Rural Literacies: Toward Social Cartography

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In this article we analyze the emergence of the field of rural literacies. We attempt to map this field in a way that illustrates the foundational ideas of literacy and rurality as relational concepts, which are devoid of meaning as what we call "singularities." Our insistence on the importance of context and place reveals multiple rural literacies instantiated in a diverse range of studies that have emerged from foundational texts in the field. In an effort to apply a spatial lens to rural literacies scholarship, we problematize authoritative decontextualized conceptions of both literacy and rurality. In doing so, we seek to place rurality on the map as an educationally and culturally significant category in the analysis of literacy and education.

Social Cartography: Mapping Conceptual Space

In this article, we offer a framework for the analysis of rural literacies scholarship to expose both gaps in this research and the conceptual clusters that inform it. Our goal is to provide both novice and advanced researchers a way to understand and organize an emerging subfield in both literacy studies and rural studies. We invite reflection and critique of the way we have represented things. Rural literacies research is multidisciplinary and transnational, and requires ongoing effort to link its practitioners to maximize its impact at the levels of scholarship, pedagogy, and public policy.

We do not offer a panoptical vision of the field as it exists. Rather, we suggest some general categories or spaces that have emerged from our analysis of the intersection of two powerful concepts, *rural/ruralities* and *literacy/literacies*. As we have written in the past, the confluence of the ambiguous and amorphous spatial notion of rurality with the politically contested idea of literacy/literacies creates a challenge to singular positivist conceptions of both terms and the ways they interact in educational discourse and practice. Because rural is an essentially spatial term, as Halfacree (2006) pointed out some time ago, it has become difficult to understand it as a singular phenomenon. Intersecting the multiplistic conception of *ruralities* with the similarly pluralistic idea of *literacies* can highlight how multiple literacies operate differently across time and place.

The metaphor of the map has been used productively in education research for some time. Paulston's invention of "social cartography" as a method for the comparative analysis of different knowledge forms lets us move beyond linear knowledge claims in the social sciences and toward relational analysis of the connections and disconnections between different worldviews (Paulston, 1993; Paulston & Liebman, 1994). Both rurality and literacy can only be understood relationally; they cannot be defined as a set of uniform characteristics. Maps are always partial, incomplete representations; they orient and simplify but can also disorient and misconstrue (Latour & Porter, 2013). Social cartography, as a tool for understanding rural space, has been suggested by Green and his collaborators over the past decade (Green, 2008; Green & Letts, 2007; Green & Reid, 2014), and in this article, we follow on from this work.

Paulston's maps (Paulston, 1993; Paulston & Liebman, 1994) are emergent, provisional, and partial, and always represent a spatial story told from one perspective. This

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perspective invites mess and complications and seeks to understand how ideas and bodies move in space, rather than trying to represent phenomena (such as rural and literacy) in a definitive way. Such a goal fits well with the overall orientation of much contemporary work on rural literacies, which seeks to expand ideas of rural literacies beyond traditional deficit models. This approach takes into account the fluid and context-dependent nature of literacies. It also serves as a corrective to ever-increasing attempts to map and measure a final and conclusive definition of what counts authoritatively as literacy or what "works" in literacy instruction. Both efforts conjure hegemonic conceptions of literacy as a measurable phenomenon or skill set more or less in the possession of individuals (and societies).

The spatial turn in social and educational theory has produced a significant proliferation of studies that map literacies (e.g., Mackey, 2007; Mannion, Ivanič, & The Literacies for Learning in Further Education Research Group, 2007; Masny & Cole, 2012; Waterhouse, 2012). While diverse in their theoretical and methodological formulations, these cartographies of literacies all confront what Eppley and Corbett (2011) call *singularities*. These visions of literacy imagine a quantitatively measurable phenomenon and are today linked with national and international testing schemes that attempt to develop ways to measure/map literacy as a singularity across different social and physical geographies. This linear vision of literacy attempts to measure the "amount" of the singular substance (literacy) found in different populations, rather than to interrogate how different populations both use literacies to get things done (Esposito, Kebede, & Maddox, 2015) and how access to hegemonic variants of tested literacy are unequally distributed across social space (Comber, 2015, 2016; Corbett, 2008; Kearns, 2016).

