

Place-based Innovations for Rural Education: An Introduction to Volume 10, Issue 1 of TPRE

Elizabeth Japczyk Schuler, *Beaufort County Community College*

Currently, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) utilizes physical addresses and geographic coordinates in an urban-centric system to categorize rural areas based on their proximity to urban centers (Institute of Education Science, 2006.). On a fundamental level, spatial narratives affect how we perceive certain objects in relation to others. These narratives establish a norm for which objects are centrally located (Bæck, 2016). Within the current rural parameters set forth by the NCES, urban education settings are being assumed as the norm in educational research, despite recent US census data. It was reported that 57% of US school districts and 24% of students are rurally located (Institute of Education Science, 2013). The variety of rural locales in which educational institutions are situated has reinvigorated the interest in rural education. The shift in place perspective offers an opportunity to innovate research, reform practices, and propose equitable policies for rural education (Biddle & Azano, 2016).

Fundamental to the articles chosen for the present issue of TPRE is the dynamism and pertinence of place in place-based education. Rurality is not a static set of circumstances that acts as a variable determinant of causality (Corbett, 2016). Rural contexts serve as multifaceted and productive pedagogical constructs, wherein educators, students, and administrators work within ever-changing social, political, and cultural domains (Reagan et al., 2019). Research within rural settings has generalized rurality as a problem to overcome as opposed to a context to comprehend (Burton et al., 2013). While the authors of the articles within this issue of TPRE address common issues facing rural settings, such as – the deficient funding and allocation of resources, the need for improved recruitment, preparation, and retention of qualified educators, and student poverty - they also direct our attention to the potential located within

these locales, seeking to leverage favorable attributes, such as – smaller, more personalized education settings and the sense of community (Rude & Miller, 2017).

Overview of the Issue

The articles selected for the current issue of *Theory & Practice in Rural Education (TPRE)* explore varying rural places within an array of topics, including: the enrichment of child leadership research outside of the school context, the demand for trauma-informed practices in alleviating the challenges posed by childhood trauma and stress, the desire for contextualized professional development, and the need for boundary-spanning, innovative leadership in community renewal and student assessment practices. The expanse of research located within this issue speaks to the diversity of rural experiences. This issue not only includes promising research in rural education, but creative practices and templates for improved teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention.

The first article in this issue explores qualitative research into young children's leadership styles via contextual relationships of families in contrast to the traditional focus of leadership skills in early childhood classroom activities. Debra Jo Hailey and Michelle Fazio-Brunson (2020) utilized a leadership subscale of the *Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students, 3rd. ed.* to identify several first-grade student leaders and their parental figures. In interviews conducted with several parents, common trends emerged. A prominent one was rural living provides multiple opportunities for young leadership development. Data revealed the importance of small-town size and support, community involvement, and neighborhood influences in presenting leadership opportunities for young children. The authors stressed the importance of community asset

mapping to help parents determine the growth potential for their children's leadership capabilities within the rural setting.

The second article utilizes qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore trauma informed practices in mitigating the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on students in rural educational settings. In order to foster student success in social, academic, and emotional behavioral domains, Lauren Davis and Rebecca Buchanan (2020) incorporated yoga and mindfulness strategies into the curriculum of fourth grade students for the duration of nine weeks. Student and teacher pre- and postintervention survey data demonstrated positive improvements in student moods, academic behaviors, and social behaviors across all class sections. Davis and Buchanan offer an in-depth look at the benefits of trauma-informed practice and teaching children how to identify and regulate the 'big' emotions that often present problem-solving barriers.

The third research article in this issue presents an in-depth, cohort case study that explores the effects of a locally constructed professional development (PD) opportunity for mathematics teachers in rural Canada. Candy Skyhar (2020) addresses the unique, yet varied rural issues within a local context, including teacher professional isolation, educational funding challenges, and geographical hurdles. With limited available opportunities for rural educators to engage in meaningful PD, the author emphasizes the importance of constructing effective, local models utilizing the strengths of the region and mitigating challenges. Implications of this study include a responsibility of those designing rural teacher PD to analyze the dynamic contexts in which schools are situated to provide effective PD that will meet the needs of both the community and its educators.

