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Editorial: Educator Residencies in Rural Spaces Across the United States

Kristen Cuthrell, *Professor and Chair, Clemson University, Dean's Fellow in Rural Education and Outreach*

The publication of *Theory & Practice in Rural Education* enters its sixth year, marking a significant achievement. The editorial leadership feels privileged to collaborate with authors, reviewers, and readers to fulfill the journal's mission of publishing high-quality articles that address theoretical, empirical, and practical issues in rural education.

As Reagan et al. share (2024), for almost 70 years, advocates of rural education have called for specialized preparation of teachers for rural schools (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Yarrow et al., 1999). While each rural community is distinctly unique, rural schools tend to face similar opportunities. The breadth of manuscripts in this issue offers a collection of work reflecting how educator residencies across the United States in our rural schools and communities partner with university-based teacher preparation programs. This issue explores the development and study of rural residencies built upon asset-based windows into the lived reality of people in rural places by privileging their knowledge, focusing on their empowerment, and disavowing deficit-oriented narratives of rurality. These manuscripts explore the co-design and, in some cases, return on investment of rural-focused residencies. Residencies partnering with institutions inclusive of Hispanic-serving institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Predominately White Institutions, along with unique school partners, share stories and findings of impact, strategy, and discourse. From Texas to North Carolina to New Hampshire to Kansas, these experiences capture the multivocal complexities of rural empowerment, rural educational justice, the power of place, and the promise of partnership with international teachers. The authors present qualitative and descriptive studies focused on these areas.

TPRE is supported by ECU Library Services and the Rural Education Institute. All manuscripts undergo a double-blind review process coordinated by the staff, including the Journal's Executive Editor, Journal Manager, Assistant Editors, Associate Editors, and Reviewers.

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Looking ahead, the journal is currently accepting manuscripts for the next general issue, which is scheduled for publication in the spring as per tradition. Additionally, a guest-edited special issues topic on community schools is being prepared for fall 2025. Scholars and practitioners in the field of rural education are invited to submit their work to the Research Forum, the Practice Forum, the Digital Projects Forum, or the Book Reviews Forum for 2025 issues. Manuscripts for general issues are typically due in the fall, with expected publication dates in May. Special issues topic manuscripts are typically due in late winter, with publication expected in the fall. Our Fall 2026 special issues topic is yet to be determined.

Those interested in participating as peer reviewers can register on the journal's website (http://tpre.ecu.edu). By editing their profile and navigating to the "Roles" tab, individuals can select "Reviewer" and specify their interests related to rural education. The journal is also seeking an Executive Editor to oversee the review, editing, and publishing process. The Executive Editor will serve as a leader and collaborative member of the TPRE team, with primary responsibilities including the initial manuscript review, providing authors with feedback in collaboration with section editors, and conducting the final proofreading. Letters of interest should be addressed to Robbie Quinn, Executive Editor, and Jenn Williams, the Managing Editor, at tpre@ecu.edu

About the Author

Kristen Cuthrell, EdD, is a Professor and Chair at Clemson University in the Department of Education and Human Development. She serves as a Dean’s Fellow in Rural Education and Outreach. Previously, she was at East Carolina University in the

Department of Elementary Education and Middle Grades Education and served as Director of the Rural Education Institute. Her research interests include rural educator preparation, innovation through rural research-practice partnership, and community engagement in rural spaces.

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Building a High-Quality Rural Teacher Pipeline Through a Partnership-Based Residency and Induction Model

Erika Mein, *University of Texas at El Paso*
Patricia Ocaña, *University of Texas at El Paso*
Michele Blaine Gonzales, *Fabens ISD (Retired)*

One of the most pressing issues facing rural school districts is the shortage of teachers, tied in part to higher levels of turnover as compared to urban and suburban districts (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). A key strategy for addressing nationwide teacher workforce needs, including rural teacher workforce needs, is teacher residencies. This article presents the case of a sustainably funded residency program co-designed as part of a partnership between a university-based teacher preparation program based at the University of Texas at El Paso and a rural school district, Fabens ISD. The university is a large, public Hispanic-serving institution with a student population that is more than 80% Hispanic/Latinx, more than 70% Pell-eligible, and approximately 50% first-generation college-going. The rural school district partner comprises nearly 2,000 PK-12 students, more than 95% Hispanic/Latinx and 92% economically disadvantaged. In the paper, we present the key design features of this residency model, with a particular focus on asset-based recruitment strategies, faculty coaching support in the district, and district-based innovations aimed at sustaining paid pathways for residents across undergraduate and graduate levels. We also situate our partnership-based residency and induction efforts within larger region-wide collective impact efforts focused on strengthening and diversifying the teacher pipeline. Finally, we present emerging findings on the impact of residency on teacher candidates and the district employment outlook. This multivocal piece represents a burgeoning research-practice partnership (Coburn & Penuel, 2016), and we, as co-authors, present our findings from the perspectives of the university preparation program, on-the-ground faculty support, and school district leadership.

***Keywords*: rural teacher pipeline, Hispanic, residency, partnership, innovative staffing**

One of the most pressing issues facing rural school districts is the shortage of teachers, tied in part to higher levels of turnover as compared to urban and suburban districts (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). The driving forces behind rural teacher shortages

include geographical isolation, resource constraints, and workload pressures tied to the small size of districts (Oyen & Schweinle, 2020; Tran & Smith, 2019). It is widely acknowledged that the staffing challenges resulting from persistent teacher shortages can negatively impact the educational outcomes of K-12 students (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Ronfeldt et al., 2013), and these negative impacts are compounded in areas characterized by high numbers of economically marginalized students of color (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; García & Weiss, 2019; Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

One strategy for addressing nationwide teacher workforce needs is teacher residencies. Often co-designed between teacher preparation programs and school districts, teacher residencies involve candidates being immersed for an entire year in the classroom alongside a carefully selected and trained mentor teacher, with intensive coaching and support from the program provider as well as integrated pre-service coursework (Guha et al., 2016). The close partnership between the preparation program and the school district is a key defining feature of residencies. While teacher residencies initially started in the alternative certification space more than two decades ago, they have gained prominence across all levels, including undergraduate teacher education, in recent years. Residencies, according to the Pathways Alliance (2022), can include undergraduate, graduate, or certificate-only level routes and are "locally designed to meet the needs of the schools and communities they serve, including in rural, urban, and suburban areas" (p. 1).

While there is a growing research base documenting the impacts of teacher residencies in urban areas, less is known about partnership-based residencies in rural areas. This article, in conjunction with the other articles that comprise this special issue, seeks to address this gap by highlighting a residency partnership between a university-based teacher preparation program and a rural school district located 25 miles outside the urban area where the university is based. The university – a public, research-intensive Hispanic Serving Institution located in far west Texas on the US-Mexico border – includes a student population that is more than 80% Hispanic/Latinx, more than 70% Pell-eligible, and approximately 50% first-generation college-going. The residency

partner, which has been designated a rural district by the state education agency, is made up of nearly 2,000 PK-12 students, more than 95% of whom are Hispanic/Latinx and 92% of whom are categorized as economically disadvantaged. The unincorporated town where the district is based, which is in a predominantly agricultural area, includes a population of just over 5,000 inhabitants with a per capita income of $17,747 – half the per capita income of the state of Texas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022), with a town poverty rate of 48.8% (Stebbins & Sauter, 2018). In this way, the site contains some common aspects of rurality in the U.S., including a relatively close distance from an urban center, a small population, and an agriculturally based economy. The site is also unique in its proximity to the US-Mexico border and its very high poverty rate.

In this paper, we present the key design features of this residency model, with a particular focus on asset-based recruitment strategies, coaching support in the district, and district-based innovations aimed at sustaining paid pathways for residents across undergraduate and graduate levels. We also situate our partnership-based residency and induction efforts within larger region-wide collective impact efforts focused on strengthening and diversifying the teacher pipeline. Finally, we present emerging findings on the impact of residency on teacher candidates and the district employment outlook. This multivocal piece represents a burgeoning residency-focused research-practice partnership (Coburn & Penuel, 2016), and we, as co-authors, outline our findings from the perspectives of the university preparation program, on-the-ground faculty support, and school district leadership.

Strengthening the Rural Teacher Pipeline through Access to High-Quality, Paid Residencies

Given the presence of teacher residencies for over two decades – particularly in urban settings (Berry et al., 2008; Zeichner & Bier, 2012) – and their proliferation over the last decade, a consensus has emerged on the key elements that comprise high-quality residency models. These elements include strong university-district partnerships, coursework integrated with clinical practice, selection of master mentor teachers who co-teach with residents for an entire year, and placements of resident cohorts in schools selected for their modeling of effective practices with diverse learners (Guha et al., 2016).

It has been shown that intentionally designed teacher residencies lead to greater racial/ethnic diversity in the teacher workforce and increased retention rates among residency-prepared new teachers in high-needs schools (Silva et al., 2014; Silva et al., 2015; Carver-Thomas, 2018).

While year-long, clinically intensive teacher residencies have emerged as one key mechanism to address issues of recruitment, retention, and workforce diversity (Guha et al., 2017; Carver-Thomas, 2018), these high-quality pathways can remain out of reach for teacher candidates, particularly those from low-income and first-generation backgrounds. For many candidates, the economic hardship caused by foregoing income for an extended period represents a significant barrier to entering a high-quality residency pathway. In this way, *access* and *affordability* have become front and center of the residency debate (Dennis et al., 2021; Yun & DeMoss, 2020). These issues are particularly relevant to teacher preparation programs that seek to serve – at scale – predominantly undergraduate students from minoritized backgrounds.

Teacher preparation programs have made headway on questions of access and affordability by co-designing with district partners sustainably funded paid residency pathways for candidates. Much of the research and policy literature on sustainable residencies identify three mechanisms of funding, known as the "3 Rs": reallocation, reduction, and reinvestment (Bland et al., 2023; Dennis & DeMoss, 2021; Yun & DeMoss, 2020). In Texas, where this partnership is based, the state education agency channeled federal pandemic funding into supporting paid teacher residencies by providing a three-year runway for districts to identify sustainable funding sources based on these tenets. With support from a national teacher preparation technical assistance provider, US PREP, and local educational service centers, school districts across the state worked to pinpoint critical staffing roles that residents could take on as part of their paid residency, thereby serving to relieve staffing burdens on campuses while also receiving often much-needed financial assistance to complete the residency. This approach, known as "strategic staffing," included compensated roles such as substitute teaching, tutoring, vacancy pair teaching, and paraprofessionals (US PREP, 2024).

This article presents the case of a sustainably funded residency program co-designed as part of a partnership between a university-based teacher preparation program based at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) and a rural school district, Fabens ISD (FISD). Narrated from the vantage points of university-based program leadership (author #1), on-the-ground clinical faculty Site Coordinator (author #2), and district leadership (author #3), the article provides background on the district and partnership. Specifically, it outlines the targeted recruitment strategies employed to attract University teacher candidates, who are predominantly Hispanic, to the district, as well as the on-the-ground efforts to provide ongoing coaching and support to teacher candidates and new teachers. We also highlight the innovative staffing models utilized by the district to fund undergraduate and graduate residents sustainably. The article wraps up by situating this university-district partnership within larger, cross-sector efforts to strengthen the teacher pipeline across rural, suburban, and urban areas across the El Paso region of far west Texas.

Program Overview: UTEP-Fabens Partnership

The rural partnership-based residency at the center of this article is part of the fully scaled, year-long Miner Teacher Residency program at UTEP. The program's overarching goal is to prepare the highest-quality teachers who are day-one ready to meet the needs of diverse students and provide rigorous, high-quality learning experiences to all students. Since its launch in 2019, the Miner Teacher Residency has prepared more than 400 teachers, with an average of 125-150 teacher graduates per year during the last three years. With funding from the Teacher Quality Partnership program at the U.S. Department of Education and local philanthropic support, the university also provides induction support to first- and second-year teachers who are resident graduates.

The residency program is a requirement for all undergraduate education majors (elementary, elementary bilingual, middle grades, and special education certification areas) and an option for post-baccalaureate alternative certification-seeking candidates. It is (so far) a paid experience for all teacher candidates at all levels. Residents spend four days/week co-teaching alongside a master mentor teacher who is carefully selected by the partnership and participates in more than 15 hours of professional development

from the university throughout the residency year. In addition, residents participate in a weekly seminar with their Site Coordinator, a university clinical faculty member who conducts 7-8 walkthroughs and four individualized observation cycles throughout the residency year. In addition to the coaching and support provided to residents by their mentor teacher and Site Coordinator, the Miner Teacher Residency model includes quarterly shared governance meetings with district partners, where university and district/campus leaders share data and make joint decisions about the program. In this section, we provide background on the LEA partner from the perspective of district leadership and describe the origins of the partnership from the perspective of the district-based university Site Coordinator.

Background on Fabens ISD

Fabens ISD is located along the southern US-Mexico border in a community that is one of the poorest in the state. The district meets the criteria set by the state agency for classification as a rural district. It is also an unincorporated town, reliant on the county for services. FISD is the largest employer and only source for libraries and local government in the form of an elected school board. The area's low incomes are reflected in its property values. The typical home in the community is worth just $61,600, less than half the median home value in the state ($142,700) and about a third of the national median home value of $184,700. Low property values mean the district collects less funding from those valuations. According to the state education agency, the district collects less than $3 million in property taxes, which accounts for only 10 percent of all district expenditures. Also, our cash reserves in the district are depleted, so we have to be extremely intentional in how we spend our financial resources.

Additionally, over 92% of our students are identified as economically disadvantaged, and 48% are identified as emergent bilingual. Due to poverty issues and a lack of community centers and opportunities for enrichment, many of our students do not engage in the same stimulating activities that their more financially stable peers engage in. Furthermore, due to close proximity to the border, we have students with dual citizenship who are separated from their nuclear family for weeks while in school, face

challenges in their English-speaking and academic skills, and lack similar background knowledge as their peers.

Despite these obstacles, FISD does not make excuses for our students. Instead, the district works to fill the void, build their schemas, and form their crystallized intelligence. The students may be poor in income but rich in potential and heart. The 2019 state accountability rating was 88 out of 100, and the district competes with and often outperforms other schools across the state with similar demographics. None of the campuses were identified as Requiring Improvement or Targeted Support, based on 2019 Federal Accountability metrics. The summative measure of success is the Career, College, and Military Readiness (CCMR) outcomes. In this measure, the Fabens ISD rate exceeds the regional and state rate by 20%.

With just under 2,000 students, FISD provides robust academic programs and college and career readiness programs, including an Early College High School, STEM Engineering pathway, and P-TECH (Pathways in Technology Early College High School) and Early College school within a school. The need for dual credit credentialed teachers was met with a “District of Innovation” designation from the state agency. This designation allowed the district to hire non-state-certified teachers for hard-to-fill positions. While this helped combat the teacher shortage, this plan could not be used for Special Education and Bilingual teachers, two certification areas in great need. The teacher turnover rate post-COVID has risen to 24%. “Grow your Own " initiatives in FISD were crucial to meeting the district's staffing needs and providing equitable access to quality instruction for all students. Returning from the pandemic, FISD experienced an even more severe teacher shortage. Vacancies in Special Education and Bilingual Education received no applicants. Recruiting from alternative certification programs, Bilingual exception waivers, and increased caseloads for its current SPED teachers, in addition to the expanded role of paraprofessionals, provided some short-term solutions. A nascent but growing partnership with the local university paved the way for longer-term solutions.

Origins of the UTEP-Fabens Partnership

Teaching can be an isolated experience, especially for new teachers. This became even more evident as novice teachers started the 2020-2021 school year in what soon became a new way of teaching and interacting through a virtual platform. In August 2020, amid a global pandemic, the common image of students filling up hallways on the first day of school seemed to be a thing of the past. Instead, new teachers started their careers in a less-than-ideal setting for any educator, more so for a novice teacher. Meeting their students for the first time through a computer screen and having their home spaces transformed into "classrooms" became the new norm. For new teachers, the challenges multiplied as they tried to manage remote teaching, navigate a new curriculum, and use new educational platforms. Despite facing challenges beyond what had been experienced by any educational organization, FISD prioritized its mission to create a support system to ensure their novice teachers' retention and consequently impact student learning.

For FISD, the teacher shortage was a challenge even before the pandemic, which led the district to find innovative ways to recruit and retain highly qualified educators. As part of their efforts to counteract the already prevalent teacher shortage, and with support from the local community foundation, FISD partnered with UTEP to provide instructional coaching initiatives that supported new teachers and their classroom mentors. Through this partnership, the Miner Teacher Mentorship Program was born in 2020 to provide meaningful support systems for new teachers and cultivate an optimal learning environment for their students in this small rural community, who predominantly lack the same opportunities and resources as their urban counterparts. As part of this model, a university induction Site Coordinator (author #2) worked alongside district leaders to build capacity in new teacher mentors and to help build infrastructure to support new teachers. While early program efforts focused on mentoring support for all new teachers in the district, more recent grant-funded efforts focus on providing two years of aligned induction support to resident graduates employed by the district.

Key Elements of Co-Designed Paid Residency

Anchored in early partnership efforts focused on new teacher mentorship, the UTEP-Fabens collaboration expanded in 2022 with the opportunity to access state

funding to support paid residencies. One stipulation of the state-level grant was that the district and Educator Preparation Program would develop a plan to support the residency once state funding ended – efforts that the university had already engaged in with other district partners as part of our paid residency pilot. With the foundation of partnership in place through the mentorship program, university program leadership worked closely with district leadership to design the year-long residency starting in early 2022, with planned implementation for fall 2022. From February to June, we met monthly to discuss key design aspects, including district workforce needs, resident recruitment, mentor teacher selection, and parameters for compensated resident roles.

The signature elements of the UTEP-Fabens residency were part of the university's teacher residency model, which was initially based on technical assistance from US PREP and was incrementally scaled after the initial pilot in 2019-2020. These elements included: immersion of teacher candidates in classrooms co-teaching alongside master mentor teachers four days/week for an entire year; careful selection and training of mentor teachers; coaching of teacher candidates by a university field-based clinical faculty Site Coordinator, who conducts 7-8 walkthroughs and four formal observations with video-based coaching throughout the year; a weekly residency seminar; and shared governance between the university and school district, where program data are reviewed together and decisions about residency and teacher preparation are made jointly.

In 2022-2023, the residency included the placement of seven elementary, elementary bilingual, and special education candidates in FISD, while in 2023-2024, there were five candidates representing the same certification areas. All candidates across both years were female and Hispanic/Latina. Residents were paid a $20,000 stipend based on grant funding allocations from the state, while mentor teachers – many of whom were recognized as high-performing teachers under the state's incentive program – earned a $2,500 stipend from the same funding source. For 2024-2025, the district engaged in internal budgetary re-allocations and assumed budgetary responsibility for eight residents and mentor teachers using a strategic staffing approach; the district provided resident stipends in the amount of $14,000 – which was aligned with neighboring districts and was decided as part of a region-wide governance structure.

While the UTEP-Fabens residency partnership included the key elements that characterize the university's residency model at scale with districts across the region, the partnership also included some distinctive features that reflected the uniqueness of this rural context. One was the intentional focus on recruitment of teacher candidates to the district; another was the Site Coordinator role and relationships built over time in the district; and the third was the innovative staffing model implemented by the district in order to be able to provide stipends to residents.

Intentional Recruitment of Teacher Candidates for Rural Placement

One key struggle faced by FISD before the launch of the year-long residency was recruiting teacher candidates who sought to be placed in the district for their semester-long student teaching experience. Without these placements, the district relied heavily on alternative certification candidates to fill teacher vacancies. Through the university-district shared governance structure and within a larger, region-wide Teacher Pipeline Community of Practice, the need became apparent for intentional recruitment efforts focused on the unique strengths of FISD as a rural district to build a district-specific rural teacher pipeline.

The basis for these recruitment efforts was the co-designed Miner Teacher Residency model, where teacher candidates would have access to high-quality preparation in the district. Given the already-established Miner Teacher Mentorship Program, residents hired in the district would also have access to two years of induction support following the residency. With these program pathways in place, we set out to recruit university teacher candidates to select FISD as their preferred residency placement district.

From the university side, one key strategy was the implementation of a District Information Fair for prospective residents. The idea for the District Information Fair originated in part from program leadership looking at data on the districts selected by teacher candidates for their student teaching and residency placements; we found that students tended to select based on geography and legacy, and these criteria favored the three large urban districts surrounding the university. We also heard from our rural district

partners about their challenges with promotion and their desire to spotlight their strengths with incoming teacher candidates.

To provide voice and space for rural districts in the candidates' preference selection process, we implemented the District Information Fair, where each school district had equal access to candidates in one setting and could share information on a one-on-one and small-group basis with candidates. The event, which takes place on the university campus prior to the deadline for teacher candidates to submit their residency application, provides prospective residents with the opportunity to meet with representatives from each of the university's seven district partners in the region to learn more about the residency and new teacher experience in each district. Representatives from rural districts such as FISD can share the benefits of working in a rural district, including (but not limited to) the small size, close-knit community, and high levels of support for teachers.

Another important strategy implemented by UTEP and FISD, with support from philanthropic partners and the state education agency, was the recruitment of current paraprofessionals in the district to complete certification with UTEP. This "Grow Your Own" (GYO) approach mirrored that of other districts and teacher preparation programs across the country (see Gist et al., 2019). In order to attract GYO candidates, UTEP staff worked with FISD to conduct campus-based and virtual information sessions to provide information about teacher preparation program pathways. Philanthropic partners, including the Brown Foundation and the El Paso Community Foundation, also provided tuition support for FISD paraprofessionals to complete coursework for certification.

The final key strategy for teacher candidate recruitment was the culture built around the residency in FISD. From the outset, teacher residents were treated like teachers on their respective campuses and were warmly welcomed into the community. The district supported residents at every level, from matching them with top teachers to providing technology support and access to materials from the beginning of the residency. The culture of support constructed around the residency from district leadership to campus leadership to classrooms was a highly effective recruitment strategy, as word

started to spread among teacher candidates about the value and benefits of being placed in FISD.

Between years one and three of residency recruitment, the number of university teacher candidates who selected Fabens as their top preferred district more than doubled. At the start of the residency partnership (fall 2022), three teacher candidates selected FISD as their preferred district, with three more selecting it for the spring 2023 start. In our third year of the partnership (fall 2024), eight teacher candidates chose FISD as their preferred district.

University Site Coordinator Based in the District

In the university's preparation program, the clinical faculty Site Coordinators (SC) play a crucial role that is fundamental to the program's success. They serve as key players in coordinating the collaboration, communication, and coordination of collaborative spaces between community partners, students, college of education faculty, and district and campus administrators. Additionally, the Site Coordinator provides residents with a differentiated coaching and mentorship approach to support and guide them through their educational pathway. Grounding their practices in ongoing data collection/analysis, Site Coordinators continuously refine their coaching to enhance student outcomes and ensure they meet their residents' needs. Moreover, in recognition of our region's diversity, Site Coordinators advocate for practices that promote equity and inclusion of all students.

The role of the Site Coordinator in Fabens ISD is not just unique; it is transformative. As part of its mission to prepare and retain educators, the district has embraced the university educational pipeline, welcoming teacher candidates to complete a year-long residency under the guidance of exceptional mentor teachers at their different campuses. This approach provides a multilevel system of support for aspiring teachers who choose FISD as the place to complete their residency. The transformative aspect lies in the opportunity for the same Site Coordinator to accompany the teacher candidate through their residency and induction programs. Solid relationships have been cultivated between the Site Coordinator, teacher residents, and teacher mentors, leading to positive outcomes. The impact of such relationships is evident when teacher residents seek the

Site Coordinator's feedback, coaching, and advice beyond the required program observations, a clear sign of their confidence and trust in the program and the Site Coordinator.

Site Coordinators not only support residents in developing reflective practice and creating specific goals driven by their self-assessment but also play a crucial role in creating a supportive environment. They lead a weekly seminar reinforcing interactions and fostering a safe space where residents can freely express themselves. It is through these meaningful interactions that special bonds are formed, enhancing the overall learning experience. Furthermore, the Site Coordinator has gained access to all campuses and has established rapport with district and campus personnel, facilitating formal and informal communication, including data sharing, progress made between observation cycles, and discussing campus needs, as well as highlighting milestones achieved in the residents' educational journey.

In essence, the Site Coordinators' commitment and guidance greatly contribute to the pathway's success; more importantly, they support the creation of transformative educational spaces that empower and leave an enduring impact on the students being served through the partnership.

