

Gifted Rural Learners: Exploring Power, Place, and Privilege with a Focus on Promising Practices

An Introduction to Volume 10, Issue 2 of *TPRE*

Angela M. Novak, *Department of Elementary Education and Middle Grades Education, East Carolina University*

This special issue of *Theory & Practice in Rural Education* highlights gifted rural learners; the call sought papers on the concepts of power, place, privilege, or promising practices in the field of gifted rurality. This introductory article provides a brief synopsis of each of the seven peer reviewed articles and an analysis of three principal themes that emerged from the articles: equity, identity, and a sense of place. Additionally, three questions regarding gifted rurality are explored: How does gifted education view equity in the context of rurality? How does intersectionality impact gifted students? How does (or should) gifted education as a field adjust in order to recognize the strengths and assets of our gifted rural students?

Keywords: gifted education, rural education, gifted rural learners, equity, promising practices, place, intersectionality, identity

Teachers know their students cognitively, affectively, and culturally. A significant aspect of cultural identity is geography; your area, your place directly influences who you are (Gollnick & Chinn, 2013). This is strongly evident in rural gifted students. Richards and Stambaugh describe the essence of rural (2015) with characteristics such as a sense of place, a value in tradition, the role of family in the students' lives, the role of religion, and the impact of commercialism and varying definitions of success. Moreover, the pull of home can conflict with the push of opportunity for gifted rural students, as the rural environment may provide challenges to education and access for gifted learners. Researchers identify several challenges to gifted learners in the rural settings as well as promising practices that can encourage learning and growth.

Lewis (2009) considers the challenges to rural gifted students through the lens of three perspectives: students, educators, and community. From the students' points of view, the size of the schools and relative homogeneity can restrict gifted

programmatic options, opportunities for rigorous and challenging coursework, and mentorship opportunities and career planning (Lewis, 2009; Mattingly & Shaeffer, 2015). In addition, due to the population density of rural locations and gifted learners' needs for like-minded and like-ability peers, peer relationships are potential challenges. For educators, challenges vary from curriculum materials and technology to monetary resources. Budgets based on per pupil expenditure do not give much room to update texts, computers, and classroom supplies. Scheduling can also be a challenge for teachers in rural schools, requiring constant flexibility in gifted programs, and in middle and high school course offerings. Teacher candidates are not as plentiful in rural districts, and access to professional learning opportunities may be limited (Lewis, 2009; Mattingly & Shaefer, 2015). Community perspectives that can provide challenges to gifted learners in rural locations include a cultural dynamic that is resistant to change, educational expectations that do not

support advanced academic programming, and the changing demographics in rural settings (Lewis, 2009).

Challenges to rural gifted learners increase exponentially when gifted and rural are combined with a third descriptor. Donna Ford describes finding gifted rural Black and Hispanic students like “finding a needle in a haystack” (2015, p. 71). This could be traced to what was once considered a politically correct way of describing students- low-income Black students labeled urban, and low-income White students termed rural (Ford, 2015). Rural, however, does not equate with low-income as you view the rolling hills of Kentucky horse farms, nor does urban fit the perception of economically depressed, under the shade of high-rises on the Upper East Side of New York. Rurality is not homogenous, though this is not to say that poverty is not a challenge to some rural areas. Seventy percent of counties that are considered high child poverty counties are rural, a disproportionality considering 63% of counties are rural. An even higher percentage- 77%- of persistent child poverty counties, marked by at least four decades of high child poverty, are rural counties (Mattingly & Shaefer, 2015). Ford recommends approaching gifted rural education through a multicultural focus: culturally responsive teaching, with components of philosophy, learning environment, curriculum, instruction, and assessment (2015). Thus, as the topic of gifted and rural is researched, an ideal approach, even as we consider themes and understandings across gifted rural populations, is to consider the intersectionality of gifted, rural, and “X”. Teaching Tolerance defines intersectionality as “the social, economic and political ways in which identity-based systems of oppression and privilege connect, overlap and influence one another” (Bell, 2015, p. 38). Moreover, rural education can be viewed through a dynamic lens, recognizing the strength in the concepts of place, family, belonging, and tradition.

