

## TRAVELS IN SPACE AND PLACE: IDENTITY AND RURAL SCHOOLING

*Michael Corbett*  
*Acadia University*

This analysis draws on interview data from a three-year study of educational decision making of youth living in a coastal community in Atlantic Canada. Students whose educational and mobility aspirations extend outside the known spaces of the community develop the ability to negotiate multiple social spaces in and out of school. The school-successful "floater" identity position is assumed by youth comfortable in a variety of social groups and situations ranging from peer cliques to interactions with teachers and other institutional authority figures. This contrasts with more localized identity positions, marked by strong and exclusive identification with local networks.

Key words: rural education, mobility, education trajectories, high school, school cliques, Nova Scotia education

Dans cet article, l'auteur analyse les données tirées d'entrevues effectuées dans le cadre d'une étude de trois ans portant sur les décisions de jeunes d'une localité côtière du Canada atlantique quant à leurs études. Les élèves dont les aspirations en matière d'éducation et de mobilité dépassent les espaces connus de la communauté développent l'aptitude à négocier de multiples espaces sociaux à l'école et en dehors de l'école. Les jeunes qui sont à l'aise dans plusieurs groupes sociaux et situations, allant des cliques de camarades aux interactions avec les enseignants et autres figures d'autorité, adoptent la position du « migrant » qui réussit à l'école. D'autres, au contraire, s'identifient fortement et de manière exclusive à des cercles ou réseaux locaux.

Mots clés : éducation rurale, mobilité, parcours scolaires, école secondaire, cliques d'élèves, enseignement en Nouvelle-Écosse

Although becoming mobile is a powerful compulsion for rural youth, getting out of town is no easier than it has ever been. Within this mobility imperative, as I have called it elsewhere (Corbett, 2005a, 2007), formal education is a key component of self-mobilization not only in terms of classic forms of upward social mobility, but also in spatial terms. Youth stuck in particular devalued social class positions and places (e.g., decaying and violent inner cities and redundant and backward rural villages) have become a principal target of contemporary pedagogies (Popkewitz, 1998).

#### IDENTITY, MOBILITY, AND PLACE IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

Social theorists like Giddens (1990), Castells (2004), Urry (2000), Bauman (1998, 2001, 2004) think about contemporary capitalism in terms of the idea of fluid movement of bodies, ideas, and goods through and across space and place. Mobility continues to be crucial to the development of industrial capitalism both as a key social process and as a fundamental metaphor.<sup>1</sup> In the context of an individual life, mobility is now considered to be endemic to globalization (Papastergiadis, 2000) and a crucial marker of privilege (Bauman, 2004).

Modern education effectively mobilizes and deploys successful students across a variety of market contexts, “disembedding” (Giddens, 1990, pp. 21-29) them from traditional affinities and attachments, notably to place and to tradition. These consequences are particularly evident in rural communities where place attachment is more tightly bound to both family and traditional forms of economic activity as well as to established forms of masculinity and femininity. Rural youth are encouraged to forget place-based identities and to assume mobile and flexible self-constructions as agribusiness, corporate fishing, industrial logging, and mining reconfigure rural geographies, economies, and societies. By being flexible, mobile, and deployable, the educable child learns that intimate connections to the land are irrelevant to present conditions (Bowers, 2000).

As a result of this spatial reconfiguration, rural youth who are integrated into local spaces have come to be systematically constructed outside the frame of educability. Popkewitz (1998) called the discursively constructed “urban/rural” child, who is inflexible, “stuck.”

and “deficient” compared to the “absent presence”<sup>2</sup> of the “real,” educable child who is essentially suburban and middle class. This “urban/rural” child is deficient by virtue of being in the wrong place and by being unable to escape. An important part of the identity configuration of the “educable child” is that this child is not “stuck” in place; rather, she or he is active, calculating, mobile, and focused on abstract and increasingly virtual spaces opened up by education. The educable child is developing as a flexible proto-worker engaging in multiple forms of mobility in preparation for deployment in the emerging production and consumption spaces of contemporary capitalism.

But “getting out” is just as problematic as moving up the social class ladder. As Castells (2004) argues, the cultivation of Giddens’ (1991) individualized, mobile, “reflexive project of the self” (pp. 32-34) is the preserve of the privileged. More common rural identity constructions remain connected to particular places and normative identity positions (Thomson, 2002 NiLa). Bauman (1998, 2001) suggests that globalization has, for the vast majority of the world’s people, led to an immobilized glocalization in which choice and living conditions are increasingly constrained.