After charting the spread of the term rural literacies through time and demonstrating its movement into three distinct national contexts (with a limited spread to the rest of the world), we then provide a narrative analysis of the term, highlighting the different disciplinary perspectives that have influenced its evolution. Last, we analyze the content of sources citing Donehower, Hogg, and Schell's *Rural Literacies* (2007) to offer a conceptual map of the networked "ideascapes" that seem to us to be prominent in rural literacies scholarship in the last decade. We do not, however, attempt to map epistemological or ideological spaces that relate to rural literacies and the different worldviews and disciplinary traditions out of which this work arises. As the field establishes a larger body of work, this level of analysis that more fully activates the potential of social cartography, should, we suggest, emerge as an extension of our introductory analysis here.

Evolution of the Term "Rural Literacies": Four Key Works

The term "rural literacies" first appears in U.S. scholarship in a 1995 doctoral dissertation at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln (Kruse, 1995). It exhibits cross-disciplinary influences on rural literacies work. A graduate student in the Department of English, Kruse was advised by Joy Ritchie and Robert Brooke, writing studies scholars who also worked in English education. Kruse has a background in secondary English teaching and describes her dissertation as "an ethnographic study of rural literacies," but she does not explicitly define the term. The goal of her study is to describe literate behaviors that rural students exhibit in college writing classrooms and "to identify those small-town experiences and expectations that make their way into these students' literate behaviors" (Kruse, 1995, p. 236). The theoretical frameworks upon which Kruse relies come from rural sociologists' studies on rural life and rural adolescence, as well as works in English education and writing studies on high school students' transitions to college writing.

The next major work to invoke the term was Edmondson's *Prairie Town*, published in 2003. Edmondson, a professor of education at the Pennsylvania State University, was influenced by theories of critical (Freirian) pedagogy and was deeply worried about the future of rural communities under neoliberal economic policies. It is in her work that we first see the theme of sustainability, or community survival, emerge in connection with rural literacies. Sustainability, variously defined and sometimes undefined, would continue to influence works on rural literacies from this point forward.

Edmondson (2003) documented the collision between "traditional literacies" and "neoliberal literacies" in rural communities and explored the rise of "alternative agrarian literacies" that might emerge from this collision. Edmondson argues that one of these systems, "alternative agrarian literacy," might best aid rural people to sustain their communities by helping them "read value in their community, have control over their lives, and have choices about how they will live in the community" (Edmondson, 2003, pp. 108-109). While Kruse (1995) saw rural literacies as primarily school-based practices with texts, Edmondson (2003) extended these literacies beyond school and the notion of text-based literacy to the Freirian concept of "reading the world" as well as "reading the word" (Freire & Macedo, 1987). We can see here the influence of New Literacy Studies (NLS; Gee, 1991; Street, 1995, 2003) that defines literacy linguistically (as discourse behaviors; not just operations with texts) as well as anthropologically and rhetorically (as socially situated and goal-oriented).

The NLS understanding of literacy continues to influence the definition of "literacies" in "rural literacies" from this point forward. The publication that popularized the term—*Rural Literacies* (Donehower et al., 2007)—was published at the instigation of Brooke. It was heavily influenced by Brandt (2001), an NLS scholar, in its definition of literacy. Focusing in part on the issue of rural sustainability within neoliberalism that Edmondson (2001) articulated, the authors used Brandt's notion of literacy as a "resource" to define rural literacies as "literate skills needed … to pursue the opportunities and create the public policies and economic opportunities needed to sustain rural communities" (Donehower et al., 2007, p. 4). Picking up on another thread introduced by Edmondson (2001), *Rural Literacies* emphasized that a key aspect of such literate behaviors was the ability to form connections among rural, urban, and suburban communities.

Donehower, Hogg, and Schell (2007) also document the longstanding "urban bias" to which rural literacies has been subjected (p. 26), a theme that also emerges in the *Rethinking Rural Literacies* (2013) collection co-edited by Corbett and Green. Contributors came from the Rural Education and Literacies (REAL) research network that they founded, with members from Canada, Australia, Finland, and the United States, mostly in the field of education. They brought a deep understanding of both place-based and critical pedagogies to understanding rural literacies and had roots in NLS and progressive education. The influence of cultural geographers (e.g. Massey, 1994) was apparent in this collection as well, as many of the authors sought to understand the nature of "place" beyond geographic boundaries, as a set of relationships among people and locales. Mobility studies (Bauman, 1998; Urry, 2000) also figured prominently in this text (Donehower & Green, 2016).

