

Journaling as a Reflective Tool in a Rural Teacher Residency Experience

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Reflection is necessary for teachers to review and adjust their practice. Journaling is a learned skill and can become a viable reflective practice during teachers' preparation. In this qualitative study, researchers examined the reflective journaling endeavors of one HBCU's Rural Teacher Residency Program during the participants' rural residency experience. Findings center around the participants' positive experiences, areas of continued improvement, work-life balance, and professional development, all of which highlight the participants' successes and stressors of their residency experiences.

Keywords: reflection, reflective journaling, teacher residency, rural schools

There has been an insufficient supply of teachers graduating from educator preparation programs over the last several years; to further compound this issue, there is a dire need for teachers of color and teachers committed to working in high-need schools (Barth et al., 2016). Through the teacher residency model, educator preparation programs help close these gaps in the teacher shortage by recruiting interested people into their graduate programs that lead to teacher licensure. As teacher residents begin their year-long teacher residency experience, many have had little to no classroom teaching experience (Guha et al., 2016). This lack of experience may be even more impactful because of the volunteer and visitor restrictions that were instated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When novice teachers have limited classroom practice opportunities, they may feel underprepared and often leave the profession (Guha et al., 2016). As part of the teacher residency model, teacher residents are engaged in coursework that is closely aligned to their year-long clinical practice experience and receive continued support from their educator preparation program faculty and mentor teachers, allowing them to thrive in the classroom and reach their goal of becoming a teacher (Guha et al., 2016). Journaling is one strategy that can be used to support teacher residents throughout their year-long residency experience (Minott & Young, 2009; Ryan, 2020).

This qualitative study examines the weekly reflective journaling responses of six Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) students who were also participants in one Historically Black College and University's (HBCU) Rural Teacher Residency Program (RTRP) throughout the duration of their residency experience. Findings center around the participants' positive experiences, areas of continued improvement, work–life balance, and Professional Development (PD), all of which highlight the participants' successes and stressors of their residency experience.

Literature Review

Teacher residency models provide participants with a true picture of what it is like to be a teacher while allowing them to be immersed in the communities of the schools in which they are placed (Garza & Harter, 2016). The National Education Association supports the use of teacher residency models, stating they are “committed to having all students receive access to excellent, profession-ready teachers and, toward that end, the NEA believes that every teacher should be trained in a teacher residency” (National Education Association Report, 2014, p. 4). Residency programs place educator preparation residents in a full-time, year-long classroom apprenticeship with a highly qualified mentor teacher in a high-need setting and is accompanied by master's level coursework. Teacher residents enter their programs as part of a cohort, and they have opportunities to engage and collaborate with their peers throughout their residency experience (NCTR, 2019). Key components of a teacher residency program are a targeted recruitment and selection process with rigorous standards, highly focused pre-service preparation of residents, and hiring and induction support (NCTR, 2019). The residency program examined in this study aligns with the beliefs of Garza and Harter (2016), NCTR (2019), and the National Education Association Report (2014).

Reflective journaling provides teacher residents with one reflection strategy to document their experiences throughout their year-long residency experience and process their strengths and areas for improvement. It is imperative that teachers be reflective so they can review their practice and adjust it as needed (Ryan, 2020). Journaling as a reflection tool is a learned skill and can be instilled in teachers as a viable practice during their pre-service preparation. Journaling as an educational strategy allows teachers to hone in on specific moments in time and deeply examine them to draw conclusions and adjust practice (Ryan, 2020). Graduate-level pre-service teachers can use the journaling process to dig deeper into the planned and unplanned occurrences in their teaching clinical experiences and reflect on them as they respond to guided reflection questions (Minott & Young, 2009). Reflective journaling provides the platform for the graduate level, pre-service teacher residents to explore who they are as teachers, their relationship with the school, classroom, and students, and draw connections between their coursework and teaching in an effort to fully understand themselves as teachers and the educational system as a whole (Barney & Mackinlay, 2010; Minott & Young, 2009). As they continue

to journal as a tool for reflection, the teacher residents' ability to reflect on their practice will improve and so will their self-efficacy and knowledge of teaching (Minott & Young, 2009; Ryan, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in John Dewey's Theory of Reflective Practice. Rodgers (2002) states that reflection is essential to teachers' learning, and to be effective, reflection must be clearly defined. Dewey (1938) states,

What [an individual] has learned in the way of knowledge and skills in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations that follow. The process goes on as long as life and learning continue. (p.44)

