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Book Review

Rural Education: Issues and Practices. Alan J. DeYoung (Ed.). New York: Garland Publishing, 1991, 460 pp. ISBN-0-8240-5649-3.

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Part of a series of source books in education, *Rural Education: Issues and Practice* is a collection of essays that introduces a reader to both the issues and the scholarly work of the field. In the editor's words, "it is my hope that each of the chapters to follow will spur readers to continue their readings in each content area" (p. xvii). For this reader, the editor's hope was realized. I found the essays to be interesting, well-written, and stocked with an abundance of references for further reading.

The collection of essays is divided into three parts, each of which adopts a different perspective in defining issues of concern. Integrating both history and ideology, Part I offers fascinating glimpses of the social context in which rural education has evolved. Part II focuses on topics likely to be of most interest to practitioners: teacher recruitment and retention, reorganization, use of technology, equity concerns, and so forth. Finally, Part III explores the future: the need for more coherent federal and state policy, the growing "rural voice" of grassroots organizations, and the "new story" that rural schools have to share with the educational reform movement.

The three essays in Part I presented the most challenging, yet fascinating, set of issues. From Paul Theobald's assertion that, during the 19th century, ideology and political economy interacted to give rise to regional differences in rural schools, to Craig Howley's conclusion that "schools cannot directly change the social and economic structures in which they are embedded" (p. 116), we are escorted through a remarkable literature that remains relatively unknown to many educators. Harvey Neufeldt and James Akenson's accounts of rural adult education during the 20th century is perhaps more familiar, but no less convincing, in its assertion that education has mirrored national (*not* local) perspectives of what rural people need. In so doing, our use of Friere's concept of empowerment reflects the character of accomodation rather than creation.

The six essays included in Part II taken on issues of more interest to practitioners. They vary in the extent to which they cite specific examples, but uniformly define the issues and review the literature specific to each topic. Dwight Hare's discussion of teacher recruitment/retention and Terry Berkeley and Barbara Ludlow's review of special students share a structured and exhaustive approach to the literature. Bruce Barker's discussion of the use of technology offers an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of current technologies and then presents excellent descriptions of illustrative programs. David Monk offers a more abstract, but extremely valuable, examination of school consolidation and its alternatives in responding to calls for reorganization. Margaret Phelps and George Prock's discussion of equal educational opportunity offers a vehicle with which to examine issues of horizontal and vertical equity. Finally, Teri Lipinski presents a comprehensive—although somewhat thin—description of the resources available related to rural service delivery.

Part III consists of essays that suggest more appropriate views for policy makers, examine the new-found voice of the rural citizenry, and challenge us to create "a new story." Robert Stephens and Willis Perry's essay presents an extremely structured and thoughtful analysis of what a policy agenda relevant to rural schools might entail. Their argument that policy decisions continue to ignore adequacy, responsiveness, and appropriateness offers reason enough for why policy hinders, rather than enhances, rural education. Paul Nachtigal's review of the conditions that have given rise to grassroots organizations concerned with rural schools to his call for coalition-building among

those organizations with rural interests reflects the hope that local citizens can have an impact. Finally, Toni Haas confronts us with the need to move the educational reform movement from "an old story" to "a new story"—from a system that has encouraged centralization and homogeneity to a system that will allow for shared power and diversity of practice. In that sense, Haas reaffirms Howley's conclusion that education needs to empower individuals, not the political economy.

For the most part, the collection succeeds in offering access to the research literature. The essays reminded me of the rich literature available in rural education as well as the valuable perspectives offered by scholars outside the educational community. Over and over, the need to respect local differences is reaffirmed—a need that complicates the work of researchers, yet reflects the reality of rural institutions.

In reflecting on what I read, however, I found myself thinking about how inadequate our current knowledge base is. The structures with which we've learned to collect, organize, and present information often ignore local conditions. David Tyack speaks of the *one* best system, the often unconscious assumption that one strategy will serve all needs. Programs are called "models" only if they are transferrable to another settings. Authors of many of these essays clearly struggled to convert locally specific information to a more generalizeable form—trading the richness found in individual stories for necessarily vague processes. Even among those who acknowledged that solutions must be tailored to the local circumstance, the information gathered offered little insight into how this tailoring process occurs.

I came away wondering whether the rural research community also needed to find "a new story," to borrow Toni Haas' metaphor. Chaos theory, developed in part because scientists could never predict the weather, argues that slight differences in initial conditions lead to what conventional science sees as the unpredictable. Small differences in local conditions become amplified over time, leading to quite different (and seemingly unpredictable) outcomes. Perhaps we need to invent research processes that focus on initial conditions or that explore the processes by which small differences in these conditions lead to quite different outcomes. Ultimately, we need to find better ways to share the *richness* of what we know.