Rural Transformation and Newfoundland and Labrador Diaspora
Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education

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This book series is dedicated to the radical love and actions of Paulo Freire, Jesus “Pato” Gomez, and Joe L. Kincheloe.
Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy’s (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity—youth identity in particular—the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them? Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant.

But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an
electronic mediated world demands some “touchy-feely” educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.

If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education seeks to produce—literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.
Rural Transformation and Newfoundland and Labrador Diaspora

Grandparents, Grandparenting, Community and School Relations

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SENSE PUBLISHERS
ROTTERDAM/BOSTON/TAIPEI
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We have always had a vague sense of the power and the place of grandparents in our lives, family and community. The chapter titles in this telling text spell out for us the wide-ranging scope of that power and place of grandparents.

This book is based on the premise that significant knowledge resides in the local, and in the focused reflection on the local context. When this local reflection and experience is placed in a wider educational perspective valuable intellectual insights are gained and personal information becomes instructive for the wider community. The local becomes global.

This book offers a platform not only to look in on the lives of vital grandparents but paints, in broad strokes, a mural of coming, changing, as well as challenging cultural and social settings. In what the astute editors, Amarjit Singh and Michael Devine, call “small nuanced studies” we find telling narratives of generational connections in the face of changing and challenging odds. The editors write about the “changing patterns of communities” and in the very presentation of the grandparents, who often possess well-honed voices, reinforce the notion that knowledge is local and governed by context. Singh and Devine are very aware of the direct link to and importance of this contextualized production of knowledge. While this linkage can be seen as linear it, in time, becomes embedded in the fabric of our thinking and living. In other words, the voices shared here help produce culture and society. It is, then, part of a moving entity.

This book does a great service to the concept of diaspora, as well as to the changing nature of that concept. We often associate diaspora with the image of hordes of people moving from one land to another in quaint ships, seldom to return to the homeland. The fact that we now live in a jet-hopping, tweet-frenzy world does not lessen the pain of dislocation. The voices and stories in this book attest to that. These voices and stories also show that our views of grandparents are changing: their roles are changing. This book elevates the status of grandparents by positioning them as vital members of a complex and challenging society where their skills, gifts, and sheer presence are most formative. In the book Singh and Devine have given opportunities for many people to express their thoughts and put key aspects of their lives in a context that informs the communities where we live.

Some years ago I wrote a play called Out From Here. It dealt with out-migration from Ireland in the mid nineteenth century, and out-migration from Newfoundland.
in the mid twentieth century. While doing the research for that play I was taken
by the similarities between the leavings from Ireland and the leavings from
Newfoundland. It was sobering to realize that the forces that drove people from
Ireland were similar, in kind, to the ones that drove men and women to go to “the
Boston states” to make a living and to invent a dream. Like the emigrants from
the famine lands many of the emigrants from this place never came back. Many of
them, my relatives included, climbed steel and worked on building their individual
dreams. That exodus from Ireland is further echoed now as men and women
emigrate from Newfoundland and Labrador to do dirty work for great money in
Alberta. The diaspora continues.

Nowhere was the reality of outmigration, diaspora if you will, brought home to
me as when I did the dedication to that play. It was then that I more clearly saw the
raw reality of outmigration: my three children were all gone from here. They left,
for other green pastures, between the ages of 18 and 22. Today, they remain away,
and like many others I am a long-distance grandparent. Like many others I live the
loneliness of the long-distance family.

In the telling and poetic narratives found in this book we probe the meaning
of home, place, and belonging. These narratives do not “make fools of writers”. These narratives help us see and articulate what we take for granted around us. The eyes of others, notably visitors to this place, can make the sky clearer and the rocks more rigid in their solid wonder. As one writer here said, “imagine that”. In scholarly tradition Singh and Devine have noted the themes that emerge from the various narratives. Given the variety and scope of the narratives such elaborated themes are most helpful. These narratives speak eloquently to the power and place of grandparents and to the significance of grand-parenting. Some of the narratives found here reflect a tingle of nostalgia. While the grandparents tell of raising large families, being very busy, working hard, there is a sliver of longing for far off days. While this sentiment is not universal in the narratives shared here, it probably speaks to a sense of belonging, of belonging to this place.

The place of respect given to grandparents as well as the expectations laid on
people living in given communities is evident in the narratives. We might say,
today, that these communal expectations were somewhat rigid and set the norm for
acceptable behaviour. Linked in with expectations and generational norms was the
reality of “going away”. In time, and maybe always, there was a need for people
to move because “you had no choice but to look for employment opportunities
elsewhere.” Elsewhere, what a word that is. No matter where it was, “elsewhere”
was not here, not home, not this place. As John Munn said in the locally produced
movie John and The Missus, “You’re not telling me where to live; you’re telling me
where to die.”