Dewey (1933) claims, "We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience" (p.78). Through the progression of the reflection process, one has an experience, takes the data from that experience to develop a theory, tests the theory, interprets the findings, and finally applies the new knowledge to an upcoming experience (Rodgers, 2002). Experience-based reflections and the eventual application of the knowledge gained from them may be contextually based, and similar experiences in different contexts may yield different results (Rodgers, 2002). The sum of those results requires one to be committed to continual reflection and growth over time (Rodgers, 2002). One must also construct meaning from the experience through reflection and see its connections to the past and future, giving value to one's experiences (Dewey, 1916/1944). As such, Rodgers (2002) has outlined four criteria that conceptualize reflection:

1. Reflection is a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understanding of its relationships with and connection to other experiences and ideas. It is a thread that makes continuity of learning possible and ensures the progress of the individual and, ultimately, society. It is a means to essentially moral ends.
2. Reflection is a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, with its roots in scientific inquiry.
3. Reflection needs to happen in the community and in interaction with others.
4. Reflection requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others. (p.845)

This framework provides the foundation for which participants in this study critically and systematically examine their teaching experiences as members of a collaborative residency model cohort where they refine their content and pedagogical knowledge to improve their practice.

Methodology

The research questions for this study are:

- What impact does reflective journaling have on the participants' year-long residency experience?
- What common themes surround the participants' residency experiences?
- Based on these themes, what strengths are noted?
- Based on these themes, what areas of continued growth are noted?

Background and Participants

This study took place during the 2021–2022 academic year at one HBCU. Six MAT students who were also members of the HBCU's RTRP and enrolled in their year-long residency experience were invited to participate. The RTRP aimed to recruit, prepare, and license college graduates, paraprofessionals, and career changers who aspired to teach high-need subject areas in high-need rural schools. The program included innovative programming that included incentives such as quality preparation, mentoring, focused induction services, and ongoing PD.

All six participants were female. Of the six teacher residents invited, all six participated. All six of the participants were elementary majors. One was Caucasian, and five were African American. Each held a bachelor's degree. The year-long residency experience, also called the clinical practice/student teaching experience at this HBCU, took place while the teacher residents were enrolled in the final two courses of their online MAT degree program, Clinical Practice I and Clinical Practice II. All participants were engaged in a full-time placement in a rural school setting alongside a master teacher for this experience, which aligned with their participation in the RTRP. In Clinical Practice I (August 2021–December 2021), all participants attended their assigned residency placement, Monday through Thursday, under the supervision of their master teacher. On Fridays, the participants convened at the university for Collaborative Fridays (needs-based PD sessions). In January 2022, the participants began Clinical Practice II and returned to their assigned residency placement to complete their traditional student teaching semester, where they engaged in a variety of teaching experiences under the supervision of their master teacher for 15 weeks for the entirety of the school day, Monday through Friday. As part of this experience, the teacher residents gradually assumed the full teaching load and taught the full educational day for seven weeks before gradually releasing the load back to the master teacher in the final weeks of the experience. Their residency experience ended in May 2022.

Data Collection and Analysis

As part of this study, the six participants were asked to complete weekly online reflective journals from September 1, 2021 to December 2, 2021 (Clinical Practice I) and January 10, 2022 to May 5, 2022 (Clinical Practice II). The open-ended journal entries were presented in a Qualtrics survey, and the participants were not required to answer each question in each journal entry. The five reflection questions are listed below:

1. What went well during your residency experience this week?
2. What can you improve upon based on your residency experiences this week?
3. Describe how you have maintained a work/life balance over the course of this week.
4. Describe any professional development opportunities at the university or your placement school during this week.
5. Describe a strategy learned from the professional development that you used in your residency experience this week. What went well, and what would you like to improve upon?

Four researchers contributed to this study. One researcher led the data collection process by preparing the weekly reflective journal links and reminding the participants to complete their entries. Once the participants completed all of their journal reflections, the lead researcher collected and de-identified the data; the team of four proceeded with the thematic data analysis.

The researchers employed several strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of this qualitative study. To ensure the credibility of the findings, they reviewed all data separately and, as a team, met and discussed any discrepancies; additionally, they engaged in prolonged fieldwork (10 months) to develop a deep understanding of the context and participants' perspectives (Ahmed, 2024). Transferability was addressed through the description of the research context, participants, and processes to allow readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other settings (Ahmed, 2024). Dependability was maintained throughout the research process as the researchers documented the decisions they made as well as their data collection methods and analysis procedures (Ahmed, 2024). Finally, the researchers acknowledged their backgrounds as a reflexivity practice (Ahmed, 2024).

