given the mobility aspiration for the majority of youth from their parents and teachers, it is the youth of the marginalized group in each town that remains the best hope for their sustainability.

The Metamorphosis of Social Justice

The project of moving out of town represents for rural young people a new unknown journey. If rural life was defined by students as "being safe," moving out of town was seen as "becoming a stranger." The idea that small is better and safer was strongly related to the idea of "freedom," "open space," and "knowing all the people." On the other hand, moving out of their communities meant "living surrounded by strangers" and becoming another stranger. In other words, so far schooling in a rural community has offered shared responsibilities and internalized roles. It has provided clear structures and outcomes to pursue. However, in the future students recognize a horizon of multiple choices and new social roles, which entails new responsibilities and unknown outcomes. This horizon is embedded in uncertainty, where their traditional institutionalized social role and responsibility as rural students fragments and becomes delocalized, but it is also fuelled by motivations and needs of gaining new skills and social relationships beyond their communities. Thus, a new spatial and temporal context brings new possibilities that imply new choices but also new uncertainties. Students are faced with a necessity to redefine themselves into new social roles within inner rhythms that demand new strategies (Melucci 1998). These new strategies have the capacity to inform a different understanding of social justice.

As mentioned above, the need to migrate is also sustained by a belief that further education is needed to navigate through competitive environments such as the postindustrial labor market. The pursuit of further and higher education becomes strategy, a tool to enhance their life chances. As du Bois-Reymond (2009) points out, becoming a lifelong learner complements and augments somebody's cultural and social capital and it can even make up for a person's lack of capital. This discourse is embedded in what neoliberalism proposes to individuals: "you yourself are the captain on the ship, you have your luck in your own hands, don't blame your parents, (and/or) teachers" (du Bois-Reymond 2009, p. 34). Thus, risks, barriers, responsibilities, failures and success are placed on the individual, not the social or structural inequities. Sociologists of youth have long established that the creation of transition regimes (du Bois-Reymond and Staubert 2005; Walther 2006; Wyn 2015) constructed a perceived commonality in the youth experience, continuing further education, where those that cannot achieve it are placed as "at risk" or deviant by their own fault. Embedded in normative expectations of youth transitions is the above

stated idea of aspire to be mobile and flexible to make it work in a complex post-school social environment. The problem is that this kind of transition is harder to achieve for some social groups (like rural, Indigenous youth) that face more and different barriers (Cuervo and Wyn 2014).

"It Is Really up to the Individual How Far They Want to Go": The Pervasiveness of the Neoliberal Discourse

The commonly held belief among students about a future abundant with choices but also uncertainties is strongly influenced by adults' discourse. For instance, teachers are aware that the future is uncertain and complicated for rural students, with many challenges waiting. Edward affirmed that "individual drive" is a necessary prerequisite to navigate a precarious and complex labor market. For him, teachers should be "training them (students) on swapping, changing jobs, on being able to adapt, being flexible." Mary believed the school provides a good education, "they get one on one (teaching) here" and asserted that "we try to teach students to have that self-motivation" because is up to "the child to have the ability to press up the scale." Laura observed: "everything out there is competitive, you go for a job and it is competitive … And the person needs to have skills and drive. And it is that personal drive that is probably one of the defining differences between people that take opportunity and people that don't." In my visits, teachers showed to have the best interest of students and worked hard to provide them with the possibility to continue with education and work after leaving school. Instilling in students the need to work hard and the competitiveness of future pathways is also an important task for teachers. However, here their discourse also promoted traits of individualism, self-reliance, and choice as a way of coping and/or exercising control over their future. The problem with this discourse is that it can potentially espouse that youth agency is a sufficient condition for achieving any outcomes anyone wishes to achieve and obscures structural barriers that might deter people from arriving at those outcomes.

Despite the well-known difficulties of continuing their post-school pathway away from their families and communities, young people optimistically believed the future in general offers opportunities open for all. In other words, many of these students were cognizant of structural barriers due to locality, socioeconomic status, or gender, but they utilize the neoliberal discourse of self-reliance, choice, and individual responsibility as a strategy and coping mechanism to tear down those barriers. For

example, Simon wanted to attend university in Melbourne. His comments began from a point of structural consciousness by asserting that there is a disadvantage toward nonmetropolitan students from low socioeconomic backgrounds: "With university, people that have the money (they) can get no matter what score they have but if you don't (have money) you have to get a very high one." Nevertheless, despite this *self-othering* of rural youth, Simon's belief was that opportunities are open in society as "everyone gets an opportunity to go to school." He asserted that differences are later produced as an outcome of effort that is associated with choice: "it is really up to the individual how far they want to go." Tina has mixed feelings regarding societal inequalities: "there are always going to be some differences" and "poor people miss out on things that we will get normally." However, these structural disadvantages are corrected by stressing individual choice and hard work as the predictor of social outcomes: "If you want to make it, you'll make it big, but if you want to survive, you can just do that." Tina recognized inequalities in society but she accepts them by normalizing them. Her view of people living in poverty is that "they have to work a lot harder to get it, but then sometimes if they cannot get it, they give up." The key for her is self-reliance and clear objectives: "work hard, have goals that you want to get and make sure you get them." Finally, Tamara claimed that "it is up to you whether you want to take the opportunities or not," thus transforming structural barriers and opportunities into individual choices.

Some students illustrated their views of individual responsibility, choice, and self-reliance by placing the lens on socially disadvantaged groups. Helen suggested that hard work is the route to achieving success in a society where "everybody has a chance to live properly." She believed in an idea of equality of opportunity in society at large but stressed the notion of individual responsibility through her view of Aboriginal people: "in some cases they are not taking their chances. They get government assistance, help. They have to take their chances." Other students like Evan and Deon also agree with this view about Aboriginal people. Evan affirmed that "Aborigines get all the grants, they get heaps of things, like houses but they just don't use it; they don't take advantage of it." Finally, Deon also stated that Indigenous people were offered plenty of government assistance and that they were failing to utilize it properly, while at the same time "the government needs to improve the drought relief for the rural areas and look after the rural roads better."

From Equality to Desert: The Normalization of Inequalities

A critical aspect from students and teachers' comments is that there is a metamorphosis of the concept of social justice from the present to the future—from equality to the principle of desert, based on ideas of merit. In looking to their future post-school years students shift from the warm environment of their community into a competitive and uncertain future favoring more inegalitarian views of social justice. As individual effort is the factor that will give them their rewards and achieve their goals, the principle of desert plays a greater role in viewing social justice in a competitive environment, as a legitimate allocation principle. As argued by Miller (1992, p. 589) in his study of the meaning of social justice, where social relations become competitive (i.e. competition for scarce resources and places in a tight and precarious labor market) and people move "outside a small-group context" (i.e. a rural school), the criterion of desert takes center stage over claims for equality.

What comes through strongly about students' future is an organization of individual and societal outcomes through the principle of merit sustained by a discourse of individual responsibility and effort. Students' view of reward based on effort and contribution might respond to a rural ethos and romantic view of small communities composed of hardworking people. Furthermore, as McLeod and Yates (2006, p. 180) found in their longitudinal study with Australian youth, through achieving their goals by working hard, students are "being socialized into individualist ways of thinking that put responsibility for one's fate on the individual," placing the emphasis on the individual over the social, including a lack of empathy for those at school that were victims of different forms of discrimination. This kind of socialization is underpinned by discourses of choice, individual responsibility, and self-reliance and the idea of merit as objective and unbiased within a society that provides supposedly open structural opportunities for all. Furthermore, and in accordance with the literature in youth studies (e.g. du Bois-Reymond 2009; Furlong and Cartmel 2007), these young people are optimistic about their future, mostly by relying on a belief in education and a discourse of agency and self-realization over structural barriers (that are recognized in the place and time of present rural schooling).

The problem with the principle of desert is that it favors individual rather than social perspectives (and solutions) to determine or understand

an issue and is blind to social, economic, and cultural differences. It values competition over cooperation, the individual over the social. The principle of desert presupposes that there can be a criterion for allocating goods and benefits that is culturally neutral (Young 1990). As stated in Chap. 4, impartial and neutral views of a certain issue aim to vanish social particularities and difference in society and set standards for which not all social groups have equal access. Normative youth transitions presuppose universal and neutral cultural values in students' goals that homogenize the multiplicity of identities in a community, including contributing to sorting out the winners and losers in the educational race for access to privilege positions (Young 1990, 2006a). This normative youth transition aligns better with urban youth while it places young people in rural areas staring from a disadvantage point.

Thus, in looking at their future, students do not abandon their claim for *access* to resources, but they do abandon the idea of *equality of access*. Most importantly, if the processes and outcomes of schooling should be fair and equal the same is not claimed for the future post-school. There is an acceptance that inequalities exist in the social world but that they are the product of "choices" and "responsibilities" rather than structural inequalities. Effort and ability are socially just allocation principles. In other words, there is a normalization of social inequalities in their conception of the future; while inequalities are not accepted during the present time of schooling, they are accepted when looking into the future, the required "level playing field" disappears. This normalization of inequalities is mediated by adopting some neoliberal sensibilities, such as self-realization, choice, and individual responsibility, where the problem of inequality becomes the problem for the individual rather than the society. In this, here is a strong emphasis of the distributive dimension of social justice in the present and the future (albeit, individualized in the future) but weak conceptualizations of the other dimensions, recognition and participation, in any temporal and spatial scale. Radical egalitarians like Phillips (1999, 2004) and Young (2000, 2001) affirm that a central problem with the basic liberal idea of equality focused on individual rather than social positions is that it obscures structural inequalities. As they would see it, equality of condition between different social groups (e.g. gender, class, race) is a critical standard for assessing how socially just are relationships (see Armstrong 2006). Problems of inequalities are not just a matter of bad luck (e.g. born to a poor family) or personal choice but are the result of an individual's social location in structures (e.g. gender,

class, race) which often "implies predictable status in law, educational possibility, occupation, access to resources" and where each of these "factors enable or constrain self-determination and self-development" (Young 2000, p. 95). In consonance with Young, Phillips (2004, p. 15) views the problem of casting inequalities as a matter of luck and choice as a misrepresentation of "the effects of social relations and institutions," as if these were "generated by individual choice." As puts it: "instead of discrimination, we see only individual differences in qualification or talent; instead of inequality, we notice only the effects of luck and choice." Even more, the social context on which choices are made is overlooked, thus emphasizing agency, in detriment of structure, as the sole predictor of life outcomes.