Innovative Staffing Model to Meet District Needs

In 2022, grant funding for teacher residencies, with support from the state education agency and the university, allowed Fabens expert teachers to mentor student residents from the university for a year-long paid residency. The Miner Teacher Residency replaced traditional student teaching by providing student teachers with a full year of paid teaching experience instead of a traditional one-semester student teaching experience. The residency brought well-prepared university students to the district, where they would train to fill future vacancies.

While taking advantage of this funding, FISD also selected a sustainable funding model to fund the program past the grant period through the Vacancy Pair Teaching and Paraprofessional Vacancy models (US PREP, 2024). Mentors participate in co-teaching training provided by the university and work with teacher candidates through an array of co-teaching models that support residents as they progress toward independence in their

teaching. With this residency model, prospective teachers receive practical, hands-on classroom experience, preparing them for a more successful launch to their career as educators at FISD.

At FISD, teacher leaders serve as mentors to grow teachers and build support systems to ensure all students receive quality instruction while supporting teacher retention. Starting with a year-long residency, UTEP-prepared teachers in Fabens receive an additional two years of induction support, followed by opportunities to serve as mentors themselves and earn additional pay through the state's Teacher Incentive Allotment program. All of these opportunities - designed to honor effective, experienced teachers - provide a pathway that both attracts and keeps quality teachers in the district's classrooms.

Applying for grants and building partnerships has allowed FISD to combine resources for maximum impact to meet short-term and long-term teacher vacancies and better equip those teachers for sustained, successful, and rewarding careers serving the students who need highly qualified and dedicated teachers most.

Early Indications of Impact

The first two cohorts of resident graduates from FISD self-reported high levels of preparedness in different domains of teaching on the university's exit survey, taken at the time of graduation just weeks before the end of the residency. Of the five residents who completed the survey, 100% reported feeling well-prepared or very well-prepared in planning, instruction, learning environment, and professionalism. The same percentage reported feeling supported by their mentor teacher. When asked open-ended questions about what was most valuable about their residency experience, one highlighted that her mentor teacher was "incredible." Another identified "support" as being most valuable. A third resident mentioned "being able to see the real day to day of a teacher" as their highlight, while a fourth resident – a Grow Your Own candidate - spotlighted "getting to learn from a mentor teacher that I had the privilege of seeing as a little girl."

After successfully pairing residents with highly effective mentor teachers, FISD offered jobs to all residents after year one. All but one stayed with the district and filled critical vacancies the following school year as a new round of residents was welcomed

aboard. One resident who became certified in Special Education spent her residency paired with a master teacher who was given the caseload of two teachers due to the teacher shortage. The resident was able to work and learn alongside her mentor while serving the students through the co-teaching models, reducing the teacher-student ratio, and then filled that same vacancy the following year, where she now works with her former mentor as her colleague.

The mid-year influx of additional residents in spring 2023 was strategically placed in classrooms surpassing the class size limits allowed by the state. Hired the following year, FISD was able to fill all vacancies and reduce class sizes, ultimately impacting student outcomes. Going into staffing projections for the upcoming school year, FISD is projected to have a surplus of qualified applicants and will phase out the need for waivers in the elementary grades. As districts work to find sustainable funding for the residency program, FISD was visited by the state education agency to film, interview, and highlight the staffing model that will allow FISD to continue to train the next generation of teachers and ensure its students are well prepared to succeed after graduation.

The early indications of residency impact evident in FISD are part of a larger collective impact effort (Kania & Kramer, 2011) focused on strengthening the teacher pipeline across the greater El Paso region. One mechanism for this collective impact is through the El Paso Educator Pipeline Community of Practice (CoP) established in early 2019 by the local community foundation as a cross-sector partnership among philanthropy, the university educator preparation program, local school district leaders, the local community college, educational service center, and technical assistance partners. Convened by the El Paso Community Foundation, the Educator Pipeline CoP meets every quarter to plan and share data related to key initiatives aimed at positively impacting the teacher pipeline and, ultimately, PK-12 student outcomes across the region. The Miner Teacher Residency and Mentorship Program launch was a key initiative supported by the CoP, with early support provided by the Brown Foundation and later the Teacher Quality Partnership and Hawkins programs at the U.S. Department of Education.

Discussion and Practice-Based Recommendations for Rural Residencies

This article describes a residency partnership developed between a large, public Hispanic-serving institution and a rural school district located on the U.S.-Mexico border. The residency model co-designed between the university-based teacher preparation program and rural district includes several components associated with high-quality residency pathways (Guha et al., 2016), including candidates' spending an entire year co-teaching alongside a carefully selected and trained mentor teacher; coaching from a University Site Coordinator based in the district; integrated coursework; and two years of aligned induction support provided by the same University Site Coordinator. Embedded in the model is funding for resident "strategic staffing" stipends (undergraduate and graduate), which initially came from a state grant but have transitioned to being district-supported based on their internal reallocation strategies (Dennis & DeMoss, 2021). Early indicators point to the model's success in fostering a strong sense of preparedness among graduates and addressing acute teacher vacancy needs in the district.

As teacher residencies – particularly residencies in rural school districts – continue to expand across the country, this case points to the critical importance of partnership in co-designing and co-implementation of successful, mutually beneficial residency models. The emphasis here is on building a "transformational" rather than a "transactional" partnership (Butcher et al., 2011, p. 31) – one based on a shared sense of mission, open communication, and effective management of challenges as they arise. The structures and practices of transformational partnerships help pave the way for preparation programs and school districts to build a foundation of trust to navigate the everyday implementation of the residency and challenging decisions and difficulties as they arise. This mutual responsiveness embedded into partnership structures and practices allows for a tailored approach to addressing the specific needs that arise in a rural district, such as those related to the recruitment and retention of teacher candidates. This article highlights how teacher preparation for rural communities should not take place in a silo but rather should be "joint work" (Feimen-Nemser, 1998, p. 67) to ensure the highest level of preparation for the next generation of teachers. Raising teachers' preparation level at scale, in turn, positively impacts PK-12 students, particularly students from marginalized

communities who may have uneven access to high-quality teachers throughout their PK-12 career.

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About the Authors

Erika Mein, Ph.D., serves as Associate Dean of Academic Affairs in the College of Education at the University of Texas at El Paso and Professor in the Department of Teacher Education. As Associate Dean since 2019, she has helped spearhead transformation in UTEP's teacher preparation program, focusing on providing the highest-quality preparation to predominantly Latinx teachers in and for the El Paso region. One key innovation was the co-design, implementation, and scaling of UTEP's year-long paid teaching residency, called the Miner Teacher Residency, in close partnership with seven regional high-needs school districts. She also led the re-design of UTEP's post-baccalaureate teacher certification program to include a year-long residency apprenticeship tied to an accelerated master's degree pathway. These transformation efforts are part of a larger region-wide collective impact effort to strengthen and diversify the teacher pipeline to enhance the PK-16+ educational opportunities and outcomes for all students.

Michele Gonzalez is currently the Teacher Incentive Allotment Partnerships and Supports Manager at the Texas Education Agency. Most recently, Michele was the Assistant Superintendent at Fabens ISD in Region 19 El Paso, with over 30 years of education and executive leadership experience. As a district leader for leadership, assessment, curriculum, and instruction, Michele led critical systems-level work in her district to implement TIA alongside key initiatives, including District of Innovation, strategic staffing, teacher residency, and new teacher mentor programs to support teacher recruitment and retention in the district and region.

Patricia Ocaña is a former elementary and secondary educator dedicated to bilingual education and equitable learning settings. Her passion for the field inspired her to

transition to The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), where she serves as a faculty Site Coordinator for the Miner Teacher Residency and Mentorship Program. Patricia Ocaña's experience as an emergent bilingual motivates her commitment to supporting and promoting linguistic diversity and equity for all students. Her pathway from classroom teacher to working with teacher candidates and novice teachers highlights her commitment to fostering the next generation of educators committed to creating equitable learning spaces for all students. In addition to her role as Site Coordinator, Patricia Ocaña is also a Ph.D. candidate in UTEP's Teaching, Learning, and Culture program in the Literacy and Biliteracy strand. Her research focuses on language(s), culture, identity, literacy, and biliteracy in providing educational equity in our rich bilingual, bicultural region's schools. Her work is driven by a vision of a transformative approach to education that uplifts individuals and communities alike.

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Project edPIRATE: A Teacher Residency MAT Program for Rural Educational Justice

Angela Novak, *East Carolina University*
Jennifer L. Gallagher, *East Carolina University*

Rural educational justice demands reconstructing educational structures, including teacher preparation programs. With federal funding from a Teacher Quality Partnership grant, we rebuilt a Master of Arts in Teaching pathway program from the ground up, using a co-teaching residency model and a core framework of rural educational justice practices. With goals of establishing a healthy racial climate, building the racial literacy and culturally responsive teaching capacity of the teaching resident and mentor teacher teams, and fostering rural humanizing community spaces designed to cultivate genius, joy, love, intellect, and criticality (Muhammad, 2023), the first two years of the five-year grant are the subject of this theory-to-practice analysis. Utilizing a school-university-community collaboration approach, we identified, placed, supported, and mentored teacher residents in a place-conscious approach to the rural, racialized communities and contexts in which they teach. The purpose of this article is three-fold: (a) to contextualize the educational inequities and opportunities that exist in the rural Southeast Black Belt, (b) to present our rural educational justice teacher education framework, curriculum, and processes to members of the field of rural education, and (c) to share emerging themes from our experiences creating a teacher education program for rural educational justice. What we offer is not yet an exemplar. However, it provides theoretical foundations, an ambitious curricular framework for rural teacher education, and an analysis of lessons learned.

***Keywords*: teacher pathways, Black Belt, research-practice partnerships, rural educational justice**

The paradigms of neoliberalism, racial capitalism, and globalization have negatively impacted schools in the southeastern U.S. Black Belt. This history has left our rural public schools underfunded and Black genius within them undervalued. Traditional teacher education to support our rural schools, often decontextualized, ahistorical, practice-oriented, and including only additive (rather than centralized) components of culturally responsive pedagogy, has failed to respond to these educational crises - as evidenced by ongoing educational debts and disparities (Owens, 2019; Swain & Baker, 2021; The Education Trust, 2022). Instead, community-based teacher residencies grounded in historically responsive literacy and place-based social foundations offer a

new path to meet the demands of rural educational justice (REJ), which Corbett (2017) outlines as "recognitional (domination, disrespect, and marginalization of groups) and associational (the extent to which individuals and groups are involved in decisions that affect their lives) [problems]" (p. 1–2) in addition to redistribution of resources within a spatial educational frame.

Disparate education in the rural southern Black Belt is operationalized through "space, place, and power collide[ing] with the historical antecedents of settler colonialism and white supremacy" (Swain & Baker, 2021, p. 17). The Black Belt refers to counties stretching across southern states, with dark, fertile soil formerly tilled by enslaved souls on plantations and since then has been home to a majority Black population. Current reports of Black Belt locales (e.g., Owens, 2019; The Education Trust, 2022) detail the historical and present-day systemic exclusion of and discrimination against Black students, such as having fewer opportunities than their peers (e.g., AP courses or high-speed internet access; Owens, 2019) and having less qualified teachers (e.g., less experienced or not credentialed in their field; Owens, 2019; The Education Trust, 2022). This has historically been a political issue, with white politicians divesting Black children and the rural sector from appropriate, equitable educational experiences (Anderson, 1988; Biddle et al., 2017; Fultz, 2004).

While many laud the historic Brown v. Board of Education landmark case as a breakthrough for equality, the effect was political shifts in southern states' laws. This included abolishing several states' public education requirements, compulsory attendance regulations, and modification of tenure laws (Fultz, 2004). As a result, Black teachers and principals were dismissed from the workforce in alarming numbers (Fenwick, 2022; Fultz, 2004). To this day, Black teachers have not returned to the pre-Brown numbers, nor are teachers' racial and ethnic identities representative of the student populations they serve. In NC, 25% of students are Black, with Black teachers only 15% of the educators. In contrast, 48% of students are White, with White teachers comprising 77% of the workforce (The Education Trust, 2022). With these needs in mind, a focus on reimagining and restructuring schools emerges.

Over fifty years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke about reimagining from just such an unjust society for the enhancement and promotion of everyone's dignity, stating that he was "convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society" (King, 1967, 42:12). This person-oriented shift requires a stronger focus on students and a shift in educators' understanding of themselves: racially, culturally, and in the contexts of power and place. bell hooks (1994) offers a vision of repair in teaching and learning spaces by teaching to transgress obstacles and boundaries as well as against systems of oppression. Teachers must engage both their own and their students' mind and body wholeness and create

spaces of possibility where teachers and students grow and are empowered in educational pursuits toward freedom (hooks, 1994). Such teaching requires teachers to work and live within the disparities evidenced in the Black Belt and see the genius, hope, and possibility for freedom that lives there.

However, where, and how do we prepare teachers to heed hooks's call? Housing teacher education within nearby university settings (although commonplace for much of the last century) risks entangling transgressive education with the negotiations between the roles of academic disciplines and professional practice (Labaree, 2008). On the other hand, recent teacher education programs that have subverted university preparation (e.g., Teach for America) have abstained from commitments to the democratic education underpinnings of public education or engagement with community assets and resources (Zimmerman, 2018). These issues are compounded in rural settings, where recruitment and retention contribute to a professional educator shortage (Biddle & Azano, 2016; Tran et al., 2020).

Democratic rural education should be of attention for teacher preparation universities and policymakers alike in North Carolina as it is consistently ranked as a highest-priority state with rural students much more likely, as compared to their peers in other states, to "live in a household with an income below the poverty line, attend a racially diverse school located in a community where many families live below the federal poverty line, and have moved residences within the last 12 months" (Showalter et al., 2023, p. 22). While there are oft-cited challenges to rural teaching (e.g., pay, fewer resources, taking on multiple roles, and personal and professional isolation; Biddle & Azano, 2016; Owens, 2019; Tran et al., 2020), rurality is steeped in assets. Rural districts may have more teacher autonomy, lower class sizes, richer school culture, and community camaraderie (Tran et al., 2020). Within the rural community setting, there may be more small-town engagement indicative of the rural lifestyle, which also comes with a lower cost of living among a natural, less-polluted environment than urban locales. Tran et al. (2020) also noted in their literature review that rural areas have less crime than urban locales and that teachers are seen as having higher status in these typically friendly communities. This asset-based view of rurality is important to convey in teacher education programs.

In addition to location, the approach to teacher education matters. Educator preparation programs must align the focus of their coursework with their educational and democratic commitments. Increasingly popular high-leverage practices and ambitious teaching frameworks (e.g., Ball & Forzani, 2011; Lampert, 2010) focus teacher education on decontextualized practices as tools for engaging students in high-level academic pursuits. However, as education historians and foundations scholars alike have noted, the practice-based turn to teacher education must be deepened by work in socio-historical foundations of education that is contextualized through a place-conscious approach and

an adjustment of the location of expertise in teacher education (Zeichner, 2015; Zeichner et al., 2015) to truly account for the "macro socio-historical forces that push and pull teaching, learning, and schooling" (Bowman & Gottesman, 2017, p. 233). Importantly, place-conscious approaches need to center the needs and assets of the community. Teacher education programs should dialogue with community and school district members to engage in equitable partnerships to support teacher education that aims to repair educational injustice (Zeichner, 2019). In particular, the needs of rural educational systems, each singularly unique in their community needs and assets but often geographically distant from universities, can only be understood in research-practice partnerships that offer site-specific and mutually sustaining collaboration. Teacher residencies offer a third-space avenue for such collaboration (Coffman & Patterson, 2014). Whereas a growing body of scholarship has been documented on partnership style teacher residency partnerships that focus on urban areas (Berry et al., 2008; Hackett et al., 2021; Klein et al., 2013), there are less models focused in rural areas, and even less scholarship to understand the unique opportunities and obstacles that are afforded in rural school-university-community partner residencies.

REJ demands a reconstruction of educational structures, including teacher preparation programs (e.g., increasing enrollment of teacher candidates of color and improving the quality of programs regarding racial bias and cultural responsivity; The Education Trust, 2022). With federal funding from the Teacher Quality Partnership grant, our team is working toward that goal by rebuilding a teacher education program that seeks to transform rural schools from systems of inequity to humanizing community spaces cultivating genius, joy, love, intellect, and criticality (Muhammad, 2020, 2023). We have centralized Muhammad's Historically Responsive Literacy Framework in our vision of effective teaching and teacher education curriculum. Utilizing a school-university-community collaboration (Reardon & Leonard, 2022), we have identified, placed, supported, and mentored teacher residents in a place-conscious approach to the rural, racialized communities and contexts in which they teach. The purpose of this theory-to-practice paper is three-fold: (a) to contextualize the educational inequities and opportunities that exist in the rural Southeast Black Belt, (b) to present our REJ teacher education framework, curriculum, and processes to members of the field of rural education, and (c) to share emerging themes from our experiences creating a teacher education program for REJ. What we offer is not yet an exemplar. However, it provides theoretical foundations, an ambitious curricular framework for rural teacher education, and an analysis of lessons learned.

Positionality of Authors

We crafted this manuscript on behalf of the grant team; our written work represents the substantial collaboration and sustained effort behind a collective vision of rural

educational justice. The grant team is led by the PI, who also serves as the Director of REI, and the Teacher Residency Co-PIs. The core grant team also includes School Leadership Co-PIs, College of Arts and Sciences faculty, teaching faculty for the Teacher Residency and School Leadership facets, support staff, members of East Carolina University (ECU) Support Services from the research and educator preparation offices, and LEA Superintendents. We represent a Teacher Residency Co-PI (Gallagher) and a member of the teaching faculty (Novak), both white, in the teacher residency program. We acknowledge that we see the work through our lenses as we engage in the reflective work of crafting the story of our edPIRATE thus far. Our racial identities undoubtedly limit our reflection on the complex racial justice goals our work seeks to further.

Literature Review

The Where – Rural Education in the Black Belt

While it has always referred to a geographic region of the South, the term Black Belt has had multiple origins as early as 1901, as explained by Booker T. Washington:

> The term was first used to designate a part of the country which was distinguished by the colour of the soil. The part of the country possessing this thick, dark, and naturally [sic] rich soil was, of course, the part of the South where the slaves were most profitable, and consequently, they were taken there in the largest numbers. Later, and especially since the war, the term seems to be used wholly in a political sense — that is, to designate the counties where the black people outnumber the whites. (as cited by Tullos, 2004, para 5)

Rural Black Belt communities today reflect divergent characteristics of place, with higher rates of unemployment, poverty, food and health apartheid, and lower than average educational achievement scores, while at the same time boasting a rich cultural heritage of civil rights movements: all but two of the Black Belt counties have at least one marker on the N.C. Civil Rights Trail (N.C. African American Heritage Commission, n.d.), literary tradition (e.g., W. E. B. DuBois's 1903 work, *Souls of Black Folk;* Richard Wright's *Black Boy;* Tullos, 2004*),* and educational innovations, with North Carolina establishing the most Black-community-led Rosenwald schools than any other state (Anderson, 1988; Hanchett, 1988).

Rural Educational Spaces

The field of rural education, intrinsically connected to life within the Black Belt although not often the focus of academic study, is as deep as the roots of public education itself. The historical development of rural communities cannot be separated from the educational institutions that many rural communities became centered around. Since the idea of public schools started and expanded across the nation, rural people have worked

together “to run their schools, to build schoolhouses, to hire teachers, and to collect taxes” (Kaestle, 1983, p. 185). However, this did not mean educational access was always equally afforded to all members of rural communities. Rural schools, particularly in the South, were often the most reluctant to integrate and open access to all members of the community (i.e., Cotton, 1972). And yet, even within this troubled history, tremendous promise and possibility remains situated and ripe for cultivation within rural education.

Today, rural schools are often the most integrated educational spaces in the country. According to Orfield and Frankenberg (2008), “the only areas where levels of intense segregation have declined since the early 1990s for black and Latino students are in rural areas and smaller towns” (p. 2). And despite data indicative of rural schooling deficits, such as the lack of access to technology, college-level coursework and diverse extracurriculars (Croft & Moore, 2019), many practitioners and scholars alike celebrate and find value in the meaningful cultural wealth innate to rural spaces and schooling, such as rural resourcefulness, rural ingenuity, rural familism, and rural community unity (Crumb et al., 2023). To center rural cultural wealth in classrooms, valuing those funds of knowledge needs to be cultivated through rural teacher preparation. The reality is that within larger contexts of teacher shortage (Fischer et al., 2022), coupled with the underlying racism found in teacher education (Kohli et al., 2022), rural districts are facing staffing crises that demand context-specific strategies to address them (Oyen & Schweinle, 2020). One promising pathway that naturally incorporates cultural capital, rural community unity, and local cultural understanding is the homegrown or Grow Your Own (GYO) program (Idahor, 2022; Valenzuela, 2017)

Homegrown Educators

Homegrown and GYO programs may be used synonymously, though programs vary in their specific definitions. These programs are efforts on the part of districts and/or universities (and/or partnerships between the two) to pursue community-based individuals who are representative of the diversity of the district–who understand the community context, the cultural lives of the children, the local political landscape, and so on–and make a purposeful investment in these individuals (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Idahor, 2022; Valenzuela, 2017). This investment leads to the individuals’ teaching licensure and typically involves a repayment-based district contract. Assistance can be financial (e.g., tuition or reimbursement, stipends), time and effort related (e.g., work release), and involves mentorships, job shadowing, affinity groups, and other structures designed to support the individuals’ and program’s success (Bland & Smith, 2023; Carver-Thomas, 2018). For some programs, the recruitment effort may be limited to employees within their districts (e.g., supporting classified personnel to complete their Bachelor of Arts degree with licensure, which is more typical of GYO programs) while others may involve open recruitment (i.e., edPIRATE).

Districts, universities, and research-practice partnerships can benefit from "equitable approaches and critical perspectives that combine the powerful role of 'homegrown' teachers, culturally relevant curriculum and social justice pedagogy in addressing achievement and opportunity gaps, especially for the nation's woefully underserved" (Valenzuela, 2017, p. 1), particularly homegrown pathways that recruit teachers whose racial and ethnic identity mirror the students in the district. These programs, in similar ways to all teacher education, must be explicit in providing a healthy racial climate. Seeking a diverse student group alone will not replace the whitewashed curriculum and pervasive systemic racism found in teacher education policies and programs (Kohli, 2022; Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2020).

The How – Co-Teaching Residency Model for Teacher Education

One university-based teacher preparatory strategy that can be coupled with a GYO approach, the teacher residency model, is gaining traction throughout teacher education programs, many with positive results. They have been found to improve the quality of new teachers (Azar, Casciano, et al., 2020; Azar et al., 2021; Educators for Excellence, 2018; Rockman et al., 2018), increase retention (Barnes et al., 2007; Rosenberg & Miles, 2017; National Center for Teacher Residencies [NCTR], 2017), and positively impact student achievement (Azar, Casciano, et al., 2020; Azar et al., 2021; Lindsey & Hart, 2017;). Teacher residencies are also a proven approach to increasing diversity in teacher pathways (Azar, Hines et al., 2020; Rowland et al., 2023).

In general, teacher residencies are characterized by partnerships between teacher preparation institutes and LEAs, year-long student teaching internships, ongoing feedback and coaching with an experienced mentor teacher, and rigorous coursework aligned with the experiential aspects of the internship (National Education Association, 2024; NCTR, 2023). NCTR replaced standards in teacher residencies with levers: "partnering and designing for equity; training site recruitment, selection, and support; mentor recruitment, selection, and support; resident recruitment and selection; residency leadership; residency year experience; financial sustainability; and graduate support" (NCTR, 2023, para. 3–10; updated from the 2021 iteration). These interconnected levers are used as benchmarks in consultation for the successful implementation of both new and existing residency programs.

Another key element of teacher residencies, critical to developing equity-focused teacher practice in democratic education, is building communities of practice for beginning teachers (Grossman et al., 2001). This develops open dialogue around equity and social justice issues, establishes relational trust, and builds leadership capacity in the teacher resident (Grossman et al., 2001; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Tschida et al., 2024). Within this community of practice, Tschida et al. (2024) note, "Although practicing teachers serve as mentors to their student teachers, the duality of the relationship

acknowledges that student teachers also contribute to the knowledge and growth of their mentor teachers" (p. 11). This is particularly relevant in co-teaching models, which are often utilized in teacher residencies to help novice teachers develop their pedagogical skills or create classroom communities (Bacharach et al., 2010; Goodnough et al., 2009; Roth & Tobin, 2005; Ruys et al., 2010; Tschida et al., 2024; Weinberg et al., 2019).