Three researchers were African American, and one was Caucasian; all were female educators with advanced degrees. All researchers were instructors in the MAT program and/or connected to the residency program in which the participants were engaged, so all participants knew and interacted with the researchers regularly. With the researchers' background in education, it is likely that their knowledge of the field could influence the interpretation of data. To address this influence, researchers acknowledged any assumptions during the data analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and report themes found within the reflective journaling data set, a thematic analysis of the questionnaire data was conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Initially, the researchers reviewed each participant's responses and made notes of the relevant responses. The notes were then reviewed and grouped according to the identified relationship. Major themes were identified from these groupings, and the data were sorted. The themes were aligned to the purpose of the study and provided answers to the research questions.

Findings

Four major themes arose through the data analysis: positive experiences, areas of continued improvement, work/life balance, and PD. A general overview and frequency of these themes are highlighted in Table 1: *Major Themes from Reflective Journaling* below:

Table 1

Major Themes from Reflective Journaling

Theme	Frequency	Frequenc y	Frequen cy	Frequen cy	Freque ncy	Frequen cy
Positive Experiences	Getting to know students and staff (8)	Planning (7)	Learning New Teaching Strategies (8)	Working with Whole and Small Groups (7)	Leading Classroom Instruction (7)	Learning About Assessment (7)
Areas of Continued Improvement	Classroom/Behavior Management (10)	Pacing/Ti me Managem ent (10)	Lesson Planning & Preparation (4)	Working One-on-One with Students (2)	Using Kid Friendly Vocabulary (4)	Level of Comfort Leading Instruction (3)
Work/Life Balance	Time for/Treating Self (25)	Schedule d Down- Time (3)	Cutting Back on Hours (4)	Time Management (8)		
Professional Development	Collaborative Fridays (3)	School PD, PLCs and Team Planning (14)	University and Organization Level PD (7)	MTSS (8)	IReady (4)	

Additional information related to the analysis of the four major themes are as follows:

Positive Experiences

Throughout their residency experience, participants reflected positively about their time in their assigned schools. Getting to know their students and their routines was frequently listed as a positive experience. One participant noted:

The majority of my students have learned my name and see me as an equal to their teacher. Coming from a teacher assistant perspective, this is a huge difference in the connection you make with students. They often come to me for things such as help with an assignment, instructions, or even permission to do certain things. I am grateful it has been easy to get to know each of them individually.

Participating in planning opportunities was also positively received. One participant shared:

An important part of my week that went really well were the multiple meetings that took place after school in order to provide one of my students with interventions for the classroom throughout the school year. I got to hear his previous and current teachers analyze his behavioral and assessment data in a way that focuses on how we can make him successful academically, and it was overall a great learning experience.

One indicated:

This week, I have received a lot of support for my upcoming lesson plans. I was greatly overwhelmed and changed and altered my entire lesson plan, possibly four times. After a moment of distress, my mentor and other colleagues in the grade level were super supportive and shared some stories and advice.

Another noted, "During Professional Learning Communities (PLC), my mentor teacher thanked me and spoke highly of me to the principal and instructional coach. I felt appreciated."

Having the ability to lead whole and small group instruction was also received positively among the participants. One participant acknowledged that she was "able to develop a better relationship with my teacher. She has helped me a lot to better develop skills with my students and has offered opportunities to lead." Another added:

This week I think it was evident that my classroom management has been improving since beginning the program. I had a substitute teacher in the class, and I had to take the lead in some instances since I was used to our routine and could explain that to her.

Similarly, one shared:

I had a sub for three days and I was able to help the sub navigate and keep the children on task and sort of run the schedule of the day. The sub trusted me and my relationship that I have built with the students to be an effective leader.

Finally, one noted:

I was given the opportunity to lead a math game for my students, and I did a semi-good job. I overcame a fear of my students and trying to teach. I have a lot to improve but I did that well.

Continuing to learn about assessment was another positive experience for the participants. One participant shared:

My favorite part about my residency experience this week was re-assessing students with their kindergarten sight words. The first time I assessed them was the first week of school, and they have already learned a handful of new sight words in that short amount of time.

Another participant stated:

I've been assessing my students, and the instructional coach met with me and gave me a ton of positive feedback. He made me aware of my proximity and engagement with my students. I've noticed that I tend to ignore certain students (high-fliers) which is not fair to them. Each student deserves the same amount of time and care. Even if they are exceeding in the course, all students deserve your time and help.