My point is that the scarcity of opportunities and need to move out of town and the unpredictability of the future is countered by an ethos of self-realization, a personal drive that has its basis on individual responsibility. This discourse becomes the coping strategy that adults and young people call on to confront the uncertain terrain that moving out of the community, with all its emotional and financial costs, and entering a precarious labor market presents. This also reflects what Cheshire (2006) (see Chap. 3) views as a discourse of self-help in contemporary rural development policy that is driven by a new individualism and entrepreneurialism; values that are also common in the sociology of youth (see Kelly 2006), and that are needed in the new neoliberal social contract between citizens (or regions) and the state where the responsibility for each person's future shifted from collective to individual focus. In both communities, despite acknowledging the difficulties that a tight and complex labor market and the cost of further education represent for rural young people, and *otherness* that permeates many of participants' reflections, there is a "cruelly optimistic" (Berlant 2011) message that is being passed on to students by some adults of a society that clearly distinguishes winners and losers, and in which side one person will end depends mostly on the subject rather than the structural conditions. This message based on notions of effort and ability, merit, as the allocators of opportunities in life undermines the pluralization of social justice by denying the unequal starting point by each social group but also overestimates the capacity of rural youth and their families to navigate the complex challenges of dislocating life away from family and community in the search for post-school education and work.

Conclusion

By no means is my intention to blame teachers or parents for wishing for students the best post-school options available to them. In particular when already policy signals of mobility, lifelong learning and cosmopolitanism are very hard to resist, including the harsh reality that post-school opportunities are not plentiful in both communities. But if anything this chapter shows through participants' voices and experiences is the contested nature of social justice and the need to contextualize its meaning. While there is a strong affirmation in the present, that is within issues of rural schooling, of the principle of equality with a stress on the politics of distribution, when confronted with an uncertain future participants have a tendency to normalize inequalities through discourses of self-realization, choice, and individual responsibility, favoring the principle of desert and almost individualizing rather than pluralizing social justice. As stated in Chap. 4, this limited conceptualization of social justice has the potential to undermine the robustness of democratic societies by accepting unequal social outcomes, particularly for marginal groups within already marginalized communities, as the product of individual efforts and choices.

This metamorphosis of social justice is mostly the product of a journey from certainty to uncertainty. For rural students the school and the community offer institutionalized spatial and temporal delineated boundaries. The boundary of schooling provides students with clear social roles and internalized disciplines to follow. In other words, their temporal horizons are socially and spatially structured. If space and time are constructed through social relations then the lack of knowledge of future social relations fosters the uncertainty of rural students (and parents and teachers). It comes as no surprise that the participants will hold closely to the notions of self-reliance, hard work, and wide open opportunities to confront a future of uncertainties. However, at the center of these different understandings of social justice are clear processes of inequalities for the majority of the corpus of students in their lack of post-school study and work opportunities, for the minority group in the community through a silent discrimination toward them, and for the community at large, insofar they have to encourage their most "successful" youth to migrate, thus jeopardizing their future sustainability. As mentioned above, the irony is that those marginalized youth that will remain in precarious conditions represent the best hope for all.

Notes

1. Half of the students were thinking of going to university, a third wanted to take on an apprenticeship, while a few of them were open to the possibility of leaving school before finishing Year 12 if a good job opportunity appeared.
2. Diane refers by "the minority" to the socially marginalized group in Highland community composed of families that have recently moved into town attracted by the low cost of housing and that while unemployed make a living through welfare assistance.

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Discourses and Practices That Pluralize Social Justice

It is clear from the previous two chapters that social justice needs to be conceptualized in a more plural way for it to be relevant to rural schools. It is also clear that social context, structures, and subjectivities inform what social justice is. Equality for whom and for what? Thus, my goal in this chapter is to examine the ways in which participants make plural social justice possible through their discourses and practices. How they resist, challenge, and reshape the pressures and constraints of neoliberalism in education and societal inequalities at large in their school contexts. The aim is to articulate an "attainable" hope for a future that can be translated into practices that can enlarge the boundaries of what might be realizable within the particular context of rurality. I argue that one of the critical aims of education should be the provision of "attainable" hope, that is, real possibilities for better opportunities for the socially disadvantaged youth. A hope that is not naive or conducted by unrealistic goals but rooted in an understanding of what is possible in society and schools.

The aim, then, is to discover the possibilities for social change, for improvement in the present and future that offers a social direction in the development of rural schooling. In the following section I focus on the important but elusive concept of "hope." I look at what hope might mean to participants and how it can help promote socially just schooling in a rural context. Rather than promoting a utopian outlook, I acknowledge that teachers are conscious of the difficulties of interrupting social injustices, which, on some occasions, produces feelings of "powerlessness." This is followed by practical examples of plural socially just teaching and

learning applied in the school by some of the teacher participants. I argue that teaching and learning is a relational process based on "learning from the Other," thus opening social justice to other dimensions than the distribution of resources. Finally, I conclude with final reflections on my examination of the meaning of social justice in rural schools.

The Idea of Hope

The idea and concept of hope has gained relevance within various disciplines in social science.[1] However, hope remains a contested and open term. This lack of explanation resembles what happens with the notion of social justice. Both concepts are used without explaining what it is that we should be aiming for. There is a longing for hope, social justice, and a better society; however, we do not know how we will arrive at this, where it is that we want to arrive, or what is really feasible. Therefore, it is important to pause on our journey so far and look more deeply into what the concept of hope means for social justice and rural school participants. In other words, what are the opportunities for preparing rural youth socially, economically, and politically with the necessary tools for the present and for their future post-school journey; and equally, what are the opportunities for creating a professional environment for teachers based on a plural social justice.

Hope as a Strategy

Hope has a foot in the present and another in the future and is related to social justice in its utopian (especially given the neoliberal context) sense of possibility, of longing, its capacity to transcend the social, economic, and cultural context. Hope can be empowering and transformational. It can become a plan, a road map for betterment of oneself and society's condition. As McLeod (2007, p. 157) puts it, there is "an argument for seeing hopefulness as a vital aspect of social justice politics," and to see hope "as a strategy of both survival and subjectivity" with a sense of possibility of social change against contemporary settings of injustices. In relation to education, hope is tied to the idea that teaching and learning leads to social improvement (Halpin 2003, p. 15, see also Sawyer et al. 2007), to the betterment of society and individuals. In the previous chapter, students described their plans for the future, which were usually framed by hope. Their willingness to continue with further education and

leave their communities contained the hope that "things will work out," as one young female participant put it. This hope has the capacity to provide participants with a different and better kind of future (one where they can fully participate in the different spheres of society). Thus hopefulness can also be understood as a strategy to imagine a kind of future with open possibilities, many of which are denied in the present, a coping resource to confront the uncertainties of the future and the struggle against despair. Most importantly, the concept and possibility of hope have to be located in its specific sociohistorical spatial and temporal circumstances of increasing inequality, precariousness, and insecurity in the labor market, and other societal spheres (Cuervo et al. 2013; McLeod 2007), where not continuing with further education and gaining more education credentials is understood as denying oneself the tools to manage one's life. This pursuit of further education by the young participants in post-school life, supported by parents and teachers, is a practical action within a social context of uncertainty, and anxiety, aimed to construct a life outside their communities, to imagine a different future.

There is nothing wrong with being hopeful for oneself and society's future. It is a necessary condition for social change, for a better life and development of society. The problem, I argue, arises when the gap between what is possible and what is desired or dreamt is too wide and a person's aims become unrealistic. This is what Berlant (2011, p. 24) calls cruel optimism, "a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility," in which "the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation" (p. 2). For her, all attachment is optimistic, including the possibility of achieving the once guaranteed "good life" (e.g. upward mobility, social equality, job security), which has been eroded, and has set in motion the notion of an ongoing crisis for young people (see also FYA 2013; International Labor Organization [ILO] 2013). Nonetheless, as McLeod (2007, p. 166) puts it, "having or mobilizing hope is part of a biographical social project," but if hope should be placed in a social, spatial, local, and historical context, then it is relevant to examine it within neoliberalism.

Hope as a Fantasy

In this context, Ghassan Hage's (2003)[2] approach becomes useful and clarifies the concept of hope in the present and for rural people. For Hage, a major strength of neoliberal conservative governments is to distribute

"fantasy," as a "set of subliminal beliefs that individuals hold and which makes them feel that their life has a purpose, a meaningful future." He follows his argument by affirming that in a globalized capitalist world dominated by increasing inequalities, the capacity to distribute hope has become paramount for the survival of the neoliberal system, which has become a mantra for the possibility of social mobility. Most importantly, there is an unequal structural distribution of hope in society. That is, some social groups, such as the middle and upper class, have a higher capacity and resources to access hope, or what Hage (in Zournazi 2002, p. 155) views as the "hope of access," because neoliberalism excludes some "from the networks where hope is circulating." In this neoliberal environment, Hage (2003, p. 8) argues that the state has retreated not only from many of its welfare duties but from the idea of an ethical society, where the boundaries of society are confined and delineated by the boundaries of the dominant class, and the marginalized and powerless are "left to their own devices." Most importantly, rather than examining if a society gives people hope or not, Hage believes we should look into what kind of hope is encouraged in this society. (The word "hope" could be replaced with social justice bringing us to inquire what kind of social justice is promoted in society.)