Power, Place, Privilege, and Promising Practices: Articles in this Issue

The purpose of this themed issue of *Theory and Practice in Rural Education* is to explore the ideas of power, place, and privilege as they relate to

promising practices for gifted learners in rural settings. Rather than casting a deficit view on rural gifted learners, viewing students through the challenges that rurality brings to the table, opening our eyes to the lush familial, cultural, historical, intellectual, and creative resources that the rural place provides its community. Article submissions crossed a variety of topics from analyzing children’s literature to specific curricular options to disaggregating AP data, but themes emerged throughout the articles: equity, the power of place, and identity. The first three articles all involve a curricular aspect in language arts: they tie to literature or writing. Two of the three discuss aspects of a Jacob K. Javits grant on place-based curriculum for gifted learners, Promoting PLACE in Rural Schools, while the third is a critical analysis of children’s literature about gifted rural figures. The fourth article takes a close look at data disaggregation and nomenclature. The last three articles cluster together in a theme of rural schools in practice, starting with an overview of barriers and facilitators to gifted Black rural students. The final two articles are individual studies, the first a case study of three gifted programs in Rural Appalachia, and the last a reflection on schooling in Rural Texas. As special editor for the issue, in this introductory article it is my distinct honor to provide a brief overview of each of the articles in this special issue, and then comment on the themes that emerged from this issue, with the following three questions explored: how does gifted education view equity in the context of rurality? How does intersectionality impact gifted students, and how does (or should) gifted education as a field adjust in order to recognize the strengths and assets of our gifted rural students?

A Place for Writing: Examining a Place-Based Curriculum for High-Performing Rural Writers

Erica Bass, Amy Price Azano, and Carolyn Callahan (2020) explore the results of the second cohort of students participating in the Promoting PLACE in Rural Schools Jacob K. Javits grant in the first article of the special issue on gifted rural learners. In an experimental design study, the treatment group of students were engaged with a gifted language arts curriculum that connected to place. In doing so, students both expanded their

writing skills and developed more complex thoughts about place. Bass, Azano, and Callahan share instructional takeaways in how to use the tools of the profession as a common language and in how to make connections to place that support students in their thinking about place and its value.

Gifted Rural Writers Explore Place in Narrative Fiction Stories

In a second study using data from the Promoting PLACE in Rural Schools grant, Azano and Callahan return with their insights with lead author Rachelle Kuehl. In this article, data is shared from a section of the study in which students describe place in the settings in narrative fiction stories. Authors describe students' connections to place through their rich descriptions of nature, in their explanations of encounters with new surroundings, how they highlighted specific settings, in their depictions of rural communities, and in the topic of displacement (Kuehl et al., 2020).

Young, Gifted, Black . . . and Country

Jennifer Gallagher and Melissa Wrenn (2020) share the results of a critical content analysis of five children's books in the third article in the gifted rural learner special issue. Each of the contemporary non-fiction books focuses on a historical gifted Black individual that spent at least part of their life in a rural setting. Gallagher and Wrenn noted that in each case, the child's giftedness was not only supported by the community, but also impacted the rural community in a positive way. Additionally, the authors noted themes of giftedness in curiosity, self-direction, and resourcefulness and in intersectionality, specifically race-based discrimination in learning and obstacles of poverty.

Take Care When Cutting

Michael Thier, Paul Beach, Keith Hollenbeck, and Charles Martinez (2020) discuss five different approaches to analyze rurality and remoteness using the National Center for Education Statistics urbancentric codes, highlighting the need to move beyond the common classification of rural vs. non-rural. The fourth article in our special issue discusses the findings from the data disaggregation process. Based on these findings, Thier and colleagues—provide several recommendations for

researchers with regard to policy making in particular.