The combined impact of the contributors' orientations and specializations created a new set of emphases for rural literacy studies, including:

- Mobility of both texts and people;
- New ways of defining "place" that account for mobility trends and relationships among places;
- The psycho-emotional and aesthetic work of literacy that affects people's relationships with rural places;
- The performative work of literate practices that can make, critique, and re-make rural identity; and
- The relationship between school literacies and pedagogies and literacy practices outside of school.

Sustainability remained as a goal of rural literacies, but *Rethinking Rural Literacies* (Corbett & Green, 2013) strongly expanded the sense of what constituted such sustainability, beyond the "public policies and economic opportunities" emphasized by Donehower, Hogg, and Schell (2007).

Method

We tested a number of different academic databases for sensitivity to the term "rural literacies." Google Scholar proved the most useful to identify sources citing Donehower, Hogg, and Schell's *Rural Literacies* (2007). As of March 2015, it listed 100 such works; we were able to trace 95 of these as separate sources and use them in our conceptual analysis. When we turned to an advanced search of the terms "rural literacies" (240 sources) and "rural literacy" (2,408 citations), we found considerable difference between texts that pluralize the term literacy and those that do not. The first Google Scholar citation for "rural literacy" (Zhang, 2006) looks at literacy "gaps" in Sub-Saharan Africa. Of the 29 citations of the term "rural literacy" for 2016, 18 dealt with India, two with China, four from disparate locations in Africa, two from former Soviet satellite states, one from southeast Asia, and one with literacy problems in "developing nations." The one U.S. study compared the impact of Head Start programming in rural and urban locations. All the 2016 "rural literacy" sources assume a singular, uniform definition of literacy and adopt a deficit perspective, working from the premise of an urban-rural literacy gap as measured by standardized instruments. In contrast, citations for "rural literacies" often work against a deficit model; focus on sites in Australia, Canada, and the United States; and conceptualize literacy as a highly contextualized social practice rather than a measurable and quantifiable skill. This latter orientation reflects the influence of New Literacy Studies research.

Other search engines do not usefully distinguish between "literacies" as a plural term and "literacy" in the singular. Web of Science yielded no citations for "rural literacies" but five for "rural literacy." EBSCO brought back only four citations for the term "rural literacies," once we got it to accept a search for literacies in the plural. In Wiley Online Library, a search for "rural literacies" brought up 167 hits, but when we downloaded the lead article, there were no references to either "rural literacies" or even "literacies." The term "rural literacy" was actually used in the text. We repeated this process with three other articles with the same result. The Wiley search engine seems to conflate the terms literacies and literacy, indicating that it is less sensitive to the pluralized term. This distinction is important for researchers working in rural literacies research. The pluralization of literacies, and whether the search engine recognizes this

distinction, is critical to finding the scholarship that stems from NLS approaches to literacy rather than positivist ones.

Ultimately, Google Scholar and ProQuest showed the best sensitivity to the term rural literacies for our purposes. ProQuest provided the data for mapping rural literacies research in time and geographic space. We used the citations of *Rural Literacies* (Donehower et al., 2007) that Google Scholar identified to generate our conceptual maps. For these, each of us independently coded the 95 pieces by reading the abstracts and, where necessary, finding the sources and reading further. After mapping our individual codes, we created a combined set of codes and corresponding conceptual map.

Findings

Tracking Rural Literacies Scholarship Through Time and Geographic Space

In ProQuest a basic search for the term "rural literacies" brought up 115 hits and included a bar graph showing growth in the use of the term in academic sources. The earliest seems to be Kruse's 1995 dissertation . ProQuest allows for a search that distinguishes different types of publications, including dissertations, which are important because they represent the work of emerging scholars in the field.

Using the frequency data for ProQuest for each type of academic publication from 2007-2015, it is evident that the idea of rural literacies has had a steady and growing impact on the production of new work in the field. (See Table 1.) It will be interesting to see if this interest is sustained as these early-career scholars develop their ideas and research agendas. The impact in scholarly journals is more difficult to gauge. Each database appears to construct a different definition of rural literacy/literacies, and each counts citations from a limited range of academic journals. What is clear from this analysis is that the idea of rural literacies is having an impact as a discursive construction, generating a field of research that both challenges and fits in with traditions of writing about literacy in conjunction with rural space.