In the fourth article, Sarah Zuckerman (2020) analyzes the centralized role of rural schools within their communities and the importance of boundary-spanning leadership for school and community renewal. Rural school leaders hold a responsibility to forge mutually beneficial relationships between school and community to promote agency and action towards the common good. The author

expounds on the varying roles educational leaders assume and how their ability to direct change is both facilitated and constrained by their formal roles.

The fifth article presented in this issue addresses the inequitable nature of traditional grading practices and the need for rural schools to move toward more effective grading policies. Tom Buckmiller, Matt Townsley, and Robyn Cooper (2020) employed a mixed-method survey of 85 rural principals to assess their intentions of employing standards-based grading (SBG) within their schools and perceptions of their leadership efficacy and resources in pursuance of this venture. The data demonstrated that not only did the principal sample incorporate SBG into their five-year vision, but that they also maintained the literacy, capacity, and resources to support SBG within their schools. The authors propose multiple solutions for strategic implementation, acknowledging the barriers to such a monumental task.

The issue next addresses innovative practices in rural teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention using community-based participatory research (CBPR) and a skillfully adapted video grand rounds (VGR) structure for special education teacher candidates. The sixth article examines how the cultivation of collaborative partnerships between universities and rural school districts can lead to increased efficacy in creating and testing a contextualized, rural clinical practice model. Tena Versland, Kathryn Will, Nicholas Lux, and James Hicks (2020) placed two groups of 13 preservice teachers into rural, remote schools in Montana to measure perceptions of rural schools before, during, and after a week-long clinical experience. Data indicated that the immersive rural clinical model positively changed the preservice teachers' perceptions of teaching in rural schools and provided the students a better understanding of working in a rural context. The authors offer an in-depth look at the implications of their research, including promise for the recruitment and retainment of teachers in rural areas, and the collaboration of school district leaders and university personnel to cocreate educational programs that bring rural communities and higher education into mutually beneficial partnerships.

There are many challenges that come with requiring special education teacher candidates to have a specified number of observation hours in rural education settings, including the availability and accessibility of quality special education teachers to serve as clinical teachers. The authors of the seventh article explore an innovative VGR structure for preparing special education teacher candidates with varied clinical experiences, including rural special education classrooms. Karen Voytecki, Marsha Craft Tripp, Kathi Wilhite, and Sandra Hopfengardner Warren (2020) designed and implemented an innovative VGR model to enhance and measure teacher candidates' observation skills in an early experience course. Data revealed the importance of VGR observation tasks in improving student observation protocols and ability to translate these skills to live observations. The authors offer a VGR template to supplement and/or replace face-to-face observations, thus revolutionizing rural field experiences.

In the final submission for the present issue, Kathleen Dorr (2020) provides a thoughtful critique of the book *No Longer Forgotten: The Triumphs and Struggles of Rural Education in America*. While rural schools are often generalized into one, broad category, Dorr stresses the need to recognize the potential this categorization has for oversimplifying regional issues. Dorr urges rural practitioners to thoroughly understand the communities in which they serve, and the defining characteristics of those communities, citing rural poverty levels, the current state of education for Black students, the politics of the region, staffing issues, and the lack of technology resources. By understanding each rural community's distinct features and needs, practitioners can ensure they are proposing innovative solutions that will work for their specific community, and not simply using a one-size-fits-all approach.

Final Thoughts

'Place' is a living, breathing entity, not a stagnant 'backdrop' to our lives. In a rural context, it is the manifestation of cultural-historical time, interpersonal dialogue, and the interaction between a community and its material environment (Van

Eijck & Roth, 2010). In thoughtful contextualization of rural place, we are able to draw on the strengths of our communities and mitigate the effects of our deficiencies. The articles in this issue demonstrate the importance of understanding rural place in developing boundary-spanning leadership, creating relevant professional development opportunities for educators, utilizing trauma-informed practices to mitigate the effects of rural poverty and childhood trauma on student educational barriers, and revolutionizing rural teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention.