Black and Gifted in Rural America

Expanding upon and reexamining a previous publication in our fifth article, Joy Davis, Donna Ford, James Moore III, and Erinn Fears Floyd (2020) explain the challenges facing and the promising practices serving gifted Black rural learners. They then delve into the nature of rural communities, detailing the intellectual, academic, and cultural features that create both challenges and, when seen through a dynamic lens, facilitate growth for Black gifted rural students. The authors close with suggestions in curriculum, research, curriculum, and programs while honing in on access, equity, and excellence.

Exploring Gifted Education Program and Practice in Rural Appalachia

In the sixth article on rural gifted learners, Myriah Miller and Carla Brigandi (2020) share the findings from a case study of three gifted teachers in rural Appalachia. By exploring the organizational structure of the gifted program as well as the teachers' perceptions, practices, and experiences, the researchers illustrate how the teachers' use of resources and gifted curricula in practice in rural Appalachian classrooms. The authors discuss findings in terms of the concepts of place and in the topic of teacher retention.

Reflections on Rural Gifted Education in Texas

The final article in the special issue on gifted rural learners speaks to both the challenges and promising practices in gifted rural education from a reflective standpoint. Katie Lewis and Cecelia Boswell (2020) combine a review of school district policies and procedures and group interviews with a reflective analysis from a 30-year veteran of Texas gifted education.

Themes and Central Questions

Equity, place, and identity emerged as themes throughout this issue, all of these themes have been pervasive in the media of late. Over the last few months, as I read countless racial solidarity statements that begin with "now is the time", I personally wondered: why wasn't it the time before?

Why with George Floyd and Breonna Taylor? Not that I don't appreciate the movement towards social justice, towards equity. But why not with Trayvon Martin? Tamir Rice? I struggled with this as 'the moment', the time when we as a country surpassed critical mass; when we decided that these event(s) were more egregious than the rest. Yesterday was the time. Last year was the time. Five years ago. Ten. An equity advocate and mentor counseled me, "that's well and good, but take 'now' by the horns, and don't let it go". I am proud to stand with organizations such as CEC-TAG that publish not just statements of solidarity, but A Critical Call to Action. And I am grateful for the opportunity to work with the researchers and the work they submitted to the gifted rural learners' special issue of *Theory & Practice in Rural Education*.

As Drs. Gallagher and Wrenn so acknowledged in their article, before I begin with the themes from our special issue, I will start with a positionality statement: I identify as a White, cisgender female, and I recognize the privilege associated with my identity. I identify with an antiracist (Kendi, 2019) and abolitionist teaching (Love, 2019) stance, and like Drs. Gallagher and Wrenn I align myself with equity literacy (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015) as a tool to transform schools. I work in the field of gifted and talented education, and while I identify as an equity advocate and co-conspirator, I also acknowledge that I am on a continual journey in terms of my own knowledge and understanding, and I am intentional about participating in learning experiences so that I can continue to learn and grow.

Equity

Race, ethnicity, and equity emerged as a theme in several articles, and what a timely theme it was in the spring, summer, and fall of 2020. In thinking about equity and the power of nomenclature in rurality, Thier et al. state, "we encourage deep thought about geography, so that both research producers and consumers can all know the types of places that studies include or exclude, helping policy makers avoid the creation of winners in some places and losers in others," (2020, p.75). In their critical analysis of children's books, Gallagher and Wrenn noted, "While racism pervaded the lives in the other texts, there were many specific similarities

of how racism related to their opportunities to learn" (2020, p. 46). Thier et al. noted that going to school in any particular geographic locale should not by very definition cause access or lack thereof to gifted programs, but it can potentially point to other variables that may hinder such access. They suggested that "researchers can examine causal effects that might lurk behind such labels, yielding interrogation of how community norms and social connectedness might vary based on the salience of rurality and/or remoteness," (2020, p. 76).

