

Reimagining the Rural: Deconstructing Generalisations and Imagining New Ways of Being in a Post-COVID Scotland

Wednesday 4 August 2021 - Parallel Session 3 - 11.30am to 12.30pm (GMT+1)

MUR CAMERON - Embedding Learning in Culture

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The reality of poverty in the Highlands and Islands is masked in official indices designed to identify areas of deprivation. Also, statistically, schooling in rural areas seems to sustain itself without any further support. These mirages generate the need for a reframing of perceptions of rural schooling in Scotland. Within more plain sight is one of the issues reoccurring in the literature on rural education, namely the 'leaving discourse' (Corbett & Baek, 2016; Hargreaves, 2017; Roberts, 2018). While there is clear regional variation (Expert Advisory Group on Migration and Population, 2020), rural communities often experience outward migration at certain stages in young people's lives, whether on the completion of their education or training, or in moving onto its next stage. The global pandemic has reframed patterns of work and learning with many functions carried out effectively from people's homes. This new way of being highlights the potential for a generation of digitally literate young people to demonstrate the capacity to deliver goods and services from their rural communities, reducing the need to leave. This paper, based on semi-structured and unstructured online focus group discussions with a divergent group of Newly Qualified Teachers, explores the reframing of schooling in and around the pandemic, and its potential to contribute to the diversity and sustainability of rural communities in a newly invigorated digital age, as well as two hidden aspects of experience in our region: crypto-poverty, and the masked difficulties faced by very remote rural schools.