Table 2 illustrates how citations of *Rural Literacies* (Donehower et al., 2007) have proliferated both around the world and through U.S. states, as found through a Google Scholar search. It also shows how the idea of rural literacies has tended to be located in "settler society" national contexts (i.e., Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand), and predominantly in regions of the United States in which rural issues and populations are prominent (i.e., Appalachia and the Midwest). At this point in time, the idea of rural literacies has not been taken up in Europe or in the very locations where rural populations still predominate (i.e., south and southeast Asia, China, Africa, and Latin America), nor has it been adopted where singular and authoritative conceptions of literacy are often used as a proxy (and an excuse) for underdevelopment. At the present time, it seems rural literacies research is a subfield that is still developing within a relatively small circle of North American and Australian academics who are influenced by theoretical developments in rural studies and/or literacy studies. This trend mirrors the way in which the term rural literacy as a singularity is regularly and consequentially applied to people and places outside the frame of Western educational culture.

Mapping Conceptual Space: Collaborative Coding

The multidisciplinary, transnational landscape of rural literacies research has evolved quickly as the term has expanded in meaning. We offer in this section an analytic reading of works that have cited in Donehower et al. (2007) to provide one way for researchers to position their work in this conceptual landscape. Our first reading of rural literacies citations yielded a set of initial sensitizing themes.

- **Literacies and sustainability.** These studies connect literacy practices with the development of rural communities. They are set

Table 1

Rural Literacies in ProQuest 2007-2015: The Spread of the Idea through Time

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Dissertations (58)	2	4	5	5	7	8	8	8	9
Scholarly Journals (45)	3	3	10	1	3	6	7	8	3
Books	1					1			
Trade Journals				1				1	1
Newspaper Articles	1						3		
Total	7	7	15	7	10	15	18	17	13

Table 2

Google Scholar Citations of Rural Literacies (Donehower et al., 2007) by Country (Including by State for Select States)

Countries	Number of Citations
United States	61
Ohio	6
Texas	5
North Dakota	5
Kansas	5
Virginia	4
New York	4
Australia	17
Canada	11
New Zealand	2
Mexico, Mongolia, Philippines	1 (each)
International	3

within discursive frameworks which include neoliberalism, interpretive or phenomenological analysis, critical theory, as well as post-structural or deconstructive analysis. These analyses share an interest in aligning literacy to rural and community development and to ideas of sustainability and survival with regard to people and places.

- **Literacies as capital.** These studies focus on literacies as forms of economic and/or social capital. Such works investigate the measurement of levels of literacy in rural areas, either critically as a way of thinking about how literacies are inherently political, or within allegedly politically neutral (conservative) framing.
- **Literacies as multiple and mutable forms of symbolic engagement.** These studies interrogate the various technologies with which meaning is made in contemporary societies. Studies of this type investigate the landscape of multimodal communications, multiliteracies, and networked spaces as they relate to rural citizens.
- **Literacies as cultural expressions of identity.** These studies consider the ways distinct textual practices mark and manage a group's sense of itself and its relationship to other groups.
- **Literacies as personalized sites of pleasure and learning.** These studies take up the multiple ways in which people make meaning and derive pleasure from their literate engagements, which reflect their personal learning, work, and leisure agendas.

We thought about these initial sensitizing themes as overlapping layers, rather than distinct organizing and unifying frames. We expected to find work that addressed issues of rural community sustainability in multiple ways, and studies that focused on literacies as sites of pleasure and identity construction. We also anticipated work in technologies and multiliteracies, as well as research that linked various forms of "capital" discourse, responding to broader human capital and neoliberal framings of education. Next we individually analyzed and coded each of the citations.

Mike stuck closely to the initial themes, attempting to understand the data in terms of fit or lack of fit with our sensitizing codes. The three principal codes he developed (identity, social justice, and sustainability) represented nearly three-quarters of the sources. Other codes included a

teacher education code, one that dealt with technologies and networking (coded multiple/mutable), and a code relating to literacies and personal learning. (See Table 3.)