Within a teacher education paradigm that centers equity, includes the essential elements of pedagogy, and prioritizes relationships and classroom community, the structure of co-teaching has the potential to embrace all of the above (Tschida et al., 2024). While co-teaching should automatically incorporate co-planning, Cayton & Grady (2024) delve specifically into the benefits of co-planning as equity support during rural internship experiences, identifying the benefits and concerns of six models of co-planning, akin to the co-teaching strategies, along with a corresponding equity checklist for teacher residents' and mentor teachers' use. Considerations for co-planning and co-teaching responsibilities are important, in terms of a gradual release of responsibility model, as the resident teacher should assume more of the day-to-day classroom duties over time (Cayton & Grady, 2024; NCTR, 2023).

For What Purpose – Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Educational Justice in Rural Spaces

The needs of rural schools in the Black Belt go beyond merely filling positions with qualified teacher candidates; newly minted educators should be prepared to enact equitable change in rural communities. Author, activist, and educator bell hooks lamented the post-Brown loss of Black educators in her own educational journey in rural Appalachia, remarking that Black teachers understood her, taught her, loved her, unlike any other teacher (1994). In racially segregated schools, with students and teachers who were culturally relevant, responsive, and equity-minded, hooks described "education as a practice of freedom" (p. 3); once she attended integrated schools, education was no longer a "messianic zeal to transform our minds and beings" but "knowledge was suddenly about information only. It had no relation to how one lived, behaved. It was no longer connected to antiracist struggle" (p. 3). hooks's zest for learning was shut down, as obedience, not enthusiasm, was the expectation; "too much eagerness to learn could easily be seen as a threat to white authority" (p. 3). In much of her work, hooks issued a clarion call for authentically engaged pedagogy, liberatory teaching, and building a multicultural community grounded in democratic education (hooks, 1994, 2003); this is the need for culturally responsive pedagogy and rural educational justice (REJ).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Healthy Racial Climate

Culturally responsive pedagogy, a field often explored in urban spaces (Sirrakos & Emdin, 2017), offers concepts, strategies, and goals that are just as relevant in rural

educational spaces. Cultural responsivity is an emancipatory approach to pedagogy based on students' individuality (e.g., cultural strengths) and how the educator develops relationships with the students, adjusting materials in a critically responsive manner (Sleeter, 2011; based on a synthesis of definitions by Geneva Gay and Gloria Ladson-Billings). Rigorous explorations of culturally responsive pedagogy tell us that: "Today's Black children need Black pedagogy, curricula, and educators who understand, care for, believe in, and are willing to nurture them as the optimal possibility in reversing the current crisis of Black education" (Wright, 2023, p. 2). At the very foundation, teacher residents should value the genius that exists in the Black Belt by acknowledging and centering cultural and historical literacy practices (Muhammed, 2020, 2023).

REJ practitioners must begin by developing racial literacy, such as through an archaeology of self (Sealy-Ruiz, 2021). Educators need an understanding of the potential and life-altering effect of their–as well as systematic and others'–biases and attitudes on outcomes for Black learners (Picower, 2009; Sealey-Ruiz, 2011, 2021; Wright et al., 2023). Sealey-Ruiz states that "racial literacy asks that teachers take action against injustice in their school settings once they recognize it. Racial literacy requires familiarity with unconscious bias, unintentional racism, microaggressions, and structural racism" (2011, p.118). Purposefully engaging in reflecting on and promoting racial literacy is an essential component of the behavioral dimension of a healthy racial climate in teacher education programs (Kohli et al., 2022). In addition, a healthy racial climate involves the historical dimension (by first acknowledging and then addressing the ongoing legacies of racism in the teacher education programs and local districts and communities); the operational and structural dimension (by understanding the teacher education program's commitment to racial justice–and adherence thereto–through the policies and structures, e.g., recruitment and retention, curriculum, and internship placement); the compositional dimension (in which there is a proportional representation, or critical mass, of same-race minoritized teacher candidates as well as faculty, mentor teachers, university supervisors); and the psychological dimension (through which the emotional toll of existing in a predominantly white space, likely in both their coursework and internship placements, is recognized through open and empathetic dialogue, and support services are offered freely and without judgement; Kohli et al., 2022). Once educators dig deep into this reflective archaeological site of self-understanding (Sealy-Ruiz, 2021) within a healthy racial climate (Kohli et al., 2022), the work of REJ comes into play.

Rural Educational Justice (REJ)

Gorski (2013) commented on the word salad that can be made when talking about diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice initiatives, committing to several actions to differentiate and ground social justice work. "Put justice before peace: Racial justice, rather than racial harmony or awareness, is the inverse of racial injustice. Social justice

is the inverse of social injustice. So the results of my social justice work should be less injustice" (Gorski, 2013, para. 12). Thus, REJ must come before harmony or peace and is the inverse of rural educational injustice. It is the recognition of disrespect, domination, oppression, and/or marginalization of groups (Corbett, 2017) that causes disharmony and disrupts neighborly peace (Gorski, 2013). Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez from New York declared, "Justice is about making sure that being polite is not the same thing as being quiet. In fact, oftentimes, the most righteous thing you can do is shake the table" (2019, 1:45).

Gorski's second point is crucial in justice work: it is action-oriented. Awareness and recognition are important steps, but "not, in and of itself, social justice . . . These are the sorts of activities that prepare us for social justice. But they also can be distractions from social justice if they don't point toward action for social change" (Gorski, 2013, para 13). Teacher residents, mentors, and the community can become catalysts leading political and cultural decisions for systemic and societal (e.g., working to change policy and redistribution of resources): rural educational justice (Corbett, 2017; Gorski, 2013). While the work can begin with culturally relevant practices, REJ also requires dismantling inequities beginning in the teacher resident's spheres of influence.

In Praxis: The edPIRATE Teacher Residency Program

Project edPIRATE is a K-8 Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) residency program with the goal of cultivating high-quality teachers to meet the needs of our Local Education Agency (LEA) partners. The program includes a one-year teacher residency with a living stipend ($41,000), graduate classes taught online (reducing the financial impact for students), and extended support for teachers after graduation (induction model). This rural educator pathway is based on research-based best practices for recruiting and retaining educators of color (Rowland et al., 2023), remaining open to all in recruitment.

Context

North Carolina has the country's second-highest number of rural students: 568,161; roughly 40% of its overall percentage of public school students is spread geographically across the state in 78 out of 100 N.C. rural counties (US Census Bureau, 2023). Additionally, North Carolina has a student population that is poorer and more diverse than most other states (Showalter et al., 2023). East Carolina University (ECU), located in Greenville, North Carolina, is one of 17 constituent institutions of the University of North Carolina (UNC) system. With a mission of regional transformation, ECU is a leading producer of teachers and administrators in the state's rural eastern region, averaging 700 program completers annually across all licensure areas.

ECU boasts nine undergraduate colleges, including the College of Education (COE), a graduate school, and four professional schools. While the Rural Education

Institute (REI) has many interdisciplinary projects, it is housed in the COE. Established over 30 years ago with funding from the N.C. legislature to focus on the advancement of education in rural eastern North Carolina, REI has been a major catalyst of improvement in the region. Through edPIRATE, REI is maintaining its focus on collaborative partnerships oriented toward teacher education while developing its research program at a national level, collaborating with community stakeholders toward positive transformation in families and schools through grant-funded projects. edPIRATE's outcomes align with REI's mission and specific goals of improving educational outcomes for schools, students, and communities through collaboration.

All four edPIRATE partner districts are in eastern North Carolina but west of the more prosperous coastal counties. All are counties designated as Tier 1 – most economically distressed by the N.C. Department of Commerce. Our needs assessment found that child poverty (ages 5 to 17) in 2020 ranged from 23.5% to 36.4% in our LEAs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022; Table 1 provides data from our partner LEAs as submitted in the grant application).

Table 1

Partner LEA Data

District	Child Poverty %[2]	RLIS/ SRSA [3]	Locale Code[4]	Proficient Math %[5]	Proficient ELA %[6]	ELL Students Count(%)[7]
ECPPS[1]	24.1%	RLIS	RF:41	9.9%	28.1%	216(4%)
GCS	27.9%	RLIS	RD:42	17.6%	30.1%	363(13.3%)
LCS	23.5%	N/A	RF:41	18.6%	27.3%	455(5.5%)
WCS	36.4%	RLIS	RF:41	26.3%	24.3%	43(4.1%)
STATE	17.0%	N/A	N/A	40.0%	46.0%	131,247(9.6%)

Note. [1]ECCPS is Pasquotank County Schools in SAIPE database. [2]SAIPE, US Census Bureau, 2022. [3]DOE, 2022. [4] NCES, 2022. [5]NCDPI, 2021, [6]NCDPI, 2021, [7] NCDPI, 2022b.

Moreover, as documented in Table 2, our partner districts need (a) highly qualified teachers who meet the requirements for full state licensure, (b) structures and support that sustain a new teacher pathway, and (c) structures and support for educator retention. Teacher turnover (i.e., attrition in North Carolina) ranged from 8.7% to 15.7% in LEAs in 2022 compared to an 8.2% state average; each of the districts reported more than 10% of teachers with emergency, provisional or temporary licensure in 2022 (with one LEA at 28%) compared to 6.3% in North Carolina as a whole. All LEAs reported difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers and principals. Moreover, all the LEAs report a need to hire more teachers of color to represent the diversity of their student population

better.

Table 2

Indications of Need for Professionally Trained Teachers in Partner LEAs

District	Teacher attrition rate[1]	Percentage of Teachers with Emergency, Provisional, or Temporary Licensure[2]	Percentage of Initially Licensed Teachers[3]
ECPPS	12.3%	12%	21%
GCS	14.5%	15%	25%
LCS	8.70%	11%	9%
WCS	15.7%	28%	26%
STATE	8.20%	6.3%[4]	19%[5]

Note. [1] LEA self-report, 2022. [2] LEA self-report, 2022. [3] LEA self-report, 2022. [4] NCDPI, 2022c. [5] NCDPI, 2022c.

Vision, Mission, and Vision of Effective Teaching

Centering all this work is our vision, mission, and vision of effective teaching (VET). The vision of the edPIRATE program is rural school classrooms and rural teacher education programs that are humanizing, asset-based, and equity-oriented. The mission of edPIRATE is to equip educators for this vision and utilize the power of collaboration between ECU educator preparation and community partners to reimagine and grow REJ. Therefore, our VET in this REJ MAT includes the following: (a) Rural educators engage themselves and their students in important questions of democracy and justice, (b) Rural educators effectively utilize practices that engage, elevate, and expand the wealth of rural communities resources and literacy tools to empower themselves and others (e.g., rural resourcefulness, rural ingenuity, rural familism, rural community and rural unity; Crumb et al., 2023), (c) Rural educators effectively integrate students' funds of knowledge and disciplinary inquiry and literacy practices, and (d) Rural educators recognize school is a hub and home of the community. While a vision of what effective teaching for REJ looks like was imperative to understand what we were working toward, it was also necessary to formulate the building blocks–the regular teaching practices designed for and implemented within rural Black Belt schools–that would enable teacher residents to build toward this vision. These became our Rural Educational Justice (REJ) practices, which are explicated below.

Core REJ Practices

Elmore (2002) famously stated, "Only a change in practice produces a genuine change in norms and values. Or, to put it more crudely, grab people by their practice and

their hearts and minds will follow" (p. 3). At its core, this project focuses on the pre-service preparation of teachers and future leaders who will strengthen and support rural educational justice (REJ). Our curriculum framework, developed by the faculty involved in the project, is driven by 11 REJ practices in their work. By intentionally spiraling them throughout the courses, our goal is for teacher residents and, by proxy, their mentor co-teachers to embody the REJ practices in their daily teaching. These practices are intended to be innately place-conscious and context-dependent in application, which differs from other practice-centered approaches. Table 3 presents each practice, a brief description of the foundational commitment, and what it looks like in action.

Table 3

Rural Educational Justice (REJ) Practices

REJ Practice	Foundational Commitments	How it Looks in Action
1 Active Self-Reflection on Justice-Oriented Educational Philosophy + Commitments	The exploration of justice-oriented educational frameworks and philosophies (e.g., Freire, Gorski, Love, Muhammad) that address historically oppressive practices that have harmed marginalized communities, must also seek to provide antiracist, anti-bias, justice-oriented, approaches to teaching and actively call participants to collective commitments and action.	Teacher residents must first explore their identities, histories and experiences and engage in active self-reflection. This draws on the work of Dr. Yolanda Sealey Ruiz's archaeology of self, where she focuses on the importance of deep self-excavation, exploring the beliefs, biases and ideas that shape how we engage in this work (Sealey-Ruiz, 2021). This self-reflection includes racial literacy development which teacher residents practice to interrupt racism, develop an awareness of history that shapes the world today, reflect on their identities, understand the limits of their views, and be profoundly committed to their communities. Having engaged in self-excavation in the context of their community school, teacher residents are situated to recognize and nurture their students' identities.
2 Asset-Based Relationships with Students, Families, and Communities	Asset-based relationships are relationships built on honoring, validating and celebrating the strengths of students, their families, and our communities (Nieto, 2013, Minor, 2023).	The social and cultural capital that students bring into the classroom is valued and used as a foundation for learning. Teacher residents integrate this information into coursework, sharing examples and engaging in collectivity with their peers in this learning process. Key to this work is for the teacher residents–and by proxy the mentors in the co-teaching model–to actively recognize and dismantle the existing deficit ideologies that might already exist in their practices and schools. Further, teacher residents take the asset-based lessons created in the coursework into their residency experience to teach.
3 Humanizing	Humanizing and democratic classroom cultures and routines	Faculty model how to facilitate a democratic culture. Together, the individuals are engaged in shared understandings of the norms and

Democratic Classroom Culture and Routines	are grounded in the value and autonomy of individuals (Parker, 2022; Shalaby, 2017).	expectations required of them to share space, be vulnerable with one another, engage in learning together and make decisions together. Teacher residents practice the democratic culture as modeled by faculty. Instead of focusing on rewards and punishments of behavior, community norms are maintained by continual commitments to each other as humans and relationships developed through a community of care.
4 Student-Centered Authentic Assessment that Values Collaboration, Creativity, Curiosity, Flexibility, and Complexity	Assessment is any way teachers understand their students and then use that information to make decisions. It can be thought of in three broad ways: assessment of learning, assessment for learning, and assessment as learning (Harapnuik, 2020). The ideal assessment for REJ is equitable assessment that values student voice (Milner, 2018).	Teacher residents are actively involved in the process of goal setting; products are authentic and meaningful, and time in class is spent in collaborative groups with activities that challenge individuals at appropriate levels of depth and complexity. Teacher residents apply the assessment principles taught in each methods course to their co-teaching experiences, remaining flexible and responsive to student needs, modeling this so that students can engage in similar flexibility and responsibility with their peers. Teacher residents and students remain open-minded and curious, asking and responding to questions that push each other's creative and critical thinking in the content.
5 Planning and Enacting Justice-Oriented Inquiry Curriculum in the	Social-justice inquiry practices have students take an active role in learning by asking questions that challenge or disrupt inequity, stereotypes, oppression, discrimination, etc. Students take ownership for their learning, seeking out information,	Through inquiry-based practices, teacher residents will plan curriculum that center questions important to students, their communities, and justice. Their inquiries allow teacher residents to develop and improve their disciplinary (History, Math, Science) inquiry and literacy practices and engage with multimodal disciplinary resources. Inquiries might focus on interdisciplinary questions about providing educational opportunities, excellence, access, and advancement for historically marginalized and

Content Areas	evaluating their sources, and collecting data to answer these questions in a way that promotes agency and critical thinking (Conrad & Gallagher, 2023; Conrad et al., 2024; Borden, 2022).	underserved populations in rural communities. Once planned, teacher residents will use the curriculum in their practicum experience.
6 Planning and Enacting Universal Design for Learning and creating Justice-Oriented Spaces	UDL meets the diverse educational needs of all students, including those with exceptionalities, in the rural classroom. Building with UDL, to begin all classroom activities with equitable access for all learners, is the ideal way to create spaces that can be justice-oriented both in process of learning and cultivating spaces to meet justice-oriented civic goals (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) that benefit rural communities.	Teacher residents will plan lessons using varying sources of engagement (affective networks), representation (recognition networks), and action/expression (strategic networks), providing all students with the necessary resources to encourage their talents and strengths to emerge and develop agency for social change (Borden, 2022; CAST, 2024). UDL framework will be integrated across disciplines and consider exceptional children, multilingual learners, gifted and talented students, and any/all students without district-provided labels that may benefit from individual accommodations or modifications. By using UDL, teacher residents are continuously reflecting, designing and adapting classroom environment, instruction and resources to meet justice-oriented goals.
7 Integrating Arts into the Curriculum	Arts integration is the purposeful inclusion of visual arts, music, drama and movement (The Vision Board, 2024). By integrating the arts, educators can increase achievement, teaching and	Authentic arts integration is more than adding arts-based activities to curriculum and/or assessment. Integrating arts purposefully into the curriculum requires an entire approach to teaching that values self-expression, inspiration, imagination and creativity. Teacher residents will leave room for these affective, subjective, and highly personalized goals

	assessing content more equitably (Long, 2022; The Vision Board, 2024).	and opportunities at the forefront of curricular goals, to be included in learning opportunities and assessed along with disciplinary standards.
8 Intellectual and Humanizing Engagement, Pacing, and Questioning	The social constructivist theory of teaching and learning is built on the idea that knowledge is constructed through discourse (Vygotsky, 1978). How questions are structured, of whom they are asked, and how often they are directed to different individuals requires deep reflection and practice–this reflection may point out unconscious biases.	For teacher residents, this can look like a myriad of social interactions. Discourse opportunities should provide students (both teacher residents in class with faculty, and students who have teacher residents as educators) avenues to share their initial thinking and changes in their thinking in deep and meaningful ways. This should go beyond call and response *guess what's in my head* teacher questioning and include higher order thinking questions and multiple forms of expression for students to participate in knowledge making. Teacher residents should always keep the humanity of students at the forefront in their mind as students are social beings in a socially complex classroom environment, and they should adapt the pacing and creation of their questioning to reflect the needs of their students in the knowledge construction process.
9 Choosing and Utilizing High Quality Resources that Support Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	High quality resources that support culturally responsive pedagogy are resources that serve to provide access to information that is important to students and helps them discover and engage in the world around them while learning content knowledge in meaningful ways. High quality resources show multiple perspectives, disrupt deficit perspectives, challenge the	High quality resources not only provide content knowledge, but they also show that teacher residents have an awareness of the students they serve; along with content knowledge, these resources validate and affirm the lives, experiences, and identities of students. The questions provided below are provided to assist teacher residents in selecting high quality resources that support culturally responsive teaching. • Who is represented in the text/resource, and how are they represented? • Who is silenced or minimized in the text/resource and how? • How can this text challenge incomplete or harmful dominant narratives about different identities?

	status quo, help to amplify voices that are often silenced and help our students view the world through mirrors and windows (Bishop, 1990).	• Does the writer treat their subject with complexity and nuance and avoid stereotypes? • In what ways can this text help to develop a positive social identity for my students? • What does this text not do or include that I will have to supplement with another text? What counternarratives will my students need after this text? (Ebarvia, 2023)
10 Integrating Mindfulness and Social Emotional Learning	Mindfulness is "the awareness that emerges through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). Democratic classroom environments incorporate mindfulness and awareness of the whole child.	In a mindful approach to teaching, teacher residents establish a classroom community with opportunities to ground teachers and students alike in the present moment, to reflect on their activity with purpose, and to treat themselves kindly in their full humanity. Mindfulness cannot be separated from social emotional learning opportunities and goals in which students and teachers take time to build knowledge and practices about their emotions and social skills such as empathy, self-awareness and relationship building. Without taking time to reflect and foster understanding around the process, students (and teacher residents) may not have the context to make mindfulness meaningful.
11 Teacher Leadership through Advocacy for Rural Educational Justice for Children, Families,	All students, families, and community members must be invited and welcomed in the process of building equitable and supportive schools (IDRA, 2022). Teacher leadership skills have been defined generally by the field to include cultivating a collaborative culture, utilizing	Teacher residents do not improve any teacher leadership skills in a vacuum. They must also be aware of the ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) within which they are teaching and within which their students are learning. A deep awareness of their place and space provides an apt understanding for teacher residents to utilize the best strategies and avenues to enact their own agency. While every context may not provide the most conducive environment to implement REJ practices, schools and communities rely on teacher residents to advocate on behalf of children and their communities to make the

and Communities	research to enhance practice and student learning, and boosting family and community engagement, among others (National Education Association, 2020).	changes that are necessary to pursue justice. Each skill demands nuanced, context-specific application when used in pursuit of REJ.

Processes

The edPIRATE program has now graduated our first two residents. Our process to get to this stage of our program development, including the development of our team and grant-writing process, the creation of our framework including the REJ practices explicated above and the bureaucratic processes necessary to pave the path for the curricular changes and the administrative support needed to graduate our first cohort could all be described with innumerable adjectives: from the positive, to the improbable, to the frustrating, to the hopeful. While we cannot explain all the various components of our process within this article, we think several key points of our process may be helpful to other rural teacher resident programs trying to do similar work.

Support from the National Center for Teacher Residency (NCTR)

After being awarded the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant that would see the edPIRATE teacher residency program into fruition, our team engaged with support provided by the National Center for Teacher Residency (NCTR). We attended online trainings as well as in-person workshops and even hosted members of the NCTR team on our campus for individual team support. NCTR's almost 20 years of evidence-based practice in teacher residency informed much of our processes (see Azar, Casciano et al., 2020; Azar et al., 2021; Azar, Hines et al., 2020; NCTR 2017, 2023).

Recruitment to Placement

We engaged in various activities to recruit potential teacher residents, support them through the application process, get them on contract, and place them in the district partner school where they would complete their residency. We relied heavily on districts and local advertisements in the first year. We put flyers in local coffee shops and libraries throughout the target counties, ensured that each school had a supply for their staff, family, and friends, and spent a great deal of time going to in-town recruitment events in the first year, such as science nights, with the hope of passing the word through the community. We held online information sessions (providing an application fee waiver to attendees) and ran a social media campaign on X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram. In our second year, we continued with these methods but also spent time recruiting at our university as well, sending emails to graduating seniors in a variety of departments, attending a graduate 'bash' that offered recruitment tables, and having an edPIRATE representative dropping in to personally speak to a myriad of courses that had graduating seniors in different departments, such as world languages, psychology, and sociology. For the third year, we plan to purchase billboards served in the local areas and media advertisements.

After their application to the program, qualified applicants were interviewed by three members of the teacher residence team. Approved candidates were accepted into

the program but still needed to meet the requirements for ECU graduate school admission. After all new resident teachers were accepted, the Associate Director of Teacher Residency (ADTR) provided a group online orientation, discussing logistical information (e.g., graduate school requirements, upper division requirements, internship applications), engaging in community building and relational trust activities, and giving an introduction to the REJ practices, historically responsive literacy framework (Muhummad, 2020, 2023), and self-excavation through the archaeology of self (Sealey-Ruiz, 2020).

The contract is an important facet of edPIRATE; ideally, this is provided at orientation. The contracts outline their commitment to four days a week at their residency, requirements for licensure, and the obligation to serve as a teacher for three years in their assigned district. Also stipulated is if residents do not meet the contract obligations, they must repay the living allowance ($41,000) that they have received up to that point, provided in three payments during the year (July, December, April). If teacher residents do not serve all years of their three-year district commitment, their repayment obligation is prorated.

Both last year (for year one) and for the current (year two) cohort, we invite new teacher residents to choose their preferred partner LEAs and request grade levels for residency placement. The ADTR works directly with district staff, mostly HR directors but also administrators, to secure placements in high-need schools. Unlike typical placements through the Office of Clinical Experiences at ECU, if teacher residents are already employed by their LEA of choice and they request the same placement, edPIRATE will work to find them a residency position in their existing school if possible, assuming their MAT program for licensure is commensurate with this placement. This honors our commitment to the values of rurality and place.