As you read, I encourage you to use this issue of TPRE as a template for innovation within your community. Uncover the defining features of your 'place' and leverage those strengths for contextualized place-based innovations for the advancement of rural education.

References

- Bæck, U. K. (2016). Rural location and academic success – Remarks on research, contextualization, and methodology. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 60(4), 435-448.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2015.1024163>
- Biddle, C., & Azano, A. P. (2016). Constructing and reconstructing the "rural school problem" A century of rural education research. *Review of Research in Education*, 40(1), 298-325.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X16667700>
- Buckmiller, T., Townsley, M., & Cooper, R. (2020). Rural high school principals and the challenge of standards-based grading. *Theory and Practice in Rural Education*, 10(1), 91-102.
<https://10.3776/tpre.v10n1p91-102>
- Burton, M., Brown, K., & Johnson, A. (2013). Storylines about rural teachers in the United States: A narrative analysis of the literature. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 28(12), 1–18.
- Corbett, M. (2016). Rural futures: Development, aspirations, mobilities, place, and education. *Peabody Journal of Education* 91(2), 270-282.

- <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2016.1151750>
- Davis, L., & Buchanan, R. (2020). Trauma-informed practices in rural education. *Theory and Practice in Rural Education, 10*(1), 24-41. <https://10.3776/tpre.v10n1p24-41>
- Dorr, K. (2020). Book review: Challenges and interventions in rural schools. *Theory and Practice in Rural Education, 10*(1), 141-144. <https://10.3776/tpre.v10n1p141-144>
- Hailey, D. J., & Fazio-Brunson, M. (2020). Leadership in the early childhood years: Opportunities for young leadership development in rural communities. *Theory and Practice in Rural Education, 10*(1), 6-23. <https://10.3776/tpre.v10n1p6-23>
- Institute of Education Science. (2006). *Rural Education in America: Definitions*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ruraled/definitions.asp>
- Institute of Education Sciences. (2013). The status of rural education. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_tla.asp
- Reagan, E. M., Hambacher, E., Schram, T., McCurdy, K., Lord, D., Higginbotham, T., & Fornauf, B. (2019). Place matters: Review of the literature on rural teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 80*, 83–93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.12.005>
- Rude, H., & Miller, K. J., (2017). Policy Challenges and opportunities for rural special education. *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 37*(1), 21-29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/8756870517748662>
- Skyhar, C. L. (2020). Thinking outside the box: Providing effective professional development for rural teachers. *Theory and Practice in Rural Education, 10*(1), 42-72. <https://10.3776/tpre.v10n1p42-72>
- Van Eijck, M., & Roth, W. M. (2010). Towards a chronotopic theory of “place” in place-based education. *Cultural Studies of Science Education, 5*(4), 869-898. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11422-010-9278-2>
- Versland, T., Will, K., Lux, N., & Hicks, J. (2020). Envisioning the rural practicum: A means to positively affect recruitment and retention in rural schools. *Theory and Practice in Rural Education, 10*(1), 103-118. <https://10.3776/tpre.v10n1p103-118>
- Voytecki, K. S., Craft Tripp, M., Wilhite, K., & Warren, S. H. (2020). Video grand rounds in rural teacher preparation. *Theory and Practice in Rural Education, 10*(1), 119-140. <https://10.3776/tpre.v10n1p119-140>
- Zuckerman, S. J. (2020). The role of rural school leaders in a school-community partnership. *Theory and Practice in Rural Education, 10*(1), 73-91. <https://10.3776/tpre.v10n1p73-91>

About the Author

Elizabeth Japczyk Schuler, MAEd, is an instructor of psychology at Beaufort County Community College in Washington, North Carolina. She possesses a BA in psychology from Lewis University (2014) and an MAEd in adult education with a community college instruction certificate from East Carolina University (2019). Currently, she serves as a member of the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP), division two of the American Psychological Association (APA). As a first-generation college student, she is passionate about working with rural, first-generation college students to develop a strong learning foundation on which to build their future careers and enhance their opportunities for social mobility.