Mike organized his seven basic codes into four dimensions: psychosocial, technological, institutional, and ecological. This heuristic integrates identity formation with new technological affordances within the institutional processes of schooling that sit within broader ecological transformations affecting rural communities. He saw the studies working in a general space where individual literacies, mediated by new technologies, were taken up in institutional spaces and in civil society around questions of sustainability.

In her analysis of the sources, Kim developed a different yet not incompatible set of codes. She looked for the ways that authors used elements of *Rural Literacies* (Donehower et al., 2007) in their work. Her principal theme related to research that responds to chronic urban bias in literacy research. Second, she coded the theme of sustainability in two ways: in terms of literacies as localized social practices and in terms of "bridging" practices that linked particular rural communities to other geographies. Next, Kim identified formal schooling and literacies as a significant code. Finally, she explicitly named neoliberalism as a thematic unifier in more than 20 of the works. (See Table 4.)

Kim identified five contextual spaces with which researchers seemed to be concerned: the representational history of rural literacies and rural schooling, the context of rural education, the economic context of rural places under neoliberalism, the material and technological context of changing forms of literacy and literacy dissemination, and the psychosocial context of rural life. She saw researchers citing *Rural Literacies* (Donehower et al., 2007) as working at the intersection of two or more of these contextual frames: for example, researching the effects of the representational history of the rural on rural identity and relations, and the ways that digital literacies can mediate those effects.

Looking at the connections between the codes we each produced and at the way we each mapped conceptual space visually, we identified five principal themes of this space:

1. **Identities** (individual, collective, and communal) and the role of rural literacies in their formation and management;
2. **Sustainability** for rural communities, how to define it, and how to determine literacy's role in it;
3. **Social justice within the contexts of globalization and neoliberalism**, and the possible role of literacy and literacy pedagogies in achieving social justice for rural places and peoples;
4. **Rural schooling and the effects of metrocentrism** on education policy, theory, and praxis (within this theme, teacher education emerges as a distinct concern, perhaps because it is the arena in which most of the researchers we examined hope to have an influence on rural education);
5. **Technologies** and other material resources for literacy that create networks and potentially build social capital through bridging, bonding and linking (Putnam, 2001; Woolcock, 2001).

These themes exist in relation to one another, rather than in isolation. First, questions of identity and sustainability are central to many analyses that operate under the rubric of rural literacies. This functions at a number of levels. Literacies are enacted as social practices that express and represent place attachments and bonds of solidarity. Literacies express lifeways which are often threatened by the forces of "development," neoliberalism, and educational "improvement" schemes (Scott, 1999) aimed at rural communities which are defined in deficit or by other types of economic, cultural, and social policy framing that challenge

Table 3

Mike's Coding of Sources Citing "Rural Literacies" (2007)

Code	N
Identity	25
Social justice	22
Sustainability	18
Teacher education	11
Multiple/mutable	10
Personal learning	9
Reading and writing instruction	4

Table 4.

Kim's Coding of Sources Citing "Rural Literacies" (Donehower et al., 2007)

Code	N
Urban bias: identifying and assessing rural literacy and education through a metropolitan lens	38
Sustainability 1: defining rural literacies as those needed/emerging to "sustain life in rural areas," with a special emphasis on public policy and economic opportunity	25
Schooling: focusing on the role of schooling in the formation of rural literacies	22
Neoliberalism: considering the interplay between rural literacies and neoliberal policies and practices	21
Sustainability 2: emphasizing literacies that link rural communities with other rural, urban, and suburban communities	15
Defining rural: citing *Rural Literacies*' definition of rural as demographic, geographic, and cultural	14
Place identity: emphasizing literacy's role in forming place identity	5

the very existence of rural communities and traditions. Nevertheless, we were a bit surprised to find relatively little work that addresses personal literacy practices or "local literacies" of rural people drawing on the NLS tradition (Barton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanič, 2001).