Areas of Continued Improvement

Reflections indicated that the participants were aware of areas where they could continue to improve. Reflections surrounding classroom management, time management, and instruction were often similar, and there was not a clear separation between these areas. One participant noted that when it comes to classroom management, "often times my students can get loud and unfocused, and it is challenging to bring them back from that. In the coming weeks, I would like to continue trying different strategies that help them to refocus." Another shared:

My cooperating teacher gave me feedback. She said I need to find my consistent firm teacher voice. She said she heard it a couple of times while I regained control of the class. However, she said I need to use it at all times.

Similarly, as it relates to time management, a participant indicated:

I think that based on my experiences this week, I need to learn how to better manage my time and designate times to plan. I realize how difficult it can be to plan the delivery of interventions for those students who need them and also monitor their progress so having a strict schedule might help.

As it related to one-on-one instruction, one participant shared:

I can improve upon the amount of time I spend with individual students. I've also noticed that I'll spend more time with low-flier students than I would with high-fliers. That could be in whole groups and as I walk around and stop, I'll spend 2 minutes with 1 student, which is not a good thing. I should spend at most 20 seconds per student, and then encourage pairs to help one another.

When leading instruction, one participant mentioned the need "to improve on asking more focusing questions in lieu of funneling questions. I am still having moments where I want to tell them the answer rather than allow them to think through and problem solve." Another added the need to improve their tone and voice, indicating, "I need to slow down and allow more time for students to explain their thinking." Finally, one participant shared:

I can improve on my patience. I learned that when I am in a small group and the students begin to disrupt me, I tend to teach quicker. I think that is due to my anxiety and frustration; however, I have gotten a lot better; I take a deep breath and do not teach so fast because I know that is where I will lose them.

While it was described as a positive experience, planning was also listed as an area of continued improvement for the participants. One participant shared:

Based on my experiences this week, I think I can improve on keeping record of all of the different tools and resources that the teachers in my classroom have pulled during these first couple of weeks. A lot of the resources I could see myself using in my future classroom, so I should make sure to keep track of things that they are granting me access to.

Another participant stated:

I would like to improve on asking my lead teacher more questions. Sometimes I get into a mindset of I should wait to ask questions because my questions may be answered through observing, but I know that sometimes it is still good to know and through observing you can add to the answer that was explicitly stated.

One participant noted they were “working on zoning the entire classroom during independent work as well as asking students questions during independent work that will boost my engagement with them during independent work.” Finally, one participant indicated that they “need to learn how to improve on scheduling for progress monitoring students who need that additional assistance. It can become overwhelming, so a set schedule will help me stay on track with things like that.”

The use of appropriate vocabulary was also shared as an area of improvement. One participant said:

I’d want to improve in speaking to my children. I noticed that I need to practice my kid friendly talk when I am explaining and telling them directions. I noticed that they do not register what I am saying because I am not using the proper language.

Another shared, “I learned that words truly matter when teaching and that you should be intentional with the vocabulary you decide to use within a lesson. I was saying tens, twenties, ones when I should have been saying groups of ten.” Finally, one shared:

I can be more prepared with the specific words that I am going to use when we are doing word work. Unfortunately, I am not at the level where I can think of the proper words to use off the top of my head.

Work/Life Balance

While mentioned regularly in the areas of continued improvement, participants’ work/life balance was a continued struggle and warranted itself as a separate theme. Participants stated that they often felt overwhelmed, and they struggled to find time for themselves as they split their time between the residency experience, coursework, and

personal obligations. They found that planning scheduled downtime, cutting back hours at or quitting part-time jobs, and treating themselves were necessary.

One participant noted that they needed to designate time to each aspect of their life to meet their goals. Another shared they needed:

I go to bed around 9 pm/10 pm to ensure I get enough sleep for the next workday. In addition, I make sure to eat breakfast at least every morning, as well as pack 2 to 3 snacks for the day. With that, I pack a sustainable lunch and plenty of water. On the weekends, I try to do something to relax and re-center myself.

One participant stated they “created a mini schedule/ to-do list. At the top of the list, I have assignments that can be turned in quickly, and as I work down the list, I have assignments that may take longer.” An additional participant indicated:

I am still struggling, and it will get better; however, when I get home from work, I start homework and do not wait until Sunday or the weekend to begin my assignments. I like to get a head start [on assignments], and I try to do as much as possible [early] and do edits on Sunday.

