ISFIRE 2009

International Symposium for

Innovation in Rural Education

Innovation for Equity in Rural Education

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University of New England

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Discussion Summary

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Introduction

The overarching theme of ISFIRE 2009 concerned innovative strategies for improving equity in rural education. In the keynote addresses, speakers addressed issues around six key themes:

1. Promoting Rural Policy Initiatives
2. Enhancing Rural Student Experience/Growth
3. Nurturing the Rural Teacher Experience
4. Optimising the Curriculum
5. Improving Resources in Rural Schools
6. Addressing Special Issues in Rural Education

Presentation sessions were also organised by theme. At the end of each session, time was allocated for participants to discuss issues of relevance prompted by keynote addresses and/or session presentations. Guidance for these discussions was provided in the form of four questions:

1. What innovations have been successful in achieving equity in rural education?
2. What has contributed most significantly to the success of these strategies?
3. How could these initiatives be implemented in other rural locations?
4. Any other comments?

Session Chairs gathered comments from participants and these have been collated and grouped. The comments provided in the session discussion were grouped into categories based on their general emphasis or advisory content. Eight distinctly different categories were identified. In some cases, grouping relied on an interpretation of the statements made as it was not possible to seek clarification from those who made the comments. Overall, the intent of the groupings is to provide some structure for the contributions made during discussions. The groupings, together with typical examples are provided below.

1. Capacity (social and cultural dimensions), e.g., *Schools have become the central point in towns due to the economic downturn*;
2. Partnerships (both within and external to organizations), e.g., *Can local identities (e.g., local farmers, agronomists) be used to support ideas?*;
3. Professional development, e.g., *Sharing exemplary practice through visiting other schools, other classrooms*;
4. Teaching and learning, e.g., *Effective teachers have evaluated the risks taken*;
5. Specific programs, e.g., *QuickSmart*;
6. Technology, e.g., *Suite of IT skills enable people to stay connected*;
7. Infrastructure, e.g., *Funding – covering PD budgets, helping clusters of schools work with each other, with relevance to their needs*; and
8. Policy, e.g., We need to ensure the needs of rural education are considered in the development of the national curriculum in Australia.

Theme 1 – Promoting Rural Policy Initiatives

Question 1: What innovations have been successful in achieving equity in rural education?

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
- Linking schools to local expertise in the community

Professional Development:
- Posting teachers to rural areas for a period of time

Policy:
- Clustering small rural schools in Korea

Question 2: What has contributed most significantly to the success of these innovations?

Capacity (social and cultural dimensions):
- Being adaptive and fitting into the local context
- Taking parent/family needs into account
- Increasing social interactions
- Building in structures to ensure sustainability, e.g., involve Indigenous Teacher Aides who are more likely to remain in the community

Teaching and learning:
- Giving authentic experiences to the students, e.g., using student data in real science investigation

Policy:
- Local control of funding

Question 3: How could these innovations be implemented in other rural locations?
- By giving consideration to the points raised in Question 2

Other comments:

Teaching and learning:
- We need better ways to measure the success of innovations, especially student outcomes

Policy:
- We need to ensure the needs of rural education are considered in the development of the national curriculum in Australia

Theme 2 – Enhancing Rural Student Experience/Growth

Question 1: What innovations have been successful in achieving equity in rural education?

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
• Setting in place professional partnerships between schools and scientists (e.g., CSIRO)
• Creating science-based community – school links
• Bringing medical students to rural locations to expose them to a 'rural life' and to dispel come misconceptions
• Enchantment pedagogies need to be taken to teacher <u>not</u> just to students – get the teachers excited
• Innovations as partnerships between school and university personnel
• What to do if there are no tutors in private companies in metropolitan areas for revision (HSC level). WA DET provided similar tutoring by VC to rural/remote schools (paid teachers)
• Gifted students – online mentoring, but are usually provided by organizations, rather than government

Professional development:
• Remote learning teams – provide support for teachers, professional development

Teaching and learning:
• Face-to-face component at appropriate level is essential
• Exposure of other points of view
• Making expertise explicit
• Place-based education – range of projects which engage children; sustaining rural communities
• Passion of teachers and implementers – there must be trust for the program to flourish
• Independent/private schools sometimes have tutoring

