

Flipping Narratives in New Spaces: An Introduction to Volume 9, Issue 1 of *Theory & Practice in Rural Education*

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I am honored to introduce this issue of *Theory & Practice in Rural Education (TPRE)*. This issue presents five research articles and one practitioner article, which focus on rural teachers, administrators, and counselors using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Beyond the rural theme, this issue is special for two related reasons. First, the articles that comprise this issue situate their studies within known gaps in the literature noted by recently published and forthcoming systematic literature reviews (Biddle & Azano, 2016; Burton, Brown, & Johnson, 2013; Their, Longhurst, Grant, & Hocking, 2019). Second, these articles present research that rejects deficit narratives of rural teaching.

Response to Literature Reviews

In our forthcoming mapping review of rural education research, my colleagues and I discovered what we call *rural research deserts*, where there is a great need for more rural-related research activity. Specifically, we found that portions of the West, Upper Midwest, and the Northeast United States consisted of rural education research deserts, where few or no rural studies have been reported (Their et al., 2019). Henry's (2019) article in this issue is drawn from one such research desert: the West. Though other regions, such as the Southeast and Appalachia, produce more rural research than the previously mentioned regions, more studies are still needed; the peer-reviewed research base in rural education studies at the primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels in the United States consists of only around 500 studies (Their et al., 2019). Therefore, studies that focus on a sample of the entire United States, such as Chambers, Crumb, and Harris' (2019) piece, and studies from non-research deserts, such as Panos and Seelig's (2019) piece

from the Rust Belt, are welcomed additions to our rural education knowledge base.

Recent literature reviews of rural education research seek to change the narrative surrounding deficit perspectives of rural spaces and people. Biddle and Azano's (2016) historical review of rural teacher recruitment, retention, and training found that waves of education reform begat research that sought to solve the *rural school problem*. They contended that the construction of the rural school problem would be better supported by positioning research to seek out equity for rural spaces rather than pointing out rural problems and, thus, deficiencies. Penos and Seelig's (2019) article in this issue follows Biddle and Azano's call by tracking how rural teachers construct and deconstruct their own deficit thinking.

Similarly, Burton, Brown, and Johnson (2013) called for more counter-narratives and alternative storylines to the deficit storytelling that exists within the rural education literature. Indeed, Coady, Lopez, Maricnhai, and Heffington's (2019) study explores the experiences of rural teachers who engaged with Teacher Leader English to Speakers of Other Languages (TL-ESOL) professional development (PD) activities. Rather than focusing on the deficiencies of their students, the TL-ESOL participants engaged in PD to adequately serve their students.

Overview of the Issue

This issue begins with a quantitative analysis of rural science and mathematics teachers' perceptions of their students' success (Chambers et al., 2019). The authors of this piece used the High School Longitudinal Survey of 2009 to compare student postsecondary aspirations according to locale code. Similar to other analyses

of rural student aspirations, Chambers et al. found that rural students aspired to postsecondary education at a similar rate to non-rural students (Doyle, Kleinfeld, & Reyes, 2009; Irvin, Byun, Meece, Reed, & Farmer, 2016). The authors did, however, find a statistically significant difference between rural students' perceptions of their math and science teachers' beliefs about their students' success; rural students were less likely than non-rural to believe that their math and science teachers thought that all of their students could be successful.

The second article in this issue is the aforementioned critical case study of a teacher reading group by Panos and Seelig (2019). The authors of this piece used critical discourse analysis via ethnography to explore the neoliberal construction of poverty discourse among a group of rural teachers. This piece is exciting because it follows a group of teachers who begin their study of a critical piece of literature and discover how their own constructions of poverty impact their view of their school and their students.

The third article from this issue is a study of PD for teacher leaders who were interested in better serving English Language Learners (ELs) in rural settings (Coady et al., 2019). Coady and colleagues used a theoretical framework that included the place-based teacher leader and high-quality teachers of ELs. The authors found that there was a nearly even cross-section of TL-ESOL participants when it came to experience; around the same number of TL-ESOL participants were early, middle, and late career teacher leaders. One particularly interesting finding from this article is a consistent narrative of responsibility to complete the TL-ESOL to better serve EL students and their families. This article also taps into the perspective of bilingual rural teachers, an underrepresented perspective (Burton et al., 2013).

This issue shifts from teachers to administrators in the fourth article (Henry, 2019). In this article, Henry examined the experiences of rural superintendents and rural principals and how they leverage local resources to meet the unique needs of schools in the state of Washington. Henry showed that changes in state and federal education

policy led to the extension of rural administrative duties. These duties include creating curricular materials for teachers, serving as test coordinators, and evaluating teachers based on new frameworks. Henry's article demonstrates that administrative responsibilities have expanded in response to neoliberal educational reforms that focus on teacher and student accountability.

The final research article shifts attention to rural school counselors (Grimes et al., 2019). This article takes a phenomenological approach to the examination of rural school counselors who advise rural students about careers in STEM career fields. Geographic space and lack of internet connectivity were two of the significant barriers rural school counselors faced when advising students. Grimes and colleagues shared an interesting finding concerning the development of STEM activities that are relevant specifically to the nearby local community; the creation of a new building with access to a pond and forest led STEM teachers to conduct water and timber studies. The innovation Henry described flips the narrative of rural spaces as backward or behind by focusing on STEM opportunities that are relevant in many rural communities.

This issue concludes with a practitioner article that explores Twitter as a means to support rural preservice teachers (Zimmerle & Lambert, 2019). The use of Twitter to support rural preservice teachers is interesting because it can help alleviate the issue of connectivity in some rural spaces, as Twitter takes up little bandwidth and is easily accessible in places that have smartphone connectivity. Zimmerle and Lambert provided readers with a set of specific guidelines to implement the use of Twitter for preservice teachers, including the requirement of creating a Twitter handle, developing a Personal Learning Network, and engaging in discussions through hashtags.

Final Thoughts

This issue of TPRE represents a giant step forward for the field of rural education research. All of the articles provide nuanced perspectives that often flip dominant narratives of rural deficiency that have plagued our field for too long. Thank you

to Executive Editor, Laura Levi Altstaedter, and Managing Editor, Diane D. Kester, for inviting me to introduce this issue of TPRE and to the entire editorial team for their ongoing work. I hope that future rural education research will follow the lead of the articles in this issue that provide new narratives that focus on equity rather than on the supposed inherent deficiencies of rural places and people.

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