Rural literacies research has demonstrated the way in which literacy practices are, on the one hand, defensive and oriented to social struggle for survival, and on the other hand, expressive of uniqueness and solidarity. Within Putnam's (2001) concept of social capital, some of these socially-enacted literacies can be understood as a form of bonding capital. However, we also found work on rural literacies that is more compatible with Putnam's idea of bridging social capital, as new technologies provide rural citizens with new tools to reach out and form alliances, networks, and connections with others in diverse locations. This idea has been taken up in the rural education literature, and our work supports the general finding that social solidarities play an ambivalent relationship with formal education (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2002). The idea of sustainability plays powerfully into this kind of work in the sense that it can be understood as a way of thinking about preserving and protecting established lifeways and/or developing new networks, solidarities, markets, etc., that link rural communities to broader flows of ideas and opportunities in a globalized environment.

The way that literacies are taken up in institutions of formal education is another focus of rural literacies research. This work is sometimes framed in terms of specific reading and writing programming in rural schools, but more typically, studies integrate an analysis of schooled literacies with urban-centric policy, pedagogies and curriculum. Some of this work suggests new and place-appropriate/sensitive ways to think about literacy programming in schools. Often, place-based pedagogies are merged with critical pedagogies to accomplish the goals of rural-regional sustainability (e.g., Kerkham & Comber, 2013). Some also speak to alternative ways of framing rural education to generate openness and possibility rather than deficits and gaps (Comber, 2015, 2016). There is also an emphasis in some studies on the connection between rural education generally and literacy practices specifically, as well as the role of school in community sustainability and youth retention. This work connects arguments about community sustainability with the sorts of educational practices that support strong rural communities or that challenge hegemonic neoliberal assumptions about the nature and character of rural development and about rural people as non-aspirational or failed economic participants (Cervone, 2017; Corbett, 2014; Zipin, Sellar, Brennan, & Gale, 2015).

As rural communities are drawn into large-scale policy and assessment matrices, discussions of rural literacies that we have surveyed often speak to education as a means of promoting a rurally-focused social justice agenda. In many communities, the locus of power has shifted in the past two or three decades away from more locally-controlled

educational governance and practice to broader-scale embedding and evaluation of local practices in state, provincial, and national systems. Questions about urban bias and social/spatial justice (Soja, 2010) with a specific rural inflection are common ideas that run through many of the works surveyed here.

Taking into account some of the options for conceptual mapping described by Martin Liebman (1996), we offer this map of rural literacies research based on the works we reviewed (Figure 1).

Sustainability is in the "cross hairs" here, since rural sustainability (variously defined) seems to be the goal of most research on rural literacies. The basic definition of sustainability provided by the Brundtland Commission, the ability for communities "to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43), provides an anchor through which diverse studies mobilize the idea of rural literacies. In the context of rural spaces, sustainability takes on a number of dimensions, including increased human and social capital, diversified and adaptable economies, responsible management of the environment, community cohesion and pride (Flora et al., 1999), and spatial and intergenerational equity (Owens, 2001; President's Council on Sustainable Development, 2004). Rural literacy researchers seek to understand the part literacy might play in one of more of these dimensions; as a result, they focus on varying aspects of sustainability and may exclude some entirely.

Thus, in the context of rural social space, literacy-for-sustainability can refer to a range of practices from providing youth with the literate tools (Corbett, 2008; Corbett, 2010) for life in changing rural communities, to preparation for neoliberal social participation, to dealing with the tensions relating to youth outmigration. Researchers differ on their ideological orientations as to what rural sustainability and survival will require and the potential role of literacy in meeting these requirements. We do not map those ideological differences here; they are as yet emerging and shifting as the field gains coherence.

Instead, the four quadrants of the map represent common preoccupations of rural literacies research. The top two, identity and social capital, are means by which literacy might promote (or impede) sustainability. The bottom two quadrants represent pedagogical and activist concerns about the ways literacies are promoted and denied both