Furthermore, while hope is usually a concept that has positive connotations, Hage argues that it also has a negative side.[3] This negative side is related to the notion of "deferral of life." Drawing on Marcuse, Hage (in Zournazi 2002, p. 151) states the logic of late capitalism establishes that "we live an ethic of hope, and that becomes an ethic of deferring joy which fits in very much with the idea of saving and deferring gratification … (whereas) enjoyment being subjected to the logic of capitalism—you suffer now in the hope you might enjoy later without this enjoyment really ever arriving." In other words, the ethic of hope is placed in a space and time of tomorrow that concerns mostly a material pursuit. Therefore, hope can also distribute false possibilities of what one person can achieve by obscuring structural barriers and placing an overemphasis on the power of agency to transform material and social conditions. Neoliberal discourses of self-reliance, individual responsibility, and choice, sustained by several participants, can lead to an overestimation of the subjective possibilities and capacities (see Chap. 3; also Furlong and Cartmel 2007; McGeer 2008), to "an illusion of agency" (Bovens 1999, p. 679). Nonetheless, as stated earlier, I do not want to fall into a culture of hopelessness where people are forever vulnerable and powerless, and oppressed

passive recipients of policymaking decisions from dominant forces. Below I offer several examples of practical hopefulness, empowerment, and self-realization by rural school participants based on realistic consciousness of the limitations and possibilities of their social world.

Difficulties in Enacting Plural Social Justice

An understanding of "attainable" hope and realistic practices of social justice is reinforced by teachers' consciousness of the impact of students' socioeconomic background on schooling processes and outcomes. A socially just education should be also based on recognizing the structural and personal challenges faced by student members of disadvantaged groups rather than approaches that "blame the victim" (Cassidy and Bates 2005, p. 70). I argue that this recognition of all social groups in the community and the school is an important condition, albeit not sufficient, to redress inequalities because it highlights structural and personal barriers rather than overlooking them.

Teachers were aware of the difficulties of interrupting social injustice and oppression to empower students. While in this section I provide evidence of patterns of hopelessness, this should not be taken entirely negatively—recognition of reality can lead to creative forms of teaching and learning (Halpin 2003) and awareness that practicing and attaining social justice is not an easy road but something that has to be constructed every day. Being conscious of the limitations that students bring to school helps teachers think about how to redress inequities in learning and teaching. Teachers in both schools were attentive to the fact that some students come from poor socioeconomic backgrounds and struggle to connect to the values and norms that schools promote. In Highland, these students are part of the "minority" in the community and sometimes suffer from discrimination and bullying by other students. Teachers in Highland were conscious that economic constraints in larger metropolitan and regional centers and inequalities in society at large have driven poor families to small rural towns where they can afford housing. As Mary, a teacher, comments: "you have a lot of very low socioeconomic families here, and there is no support, there is nothing for them to do but it is a place where they can afford to live. So there is sort of becoming a little bit of division." Oscar asserts that there is "an attitude" toward those "kids who are definitively from the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder." He observes that those excluded "are quite well aware, that there is an attitude, that they have

been placed on the bottom of the ladder." Most importantly, teachers in both schools were aware of the role family backgrounds and socioeconomic status play in students' achievement. Diane provides a Bourdieusian introduction: "education can be the greater equalizer if you come from a poorer working class family but if they are encouraging the value of education." She felt, however, that in the community in many instances those from low socioeconomic background "don't see that education can get you to a better job, so they are discouraging rather than encouraging."

According to Belinda, students' post-school destinations are influenced by family class position: "I think there are some students that leave at the first opportunity that they have." She asserted that some students only wanted to leave school early and continue to work with their families in the farm, seek an apprenticeship outside town, or just fall into an unemployment culture that has been present in their families for a long period. Belinda stated: "I have a student in year 10 at the moment and he hates English, he has very poor literacy skills, and all he says he wants to do is work on the farm with his dad. And that's it. Why would I want to learn this? Why would I want to talk about this, I just want to go and milk cows from four in the morning to whatever." Edward believes education can overcome social inequalities "but the outside influences out of the school, out of the teachers' classrooms, play a big role … Education in itself is quite levelling but the extra resources make the difference, the resources, the expectations, the pushing."

In these comments teachers reveal a critical analysis of the impact that social context has on the possibility of socially just educational practices and outcomes. They expose the ways in which broader social inequalities can get on the way of emancipatory projects based on educational strategies to redress disadvantage. Teachers are aware not only of the social complexities that are present in their communities but also of the limits of their role and resources, including the constraints imposed by neoliberal frameworks of performance and accountability. "Blame games" and calls for responsibility are abundant in the educational debate; it should not be surprising that they are present in these two rural schools. Crucial to redressing social injustices is the despair-hope pendulum of believing that teachers can make a difference in students' lives. These teachers present an ethic of care for their students and do believe they can make a difference but constant and growing pressure, responsibility, and blame can contribute to shifting the pendulum in the wrong direction away from hope.

Teachers Feeling Powerless

Even though this chapter provides a way forward in pluralizing social justice in schools discourses and practices, I do not want to paint an impossibly utopian view for the sake of adhering to the possibility of plural social justice. There were some teachers that felt powerless when trying to interrupt the reproduction of social inequalities and poverty. In Lowland, some teachers found it difficult with students from the socially marginalized groups; some of those from Indigenous background. Fred's experience provides a powerful example. He tried to "organize work experience" for a student but the student turned it down because he thought he would "be the laughing stock of (his) family." According to Fred, the student stressed: "my father and my mother and my sister have never been to work … they lived on welfare, and they enjoy it, and if I go and do work experience they'll make fun of me." He is aware of the structural and personal barriers some students face at the time of hoping for other possibilities. In other words, celebrating hope per se only reinforces hope as a fantasy, a dream or an expectation which is difficult to attain for some students. Fred felt powerless before this situation:

> Fred: I thought that was really sad because this kid had a lot of talent, and he wasn't going to get the chance to show it to an employer. And, he's a fairly, you know, like, he's not alone, there's a few kids like that, where their families are totally dependent on the welfare system, and they don't want to change, you know, they don't want to get a job.
>   Hernán: And how did the school react to this situation?
>   Fred: We were totally powerless. You know, they've made a decision: "No kid of mine's going to get a job, we live quite well on the welfare system and we don't want to change it." And they were very suspicious of the school, trying to interfere. And that's … it's an uncommon situation but a devastating situation because it reinforces the poverty. And there's probably … I could probably identify a dozen families like that.

Other teachers in both schools describe a sense of powerlessness toward the possibility of interrupting processes of social marginalization and disadvantage. For instance, according to Corinda "education is … just broadening kids' horizons, to say there's more out there than just living in Lowland and having kids." However, she feels that the struggle is an uphill one: "You know, I think the girls here that's their aim in life, some of them; to have a family, sort of around twenty or so, that's what they

want to do, that's their life; not wanting to have a career in something else. And that's to me just education." She talked extensively about girls that will get pregnant at a young age and then look for welfare assistance to economically support them. When asked how teachers could help to interrupt the cycle of poverty she thought about where the line of responsibility falls: "I don't know but I'm not sure that it's entirely the school's responsibility. I mean, it's really, I suppose, a cultural thing in the community. Of how to break that cycle, I'm not sure." Despite this complex situation Corinda does believe that she can play a role. She stresses that she "wouldn't like to think that it is unbreakable, but how to break it I'm not sure." She focuses on a politics of distribution through government welfare programs as an engine start: "I mean, I suppose that the working for the dole is a good system in that it gives kids skills and sort of gets them into the workforce."

Many of the situations described by Highland and Lowland teachers strongly suggest that the paradigm of equality of opportunity as the dominant principle of social justice does not work where there are complex social and cultural factors influencing social exclusion. That is, it is not sufficient to offer opportunities; these opportunities must take into account the social particularities of each individual and group, they need to be meaningful and "wanted" opportunities (Howe 1997). As I outlined in Chap. 4, there is also a need for social inclusive practices at school, where all students are valued, respected, and heard, without having to sacrifice their social particularities (Young 2006a). Opportunity is better seen as "doing more than having, a condition of enablement" that nurtures the self-respect and self-determination of individuals and social groups (Young 1990, p. 26). While a politics of distribution dominates the social justice landscape of rural school participants' claims, in the following subsections I want to illustrate how the dimensions of recognition and associational justice are practiced in these rural schools. This pluralization has to do with issues of self-respect that Young (1990) would accord is critical for attainable hope and for promoting the autonomy, decision-making power, and respect of all social groups in school and community. This opportunity for self-determination and self-development was present in both schools, reflecting the messiness of life, insofar in these rural spaces promotion of social justice and forms of social discrimination lived hand by hand. These practices involve individuals in a social space seeking communication with one another about their interests and needs by proposing solutions to problems through gestures, demonstrations, arguments,

and even stories (Young 2000), thus promoting a plural social justice and "attainable" hope.

Practices That Promote Plural Social Justice in Rural Schools

In both schools there are teaching practices that create a relational process between teachers and students (and school staff and parents) that does not only reduce issues of justice, power, rights, and needs to the distribution of resources but also addresses issues of recognition and participation of all social groups in the community. Plural social justice entails providing every student with the social opportunity for empowerment, self-development, and self-determination, including constructing spaces of participation and to express through their own voice their needs and desires (Enslin 2006; Young 2000).