Coursework

Residency co-teaching placements (for previous and future cohorts) are for a full year; teacher residents are in their schools for four days per week for 3/4 of the school year. The co-teaching model offers frequent opportunities for modeling planning (using any co-planning strategy) and teaching (using one teach-one observe or one teach-one assist co-teaching strategies, as well as chances to engage in practicum teaching (using station or alternative/differentiated co-teaching strategies). Teacher residents engage in self-reflection as part of their coursework and receive structured feedback from their mentor teachers, course faculty, and a university supervisor. In the second semester, teacher residents remain at four days per week while completing the edTPA, which is required for N.C. licensure. Later in the second semester, teacher residents begin to gradually assume more teaching responsibilities from their co-teachers as they are required to teach all subjects full-time for two weeks as part of their internship requirements.

Teacher residents have one day per week in which they do not go to their residency site so that it can be fully allocated for their graduate studies (in addition to evenings and weekends). The REJ practices discussed earlier are intentionally woven throughout the 30 credit hours of graduate courses (see Table 4). Teacher residents take courses over four semesters: Summer, Fall, Spring, and Summer. Summer sessions are five weeks, and in the fall and spring semesters, one course (internship) is a 15-week course while their other courses are taken as 8-week sessions, consecutively. Between coursework and the co-teaching opportunities in their placements, teacher residents can engage in lower-stake, supportive aspects of teaching practice in the first semester before taking on the reality of full-time classroom responsibilities in the second semester.

The MAT is organized into cohort design; teacher residents move through the courses as a group, coached by the ADTR, a university supervisor, and supportive teaching faculty. Courses have literacy-embedded (including the five essential components of reading instruction as defined by legislation) and an equity focus, with a throughline concentration on multilingual and exceptional children's education. Coursework is aligned with the N.C. Standard Course of Study Courses as well as inTASC standards and accreditation standards. Table 4 provides the year 2 schedule for the elementary MAT. The edPIRATE grant identifies ECU COE faculty as teaching faculty; we also have additional ECU full-time and adjunct faculty who teach the courses.

Table 4

Elementary REJ MAT Courses

Course Title & REJ Practices	Course Description	Course Objectives
First Summer		
Democratic Education in the Rural South (K-12) REJ: 1, 2, 10, 11	Examines historical and contemporary policies and practices of public education within a rural southern context to develop place-based praxis.	Critically reflect on and explore personal experiences, values, and beliefs to examine the relationship between self, schools, and society (especially as it relates to our local contexts of education). Explain the ways traditional schooling has impacted local demographics and created and sustained educational inequities. Analyze historical and contemporary patterns of controversies and trends in education and the relationship to political and economic power in rural eastern North Carolina. Develop shared language of the characteristics of democratic education and articulate a vision for REJ in eastern North Carolina.
Universal Design for Learning to Support Inclusive Rural Classrooms (K-12) REJ: 4, 6, 7, 10	Applies the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework to meet the diverse educational needs of students, including those with exceptionalities, in the rural classroom. Emphasis is on providing flexible, holistic, and inclusive learning opportunities to remove	Through the UDL framework, students will: Utilize UDL to plan and teach inclusive instruction within a justice-oriented space. Develop authentic integration of the arts, mindfulness, and social emotional learning into curriculum. Apply REJ practices that engage, elevate, and expand the wealth of rural community resources to meet the needs of exceptional learners through the UDL framework providing whole class and intensive interventions. Analyze the historical and current theories and trends in assessment to determine an appropriate assessment model for an equitable and racially just classroom environment within the rural educational system.

	barriers, using authentic assessment, and teaching effectively in REJ to develop strategic, resourceful, and motivated learners.	Develop student-centered authentic assessments that value collaboration, creativity, curiosity, flexibility, and complexity for racially literate and equitable classroom learning and assessment. Apply self-excavation and learning theories to schooling experiences.
Fall		
Introduction to K-5 Literacy Instruction for Rural Educational Justice REJ: 4, 5, 7, 8, 9	Foundational literacy course that teaches methods for literacy instruction in grades K-6 with a focus on culturally responsive instruction, REJ, and meeting the diverse needs of students.	Apply the concepts of literacy and developmental stages of reading and or writing. Implement multiple ways to teach reading in elementary grades through a justice oriented, inquiry lens. Implement various authentic, student-centered literacy assessments to inform instruction through collaboration, creativity, curiosity, and flexibility. Analyze various reading strategies in literacy instruction. Evaluate appropriate methods and materials used in the teaching of reading in the elementary grades. Utilize high quality and diverse resources that support culturally responsive and academic language as well as racial literacy. Design inclusive reading instruction to meet the individual needs of elementary-aged students, including advanced readers and readers who may not yet be meeting grade-level expectations
Responsive Community-Based Rural Classrooms (K-12)	Supports teacher candidates' development of asset-based dispositions toward students and	Use self-excavation theory as a tool: Reflect on one's identity and self as teacher within the rural space. Reflect critically on and analyze personal experiences, values, and beliefs to examine the relationship between self, schools, and society and to clarify one's aspirations as a teacher.

REJ: 2, 3, 10	communities. Application through strategies to integrate community in the classroom and classroom in the community, emphasizing curriculum of care. Introduces and provides application of core practices for multilingual learners through humanizing pedagogy.	Apply humanizing pedagogy and democratic classroom culture and routines through relationships where everyone is valued and has autonomy. Analyze the community and cultural assets of a student and community population constructively using asset mapping. Build asset-based relationships with students, families, and communities. Integrate mindfulness and social emotional learning. Design classrooms that support meaningful learning for all students with particular emphasis on scaffolding and support for multilingual learners.
Rural Educational Justice Internship I REJ: 2, 3, 4, 4, 6, 7, 10	Supervised teaching internship in appropriate subject and level classroom. Emphasis on asset-based relationships with students, families, and communities.	Identify asset-based relationships with students, families, and communities. Develop humanizing democratic classroom culture and routines through relationships where everyone is valued and has autonomy. Apply mindfulness and social emotional learning. Select high-quality and diverse resources that support culturally responsive and academic language and racial literacy. Enact student centered justice-oriented inquiry curriculum in the content areas.
Spring		
K-6 Science Instruction for Rural Educational Justice	Implement research-based practices to teach science in elementary grades through a justice-oriented, inquiry, and	Reflect on themselves as science learners and consider how race, ethnicity, rurality and other factors and experiences have influenced their science identity. Align instruction with state and national science standards.

REJ: 4, 5, 7, 8, 9	place-conscious approach.	Engage in science and engineering practices to promote wonder and to develop understandings of the natural and constructed world. Implement research-based practices to teach science in elementary grades through a justice oriented, inquiry lens with a place-conscious approach to teaching and learning. Employ a place-conscious approach to science instruction focused on students' and rural communities' assets to meet the individual needs of elementary-aged diverse learners. Engage in inquiry-based science lessons that promote humanizing democratic classroom culture and routines. Implement authentic, student-centered science assessments that inform instruction and value collaboration, creativity, curiosity, and flexibility. Collaborate with peers in the planning and evaluation of science lessons to develop communication and teacher leadership skills. Utilize high quality and diverse resources that support culturally responsive academic language as well as racial and scientific literacy.
K-6 Mathematics Instruction for Rural Educational Justice REJ: 4, 5, 7, 8, 9	Implement research-based practices to teach mathematics in elementary grades through a justice-oriented, inquiry and place-conscious approach.	Analyze key mathematics concepts in grades K-6 mathematics with a particular focus on whole number operations, properties of numbers, and rational number concepts. Explain how the Standards for Mathematical Practice can provide more equitable ways for students to engage in mathematical learning and to develop their self-identity as learners and doers of mathematics. Apply the Effective Mathematics Teaching Practices to plan and implement lessons that are student-centered and provide opportunities to engage in justice-oriented inquiry.

		Analyze mathematical tasks for level of cognitive demand and for the ways they can support justice-oriented inquiry and culturally responsive language. Apply the five recognized practices for facilitating rich, equitable mathematical discourse. Assess available teaching resources for their mathematical and pedagogical accuracy as well as for the ways that they support culturally responsive teaching practices, academic language, and racial literacy. Develop strategies for creating formative and summative, student-centered, authentic mathematical assessments that value collaboration, creativity, curiosity, flexibility, and complexity.
Rural Educational Justice Internship II REJ: 5, 7, 8, 9	Advanced supervised teaching internship in appropriate subject and level classroom. Emphasis on asset-based relationships with students, families, and communities.	Develop student-centered authentic assessment that value collaboration, creativity, curiosity, flexibility, and complexity in racial literate and equitable classroom learning and assessment. Enact student centered justice-oriented inquiry curriculum in the content areas. Implement Universal Design for Learning and justice-oriented spaces. Utilize intellectual and humanizing engagement, pacing, and questioning.
Final Summer		
K-6 Social Studies & Literacy Integration for Rural	Provides pre-service teachers the opportunity to learn how to meaningfully, effectively, and efficiently integrate social studies and literacy	Reflect on their identity in relation to the social sciences and democratic education - considering how race, ethnicity, rurality and other factors and experiences have and will influence their work as a social studies teacher. Critically analyze standards, curriculum, and teaching resources to reflect a REJ vision.

Educational Justice REJ: 4, 5, 7, 8, 9	through a justice-oriented, inquiry, and place-conscious approach specific to rural learning spaces.	Apply social science disciplinary literacy in rural educational spaces. Design place-based curriculum that integrates literacy and social studies standards and is focused on students' and rural communities' assets. Implement research-based strategies to teach social studies in elementary grades through a justice-oriented inquiry lens with a place-conscious approach to teaching and learning. Plan inquiry-based instructional practices, routines, and talk moves that promote humanizing democratic classroom culture and routines. Implement authentic, student-centered social studies assessments that inform instruction and value collaboration, creativity, curiosity, flexibility. Utilize high quality and diverse resources that support culturally responsive academic language as well as racial and civic literacy.
Community Based Practicum REJ: 2, 3, 10, 11	Summer enrichment program at school sites. Emphasis on asset-based relationships with students, families, and communities.	Implement teacher leadership strategies that advocate for children, families, and communities through a REJ lens. Develop asset-based relationships with students, families, and communities. Design humanizing democratic classroom/camp environments where everyone is valued and has autonomy. Integrate music, art, drama, creative writing, and dance into camp activities. Apply mindfulness and social emotional learning strategies to inclusive daily practices. Engage in place-based community teaching and learning.
REJ Practices (see Table 1 for descriptions)		

1 Active Self-Reflection on Justice-Oriented Educational Philosophy + Commitments; 2 Asset-Based Relationships with Students, Families, and Communities; 3 Humanizing Democratic Classroom Culture and Routines; 4 Student-Centered Authentic Assessment that Values Collaboration, Creativity, Curiosity, Flexibility, and Complexity; 5 Planning and Enacting Justice-Oriented Inquiry Curriculum in the Content Areas; 6 Planning and Enacting Universal Design for Learning and Creating Justice-Oriented Spaces; 7 Integrating Arts into the Curriculum; 8 Intellectual and Humanizing Engagement, Pacing, and Questioning; 9 Choosing and Utilizing High Quality Resources that Support Culturally Responsive Pedagogy; 10 Integrating Mindfulness and Social Emotional Learning; 11 Teacher Leadership through Advocacy for Rural Educational Justice for Children, Families, and Communities

Learning Exchanges

Each summer, our first year and second year teacher residents as well as grant members, district partners, and community guests, engage in a summer community learning exchange (Guajardo et al., 2015). We carry the energy of the learning exchange forward throughout the year for our teacher residents. As teacher residents have one day per week that they are not in their residency placements, one of these days per month is reserved for monthly Learning Exchanges (LE). These monthly meetings are ongoing extensions of the celebratory start of the program held in the summer.

The initial LE is a multi-day event that introduces the tenets of the program, builds community, and establishes a groundwork of rural educational justice (REJ). While the teacher residents are the focus, mentor teachers, and administrators from the partner districts are also included in this community engagement event. Part celebration, part orientation, part institute, the initial LE is information-laden, community-oriented, and equity-embedded. It sets the tone for the mission and vision of the upcoming year.

Subsequent monthly LEs are generally in person, but they may be moved online based on weather or schedules. These half-day sessions are led by the ADTR and grant PI. Teaching faculty may attend, and various consultants might be invited, depending on the agenda or needs of the teacher residents. For example, one month might have a focus on the edTPA, required for licensure in NC, as grant funds are utilized to secure an edTPA consultant from November–February for the teacher residents (high touchpoint months). In the first year of the grant, the science course instructor met with teacher residents on Wednesdays to model science experimentation and use of lab materials (a challenge in an online environment). These LEs were further opportunities to engage in relationship building and community trust and ensure a healthy racial climate in the teacher education program.

Discussion

In every educational endeavor, there are opportunities that further cultivate the project's goals, tensions that restrict, change, or circumvent progress, and barriers that may prevent actors from meeting certain goals. Reflecting on these moments and learning from them is an essential component of the evaluation process. Moreover, when working in equity and justice spheres, keeping an open dialogue about fears and hopes, just and unjust, serves to ground us. In her 2003 book *Building Community*, bell hooks wrote, “Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity” (p. 196). But it is in silence that we lose; hooks continued, “Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, reveling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community” (hooks, 2003, p. 196). In this discussion section, we

present an analysis of learnings in the first two years of the edPIRATE grant, positioned first as opportunities and then as tensions and barriers.

Opportunities

In evaluating the translation of theory to practice, we identified several aspects in which the program was operationalized efficiently, the teacher residents excelled, or the grant team members exhibited strengths or expanded their knowledge base. In the context of this analysis, these aspects are identified as opportunities because they are areas that cultivated expansion and growth toward our robust justice-oriented goals. The following section will discuss opportunities in curriculum, recruitment and retention, and collaboration and collectivity.

Curriculum

During the curriculum dreaming phase (year one, before teacher residents arrived and the course creation and teaching journey began), core grant leaders and teaching faculty met frequently across the year for several hours at a time. While the core grant leaders established a curriculum dreaming framework, the teaching faculty on the grant brought rural and content expertise (Muhammad, 2020, 2023; Sealy-Ruiz, 2021; Wright, 2023) and were invited to contribute to vertical planning around how and why core REJ practices were embedded in each course. Faculty worked collectively to create objectives in alignment with the REJ practices; university, state, and national accreditation standards; and research-based best practices in multilingual and exceptional children education as the program was designed to embed these concepts in each course (CAST, 2024; Conrad & Gallagher, 2023; Nieto, 2013; Milner, 2018; Minor, 2023; Parker, 2022; Sealey-Ruiz, 2021; Shalaby, 2017). This process was iterative, requiring open dialogue, reflection, stepping away–and putting ego away–and then coming back together for more discussion (hooks, 2003).

Another growth opportunity was a partnership with the Educational Leadership program. Faculty in the department created educational leadership micro-credentialing (ELD-MC) to support mentor teachers and school leaders in partner districts, offered for free as part of the grant. The ELD-MCs included Evidence-Based Observations for Equitable Academic Discourse and Authentic Community Engagement in two courses, Part I: Foundations and Part 2: Application. The success of the micro-credentials (Militello et al., 2021; Tredway et al., 2021) led to branching out beyond the COE to other members of the grant advisory board in the College of Arts and Sciences. By year two, the Psychology faculty collaborated with the Educational Leadership faculty, creating two additional ELD-MCs: Trauma-Informed Strategies in Schools and Alternate Interaction Strategies to De-Escalate Challenging Behaviors. These short but effective training modules increased district buy-in and appreciation for the partnership with REI.

Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment was both a challenge and an opportunity; we will share some growth points in our recruitment efforts in this section and discuss tensions and barriers in the next section. As we shared in the process section above, since we spent considerable time on the ground in the districts for recruitment, this process strengthened our working relationships with the districts beyond the central office level (NCTR, 2023). We got to know the leadership and faculty of the schools on a more personal level, and our team spent countless hours in the communities (Crumb et al., 2023). We also grew as a team and attended these events together, whether online information sessions or staffing a booth in a middle school gymnasium; we heard how our peers presented the program, picked up tips, and often learned something new about the program and each other (Boggs, 1998).

Collaboration and Collectivity

While it is a theme seen in both curriculum and recruitment/retention, the opportunity for collaboration and collectivity is also a category of its own. The learning and growth the grant team experienced through collaboration and collectivity cannot be understated (Boggs, 1998). In addition to quarterly meetings as a full grant advisory team, the core grant team met regularly (sometimes several times a week, sometimes bi-weekly or monthly – depending on issues that had arisen), and teaching faculty met regularly, as described in the curriculum section, as did the Educational Leadership team. The meetings often involved team building and working together not just on grant work but on advancing our knowledge in racial equity, teacher residencies, the communities where we were doing our work, and more (Crumb et al., 2023; hooks, 2003; Picower, 2009).

We took retreats and immersed ourselves in work and one another, always staying in rural spaces to better understand our place and context (hooks, 1994, 2003; Oyen & Schweinle, 2020; Valenzuela, 2017). Members of the grant faculty read, shared, and discussed rural, racial literacy, and social justice books and articles, attended conferences together–as presenters and/or attendees–and brought understandings and implications back to the team. We regularly reserved time and space for dreaming, particularly in the new curriculum we were building for teacher residents (Boggs, 1998; Crumb et al., 2023; Love, 2019; NCTR, 2023).

Tensions & Barriers

A positive effect of democratic education is “a commitment to ‘radical openness,’ the will to explore different perspectives and change one’s mind as new information is presented” (hooks, 2003, p. 48). It is in this spirit of democratic education and radical openness that we explore the tensions and barriers that we experienced in the first two

years of the edPIRATE program organized in three categories: political climate, recruitment and retention, and curriculum.

Political Climate

In North Carolina, the current political climate around anti-Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) legislation created barriers and tension through legislation such as the Parents' Bill of Rights (colloquially known as 'Don't Say Gay' Bill, S.B. 49, 2023), Nondiscrimination and Dignity in State Work Act (shortened to the Compelled Speech Act, S.B. 364, 2023) and the proposed Equality in Education Act (referred to as the Anti-CRT Bill, H.B. 187, 2023). Governor Roy Cooper and the white, conservative majority N.C vetoed both S.B. 49 and 364. Congress voted to override the veto; H.B. 187 passed the House and has been stalled in its second reading in the Senate since March 2023.

One example of how this political climate created tension was when we experienced misinformation from local school districts about the contents of the Parents' Bill of Rights. Teachers indicated that due to this legislation, they were required by district policy to send home permission slips prior to read-alouds of any diverse texts; the legislation does not comment on racial or ethnic diversity or family structure, merely that "Instruction on gender identity, sexual activity, or sexuality shall not be included in the curriculum provided in grades kindergarten through fourth grade" (S.B. 49, 2023, p. 8). This reinforced the overwhelming whiteness of education (Picower, 2009).

Another legislative hurdle was the outcome of the Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. University of North Carolina, which held that the admissions programs at the University of North Carolina violated the 14th Amendment, Equal Protection Clause. As a result, ECU's Office of Research, Economic Development, and Engagement (REDE) shared new policies that could negatively impact our recruitment goals to increase racial diversity amongst rural teachers through this teacher residency pathway (Rowland et al., 2023). As our grant aimed to diversify the workforce, but recruitment remained open to all, edPIRATE was within the letter of the new law. However, any recruitment efforts going forward to protected class organizations would be under scrutiny.

While the polarized reaction to anti-DEI legislation (Zerquera, 2023) did not overtly influence those of us individually teaching in the edPIRATE program, as a team, it did create stress points as we worked to fulfill our mission and vision in this new context. We were apprehensive of how much the REJ practices might create tension and/or barriers for our teacher residents, mentor teachers, and administrators who were strongly invested in the homegrown pathway program (NCTR, 2023). Moreover, we questioned if new policies based on legislation might disrupt the recruitment of future cohorts, and impact the forward movement of our induction process, set to begin this year with our first round of graduates finishing their final courses as we write this manuscript.

Recruitment and Retention

We faced challenges in our first year with recruiting and retaining students. Our first living allowance was set at $25,000. However, through careful budget adjustments, the grant PI raised the living allowance to $41,000, which substantially offset the cost of living for teacher residents to pursue this full-time residency model degree. In our first year, we did not extend our recruitment efforts as far (or as close to home), nor did we have as broad of a staff. These factors impacted recruitment (Bland & Smith, 2023). We also had several students who were not able to continue with the program as it progressed for financial and/or family reasons or goodness-of-fit (e.g., online learning, justice focus).

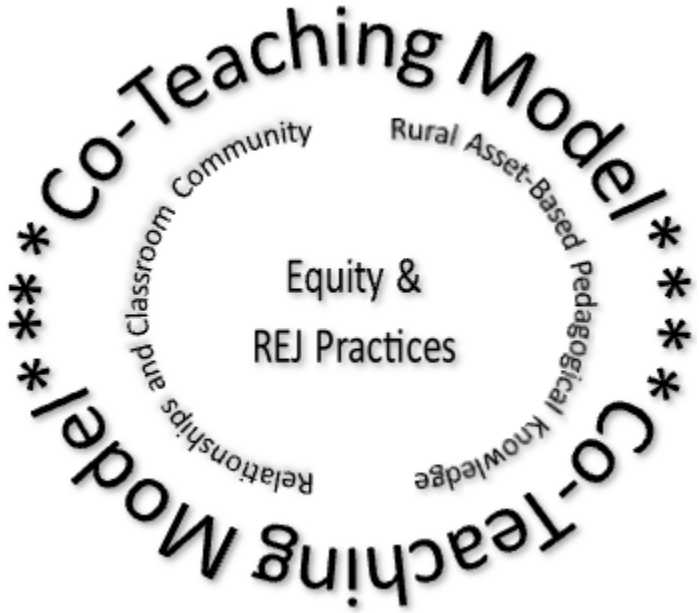
As described in the Opportunities section, we expanded our recruitment methods substantially in the second year. This has more than doubled our starting enrollment for the second cohort, who will begin engaging in the REJ curriculum starting in summer 2024, while the first cohort finishes and begins their first full year teaching and receiving edPIRATE induction support.

Curriculum

The REJ curriculum was an additional hurdle. A hallmark of university education is academic freedom. However, we are still bound by the constraints of the university catalog and the curriculum set forth in it. Curriculum dreaming takes time and effort, which was exerted during the first year of the grant. The university curriculum and catalog change process takes time and effort, and will not be complete until the close of the second year for the elementary courses. During this curriculum writing process, we integrated REJ and asset-based rurality (Crumb et al., 2023) into an existing framework of co-teaching (Tschida et al., 2023); Figure 1 demonstrates how these concepts work together. As we taught the first cohort, we simultaneously worked through this process while still teaching the old courses–using the tenets of academic freedom to adjust the content and materials to the rural and democratic foundational needs (e.g., Crumb et al., 2023; Ebarvia, 2023; hooks, 2003; Moll et al., 1992) of REJ, but with the challenge of being in a liminal space.

Figure 1

REJ Co-Teaching Model



Note. Adapted from Tschida et al., 2024

While this barrier has been removed for the elementary curriculum, in this upcoming year of the grant (2024–2025), we will make the same catalog adjustments to the secondary (middle grades) curriculum. As edPIRATE faculty, we will practice the balancing act more. The second cohort will experience the first year of the full edPIRATE elementary curriculum, with aligned objectives representing the catalog description; the program that will live on, ensuring sustainability even after the grant TQP grant ends (NCTR, 2023).

Next Steps – Induction and Synergy with School Leadership

As we reflect on the discussion of opportunities, tensions, and barriers, part of these cogitations are the next steps in this grant work. While typically, articles project future directions, this section discusses the near future. It is less ideology of what could be done as we describe plans that were part of the original grant submission that are still in the process of development.

The grant was written in collaboration with our Educational Leadership Department with the idea that the edPIRATE programs would create synergistic movement toward REJ throughout and between spaces of teacher education, leadership preparation, district administration, and district teachers. While the Educational Leadership team has been successful in producing, launching, and facilitating micro-credentials and is continuously forging relationships with district administration, we are not yet sure if we have capitalized on the potential synergy our teacher education/educational leadership partnership could cultivate. The summer LE is one process where we have started this work.

Additionally, we do not think we have formulated regular enough processes with the mentor teachers to engage them and cultivate energy around the potential of the REJ practices. By the time of the publication of this article, we will have hosted a Beginning Teacher Summit for all Beginning Teachers in partner LEAs, along with Mentor Teachers and teacher residents, focused on bringing the REJ practices to full capacity in classrooms. We also have brainstormed ideas for a micro-credential specifically created for Mentor Teachers on coaching teaching residents, with the REJ practices embedded.