Specific programs:
• *QuickSmart* and G&T innovation days bring equity to rural Australia

Technology:
• Video conferencing
• Collaborative technologies
• Access and possibilities for students with low literacy levels by using technology
• Technologies (e.g., viedoconferencing) are very expensive (e.g., band width); but can use open source software to minimise this; cross-sectoral support
• Distance partnerships through email
• IDL and the use of technology
• ICTs are useful because they demonstrate student achievement
• e-tutoring: taking the idea and use not just in the low SES rural areas
• "your tutor" online tutoring service (paid by parents) – on-demand tutoring in 1st year uni students; addresses location but not SES differences
• Korean model of e-tutoring allows for poorer families to access tutoring
• "your tutor" online tutoring service (paid by parents) – on-demand tutoring in 1st year uni students; addresses location but not SES differences

Question 2: What has contributed most significantly to the success of these innovations?

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
• Promotion to community (not necessary to the Department)
• CSIRO acted a broker, but the ongoing nature of the partnership is between the members of the partnership
• Use of a scientist to build teacher confidence to teach science
• Partnerships with communities – very important in rural areas
• Leader who keeps the project going, i.e., lecturer working with two schools is more successful than two schools working on their own
• School leadership – the more a school leader pushes for a particular technology to be used (e.g., emails for school messages) the more likely it is to be utilised

Professional development:
• Ways to assist teachers cater to diverse needs can be successful

Teaching and learning:
• A learning focus for the innovations is critical (e.g., the 4 Ps)
• A Focus on the needs of students is needed – what it is that isolates them, is powerful in success; gives them a group to belong to
• Collaboration and good-will of those involved (teachers); Teamwork.
• Quality and commitment of all involved (teachers, mentors, families)
• Students like the 'public' nature of connectedness
• Capacity to respond to students' "thirst for knowledge" in ways that appeal to students
• "necessity is the mother of invention"
• Face-to-face, reflections, sharing
• Understanding of affective factors, pedagogies link empathy as a particular value
• Curriculum differentiation is important
• Teachers need support to facilitate programs – technical and pedagogical support assisted the social computing project to be successful
• Change of culture, e.g., expectation regarding checking emails

Specific programs:
• Feedback in *Quicksmart* (Tutors, students, system)

Technology:
• ICTs show results, e.g., graphing in *QuickSmart* and outcomes of G&T days
• Making sure technology is available for students <u>and</u> staff

Infrastructure:
• Funding and the necessity of funding: where does funding come from; already in the schools
• Being able to use resources efficiently, e.g., home tutors

Question 3: How could these innovations be implemented in other rural locations?

Capacity (social and cultural dimensions):
• Build capacity (in remote locations particularly)

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
• Can local identities (e.g., local farmers, agronomist) be used to support these ideas?
• Need to have principals and executive on board
• Progress SiMERR agenda
• Rural health and medical connections again needed
• 'Road Shows' are often willing to travel to rural/remote areas

Professional development:
• Need to nurture people with ideas
• Support young teachers

Teaching and learning:
• Direct adoption into another context unlikely to be successful – more a matter of adapting and utilising models. These are more "proof of concept"
• Expansion of the interests in science, i.e., science technology
• Use of process to apply scientific investigations to other questions
• Taking projects to scale is challenging
• Whole school approaches are necessary to cater for diversity
• Develop a culture of feedback in schools

Technology:
• Access through websites for gifted programs
• Social computing – expand across to other areas of the school, then expand to other schools, or expand your repertoire of technology

Other comments:

Capacity (social and cultural dimensions):
• Big equity issue is keeping kids in the country after Yr 7 when parents think they must
• This "community" values the opportunity to share – wants that extended; and (the "community") recognises the need to be strategic in order to have influence on policy and programs
• An issue is that some rural students go to university but get 'home-sick' and come home before they graduate
• Trust is a big issue

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
• Could build partnerships with professional associations for sustainability and spread
• Schools could be involved in other science research projects
• Scientists involved with K-6 schools tend to be able to support other areas not just their speciality

Teaching and learning:
• All the innovations are about teaching and learning NOT about the technologies