Toward a Greater Understanding of Teachers' Work by Parents

In this first example, I focus in the role of the teachers and their relationship with parents. Both rural schools are an extension of their community where parents are able to work and be actively involved in the school. This "extension" includes many activities that take place in the school premises, constructing it site as the hub of the community. As I have outlined in Chap. 4, acknowledging the views and needs of the *Other* is a critical form of engaging in socially inclusive practices of schooling. It promotes respect for each individual and social group within the school and the community. A practical case in point is given by the example of parents working part-time in the school and realizing the work that teachers put in educating their children. Galea's (2006) analysis of Young's work asserts the critical need for dialogical education if we are searching for hope and democratic education. While he stresses this in relation to teacher-student relationships, I believe as critical to democratic education and hope is a strong teacher-parental relation. A better understanding by parents of what teachers' work entails can provide a strong alliance to supporting teachers. This becomes relevant since different studies done by the federal department of education have stated teaching is viewed by many teachers as a low status job that also offers poor career progression and which is negatively perceived in the community (Department of

Education, Science and Training [DEST] 2002, 2003, 2006). On one hand, some teachers in both schools felt that community members held stereotypes about teachers "having an easy job" that included a "good remuneration for few hours of work" and "long holidays"—particularly compared to the hardship endured by farmers. For instance, Mary felt some members of Highland community thought she had "a very easy job because I teach arts; they think I am painting with the kids and I get to be paid … yeah" (Mary laughed). Diane commented that "I don't think we are respected as when I first started in 1979, I think there was a lot more of respect for the profession as a whole, not just this community but by society." Belinda in Lowland asserted that "I don't think it matters what community you're in, but people have always said that about teachers, 'Oh, you get good holidays,' you know; and actually I think they don't understand the amount of work we put in."

On the other hand, as mentioned above, rural schools offer the advantage of small-size classes and one-on-one relationship with students, even after school hours. Almost all teachers, parents, students, and principals praised this "closeness," as one parent put it. From this close relationship positive issues, such as care, respect, and trust, emerge as an advantage to interrupt social inequalities. As Charles, a teacher, comments: "I think even here working in a rural school you have a lot more trust." Relationships are at the core of an ethic of care, which as Rodriguez Ruiz (2005) would argue, is compatible and complementary to an ethic of justice. But as teachers' practices in this chapter demonstrate, this care is both an activity and attitude, one that needs to be active rather than passive (Tronto 1993, 2013). Care, trust, respect are all ingredients that enhance self-determination and self-development (Young 2000, 2006a) and that generate an empathetic environment of love and solidarity that can encompass all dimension of justice (Baker et al. 2009). Further, this visibility of teachers' work for the community has the capacity to enhance their self-esteem through a revaluation of the multiplicity of roles they played beyond formally delivering a curriculum. In this case, a strong partnership between teachers and parents provides forms of recognitional justice that enhance the social harmony any institution needs to be inclusive of all its members.

Several teachers felt that the gap between reality and stereotype of what teaching entails in school was bridged when parents had they possibility to work in the school and cooperate in school activities. For example,

Corinda illustrates the issue of parents working in rural schools as teaching aids, thus extending the school into the broader community:

> We've got a lot of teacher aids, probably a dozen or so who, most of them are parents. And I think until they actually got into the system and see how you work and what hours you work, they probably thought, "Oh yeah, that's a pretty good job up there, you know, good money." But when they get into it, a lot of them have said to me, "I don't know how you've put up with all those kids and all that work." You know, I think they do admire and respect you a lot more when they actually get in the classroom and see all the work you put in.

Valery affirmed that small rural communities offer an advantage in terms of "visibility" of teachers. For her, in Lowland, teachers are more respected than in other places because

> It is such a small community, so we see the teacher next door coming home at five o'clock not three thirty. We see them spending hours and hours actually doing homework and you see how much they actually care about your children, you can actually see what they do. It helps understanding each other, talking more often about issues at school.

The notion of "learning *from* the Other," of listening to others, is critical to the realization of democratic forms of schooling. The sorts of formal and informal structures I have outlined above involved recognition of the Other and belong to dimensions that go beyond the paradigm of redistributing resources. They comprise dimensions of associational and recognition of social justice through the construction of a dialogical education, which does not seek agreement and universal views about a certain issue or problem but challenging norms and values through the articulation of multiple viewpoints, interests, and needs (see Benhabib 1992; Young 1997b). An understanding of what teaching entails and the work they do is an important resource to redress inequalities through a view of social justice that encompass recognition of all members of the (school) community. Injustice and oppressive issues cannot be interrupted within the boundaries of schools alone but through a systemic reform in education and the community. The example above illustrates the possibility of creating a strong solidarity between two of the most important social actors for the development of self-esteem of young people and promotes a social justice beyond the school into the community and society at large.

Nonetheless, while this relationship to other people is a necessary condition for creating a plural social justice it is by no means sufficient. If we content ourselves to acknowledge somebody else's position but we do not give them a voice, then as Young (1990, 2000, 2001) argues, the recognition becomes a formal procedure of respect or tolerance, where those voices are usually assimilated over time. The point of a dialogical education is the construction of a process that enlarges our thought, perspectives, and experiences to put in motion the accommodation of others viewpoints and challenge our colonized views of the social world (Young 1990, 1997b).

Interrupting Oppression and Social Injustice: Caring for All Students

To fully engage in socially just practices in education, we need to "listen *from* the Other." As mentioned above, a dialogical education that enlarges our thought and perspective enhances the possibility of being receptive to social, cultural, economic, and political difference that challenges rigid and universal conceptualizations of what means to be a member of a community. Giving a voice to students, parents, teachers, or principals is critical to creating participatory and inclusive schooling practices, and especially to let those who are socially marginalized speak for themselves in their own idiom. Young (2000, 2001, 2006a) argues that learning and knowledge is critical not just to compete in a complex and tight labor market but also to interrupt social exclusion, marginalization, and injustices. However, for learning and knowledge to contribute to "attainable" hope, it has to be based on "real learning," and situated in a socially just space that empowers the interests, abilities, and hopes of all children and young people (Nieto 2000). Furthermore, as Sonia Nieto (2000, p. 14) states, schooling is "about larger purposes than inputs, outputs, and standards as measured only by tests" and it entails other relationships than vocational ones. If there is to be "attainable" hope for rural school participants learning *from* the Other needs to be present, which includes all students, all social groups, regardless of their social background.

I want to reiterate that socially disadvantaged students need to gain access to skills and knowledge that will help them to at least put a foot in the labor market and enable them to participate in the different spheres of societal life. However, democratic educational practices, such as learning *from* other social groups and a strong interest in other disciplines and issues

other than those valued by the market should also be relevant and present in the curriculum and school practices. Thus, in this second example, I illustrate how teachers open channels of dialogical education and participation to include those socially marginalized students that generally find few opportunities to express their viewpoints. For instance, Kate, a Highland school teacher, is aware that students from families who receive welfare assistance tend to repeat the poverty cycle of their parents and leave school early relying mostly on welfare assistance to make a living. However, she also knows that this pattern is not impossible to interrupt: she gives an example of one student, at that point in Year 12, who approached her to find information about continuing studying at university:

> I met a student because she told me she was interested in doing university studies and I told her if she knew such and such stuff and she said no, she didn't. We do have a career's coordinator but that particular student is considered one of the "minority" and she wasn't comfortable going there, not because of the staff member but because there was so much information that she didn't feel capable or didn't know what to do with.

A lack of the appropriate forms of capital worked against this student's imagination to other possibilities outside the physical and emotional boundaries of her family and community. By giving this student the space to talk and be heard, by co-constructing knowledge, both teacher and student are better able to address the obstacles for her. This openness to those at the margins in the school and community reveal an ethic of care, which should not be seen counteracting the development of socially just and quality education (Lingard and Keddie 2013). The "care" displayed by teachers in their practices reveals a caring for social justice and a demand for intellectual rigor but departing from the needs, interests, and desires of those marginalized. Mary, who has concerns about some members of the community, offers a good example to illustrate this point. She teaches art in Highland school. She felt that some members of the community did not engage enough in volunteering activities and that "they seem to have a low expectation of their future possibilities." Mary ascribed to the possibility of social change and improving the lives of the students on welfare assistance. She acknowledged that they come from families of "third generation unemployment" and "culturally very different" from the rest of the community.

> But my view is that there is a culture there that continually blocks these students from ever getting ahead or improving or having a quality of life outside. Well, they will go home at the end of their schooling and look at unemployment benefits, the cycle continues. They don't move to the city, they stay. They reproduce the family culture. Some have babies, sometimes at very young age.

Despite the apparent bleakness of this picture, Mary presents a duty of care and a demand for intellectual rigor for the students and is committed to giving them a voice. She wants to "talk to these kids and find out what they are interested in and [what] their skills are." She asserts that students that are struggling are getting one-to-one attention and most importantly are given a voice: "teachers can actually try to develop a rapport with the students about what their interests are and try to plan the curriculum to their interest." Here, a politics of recognition and association takes center stage through a culturally inclusive pedagogy (Lingard and Keddie 2013) that brings to the fore in the curriculum the funds of knowledge of nondominant groups (Zipin et al. 2013) to render their identities "visible" and their voices "loud." It speaks directly to Young's (1990) faces of oppression, such as marginalization, the lack of recognition of status and worth of certain members of the community, and the cultural misrecognition of their experiences and values. Through the interview, Mary claimed that her teaching is "moral, intellectual and social" but that she is "not political."[4] She believed that "it is good for them (students) to know how things work in society" and that she is "usually able to discuss it, but doesn't like politics." However, examining her responses to my different questions, I found a politically conscious individual. For example, she argued that education "is the only way to equalize society" and that her idea of education entails more than formal knowledge but contributing to create a robust self-esteem in the student. In her class, she is interested in "contemporary art work as a statement." She makes sure her students look at not only the aesthetic side of the art work but also the historical, social, and political sides:

> Well, we study a lot of those issues in art. So we often do very contemporary art [where] there is a lot of representation of anger in society … quite often I have to, you know, fill the kids in because they might not understand all the reasons why that artist is angry so … quite often we do a trip to Melbourne and I point at different things while we are there and I explain a lot of the

history of what has happened before and now, and how it's changed or the reasons that I think of the change. They have to study articles in the newspaper of a social problem and both sides, for and against, and that part of studio-arts, they have to do all that. So they often study social justice through arts and they have to do that, focus on the cultural context, on issues of society.