Lastly, an additional benchmark of our program's success–our graduates' induction from beginning teacher to professional licensure at the conclusion of their commitment to the district– is a process that we need to fully flesh out. North Carolina has new teacher support and induction process. We intend to create a support system that coincides with the district process to meet state requirements while also focusing our graduates' attention on further cultivating REJ practices in their classroom. This will require continued mentoring and professional learning that includes the edPIRATE Educational Leadership arm, district/school leaders, and potentially the creation/facilitation of additional micro-credentials.

Conclusion

If we were to tease out a theme from the tensions and barriers presented above, it would be vision and mission versus pragmatism: that is, what we wanted to accomplish – what we freedom-dreamed (Love, 2019) as the grant was written and in year one – vs. the realistic political reality that we found ourselves working within. We deeply felt bell hooks's words, "Working as an academic within institutional structures designed to contain ideas, to repress imaginations and indoctrinate the mind, I have consistently felt extremely frustrated. More often than not, the demands of academics were at odds with intellectual life" (2003, p. 186). Yet hooks continued, and in this praxis piece, we share our practices and pitfalls as an act of reflective processing, looking back and moving forward. Education as the practice of freedom, teaching to transgress, is how minds and hearts open; it is in the dialogue that change happens (hooks, 2003).

Have we advanced the goal of REJ in our small segment of the rural Black Belt? Have we increased the racial literacy and cultural and historical literacy practices of our teacher residents entering rural classrooms? Have we, ourselves as teacher educators, cultivated more depth and expansion in our purpose to collaborate with, serve, and transform rural educational spaces in the Black Belt? Of these three questions, only the third and final one can be answered thus far in the undoubted affirmative. In a small amount of irony, our edPIRATE story so far reminds us of a simple but powerful quote from an activist who spent most of her life/work in urban spaces. Grace Lee Boggs wrote, "In order to change/transform the world, they must change/transform themselves" (1998, p. 153), not as an excuse to focus ourselves completely inward but to help us understand

that revolution and change must take place both within ourselves and in our institutions. To us, this also means that the changes we seek to happen in rural classrooms must be observable in our own relationships and practice. At this stage in our journey, we can only be sure that we have begun one side of Boggs's call.

Our collective dreaming, our bureaucratic diligence, and our pervasive collaboration have undoubtedly transformed ourselves, individually and collectively, and our institution through the tangible changes we have made to a teacher education program. Moreover, to further connect to Boggs's work, which activated change both for and through *community*, we know that we have cultivated tremendous community amongst our edPIRATE team. Time, future empirical research, and further district collaboration might serve to let us know the broader impacts of the edPIRATE program beyond this. We hope to follow up with these impacts in future contributions to rural education literature.

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About the Authors

Angela Novak, Ph.D., an equity advocate, is an associate professor and gifted coordinator at East Carolina University. For 25+ years, Angela has engaged collectively with learners, families, communities, and staff in K-22 education as an inclusion co-teacher in a variety of gifted and talented educator, specialist, and administrative roles in public education and in non-profit academic programming. Multilingualism, equity, and belongingness are deeply embedded throughout her professional work and personal lived experiences, contributing to her publications and presentations in giftedness, educator professional learning, collegians, and play. Angela is a mother-scholar, educator, and current editor of the *Journal of Advanced Academics.*

Jennifer L. Gallagher, PhD, is an associate professor in the Literacy Studies, English Education, and History Education department in the College of Education at East Carolina University, where she teaches social studies education courses and serves as the program coordinator for the undergraduate and graduate history education programs. Gallagher is originally from northern Wisconsin and earned her BA and MEd from the University of Minnesota. She taught social studies for several years in Colorado and then earned her PhD at Iowa State University, where she also taught diversity courses, social foundations of education, and social studies methods. Her research and her professional efforts focus on supporting teacher candidates, in-service teachers, and P-20 students in critical inquiry of the social world. She has also collaborated with colleagues across the college and engaged in related work in literacy education, science education, and educational leadership. Her work has been presented and published in state, national, and international outlets, including Social Education, Social Studies and the Young Learner, Social Studies Research and Practice, Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, and *Journal of Social Studies Research*. She can be reached at gallagherj17@ecu.edu or on Twitter as @DrGSocialEd

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"Hidden Gems" and "Rough Mannerisms": Examining Preservice Teachers' Discourses of Place and Rurality

Emilie Mitescu Reagan, *Claremont Graduate University*
Emilie Coppinger, *University of New Hampshire*
Bryan Mascio, *Power of Place*
Allie Tompkins, *University of New Hampshire*
Beth Fornauf, *CAST*

While research has examined preservice teachers' perceptions toward rural schools, there is limited research on how they navigate their own discourses of rural communities, particularly for preservice teachers embedded in the rural communities in which they teach. In this exploratory qualitative study, we examine the discourses of place and rurality of four preservice teachers (residents) while enrolled in a rural teacher residency program in the northeastern United States. Findings suggest that rural residents' discourses oscillated between place "as it is" and place as it "ought to be" as they identified strengths and challenges of generalized and specific rural communities. Additionally, findings suggest that preservice teachers engaged with and resisted idyllic and deficit discourses of place and rurality, drawing on their experiences living in and engaging with the unique contexts of their rural communities. We offer implications of this work for our responsibility as teacher educators who prepare teachers for schools and the rural contexts in which they will teach.
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***Keywords*: rural teacher preparation, teacher residency, preservice teachers, discourses, place, rurality**

For almost 70 years, advocates of rural education have called for specialized preparation of teachers for rural schools (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Yarrow et al., 1999). While each rural community is distinctly unique, rural schools tend to face similar opportunities (e.g., smaller class sizes, the centrality of the school in the community) and challenges (e.g., geographic remoteness, professional isolation, economic transition) that set them apart from urban and suburban schools (Barley, 2009; Biddle & Azano, 2016; Fry & Anderson, 2011). Drawing on these common and unique features, research suggests that teachers need place-specific knowledge and skills to work and live in rural communities (Biddle & Azano, 2016; White & Reid, 2008).

A growing number of teacher preparation programs have implemented coursework and field experiences to support preservice teachers in learning about the rural schools and communities in which they will teach (e.g., Azano & Stewart, 2015; Barley, 2009; White & Reid, 2008). While research has examined preservice teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward rural schools (e.g., Azano & Stewart, 2016; Burkett & Gimbert, 2009; Islam, 2012; Kaden & Patterson, 2014; Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015; Lock, 2008; O'Neal et al., 2008), there is limited research exploring how preservice teachers conceptualize and articulate their understandings of the rural communities in which they will teach while simultaneously navigating dominant social and cultural discourses on rurality. This is of particular relevance for preservice teachers who have experience living in rural communities prior to enrolling in a teacher preparation program (e.g., Burton & Johnson, 2010).

In this exploratory qualitative study, we examine preservice teachers' (known as "residents") discourses of place and rurality while enrolled in a rural teacher preparation program, Rural Teacher Residency (RTR).[1] Specifically, we address the following research questions:

- What are residents' discourses of place within a specific rural context?
- What are residents' discourses of rurality in relation to the strengths and challenges of a specific rural context?
- What is the interaction between residents' discourses of place and rurality?

Here, we examine how four rural-embedded residents engage with these discourses and the extent to which they embrace or push against commonly held discourses of rurality.

Conceptual Framework

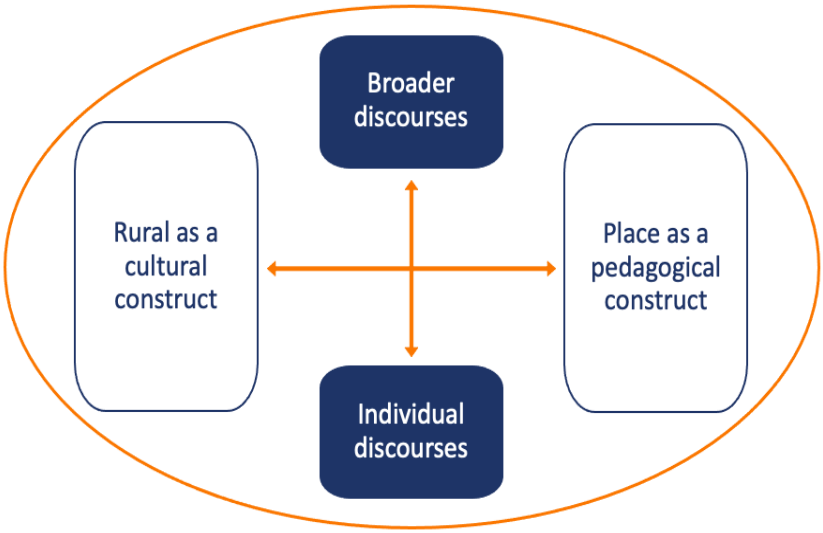
This study is framed by discourses of place and rurality. We draw on Gee's (2014) notion of "Discourse" to consider how language is used for communication as well as to signify membership within particular social communities that engage in particular actions. For example, teachers use specific language when enacting the role of the teacher in a school that they may not use in less formal contexts, such as at home. In the current study, discourse encompasses how preservice teachers interact with broad concepts of place and rurality as well as how they make sense of their own roles and identities in a specific rural context. This understanding of discourse considers both language preservice teachers use to talk about place and rurality as well as broader already-existing discourses in which they participate, those built on local histories, cultural values, social norms, and beliefs of a particular rural place. These discourses overlap, reinforce, and mutually shape one another as preservice teachers participate in and shape them.

[1] Rural Teacher Residency is a pseudonym for the residency program. All individual names and organizations described in this study are pseudonyms.

The current study examines the relationship between prevailing discourses of place and rurality – many of which are grounded in stereotypes of rural people and communities (Biddle & Azano, 2016) – as well as preservice teachers' own values and judgments about the communities in which they will teach and the people who inhabit and shape specific communities (see Figure 1).

We situate our understanding of place within theories of place-based (e.g., Sobel, 2004) and place-conscious (e.g., Greenwood, 2013) education. Such theories draw on the local context to inform curriculum (Sobel, 2004; White & Reid, 2008) and build on the pedagogical nature of places as they relate to the broader social, cultural, political, and economic landscape (Greenwood, 2013; Vernikoff et al., 2018). These approaches offer an alternative to decontextualized and *placeless* forms of teacher preparation that position teaching and learning as disconnected from the communities in which they exist (Haberman, 1996). We view the place as a dynamic pedagogical construct rather than a static backdrop for teaching and learning. The place encompasses social, historical, cultural, and political relations and practices that are ever-shifting and evolving (Schafft & Jackson, 2010). Put another way, places (like discourses) shape and are shaped by the values, interests, and priorities of those who inhabit them (Reagan et al., 2019).

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Similarly, we frame rurality as a "cultural construct" (Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015; Reagan et al., 2019). Following other rural teacher education researchers, we recognize that the descriptor "rural" embodies a number of competing discourses. For example, Anthony-Stevens and Langford (2020) observed that discourses of "White, pastoral, and culturally static" rural places operate in many areas of the United States (p. 334). In Australia, scholars have noted that discourses of rurality often position it as deficient in

contrast to "metro-centric" norms (Campbell & Yates, 2011), which has implications for rural schools being perceived as undesirable, difficult to staff, and even backward (Reid et al., 2010). Further, rural can be understood as both "a quantitative measure" in terms of distance from an urban center, population density, natural resources, economic drivers, and transition and as a "cultural construct" in terms of the identity and social constructions of those who inhabit it (Kline & Walker Gibbs, 2015, pp. 68–69). Its existence depends partially on the complex and overlapping considerations of geography, demography, and economy. It is further shaped by the commonalities and norms local community members know, emphasize, and consider important and that are constituted in everyday interactions and events.

We explicitly reject discourses that oversimplify rural places as either idyllic or fundamentally deficient and argue that both are inherently problematic. The "idyllic trope" portrays a limited view of rural places as cohesive, conflict-free communities and fails to acknowledge the reality of the challenges they face (Azano & Stewart, 2016, p. 115). In contrast, deficit discourses position rural schools and communities as problems to be fixed; by emphasizing what is perceived to be lacking in terms of resources and proximity to urban centers, rural schools (and, by extension, students) are subsequently identified as undesirable (Reid et al., 2010). These discourses lack attention to the complexity of rural places (e.g., Lichter & Brown, 2011), and we actively work against overly broad descriptions that define rurality only in contrast to the norms of metrocentric (Campbell & Yates, 2011).

Literature Review

Recent research on rural teacher preparation has focused on specific components of teacher preparation that aim to recruit and prepare teachers for rural schools and communities (Reagan et al., 2019). In particular, researchers have examined the extent to which there is a rural focus in teacher preparation (e.g., Barley, 2009) and whether and how specific teacher preparation structures (e.g., coursework, field-based experiences) support preservice teacher preparation and commitment to teaching in rural schools. Overall, the research suggests that rural-focused coursework and field-based experiences in rural schools and communities contribute to preservice teachers' awareness of rural contexts and encourage preservice teachers to examine their perceptions of rural schools and communities (e.g. Azano & Stewart, 2015, 2016; Burkett & Gimbert, 2009; Islam, 2012; Kaden & Patterson, 2014; Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015; Kline et al., 2013; Lock, 2008; O'Neal et al., 2008; Sharplin, 2010). However, the research also suggests that after completing coursework and field-based experiences, preservice teachers want more experience in rural schools and communities. In other words, a set of courses or isolated field-based experiences are not enough for preservice teachers to combat the fragmented nature of the preparation for instruction in rural schools or for them to develop complex understandings of rural communities.

There have been calls for initiatives to recruit teachers who are from rural communities as rural-embedded prospective teachers may bring insider and local knowledge to teaching (e.g., Barley & Brigham, 2008; Monk, 2007). Furthermore, as Reid et al. (2010) argue, knowing about a place can contribute to the relevance and connectedness of the school curriculum and to the sustainability of rural places. Some evidence suggests that these programs and initiatives attract teachers who are rooted in and committed to teaching in rural communities (e.g., Cobbold, 2006; Miller, 2012; Monk, 2007). However, following the work of Somerville et al. (2010), Reagan and colleagues (2019) cautioned that

> knowing a place by virtue of having lived or grown up there can prove problematic for teachers. Assumed knowledge of "the rural" can effectively counteract the process of coming to know a particular place and consequently coming to know oneself there. In other words, a sense of place is linked with one's construction of self in that place through conscious and intentional interaction. (p. 87)

Thus, even though preservice teachers can bring insider knowledge and experience, they also need multiple opportunities to unpack competing discourses of rural schools and communities. As Anthony-Stevens and Langford (2020) argue, "teacher education in rurality must commit to establishing pedagogical conditions that enable rural preservice teachers to critically analyze dominant definitions of rural spaces—and to examine how such definitions influence identity making and identity denial in rurality" (p. 342).

In our study, we attend to these advances in rural teacher preparation while also responding to recent calls in the field of rural teacher education research. Roberts and Cuervo (2015) challenge the rural education research field to broaden their discussion, confronting the fact "that in many studies that pass as 'rural' the meaning and nature of rurality is not central to the research or often taken for granted," and calling for researchers to "value rural people and communities and ensure rurality is central to the research agenda." (p. 7). Additionally, Their and colleagues (2021) identify "research deserts" within rural education, citing the relative dearth of studies that geographically take place in the northeastern United States, that involve post-secondary education settings, or that focus on teachers rather than K-12 students.

Context & Methods

This study is part of a larger longitudinal study of the impact of the rural teacher residency program on residents' learning and practice. In this exploratory qualitative study, we analyzed rural-embedded residents' discourses of place and rurality while enrolled in a rural teacher residency program (RTR). Established in 2016 as part of a Teacher Quality Partnership federal grant, RTR is a 15-month graduate-level program that prepares residents to become elementary and secondary mathematics and science

teachers in rural high-need schools[2] in a northern region of a northeastern U.S. state. The rural communities central to RTR are geographically separated from the rest of the state by a vast mountain range. Run by a public, research-intensive university, RTR is intentionally embedded in the rural communities in which the preservice teachers will teach. During the time of this study, coursework as well as school-based, community-based, and professional development opportunities were offered to preservice teachers two hours north of the university in the mountain region where RTR preservice teachers, district partners, and community partners were located. The structure and location of the program were aligned with the goal of preservice teachers getting to know and preparing to teach within a particular community (Reagan et al., 2018).

RTR faculty and staff supported the program's commitment to place-based tenets since the program's inception. In particular, RTR faculty and staff sought to challenge deficit discourses around the concept of place and rurality by providing opportunities for preservice teachers to think critically about their understandings and expectations of rural communities. Assignments in the program's introductory coursework focused heavily on discussion of and reflection on residents' experiences within particular rural communities. This was carried out with the intention of preparing these teachers for *somewhere*, as opposed to *everywhere* (Vernikoff et al., 2018).

As a five-person research team consisting of RTR faculty and staff, we were particularly interested in the ways in which preservice teachers engaged with discourses of place and rurality. Three of us had experiences working with the participants in this study as program leaders and course instructors. The other two of us joined the program after the participants in this study graduated and had begun teaching in partner schools in the region. During the time of data collection for this study, none of us worked directly with the participants in this study.

Participants

Participants in this study included four rural-embedded residents from RTR's first cohort, Amanda, Jessica, Kristin, and Mary, who lived in the rural region of the state prior to enrolling in the residency program. Some considered themselves outsiders after living in their communities for more than five years (e.g., Amanda), and others moved back to the towns where they grew up (e.g., Mary). The participants all identified as white women with children of their own, all held bachelor's degrees, and they were all career changers with more than five years of professional experience that included working in schools prior to enrolling in RTR. As presented in Table 1, the residents' undergraduate majors included business management, early childhood education, and sciences. Their prior

[2] The phrase “high-need school” is defined by the proportion of students who qualify for Free- and Reduced-Price Lunch per the requirements of the federal grant.

school-based experiences ranged from paraprofessionals to Title I educators to speech and language assistants. The residents also varied in terms of the certification area(s) they were pursuing in RTR, including elementary education, middle school science education, and secondary life science (biology) certification. Two of the four residents completed requirements across multiple certification pathways.

Table 1
Participant Information[3]

Pseudonyms (N = 4)	Educational Backgrounds	Professional Backgrounds	RTR Certification Pathways
Amanda Jessica Kristin Mary	Undergraduate majors: ● Management ● Biology ● Early Childhood Education ● Animal Science	● Paraprofessionals (N=2) ● Title I educators (N=1) ● Speech and Language educators (N=1)	● Elementary (K-6) (N=2) ● Elementary & Middle School Science (K-8) (N=1) ● Middle School Science (5-8) & Secondary Life Science (7-12) (N=1)

Data Sources

In this study, the primary data source came from one particular RTR course, "Sociocultural Perspectives of Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Place," that took place during the first summer term of the program. We chose this course because of its centrality to RTR's mission of understanding place and rurality as complex, multi-faceted constructs. The course had a field-based component, requiring preservice teachers to participate in a 30-hour internship with a community-based organization (CBO). Examples of these internship sites include recreation centers, family centers, and outdoor education organizations. As part of this course, residents were asked to record and reflect on observations from their internships and community interactions through the use of field notes (Emerson et al., 2011). These field notes were then used by residents, in combination with readings and discussions on place and rurality, to write a series of three

[3] Participant information is aggregated to preserve the confidentiality of participants' individual demographic, professional, and educational backgrounds.

thought papers throughout the summer (n=12 thought papers across all participants, consisting of approximately 75 pages worth of data). We triangulated the residents' thought papers with other data from the larger study, including residents' descriptions of rurality in pre- and post-residency surveys and post-residency focus groups.

Analyses

Our approach to qualitative data analysis was iterative (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As a team, we read through the corpus of data multiple times. We broke into subgroups, where we individually read residents' thought papers from the course, first creating and then utilizing the coding spectra shown in Table 2. One subgroup focused on the "contextualization" spectrum and discourse of place, assessing where preservice teachers were (or were not) making connections between concepts of place and the context of the local schools and communities. The second subgroup focused on two spectra: the "characterization" spectrum was used to assess whether preservice teachers were identifying a topic as a strength, challenge, or merely a description of the associated place, and the "valence" spectrum identified whether the resident was assigning a positive, negative, or indeterminate value to the place's handling of that same topic. Each researcher individually segmented the data based on meaning and continuous thoughts – segment size varied from parts of sentences to spans of a full page or more – and coded the resulting passages. Subgroups met to discuss the segmentation and coding; when differences were identified, we used evidence from the data to come to a consensus.

Table 2
Coding Spectra

Spectrum	Codes		
Contextualization	Place as Concept Only	Place as Context Only	Place Explicitly Connecting Concept and Context
Characterization	Strength of the Community/Place	Challenge for the Community/Place	Description of the Community/Place
Valence	Positive Judgment of the Community/Place	Negative Judgment of the Community/Place	Indeterminate Judgment of the Community/Place

We then met as a full research team to examine the convergence of the subgroups' coding, discussing and summarizing each passage and confirming codes across the

three spectra. Each individual team member then analyzed patterns and themes that emerged from each of the participants.

One tool used for this was creating a State Space Grid (SSG)[4] (Hollenstein, 2013; Lewis et al., 1999). The purpose of an SSG is to go beyond conventional analysis, representing the data as a dynamic system (Hollenstein, 2013; van Vondel et al., 2017). This is particularly valuable in the current study's third research question, investigating the interaction between the preservice teachers' discourses of place and rurality. Believing that the interactions between the three coded spectra are complex and dynamic rather than simple linear relationships, SSGs allow us to align with the "science of the individual" (Rose et al., 2013, p. 152) and visualize patterns and interactions accordingly.

After multiple rounds of coding and iterative analyses, we narrowed the focus of the third research question to specifically investigate the residents' interaction with broader discourses of idyllic and deficit framing of rural places. To this end, we concentrated subsequent analysis on the left column of the SSG representing preservice teachers' positive judgments for possible evidence of idyllic discourse and on the right column representing residents' negative judgments for possible evidence of deficit discourse. This use of the SSG was particularly valuable in understanding the discourse interactions as a dynamic complex system since this visual representation allowed us to look at the "conceptualization," "characterization," and "valence" spectra simultaneously. These, along with other findings, are explained in the following section.

Findings

We organize our findings by the three research sub-questions. First, we found that residents' discourses of place varied from abstract terms and ideas around place (place as concept) to specific terms and examples (place as context) to drawing specific connections between place as a context and concept (connection). We describe these variations as residents' discourses of place "as it ought to be" (a general description of place) and discourses of "place as it is" (a description of a place with specificity). Second, we found that the four residents' discourses of rurality were expressed in terms of their thinking around perceived challenges and strengths surrounding and within rural communities. Third, we found that through the interaction among discourses of place and rurality, residents tended to engage with dominant idyllic and deficit understandings of

[4] SSGs allow visualization of multiple data points on two or three dimensions, and the ability to analyze complex dynamic systems. In a basic sense, a SSG is essentially a scatterplot graph that can utilize ordinal, nominal or categorical variables, by displaying it as categorical on both the X- and Y-axes. This creates a grid - in the case of the present study with three rows and three columns, resulting in 9 individual cells - where each cell is a possible "state" that any given passage may exist in. Additionally, a third dimension of data may be represented, with each point on the grid signified in an appropriate color.

rurality and place. However, in some cases, the residents resisted these dominant discourses as described below.

Discourses of Place: "As It Ought to Be" Versus "As It Is"

Our analysis of the contextualization spectrum revealed that the four residents discussed[5] "place" in one of three ways. In some cases, the four residents did not focus on a particular rural location but instead referred more generally to characteristics often associated with rurality (e.g., a supportive, close-knit community). In these instances, they talked about ideas related to theories of place, such as social, geographic, and demographic characteristics, but did not use individual people, organizations, or locations to tell the story of the place. In contrast, residents' discussions of place sometimes focused on the specific context in which they lived and worked. Here, residents constructed narratives featuring individuals, organizations, and towns by name in order to illustrate their understanding of place. Finally, residents sometimes made explicit connections between place as a concept and their own specific context in which they would refer to specific people, organizations, or locations to explain or provide an example of a concept of place.

Discourses of Place "As It Ought to Be"

In conceptual discourses of place, residents' language refers to normative perceptions about the relationship between schools and communities and how they ought to operate interdependently. For example, the four residents drew on these norms to describe how educators *should* build relationships with families and communities. Amanda stated, *"If I know my community and the families within, I can teach the students in the way that suits their needs because I will understand their environment" (Amanda, Thought Paper 1).* Amanda suggests that the teacher's role is not only to support students but also to do so by being an active participant in the community. Such observations and statements could be about any school or community; Amanda's description did not reflect the specificity of a particular rural community.