- 21st century requires that teachers have significant technological skills (that are useful and used in the teaching)
- Turn-over of staff is a critical factor in sustainability into rural school
- The tension between realising science is special, e.g., building the harbour bridge, to what is local and relative, e.g., science on the farm.
- Korean perspective: Asian countries emphasise skills and content vs Western thinking and engagement. Successful Asian students do not like maths/science, and the less successful actually like their maths/science; can we combine the two?
- What can we do to allow new spaces/innovations when the curriculum is so crowded? Singapore example – de-cluttering the curriculum; Big Question approach. Relevance to students – fragmentation of knowledge.
- Domination of TER (Tertiary Entrance Rank); cascading down effects the curriculum/ Tertiary institutions need to seel alternatives to the TER.
- Maths knowledge at universities is poor; leading to careers that do not support maths
- If motivation to learn an area is high, then teachers will learn (e.g., maths)
- Content needs to be taught in alternative ways; leading to best pedagogies. Teachers who can see "connections" can pass on the connections
- "Passionate" teachers – what are they passionate about? Passion needs to be about learning
- Continuing to learn – links with enchantment pedagogy
- Implementable programs – need to be compatible with school realities
- Need a more consolidated, student-centred and pedagogy-centred approach

Technology:
- Still difficult to get good network/net coverage in very remote areas
- Cyberbullying is a 'Catch 22' – teachers don't know about it and students don't tell
- Careful use of tool 'permissions', e.g., making sure students and teachers are aware of how to set social networking/ Internet-based tools so that have an appropriate level of technology read/write access

Infrastructure:
- Issue of 'big system' thinking going for much more centralised delivery
- Still a big continuum between how well schools use what they have

Policy:
- Difficult to run cross-state programs on projects as each state endorses cross-systems or blocks tools differently

Theme 3 – Nurturing the Rural Teacher Experience

Question 1: What innovations have been successful in achieving equity in rural education?

Capacity (social and cultural dimensions):
• Key people
• Money for placements in rural areas – attractive notion that students adjust to fit into the community and the community adjusting to fit in with the student/teacher and embracing them. Send students out in groups to country …
• Retired people who go to remote places so they make a contribution
• Young couples and children

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
• Systems communicating with other systems (rather than simply within their own organizations), including professional associations, various education sectors

Teaching and learning:
• Taking the debate to the participants rather than telling them what needs to happen
• One model: Action research and developing relevant resources/projects that are contextual and relevant

Specific programs:
• SiMERR projects
• Government initiatives – ASISTM; SiMERR (through its funding of projects)
• State initiatives – DET; RPO (districts)
• Sector/system initiatives, e.g., Catholic system
• Special focus initiatives

Technology:
• Suite of IT skills enable people to stay connected

Question 2: What has contributed most significantly to the success of these innovations?

Capacity (social and cultural dimensions):
• Making rural people the focus – margins taking control rather than the centre
• Focus on equity
• Breaking down stereotypes
• Changing demographic of novice teachers (mature age, mid-career changes)
• Sense of community is important
• Lots of different teachers are coming into metropolitan schools all the time and this is seen as a positive – bringing in new skills and ideas. However, in rural communities, the communities wonder why they live there – don't like the place etc
• Mostly friends who have married locals and had families

Professional development:
• Having a good facilitator is critical – but can an "innovation" be made 'leader-proof'?
• Recognition to be involved in a special project

- Teachers need time; money pays for this – teacher reflection time and networking

Teaching and learning:
- Different opportunities
- Welfare and behaviour management skills when want to move from rural schools

Infrastructure:
- Funding – covering PD budgets, helping clusters of schools work with each other, with relevance to the needs

Question 3: How could these innovations be implemented in other rural locations?

Capacity (social and cultural dimensions):
- Overcoming high turnover of key leader/facilitator for innovation by increasing role of the community (looking after the leader)
- Consider suitability of people for the context
- Recruitment – those who relate to land/environment
- Professional life can be advanced in rural community because you know the people in authority
- Only people from outside feel isolated, not those that are from there
- GAP – aren't going to get people from the communities because they don't have the literacy skills
- Stay for 12 months – start to value the community

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
- Rural sociologists – research and resources – connections
- Successful retention - … students for rural communities
- City students who study in rural universities and don't want to go back to the city
- Connecting with health – usually there with education – the systems
- Need to develop the connectedness
- Professional development though university linked to schools (PG study/)
- School projects need to be relevant and supported by leadership

Professional development:
- Workload issues – multilevel teaching – burnout
- Big question – Who controls PD?