Other participants mentioned using the weekends as their designated time to work on their assignments. Another added, “I have committed [myself] to completing something from my coursework for at least two hours. Afterward, I tend to address family, life, or personal tasks.” Similarly, one participant said, “During downtime at school, I read one of the chapters that are assigned. I also begin homework weeks in advance, so I won't stress getting it done.”

Professional Development

Throughout the RTRP, participants engaged in monthly PD, which included sessions titled “Classroom Leadership” and “Academic Rigor.” There were also monthly collaborative Friday sessions provided by the university. In addition to the university-provided PD, participants indicated that they participated in many PD sessions in their schools related to MTSS, PLCs/team planning, literacy, using graphic organizers, IReady, and questioning. While they were asked to describe specific strategies they used from these experiences, they often described what strategies they would use in the future versus what they tried in their residency placements.

As part of the Classroom Leadership PD session, one participant found that in order to build relationships, it was imperative to give gifts without strings, and shared, “I have made sure to greet all of my students properly in the morning and ask about their personal lives; I think that that has made their days a little better.”

After attending the Academic Rigor PD session, one participant reflected on the importance of using Bloom’s Taxonomy to create objectives and learning outcomes when planning. She also shared that “I would also like to try a form of nonlinguistic representation as a form of assessment.” Another participant stated that prior to the session, they were confused, and “the meeting was very helpful and explained [Bloom’s

Taxonomy] a lot better for me . . . I did not understand the term non-linguistic, so after the meeting, [the presenter] explained it.” One participant shared that they utilized non-linguistic representation with their class after the PD session; they noted:

For some of the questions on the student assist survey, I had my students draw their answers. By doing so, it helped me to understand which students understood the question and which did not. After they drew their responses, we talked about what they drew, and they typed their answer to the questions into the Google form. That portion of the assessment went well. To improve, I would like to work on classroom management during these fun discussions.

The participants also reflected on their takeaways from a PD session related to differentiation. One participant stated that prior to the session:

I truly did not know what it meant to differentiate; I always thought it was assigning additional tasks for students, but after this session, it is a lot more complex than that. It is forming tasks where students are demonstrating their knowledge based on various levels of taxonomy.

Another participant shared a strategy that they used after the session called "Most Difficult First" in which the students chose to work the five most difficult problems on their problem set first. "If they miss more than one, then they have to complete the entire problem set; however, if they miss zero, they do not have to complete the problem set."

The participants found the collaborative Friday sessions to be helpful as well. One indicated, "We analyzed the importance of addressing students' conceptual, procedural, and mathematical reasoning skills for each concept in order to ensure mastery of that concept." Another shared that during these sessions, the instructional coach explained:

Funnel vs. focus questions have been super helpful when teaching small groups. Prior to the meeting, I didn't think I had ever asked my students focus questions. I wouldn't know if I was teaching correctly and if my teaching was effective for my students. After the meeting on Friday, my small groups have been a lot better. I have been better at allowing my students to answer their own questions and allowing them to guide instruction. I have allowed my students to help one another opposed to me answering the questions. Like [the instructional coach] told me 'If a student can explain it, do not explain.'

Similarly, an additional participant shared, "I learned how important it is to ask the right questions to get students to solve their own problems. As time consuming as it may seem, it's worth it in the end."

Another collaborative Friday session focused on growth vs. fixed mindset. One participant shared that they "discussed the differences between having a growth vs. fixed mindset not only within the classroom but also in regular life. . . . Instead of having a fixed mindset about learning as I observe, I can change that to a growth mindset." Another participant noted, "I need to be careful what I say to my students because a simple

compliment or praise can result in a child having a fixed mindset . . . We learned about negative labels and the damages they can cause.”

Discussion

Researchers in this study sought to determine the impact reflective journaling had on the teacher residents' year-long residency experience in a rural setting. While this question was not directly answered by the participants, their journaling provided insight into their residency experience through their documented journal entries. Often, through their reflections, the participants shared thoughts and feelings about their residency experience and RTRP support structures that were not shared verbally when they were meeting with their instructors, mentor teachers, or peer group. Four major themes arose from their reflective journal responses: positive experiences, areas of continued improvement, work/life balance, and PD. The strengths of their experiences were noted in the positive experiences and PD themes. Themes in the areas of continued growth and work/life balance were highlighted as areas for improvement.