Across the thought papers, the four residents noted the importance of out-of-school learning experiences, endorsed asset-based approaches as a good way to support students, and noted an increased awareness of life outside the school without referencing specific people or organizations. The residents consistently emphasized the importance of collaboration and building knowledge of a community through observation. Kristin stated, *"To truly get to know a community, one must recognize the importance of genuine and authentic relationships. Observations can be clear indicators of how the community functions through examining the dynamic fellowship of a society" (Kristin,*

[5] As described in our methods, all data from preservice teachers was in written form. Following Gee (2014), we include this writing as a form of discourse, and use the terms "said," "discussed," and "talked about" interchangeably in reference to the writing samples analyzed for this study.

Thought Paper 1). In these examples, the residents refer to the notion that one must come to know a place by learning about its people and values, a core idea of theories of place, but without offering specific examples of how or with whom to form authentic relationships.

Discourses of Place "As It Is"

In the thought papers, the four residents' descriptions of context were, for the most part, shared as narrative accounts of their experiences as participant observers in the community. They told stories about the communities in which they lived and worked and the specific people and places they interacted with served as characters and settings. The details they described appeared to be rooted not only in their observations but also in the past knowledge of the people and places they describe, underscoring Gee's (2014) conception of the role of context in discourse, which includes "what has previously been said and done by those involved in the communication; and any shared knowledge those involved have, including shared cultural knowledge" (p. 12).

In many cases, the residents described their observations of children's social behaviors across settings (e.g., activities with community organizations, camps, and neighborhoods), interactions with other residents and adults, and exchanges between caregivers and children. They talked about these contextual interactions in ways that both reflected their views of and experiences in the specific place and simultaneously served to solidify that view through their descriptions. In one example, Mary described her experiences working with a local group that facilitated outdoor activities for children in the community: *"The group [of children] was excited to have a strategy and work together without any one clear leader taking over. This experience was reminiscent of my experiences this summer observing the neighborhood kids [in the rural community] organizing their own fun" (Mary, Thought Paper 3).* In her description, Mary went on to make many references to specific landmarks and organizations to describe how the students involved in the activity related to one another and to the places she mentioned and emphasized her familiarity with the shared knowledge of the area.

In another example, Jessica relayed a conversation in which another adult referred to a community organization as a *"hidden gem."* Jessica further explained:

> *This place is truly a community-based center that needs to be shared more. I am picturing flyers and a current website, maybe handouts that can go home with children at school. Our district already has the After School Program through them, so why wouldn't we try to 'sell' the other services they have to offer?" (Jessica, Thought Paper 2)*

Jessica used the names of specific adults and specific community organizations to tell the story of the communities in which they lived and worked. Both Jessica and Mary's descriptions position themselves as "knowers" of place by illustrating their shared

knowledge of the people, organizations, and landmarks within their respective communities.

Tensions Between "Ought to Be" and "What Is"

When the residents made connections between place as a concept ("what ought to be") and as context ("what is"), we observed they were often negotiating how a community ought to be with how a community actually is. The residents highlighted nuanced and complex attributes of students that might go unnoticed and were underappreciated in a school setting. For example, Mary wrote,

> *Another student who has trouble completing assignments in school and staying on task is fabulous with young children. He constantly has the grade school children organized in games when attending his siblings' events and activities. When he sees the grade school kids in the halls of the high school, he not only acknowledges them but makes a point of talking to them and giving them high fives or fist bumps. I so enjoy seeing this kind-hearted side of a student who is sometimes misjudged in the school setting. (Mary, Thought Paper 3)*

Mary's discussion here challenges the idea of judging students based on academic norms (e.g., completing assignments) by pointing out qualities of a particular student that are obscured by how he does in school. She then offers examples of other characteristics that she views as just as important and noteworthy in broader community contexts.

There was also a socioeconomic thread in the preservice teachers' connections between concepts and context and a theme of descriptions of abundance versus scarcity. In negotiating the tension between what is and what ought to be and asking how communities might get to a place of valuing a variety of contributions, the residents wrestled with a tricky balance: acknowledging the existence of barriers contributing to scarcity while resisting descriptions of specific places that defined them by barriers or perceived lack of resources. Kristin said, *"Our remote location means we must travel a little further to access opportunities, but the quaint, quiet, and closeness with the community outweighs the seclusion. As with most communities, we rally together when times get tough." (Kristin, Thought Paper 3)*. Although they made some general statements about how they thought schools should or could operate, the four residents also grounded these wonderings with knowledge and observation in their specific contexts.

Discourses of Rurality: Challenges and Strengths

When examining discourses of rurality, we were particularly interested in the intersection between "characterization" (i.e., strengths and challenges) and "valence" (i.e., positive and negative judgments) coding spectra because these excerpts demonstrated residents' thinking around perceived challenges and strengths of rural

places. We found that across the assignments, the majority of the residents' descriptions of rural communities had no discernable judgment (positive or negative) about specific community members or rural community characteristics; rather, they tended to describe observations, ask questions regarding specific observations or interactions, or reflect on ways they may have judged circumstances prior to the RTR program. When residents described challenges, they tended to focus on the lack of resources, poverty conditions, the need for increased home-school-community connections, and the perceived disconnect felt by youth inside of schools. When residents described the strengths of rural communities, they tended to describe specific organizations, "community," and getting to know kids to support them in and out of the classroom.

Discourses of Rural Challenges

In passages coded as "challenges" of rural communities, the four residents tended to focus on the lack of resources and poverty conditions of the rural communities in which they were working. In these examples, the residents tended to reframe challenges to describe community resiliency and coming together in response to challenges. For example, in one thought paper, Kristin described, "*The 'pioneer' spirit is strong and will only continue to grow as the greater community strives to develop and demand support for one another. To know that you have others in the same 'boat' and willing to share the load helps to make rural life a bit more bearable" (Kristin, Thought Paper 3).* Here, Kristin described the general community response to "rural life," and ways in which coming together strengthen the community and support each other through burdens and challenges.

When residents described the challenges of rural communities negatively, their discourses tended to focus on specific judgments about a teacher or community member and their attitudes towards individuals or groups. In these examples, the residents may have been making judgments about community members who spoke negatively about students, families, or particular groups. For example, while observing an interaction at her community internship site, Mary noted,

> W*hile at [Mountain] Lake, I overheard one of the teachers apologize to Sean [a counselor] in front of students about the low academic ability of the group he had spent the day working with. I had not seen Sean have any problems with the students throughout the day, and I felt [the teacher] was selling the students short by labeling the group poor." (Mary, Thought Paper 3)*

In this example, Mary's negative judgment is regarded as a teacher-to-teacher interaction in which one teacher describes students outside of school in a negative light.

Discourses of Rural Strengths

In contrast to the perceived challenges of rural communities, the four residents described the strengths of rural communities either with positive or indeterminate value judgments. In particular, the residents described specific organizations and businesses that they viewed as resources for the community and opportunities where kids could be authentically themselves. For example, Mary described an outdoor education organization where kids could just be themselves, thrive independently, and explore nature. Drawing on these opportunities and resources, Mary raised questions about how teachers in schools could see students for who they are rather than in terms of their academic abilities or achievement.

Additionally, the residents described the strengths of rural places through what they perceived as examples of a strong and tight-knit community. Here, they highlighted that the strengths of the community outweighed the deficits or challenges of living in a specific rural place. In Kristin's third thought paper, she shared an example of the community rallying around a family after a fire to donate resources and toys, describing the sentiment that community members were more likely to mobilize and stick together, exemplified by a child who "gave what she had" to help another family. The residents drew on specific examples where individuals demonstrated the "Yankee spirit" and converged around supporting each other through challenging times.

Finally, when describing the strengths of rural places, the four residents highlighted the need to genuinely get to know students as a strength of rural places in and out of school settings. For example, Amanda drew on her experience as a speech-language pathologist and how she got to know students whom she supported. Kristin aimed to build on the "functional pioneer spirit" to develop a community in her classroom based on teamwork and respect for the individual. Mary aimed to see students in a positive light, as who they are outside of school and in the community. Together, these strengths were often positioned in terms of the perceived assets of rural communities and community-centeredness, as well as the ideals of how they wanted to draw in the assets of rural communities in the classroom.

Interaction Between Place and Rurality: Navigating Idyllic and Deficit Discourses

We recognized their engagement in common discourses of rurality and place as we examined how the four residents discussed these perceived strengths and challenges. One of these discourses is that of rural as idyllic, associating a rural place solely with presumed and stereotypical benefits of living and teaching in these places (e.g., close-knit community, small class sizes, connection to nature). Simultaneously, we saw evidence of the residents engaging with the discourse of rural as a deficit, associating rural places with only generalized challenges (e.g., lack of resources, facing economic hardships, metro-centric view of rurality). While we identified patterns of both idyllic and

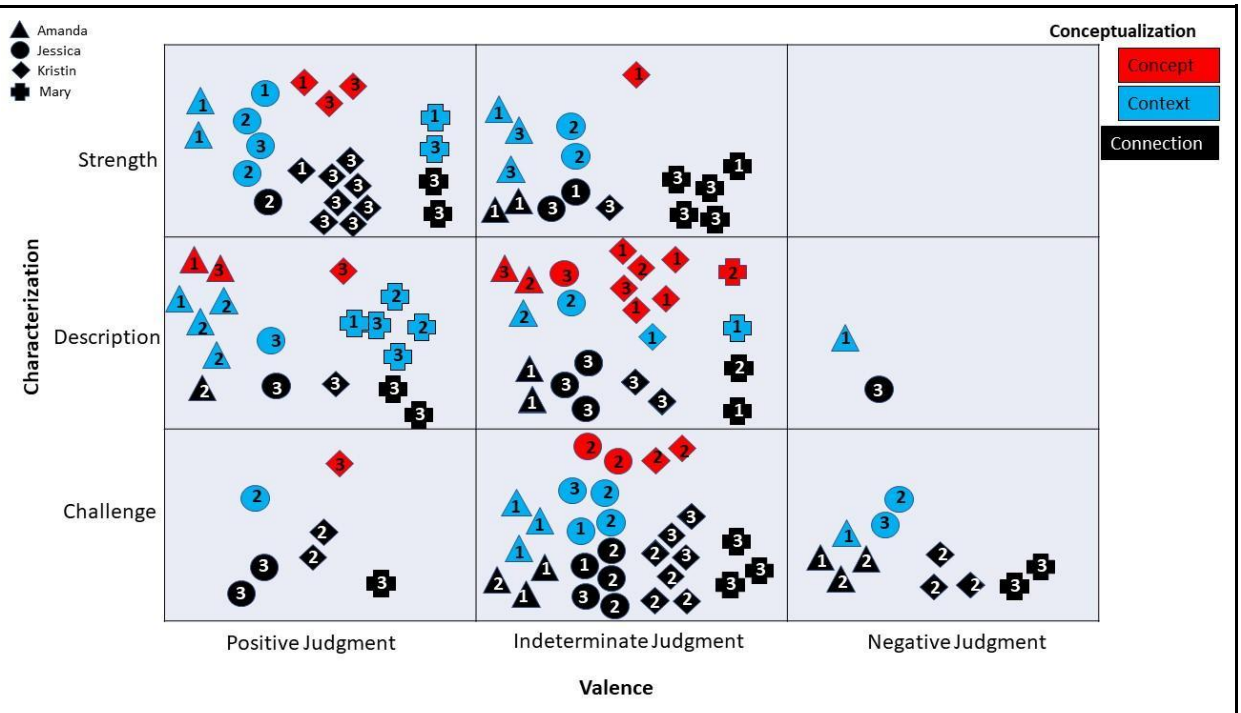
deficit discourse across the residents' thought papers, we also identified examples of the residents resisting these discourses. We identified several patterns that the residents used to disrupt idyllic and deficit discourses. In the following subsections, we draw on our textual analysis, as well as patterns observed in the SSG (Figure 2), to describe these disruptions.

Resisting Discourses of Idyllic Rurality and Place

As can be seen in the left column of Figure 2, the residents made quite a few positive judgments, relatively speaking. In the vast majority of these, they engaged in idyllic discourse in their context-bounded narrative descriptions from their observations in the community. These included previously mentioned references to the "pioneer" or "Yankee" spirit in the region. This idyllic discourse was also marked by stories of the community rallying together, which Amanda summarized as *"The town does such a great job helping others" (Amanda, Thought Paper 1).* When residents resisted idyllic discourse, they tended to do so in one of three ways: they applied a lesson learned to their teaching, contrasted in-school with out-of-school observations, or asked questions.

Figure 2

Fully Disaggregated State Space Grid



Note. This SSG displays fully disaggregated data, with each coded passage from each thought paper from each participant as a separate visual representation (N=128 coded passages). Each participant is depicted in a different shape, within which the source of

the respective passage (number of the thought paper) is shown. The Valence and Characterization spectra are shown across the x- and y-axis, respectively, and color depicts the Conceptualization spectrum.

One way that the four residents resisted idyllic discourse was by taking what they had learned from a person or organization and applying it to their own emerging teaching practice. An example of this is when Jessica later reflected on what motivated her admiration for the "hidden gem" organization and applied that to the school in the community where she lived,

> *I know [my school] was talking about doing home visits, and I see the ["hidden gem" organization] as a great model for this. Maybe more collaboration in this area would be beneficial to our teachers and administrators. I am looking forward to learning even more about the ins and outs of the services provided, along with success rates and strategies that seem to work for the team and can be carried over into the classroom, school, and community. (Jessica, Thought Paper 2)*

In this example, Jessica resisted the oversimplified discussion of a community organization to consider the more complex issue of how, as a future educator, she can integrate what she learns from local organizations into her own classroom practice.

The second way residents resisted idyllic discourse was by juxtaposing observations of students in a community setting with the school's framing of the same students. This always contrasted the students' positive perception and performance outside of the school with the negative school experience. This could be seen in the connection Mary made (shared above) about her kind-hearted student who struggled with staying on-task in school and yet took charge of younger neighborhood children to support and encourage them. She described the experience of getting to know students outside of school as important because "*Many times the young adults I worked with in class were very different people outside of the confines of school*" *(Mary, Thought Paper 3).*

The four residents also resisted idyllic discourses when they posed questions rather than took positions during their observations and reflections on the community. Kristin posed a question when community members reported that, in their town, poverty had little impact on students' social experience in school or during athletics. Connecting these community reports and observations with what she was learning in her coursework, she took an inquiry stance rather than adopting or dismissing this contrasting information. She asked, "*At what age do youth begin to recognize a social distortion based on income inequality...does socioeconomic status, of which youth have no control, affect their social*

involvement?" *(Kristin, Thought Paper 2).* As discussed in the next section, this led to her ongoing investigation of poverty in the rural community.

Resisting Deficit Discourses of Rurality and Place

The four residents made very few explicitly negative judgments in their writing, as seen in the right column of Figure 2. In those negative judgments, residents occasionally engaged in simple deficit discourses based on their prior personal knowledge and experiences with the individuals or community, such as Jessica agreeing with a parent who described a teacher as "*very cold and just doesn't care*" (*Thought Paper 2)* or Amanda commenting on a community member's "*raggedy appearance and rough mannerisms." (Thought Paper 2)*. However, this simple deficit discourse was not common across the residents' thought papers; instead, they either tended to take an inquiry stance or made negative judgments of those community members who were themselves judging others.

. When taking an inquiry stance, residents tended to engage in the same questioning that moved them away from simple, idyllic discourse. As illustrated above, Kristin engaged in an ongoing investigation questioning the developmental trajectory of SES mattering to children, including interviewing her own children of different ages about what they see among their classmates. Other residents used questioning very explicitly to stop themselves from taking a deficit stance. For example, Jessica states:

> *The way the grandmother was interacting with this little boy has me thinking a few different things. First off, what is this child going to be like when he enters school? . . . Second, is she fostering his creativity by feeding into him being a dinosaur?. . . If I had met her prior to this class and observed her interactions, I believe I would have thought differently about her, maybe making the judgment that she was not being hard enough on him or that she spoils him by letting him do whatever he wants. (Jessica, Thought Paper 3)*

The other way that residents resisted simple deficit discourse was when they engaged in what we referred to as "meta-judgment" or "judging the judgers." In these situations, the residents negatively judged individuals because those individuals were negatively judging others. Mary's complaint (shared previously) about a teacher needlessly criticizing students while at a lake is indicative of her judging educators whom they perceived as being overly critical of students. This meta-judging sometimes occurred when residents encountered community members exhibiting deficit discourse about poverty in the community. For example, in Kristin's investigation of views on SES, she encountered a landlord who believed "*some of his impoverished adult tenants manipulate the system to get out of working even going as far as getting a prescription for a 'working dog' to enhance their disability. . . . It appears that, by adulthood, the negative connotation surrounding poverty has been established*" *(Kristin, Thought Paper 2).*

Throughout these thought papers, the residents engaged in discussions of place as it is and place as it ought to be as well as navigating the tension that can arise between these two perceptions. As they described the rural communities they were situated, we identified different patterns in their discourse around strengths and challenges. While they engaged in idyllic and deficit discourses of rurality and place, the residents resisted dominant discourses by incorporating more nuanced discussions of the strengths and challenges they observed in these places. In this case, as residents resisted deficit and idyllic discourses of rurality and place, they inevitably moved toward alternative discourse. We identified several methods residents used to move away from these discourses; however, we hope future research can further explore the discourse(s) residents were moving toward.

Discussion

Building on the literature on rural teacher preparation (Azano & Stewart, 2016; Burkett & Gimbert, 2009; Islam, 2012; Kaden & Patterson, 2014; Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015; Lock, 2008; O'Neal et al., 2008), we were interested in how preservice teachers who had lived in and were embedded in rural communities navigated discourses of place and rurality while enrolled in the RTR program. This exploratory study examined how four rural-embedded residents engaged in their own discourses and broader discourses of place and rurality.

Overall, we found that residents engaged in their discourses of place and rurality and broader discourses of place and rurality as they came to know--or know more deeply or in a new way--specific rural places (Corbett, 2010). In particular, through thought papers, observations in the community, and community-based internships, the four residents navigated general understandings or ideas around what it means to know a place and specific references to individuals, organizations, and practices. In these instances, they moved back and forth between what "it ought to" mean to know a rural place, generally, and their understandings of "what is" a specific rural place. Additionally, they navigated between the challenges and strengths of rural communities. Specifically, the residents identified poverty conditions, limited resources, and disconnect between schools, home, and the broader community as challenges they perceived or observed. When residents identified strengths, they highlighted the strengths of the community (as a broader construct), resilience, organizations, and getting to know children and youth in and out of formal school settings.

There was some evidence of the residents' engagement with broader rural discourses, in particular idyllic and deficit-based discourses of rurality. This is not surprising, given broader representations of rurality and rural communities (Biddle & Azano, 2016). However, we also found evidence of resisting these broader discourses by asking questions of themselves or their inferences or through normative statements around the individual making potentially problematic statements. While limited, we view these examples as evidence of entry points for further work around how preservice

teachers may begin to unpack their observations and understanding of rural places beyond superficial or surface-level ideas.

Together, this study provides a lens into how the residents are understanding their roles as situated in specific rural communities. Furthermore, this study contributes to the literature on preservice teachers' discourses of place and rurality as they develop conceptual and practical tools to become high quality teachers in rural communities. Through our coding schema, we believe this study offers a nuanced framework for analyzing the specificity of place about individual and broader discourses of place and rurality.

Limitations

While we believe this study contributes to the literature on rural teacher education, focusing on preservice teachers' discourses of place and rurality, we also recognize the essential limitations of this exploratory research. We acknowledge that it is bounded by the specificity of the program (RTR), geographic and socio-political context (in our northeastern state), as well as the course assignment and stage of the program (introductory summer) from which the data was derived. As such, we do not claim to generalize how preservice teachers in other programs or contexts may engage with similar discourses. While students' thought papers yielded rich data, we recognize the limitations of course assignments and the potentially performative nature of preservice teachers' written work. Situating this inquiry at the beginning of the program limits our understanding of whether and how residents' discourses changed throughout the program and how they engaged in these discourses in their work in schools. We view these limitations as opportunities for further inquiry and research related to preservice teachers' discourses of and practices related to place and rurality in rural teacher preparation.

Implications

As noted, scholars have advocated for the centrality of place in the rural teacher education curriculum (e.g., Biddle & Azano, 2016; White & Reid, 2008). For example, as White and Reid (2008) suggest:

> Teachers who, over their careers, take up a rural placement need to be prepared for the unique features of living and working in a rural community—in particular, the need . . . to be acutely aware of and respond to community issues and the potential of place-based pedagogies for expanding the repertoire of practice available to [students] in rural schools. (p. 9)We see this study as one way of examining how preservice teachers make sense of the unique features of living and working in the rural communities where they will teach by analyzing their discourses of place and rurality.

We offer implications from this study for rural teacher preparation practice and research. As this study suggests, in the first summer of the RTR program, the preservice teachers demonstrated some evidence of resisting superficial or stereotypical discourses

of idyllic rural tropes or deficit-laden ideas about rurality. Building on existing literature, this study suggests that preservice teachers need multiple opportunities during teacher preparation to engage with rural schools and communities (e.g., Azano & Stewart, 2015) and unpack their discourses and broader discourses of rurality. Additionally, the four residents in this study had significant experience living and working in the rural region before enrolling in RTR. However, as we noted, despite having connections to and experience with rural communities, preservice teachers need structured opportunities in coursework, in schools, and in the community to question their taken-for-granted assumptions and understandings of the rural places in which they live and teach (Sommerville et al., 2010). Along these lines, teacher preparation should provide intentional opportunities and strategies for preservice teachers to push against and unpack superficial generalized understandings of rural places toward knowing the unique features of a specific rural place by taking on an ethnographic lens (Corbett, 2010; Reagan et al., 2019).

We call for multiple intentional opportunities for preservice teachers to name and describe their understanding of specific places and to unpack their normative assumptions around place and rurality. Specifically, teacher preparation programs should create opportunities for preservice teachers to ask questions such as: "What am I observing, and how does it connect to my understanding of a specific rural community? What makes this a strength (or challenge) of this specific rural community? Why do I believe this to be the case? And what evidence do I have to support this understanding? Or what evidence do I have that does not support this understanding? Finally, how does this understanding inform my work as a teacher?"

Further research is needed to explore the extent to which alternative discourses are associated with complex understandings of rural places, particularly how it manifests in schools and with students. We believe our coding schema and the use of State Space Grids can support future research on the extent to which these alternative discourses are associated with a more complex understanding of rural places. Building on this work, we recommend longitudinal research that follows preservice teachers through teacher preparation and into their first years of teaching to examine how discourses of place and rurality are presented and unpacked during teacher preparation across multiple settings (e.g., in coursework, schools, and community settings), and in the first years of teaching. As Anthony-Stevens and Langford (2020) argue, there is a "need not only for specific experiences in rurality to be analyzed, but their relationship to wider circulated stereotypes about rurality should be critiqued as well" (p. 10). Further research is needed to explore the curriculum of rural teacher preparation programs and how opportunities during teacher preparation shape or inform preservice teachers' understanding of place and rurality as it may ultimately enable teachers to expand opportunities for students, thus leading to sustaining rural schools and communities (Reid et al., 2010).

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About the Authors

Emilie Mitescu Reagan, PhD, is an associate professor of education at the Claremont Graduate University School of Educational Studies. Reagan's research focuses on social-justice-oriented teacher education policy and practice. As part of her research, Emilie has secured external funding to develop programs and conduct research on rural teacher education, including a U.S. Department of Education Teacher Quality Partnership grant

to design and implement a rural teacher residency program (as co-principal investigator) in a Northeastern U.S. state.

Emilie Coppinger is a doctoral candidate in the University of New Hampshire Education Department, specializing in Children and Youth in Communities. Her research explores how school-community partnerships are conceptualized and enacted. In addition to her research, Emilie has experience building and sustaining partnerships in non-traditional learning environments with diverse community stakeholders.

Bryan Mascio, EdD, is an adjunct lecturer at Harvard Graduate School of Education, Faculty-in-Residence for Power of Place Learning Communities, and an independent education consultant. With a background as a K-12 teacher and teacher educator and a grounding in Disability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit), he works with teachers and schools to use Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and other equity-oriented frameworks to best support students and families who have been disserved by traditional schooling.

Allie Tompkins is a behavior analyst and doctoral student at the University of New Hampshire. She received her bachelor's degree from the University of Vermont and a master's degree in special education from Simmons University. She currently runs an inclusive preschool program in New Hampshire. Her research interests include social-emotional learning, disability activism, and social justice in schools.