In this article I address the mobility decision making of youth in a coastal community in Atlantic Canada by exploring their sense of socio-spatial identity (Jones, 1999). In a series of semi-structured interviews, I asked young people to speak to their current and future educational trajectories as well as their sense of spatial identity and geographic mobility trajectories. Although most of these youth desired to complete educational trajectories through secondary school leading to post secondary “tickets” that would give them imagined excitement and opportunity in urban spaces, high school completion rates remain relatively low in rural Canada. I argue here that this phenomenon can be partly explained using Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of cultural capital to examine young people’s different identity orientations to place, space, and mobility.

## METHODOLOGY: EDUCATION AND THE AROUND HERE CIRCLE

*Where I Belong* is a three-year study of the mobility and educational decision making of a group of 25 young people between the ages of 13 and 16 living in a coastal community in Southwestern Nova Scotia. This study builds upon *Learning to Leave* an oral history-based analysis of just over seven hundred residents of this same community who came of age between the early 1960s and the late 1990s (Corbett, 2005a, 2007).<sup>3</sup> Through interviews with key informants, I developed a grounded concept of migration that defined outmigration as a move of at least 50 km from the home village. With local informants I traced to their present location over 99 per cent of the population who grew up in the community from the early 1960s to the late 1990s, finding that more than 60 per cent of this population had remained within 50 km of their place of birth. I called this local area the “around here circle” (AHC) because informants define it as a space that contains communities that are economically, culturally, and socially similar to the particular group of coastal villages in this study.

The most surprising finding was that when community is defined as the space within the AHC, outmigration rates were stable from the 1960s through to the late 1990s. In fact, the cohorts that came of age in the late 1980s and 1990s (during the crisis in the Atlantic fishery) were actually less likely to leave the AHC than people who grew up in the allegedly economically stable 1960s, 70s, and early 1980s. I also found that educational levels for the majority that remained within the AHC were substantially lower than those who had migrated beyond 50 km from their place of origin.

One key limitation of the methodology in the first study is that memory is problematic. Informants reconstructed their life histories recollecting as far as forty and even fifty years. Nevertheless, it was clear that adolescence, and specifically the period between grade 8 and grade 10, was a crucial time for educational decision making. Therefore, the current study analyzes the educational and migration decision making of 14 to 16 year olds living in the villages in 2004. This study attempts to understand what Bourdieu (1990) calls the “logic of practice” employed by young people regarding mobility and educational decisions at a point in life where classic social psychological theory (exemplified by Erikson’s

[1968] work) predicts confrontation with key individual crises in the formation of identity.

I based this article on two sets of interviews conducted with 20 young people (grades 8 to 10 as of the 2004-05 school year), one in November of 2004 and the second in May 2006. This sample of young people represents students from a coastal community still in school as of May 2006. The original sample population was 25 students, but by May of 2006, five students had dropped out of school (most before completing grade 10), leaving a final sample of 11 boys and 9 girls.<sup>4</sup> All interviews were transcribed and analyzed using James Spradley's (1979) ethnographic interview framework to isolate cultural themes.

## FINDINGS

### *A Safe and Beautiful Place ... But the Wrong One*

Three ideas play against one another, generating fundamental tension for youth in this community. First is the almost universal idea that the community is a safe place to live. Unlike the youth in similar urban-focused work, youth in this study talk about home as a place of security, beauty, and conviviality. In risk society, where the world outside seems to be collapsing under a variety of hidden threats, personal security assumes a heightened value.

It's a nice fishing community, and it's got pretty good scenery and look-offs, and people get together for gatherings and stuff, like that. They have a horseshoe tournament up by my house and there's all these kids, like my age, getting work once the fishing season starts, like to help set traps or bait for somebody, there's a lot of nice (pause); like the people there are quite nice. (AS-Male-aged 15)

The second idea is that the community is not a place that can sustain youth throughout a working life. One informant put it this way:

Like there's nothin' here. I don't know, but they're not goin' about it the right way, they're going about it like, go to Alberta and work on a rig, something like that. They don't want to go to school or nothin' ... You gotta have your grade 12. ... Most places out there, I imagine you have to have grade 12, even, for them to even read your thing there [resume]. (KO-Male-aged 16)

The third idea is that education is necessary for life outside the community although it has not been important historically for those who stayed in the local area. The economic base upon which the community has been built is understood as uncertain, even for well-positioned young men whose families hold fishing licenses and own gear. The privilege of being able to choose to stay is fraught with uncertainty.