The reflective journaling process was systematic for the participants as they responded weekly to a series of questions related to various aspects of their participation in the RTRP, and it caused them to have a positive attitude regarding their growth and preparation as educators (Minott & Young, 2009; Rogers, 2002). Examples of the participants' positive attitudes about their growth and preparation as educators can be seen in their responses related to their PD opportunities. Per their journal responses, the participants received the information shared in the PD sessions, and they were able to implement strategies that enhanced their ability to connect with students, plan lessons, and differentiate instruction. Additionally, their participation in the Collaborative Friday sessions supported their growth in content knowledge, questioning skills, and mindset.

The findings of this study aligned with Dewey (1916/1944), Rodgers (2002), and Ryan (2020) as the participants' reflective journaling experiences allowed them to construct meaning from their residency experience and grow as educators. The participants' growth as educators is evident in their journal entries when they describe the experiences they had throughout the year-long residency experience. For example, the participants described the support they received from their assigned clinical educator and other teachers in their school. The participants spoke of how their participation in PLCs impacted their planning. They reflected upon their opportunities to participate in instruction and the feedback they received from their clinical educators, coaches, etc., regarding what they did well and how they could continue to improve, especially related to classroom and time management, planning, questioning, and vocabulary use.

Guha et al.'s (2016) work proposes the importance of the teacher residency model's alignment of and simultaneous progression through coursework and the year-long clinical practice experience. While this model does allow the teacher residents to effectively reach their goal of becoming educators, the participants' journal entries

indicated that work-life balance was a continued struggle for them as they navigated how to effectively participate in the year-long residency experience, complete required coursework, and attend to personal obligations.

Recommendations

Moving forward, several recommendations for supporting teacher preparation candidates in becoming reflective practitioners, especially those in residency programs, can be made. Educator Preparation Programs (EPP) should seek teacher candidates' input on the impact reflective journaling had on their practice. It is important for all teacher candidates to see the value of reflection and not view it as just another assignment they have to complete for a grade. Moving forward, it will be imperative to ask teacher candidates what impact they felt reflective journaling had on their year-long clinical/residency experience.

It is important for EPPs to build community among teacher candidates by having them share their reflections. Embedding a "think-pair-share" activity as a component of reflective journaling can be an effective practice in which the teacher candidates work independently to "think" about the experiences they encountered throughout the week. They can then "pair" with a peer for an in-depth discussion regarding the strengths and challenges faced. Finally, they can "share" a strength and/or challenge with the whole group to foster continued dialogue and peer support.

EPPs can adopt/develop a reflective model for use throughout the duration of the teacher candidates' program of study. Reflection is a learned process. Teacher candidates, whether they enter the profession through traditional or alternative routes, should systematically practice reflecting on their experiences using a consistent model throughout their preparation programs. This practice will provide them with opportunities to develop as teachers and understand how their coursework and teaching experiences align as they continue to grow as teachers.

Teacher candidates' reflections should be utilized for program improvement. By examining and evaluating teacher candidates' reflections, educator preparation programs can understand the school and non-school-related influences that impact their matriculation through the educator preparation programs. Through these findings, educator preparation programs can justify changes to curriculum based on needs that arise in the reflections regarding coursework and field experiences. They can also plan to support non-school-related issues that may arise, such as personal, financial, and mental health issues.

Conclusion

This qualitative study captured six teacher residents' engagement in reflective journaling during their year-long residency experience in rural schools. Throughout their participation in this study, participants were able to reflect on a series of aspects of their

participation in the RTRP, and the findings showed that the participants had a positive attitude in their path to becoming an educator, even though they faced some challenges along the way (Minott & Young, 2009).

The themes extracted from the participants' reflective journal responses related to the participants' positive experiences, areas of continued improvement, work-life balance, and PD. These themes highlight a need for teacher residencies to support their teacher residents' engagement in the reflection process throughout their residency experience as a tool for the teacher residents to be cognizant of their strengths and areas of continued improvement and use that knowledge as they grow and develop as educators (Dewey, 1916/1944; Dewey, 1933; Dewey, 1938; Rodgers, 2002; Ryan, 2020).

By participating in this study, it is expected that the participants' self efficacy and teaching skills improved and will continue to develop as they begin their teaching careers. It is hoped that the reflective journaling process will become innate for the teacher residency participants, and they will continue this process as they transition into their role as classroom teachers. This work will also encourage conversations among the partner school districts and the educator preparation program surrounding sustainable teacher residency model practices.

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