The Power of Place

Given that two of the articles are specifically focused on place-based curriculum, it is not unusual that place emerged as a theme, however, it is in more than just the two contributions. Lewis and Boswell share that "rural gifted learners manifest their giftedness in different ways based on their lived experiences, which vary from student to student and from one rural community to another" (2020, p. 123). They specifically refer to the Promoting PLACE Javits grant and the use of the CLEAR curriculum 'what works' in gifted rural programming. Miller and Brigandi note that place-based practices are supported by empirical evidence and are aligned to the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) PreK-12 Gifted Education Programming Standards, stating that "scholars propose incorporating place-sensitive curricula and pedagogy in teacher education and professional learning opportunities to support teachers who practice in rural areas" (2020, p. 104).

Both articles using the CLEAR curriculum with data collected from the Promoting PLACE Javits grant shared the impact of place on students. For Bass et al, the students connected to the environment that was situated in their locale, "The shift in how treatment students conceptualized place suggests they are thinking about place in more complex ways, grounding their concepts of place in local nature and the local environment", (2020, p. 18). They further describe, "Place does not have to be a building or a structure; students are thinking about place in terms of nature and the environment and the meanings and feelings ascribed to those places," (2020, p. 20). Kuehl et al. found that "when given the opportunity to craft a

story in whatever genre they wanted, many students relied on their local communities and natural surroundings as settings, suggesting that they consider place to be an important part of their worldview” (2020, p. 31). Their findings suggest “Because many of the students’ descriptions of setting were so strong, this study indicates that a place-based curriculum emphasizing literature set in rural spaces may have helped foster the development of such impressive writing,” (2020, p. 37).

Identity

The concept of place pushes beyond the boundary of place itself and into identity. “Students were taught to understand place as a valuable part of their identities through the reading, writing, and class discussions embedded in the Promoting PLACE curriculum,” (Kuehl, et al., 2020, p. 37). However, as indicated by the equity theme earlier, not all gifted rural students have the same experiences, “certainly, many young, gifted, Black children live in rural areas, but they are not likely to see themselves in their classroom libraries,” (Gallagher & Wrenn, 2020, p. 49). The idea of using books or curriculum that enables children to see the world outside windows as well as reflecting themselves mirrors is extensively researched; Gallagher and Wrenn indicate that a goal should be “that rural, Black, gifted learners have more opportunities to see mirrors of themselves in books and that those mirrors include how their rural communities are assets to their giftedness rather than deficits,” (2020, p. 58). Davis et al. concur, stating, “Black students in rural areas, in particular those in GATE classes where they are racially isolated, benefit from seeing themselves reflected and affirmed in lesson plans and instructional materials,” (2020, p. 94).

How does gifted education view equity in the context of rurality?

Historically and presently, gifted education’s picture of rurality is one of disproportionality “despite inclusivity statements in both commonly adapted definitions of giftedness from the US Department of Education and NAGC and common social constructions of giftedness as behaviors beyond IQ. Reasons for this include institutional and cultural

barriers to gifted education identification” (Miller & Brigandi, 2020, p. 102). One such institutional barrier can be the dichotomous view of urban versus rural. “Treating communities like they are either a city or a country mouse in an Aesop fable oversimplifies real differences. Binaries might provide a comforting heuristic, but they merely produce rough cuts of data that can blind policy makers from actual needs” (Thier et al., 2020, p. 77). In contrast, Thier et al. indicate that “our proximity and fully nuanced approaches can enable context-specific solutions for various needs that gifted students in rural and/or remote areas experience” (2020, p. 77).