Teaching and learning:
- Balance of continuity
- Improved learning outcomes should also be the purpose of all teaching
- Decluttering the curriculum to allow teachers the time but still need money for projects

Specific programs:
- Continuing great project models through SiMERR

Technology:
- Centralisatioin of communication (e.g., video conferencing) resources (se telecentres becoming resource centres in WA) across agencies available for use
- Consider whether technology is necessary – can the same result be achieved using more basic means (e.g., telephone)
- Telecentres

Infrastructure:
• Need for system level support
• Expense of constantly recruiting

Policy:
• Advertise for teachers in magazines such as listing to recruit

Other comments:

Capacity (social and cultural dimensions):
• Lauricello's (?) works – local community knowledge experts; Indigenous elders
• Bourdieu (?) – cultural capital; but to function in rural schools
• Rugged individualism of rural community; pragmatic skills
• This families embrace 'irrelevance' – cultural capital; cultural knowledge. Some families embrace the pragmatic
• We end up alienating ourselves from the world around us
• Open people to their potential to who we are as a global community
• Values pursued, adopted to make the world a better place; to provide integrity to indigenous people
• Maybe they are not like us and can teach us something else
• Pat's binary – teacher who knows place but there are people from outside place
• When can we sense place?
• If teachers have a sense of place, what happens when they go to another place?
• We had 3 distinct countries: Korea – high education values; Canada – change in the idea of irrelevance; Remote Australia – no relevance, no opportunity. Frustration of teacher impact on their values
• Information inside our heads – is this what makes us successful?
• Youth – financial decisions
• Not realistic for students to go out into rural communities – family commitments
• What is 'place'?

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
• Mentor systems – at the right time, with appropriate people, with appropriate support to follow-up, of an appropriate style, with a clearly defined role
• Bonding with teacher authority
• Different professions in rural areas are connected through different regions
• Sustainability of educational projects

Professional development:
• They do not understand place themselves
• Can we "grow our own" in terms of teacher education and students from divers rural and regional areas
• How do we get students who want to live and learn in these remote isolated areas
• We need to work with them in situ
• False realities – when you go out for one week, you expect it to be like that all the time
• External students – working, so they can't go out to remote schools
• Critical period is in week 7 and 2nd term – when they can become overwhelmed
• How long do we want to retain teachers for?
• Dissemination of good outcomes of project

Teaching and learning:

- What is happening in the US – funds of knowledge (Louis Malle ?)
- Teachers valuing the knowledge the children come to school with
- Tension: equity of within knowledge and the curriculum
- Contextualise education from where the kids are at – c.f. traditional western knowledge … doe this restrict their curriculum and learning experiences; in metropolitan area – the kids learn science but rural kids work within rural context so it is not traditional science knowledge
- Timing of post secondary education – connecting to 'noble life' either deconstruct the testing regime or what do teachers need to do? Think about where every student starts; all students need an equal chance of meeting the 'tests' fairly
- Rural students have 'social' capital but not the cultural capital that is what is tested by the school and international research studies of student achievement
- Place-based education does it diminish students' horizons? They work hard not to limit children's horizons – global and local
- Putting learning in context – but we need to broaden students learning
- Uninformed policy makers drive the agenda
- Tensions: " learning for learning" is it learning for choices; or tensions between the local and global, and between the ideal and the pragmatic
- You don't want to lock in local prejudices – there are other forms of knowledge and knowing
- Continue to work on the main stream to make it more innovative with knowledge of place, e.g., Indigenous knowledge – historical knowledge and traditional knowledge
- Educators in their essence between government policy, data driven outcomes and what is important in place and space
- Going in and building relationships
- Teaching English and English only
- Attendance as an indicator of performance for schools and principals
- At the base of education being measured by governments and policy makers a dominant epistemology – one which eschews the value questions
- To what extent can we educate people to love to learn, to give meaning and purpose in their lives – the dominant epistemology depends on power as a primary value
- Paradigm shift: saturation; transformations; self-destructive education system
- What is worthwhile: counter-vailing epistemologies; knowledge as connectivity
- A teacher's sense of place and how do they develop this?
- To develop that intellectual quality – our learning; the teacher needs to know the place
- It is about relating that (sense of place) to a high level and deep knowledge
- Rural – idea of how horrible or how beautiful in-servicing of teachers and school context
- Learning for choice – frustration of visiting a school – having a sports day that extends into 3 days of sports and fun; is this related to intellectual academic work?
- Denying place and cultural capital; different mixes and matches; can we influence the testing regime in the aim of equity?
- Can these kids read and write and be numerate; discrepancies masked, for e.g., in NT the difference in rural in Australia and in comparison with Korea
- Rigour is what is important
- Place-based learning and engagement; scaffolding; irrelevance
- One of the girls taught herself to be a leader in her community