This dialogical education process started by Mary requires teachers to challenge their colonized knowledge, not by putting ourselves in somebody's shoes, which Young (1997a) views as a way of continuing silencing the Other and maintaining structures of power relation in place, but by assuming a position of what Young calls "wonderment"—listening from the *Other* without knowing where she is coming from and by avoiding projecting our fantasies of what she might want and letting her state her needs and desires. Similar to Young's approach, Noddings does not argue for an acceptance of marginalized social groups through an assimilation process that concludes in homogenization, but in arriving at a common understanding as an a posteriori condition of social justice through embracing difference and diversity. Noddings (2003, p. 19) draws from Dewey's argument that "conjoint living (speaking, listening, working together)" is a way of constructing "common values and understandings." As for learning, Noddings (2003, p. 21) argues for the recognition and participation of students in the "construction of objectives for their own learning and to become increasingly proficient in making well-informed choices." Thus, the idea is to generate a dialogical education that respects and enhances all standpoints toward the construction of teaching and learning practices that are truly inclusive beyond mere tolerance of difference. The point of Kate and Mary's examples is that teachers should not try to assume to know what students want before asking them, and that adopting someone's position might impede communication because the teacher thinks she knows what the needs of the other person are. Listening *from* the Other can have positive implications for socially marginalized students' well-being and their engagement in schooling. Research has demonstrated that teachers are a critical source of support for students' social, emotional, and moral development, which contributes to enhancing their self-worth through offering students ways of self-expression (e.g. Cassidy and Bates 2005; Noddings 2003; Seaton 2007). Moreover, as Seaton (2007) asserts, teachers' care is constructed around the notion that every student has something valuable to contribute to the learning process and to society.

These are powerful examples of how to enact a plural social justice by placing students' interests and needs at the center of their practices.

The Politics of Identity

In this third example of enacting plural social justice, I identify how several other teachers focused on identity and participatory issues of different social groups to achieve more socially just education practices. The comments below are embedded in a politics of identity or recognition that confront the stigmatization of certain social groups in society. Moreover, as Young (2006a) asserts, "stigmatization" is common in schools where what is normal is determined by the dominant social group or the majority and where they create labels that only contribute to create "lifetime losers." In Lowlland school, Belinda offered a pluralist account of social justice: "it is civil rights, humanitarian values, education, (and) awareness of diversity." She placed the emphasis upon knowledge in constructing a bridge between different social groups:

> I try to do [teach social justice] that all the time, especially in the social studies classes in my junior years. How do I do it? I often talk about values, where we get our values from. I often talk about choices that people make and why they make them. I talk about diversity, I teach a lot of Indigenous stuff … I talk to the students about the fact that "White Australia" has a black history as well. It is important that students are more educated about that and are less narrow minded.

In doing so, Belinda moved beyond the idea and enactment of a teacher as "policy proof" and "curriculum technician" to become what Whitehead (2007) refers to as a "disruptive voice" collaborating to interrupt social injustice by raising awareness of socially marginalized identities. For Fred, his role was that of generating cross-cultural awareness and understanding. Fred regularly discusses religious and multicultural issues, such as the use of headscarves by Muslim women:

> There were those in the class that had some suspicion of anyone wearing a headscarf, they didn't understand the cultural expectations associated with it. Once they gained an understanding of it, they became more tolerant and I think that's the role of teachers in our society, is to spread the tolerance across and the understanding about issues that the society is confronted with.

These inclusive pedagogies create learning encounters that enhance reciprocity and mutuality among different social groups (Lingard and Keddie 2013). Other teachers like Charles try to give students a voice, "listen to what they've got to say," while Oscar focuses on "spending more time with disadvantaged kids." While Young (2006a) points out that the educational system is in many ways a social reproducer of inequalities, she also acknowledges the many counterhegemonic educational materials and educators that work to undo those effects. As Giroux (1990, p. 91) has suggested, schools and teachers can neglect democratic practices by denying students their voice through neglecting their culture and history, or as we have seen above they can promote them. The significance of these comments is not just encapsulated in the different forms of teaching in the same school or the fact that some teachers will have sophisticated understandings of social justice. The point here is also to acknowledge that governments' and schools' policies, norms, and rules are shaped by teachers. The implication of teachers' comments above is that teachers make use of their own agency despite policies and systemic pressures and despite the clear direction of education policy aimed at promoting schooling as a function of the labor market. For teachers in this study, the function of hope is that it can work to imagine a different teaching environment, one that promotes socially just educational and professional practices such as professional development, respect, and participation in decision-making—associated with recognitional and associational justice. However, as stated in previous chapters, we should not romanticize teachers' agency or, on the other hand, portray them as forever powerless. Such views deny the reality of social change. Like in many schools (see Apple and Beane 2007; Gewirtz 2002; Keddie 2012), some of these teachers developed or adapted the curriculum to include all students with critical moral, political, and social issues associated with a politics of distribution, recognition, and association.

By the same account, other teachers might not be attentive to issues of social justice due to systemic pressures (Gewirtz 2002). Strategies and processes on how to begin democratic participation in schools that enhance *learning from the Other* are not so simple to implement. In schools, discourses and practices create and re-create relations between students and teachers, school managers, and parents, which are usually defined in terms of power, control, and regulation (Lynch and Lodge 2002). Power relations between, for example, students and teachers at the micro-level of classrooms are of a different, albeit related, distributive and recognitional

concern. At a macro-level, rural schools also find relations of power, control, and regulations (and policy frameworks) between them and state and national government institutions. As Lynch and Lodge (2002) affirm, while teachers might exercise control over their students, they are also subject to control and regulation by the state, parents, schools managers, and even students. Teachers, students, parents, school managers are simultaneously powerful but powerless vis-à-vis different stakeholders. Even more, power, control, and regulation are not only experienced vertically but also laterally: for example, younger teachers might find themselves powerless within the school organization. In sum, while policy directives are unable to control what happens in classrooms, I also claim we should not overstate the agency of teachers (and principals) in contesting these policies and enacting excellent outcomes in the classroom and beyond.

Social Justice Outside the Social Science and Humanities Subjects

The fourth example I want to highlight is the ways in which social justice can be practiced beyond the social science and humanities subjects. There is a widely held belief that social justice can only be taught in humanities subjects, such as art, history, and civics and citizenship. For instance, some teachers believed that social justice could be applied to some streams of the curriculum, the academic one, but not to others, the "hands-on" or vocational one. That dichotomy was constructed by Valery. She stated that social justice belonged to the humanities subjects where "certainly there is a push in this area to do more with civics and citizenship." For her the problem lies in the way schools are currently structured, because "to be honest they are so 'discipline based' in high schools at the moment that it's very, very difficult to introduce the topic of social justice across all of those kids." In contextualizing approaches, methods, and ways of practicing and teaching social justice, some teachers believed they did not teach social justice through any area of their subject but through classroom management and disciplinary issues within the school boundaries. These normative and procedural aspects of schooling have been historically central features in teachers' work. For instance, Bob's initial reaction to my inquiry was to think he did not teach social justice; however, later he argued that in his wood-work class he focused on "behavior in class," showing students "what's right and wrong" with respect to others. Laura did not believe "that it necessarily comes through the curriculum," suggesting "that social justice partly comes from the way in which people

interact in the school: staff to staff, staff to student, and students to students; is probably more where you have social justice."

However, these two rural schools, and especially Lowland school, have implemented socially just practices by providing spaces of participatory learning to socially marginalized young people that otherwise would be disconnected from formal learning process. For example, Lowland school has implemented various programs targeting early-school leavers. Some young people that have left school before Year 10 are invited to take VCAL courses where they can learn a skill. Fred explains:

> We've actually had this year; we've got some of those kids coming to our off-campus VCAL program. The VCAL program, they've actually left school, you know, years 8, 9 and 10, they've been, you know, poor-attendees and they've actually decided to come on 3 half-days a week and learn again, now that's a significant change.

This school policy is being conscious of young people in the community who are socially excluded and need to engage in more adaptive learning processes to broaden their horizons. As Corinda points out: "I'm a firm believer that the more they can stay at school, the better off they are, and they'll, sort of, have got a better chance for jobs that may break that chain of you know, poor education, low socioeconomic background, those things." This school program usually is focused on young people that come from poor socioeconomic families and that are the youth that won't leave the town. In place here is a strong focus on distributive justice through delivering the necessary forms of capital that will ensure marginalized students to have the knowledge and resources to compete in the labor market for social positions, status and goods. Alone this kind of social justice practice could be seen, in the words of Michael Apple (2013), as more "training" than "education." However, in my view offering the participatory space of learning for these young people that experience different structural disadvantages is a key role of schools in their quest to change society. In this practice a politics of distribution is implemented through love, care, solidarity, and justice to challenge "*society's structure of (in)equality*" (Apple 2013, p. 16, emphasis on the original). It shows that issues of caring and love are not just part of an affective politics of recognition but that encompass, and demand, issues that have to do with redistributive matter—thus proving the heterogeneity of justice.