The phrase “emotional comfort” is a telling one when we think about the role of grandparents. I see the need for that emotional comfort with my own children, whose
long-distance question often begins with, “How is Nan?” The connection is way
beyond expectation or sense of responsibility; it is often a matter of the heart and
soul. Another telling aspect found in many of these narratives is how grandparents are able to analyze, reflect on, and articulate their place in the world. Singh and Devine write about “local theorizing”. This is it in action.

Another aspect of the narratives in this book is the significance of the physical house, and the notion of “home” [As the little girl in Yesterday’s Men said, “Yes, we have a home but we don’t have a place to put it”]. Likewise, the idea of being connected in a community where “everybody knew everybody” was often depicted by calling people aunt or uncle, who were not related at all. This adopted kinship speaks to the level of connectedness lived in many communities depicted in the narratives here. The sense of disconnectedness felt by many people after they had been “relocated” from isolated communities into larger towns and cities was akin to what people felt who left here to go to New York or who now leave for Fort McMurray. There is often, always, a missing of the vital connectedness of the lost or left community.

The loneliness of the long-distance family is evident in many of the grandparent narratives here. Many people speak of the effort to stay connected, but in many ways digital hugs just don’t cut it. As my little grandson said, “Granddad, sometime you must come on the plane with us.” When I asked him why, he said, “When I am in England I do not see you.” This was for me a fond existential moment!

The studies in this book show that grandparents can be seen as receptacles of community values and as such are generational conduits for such values and cultural capital. This notion of the place of grandparents in passing on values, mores, as well as cultural and social expectations is significant. Many grandparents clearly see this process as part of their “job”. Very often while grandparents might be telling about the trappings of culture, for example, “Jiggs Dinner every Sunday”, they are in fact sharing more telling and deep-rooted aspects of life having to do with respect, dignity, and responsibility. Gems of foundational wisdom are found in these narratives. So very often the brightest sparks in a grandparent’s life is a grandchild: cherished, coddled, loved, and adored.

The narratives in this book acknowledge the changing role of grandparents. Not even the role of grandparent can remain fixed when the community is spinning. There appears to be, according to narratives here, a more increased role for grandparents.

The reality of out-migration, that tangly relative of diaspora, is often referenced by claims like, “many of the young ones are gone away now.” There is also an expressed sense, in many of these narratives that when people leave a community, “things are lost.” Not least of such loss is the “lack of opportunity for [grandparents] to develop a close relationship and engage in grandparent-grandchild activities.” Family is a key part of so many lives. Many of the grandparents given voice in these studies, “loved talking about their families and grandchildren.” Grandchildren and the process of grandparenting, is a vital force in many people’s lives.
One of the great contributions of the studies presented in this book is the way they help us see grandparents in a positive light. Elizabeth Davis, speaking about elder abuse, claims that helping society change the view of seniors will be a key aspect in curbing such abuse. This book makes a wonderful contribution to such a cause. One other thing this book does is put the whole concept of grandparenting in a historical and social context as well as it reinforces the ideal that “educators should acknowledge the diversity of family structures” that exist today. The whole notion of blended families becomes important when we realize that children from various family clusters are now extending the networks of grandparents. The reality is that children can have many grandparents. This can be both a rewarding and challenging generational reality. As is strongly advocated in this book, it is essential that educators, curriculum developers, and teachers appreciate the place of grandparents in their students’ lives. Curriculum has often seen grandparents as sources of information, but they are so much more than that. It is also important to realize that the types of grandparents can have “different and distinct relationships” with their grandchildren. This book, in the sheer variety of relationships represented, is a most helpful view of the diversity mosaic of grandparents. This book continually puts the stated diversity found in grandparenting models into its larger economic and social context. This is crucial to a better understanding of the changing roles of and expectations placed on grandparents. As noted, “Grandparents are a diverse and vibrant group”, and seldom represent a uniform “grandparenting style.” There are also sobering moments in these narratives. Ones that cover the gamut from ideal grandparenting roles to ones that are tormented by the challenges of their children’s lifes: they are all reflected here.

When I reflect on the contributions that grandparents make to families and communities, I am remind of an exercise I sometimes use with drama groups I work with. In that exercise I ask people to “take away” what they have contributed to the play. In short time it becomes evident that if individuals were to take away what they have done to produce the play there would be very little left. In similar fashion, if we were to take away what grandparents have contributed to us and our children we would, I believe, see massive gaps in values, mores, enjoyment, comfort, insights, information, knowledge, materials, kindness, and love. In short, we would be less than we are now.