Beth Fornauf, PhD, is a research scientist at CAST. Her research explores how educators can draw on Disability Studies/DisCrit and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as complementary frameworks for inclusive, equity-oriented pedagogy. In addition to her role at CAST, Beth has taught courses for practicing teachers, teacher candidates, and educational leaders on critical special education, research design, and inclusive education.

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

Eileen M. Wertzberger, *Kansas State University*
Todd Goodson, *Kansas State University*

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

<table>
<tr><th>Summer</th><th colspan="2">Fall</th><th colspan="2">Spring</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Induction Support</td><td>Monday</td><td>Tuesday–Friday</td><td>Monday</td><td>Tuesday–Friday</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Foreign Language Methods (3 cr)

Languages and your Future (1 cr)

Spanish Microfiction (3 cr)</td><td>AM: Residency in a Spanish Language Classroom</td><td rowspan="3">History of Education (3 cr)

FLES Methods (3 cr)</td><td>AM: Residency in a Spanish Language Classroom</td></tr>
<tr><td>Topics Core Teaching (3 cr)

Literacy and Diverse Learners in the Content Areas (3</td><td>PM: Service Learning working with Emergent Bilingual Students</td><td>PM: Service Learning working with Emergent Bilingual Students</td></tr>
</table>

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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About the Authors

Dr. Eileen Wertzberger is the Director of Field Experiences and an assistant professor in Curriculum and Instruction at Kansas State University. She taught in Kansas public schools for 13 years and currently teaches doctoral courses on research methodology. In addition, she has published research in the areas of teacher preparation and teacher induction. Eileen currently holds the distinction of being the Jim and Sandy Tangeman Professor in Education.

Todd Goodson has taught at every level from seventh grade through Ph.D. students, and he has held university faculty appointments in Education and Arts and Sciences. Currently, he serves as the Associate Dean of Teacher Education at Kansas State University and holds the Lydia Skeen Endowed Chair in Education.

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Journaling as a Reflective Tool in a Rural Teacher Residency Experience

Nichole L. Smith, *North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University*
Kimberly D. Erwin, *North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University*
Alisa S. Taliaferro Russell, *North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University*
Cailisha L. Petty, *North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University*

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	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
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/Time Management (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)	Scheduled 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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About the Authors

Nichole L. Smith, EdD, is a professor and serves as the MAED Reading Program and edTPA Coordinator in the Department of Educator Preparation at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. She teaches a variety of courses, including Clinical Practice I, Children's Literature, and Instructional Media. Her research interests include teacher retention, content literacy development, and teacher professional development. As an educator, she feels it is necessary to create a student-centered learning environment driven by assessment data, where literacy is at the core of all learning. Prior to her role at the university, Smith taught high school English and served as a media specialist. nlsmith2@ncat.edu

Kimberly D. Erwin, PhD, is the Associate Dean for the Center of Student Success and Engagement and an Associate Professor of the Department of Educator Preparation in the College of Education at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. Her research interests include African American males at the elementary level with a literacy focus and the preparation of teacher leaders who aspire to transform education by utilizing research-based pedagogical practices that meet the needs of diverse students. Erwin's research is grounded in the scholarship of Funds of Knowledge and its

dimensions. Erwin is a former elementary school principal and teacher. kderwin@ncat.edu

Alisa S. Taliaferro Russell, EdD, is the Associate Dean of Quality Assurance and Graduate Programs in the College of Education at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. She is well-known for her dedication to improving the quality and effectiveness of academic programs. She focuses on promoting data interoperability to empower educators with innovative data solutions. Additionally, she uses evidence-based practices to improve teaching and learning outcomes and encourage a culture of continuous improvement. Her research interests include culturally responsive leadership, social capital, and equity in data visualization, emphasizing her commitment to creating inclusive and effective educational environments. Dr. Taliaferro Russell's work aims to bridge gaps in academic settings and bring about meaningful change through data-driven practices. Prior to her role at the University, Dr. Taliaferro Russell taught elementary students and served as K-5 School Administrator. astaliaf@ncat.edu

Cailisha L. Petty, PhD, is the Master of Arts in Teaching Program Coordinator and an Associate Teaching Professor at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. She earned a BS in Biology and MS in Biology Education from NCATSU. She earned a PhD in Curriculum and Teaching from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with an emphasis in science education. Her research interests include equity in science education for students of color and preparing engaging, highly qualified STEM educators. mrspetty@ncat.edu

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A Teacher Residency Program at the "Crossroads of Texas": A Case Study Examining Return on Investment

Dr. Valerie Hill-Jackson, *Texas A&M University*
Dr. Delic Loyde, *Hearne Educational Foundation*
Cassidy Caldwell, *Texas A&M University*
Judy Waight, *Texas A&M University*
Sheneria J. Perry, *Texas A&M University*

Located at the literal and figurative crossroads of Texas, Hearne Independent School District (Hearne ISD) and its leadership are faced with the choice to either continue their yearlong teacher residency program (TRP) for novice teachers or suspend it altogether. To aid in their decision-making process, the authors ask: Is the yearlong TRP implemented by Hearne ISD worth the investment? First, in applying the *human capital theory*, this article ties tangible (financial) and intangible (non-financial) investments and returns for teachers to talent development. Next, a quick review of the related literature supports the discussion and buttresses this paper's return-on-investment (ROI) investigation. Third, a qualitative case study methodology leverages a unique district-level data set and allows an examination of the net return relative to the overall cost of Hearne ISD's investment of its TRP. Finally, a more nuanced understanding of Hearne ISD's specific investments and returns for a resident teacher candidate, compared to a non-resident teacher candidate, simultaneously surfaces alongside an ROI model for TRPs. Consequently, two emergent findings, folded into a discussion on teacher residency-ROI and rural school leadership, are presented herein.

***Keywords*: teacher residencies, rural school districts, teacher turnover, return on investment, human capital theory**

A short drive along Highway 6 in southeastern Texas, just 20 miles north of a tier 1 research university, is the bucolic sleepy town of Hearne, with 4544 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). "Known as 'The Crossroads of Texas,' Hearne is nestled at the crossroads of three major highways (TX 6, U.S. 79, and U.S. 190) as well as two major Union Pacific Railroad lines" (City of Hearne, n.d., para. 3). Hearne is the namesake of a 19th-century family whose wealth derived from a 10,000-acre cotton plantation. Today,

Hearne is just over four-square miles and retains all the hallmarks of a small town with one central bank, a rebounding downtown, and, like other rural communities across the country, a school district saddled with a teacher attrition rate that ranges from 30-45% on average each year (Hearne Independent School District [Hearne ISD], 2024).

The rise in teacher attrition has been a major issue for decades, but a significant spike in teachers leaving the profession has occurred since the Covid-19 pandemic. Globally, nations wrestle with perennial teacher shortage challenges (Craig et al., 2023; Mason & Matas, 2015; Williams et al., 2022). National attrition rates, on average during 2022–2023, inflated to 23% as beginning teachers left the profession at a staggering rate of 30% (Education Resource Strategies [ERS], 2024, para. 3). In Texas, "Teacher vacancy rates in the state hit 4.5% this school year, the highest since at least 2015" (Barnum, 2024, para. 9) while others evaluate the state attrition rate to be as high as 20.88% (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2023). Although teacher vacancies are a vexing problem for every type of school district, rural communities face uncommon challenges:

> To be sure, there have been a small but growing number of empirical studies that have insightfully identified the challenges and deficits common to rural schools that impact their ability to ensure adequate teacher staffing and teacher retention. These include lower salaries due to a smaller tax base; unsafe and inadequate facilities; fewer classroom and pedagogical resources; more out-of-field and cross-grade teaching because of smaller faculty sizes; less separation between personal and professional life resulting in limited privacy; fewer job opportunities for family or significant others; enhanced responsibility for overall caretaking of students; professional and psychological isolation due to distance from professional communities and other education institutions; as well as fewer amenities, such as retail services and recreational activities. (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023, p. 399)

Amid international, national, and local teacher shortages, there is an upsurge in the number of teacher residencies as an innovative approach to district-driven teacher preparation (Hill-Jackson et al., 2020), and rural school districts are participating, too. Districts provide long-term classroom space for residents to train alongside master teachers. Districts provide long-term classroom space for residents to train alongside

master teachers as their chief goal is to acquire these residents as teachers of record for the following academic school year. In turn, the residents serve in an assigned classroom for a stipend and gain exposure to instructional learning opportunities (Kwok et al., 2023). Many district leaders and researchers hypothesize that the investment of teacher residencies as extended clinical training for beginning teachers may provide returns or benefits to the district.

For instance, practitioners and scholars agree that teacher residencies show signs of being a means to stem attrition (Guha et al., 2017) and serve to develop quality beginning teachers (Guha et al., 2017; Hill-Jackson et al., 2020) in ways that prove financially advantageous for budget-conscious school leaders. However, the inability to quantify returns on investments made to teacher residencies has hampered empirical investigations to support these assertions further. As a result, school district leaders in rural communities and those responsible for implementing TRPs lack clear, evidence-based research about the net benefit of TRPs.

Located at the literal and figurative crossroads of Texas, Hearne ISD’s school leaders are faced with the choice to either continue their yearlong TRP for novice teachers or suspend it altogether. To aid in their decision-making process, the authors ask: Is the yearlong TRP implemented by Hearne ISD worth the investment? First, applying the human capital theory, this article ties teacher investment to talent development. Next, a quick review of the related literature provides a backdrop to the discussion and buttresses the meaning offered in this investigation. Third, a qualitative case study methodology leverages a unique district-level data set and allows an examination of the net return relative to the overall cost of Hearne ISD's investment of its TRP. Finally, a more nuanced understanding of Hearne ISD's specific investments and returns for a resident teacher candidate, compared to a non-resident teacher candidate, simultaneously surfaces alongside a return-on-investment (ROI) model for TRPs. Consequently, two emergent findings, folded into a discussion on teacher residency-ROI and rural school leadership, are presented herein.

Theoretical Perspective: Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory (HCT) asserts that "individuals and society derive economic benefits from investments in people" (Sweetland, 1996, p. 341). Further, HCT delineates that those investments into human capital consist of "programs and activities, direct and indirect, instructional and/or individual that positively affect the development of the individual and the productivity and the profit of the organization" (Smith, 1988, p. 1). Although there are various types of human capital investments (Schultz, 1971), education or training is regarded as chief among them for empirical analysis. Human resource developers, including school district leadership, are responsible for supporting the individual to improve the overall performance of the workforce (Swanson & Holton, 2009).

Becker (2009) clarifies that training as a form of education is an investment in human capital. Training is an essential facet of workforce development, which is focused on critical investments of the individual to improve performance (Swanson & Holton, 2009). Training may consist of programs and activities that directly or indirectly influence individual performance and productivity (Smith, 1998). Mincer (1974) describes on-the-job training and apprenticeships as one of the many educational approaches of HCT. Becker (2009) notes the importance of on-the-job training, much like teacher residencies, as an investment in human capital. A substantial body of literature on teacher education and training has reframed the narrative on professional learning and development programs as intentional and thoughtful strategies designed to expand in-service teachers' professional competencies and human capital (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, 2013; Nolan & Molla, 2017). There is an economic component to education, and those economic costs provide learning organizations with a language to calculate costs and returns—albeit with curbed certainty.

> The field of human capital theory provides an empirical framework that begins to measure these economic relationships. With a complete understanding of the foundations of human capital theory, educators and education policymakers can formulate their own evaluations of human capital . . . design educational programs that contribute to economic growth without compromising educative purpose, and,

> perhaps, to clearly define the economic component of education. (Sweetland, 1996, pp. 356–357)

TRPs, as a form of on-the-job training, are human capital investments aimed at improving and developing the human capital of teachers (Vaidya & Hanna, 2023). Residencies provide teaching candidates with both the underlying theories of effective teaching and a yearlong in-school placement or "residency" in which they practice and hone what they are learning alongside an effective mentor teacher in the classroom. Unfortunately, not much has been written about HCT and the link of TRP to ROI for school districts.

Investing in teacher training and development within a residency program offers specific and general human capital that adds value to students, the school, and the district (Guha et al., 2017). HCT provides a theoretical framework for understanding resident retention of teacher residents—as a concept of ROI for the TRP. Through this lens, the researchers can conceptualize a TRP's potential to support the individual teacher resident. TRPs, as a form of advanced clinical training (Hill-Jackson et al., 2020), offer teachers 360-degree support (i.e., financial, mentoring, and feedback) during the first three years of teaching, which heightens a teacher's commitment to teaching. Also, the researchers can envision the school district's role in providing innovative workforce development opportunities that are impactful for the school district and transferable for the teacher. Similarly, school district leaders have a responsibility to develop their new teachers by investing time, resources, and currency.

Two Attributes of Teacher Turnover: A Brief Review of Related Literature

The national numbers on teacher retention post-COVID are alarming and signal the turnover of qualified teachers in America's classrooms. While the teacher shortage was evident pre-COVID, 72 % of public schools report higher rates of attrition compared to pre-pandemic levels (García & Weiss, 2019). This phenomenon speaks directly to the new challenges faced by district personnel everywhere in a post-COVID world, but it is especially worrisome for school leadership in rural communities.

Every school district aspires to have a fully staffed and well-prepared teacher workforce as attracting and retaining excellent teachers are two of the most important

factors for student success and well-being. National trends show that the cost of recruiting and retaining quality staff has significant impacts on districts. The value of this teacher retention increases as a district considers the costs of replacing the subject areas and extracurricular activities. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023), 86% of public schools had challenges hiring teachers, and 83% of schools found it difficult to fill non-teaching positions. The cost of recruiting, hiring, and retaining quality staff can begin at and exceed over $8 billion at the national level (Carroll, 2007) and $20,000 per applicant every year (Sutcher et al., 2019). The paucity of teacher talent at a national level implores districts to invest in different ways to build capacity for the types of educators that today's students truly need. Teacher turnover in some districts can be attributed to inadequate training, mentoring, and support preparation, resulting in teachers leaving after their first year (Guha et al., 2017). However, teacher shortages and lack of resources can make finding, nurturing, and retaining top talent difficult.

Districts strive to fill every classroom with the most qualified teachers available, but the number of such qualified individuals is dwindling every year, and it is more challenging for rural districts such as Hearne ISD (Crouch & Nguyen, 2020). Longstanding research rightly connects student achievement to teacher quality (Allensworth et al., 2009; Ingersoll et al., 2016). Further, "it could also be said that the longer the teachers stay, the better the student outcomes. Either way, there is a significant relationship between student achievement and teacher retention aligning with existing research studies" (Holloway, 2022, p. 118). Teacher turnover has two major attributions: teacher training and context.

TRPs as Advanced Teacher Training

The teacher shortage crisis is further complicated by a teacher training crisis in the United States. The current training models of teachers promote fast clinical training followed by even faster exits from school districts. By contrast, teacher residencies are advanced forms of clinical training (Hill-Jackson et al., 2020) and an essential function of school–university collaborations that are "committed to nurturing and developing the next generation of educators by engaging candidates and valuing them as active members of the school and PDS communities" (National Association for Professional Development

Schools [NAPDS], 2021, p. 15). The demand to implement creative staffing strategies, such as a residency model, has been magnified by the mass exodus of pre-COVID educators nationwide.

While all teacher residencies are clinical practice, not every clinical practice is a residency (Hill-Jackson et al., 2020). Rather than being placed in a school for 12–16 weeks in the second semester of an academic year, the residency model provides novice teachers with an immersion experience throughout an entire academic year. TRPs are, by definition, district-serving teacher education programs. In Hearne ISD's TRP program, the resident:

(1) Teaches alongside a mentor teacher, who is the teacher of record;

(2) Receives concurrent instruction, which may be taught by district or residency program faculty, in the teaching of the content area in which the teacher will be certified or licensed to teach;

(3) Acquires knowledge of planning, content, pedagogy, student learning, assessment, management of the classroom environment, and professional responsibilities, including interaction with families and colleagues;

(4) Earns a master's degree and attains licensure prior to the completion of the program, and;

(5) Receives ongoing mentoring support in a structured induction program for not less than the first two years as a teacher of record (Wasburn-Moses, 2017, p. 35, as cited in Hill-Jackson et al., 2020).

The chief objective of the TRP is to recruit post-baccalaureate professionals to obtain certification at the secondary level. Teacher candidates in the TRP co-enroll in a teacher certification program and are supervised by a mentor teacher for one academic year while receiving salary benefits and tuition reimbursement. The residents earn a living wage stipend, which is only $2,000 less when compared to first-year teachers in the District. In return, residents must commit to serving as teachers of record in a high-needs school in the District with mentorship for at least three additional years. The partner university provides coursework for teacher residents in the program. The TRP is a way to be more strategic in staffing and support so that the teacher and community can be enriched with

dependable resident educators who can instantly impact and enrich the local community. This web of support ensures success for the resident educators so that they can build capacity as teachers and improve outcomes for students in their charge.

The Context of Schools for Teachers

The second attribute of teacher retention is the context of schools for teachers. The widely known "rural school problem" largely rests on the perennial challenge of rural teacher recruitment and retention (Biddle & Azano, 2016; Miller, 2008). In rural communities where the number of K-12 students enrolled in school dictates the budget, the ability to serve the academic needs of their students and remain viable in a competitive teacher labor market is precarious at best (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Seelig & McCabe, 2021). Studies show that schools serving predominantly low-income students and students of color have significantly higher rates of ineffective, inexperienced teachers and significantly greater teacher turnover (Goldhaber et al., 2016; Isenberg et al., 2016). New teachers are more likely to leave high-poverty schools and high-need subject areas after five years (Guha et al., 2017).

"The teacher supply is inequitably distributed, with poor rural schools often facing extreme difficulty with hiring and retaining qualified teachers" (Tran et al., 2020, p. 31). Teacher recruitment efforts and retention woes add to the economic distress of rural schools. Because rural districts must invest time and money into the professional development of new staff, "a high turnover rate of teachers affects the financial efficiency of a district as well as student achievement" (Eberhard et al., 2000, p. 4). It is not surprising, therefore, that rural superintendents cite recruitment and retention of highly qualified staff as their number one concern (Frahm et al., 2020; Natkin, 2003; Seelig & McCabe, 2021).

> But these schools demonstrate a "need paradox"—that is, they are the schools where programs that focus on improving teaching quality are most needed, but because of factors including inadequate teacher preparation, lack of resources, poor and/or unequal working conditions, and other negative characteristics, such programs are least likely to be implemented with rigor, if at all. (Mizrav & Lachlan-Haché, 2019, p. 1)

Shortages disproportionately impact rural, often high-need schools, which are significantly harder to staff with highly effective teachers, resulting in educator equity gaps that can lead to significant achievement gaps (Goldhaber et al., 2016; Isenberg et al., 2016). The effects of teacher turnover are further threatened in rural schools where the instability of teacher retention and the lack of certified teachers expend district resources that could be used for long-term, inclusive, and stabilizing efforts that support student outcomes and wellbeing.

Competing for quality teachers with nearby urban districts is particularly challenging for rural school districts, especially given the lack of new funding sources for public schools. Hearne ISD, like many districts, approaches its recruitment and induction processes with a focus on long-term sustainability, assessing the initial investment and returns for new teacher hires. To address the teacher shortages and, in turn, the achievement gap, rural school districts must prioritize innovative staffing investments with the limited resources allocated to such efforts.

Methodology

A qualitative case study is the research approach used to employ this study on ROI for a TRP in Hearne ISD as a bounded unit of study (Yin, 1994). The case study allows for focusing "attention on a single example of a broader phenomenon" (Gerring, 2004, p. 341). Merriam (1998) surmised that case study design is the methodology of choice where the process of inquiry, rather than the outcome of the research, is of greater significance to the researcher(s). Case study research can leverage descriptive inferences for a qualitatively small number of participants or samples when one is determining proximate causal relationships. Case studies "provide both descriptive richness and analytic insight into people, events, and passions as played out in real-life environments" (Yin, 2005, p. xiv). Case study as a methodology is especially advantageous as it allows for a thorough, first-hand investigation of the understudied issue of teacher residencies within a rural school district such as Hearne ISD.

The Research Setting

Hearne ISD, the case in this study, is an agricultural, working-class community filled with just over 700 students from K-12. Based on the analysis of the "2020–2021 District

Type Data" from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), Hearne ISD qualifies as a small and rural district due to its location, population density in the community, and access to amenities (TEA, 2021). The district demographics are shown below:

- 94.7% of the student population falls within the Economically Disadvantaged (E.D.) category;
- 87.8% of the students belong to minority groups, with Hispanics constituting 44.5% and African Americans 44.3% of the enrollment.
- Nearly one in every three families with children in the District lives below the poverty line (32.3%), facing challenges such as limited access to healthcare, food insecurity, transportation difficulties, and an increased risk of school dropout (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023; TEA, 2021).

The teaching staff is made up of nearly 90 classroom teachers for Hearne ISD and experiences high turnover each year (see Table 1). Out of the six teachers in the 2021–2022 new teacher cohort, four remain employed in HISD in Spring 2024. This is a 33.33% attrition rate for Spring 2022 Year 0 teachers. In Spring 2022, Hearne ISD employed 31 classroom teachers with 0–5 years of experience, and 17 remain employed in Hearne ISD in Spring 2024; this is a 45.2% retention rate.

Table 1

Retention and Attrition Rates for Hearne ISD (HISD) and the state of Texas, 2021.

Employment Status	First-Year Teachers	Post First-Year Teachers
HISD Retention Rate	4 (66.67%)	17 (54.80%)
HISD Attrition Rate	2 (33.33%)	14 (45.20%)
Texas Retention Rate [a]	15,040 (79.33%)	263,804 (83.22%)
Texas Attrition Rate	3,918 (20.67%)	53,182 (16.78%)

[a] Data from Texas Education Agency Teacher Attrition by District Size 2016–2017 through 2021–2022.

The Participants

In understanding the specific investments and returns of the TRP, we examine the tenure of two beginning teachers who began employment in Hearne ISD in 2021; Candidate 1 participated in a TRP, and Candidate 2 received teacher training through the traditional teacher training route.

Candidate 1: Resident Teacher

Certified through a graduate certification program, with a concentration on curriculum and instruction, and having graduated with a four-year degree in history, this beginning teacher holds a certification in history (grades 7 through 12). This thirty-something novice teacher began his teaching residency with HISD in 2021 and completed the TRP in its inaugural year, alongside a mentor teacher who also had a teaching background and certification in history. Based on his compulsory annual teaching review, Candidate 1 was evaluated at the end of the first year as a teacher of record as "meets or exceeds expectation" based on the Texas standards for teaching (Teach for Texas, 2024). In addition to an impressive end-of-year evaluation, it is worth noting that Candidate 1 participated in a couple of extracurricular school-wide activities, including serving as a theater instructor. At the printing of this article, Candidate 1 has completed a yearlong residency and two years as the teacher of record.

Candidate 2: Non-Resident Teacher

The non-resident candidate was certified through a four-year undergraduate teacher preparation program and is in her early thirties. She served as a math teacher at the start of the 2021 academic year (the same year as the resident teacher) and was evaluated at the end of the first year as a teacher of record as "approaches and meets" based on the Texas standards for teaching (Teach for Texas, 2024). School records indicate that this candidate does not participate in extracurricular activities for students. The first analysis compared financial investments for both candidates (see Table 2). Candidates 1 and 2, of similar age and teaching experience, were selected for comparison purposes because they began teaching as a teacher-of-record at the same time.

Candidate 1, the teacher resident, began receiving support through a residency experience in Hearne ISD for the 2021–2022 academic year. Candidate 1 signed a contract to remain in the District for a minimum of three years post-residency year and began as the teacher of record during the 2022–2023 academic year. The residency experience provided Candidate 1 with a full academic year of training alongside a master mentor teacher, allowing the candidate to increase their level of responsibility throughout the year and receive timely feedback toward their preparation.

Candidate 2, the non-teacher resident, began teaching as a teacher-of-record in the 2022–2023 academic year, persisted into the 2023–2024 academic year, and confirmed their intention of teaching in the 2024–2025 academic year. Candidate 2 in the traditional alternative certification route completed necessary training and observation hours before teaching in the District as a teacher-of-record in their own classroom while completing final program requirements.

