

Crossing Cultural and Linguistic Boundaries: An Innovative Transnational Teacher Residency Model for Rural Schools

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Throughout the United States, rural communities have employed innovative strategies to tackle the escalating shortage of teachers. Studies indicate that various models, including grow-your-own initiatives and financial incentives, enable rural areas to optimize resources to address the shortfall. Despite these endeavors, the demand for teachers persists. Moreover, with the increasing racial and ethnic diversity in rural demographics, there is a growing need for culturally and linguistically diverse teachers. This article explores a teacher preparation program's effort to devise a residency model for modern language teaching to connect international teacher candidates with rural communities across the state.

Keywords: rural education, international partnerships, modern languages, residency model

While school districts throughout the United States have experienced teacher shortages for decades, the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the issue, leading to a growing percentage of teaching positions being occupied by underqualified staff (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2022). Teacher shortages have disproportionately affected rural communities due to various factors, including salaries and teaching conditions (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). This reality is mirrored in Kansas, the home of the teacher preparation program (the TPP) at the center of this study. According to the Kansas State Department of Education's (SDE) 2023 annual report, the State experienced an increase in teacher vacancies from 1,650 positions in 2022 to 1,810 in 2023 (Bush, 2023). Kansas's teacher shortage is particularly extreme in rural and remote areas (Nguyen, 2020).

Additionally, as demographics in rural communities become more racially and ethnically diverse, the need for culturally and linguistically diverse teachers is growing (Johnson & Lichter, 2022; Lichter, 2012). Johnson and Lichter (2022) note that "Hispanics represent the largest share of the rural minority population, with a population of 4.1 million or 9.0 percent," which correlates with an increase in cultural and linguistic diversity within rural schools (para. 5). Kansas's population trends mirror those of the nation. From 2010 to 2020, the Hispanic population in Kansas grew by 25% whereas the state's overall

population increased by only 3% (Miller, 2021). Indeed, rural communities have become home to an increasing number of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse people. As a result, Kansas school districts are called to be responsive to the needs of an increasingly diverse student body.

This article documents how Kansas State University College of Education (KSU-COE) developed a teaching residency model designed to connect international teacher candidates with rural communities. The model leverages the assets of rural schools and international partners to address hard-to-fill positions, specifically in modern languages. As a land grant institution, KSU-COE is called to serve the residents of its state, provide equitable educational opportunities to its citizens, and leverage its resources and programs to address the needs of its communities.

Literature Review

Recruitment and Retention Efforts in Rural Schools

Rural schools' challenges have been well documented in the literature (Johnson & Strange, 2009; Ruecker, 2021; Showalter et al., 2023; Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). Tran (2023) observes that the challenges faced by rural schools are indicative of spatial injustice, marked by “the uneven geographic distribution of social, economic, and political resources” (p. 384–385). Geographic isolation presents several challenges for teachers, such as proximity to “professional communities and other education institutions,” which, in turn, limits their professional learning opportunities for continuing education (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023, p. 399). In addition, salary scales for rural schools tend to be less than those of their urban and suburban counterparts. A lack of institutional economic resources means that many rural schools are making do with “fewer classroom and pedagogical resources” as well as “unsafe or inadequate facilities” (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023, p. 399). Research shows that these challenges disproportionately affect schools with high poverty, resulting in more underqualified teachers and decreased academic outcomes (Tran et al., 2020).

Despite the challenges, rural communities and their schools are better defined by their assets – the traits that sustain them through the challenges. Tran et al.'s study (2020) affirmed many of the assets noted in the literature, including smaller class sizes, more autonomy about curricular decisions, strong ties with the community and increased community support, lower cost of living; and close-knit relationships with administrators, students, and their families (p. 33–38). In addition, rural communities are increasingly becoming more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse. Coady et al. (2023) note that “many rural communities are thriving with repopulation and economic growth derived primarily from immigrants and settled Latinos” as they provide labor for rurally situated industries such as agriculture and oil and gas production (p. 364).

Rural districts have leveraged these assets as they implement a variety of strategies to mitigate the growing teacher shortage (Oyen & Schweinle, 2021; Rhinesmith et al., 2023; Tran & Smith, 2020). Rural schools emphasize their assets in recruiting campaigns. In collaboration with teacher preparation programs, rural schools have taken advantage of various programs, such as alternative certification pathways and international recruitment programs, to increase their pool of teacher candidates (Guha et al., 2017; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). In addition, rural districts have implemented various incentives for recruitment and retention efforts, including offering signing bonuses, performance/merit pay, four-day work weeks, and housing allowances.