- Relationship was established – we provided her with opportunities
- The testing has go to go to provide opportunities to the students to take advantage of the technology and the relationships
- Discuss literacy level of Indigenous students – do literacy on …
- Majority of teachers in rural areas come from rural universities

Technology:
- Significance of having several people at one location for videoconference – opportunities for social networking at that location
- Network connection (infrastructure) issues are an ongoing problem. Note that WA is rolling out a 'supernet'; contrast between the possibilities and what can actually be delivered

Policy:
- Challenge to leaders – wrestle with universality and place, global and local – choice of mobility
- Binary – too simple; more complex wrestling with developing a new paradigm
- Bradley report – more expensive to educate someone from a rural uni
- Paradigm shift needed for rural education

Theme 4 – Optimising the Curriculum

Question 1: What innovations have been successful in achieving equity in rural education?

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
- Getting people together – students, parents, staff
- Greater involvement of parents and community in teaching and professional development

Professional development:
- Sharing exemplar practice through visiting other schools, other classrooms
- Colearners are a powerful tool to promote change
- Creating teacher networks to work collaboratively
- Effective teachers are risk takers
- PD that was focussed on the needs of students, staff and the community

Teaching and learning:
- Innovations that have been carefully scaffolded

Specific programs:
- *QuickSmart*
- Bhutan – showing a different way of doing things

Technology:
- Using technology to open the world to new resources

Question 2: What has contributed most significantly to the success of these innovations?

Capacity (social and cultural dimensions):
- Sharing in context
- Involvement of students from different stages, parents and community who will continue driving activities after school staff has changed
- Having students spend time in regional and rural and remote areas during pracs
- Schools have become the central point of towns due to economic downturn

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
- Involvement of the community – all of the stakeholders

Professional development:
- Facilitators that have enabled staff to connect

Teaching and learning:
- Effective teachers have evaluated the risks taken
- Innovation being a move on to the next step
- Having a 'can-do' attitude and the confidence to move on
- Meeting needs in context. Starting where there is a need
- Meeting needs in context. Starting where there is a need

Infrastructure:
- Sustainability

Question 3: How could these innovations be implemented in other rural locations?

Capacity (social and cultural dimensions):
- We need to improve the image of small towns, rural areas etc., especially to our New Scheme Teachers
- Opening school enrolments to adults in the community who then become learners and education becomes valued again in the community
- Need to build a culture of change to allow innovation

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
- When introducing innovations involve the whole community in the training and implementation at the school
- Leadership involvement in innovations is most important

Professional development:
- More students spending more prac time in rural and remote schools so they can see the innovation happening
- Local people/communities identifying needs and developing their professional development around those needs

Teaching and learning:
- Development and use of Action Research into each innovation

Policy:
- We need recognition that "one size does not fit all" – especially at the policy level
- Departments and policy makers need to develop a greater awareness of needs at an individual school level. They need convincing of the importance of the information

Other comments:

Capacity (social and cultural dimensions):
- Culture is very important in scaling

Professional development:
- New scheme teachers need support but experienced teachers can need equivalent support to try and change and grow
- Equity – self-reflection and evaluation of teaching staff
- Need to look at teacher training, especially High School, due to different makeup in smaller schools, e.g., smaller cohorts then multigrade classes in HS
- When introducing technology be careful not to overload staff with too many options or expectations. Go slowly and make careful, informed choices

