

Putting Henri Lefebvre to Work on a Rural Education Case Study

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Studies that engage explicitly with theory are less common in rural education literature, which tends to be dominated by policy-led and pragmatic research. To raise the status of “rural” educational research, researchers should increase criticality, objectivity, and empirical study and replace rich descriptions of rural deficiency with imaginative, constructive ideas and community involvement (Hargreaves et al., 2009). Kvalsund and Hargreaves (2009) identified four areas of rural educational research design and methodology that require attention and these include the role of theory. This paper responds to Kvalsund and Hargreaves’ proposal for a new agenda for education research in rural areas with ‘theoretical rather than policy based foundations’ (p. 148). This paper presents a ‘worked example’ of a piece of theoretical analysis done when returning to a case study of a rural school and community in England. It makes use of Henri Lefebvre’s spatial theory work and in particular, his idea of the spatial triad (Lefebvre, 1991). Case studies are familiar in ‘rural education’ studies; putting theory to work on case studies, specific sites or incidents, could be a way to optimise the beneficial aspects of the footprints of research (White et al., 2012), and to extend its reach. Lefebvre’s triad promotes the idea of spatial practices being enacted and experienced at a local level as well as at national-global scale. The utility of Lefebvre’s spatial triad for researchers in rural education spaces and places is explored and how making use of theory might connect this work with wider education literature.