People ask me like if I'm going to stay home and go fishing and stuff but from the way that's looking I ain't gonna be able to do that. So I'm going to have to get out of here and go to some kinda' college or something. Really what I wanted to do, I wasn't sure about it cause I kinda' like building stuff and designing things like that. Mom was saying that engineering or architecture might be good. (NT-Male-aged 16)

It is understood that higher education involves leaving home and venturing into unknown spaces; therefore, differential understandings of geography and space are educationally very important. "Elsewhere," the space into which education catapults successful students, is understood in different ways. Although the youth quoted below find their home place boring, when she describes what she likes about her village, the answer is framed in terms of dangers lurking elsewhere.

There isn't going to be drunk people coming round and knockin' on your door and coming in; and you don't have to worry about locking your doors at night because your not worried about anyone coming in. You feel safe because you know everyone and you're practically related to them and you're friends with them and stuff. You don't really have to worry about anyone robbing you either or threatening to kill you. (OU-Female-aged 14)

If home is safe and the unknown geography beyond AHC is dangerous, it is plausible the sustained commitment to leaving and thus to higher education might be problematic. While boring and confining, at least home is secure.

Oh, it's a boring place [be]cause there's not a lot that goes on. But I know once I got in college and everything for two months, I'd be homesick for sure. Like up in the city or something like that, that'd be bad, I don't really like cities I don't

know. But if I get somewhere, like around here, I don't mind it. But I find this place like jail. (WC – Female- aged 15)

Community is defined as safe and boring, yet ironically as an unstable and precarious place. All but three of the 20 young people interviewed in this study claimed that they wished to leave the community. For those whose family connections and social capital were grounded locally, there was some trepidation in this understanding.

Leaving home is sad, [be]cause, like, you don't know what to expect out there. You're here in this little tight community and you get used to it and you get used to everybody in it [be]cause most people don't leave. Most people like my dad and stuff, they stay down here and they finish their life down here, they love their family and stuff. But when I think about me going away, it's going to be a little different. I'm going to have to learn new things and adjust to new things other than being in my little tight community. (LB – Female – Aged 14)

For others whose privilege included social, economic, and cultural capital, formations that make out-migration and higher education inevitable, the emotional content of a move was much less problematic.

I've talked it over with them [parents] since last year's career day, since we had to do that I've been thinking about it. I'm pretty sure they both want me to go to university (laughter). I don't know how far they want me to take it into university, but I know for at least the first few years, you know, get at least one degree ... I'm in all advanced courses so (pause) well, they're setting you up for university. I think most of them expect me to go far probably, but...it's not something I'm too worried about at the moment. I'm used to other places. (BL-Male- aged 16)

This young man does not see the world outside his community as a dangerous place, but rather as a place of opportunity, a place he will need to go to fulfill expectations. He has a positive perspective on the space beyond the AHC, partly because his family linkages within the local are relatively weak, and as he put it, "I'm used to other places."

*Seeing Spaces in School: Floaters*

The young man quoted in the previous paragraph has a relatively open sense of space and place that extend beyond his immediate community. Like other outwardly mobile youth, he has a strong understanding of social space both in the peer group world of the school and in the larger sense of seeing his village in the context of a broader geography. Having traveled outside the community and having distant urban-based relatives he visits regularly provide a positive orientation to mobility. The academically successful young woman, quoted in the following paragraph, has, at 15 years of age, already established a scholastic career trajectory into the professions as well as a travel agenda that builds upon the mobility established with her family.

Well, I've been quite a few places. I've been to Mexico twice, been to Toronto twice. Last summer me, my sister and my cousin went up by ourselves to visit my aunt. And I don't know, I've been to BC ... I want to travel to every province in Canada. I don't know, Paris and France, and England. And I want to go all through Europe. I'm thinking Germany maybe too. That'd be neat, yeah. (DW – Female – Aged15)

A powerful part of the cultural capital that is exchanged in school for credentials is the ability to stand outside one's community as a stranger and look in at the people living there.

I watch them trying to be better than each other and hanging out with the snobby people. And then there's the ones that [are] into drugs. They don't seem too worried. And it's kinda sad we're...it ain't gonna be good enough that I can just say I don't have to go to school, I'm gonna be able to stay home and go fishing. I'm definitely gonna have to go school and go to college and definitely be prepared to do something else. And it just don't look good like I'm gonna be able to do that at all. (NR – Male – Aged 16)

Seeing social space is obviously mediated by family economic capital; youth whose experience is limited to the immediate locale are challenged to imagine both other places and interesting activity in virtual spaces. This aversion to virtual space is connected by the young man quoted above to the strength of his local friendship network



comprised primarily of youth who had little interest/resources for leaving and whose networks were also local.