Teaching and learning:
- Need to be aware of the cultural implications of what we bring in the children's worlds and what we take out their world
- Change is not an event, it is a process
- Scaling up needs to start from the bottom
- Scaling is best done in context of the schools
- Top-down scaling causes lag

Infrastructure:
- Schools are an industry and our viability is important to our small communities

Policy:
- Concerns over the future of some smaller central schools due to numbers
- Sometimes innovation is mandated and this doesn't work; needs to come from the base; timeframes and cost cutting have implication for success of implementation
- Double-edged sword – more v.c. could reduce the provision of supports, e.g., consultancy

Theme 5 – Improving Resources in Rural Schools

Question 1: What innovations have been successful in achieving equity in rural education?

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
• Maintaining a broad curriculum by developing a relationship (delivering) with TAFE

Teaching and learning:
• Targeted programs to skill and provide the tools for students in relative social isolation to develop team-working, problem solving etc. that students in larger communities may take fro granted

Infrastructure:
• Systemised and centralised resources (e.g., providers of technology)

Question 2: What has contributed most significantly to the success of these innovations?

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
• Collaboration (effective systems/quality facilitators) and partnerships (contextual intelligence)
• Community involvement – breaking down generational barriers

Professional development:
• Specialised consultants to run the programs and interactive technology
• Quality of the facilitator

Technology:
• Interactive technology – common platforms

Question 3: How could these innovations be implemented in other rural locations?

Professional development:
• Identify – plan – implement – review
• Ask others
• Be innovative
• Necessity is the mother of invention – need is the mother of innovation

Other comments:

Capacity (social and cultural dimensions):
• Equity requires (consistency of) staffing, willingness to contribute
• The notion of success comes from the family

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
• Success = a meaningful contribution

Teaching and learning:
• Defining success … marks? Exit outcomes or students? Well being? Acceptance by community of education outcomes? Aspirations of communities? – how to deal with these as schools

Theme 6 – Addressing Special Issues in Rural Education

Question 1: What innovations have been successful in achieving equity in rural education?

Capacity (social and cultural dimensions):
• A better understanding of the communities and cultures we are sending teachers to
• Making links between home 'culture' and then matching these with 'western education' culture
• Teacher perception of 'culture' is critical to what binds us together as educators
• Connection between place and identity
• Recognition of accommodation and change brought about by transience

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
• Setting up social and cultural support programs that also involve whole of community or group exchange programs

Teaching and learning:
• Relevant curriculum
• Matching curriculum to the needs of local environments
• Culturally relevant curriculum – bring together new ideas about what constitutes appropriate curriculum as borrowed from Indigenous ideas
• Deliver curriculum using culturally identified strategies
• Literacy programs (networked production of resources) – common software – photograph – build books – first in languages then in English

Question 2: What has contributed most significantly to the success of these innovations?

Capacity (social and cultural dimensions):
• Address core issues, e.g., cultural and social capital

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
• A greater awareness of clientele
• Value the local and then make links beyond

Teaching and learning:
• A matching of appropriate curriculum to the needs of local rural communities (particularly in places such as South Africa/ Fiji etc)
• Localisation of curriculum and resources
• Books given to family to model literacy behaviours include whole of family and related understanding (e.g., drinking while pregnant); complete integration with family life

Policy:
• Rural and remote or Indigenous focussed government

Question 3: How could these innovations be implemented in other rural locations?

Capacity (social and cultural dimensions):
•   Mobility in and out of rural communities; transience
•   Change of concept about right and wrong
•   Value the importance of rural (Indigenous; other) life and likelihood of the nation as a whole
•   Recognise sense of identity and support additional elements of community life – such as economic and social development

Partnerships (within and external to organizations):
•   Listen to locals
•   Influence policy makers to support local initiatives without strings (e.g., Wiigay project; 30% to 3% absenteeism; funded by Telstra)

Professional development:
•   Perhaps your professional development is not complete until you have taught in a rural school

Policy:
•   How can we make rural as important as urban?

Other comments:

Capacity (social and cultural dimensions):
•   What is the essence of 'culture'?