Teacher Residency Programs

While a staple of medical training programs, teacher residency programs (TRPs) in education have grown in popularity in the United States over the past twenty years (Silva et al., 2014). TRPs merge clinical experience and didactic learning, so preservice teachers learn as they engage in the practice (DeMoss & Pitner, 2022; Silva et al., 2014). For many rural and urban school districts, TRPs have offered a viable pathway for recruiting, preparing, and retaining teachers in hard-to-fill positions as TRPs allow preservice teachers to engage in full-time clinical practice (Guha et al., 2017). Residency models often enable preservice teachers to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of the teachers-of-record, teaching full-time in their classrooms while receiving clinical support from mentor teachers and their university supervisors (DeMoss & Pitner, 2022). Other models, however, mirror more traditional clinical experiences in which the preservice teacher teaches alongside a cooperating teacher (Guha et al., 2017).

The National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR) has set forth guidelines for designing and implementing teacher residency programs (*Our Residency Model*, 2024). According to NCTR, a comprehensive residency model includes the following components/characteristics: 1) preservice teachers are part of a cohort who collaborate; 2) they complete coursework from a partner TPP; 3) they engage in an apprenticeship with university- and school-level support and supervision; 4) they are evaluated throughout the process and provided with ongoing feedback; and 5) there are post-residency opportunities for continuation to in-service teaching (*Our Residency Model*, 2024). Guha et al. (2017) also note that effective residency models rely on “strong district–university partnerships” as well as provide financial support and incentives for retaining strong resident candidates upon completion (p. 32).

Internationalization in Teacher Education

American P-12 education and teacher licensing programs in higher education have an exciting history concerning internationalization. P-12 education naturally has adapted over the years to meet the needs of immigrant and migrant families and children. While those adaptations have not been without controversy and challenge, it is abundantly clear

that the change forced on P-12 systems by newcomers has enriched the landscape of American elementary and secondary schools. While we have an obvious need to continue to grow in those areas, American schools have cultural and language capacities that have transformed the systems themselves (Kissau, 2014).

Given the number of students representing groups new to local culture, some P-12 schools have sought international teachers for hard-to-fill teacher vacancies, particularly in the areas of foreign languages, science, and mathematics (Heubeck, 2022; Kissau, 2014). Approximately 11% of all K-12 teachers in the United States are foreign-born, and their presence has contributed positively to stemming the teacher shortage (Kissau, 2014). Despite the potential benefits of internationalizing the teacher workforce, addressing staff shortages via international recruitment is not widespread (Furuya et al., 2019).

Increasingly, teacher education programs in the United States are moving toward internationalization of their programs. Traditionally, the internationalization of teacher education programs has referred to the curricular and structural adaptations made to expand teacher education programs to prepare American teachers for international settings (Quezada, 2010; Roberts, 2007). This often includes diversifying the curriculum and facilitating study-abroad opportunities and international clinical experiences (DeCuir, 2017; Medina & Kiefel, 2021). Indeed, these efforts are critical to developing the intercultural competencies of all teacher candidates as they work with an increasingly diverse student body. The literature emphasizes the need to develop multicultural competencies among teacher candidates to improve disparities in the educational outcomes of students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Aronson, 2020; Gay & Howard, 2010; Cholewa et al., 2014). Furthermore, the emphasis on critical pedagogies and reflection in internationalization initiatives is pivotal in broadening the global perspectives and improving the multicultural competencies of preservice teachers (Clark et al., 2015; Sharma et al., 2011).

However, there is another element of internationalization that is less common – making teacher preparation more accessible to international teacher candidates, thus broadening the pool of talented teacher candidates who may serve in either their countries or in communities across the United States (Kim, 2024). Research universities have a long history of welcoming international graduate students to work toward advanced degrees; however, most international students leave the United States upon completion of their graduate program (Bound et al., 2021; Sutherland & Chakrabati, 2023). Centering intercultural exchanges and participation is a viable, albeit less common, approach to internationalizing teacher preparation programs.

TPP Residency Model

Institutional Context

Established in 1863, Kansas State University is the first land grant institution established under the Morrill Act (*History and Traditions, 2024*). As such, the university's mission is to "foster excellent teaching, research, and service that develop a highly skilled and educated citizenry necessary to advancing the well-being of the State, the nation, and the international community" ("Our Mission," 2023). To that avail, KSU-COE's programs develop educators who support Kansas schools while engaging in internationalization efforts to enrich its students' educational experiences.

Within KSU-COE, there are 37 initial and advanced teacher licensure programs. In response to the needs of place-based teacher candidates, KSU-COE introduced online versions of their traditional initial licensure programs. Two unique models, the Bachelor of Science Online (BSO) in elementary education and the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program, specifically target non-traditional or place-based students and significantly enhance accessibility to its teacher preparation programs across Kansas. Most students in both models come from rural communities and can serve in their local school districts while completing their teacher preparation program.