Data Collection Methods

We use longitudinal administrative data that link teacher returns to the investments made by Hearne ISD from 2021 through 2024. As the leadership of a school-university partnership that implements the TRP in Hearne ISD, the authors collaborated to review and analyze non-traditional data of the program to determine if the costs outweigh the benefits. The first and second authors are the principal investigator and associate director of the TRP, respectively. Hearne ISD's executive officer, the third author, is a strong advocate of TRPs and is a recognized leader in the state of Texas for efforts related to strategic staffing. The research team has access to and reviewed such public-facing data sources as (a) the commitment of resources as articulated in the TRP-school district agreement, (b) professional development expenditures, (c) teaching evaluations of two candidates: a resident and non-resident employed in Hearne ISD, (d) district budgets, and (e) state-funded incentives and grant opportunities received by Hearne ISD during the candidates' tenure. These data include detailed information on student, classroom, school, and district characteristics.

Data Analyses

In addition to the researchers' interpretive skills used in case study research (Stake, 2005), an ROI analytical formula was employed. In explaining ROI to school district leaders, Frank and Hovey (2014) describe it as an analytical "tool for improving resource efficiency—which is to say, improving the impact of your limited resources" (p. 1). In finance circles, ROI is a common and:

> Widespread metric used to evaluate the forecasted profitability on different investments. Before any serious investment opportunities are even considered, ROI is a solid base from which to go forth. The metric can be applied to anything from stocks, real estate, and employees, to even a sheep farm; anything that has a cost with the potential to derive gains from can have an ROI assigned to it. While much more intricate formulas exist to help calculate the rate of return on investments accurately, ROI is lauded and still widely used due to its simplicity and broad usage as a quick-and-dirty method. (“Calculator.net”, n.d.)

In TRPs, the investments often are partial- or full-year living wage stipends, professional development initiatives, and time and effort of most mentors, community mentors, and school district leadership. The returns can include benefits such as quality human capital, novice teacher of record as a member of the teaching staff, academic support for P12 learners, engaged participation in school events, and positive infusion to school culture. The basic formula for an ROI for a rural TRP is the total gains from the TRP investments minus the total costs of the TRP investments. Next, the difference between the gains and costs of the TRP is divided by the total costs, and the ROI for a TRP, in percentage, is generated (Equation 1 is shown below).

$$Ag - Bc / Bc = Percentage\ for\ ROI\ of\ the\ TRP \quad (1)$$

Limitations

Two chief limitations impact the present study. First, this ROI study was conducted within a single rural independent school district in Hearne, Texas. The use of a single case is deliberate, and since our aim is to begin to identify what might be missing from current conversations on sustainability among TRPs in rural school districts, the approach is appropriate for that purpose. The conditions within Hearne ISD are thus specific, and

so the findings may not fully reflect the conditions found within other school contexts. As such, we view the results as a distinctive exemplar, which forces us to caution those who wish to use beyond this case for which it was designed. Further studies are needed outside of this context to produce recommendations that are more broadly applicable and to fully identify and implement improvements that characterize teacher investments and returns more accurately. The case selected had shown improvements in retention over time, but it is unclear whether the case is generalizable to the larger population of rural schools. Second, this study included the tangible and intangible investments and returns endeavored by Hearne ISD's TRP for two beginning teachers. Although the first author has acknowledged the voices of the residents in prior studies (e.g., Hill-Jackson, 2023; Svajda-Hardy et al., 2024), the two teachers in this present study were not interviewed. The inclusion of the candidates' voices would potentially offer additional perspectives that could add greater clarity and depth to our interpretations. Future research is needed to better understand both the objective nature of ROI metrics compared to the subjective indicators (e.g., residents and other stakeholder experiences) and integrate them for more robust interpretations and findings.

Findings and Discussion

Avoiding any attempt to make sweeping generalizations about the results, the authors do, however, consider the meaning and the subjective efforts at "working to relate them to contexts and experience. In each instance, the work is reflective" (Stake, 2005, p. 450). Consequently, the meaning generated here is instructive for Hearne ISD and may not be germane beyond this case. That said, two major ideas surface from this case study on the TRP at Hearne ISD: (a) investments and returns and (b) school leadership and sustainable teacher training.

Investments and Returns of Hearne ISD's TRP

While there are many hidden costs for identifying and onboarding new teachers, the visible costs incurred by Hearne ISD for salaries/compensation, mentor support, professional development, administrative costs, and miscellaneous for two of its novice teachers were reviewed for analysis. Initial findings indicated that more monies were invested overall in Candidate 1, with a total of $267,850, compared to Candidate 2, with

a total of $226,124. The differential in overall investment between the two candidates was expected because Candidate 1 participated in a TRP while Candidate 2 did not. The resident received compensation of $50,408 and worked alongside a master mentor teacher who received a stipend of $2,000.00. Newly certified teachers also receive a mentor that is compensated with a mentor stipend each year for up to two years to continue supporting the novice educator. During the residency year, there was also a Community Mentor who received a stipend of $350.00 to support Candidate 1 in learning more about the school and community. The District also provided a Retention Stipend of $3,000.00 as Candidate 1 transitioned to a full-time teacher of record position. Candidate 1 also received a district-supplied computer that cost roughly $1,100.00. When combined, the estimated cost of the Residency Year is $75,286. The salaries, additional compensation, mentor stipends, and professional development expenses were similar when Candidate 2 joined the District as a new teacher the same year as Candidate 1.

Additional investments to support current and prospective teachers, Hearne ISD updates its compensation tables annually to remain competitive with neighboring districts and the state. A review of programs, clubs, and organizations identifies gaps that need to be filled by new hires. The District develops an annual recruitment package and attends job fairs with district-specific promotional materials. Hearne ISD provides professional development opportunities that are vital to the success of any teacher, especially for teacher residents. Professional development offerings include content and computerized support, as most academic programs, teacher support, and student assessments are now online. In Texas, high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) are all online, and teachers must be able to navigate those systems effectively. The District can also support teachers with opportunities to share their talents with students through a "flex" enrichment time environment, which helps build appropriate relationships between students and teachers and improves academic connections with students.

The gap in costs for the candidates widened when the District's administrative costs were considered. Both candidates received similar administrative support in their first year with the District. However, Candidate 2 required more support in the second year compared to Candidate 1, which could likely be attributed to the modes of

preparation experienced by the candidates. In addition, it is determined that the District spent more funding recruiting Candidate 2 than Candidate 1. While the initial expenses for onboarding Candidate 1 were greater in Year 1, the expenses were higher for Candidate 2 in Years 2–3 due to the additional support needed by the administration in the second year of teaching.

Table 2

Investments Provided by Hearne ISD to Support Resident (Candidate 1) and Non-Resident (Candidate 2), 2021-2025.

Investments	Residency Year 2021-2022	Year 1 Induction 2022-2023	Year 2 Induction 2023-2024	Year 3 (projected) 2024-2025	TOTAL
Salary					215,408
Candidate 1	$50,408	$51,000	$55,000	$59,000	$165,00
Candidate 2		$51,000	$55,000	$59,000	0
Additional Compensation [a]					
Candidate 1	$3,000	$2,200	$5,200	$5,200	$15,600
Candidate 2		$6,000	$6,000	$6,000	$18,000
Mentor Stipend					
Candidate 1	$2,000	$2,000			$4,000
Candidate 2		$2,000	$2,000		$4,000
Community Mentor Stipend					
Candidate 1	$350				$350
Candidate 2					
Professional Development					
Candidate 1	$1,500	$1,500	$1,500	$1,500	$4,500
Candidate 2		$1,500	$1,500	$1,500	$4,500
District Admin Costs					
Candidate 1	$16,928	$8,464			$25,392
Candidate 2		$16,928	$12,696		$29,624
Misc.[b]					
Candidate 1	$1,100				$1,100
Candidate 2		$5,000			$5,000
TOTAL					$267,850
Candidate 1	$75,286	$65,164	$61,700	$65,700	$226,12
Candidate 2		$82,428	$77,196	$66,500	4

[a] Additional compensation provided for Candidate 1’s involvement in theater club, after school tutoring, and teacher leaders opportunities. Additional compensation for Candidate 2’s involvement in coaching. [b] Miscellaneous expenses for a computer provided to Candidate 1 and recruiting costs for Candidate 2.

Additional compensation was provided for Candidate 1's involvement in the theater club, after-school tutoring, and teacher leaders opportunities. Additional compensation was provided for Candidate 2's involvement in coaching. [b] Miscellaneous expenses for a computer were provided to Candidate 1, and recruiting costs were for Candidate 2.

The analyses for the ROI are divided into two sections: intangible and tangible returns. In their most basic sense, intangible returns (see Table 3) are those that aid in the District's progress—resulting from deliberate individual or collective investments for economic gain or are incidental byproducts of efforts to reach other goals. The intangible returns were characteristics that positively impacted the District and were incapable of calculating a monetary value. Alternatively, the tangible returns were effects on the District that could be identified as monetary value. The intangible returns, as indicated in Table 3, were assessed in alignment with the state's teacher evaluation system and given such descriptors as Improvement Needed (lowest), Developing, Proficient, Accomplished, and Distinguished (highest) (Teach for Texas, 2024). The candidate was rated using this evaluation scale to reflect their instructional performance.

Based on the annual teacher evaluation, Candidate 1 presented as 'Proficient' in the 2021–2022 school year as a resident, 'Accomplished' by 2022–2023 as a first-year teacher, and 'Distinguished' at the end of 2023–2024 as a second-year teacher. In comparison, Candidate 2 was evaluated in 2022–2023 as 'Developing' as a first-year teacher and 'Proficient' at the conclusion of the 2023–2024 school year as a second-year teacher. These results demonstrate that Candidate 1 presented characteristics of a high-quality trained teacher earlier, which resulted in a higher teacher evaluation than Candidate 2. In addition, reports of higher student achievement were presented earlier and at a higher level of achievement for Candidate 1. Candidate 2 received an annual contract, whereas Candidate 1 committed four years of employment, including the residency year and three subsequent years. Due to the strategic staffing efforts made by

the District to support Candidate 1, the District received national recognition and has been invited to share its work.

Table 3

Intangible Returns[a] to Hearne ISD for Resident (Candidate 1) and Non-Resident (Candidate 2), 2021-2025.

Returns	Residency Year 2021-2022	Year 1 Teacher of Record 2022-2023	Year 2 Teacher of Record 2023-2024
Enhanced Teaching Knowledge	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished
Candidate 1		Developing	Proficient
Candidate 2			
High-quality trained teacher workforce		Accomplished	Accomplished
Candidate 1			Proficient
Candidate 2			
Improved student achievement		Accomplished	Distinguished
Candidate 1			
Candidate 2			
Commitment to teaching in the district	Distinguished	Distinguished	Distinguished
Candidate 1			
Candidate 2			
National Recognition			
Candidate 1			Distinguished
Candidate 2			

[a] Intangible Returns were characteristics that positively impacted the District and were incapable of calculating a monetary value.

The tangible returns were calculated by financial gain to the District for recognition of improved student achievement and teacher performance (See Table 4). Often, HCT investments, training, and education are "measured in quantitative dollar costs and years of tenure" (Johnes, 1993, as cited in Sweetland, 1996, p. 341). At the conclusion of the residency year, the District received $95,700 in additional funding from an increased

accountability rating due to increased performance within the District. The District opted into the Teacher Incentive Allotment that awards teachers additional compensation for student achievement and teacher performance, resulting in $90,000 received in the 2022–2023 academic year that provided stipends to Candidates 1 and 2. At the time of this analysis, the District had not been notified of the new Teacher Incentive Allotment amounts, but it was expected to be received at an increased amount for the 2023–2024 academic year. Due to the District's improved school rating, the District also received a grant of $100,000, which resulted from efforts for candidates 1 and 2. While these awards are districtwide, it should be noted that Candidate 1 remarkably improved student achievement in history, which directly contributed to the District's improved rating. Lastly, by Candidate 1 committing to the District for three years post-residency, there were dramatic savings to the District for recruitment and administrative expenses. The results were only able to be totaled for the Residency Year ($107,000) and Year 1 Induction ($215,000) at the time of analysis, but it is clear the value added to the District is increasing due to the strategic efforts made. The analysis of the two candidates, Candidate 1 trained through a residency experience and Candidate 2 through traditional alternative certification, revealed important differences in both financial investments and returns.

Return on Investment for Candidates

For Candidate 1, the total cost or investment was $267,850 (see Table 2), and the tangible returns were $322,000 (see Table 4) as he underwent a comprehensive residency program, showed higher levels of teaching knowledge and student achievement from the outset, contributed to notable improvements in district performance and national recognition. Although the initial financial investment was higher for Candidate 1, the District benefited from increased funding, grants, and reduced recruitment costs due to the candidate's long-term commitment. In determining the degree to which a teacher residency program is a cost-effective strategy for nurturing talent in Hearne ISD, the ROI for Candidate 1 (teacher resident) is calculated to increase by 20.2% (Equation 2 is shown below).

$$\$322{,}000\ (\text{gains/returns}) - \$267{,}850\ (\text{costs/investments}) / \$267{,}850 = 20.2\% \quad (2)$$

In comparison, the total cost or investment for Candidate 2 was $267,850 (see Table 2) and the tangible returns are $322,000 (see Table 3). Hearne ISD lost its return on investment for this candidate in intangible (student achievement, student wellbeing, etc.) and tangible (monetary) ways. The tangible ROI for Candidate 2 (non-teacher resident) decreased by 4.8% (Equation 3 is shown below).

$215,000 (gains/returns) - $226,000 (costs/investments) / $226,000 = 4.8% (3)

The tangible ROI for the teacher resident (i.e., Candidate 1) is noteworthy at 20.22% when compared to that of the non-teacher resident (i.e., Candidate 2), which is significantly lower at 4.8%. While the initial investment for Candidate 1 is higher at the start of their teacher residency, the impact (both intangible and tangible returns) over time offsets the initial expense. The resident in the TRP, who is supported through on-campus and community mentoring as well as daily support, has the staying power and commitment to personal growth and excellence as an educator (Svajda-Hardy et al., 2024) as compared to the non-residency peer. According to Ingersoll (2001) and supported by Hill-Jackson et al. (2023), beginning teachers who receive mentoring and induction are known to stay in teaching longer than those who have not received support as beginning teachers. These types of human resource investments for novice teachers in their preparation programs and within the school as authentic partners are beneficial to their work and relationships—which leads to better outcomes in retention and student academic achievement. The intangible contributions of Candidate 1, by way of their in-class support of learners' achievement through effective teaching, participation in professional learning communities, support to exceptional learners, and comprehension of state assessments, all aid in building the instructional capacity or returns, of a Candidate 1 who may be retained in Hearne ISD for years to come.

Table 4

Tangible Returns [a] to Hearne ISD for Resident (Candidate 1) and Non-Resident (Candidate 2), 2021-2025.

Returns	Residency Year 2021-2022	Year 1 Teacher of Record 2022-2023	Year 2 Teacher of Record 2023-2024

Capital gain for school from increased accountability rating Candidate 1 only	$95,700		
Capital gain from Teacher Incentive Allotment Candidate 1 and 2		$90,000	Expected
School Action grant received because of improved school rating Candidate 1 and 2		$100,000	
Savings [b] Candidate 1 only	$5,000	$25,000	
TOTAL	$107,000	$215,000	$322,000

[a] Tangible Returns were effects to the District that could be identified as monetary value. [b] Monetary savings to the district for recruitment and administrative expenses due to Candidate 1’s commitment.

The Role of School Leadership in Sustaining Innovation

Unlike other industry leaders, school leaders do not seek a monetary or tangible return on their investments in people (i.e., teachers). Instead, school leaders seek greater intangible returns such as student learning or other outcomes like citizenship, higher graduation rates, increased lifetime earnings, and greater career options for their learners. They understand that the surefire way to students' achievement and overall well-being is to have a highly effective teacher workforce. However, current school hiring practices by many school leaders employ stop-gap measures that prioritize teacher hires without commitment to high-need communities or requisite certification (Lachlan-Haché et al., 2023; Wurman, 2023)—ostensibly hiring unqualified teachers who are devoid of agency and pedagogical prowess. This type of employee-centered educational leadership approach stymies serious staffing plans as recruitment and retention efforts continue with business as usual in rural school districts.

By contrast, talent-centered education leadership (TCEL) is a novel approach that honors the human capital theory and extends the most cutting-edge developments in progressive human resource management and inclusive talent management to the

education setting (Tran, 2020b). Of the seven principles that undergird TCEL, the idea "that employees are the most important asset to the organization" (Tran & Jenkins, 2022, p. 268) is paramount. By attending to strategic staffing management schemas, the prospect of mitigating teacher turnover may be within reach for school districts. Parallel to the human capital theory, strategic staffing means ensuring organizations, including school districts, have the resources and innovation wherewithal to support the workforce they need to deliver their mission.

> Thinking and acting strategically about human capital development and management is the lifeblood of most high-performing businesses and organizations. Public education in this nation should be no different. Principals' and teachers' performance has more effect on student achievement than any other factor and their effectiveness in increasing student performance varies widely. Given the stakes, it is imperative to act on that knowledge and strengthen the education workforce to better serve students. Yet, few urban [or rural] school districts have acted on this knowledge to make strengthening human capital a centerpiece of their improvement strategies. (Sclafani, 2008, p. 1)

Being strategic also suggests the ability to invest in novice teachers at the start of their careers, maintain a long-term vision, and appreciate the myriad ways those investments will deliver returns (tangible and intangible) for the teacher and the school district.

Gagnon and Mattingly (2015) advise that school systems must be strategic in staffing with the current climate of a reduced workforce and fewer applicants for available positions. Strategic staffing is vital to both urban and rural school districts as a solution to increase the available level of the educational workforce, increase diversity within the school system, and widen opportunities for students. Strategic staffing takes thoughtful planning, buy-in to align resource allocation, a focus on improving teacher quality, and building additional education pathways within a district. Strategic staffing is imperative for rural districts because of the limits on available resources and attracting teacher hires. Strategic staffing allows the District to recruit and retain quality staff in such a way that students, parents, and community all benefit.

As districts look to address teacher shortages, "inclusion of TRPs can advance efforts while providing beginning teachers the support necessary for sustainability in the profession. In better understanding residents, TRPs can better thrive to recruit and sustain teachers for underserved schools" (Svajda-Hardy et al., 2024, p. 14). School leaders should consider TRPs as innovative ways to provide meaningful training for beginning teachers that will encourage teachers' "sticking power" and overall sense of belonging within the school district.

Faced with financial barriers and teacher shortages, school leaders, especially those in underserved and/or rural school districts, should try to use their scarce dollars on proven strategies that work best for maintaining a vibrant and healthy teaching force. As Hearne ISD reflects on the financial commitment to sustain the TRP, the leadership does so through careful planning and multiple funding streams to support the teacher resident, teacher mentor, and community mentor roles. Rural districts have the advantage of being small and unshackled by layers of administrative bureaucracy.

Leaders from rural school districts, and with a TCEL-human capital perspective, may position their districts as incubators of innovation, which allows new ideas like TRPs to get off the ground and become sustainable. The strength of rural school districts is their rurality and small personnel size, which allows them to tinker with agility, invest in teachers with intentionality, and transform their teaching workforce. The rationale for the intentional investment into beginning teachers by school district leaders is simple: by investing in novice teachers, they, in turn, can grow into effective educators for the benefit of P12 learners with long-term tenure in school districts. Hence, teacher training with residency influences higher teacher retention rates, and students taught by a residency-trained teacher outperform their peers (Guha et al., 2017).

Conclusion

Hearne ISD is situated at the literal and figurative crossroads as it relates to its physical location in a rural Texas community and the decision to sustain its TRP. So, the authors queried: Is the TRP in Hearne ISD worth the investment? The school leaders of Hearne ISD ran the numbers on its TRP and gave a resounding yes! This human capital analysis has been motivated.

Partly, it is due to a desire to evaluate TRPs to improve the quality of the teacher workforce through extended clinical schooling. Overall, the residency experience provided tangible financial returns and fostered intangible returns in the form of higher-quality teaching and greater student achievement, underscoring its value as an investment in Hearne ISD's teacher workforce. School leaders would be wise to don a talent-centered educational leadership perspective, undergirded by a human capital lens, and invest in the development of beginning teachers so as to retain them. Such investments may be more quickly delivered by rural school districts whose small size allows them to be incubators of innovation and deliver resources creatively to directly impact teacher retention.

Hearne ISD’s ROI for the 2021 resident is 20.2%, and 4.8% for a 2021 non-resident-reflecting a tangible ROI that is five times greater than for the resident as compared to the non-resident. And what about the intangible returns for Hearne ISD’s 2021 resident, who was named Secondary Teacher of the Year in the spring of 2024 and returned to the District to teach in the fall of 2024? Priceless.

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About the Authors

Dr. Valerie Hill-Jackson, who is a Fulbright Scholar and American Educational Research Association (AERA)/Spencer Fellow, is also an assistant professor of PK-12 Public School Administration in the Educational Administration and Human Resource Development (EAHRD) Department at Texas A&M University. In addition, she is the former Assistant Dean of Educator Preparation and School Partnerships in the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD). With a passion for critical educator preparation, her current research on teacher apprenticeships and residencies, as the principal investigator and grant writer, is currently supported by $31+ million in state and federal funding and includes such projects as (a) the Brazos Valley Teach project, (b) Teacher Education Residency Model (TERM) project, and the (c) LEADERS Project. She is the co-editor of the Journal of Teacher Education (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education)—one of the leading journals in the field of teacher education. Moreover, Dr. Hill-Jackson has nearly 70 scholarly publications, including white papers, five books, book chapters, technical papers, and peer-reviewed articles to her credit.

Dr. Delic Loyde is the Executive Director of the Hearne Education Foundation. She is also a certified Texas Education Agency Lone Star Governance Coach (LSG), and National Student Outcomes Focused Governance Facilitator (SOFG) providing training and continued governance support to school boards, their Superintendents, and senior staff. As a recognized leader in the community, Dr. Loyde has earned designation as a Texas A&M University Fellow of School Enhancement in 2022, Texas A&M Good Neighbor Partnership Awardee in 2023, and the Dean’s Roundtable Awardee in 2024. Dr. Loyde earned a bachelor of arts degree from Angelo State University, a master of education with a focus on principal and superintendent certification from Stephen F. Austin University, as well as a doctorate in educational leadership from the University of Houston. Her additional endorsements include

participation in the Harvard Principal Institute for Urban Principals, and the Brown School of Business Executive Education Academy at Rice University. Her current research projects include a focus on school board governance, strategic staffing models, and executive leadership.

Cassidy Caldwell has extensive experience in educator workforce development, most notably as the former program aide and strategist for the Teacher Education Residency Model (TERM) at Texas A&M University. Her work supported the development of new pathways into the teaching profession through innovative grow-your-own models. Currently, as the Outreach and Attraction Workforce Manager for BlueForge Alliance, she applies her expertise to workforce development in the submarine manufacturing sector by focusing on recruiting and training individuals for essential roles. Ms. Caldwell’s background in STEM education and workforce development enables her to bridge industries and foster pathways that enhance workforce readiness in both education and manufacturing.

Judy Waight is a Ph.D. student of human resource development at Texas A&M University. Her research focuses on generational change and well-being in healthcare. As a graduate assistant researcher, she works on a staff mentoring project and has been involved in projects such as the Institute for Healthcare Access project and the Leading Equity Across Diverse Environments with Revolutionary Synergy (LEADERS) grant submission in partnership with Prairie View A&M University and Texas A&M University faculty. Before joining her doctoral program, she worked as a tourism lecturer and instructional design consultant at the University of Belize. She also served as a community change agent for Oceana Belize, The Belize Coalition to Save our Natural Heritage, and Spouses of CARICOM Leaders Action Network. Judy holds a Master of Science in Hospitality Management from the University of Houston and a Master's in Human Resource Education from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign.

Sheneria J. Perry, a native of Houston, TX, is a Ph.D. student at Texas A&M University in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture in the multicultural/urban education program. Ms. Perry also serves as the graduate research assistant for the *Journal of Teacher Education*. With a passion for supporting educators, she advocates for induction programs that nurture the development of novice teachers—ensuring their longevity in the field of education. As a certified teacher in Texas from an underrepresented community, she sees a necessity for emphasizing the induction of Black pre-service teachers to nurture and equip them for teaching in urban communities. Ms. Perry anticipates being an integral part of growing diversity in teacher education; as a proponent for solution-focused research.

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Fall 2025	March 27th	Special Issue on Rural Community Schools
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Dr. Kristen Cuthrell, Director
Rural Education Institute, College of Education, East Carolina University
Mail Stop 122 (Building 123), Greenville, NC 27858-4353 | 252.328.5748