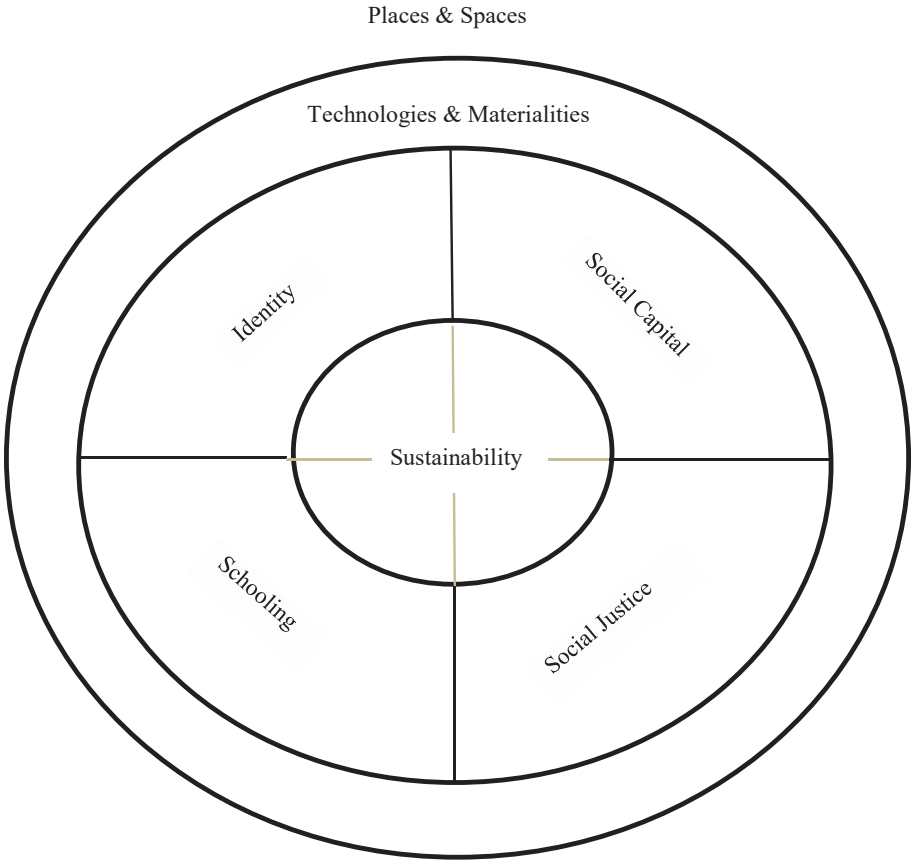

Figure 1. Rural literacies research since 2007.

explicitly (schooling) and implicitly (social justice concerns about the effects of neoliberal economics and policies on rural places and literacies). Surrounding all these are the technological and material resources for literacy available to rural communities in particular places and times. Indeed, like the complex, contested and politically-freighted idea of sustainability, the concept of materialism also refers to a vast literature in educational and social theory (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011). We do not have space here to examine the conceptual spaces that these ideas open up. Rather, we point to the way that work in the field of rural literacies points to the centrality of place and the material conditions that rural environments represent.

NLS understands literacy not as a measurable singularity or quantity, or even a commodity (i.e., as in many variants of human capital theory), but rather as a multiplicity that is complicated by new literate tools. Thus, all research on rural literacies must take into account the ever-changing array of technologies available to rural communities as well as the way that these technologies extend possibilities and expand the boundaries of the communities themselves.

Most of the rural literacies research we read could be positioned on this map, with many researchers working at the boundaries between quadrants (such as the ways in which schooling affects identity, which in turn affects outmigration from rural communities). This research operates across psychosocial, representational, institutional, techno/material, and ecological dimensions, challenging the way that literacy instruction in rural contexts is typically understood as a diminished or problematic educational space (Eppley & Corbett, 2011). We find work that asks literacy scholars, educators, and policymakers to think about social practice and the forms it takes in rural communities, in conjunction with the ways institutions of formal education frame and deliver literacy instruction (Eppley, 2011).

Implications for Future Research: Space, Materiality, and Politics

In our view, literacies are intimately tied up with place-making or Lefebvre's (1992) "production of space." Rural literacy researchers are both: (a) documenting place-making practices and struggles for space of rural educators and communities, and, (b) producing the space that is rural literacy itself which leads to further studies that look at the practices described in (a). There is a recursive space-making dynamic at work here. The very idea of rural literacies as a discursive production sensitizes researchers to think in a particular way, and indeed, to relate to the "real and imagined" dimensions of ideational and material space (Soja, 1996). On another level, by mapping the range of scholarly work in the field of rural literacies, scholars, and particularly beginning scholars, can more easily grasp both key areas of emphasis and the gaps that need further study.