Relationship with Rural Schools and Internationalization Efforts

KSU-COE is also home to the Rural Education Center (REC), which serves as a critical resource for rural school districts across the state and develops a national research agenda that centers on rural education. In support of these efforts, KSU-COE developed a rural professional development school network (RPDS) consisting of 15 Kansas rural school districts. These districts serve in an advisory capacity and support various REC and KSU-COE initiatives, including STEAM enrichment for rural schools, technology-enhanced field experiences for preservice teachers, professional development for rural teachers, and grant initiatives supporting rural schools, communities, and students.

The REC also supports KSU-COE's internationalization efforts. It is instrumental in providing a virtual STEAM summer camp that serves rural middle school students and middle school students from countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The REC also supports research into using technologies to facilitate international field experiences for teacher candidates.

Indeed, the REC and our rural school district collaborators play a pivotal role in realizing the college's vision of training "educators to be knowledgeable, ethical, caring decision makers for a diverse and changing world" (*Vision, Mission and Conceptual Framework, 2021*). The rural partners of KSU-COE utilize the resources offered by the college and the REC to provide their teachers and students with enriching experiences and learning opportunities. Diversity is on the rise in the evolving landscape of Kansas

rural schools, and these schools welcome partnerships that link their communities to global possibilities.

Description of Residency Model

The proposed residency model is in response to the demand for Spanish language teachers in Kansas and the college’s efforts to internationalize its programs in ways that enrich Kansas communities. To that end, KSU-COE has established a novel residency program called the Modern Languages Teaching and Learning (TELRN) Graduate Certificate Program. The certificate program’s coursework is conducted over one summer intersession and two semesters. As an integral part of their program, teacher candidates will undertake a one-year traditional residency in modern languages throughout the fall and spring semesters. The proposed residency model consists of coursework that complements the fieldwork, enabling participants to apply the theoretical and conceptual knowledge gained in their courses (see Table 1).

Table 1
KSU-COE’s International Residency TELRN

Summer	Fall		Spring	
Induction Support	Monday	Tuesday–Friday	Monday	Tuesday–Friday
	Foreign Language Methods (3 cr)	AM: Residency in a Spanish Language Classroom	History of Education (3 cr)	AM: Residency in a Spanish Language Classroom
Topics Core Teaching (3 cr)	Languages and your Future (1 cr)	PM: Service Learning working with Emergent Bilingual Students	FLES Methods (3 cr)	PM: Service Learning working with Emergent Bilingual Students
Literacy and Diverse Learners in the Content Areas (3	Spanish Microfiction (3 cr)			

cr)				
Characteristics of Exceptionalities (3 cr)				

Residency Model Components

The TPP's residency model follows the guidelines set forth by the National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR) and consists of five components: cohort model, coursework, apprenticeship, evaluation, and post-residency considerations.

Cohort Model: The Modern Languages Teaching and Learning (TLERN) Graduate Certificate Program follows a cohort model in which participants engage in intensive induction support during the summer and complete coursework and clinical experiences during the fall and spring semesters. While they will serve different affiliated districts, KSU-COE faculty will engage them in cohort meet-ups and support seminars to reflect upon their didactic and clinical experiences and issues surrounding adapting to new cultural contexts.

Coursework: Teacher candidates in this certificate program will complete courses in tandem with their clinical experiences. Upon completing the program, candidates will be eligible to pursue licensure and complete a master's degree with additional coursework.

Apprenticeship: The apprenticeship year comprises two different field experiences. While Mondays are designated for classes, teacher candidates will be in classrooms Tuesday-Friday. This allows them to apply and reflect upon the pedagogical approaches presented in their coursework. The first portion of their residency will have them working with a mentor teacher in a Spanish language classroom. Candidates will engage in all the clerical and instructional teaching practices with the assistance of their mentor teachers. In the afternoons, candidates will engage in service-learning opportunities where they work with students one-on-one as English language aides. In working with students and families in a different capacity, teacher candidates gain a more nuanced understanding of the rural school dynamics.

Evaluation: As a pilot program, one evaluation level will be used to determine the efficacy of this residency model. Affiliated school districts will serve as stakeholders in ongoing conversations in revising the model to be responsive to community and candidate needs. The second level of evaluation pertains to the ongoing evaluation of the teacher candidate's performance. Formative and summative assessments will provide KSU-COE with data to determine their teaching competency. This also includes a written

work sample where they document evidence of their performance during the apprenticeship year.