Finally, it is important to state that teachers are not the only social actors that can promote plural social justice discourses and practices but students and parents, and especially governments need to also. I have mostly focused on teachers here because they are at the frontline of the delivery of good or poor quality of education in schools. Thus, it is relevant to examine some practices that teachers are engaged in to inquire into what social justice in action looks like. What they demonstrate is that, to enact socially just education we need to provide recognition, respect, and participation for all school participants which should include providing meaningful resources and participatory practices to school members. Their example is a valuable one.

The Significance of Associational Justice in Teachers' Work

The fifth example is an important empowering practice happening in both schools. It is the association between teachers in each region who work together to construct networks of participation and knowledge that redress issues of professional isolation. Valery presents a way of overcoming the "curriculum loneliness" by finding support with teachers from other rural schools:

> I combined my classes with a teacher from Bairnsdale and a teacher from Mallacoota and all up we had probably 25 kids. For that network we had to travel. We had to collaborate together and create assessment tasks and we had to travel and mark them together so we had consistent marking over the whole year. It was a little bit more complicated and very, very time consuming but at the end of the day you have other teachers to share your work.

This social and educational network demands sacrifices of time away from home and other duties and resources. However, what is most important in Valery's story is that reaching out to this network opened up valuable channels of communication, support, and knowledge about the teaching and the application of educational policies. Valery worked with the Victorian Department of Education: "I've had a lot more to do with them. I'm a teacher but my actual title this year is 'Reading Schools Educator' next year it'll be 'E-learning Manager' for the whole cluster so it's not just for this school. If I was teaching just in this school and only seeing what was in this school it would be very, very hard." Thus her access to policy knowledge, that many rural teachers might not have, and her

involvement with the Department of Education put her in a better position than other teachers who, as we have seen in previous chapters, are burdened by keeping up with new policy frameworks and accountability and performance evaluation without the professional networks of association and participation.

In Highland school, an overwhelming majority of teachers were not aware of the possibility of constructing formal or informal professional networks; they did not have colleagues in their subject with whom to create a regional cluster, or simply could not afford the time and cost of it. Most importantly, it has been found that the possibility of interacting with other colleagues positively impacts on the quality of teachers' work and also upon students' learning; therefore, rural teachers should be made aware and supported to create their own cluster. Moreover, communication and dialog should not only be between teachers but school staff and policymakers and government officials. As stated in earlier chapters by the participants, there is a desire and need from them to engage in more meaningful dialog with government authorities. However, as the principal in Highland school argued, "on the surface there is consultation but I don't know how real it is. I don't think it gets too deep." While the Lowland school principal claimed that "principals should be involved in the decision-making and have a very important say as to what they introduce into their own school. That doesn't happen." Teachers' and parents' comments were similar to those of principals (see Chap. 5). Therefore, governments would greatly improve the recognitional and associational aspect of social justice—for instance, teachers' and principals' respect and self-esteem—if they engaged in more meaningful forms of communication with school participants beyond formal channels of communication such as surveys or internal reports. Education policies that are presented as neutral and decontextualize, commonly based on some meritocratic principle, lack any relevance to the myriad of social contexts and individuals present in rural spaces. As stated by Young (2006a) and Howe (1997), these forms of participation are usually reduced to formal or tokenistic types of participation that are easy to dismiss and conclude in assimilation processes. Teachers and principals argue that they would benefit from a renewed focus by governments on the recognition of teachers' and principals' work and their status. Finally, like Young (1990, 1997b), I am not arguing for a dominance of one dimension over the other dimensions. On the contrary, I am calling for a plural social justice that also recognizes and

values teachers' work and provides them with the appropriate resources (e.g. professional partnership and support).

One way of providing greater association between teachers is through the use of information and communication technology (ICT) (see Crump and Twyford 2010). This use provides a possibility not only for teachers to partner with other educators but also for students to access knowledge that otherwise would be elusive to them. All dimensions of justice are present in this example: greater resources for teachers and students, a recognition of their status and enhancement of their self-esteem and the possibility to share their concerns and need with significant others. Some teachers, like Oscar, praise ICT for bringing interaction with other schools in his history subject. However, in order to make the most of this "time and space barrier breaker," he believes he will need more knowledge to take advantage of it: "I would need more training in that area." The circulation of knowledge has become critical in terms of creating educational networks, areas of participation. This requires good access to ICT resources. In a rich developed country like Australia is it sometimes hard to believe that both major political parties are unable to reach a bipartisan position on how to develop and implement the needed technological connectedness that their citizens require. This is a deep disadvantage for rural people. The use of ICT is one of the key tools to overcome the cost of space and time for rural schools. This tool promotes social inclusion for a rural school and its participants. It bridge inequalities and promotes engagement with others beyond their immediate environment. Further, ICT can be used by school staff and students but also by community members outside the school hours. This is a critical aspect that benefits residents of remote and isolated communities.

Conclusion

I want to reiterate the relevance of the concept of hope for social justice in education. I stated earlier in this chapter that hope and education were related in the possibility of social improvement for individuals and communities. Further to this relationship, hope, through education, is a "relational construct" (Ludema 2000), an essential ingredient in social processes. Through these examples, I state the process of teaching and learning as principally a relational process between, among others, teacher and students, teachers and government authorities but also between school staff and parents. In other words, teaching and learning is about the *Other*.

As Ephraim, a teacher in Lowland school, puts it, when teaching "you're not just thinking about yourself, you're thinking about others."[5]

All three dimensions of social justice should be at play in the constitutive foundation of a democratic society. The commonly overlooked dimensions of recognition and association are critical in the relationship between listening, democracy and social change because as Noddings (2003, p. 19) urges us to think: "Why should we listen?" By listening we learn *from* the Other and a desire to listen to the *Other* constructs the foundation of a socially just democratic society. It is the desire and commitment to communicate with one another creates and sustains democracy. Thus, a commitment to the needs of all schools, students and teachers, irrespective of their social and geographical background is a necessary condition for a socially just education for all. Inbuilt into this desire and commitment should also be a view of education that is more than a function of the national economic competitiveness and growth.

A principal argument running through this chapter is the concept developed in Chap. 4; that is, that in order to redress injustices rural school participants should be viewed as "social actors" rather than "victims"; that is, Young's ideas of self-determination and self-development are essential in constructing socially just education. This possibility of becoming social actors, I claim, can only be sustained if we adopt a plural framework of social justice, one that gives the actor resources, recognition of his or her condition, and spaces of participation. Moreover, this possibility should go beyond "formal opportunities" of participation and include the ability for actors to express themselves in their own idiom (Young 2000, 2006a). This empowerment should aim not only to allow real participation but to redistribute power toward marginalized social groups (Lister 2004a, b). Many of these teachers mediated hope through the relational process of teaching and learning, that is, focusing on social inclusion by recognizing and giving voice to students, co-constructing knowledge, including those that did not fit within the general school and community population. In addition, teachers also demanded recognition from educational authorities and members of their communities. In this sense, what is needed is not only "hopeful" and "conscious" teachers but a reassessment of the neoliberal educational project that places a great value on resourcing a "knowledge economy" to the detriment of other forms of knowledge and social inclusion through education. The possibilities of change for rural education cannot be expected to arise just from the will of teachers and school principals. Embedded in this neoliberal educational environment is an idea

of schooling that is not forgiving or supportive enough of students from socially marginalized groups that for one reason or another do not easily fit into the norms, values, and routines demanded by society (Young 2006a). As stated in the previous chapter, there is a normalization of "success" and "failure" in some students, teachers, and parents discourses, which is aimed at all students, regardless of their social background, resources, and capabilities. Thus, this educational environment has the capacity to shape the discourses and practices of rural school participants and limit their views about the issues they encounter. Moving beyond this is the challenge for rural schools and policymakers in the attainment of truly socially just educational outcomes.

NOTES

1. Nonetheless, McGeer (2008) argues that there have been some efforts in the social sciences—from psychology to sociology—to explain or describe what hope means. For example, a special kind of cognitive attitude based on beliefs and desires (Bovens 1999), an emotion (Elster 1989), a disposition or a capacity (Gravlee 2000), a process or activity (Braithwaite 2004), or a combination of all these things (Walker 2006).
2. Hage (2003) is mostly concerned with nationalism within the boundaries of global capitalism.
3. The positive side of hope has to do more with an "ethic of joy," which Hage (in Zournazi 2002, pp. 151–152) draws from Spinoza. It has to do with "reaching a higher stage in the capacities to act, associate and deploy oneself in or with one's environment which constitutes us as a specific 'thing'." The ethic of joy is placed in the present and it has to do with fully enjoying yourself, being recognized, and actively participating in life.
4. In the search for "attainable" hope I have been discussing in this chapter, as a vital aspect of social justice that can overcome utopian or limited social justice positions, I asked teachers about the possibilities of socially just teaching in the classroom and in the school. This included inquiring what kind of activity (moral, political, social, or intellectual) teaching is. The majority of teachers agreed on one point: teaching should not be political. One explanation for this agreement is that teachers associated the term "political" with issues around "formal" politics, that is, based on processes and outcomes related to political parties, including formal state and national electoral contests. However, several teachers in both schools presented discourses and practices that were not just social, moral, or intellectual but also political. That is, while teachers tend to view their profession within the realms of the intellectual and moral (values) spheres, they are

also involved in political discourses, ideas, and practices, many of which concern the disadvantaged and socially marginalized groups in their communities and society at large.

5. Moreover, research shows that "intrinsic" factors, such as "making a difference" and "enjoyment of children" are significant positive motives for people to become a teacher, where teaching is seeing as a socially worthwhile act contributing to the individual and society at large (Andrews and Hatch 2002; Skilbeck and Connell 2004). It is fair to state that there are also "extrinsic" factors, which are associated with "remuneration, workload, employment conditions and status" (DEST 2006, p. 3).