Who does good in school? The right nerdy people that are all in the gymnasium friggin' doing recitals for some ancient play. The nerdy, weird kids that hang around in the back of the cafeteria. I guess I hang out with the smokies and druggies. We're always doing something, in town or back in the woods. We don't sit around. Me, I don't stop long enough to do anything but eat and sleep. I might go on it [Internet] to download some music but that's about it. I don't like the Internet and all that, sitting there in front of it typing for hours. (IB – Male – Aged 16)

The ability to see social space is granted those who have acquired the resources to move outside the home space, to assume a view of where one is from the perspective of elsewhere, and to present themselves in ways not marked indelibly and deeply by their locality. In a sense, the ability to imagine oneself in other places, and to present a credible self in these places is to have escaped the boundaries of habitual experience. This sensibility, for better or worse, has been the historical object of rural education for generations.

Youth in this study articulated a differential sense of social space that was mediated by economic and other forms of capital. Those who articulated well-formed, post-secondary ambition, and who had the social, cultural, and economic capital to achieve these ambitions, were also the children who could name the most social groups in the school and describe how and where these groups functioned. They also accepted these spaces as problematic, but fundamental. They did not, however, locate themselves within these social spaces and described themselves as *floaters* moving among social groups and in and out of spaces employing strategies of observation and analysis.

Floaters saw school and the cliques it contained from a naïve sociological perspective. They were analysts who possessed a discursive understanding of how social groups functioned within school. They also tended to be non-judgmental about these groups. Rather than speak of victimization or the exclusiveness of the social structure of the school, they understood cliques within the school as traps that other youth “get into,” through “bad choices.” Their sociological perspective is naïve in

the sense that clique insiders were presented as having chosen their positions.

They get drawn into the life down here. That's how it is. There's a lot of drinking and drugs and a lot of the guys just don't care about much. They work and they drive around looking for a party when they aren't working. When they go to school, they aren't really there. And some of the girls think that's really cool. I'm not like that. (MC – Female – aged 16)

Students who have high levels of mobility experience abstracted themselves out of the immediate locale and its social spaces and understood these spaces in discursive terms. Local peer groups were thus understood as an object of analysis. They saw social space, abstracted about it, and planned their moves within it. Their ability to see and manipulate social space and then to exercise choice within it was a part of their cultural capital within school. They were space travelers shuttling in and out of groups.

In grade seven and I was in with the popular ones there but I found that they were all kind of snobby and thought that they were better than anyone else so I started hanging around with some of my old friends like Jane; I've known her for awhile ... I find that well the popular girls they talk bad like about everyone that's beneath them. I find sometimes and some of those people make fun of the kids that go to class early and things. (DU-Female-aged 14)

The preceding quotation is illustrative of a young person who is highly aware of social space but who is not “pulled into” bounded cliques. This young woman is a typical floater. She was popular and recruited by a variety of cliques because she possessed financial and cultural resources that were in demand, but she had the awareness to understand the risks and problems associated with becoming entrenched in the space of one specific clique. She understood her floater identity as one that was mobile across the space of the school and as one that would eventually float out of the community.

Youth who have strong family economic and cultural resources which include distance travel, literacy, and expensive Internet and media-supported external perspectives on their communities also tended

to possess a parallel ability to abstract and analyze the social space of the school. They articulated group membership, inclusions and exclusions, conflicts between groups, and the physical places used by particular cliques. They also had a clear understanding of how various groups were perceived by school personnel and how well they tended to perform academically. The image of school failure was gendered masculine and located in spatial practices involving exploration of the woods on motorized four-wheel scooters.

Um...probably the 4-wheeler kids [tend to fail in school]. Because most of the time they're really, like ... they like to mouth off a lot ... so because of that they suffer, and they really don't care about their grades and stuff [be]cause they think that they can go off and work in the woods later on. ... There's like, there's the act-uppers, the smokers and the druggies; the ones who get sent to the office every day. They're the ones who are going to go, you know, not too far. (LD-Female-Aged 13)

The youth who were least clear about their ambitions seemed to be trapped in social space or even saw themselves as operating outside it. Although others defined them in particular ways, they were typically unable to place themselves in the social matrix of peer groups in the school. They had little sense of how school cliques operated, who was in them, and even what they were. They had a sense of "my group" which included their own friends, but they had a much less sophisticated sense of other groups and how groups related. The following quotation, from a youth in the same age group as the young person quoted above, provides striking differences in perception of social space. Some students were able to name and describe as many as twelve distinct cliques within the school, while others were hard pressed to name any. They seemed lost in space in the sense that they possessed only a very limited sociological sense of the social spaces within the school.