The emergence of the field of rural literacies has been part of a proliferation of work in education scholarship that challenges the contemporary turn toward large-scale comparative analysis (Glass, 2016; Hattie, 2008; Lingard, Martino, Rezai-Rashti, & Sellar 2014; Sellar & Lingard, 2014) and generic understandings of "what works" (Biesta, 2007, 2010). We suggest here a way of thinking about rural literacies as a set of ideas operating in dynamic ways, which contrasts the hegemonic idea of literacy as a relatively "tame" and easily definable problem (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Rural is an equally contested idea. As Green and his collaborators (see, for example, Green, 2013, Green & Letts, 2007, Reid et al., 2010) have pointed out, drawing on Lefebvre (1992) and Soja (1996), rurality is best understood trialectically. It is both real and imagined—a complex, sometimes contradictory, and always political overlap of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the material (Corbett, 2016).

Our analysis illustrates how an idea like rural literacies can create social space across geographic, disciplinary, and institutional locations. This view problematizes allegedly contextualized literacy work that situates rural places as problematic deficit spaces of inadequate educational productivity. The influence of NLS on seminal rural literacy texts emphasizes that hegemonic forms of literacy instruction and assessment can, and should be, both enhanced and critiqued by geographically sensitive analysis of the nuances of multiple literacies, rather than applying a deficit model based on the idea of literacy as a quantifiable singularity (Eppley & Corbett, 2011). This understanding has led to place-sensitive scholarship that highlights the importance of identity and location in literate lives, and to work that challenges the way singular conceptions of literacy inevitably obscure and possibly demean the diverse forms of literate practice found in rural locations and other zones of social disadvantage (Mills & Comber, 2015; Corbett, 2008; Kearns, 2016).

We take the linguistic turn of NLS seriously and recognize that literacies are, at one level, social constructions. But our analysis also suggests that scholars are attending to the different social conditions in which literacy practices are enacted and that these represent diverse assemblages of non-material and material conditions. In the conceptual space we map here, scholars strive to think about rural literacies in the context of local, national, and global change forces that buffet lives and institutions in challenged communities. Some also take into account material transformations of rural geographies through technological developments in resource extraction, communications, tourism, mobilities and transportation, agriculture, and fisheries.

At the level of literate practices themselves, rural literacies research has begun to take on the renewed focus on materiality that followed the linguistic turn in social science

research (Alderson, 2015; Fenwick et al., 2011; Ingold, 2013, 2015; Malafouris, 2013; Rose, 2013). We are literate somewhere and in relation to the material conditions and affordances of place. How people in rural locations engage habitually with particular sets of tools is central to how they enact literacy practices. Only a few studies that have been influenced by the idea of rural literacies have begun to map the diversity of material engagements, and we see this as an important area for future research.

We conclude by returning to this question: what are rural literacies anyhow, and indeed, what is it that we are trying to map and why? In his analysis of the historical development of the novel as a literary form, Moretti (2007) plots the emergence of a way of writing about people and place called the "free indirect style," in which the speaker stands apart from the linguistic community of the village, the kinship network, and the prominent social institutions of the time, offering comment as though from the outside, but still in a vernacular voice. Moretti specifically draws upon the seminal work of the French rural historian Weber (1976) on the development of French national identity through the spread of literacy and schooling. The free indirect style leaves the bounds of place to inhabit an in-between "modern" location. Moretti writes:

> its composite nature was precisely what made it "click" with that other strange compromise formation which is the process of modern socialization.… And the result was the genesis of an unprecedented "third" voice, intermediate and almost neutral in tone between character and narrator: the composed, slightly resigned voice of the *well-socialized individual* [emphasis in the original] (p. 82).

To answer the question "what are rural literacies and why might they matter," the very idea of literacy conjures an interface between the ordinary language practices of people in places, academic locations like schools and universities, and the thirdspace that is created in the encounter between the two. Rural places are increasingly incorporated into wider geographies through textual and institutional, political and economic practices. If literacies represent central vehicles of modern socialization, then it seems to us important to develop clearer understandings of how this works across different dimensions and scales of social space. In the age of Donald Trump, Australia's One Nation, Brexit promoters, and others who claim to speak, both to the masses and for the masses, in a disturbing yet charismatic voice which are often focused on atavistic and false rural imaginaries, a consideration of rural literacies seems more important than ever.

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