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Toward a Socially Just Rural Education

A central aim of this book has been to contribute to the overlooked research area of rural education and offer a nuanced understanding of the complexities of a social justice agenda for rural school participants. I have argued that over the past few decades, a liberal-egalitarian consensus has formed around how to achieve social justice in policy, research, and among rural educators themselves. This consensus sees the allocation of resources—the distributive agenda—as a way to "level the playing field" between disadvantaged rural schools and their urban counterparts.

In my study, in the institutionalized present of teaching and learning in rural schools, participants echo this egalitarian view, seeing equality of opportunity as the goal through receiving the same resources, funding, and material goods as the norm—urban schools. In this institutionalized time, they view inequalities as structural rather than part of failure rooted in the individual. However, this perspective shifts and the discourse changes.

As a result of the lack of further education and employment opportunities in a rural post-school world, students are encouraged by teachers and parents to become mobile and draw on material resources and social networks to make the transition to regional and urban places, even though this youth out-migration undermines the sustainability of rural towns. To cope with this post-school scenario of uncertainty, participants change their discourse from claims for equality of opportunity to one based on merit (through notions of self-reliance, hard work, and indi-

vidual responsibility). The result is an emphasis on an individual's ability to advance rather than on existing structural barriers.

I have shown the limitations of both these discourses and argue that three dimensions of social justice—distributive, recognitional, and associational—have to be in play in order to achieve socially just outcomes in rural education.

In five years past since the completion of my original study, a number of important research and policy reports have been introduced that make it timely to reflect on participants' claims and the state of rural education. Many of participants' claims are still as relevant today. Nonetheless, two interrelated distributive issues dominate findings in several research and policy studies and reports: at a rural level, the need to solve the teacher recruiting/retention problem, and at a national level, calls for rethinking the school funding system. According to recent studies, the first issue focuses on the spatial isolation of new teachers, inadequate access to services and recreational facilities, lack of adequate housing, poor preparation to teach in rural schools, and professional isolation (Kline and Walker-Gibbs 2015; Reid et al. 2010; White and Kline 2012). The second issue, a new school funding system, has dominated the educational national debate, particularly since the publication of the Gonski Review (Gonski 2011). This review has brought education again to the forefront of the national public debate, and at least for some months it was able to mobilize hope in the idea that a more just schooling system is possible. Given its importance, it is worthwhile reflecting what Gonski Review means for rural education.

The Primacy of Distributive Justice in Current Education Policy

The Gonski Review (Gonski 2011) has reaffirmed the unfairness of school funding in Australia, highlighting inequities and the need to reform "who gets what." It identified that those who are the most in need (e.g. students from Indigenous backgrounds, from rural schools, with a disability, and from low socioeconomic background) are concentrated within the public education sector and that the impact of student's social background is the most important aspect when considering educational outcomes. The Review reinforced the idea that a socially just education should recognize and redress the structural challenges faced by members of disadvantaged

groups. This recognition of social groups is an important condition to redress inequalities because it highlights structural barriers rather than individual failures (Young 1990, 2001). It places a moral demand on providing greater resources for those more in need in order for them to enjoy a good quality of education as the rest of the members of society.

Gonski's recommendations are to a degree Rawlsian in emphasizing the idea of "need," and more specifically, I am referring to the latter part of Rawls's second principle, his famous "Difference Principle," which favors the least advantaged in society. It paid particular attention to the effects on individual disadvantage and the impact of its accumulation in some schools. It argued for a funding system with a resource standard, adjusted for the level of student need. In acknowledging that the state has a special responsibility for the redistribution of funding for the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, the Gonski Review, like Rawls's, emphasized the distributive dimension of social justice in order to level the playing field and obliterate the effects of social circumstances on individual opportunity.

The Gonski Review, however, has significant weaknesses and blind spots. For one, what counts as equity in education is correlated to readily comparable statistical measurements. For instance, the Review begins with an acknowledgment that there is more to education than tests and that schooling has multiple purposes, but this position is abandoned, and findings, formulas, and recommendations are guided by achievement and failures in various tests. But perhaps, the report is more instructive for what it does not say: for instance, its lack of comment on "the role of the community" in education and education's subsequent relationship to the sustainability of rural towns. Gonski's distributive approach and the government response to it is just one example of policy frameworks which inadvertently create an export model of education in rural contexts. There is a hidden consequence in focusing purely on the distributive or funding dimension of social justice as a way of ameliorating inequity for rural students, schools, and their communities. The flow of resources *in* to rural schools occurs to help give rural students the mobility *out* of their communities through tertiary education and work in metropolitan and regional centers. This has deleterious effects on rural communities in encouraging rural out-migration. Furthermore, in an environment which has seen education cede ground to principles of the market economy and valorized choice, ironically, rural students are given little choice in the way that their "successful" transitions are framed but to leave their place.

A recent funding review report in Victoria confirms that the public sector caters for the larger proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, that family background accounts for the most significant factor in student outcomes, and that rural students are still lagging behind their urban counterparts in high-stakes testing, in school enrolment and completion, and are still underrepresented in further and higher education (Bracks 2015; see also Edwards and McMillan 2015; Lamb and Walstab 2012; Polesel et al. 2012a, b). The most critical report, however, about the Victorian government's failure toward the rights of rural children and young people has come from the auditor general (Doyle 2014). Doyle's report affirms that students in rural schools lag behind their urban counterparts in academic achievement, attendance, and school completion (p. x), and that the school bus system that connects students to schools is "administratively onerous for schools" (p. xi). While the report recognizes the provision of additional funding to rural schools, the promotion of regional professional networks, and the implementation of small programs aiming to reduce disadvantages, particularly in the vocational sector, the auditor general claims that there is no comprehensive "research-based approach" to address school problems, that the "DEECD has a limited understanding of the impact of actions it takes" and that "the program evaluations rarely consider the specific impact on rural students" (p. vii). The auditor general concludes his opening comments to the report by celebrating DEECD's development of a new *Rural and Regional Plan* but is pessimistic about its impact due to its "lack of progress to date and limited project planning that has been done," that the plan "is now behind schedule," and asserts that he has "little confidence that it will be the kind of game-changing plan that will make a difference for rural students" (p. vii). In the report it is also acknowledged that the 2010 *Victoria's Rural Education Rural Framework*, with its initiatives for a "stronger workforce" and a "21st century curriculum," was never implemented and "no new policy direction has been established to replace it" (p. 6). The sentiment that runs throughout the auditor general's report resonates with rural feelings of being powerless and marginalized expressed by participants in this book. It resembles the many false starts and stoppages that rural education policy has experienced in the last few decades and the continuous peripheral position of rural issues not only for the state but nationwide.

While these different reviews and reports are commendable efforts to address issues of disadvantage and inequality in education across the board, there is no discussion about the kind of education proposed for

rural people and communities. If anything, reviews and reports continue to show a strong economic argument for education, where raising the fortunes and opportunities of members of future generations has economic dividends for the nation as a whole. Implicit in these studies and reports is the continuation of an approach to view education as a "property right" (Rizvi 2013) based on sustaining and promoting the national workforce. Absent is any conversation about the impact that the policy technologies of accountability and performativity have on teachers' work and lives and students' learning.

Teachers, Recognition, and Neoliberal Policies

This book argues that beside distributive justice, recognitional and associational dimensions also need to be part of the plural concept if we are serious about achieving a socially just education for rural school participants. It is true that teachers in this book offer loose notions of recognitional and associational justice—mostly related to the impact of policy technologies such as performativity, accountability, and marketization in their work. Feeling of powerlessness and lack of participation were common among teachers and principals in both schools. Teachers were cognizant, and many times critical, of their changing roles due to pressure from neoliberal policy technologies that constrained their work into "facilitators of skills," thus reconstituting their status and power as educational experts. Resonating with Young's (1990) argument, a politics of recognition was important for teachers in relation to their self-respect for their work, how they were perceived by the community and the degree of autonomy and decision-making power that was available in their jobs. Having said this, teachers, and principals, also reduced their concerns to a "primacy to having" rather than giving "primacy to doing," downplaying the importance recognitional and associational justice (Young 1990, p. 8). Interestingly, present in school staff comments was a display of a "grateful subjectivity" through the concept of "luck" or "fortune" of having certain resources that other rural schools are denied, and which serves to reveal the impact of education policies that create a process of "normalization" of having to do more with less.

These policy technologies of performativity, accountability, and marketization, including the rearticulation of social justice into equity by numbers, are part of the continuing neoliberal educational project that has resulted in the construction, in Gramscian terms, of a "new civilization

design" (what Gramsci defined a new historical bloc) based on a new common sense (Torres 2013, p. 80). Indeed, since the completion of this research project, the Australian education landscape has witnessed an expansion of the use of neoliberal policy technologies in schools. For instance, the design and implementation of publicly funded *My School* website has introduced the comparison, through data from NAPLAN, of the performance of statistically similar schools in terms of the students' family socioeconomic background (see Gorur 2013; Lingard et al. 2014; Mills 2015). The website aims to make schooling outcomes more transparent and give parents more information (choice). Inherent in this type of measurement is imagining the idea of merit as the possibility of attributing unequal educational performance to natural ability and effort rather than socioeconomic background. In her analysis of *My School* website, Mills (2015, p. 149) affirms that it legitimizes the idea that educational performance is the result of "individual giftedness" rather than "class-based differences," without ever questioning to which social group this type of scholastic information that is evaluated speaks to.