Q: Would you say there are different groups that like to hang out together?

Could you put a name on different groups?

A: Not really.

Q: Some of the kids play on sports teams. Do they hang out mostly together?

A: Yes at least five of them in grade eight do.

Q: What about the girls, do they have some groups?

A: Yes, some of them do and some of them hang out with whoever. (ET-Male-aged 14)

The discourse of youth whose networks are local have a distinctly different quality when they speak of their educational trajectories. The quotation below illustrates how a locally focused young woman constructed the space of higher education. She articulates that she “need[ed] her education” and that she wanted to “go to college.” Yet, she understood all of this as a way to maintain her current local friendships.

I think that they're going to college too, [be]cause there's this girl, she's like one of my best friends and she, she's really good at doing everything. I think and she really wants to go to college ... , XXXX she wants to go, and XXXX, she ...I don't know if they really like school or anything, but they just want to go to college too, all my friends want to. (MS – Female Aged 14)

*Mobility Capital: Understanding the Self in Place*

For the most school-successful children in rural communities, leaving is a foregone conclusion. Mobile youth are prepared for leaving through family educational conversations, travel, or extended family linkages outside the immediate locale. These kinds of experiences represent “mobility capital” (Corbett, 2007) providing a crucial external perspective on the local. The acquisition of mobility capital is a process in which select young people learn to imagine the local community as an abstraction. The comfortable assumption of this external perspective is a prerequisite for seeing educational and career paths beyond school outside the community. This view of a range of social spaces is transformed into an assessment of intelligence and ability by teachers. In fact, to be comfortable speaking and interacting with teachers appears to be crucial to appearing ready to transcend the local. In this sense, teachers represent elsewhere and interaction with them is in itself a key form of mobility.

I do good in school because I can talk with my teachers. If I don't understand something I just go up and ask about it. I know they think I'm smart and I get

great marks. A lot of kids just hate teachers. They never even try to make that connection. It's like they don't speak the same language. So I think the teachers just end up thinking that they're stupid or something, but they aren't. They just hate school or something. (FL – Female- Aged 15)

Like other forms of capital described by Bourdieu (1984), mobility capital is cultivated in some rural families through ordinary and habitual patterns of socialization such as regular travel to distant places, book literacy, connections to extended family living in urban and suburban places, or engagements in the “scapes and flows” (Urry, 2000, pp. 35-37) of physical and virtual transmission of information, goods, and bodies. I further suggest that the ability to abstract oneself outside a particular locale is key to establish a serious engagement in the abstract and imaginative work necessary for secondary school success.

For others, leaving the community is a possibility that is fraught with danger and uncertainty, but which is potentially manageable. As a possibility (rather than an inevitability), post-secondary education is weighed against other choices that involve options for staying. Youth in this position generally have family connections and opportunity to stay on and work in the traditional resource industries. Elsewhere (Corbett, 2007) I called this “localized capital,” that includes social networks, embodied fisheries, related cultural capital, and the economic capital of fishing licenses, quota, and gear. Localized capital is negotiable only in Bourdieu's (1984) “market of the family” (pp. 85-92).

In these “rooted” families the distribution of mobility capital was gendered. For women, local opportunities were historically restricted to tenuous fish plant work or commuting to low wage service jobs. Otherwise, some form of higher education was necessary for women to gain access to labor markets outside the community. For families who possessed economic capital, there was little hope for young women to reproduce their own family's economic and social position within the community except through marriage to a relatively small number of similarly advantaged eligible men. Because of their economic advantages, young women whose fathers were “rich fishermen” have traditionally been successful in higher education and very mobile.

With a strong focus on localized forms of capital, “practical families” with rural working class capital and values structure a lifeworld in

which money is tight and gained through persistence and toil (Corbett, 2005b). The career trajectories imagined by these practically oriented youth were also highly gender stereotypical. Several boys in this study selected what they defined as “practical” high school courses to access apprenticeships directly or community college placements in preparation for mechanical or trade-related work. Girls in this group tended to be interested in clerical careers or in nonprofessional “hands-on care” positions in the health-care system. They tended to be more tolerant and successful in their academic courses than boys, but they were equally adamant in defining themselves as practical “do-ers” whose academic trajectories would not extend into the impractical spaces of university.