Another institutional barrier might be the curricular options in the district. In their study of three teachers in rural schools in Appalachia, Miller and Brigandi noted that one teacher specifically mentioned that her “higher educational learning in gifted education was inapplicable in her small rural program, and all the teachers’ curricula were decontextualized from the places and culture in which they were enacted” (2020, p. 112). Davis et al. describe a principal cultural barrier being a lack of cultural awareness on the part of teachers. “When teachers fail to recognize the culture of their students, in this case what it means to be a Black rural student, it will be difficult to see their gifts and talents,” (2020, p. 93). Davis et al. continue, “with Black gifted students, who may be more sensitive and insightful, this lack of teacher understanding can be problematic and also contributes to their underreferrals for GATE screening and retention in programs once identified,” (2020, p. 93). Miller and Brigandi’s case study corroborate this, “the teachers in this study were neither conceptually nor pedagogically positioned, at this point in their practice, to create culturally relevant narratives in their curricula that either took advantage of the place’s potential positive possibilities or challenged existing inequities” (Miller & Brigandi, 2020, p. 112). To address this need, Davis et al. (2020) suggest targeted professional learning experiences that address three principal areas: “(a) understanding the gifted traits, intellectual strengths, and unique psychosocial needs of diverse gifted and talented students; (b) knowing and being able to implement culturally responsive curriculum and instruction in

their gifted classes and specialized programs; and (c) understanding the cultural norms and traditions of culturally diverse families and communities” (p. 93).

How does intersectionality impact gifted students?

A key element of intersectionality is not just the overlap of identities but how they work together to perpetuate disadvantage, oppression or discrimination. As Lewis and Boswell share, “Rural gifted students may experience barriers related to their language, cultural background, and/or poverty, which influence their identification as well as retention...often the result of misconceptions of gifted education, teachers without gifted expertise, and vague gifted programming” (2020, p. 122). Gallagher and Wrenn discuss the challenge intersectionality brings to finding books as mirrors,

While rural, Black, gifted youth may see one aspect of their identities represented in discourses around them, such as children’s nonfiction literature, they are unlikely to find mirrors of their intersectional identities. While increases in representation of Black figures might make it easier to find books that mirror their racial identity, when seeking books that center on rural, Black people in positive ways the challenges are compounded. Finding a book about a Black person who is rural and also gifted is nearly impossible.” (2020, p. 49)

Davis et al. discuss the added complexity that poverty adds to gifted and Black. “African American children in the rural South have borne a disproportionate share of the burden of poverty in America for decades... Neither genes nor zip code is cause for inequitable treatment” (2020, p. 96).

How does (or should) gifted education as a field adjust in order to recognize the strengths and assets of our gifted rural students?

Many of this special issue’s articles had suggestions for this overarching question. I thought the finding from Miller and Brigandi was especially poignant to start with; the “findings of this study indicated teacher participants were willing and wanting professional learning opportunities to improve their practice” (2020, p. 113). Often, on the

outside looking in, we can fall into a blame game: if only the teachers would... In this study, all three teachers were seeking knowledge to hone their craft and better meet the needs of their students.

Curriculum offerings were a significant response across the articles. Miller and Brigandi reported that teachers’ knowledge of gifted pedagogy wasn’t applicable to their rural settings and that “disconnected and minimal preservice and in-service curricular support also attributed to the teachers’ low-self efficacy in meeting the needs of their rural gifted students. The teachers felt isolated, unsupported, and uncomfortable in their own practice” (2020, p. 113). Kuehl et al. suggested that districts advocate for a curriculum, similar to CLEAR, one that is already developed, based in place, and written specifically for gifted students, rather than a guide to follow that would help teachers plan for lessons (2020). Davis et al. extol the benefits of technology and its ability to bring curriculum to rural gifted students, but warn, “while these options are becoming more readily available to students living in rural communities, ensuring that high-potential Black students have access to emerging technology remains a challenge” (2020, p. 92).

Similar to curriculum, broader programmatic options have value in meeting the strengths and assets of gifted rural students. Davis et al. suggest programs at the regional level that can be in person or online, and share that in some cases, “rural districts have formed sophisticated regional consortiums with local universities to provide access through technologies not available to single schools or districts. The advantage of these online distance learning models is that they are more feasible and learner centered” (2020, p. 92). Another programmatic example is Lewis and Boswell’s use of practice-based evidence to make programming decisions, “Rural school districts must account for the lived experiences within their communities when determining what works. Therefore, rather than EBP [evidence-based practices], practice-based evidence (PBE) plays a more important role in determining effective gifted programming and services in rural settings” (2020, p. 124). The researchers further explain:

Utilizing PBE as a standard for creating gifted programming that works for the uniqueness of each rural community ensures gifted education in rural settings provides meaningful experiences that reflect the unique time, resources, and funding available for gifted students in that locale” (p. 124).