Thus, the production and commodification of knowledge has been reinforced with this introduction of standardized tests, rankings, and league tables, where knowledge is directed in ways that allows it to be exchanged, and where winners and losers are created at every step of the educational journey. As Young (1990, p. 204) argues, the criteria that are used to measure individuals and compare them with one another have a normative and cultural content rather than "neutrally scientific." Assessments and measures of students inevitably lead school participants to absorb specific values, norms, and conducts that are the desired ones by the system. The problem lies in that these knowledges do not easily relate to certain social groups in schools. The idea of equity that is promoted by the policy technologies of high-stakes testing overlooks the different social particularities and circumstances of different social groups of students and promotes knowledge that has its genesis removed from the everyday life experiences of rural people and places (Lingard et al. 2014).

Recent national research on teachers' views and experiences of the impact of high-stakes testing on their work confirms that overwhelmingly educators agreed that tests were taking up a significant amount of their teaching time, reducing the importance of other curriculum areas, and that they were increasingly teaching for the test, including narrowing the range of teaching strategies they use in class in favor of testing skills (Polesel et al. 2014). It is interesting to note that the researchers found

that numerous participants in their study believed that tests like NAPLAN have some usefulness, particularly in highlighting areas where more professional learning is needed, but that it is the use of it through the publication of results and the subsequent pressure, control, and transformation of teachers' and schools' work that deserves criticism.

Perhaps the issue is not to eliminate educational accountabilities but to construct what Lingard (2010) calls "richer and more intelligent" forms of accountability that take into account the place of schooling in (present and future) society, that addresses wider societal aspects of poverty and inequality and rejects scrutiny upon teachers as the sole way to improve schooling outcomes. He argues for a return to greater trust on teachers' work, including greater levels of professional autonomy and the acknowledgment that each school works in different ways and with different communities. The point that Lingard is making, and which I agree with, is that we continue with a system based on the "transfer of authority from professional teachers to standardized testing instruments," which fails to acknowledge teachers' significant role in the classroom and on students' educational outcomes (see Hattie 2009). Ultimately, it presumes a lack of trust in their professional judgments and their pedagogical assessment practices (Lingard 2010).

Is Place-Based Education Part of the Answer?

In Highland and Lowland schools, students work hard to achieve current normative expectation of youth social and spatial mobility by continuing with the pathway from secondary school to tertiary education, implying for young people in rural and remote places that lack of access to local further and higher education institutions equates with leaving their communities. Their parents and teachers support this for better opportunities, even though this youth out-migration undermines the sustainability of rural towns. This need to migrate means that the students' social relationships and identities are interrupted and that new ones have to be created, generating a post-school scenario of uncertainty for participants. To cope with this post-school scenario of uncertainty, participants adopt a social justice discursive position based on merit (through notions of self-reliance, hard work, and individual responsibility), which normalizes inequalities and justifies unequal outcomes based on individual traits rather than existing structural barriers. Most importantly, not much is said by participants about the content of the curriculum in relation to their local community.

The idea of place, as a concept and practice, appears disconnected from the rural imagination.

To solve this "placelessness" of rural schooling, some researchers have focused on the theory of place-based education. To put it simply, place-based education aims to interrupt this exogenous force that promotes an outward look of the present and future by building strong relations between youth and their local community through curriculum and pedagogy that focuses on young people's local experiences (Bartsch 2008; Gruenwald and Smith 2008; Smith 2002; Somerville et al. 2011). Against education and youth policies that homogenize and universalize students' needs, Gruenwald and Smith (2008, p. xvi) affirm that "place-based education can be understood as a community-based effort to reconnect the process of education, enculturation, and human development to the well-being of community life." They are concerned about the construction of a hegemonic and universal narrative of progress based on neoliberal policy technologies that place students' and teachers' attention on a future that is everywhere else but home. Gruenwald and Smith assert that this phenomenon of placelessness in education policies contributes to the production of alienated subjects and the decline of community life. Imperative here is the need to reconnect people and places. By empowering young people's relationships to their local place, the argument goes that it not only enhances students' academic and vocational competencies but also reanimates civic life and social capital and fosters local economic opportunities. Indeed, place-based education researchers identify schools and its curriculum as critical social actors in the survival and sustainability of rural communities, claiming that their survival is strongly tied to a revitalization of the human, social, economic, institutional, and ecological capital, where access and quality of education will play a major role (Alston 2002; Dibden and Cocklin 2005; Green and Reid 2004; Roberts 2014). The point is that sustainability is multifaceted and transcends narrow views that equate it with development of human capital, so predominant in current education policy.

Place-based learning is also presented as a successful way of engaging and motivating socially marginalized students or so-called students at-risk, through a politics of recognition and association that includes and values their contribution to the school and the community. This is a critical aspect of a place-conscious education because, as this research demonstrates, not all young people from rural areas are able to make the transition to further and higher education or employment in regional and urban centers. If

anything, different policy and research reports (see Doyle 2014; Edwards and McMillan 2015; Gonski 2011; Polesel et al. 2012a, b) continue to show that low educational aspirations, poorer quality of education, and financial costs are still key barriers to rural youth completion of schooling and participation in tertiary education.

A place-based education is critical for rural places because as in Highland and Lowland in this study, rural schools have the capacity to function as talent export industries: the young that the community constructs as "talented" find departure not only attractive but inevitable. Parents and educators embrace this inevitability, which dooms the sustainability of the community. It seems counterproductive to dedicate the community to educational opportunities only to bring about its own destruction in the process. It is those marginalized youth from the "minority" groups in Highland and Lowland that emerge as the community's greatest hope. Thus, one function of rural schools should be to support these marginalized youth for the sustainability of the communities.

While I support the idea of place-based education, like any theory it has its shortcomings and critiques. Nespor's (2008) review of different contributions to the relationship between education and place (see Theobald 1997; Bowers 2006; Gruenwald and Smith 2008) alerts us to the creation of problematic dichotomization of local versus global, including the romanticizing of community life, by place-based education advocates. Azano (2011) correctly points out that many examples of place-based education are anecdotal and lack research significance. Alecia Youngblood Jackson (2012) offers the most powerful critique that I have encountered of place-based education. Using a Foucauldian approach to the analysis of the relationship between schooling and place, she shows how efforts to resist the effects of globalization in a rural town in southern USA generated discourses and practices that aim to create unity and totality rather than diversity in the community. This process of community construction through the production of knowledge in schools based on "normalization, entitlement, control, self-identity, and surveillance" (p. 78), served to create processes of exclusion and marginalization for those members that did not share the values and norms of the majority.

Finally, I want to raise a caution about the "power" of schools to redress inequality. There is an element of naivety in thinking that more education alone can solve the structural problems faced by rural people and communities (Baker et al. 2009; Brighouse 2010). Challenges such as the reconfiguration of rural spaces from production into spaces of consumption and

protection, in addition to climate change, lack of infrastructure, transport and employment, and volatility of global markets can all affect the sustainability of rural communities beyond what schools can do. It is my view that schools have a critical role to play in this sustainability but this has to be accompanied by structural support and reform originated and sustained over time by the state. In some ways, there is a need to return to Brett's (2007) point about an old social contract between rural and the city in Australia, where once the problems of the country were the problems of the nation.

Toward a Socially Just Rural Education

A final point I want to make concerns the positive social justice practices that are already occurring in the two schools I studied. As the work of Iris Marion Young (1990, 1997b, 2000, 2001, 2006a) shows, distribution of resources goes some way to addressing power relations through access, but it is not the only factor in determining social justice. Marginalized groups within the school need to be listened to and need to participate in examining and finding solutions to their own issues. Participatory forms of democratic engagement are needed if we seek to provide those disadvantaged with a voice at the decision-making table (Young 2000, 2001, 2006a). Excluding individuals and social groups in the exercise of power and decision-making is one of the generative roots, along with issues of redistribution and recognition, of inequality in schools. The voice of marginalized groups might not be heard or taken into account not just because they lack institutional power but because they are constructed as "subordinate in status terms" (Lynch and Lodge 2002, p. 182). Marginalized groups not only suffer distributed injustices in the form of fewer resources or a limited curriculum that impacts on their post-school possibilities but they also suffer injustices in terms of institutional power and status. Therefore, the kind of pluralist social justice I have been arguing for throughout this book must entail social groups as full and equal participants in deciding their future. Social groups have to be able to speak for themselves, to find their own voice and raise their distinctive issues and concerns, thus becoming active participants of their present and future. For schooling, and society at large, to be socially just demands every subject and social group to have a right to have a voice and to be able to exercise it.

In a society of increasing plurality and fragmentation achieving social justice outcomes for schools is complex. Defining social justice according to the normative theory of distribution presents an incomplete reading of the debates concerning schooling. Therefore, applying the three dimensions of social justice to rural schooling is an argument for a better distribution of resources and facilities to deliver high quality of education, for improved opportunities to participate in the design of policies that will affect rural educators' lives and work, and for the inclusion and respect of all social groups and individuals in the processes of learning. It is the combined and accumulating effect of the lack of these dimensions (e.g. limited and irrelevant curriculum, lack of respect and autonomy of teachers, feelings of alienation for marginal rural actors) which creates the personal and structural injustices for the participants. Thus, the three dimensions need to be present to achieve socially just educational practices. They are all necessary conditions but not sufficient by themselves.

Rural education needs a social justice framework that is dynamic, revisable, and informed by rural school participants. It must shift as the rural context shifts. And it must also encompass the plurality of discourses and practices implicit in schools and society. When social justice appears as a finished conversation, an agreed consensus, there is certainly the possibility that new forms of injustice are being played out. If anything, the starting point of any reform or policy should begin with meaningful consultation with rural school participants about their needs and about current useful practices that entail socially just education. As this book has showed, there are already good examples of plural social justice enacted by rural educators that should serve as a policy and practical guide.

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