I ain't goin' to university and I wish I could take some courses that are practical and active, you know courses where I can get to work with my hands. We're doing Romeo and Juliette in English right now. I don't even understand it and I don't know why I have to take it. (CS – Male- Aged 16)

Both boys and girls in this group feared that they would have to take courses that were not particularly well connected to their work intentions. Courses like social studies, advanced maths/sciences, and English were quintessential spaces outside the pragmatic locally understood frame of what average people needed to know. For these youth, required academic courses were considered a waste of time, a series of hurdles to be overcome. In this context, minimal grades were logically acceptable for boys. Girls who had less to “fall back on” without educational credentials and mobility capital did not tend to share this view.

When I showed my marks to Grampie, he kind of laughed about it and says he was the same way. Mom didn't think it's funny though and she gets kind of mad at Grampie. She wants me to be like my sister, but it's easier for her because she likes school. Girls are mostly better at school; they like it. Grampie went fishin' (became a career fisherman) and that's probably what I'm going to end up doing. (LW – Male-Aged 16)

Practical families generally supported this view although they were committed to the idea that a boy must traverse the twin hurdles of a secondary education and post-secondary "ticket" training. They felt that they must be practical and strategic because higher education is expensive and money is tight. Yet, the practical family must choose carefully and there was little time for irrelevant educational frills other than the mandatory irrelevance of academic subjects required for secondary school completion.

For another group of youth, leaving was largely the stuff of dreams constructed within the realm of fantasy and vague notions about other places. This most desperate group appeared to be trapped in place, unlikely to leave regardless of their intentions. This group appeared to have difficulty imagining future possibilities that extended beyond secondary school educationally, and beyond the immediate area geographically. To imagine a life outside the community, it is key that one's experience be mediated by one's experience within the community.

Q: Where do you think you might be living when you finish school?

A: I don't really know. I haven't thought about it much.

Q: Is there any place you think you might like to live?

A: No, not really. It would have to be a place like around here, with the ocean and stuff. I couldn't live in a place where you didn't know anyone really. I'd miss my family. (MC – Female – Aged 14)

This experience is shaped by access to cultural and economic resources as well as the social networks of family, kinship, and community that remain important in rural communities. The ability to think into future scenarios and to construct imaginary "project selves" (Giddens, 1991, pp. 32-34) that involve "realistic" or what Bourdieu (1990) called "coherent and convenient" (p. 86) mobility trajectories is differentially distributed along social class lines.

Few of the youth in this study had a clear sense of where they were going. My informants had different levels and different kinds of attachment to place, but few had a clear sense of alternative places to live. If identity is a project as Giddens (1990) suggests, it is one that is undertaken in conditions of fundamental uncertainty and one that is

experienced with a sense of trepidation with respect to unknown and abstract spaces including those opened up by the school curriculum.

I don't understand the math really. I understood it in junior high, but now it doesn't make any sense. I do it, you know, I try but it's really hard. And social studies, like, I don't get that either. All those places and facts. It doesn't make any sense to me, like cultures and all that. Why do we have to learn that? I'm not going to those places. I'm not going to college so why do I have to read all of those novels? (KM – Male – Aged 17)

These young people understood the cost of commitment to particular life courses. Education is expensive, particularly because in rural communities, post secondary education inevitably involves an expensive relocation along with housing costs and tuition (Finnie, Lascelles, & Sweetman, 2005; Frenette, 2003). In order to commit to a particular trajectory, one needs to be sure that it is the right one.

There are things I'd like to do, but I'm not sure, you know? I'd like to be a marine biologist, you know, so I could study whales and dolphins. That'd be really cool. But I ain't doin' so good in school right now. And it's, like, really expensive to go away so you gotta' be sure. (FN-Female-aged 14)

#### IDENTITY AND PLACE: PLACING LAREAU'S NATURAL GROWTH

The idea of identity was first developed within the discipline of psychology as Freud, early developmental psychologists, Piaget, Maslow and particularly Eric Erikson, developed, in different ways, pictures of the self. In each of these theories, place is essentially insignificant. It serves as a backdrop for a set of internal processes and structures that shape the character of self-development. In the case of identity, Erikson (1968)<sup>5</sup> formalized the concept in self-reflective terms, claiming that each person has a set of developmentally determined challenges to manage through the life course.

The self appeared as an object of intense systematic study at a historical juncture in Western social development when capitalism was undergoing a massive spatial transformation from communities and social forms that were predominantly rural to an urban concentration. In Canada and in the United States, by the end of the First World War, the



population had become predominantly urban. Mobility from country to city had become a chronic feature of life for large numbers of people. Cut loose from families, the relatively simple bonds of mechanical solidarity, people became, as Zygmunt Bauman (1999) puts it, their own problem as responsible consumers and active self-constructors who have no clear identity blueprints, "doomed to choose and go on choosing and to justify our choices" (p. 134). As such it has become increasingly difficult to imagine identity as a passage through uniform stages or as the realization of adult lifeways that are understood in advance by those currently living as adults.

