

The Reality of Lifelong Learning in a Rural Community

Presentation to Bright Side Conference
Session on Rural Education

October 15, 2010

Two BIG Questions:

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Does rural education matter to social and economic development in rural communities?

What works and what doesn't work?

Outline of Presentation

History and context of rural education

The case study - presentation and discussion of findings

Summary – Answers to the two BIG QUESTIONS?

1. Does rural education matter to rural communities?
2. What works and what doesn't work?

Arriving at the question – 1st generation rural

New immigrants to southwest Saskatchewan via the US (grandmother) and Russia (grandfather)



My grandparents, 1911

Adult learning in rural communities has a long history:

On the prairies:

Wheat Pool , Women's Institutes, libraries, Chautauquas, National Film Board

Citizenship education for immigrants

2nd generation – 1930 - 40s and the Great Depression

Royal Commission on
Agriculture and Rural Life in SK

- poverty
- lack of education opportunities
- SK last province to get power in rural areas (1949 < 1% of SK farms had electricity)



My mother 1938 southwest SK - grew up in the Depression. No high school in community and few opportunities to learn.

Physical labour valued more than an education.



3rd generation 1980s to 1990s



Me, 1990 at a time of life altering changes.

My personal question:

What were universities doing to help?

Significant changes in rural communities in Saskatchewan.

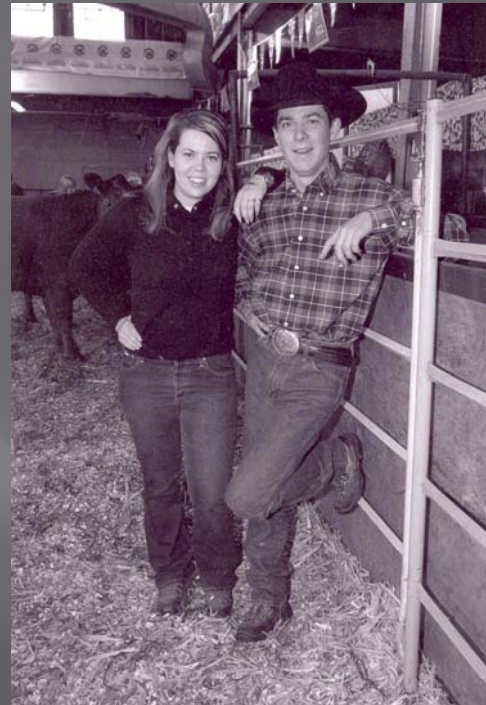
Rapid and large demographic shift (rural to urban).

Farm bankruptcies, family breakups, suicides, loss of family farms.

Government sponsored re-training programs for adults leaving farms and ranches.

The 4th generation – 2000-2010

- ▣ Youth out-migration from rural communities
- ▣ More seniors in communities
- ▣ Off-farm income necessary
- ▣ Technology has helped level the playing field



My children, Jill (29). M. Sc. (Ag Econ.) and Drew (32). Journeyman welder, Calgary.

2010



Me, 2010 and my other life



“Lifelong Learning” becomes a public policy goal.

Many rural communities consider lifelong learning as economic development strategy.

However, Bollman (1999) found that education levels (high school graduation, post-secondary education) had only a weak association to local economic growth of rural communities. (quantitative data)

Was there something that the numbers couldn't describe?

My research question : What is the reality of lifelong learning in a rural community?

Sub-questions about social capital, learning communities, learning opportunities

My approach to the BIG Questions?

1. The case:

- Neepawa, Manitoba markets itself as a Lifelong Learning Community

2. The data:

- written materials to identify learning opportunities
- Data collection: review of written materials and semi-structured interviews of adults in the community who were involved in learning activities
- Primarily qualitative data analysis using software.

3. Data analysis of qualitative data – text from interviews


Sociological tradition – text as proxy for experience

Analysis of text comprised of three analysis episodes

Exploratory Analysis Episode:	Comparative Analysis Episode:	Descriptive Analysis Episode:
<p>What kinds of things are present in the text?</p> <p>Analytical processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Word counts• Analysis of written materials• Discovering themes• Identifying categories• Semantic network analysis	<p>How do groups or cases differ from each other?</p> <p>Analytical processes :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cross-case comparisons of a priori concepts and emergent themes	<p>What are key variables? What is the strength of these variables?</p> <p>What processes are associated with these variables?</p> <p>Analytical processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Causal fragments• Causal network

Continual analytical processes of writing and preparing visual displays

Major findings

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- A. Lifelong learning does not work as a 'policy' goal or objective.
 - Lifelong learning is a 'state of mind' , highly individualistic and developmental.

 - B. Education attainment is a prerequisite to lifelong learning.



- c. Workplace learning critical component to lifelong learning.
Self-directed workplace learning appears to be greatest benefit.
- D. Involvement in learning activities builds and is impacted by social capital.
- E. Social capital contributes to social and economic development in rural communities

Answer to Question 1: *Does rural education matter?* **YES** and much more than we can quantify.

Question #2: What works ?

In order of priority

1. *Education attainment*
2. *Workplace learning*
3. *Informal and formal learning activities for all ages*

Positive social capital aims for the common good;

- while negative social capital does not extend its benefits to the wider community.

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And what doesn't or isn't working

- ▣ *Hidden populations* in rural communities: school dropouts, First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, immigrants
- ▣ *Under-skilled / low skill level employees*
- ▣ *Excessive number* (consider time and costs) of conferences, seminars, etc. offered but not attended

What did I find interesting in the research?

- ▣ How the participants embraced the *language of 'lifelong learning'*
- ▣ The *role of educators* (current and retired) for lifelong learning and in community development
- ▣ The *Hutterite question* is a dilemma for me
- ▣ The *potential of the software* for qualitative research

Questions or comments?

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