Both curriculum and programs benefit by having a focus on multiculturalism, cultural responsiveness, and equity. As Davis et al. state, “curriculum is incomplete if it is polemic and fails to promote empathy and inclusion—if students are not taught to think and learn beyond the scope of themselves, and if they cannot see others and the world from viewpoints other than their own” (2020, p. 81). Peer groups, identity groups, or cohort groups within schools or programs is one potential solution suggested by Davis et al.:

Being Black *and* gifted in a rural school environment exacerbates these feelings of disconnectedness. When racially and culturally different gifted and talented students enter new programs with a group of students who are markedly different from them in income, race, ethnicity, language, culture, and experiences, their self-esteem, self-concept, and racial pride may suffer. Students need to feel a strong sense of belonging and acceptance to be recruited and retained in GATE programs, even more so for Black and Hispanic students due to underrepresentation. Cohort groups combat the effects of isolation and increase assurance of a more comfortable “fit” for students of color to focus more on the academic challenge and less on their need for acceptance. Educators are encouraged to develop service models to identify small groups of students and cohorts who can move through programs together. (2020, p. 91)

By providing a culturally responsive environment, teachers welcome and include Black gifted students, making them a part of the classroom community. “This sense of belonging is essential when there are few culturally different gifted and talented students in their classes, schools, and related activities (e.g., competitions) in a small

school, as is usually the case in rural districts” (Davis et al., 2020, p. 93).

Another in-class theme that emerged across articles in response to this question was the idea of space and time in class. Kuehl et al. indicated that “providing space and time for students to create stories as they did during this project is valuable for gifted rural students’ growth as literate individuals in the midst of the ongoing process of identity formation” (2020, p. 38). Without allowing for the time and space for their creative minds to work, the connections they made both to literature and to the social context of their classrooms might not have been made. Miller and Brigandi wrote about the limited time in class allowed for homogenous grouping for gifted students, “this may have resulted from low prioritization of gifted services, which is particularly prevalent in rural and high-poverty schools with limited resources and competing priorities” (2020, p. 107). While they agreed that mandates were important, gifted education was equally so. Lewis and Boswell (2020) also found that consistent time blocks were an important aspect for gifted programs, from the perspective of teachers.

In Myriah Miller and Carla Brigandi’s article, as well as in Jennifer Gallagher and Melissa Wrenn’s piece, there was a connection to ‘schoolhouse giftedness’ (Renzulli & Reis, 2014), a concept that has implications in terms of the strengths or assets of our gifted students. Miller and Brigandi connected to the idea, in how teachers noted the ideals, but didn’t engage them in practice: “Additionally, teachers conceived ideals of giftedness beyond schoolhouse notions (Renzulli & Reis, 2014) but did not comprehensively engage these ideals in their curricular practice,” (2020, p. 112). Gallagher and Wrenn, in contrast, found more of an opposition to the idea of schoolhouse giftedness in their critical analysis of historical literature:

The texts trouble scholarly debunked yet popular notions of *schoolhouse giftedness*: giftedness identified only by traditional forms of identification, such as cognitive ability tests and other abilities valued in traditional school learning situations (Renzulli, 1999). None of the texts focused on the identification nor the

cultivation of gifted abilities within school classrooms. Instead, the historical figures displayed productive-creative giftedness in the form of artistic expression and original thinking that was fueled by curiosity and self-driven inquiry. Instead of within the classroom, the enactments of giftedness took place in more community-based settings, where they had an authentic impact on others—another characteristic of creative-productive giftedness (Renzulli, 1999). Therefore, the texts offer a situated representation of giftedness in which community funds of knowledge (González et al., 2006) both affect and are affected by the gifted individual.” (2020, p. 57)

The idea of schoolhouse giftedness versus creative productive giftedness and the knowledge of which giftedness is identified, or recognized is often a matter of training: what characteristics of giftedness do teachers recognize, refer, identify?