In an earlier study I found that women acquired significantly more formal educational credentials than men, and that they were almost three times more likely to migrate away from their home places (Corbett, 2005a, 2007). Today, the economics that supported the patriarchal fishery have changed dramatically, but gendered work and social patterns have been slower to change. Kenway and Kraak (2004) point out in their analysis of masculinity and work in rural Australia that local ideologies of masculinity have not been weakened even though the economic base that supports them has vanished. Formal education continues to be a woman's world in many rural places and to some extent in working-class urban communities as Lois Weis has shown recently (2004). Women in the community have traditionally used formal education to advance in the world (Corbett 2005a, 2007), and, like other rural women (Alston, Pawar, Bell, Kent & Blacklow, 2001; NiLaio, 2005), they have been much more likely than men to leave their home communities for study.

The youth with whom I worked were made to know that they "need[ed] their education" and that this need must propel them to other places. They also believed that most of the excitement of life in a consumer society existed in urban places (Baek, 2004). Their parents generally encouraged them to "go as far as they [could]," an ambivalent idea that means both educational success and going further from home at the same time.

Yet the ability to support the literate, virtual, and physical "space travel" necessary to leave is one face of unequally distributed mobility capital. Supporting a child in a way that "works" in school is a matter of

social, class-based, child-rearing styles and the middle class give their children what Lareau (2003) has called “concerted cultivation” that mirrors the pedagogical practices of the school. On the other hand, Lareau found working-class, child-rearing patterns operate on a principle of “natural growth” focused on learning from experience and a faith that granting children freedom works in the interest of their development.

But what is “natural growth” if not a kind of faith that the local and the social and cultural networks it contains will provide an appropriate education for a child. It is an implicit rejection of the pedagogical principle that Lareau calls “concerted cultivation,” the idea that the best education requires expert adult mediation, specific pedagogical direction, and disengagement from natural or unregulated and unsupervised spaces.

The process of child rearing that Lareau calls “natural growth” is, I think, a prelude to an apprenticeship-style learning that has operated in rural communities as a virtual alternative education system. By observing skillful adults whose intelligence is manifested more in ways of using the body and physical tools than symbolic tools abstracted from an embodied practice, rural youth acquire what Rose (2004) calls “working intelligence.” Working intelligence is embedded in the subtleties of work processes. These unschooled forms of knowledge and the natural ways of acquiring them through embodied practice or habitus are either ignored and/or devalued in school today much as they were when Willis (1977) wrote his classic study of working-class boys. Many of the youth in my study whose familiar spatial and identity practices involved immersion in local working and play spaces at the same time tended to be relatively lost in school spaces and in wider geographies. Ironically these people ended up becoming the backbone of rural communities that continue to struggle for survival and for control of resources on land and sea. The game heats up as these resources and harvesting privileges become increasingly valuable in the context of globalization.

What I suggest here is that in addition to differential child-rearing practices, families in different social and economic positions support different ways of seeing place and space. Some families spend surplus

capital on large all-terrain vehicles that allow for intensive experiences in the immediate vicinity. Other families invest in multiple vehicles and internet connections that take them out of the physical community. And still others invest in plane tickets and virtual travel products (notably books) that take them to distant places. These different spatial practices have educational consequences for their children.

Increasingly, images of what counts as good parenting are forced to conform to the logic of mobile modernity. The form of parenting that supports long-term educational success is defined in terms of Lareau's (2003) concerted cultivation and exclusive middle-class educational choice practices (Vincent & Ball, 2006). I argue here that in a rural context where educational choice is limited, social-class advantage is played out primarily in differential spatial and mobility practices. Despite the alarmist rhetoric around massive depopulation in Canada's coastal and rural communities, it could be that a healthy proportion of the current generation of rural youth will also remain in or near their home communities, proving with their lives that leaving is harder than staying on. If this is so, generic educational practices aimed at generating and privileging mobility capital may continue to miss those individuals who persist in rural communities and in other marginal places such as urban neighborhoods where the link between protracted education and life success is tenuous. Security, occasional work, and family support in a known place may be a better option for many rural youth than protracted education, employment prospects, and high urban living costs in unknown places. The moralistic coupling of education and leaving generates a discourse of schooled salvation that, as usual, elevates the already privileged.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the research assistance of Paula Romanow, Audrey Oldershaw, and Michelle Barr as well as the funding of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In fact, Urry (2000) goes so far as to argue that standard sociological concepts as basic as *society* are now too static to capture the dynamic nature of

contemporary mobilities. He suggests the development of a reformulated conceptual apparatus for a sociology beyond societies.

