

Creating Sustainable Rural Learning Ecologies in South Africa: Realities, Lessons and Prospects

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ABSTRACT Current educational and other research finds that it is no longer desirable, appropriate or useful to define urban in terms of rural or the other way round. To do so is to create a competitive relationship between them, to the disadvantage of rural areas. Such thinking also generalises situations that are actually very different from each other. Furthermore, a “one size fits all” approach to policy and its implementation makes it possible to overlook and disregard important aspects of the lives and the needs of the different rural communities. The realities faced by people in rural areas cannot always be addressed by policy made elsewhere and for everyone. It is very important to bring schools and communities much closer together. The Tirisano document placed schools in the most important position by viewing them as ‘centres for community life’. The situation where schools are dissociated from the communities is a complicated and challenging reality for both. However, one reason why it should take place is that it creates a key link between education and development. Emerging voices puts this matter most clearly. It points out that although integrated rural development policies are in place, they do not make any reference to education even though it is accepted that education lies at the heart of poverty reduction and rural development. Emerging voices further found that children [in rural areas] do not have their constitutional right to education realised, and their rights within education or through education are also limited. Through a literature review and participatory rural appraisal, the paper presents realities, lessons and prospects with a view to contributing to the creation of sustainable rural learning ecologies. Amongst the findings, the out-migration from rural to urban areas seems to continue unabated. There are incidents of incongruities between desirable and presented learning programmes during certain eras and a perception that one’s utopian reality may only be realized in an urban setting. It is the researcher’s view that the creation of such would circumvent the effects of rural brain drain by enhancing sustainability and rural development. In brief, the paper addresses realities, lessons and prospects pertinent to the research question: How do we create sustainable rural learning ecologies?