As a field, in order to recognize the strengths of our gifted students, we need to provide appropriate professional learning so that the gatekeepers to gifted programs are not barring gifted students from programs. Miller and Brigandi acknowledge of their sample of participants, “they came to gifted education without knowledge or training in gifted pedagogy or gifted curricula, nor did their schools and districts provide curricular guidance or in-service learning specific to the needs of gifted learners once in practice” (2020, p. 112). Further, the researchers acknowledged that their participants’ “disparate ideals of success for their gifted students in the future alternated between materialistic ethics and wanting their students to live well in their rural community” (2020, p. 99) and that their “narratives acknowledged place-based ideals of success, such as local employment, family, and a general enjoyment of life, but these ideals were secondary to dominant conceptions of success, including education, acquisition, outmigration, and career status” (2020, p. 26) pointing to a potential push/pull conflict on the part of the students, as well as potential training for the teachers to recognize this conflict. Lewis and Boswell (2020) indicate that the need for training for both coordinators and teachers is substantial for their study participants; Davis et al. (2020) concur, highlighting the need for

teachers of color, as well as the need to train all teachers in cultural competency. “Culturally responsive education affirms the value of individual and cultural differences through the act of reducing or, better yet, eliminating prejudices, biases, microaggressions, and stereotypes based on sociocultural demographic variables” (Davis et al., 2020, p. 93).

Closing Thoughts

As you read through this special issue of *Theory and Practice in Rural Education*, I hope you enjoy the contributions of this diverse range of scholars. They are teachers, school board employees, scholars from Assistant Professors to Endowed Full Professors, and scholars working beyond academia. Our contributors are working in the field of general education, rural, education, social justice, gifted education and beyond.

This issue has been put together with the gracious assistance of a TPRE graduate assistant, editorial team, peer reviewers, copy editors, and more. And, as is the case of so many of the days of our lives, we were repeatedly saved by our “tech friend”. Nick Crimi saved us from a giant bug, a graphic that attempted a hostile takeover of our website, one editing section not playing nicely with another editing section (checkmarks and boxes and permissions, oh my!) and a *coup d'état* from installing the new software! Thank you, Nick. We appreciate you.

Finally, if you have any thoughts, comments or questions, please contact the corresponding author using the contact information provided, and you are also welcome to contact me at novaka17@ecu.edu. As I close my announcements to my undergraduate students...

Yours in handwashing, maskwearing, and antiracism,

Dr. Angela Novak, Guest Editor, *Theory & Practice in Rural Education*.

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About the Author

Angela M. Novak, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor and AIG Coordinator at East Carolina University. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in education, focusing on assessment practices and gifted education. Dr. Novak has served both NAGC and CEC-TAG in a variety of network, committee and board

roles, and is on the Advisory Council of Pure Play Every Day. She recently co-edited, with Dr. Christine Weber, a three-book series of NAGC service publications related to professional learning and has authored book chapters, peer-reviewed articles in gifted education, administration, and professional learning, as well as practitioner-focused and parent-centered articles in gifted education. She has worked in public education in the gifted field as a classroom teacher, resource teacher, and central office support, as well as in the private not-for-profit sector of gifted education. Dr. Novak researches professional learning, creativity, gifted collegians, and play, all within the context of gifted education and equity. She is the co-creator, with Dr. Katie D. Lewis, of the Four-Zone Professional Learning Model and the Seven Guiding Principles for Developing Equity-Driven Professional Learning for Educators of Gifted Children. She is an equity and anti-racism advocate, and is a member of the Diversity Scholars Network, from the National Center for Institutional Diversity (NCID) and is currently the Co-Chair of the Diversity and Equity Committee for NAGC. You can read her blog or more about her work at <http://www.angelamnovak.com>.