*The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Family*

*I know it is late but I will call anyway.*

One distant night on that Green Island the people put their worry to bed. They woke the next morning to see their potato plants smitten by the blue fog of blight. The man-made Famine sneaked into the veins of the land and bled those who walked the soil. The riddle remains of how the people of a green and fertile country came to starve to death.
I Wonder Why They Are Not Answering the Phone

Emigration went on bleeding Ireland as from a wound that would not heal
And they filled its boats with the people who called this place Talam an Eisc.
Dangling between desperation and hope the Atlantic offered a tumultuous line of promise.
In the crucible of the coffin ship, the children of the Green Island rode the Diaspora onto the wicked seas.
Salt of the Atlantic served as bitter balm for the memories of Famine.
Bold people, in tainted ships, came to this place and heard “welcome”.

I Will Let It Ring a Little While More

New people lived the land and mastered the sea.
They fashioned a soul that would soften winters and inject promise.
In time, they became the people of the Rock.
Many of our people saw new horizons and moved from here.
There to build and to grow.
It is said that if my people were to reclaim their building half North America would fall down.

“Is that you Grandad?”
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost we want to thank grandparents in Newfoundland and Labrador who have never ceased to provide support not only to their family members and grandchildren living near (“non-diasporic” grandparents) and far away from them (“diasporic” grandparents), but also to their communities, generation after generation.

A number of people have contributed to this book. We want to thank the many contributors of chapters who have provided excellent work related to the topics of diaspora, grandparenting, community development, schooling, and listening to the voices of grandparents from the field. We feel it is our pleasant duty to record our debts of gratitude to them.

We want to thank John Hoben, Daniel Reid, Clar Doyle, Allyson Hajek, Kirk Anderson, Gord Ralph, Mary Cornelia Power and Joan Oldford for reading the earlier drafts of many of the chapters included in this book. Our special thanks to Clar Doyle for agreeing to write the Preface to this book. Further, we want to thank Rob Greenwood, Director of the Harris Centre, Memorial University, for having conversations with Amarjit at different times. This conversational engagement informed us of current initiatives that are being taken in the area of rural development in Newfoundland and Labrador in the context of regional, national and global policy making, governing, implementing, and evaluating discourses. The conversations helped us to sharpen our thinking and understanding of what needs to be done to sustain rural communities, families, and the lifestyles they offer to people in this province, in the context of the tensions that exists between lifestyles that are perceived as local and those that are urban and global.

The Faculty of Education and School of Social Work have been places of constant reflection and renewal for Amarjit and Mike, respectively. Colleagues and friends have contributed their time and their thoughts to this book, and the professionals working in the General Office, Financial and Administrative Services, as always, were most helpful and patient. We thank all of them.

We wish to thank our spouses Mary (Amarjit’s wife) and Pauline (Mike’s wife) for their tireless efforts and support in our completing this work.

I (Amarjit) want to thank my long standing friends Professors Gary and Gerry Gairola in Kentucky, and Ruth Larkin and Mike Hamnett in Hawaii, for encouraging me to continue and complete my various projects. I also want to thank those colleagues and friends who helped me in various ways in my professional and daily life. I know and they know who they are, so I do not need to name them here. I wish to thank Susan Bird and her family, Bowie Hannah, and especially the Power clan (my in-laws in Newfoundland and Labrador) for their help and kindness.

Both of us are grandfathers like many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, whose grandchildren live far away from them. So like many, we are involved in
distant grandparenting. Living in diaspora could be an inspiring experience in a sense that it encourages us all to engage in building and maintaining good, supportive relations with each other.

For me, Amarjit, living in diaspora and doing distant grandparenting has been a good learning process, because my siblings, my deceased parents, my daughter Neera, her husband Mori, and their two daughters - Tala and Uale’a, and my wife Mary C. Power and our son David, have all been a constant source of joy, love and support for me and each other.

For me, Mike, being a grandparent living in diaspora has taught me the value of time and building relationships from afar. My wife, Pauline and I, continually try to ensure connections and relationship development is an ongoing process as we grow with our children (six of them) and our grandchildren (five of them) both in this province and city as well as those in other provinces and other countries - to all of them, our gratitude and love.

Finally, we want to thank our series editor, Dr. Shirley R. Steinberg, http://www.educ.ucalgary.ca/werklund/ Chair and Director, The Werklund Foundation Centre for Youth Leadership Education, Professor of Youth Studies, The University of Calgary, and Project Leader and Director Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy http://freireproject.org. In writing chapters in this book I (Amarjit) I have kept memory of Joe Kincheloe alive in my mind. And we want to thank Michel Lokhorst at SENSE Publishers, for giving us the opportunity to work on this project.
ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

People with a variety of backgrounds, professions and experiences have contributed to this book. They include university professors with doctorate degrees, specializing in different academic disciplines; registered Social Workers with BSW and MSW (Bachelor and Master of Social Work) degrees, and retired and practising teachers with M.Ed. (Masters of Education) degree with many years of teaching experience at different levels in the Public School systems in Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia, Canada. Most of them work and live, or have worked and lived in small rural communities and have firsthand, nuanced knowledge and sensitivity to daily lived experiences of people living in those communities, including their own experiences.