Post-Secondary Considerations: As international teaching candidates, assuming a teaching position upon completion is significantly more complicated as it requires that a district choose to sponsor them under the appropriate visa status. That said, the affiliated districts noted their willingness to sponsor candidates, provided that they demonstrated strong teaching skills and there was an employment need that could not be filled otherwise. While the program does not guarantee any employment at the end, interns are situated so that opportunities may arise where needed.

Description of Participants and Affiliated Partners

The inaugural teacher candidates for this residency model are six teacher candidates from Ecuador, all of whom have bachelor's degrees from an Ecuadorian university that has a formal partnership agreement with KSU-COE. Our international university partners share a vision of creating intercultural programs and experiences that improve the intercultural competencies of all candidates. As part of the residency model, candidates sign memorandums of agreement stipulating that a significant portion of their learning experiences will occur in the residency communities.

Participating teacher candidates will be placed with affiliated Kansas districts that have expressed an interest in piloting this residency program. As partners in constructing this residency program, the affiliated districts will serve the critical role of providing evaluative feedback about its implementation and outcomes. Two of the three affiliated Kansas districts are rural districts that have partnered with us in various other initiatives. All three districts have increasingly diverse student demographics, with Spanish being the second most spoken language after English.

Considerations for Rural Community Engagement and Implementation

While residency models have been implemented to support the recruitment and retention efforts in rural education for some time (Afacan, 2022; Guha et al., 2017), the move toward internationalization of these programs will provide rural schools with a broader pool of qualified teachers to meet staffing needs. Studies have noted multiple strengths of rural schools in the United States, such as assertive community support for schools, deep-rooted and long-standing relationships between teachers, families, and students, and smaller class sizes (Clark et al., 2023; Hartman et al., 2022). Likewise, international candidates bring cultural capital, including their languages, customs, and educational expertise (Bound et al., 2021; Krislov, 2019). While some rural schools may lack the monetary resources of their suburban and urban counterparts, their strengths represent their cultural capital, making them ideal partners in KSU-COE's efforts to internationalize programs and, ultimately, diversify their teacher candidates.

That said, there are important considerations that a TPP must consider when engaging in the internationalization of their programs. First, TPPs must intentionally work with school districts to ensure that any proposed residency model targets the specific needs of their schools and communities. This requires ongoing collaboration and programmatic adjustments to ensure that the academic needs of both the teacher candidates and the teaching needs of the district are being met. When designing the proposed residency model, university stakeholders met with the participating school districts to outline the purpose and vision and garner feedback about the design. As a result of these discussions, KSU-COE wrote an articulation agreement that reflected the expectations of both entities.

Second, TPPs must adopt culturally responsive practices when preparing international teacher candidates. Specifically, teacher candidates, the school districts, and the TPPs must work towards building intercultural competencies that enable them to work and learn from one another. Additionally, TPPs are responsible for preparing international teacher candidates for the cultural grounding of the rural communities where they will be situated. The proposed residency model includes summer programming in which, in collaboration with participating districts, candidates will immerse in the culture, day-to-day practices, and resources of their communities.

Third, creating an international residency model must consider visa requirements that specify not only the international student's obligations to remain in good immigration status but also the configuration scope and sequence of coursework and clinical practice. Indeed, an essential partner in any internationalization efforts is the college's International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS), which ensures that all components of such a program comply with appropriate United States immigration and visa requirements.

Conclusion

We are well aware of the challenges of attempting to implement a program bringing international teachers to rural America against the backdrop of a political climate in which efforts to address diversity, equity, and inclusion have come under sharp attack from policymakers. The stakes are high. While we are committed to the goals of internationalization and cross-cultural learning, promotional efforts must begin with the clear exigence provided by the teacher shortage. From there, we believe economic considerations can, when explained carefully, be compelling to audiences that might otherwise be skeptical of the boldness of this initiative. Spanish is the second most frequently spoken language of the home in our state. Approximately 7.5% of households statewide have a first language, Spanish (*Languages in The State*, 2024), and that number is steadily rising. That statistic is deceptive, of course, because Spanish speakers are much higher in selected rural areas. For example, 60% of one of our target communities speaks a first language other than English (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024), the

vast majority of whom are first-language speakers of Spanish. Increasing the linguistic capacity of our citizens and workforce is a critically important element of long-term economic success for rural America.

The last three decades have seen an increase in emergent bilingual students in our state (*English Language Learners*, n.d.) as immigrants are an integral part of our state's agricultural, industrial, and educational economies. However, socially and economically mature linguistic capacity extends beyond ESL services. We submit that programs such as this can help our state and nation develop a deeper, more mature level of linguistic capital that can serve economic and social goals. We hope that this model can move us in that direction. Beyond that, we dream that rural America can lead the nation toward more profound linguistic capacity and maturity within the context of innovative residency programs that bring previously untapped sources of teachers to American classrooms.

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