<sup>2</sup> Popkewitz (1998) uses this term to describe the way that the image of the functional, well mannered, literate, clean, middle class child is always in the background as a comparator for teachers in marginal communities. This “real” child is a kind of standard of a proper childhood and the unattainable and thus absent model of childhood against which the “deficient” marginal child is juxtaposed.

<sup>3</sup> *Learning to Leave* is an analysis of historical outmigration and educational trajectories between the early 1960s and late 1990s in a coastal community, completed in 2001. *Where I Belong* is a follow-up inquiry into the educational and mobility decision making of youth attending high school in that same coastal community between 2004 and 2007.

<sup>4</sup> As part of this project 12 parents and 16 teachers were also interviewed, data to be analyzed in the future.

<sup>5</sup> Erikson ‘s theory of development contains a developmental series of crises to be resolved by the individual in order to achieve a stable sense of self. These are, in Erikson’s developmental order: trust vs. mistrust; autonomy vs. shame and doubt; initiative vs. guilt; industry vs. inferiority; identity vs. identity confusion; intimacy vs. isolation; generativity vs. stagnation; and finally integrity vs. despair (Erikson, 1968, pp. 91-141).

#### REFERENCES

- Aitken, S. (2001). *Geographies of young people: The morally contested spaces of identity*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Alston, M., Pawar, M., Bell, K., Kent, A., & Blacklow, N. (2001). *The Western Riverina higher education needs analysis*. Wagga Wagga, Au.: The Centre for Rural Social Research.
- Baek, D. (2004). The urban ethos: Locality and youth in north Norway, *Young*, 12(2), 99-115.
- Bauman, Z. (1998). *Globalization: The human consequences*. London: Polity.
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2001). *The individualized society*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2004). *Wasted lives: Modernity and its outcasts*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of judgment and taste*. Cambridge MA; Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bowers, C. (2000). *Educating for ecojustice and community*. Athens GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Castells, M. (2004). *The power of identity* (2nd ed). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Corbett, M. (2005a) Rural education and out-migration: The case of a coastal community, *Canadian Journal of Education*, 28(1&2), 52-72.
- Corbett, M. (2005b, November 28). We're practical people: Schooling and identity in a Canadian coastal community. Paper presented to the Australian Association for Research in Education Sydney, Australia.
- Corbett, M. (2007). *Learning to leave: The irony of schooling in a coastal community*. Black Point, NS: Fernwood.
- Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity: Youth in crisis*. New York: Norton.
- Finnie, R., Lascelles, M. & Sweetman, A. (2005). Who goes? The direct and indirect effects of family background on access to post-secondary education. January. 11F0019MIE, No. 237, Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Frenette, M. (2003). Access to college and university: Does distance matter? Analytical studies research paper series. June. 11F0019, No. 201., Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Holloway, S., and G. Valentine (Eds.). (2000). *Children's geographies: Playing, living, learning*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Jones, G. (1999). The same people in the same places?: Socio-spatial identities and migration in youth. *Sociology*, 33(1), pp. 1-22.
- Kenway, J., & Kraack, A. (2004). Reordering work and destabilizing masculinity. In N. Dolby & G. Dimitridis (Eds.), *Learning to labor in new times* (pp. 95 – 109). New York: Routledge.
- Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race and family life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- NiLaiore, C. (2005). 'You're not a man at all!': Masculinity, responsibility, and staying on the land in contemporary Ireland. *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 14(2), 94-114.
- Papastergiadis, N. (2000). *The turbulence of migration: Globalisation, deterritorialization and hybridity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Popkewitz, T. (1998). *Struggling for the soul: The politics of schooling and the construction of the teacher*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Rose, M. (2004). *The mind at work: Valuing the intelligence of the American worker*. New York: Viking.
- Skelton, T. and Valentine, G (Eds.). (1998). *Cool places: Geographies of youth cultures*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Spradley, J. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Thomson, P. (2002). *Schooling the rust belt kids: Making the difference in changing times*. Melbourne, AU: Allen and Unwin.
- Vincent, C. and Ball, S. (2006). *Childcare, choice and class practices*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Urry, J. (2000). *Sociology beyond societies: Mobilities for the twenty-first century*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Weis, L. (2004). *Class reunion: The remaking of the American white working class*. New York: Routledge.
- Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press.

*Michael Corbett* is a professor in the School of Education, Acadia University, whose research interests include rural education, social theory, educational accountability, and issues in literacy learning