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Transitioning from High School Students to Aspiring Future Rural Educators: Promising Practices to Fuel the Rural Teacher Pipeline

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Peter: What makes your rural school unique or special?

Mariah: I'm pretty much in the middle of nowhere, and our schools are surrounded by cow pastures. We get rattlesnakes in the halls all the time, and there's deer coming into the schools. Everything's more about farm life than anything else" (Perceptions of School and Rural Community project).

Mariah: What makes your rural school unique or special?

Peter: So, my school is actually preschool through high school in the same building and we had nine people graduate. And that's well, I mean that's small. I mean, not that it's that small for us, but like, not unheard of. We only have school Monday through Thursday, so that's really nice, but on Thursdays, we all go outside and do the Pledge of Allegiance. Like, as a school, so absolutely crazy! (Perceptions of School and Rural Community project)

This interview transcript is an exchange between two of the 17 rural high school students who took part in the Aspiring Teacher (AT) program at The University of Northern Colorado and highlights rural schools' unique and special qualities. The quote stems from an interview assignment, Perceptions of School and Community, part of the summer residency/concurrent enrollment teacher preparation program. Building community by sharing our rural hometown narratives was at the heart of the AT program.

We (first and second authors) designed the Aspiring Teacher Program to recruit rural students into education and locate possible solutions to the ever-growing teacher shortage problem in our state and around the country. "In our experience, the pre-service teachers who grew up in rural areas bring a unique sensibility with them to their work in the classroom" (Azano & Stewart, 2015, p. 8). Pre-service teachers (PSTs) from rural areas come with the background knowledge of place and

community that allow them to focus on creating social change to become leaders within their native context (Azano & Stewart, 2015). Therefore, the goal of this program was to make a career in teaching more accessible to rural high school students who would then potentially return to teach in their rural communities.

The teacher shortage is at epic proportions in rural areas, and in general across the nation, with 44 states currently reporting teacher shortages for the 2020-21 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The shortage is not surprising, as enrollment in teacher preparation programs has declined since 2010 (Will, 2019). As a result, rural school districts must be creative in their hiring processes, as Pre-K-12 students continue to witness high teacher turnover and watch their teachers take on numerous academic and administrative roles that lead to teacher frustration. Rural school districts are further impacted as they strive to recruit and retain highly qualified diverse teachers (Cuervo & Acquaro, 2018; Miller, 2012; Azano & Stewart, 2015). There are simply not enough prospective teachers to fill current and future vacancies. As enrollment in teacher preparation programs declines and shortage increases (Garcia & Weiss, 2019), rural school districts are launching solutions such as “Grow Your Own (GYO)” programs.

Colorado is not immune to this shortage, and colleges and universities, and school districts across the state are answering the call to search for a viable solution. In 2017, Colorado’s governor passed House Bill 17-1003, providing two million dollars to “invest in partnerships among educator preparation programs and local education providers to invest in initiatives that address teacher shortages in Colorado” (p. 3). Utilizing these grant funds,

we developed the AT Program, a collaboration between our university and a local Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) aimed to explore how a summer residency on the college campus combined with a concurrent enrollment program might help fuel the teacher pipeline in rural areas. Our goal, as educators, was to create a community where students’ rural voices could be heard. As instructors in this community, we intended to learn from students’ rural experiences and to support them in developing their identities as future teachers while establishing partnerships with rural districts to expand concurrent enrollment.

Review of Literature

Perhaps the most critical educational resource students across the country are denied is a certified teacher. According to Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas (2019), an estimated 109,000 teachers were uncertified for their teaching positions during the 2017-2018 school year. This trend is expected to continue, further accelerated by the Covid-19 Pandemic (Flannery, 2020). At the same time, the school-aged population is predicted to increase by three million, thus increasing teacher demand while decreases in teacher preparation enrollment programs continue. Between 2009 and 2014, enrollment in teacher preparation programs fell by 35%, while 23% fewer teacher preparation candidates completed their programs (Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2019). However, the issue does not lie solely in the production of new teachers. Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas (2019) attribute these staffing problems at a national level to a variety of reasons that include “production

of new teachers in various fields, but also teacher turnover, changes in educational programs and pupil-teacher ratios, and the attractiveness of teaching generally and in specific locations" (p. 4). Rural schools know this all too well.

For schools in rural areas, the teacher pool has diminished, teaching jobs remain unfilled, and administration is left with less than desirable options for filling the positions of classroom teachers (Cuervo & Acquaro, 2018; Miller, 2012; Azano & Stewart, 2015). "The inability of some rural and urban schools to attract applicants leaves principals in the precarious position of having to hire whoever walks through the door or failing to offer some courses" (Maranto & Shuls, 2012, p. 32). Suggested contributing factors include geographic and professional isolation, lower salaries, higher poverty rates, and lack of community amenities (Miller, 2012). Newly certified teachers are needed everywhere, but higher pay and more robust environments in other settings make rural communities less attractive to potential candidates.

In addition to challenges faced with teacher recruitment and retention, "A significant challenge is that rural areas produce proportionately fewer teachers than do urban areas: A smaller percentage of rural students attend college (Provasnik et al., 2007), and far fewer colleges with teacher training programs are found in rural areas" (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015, p. 3). The process of training a teacher also impedes the likelihood of students entering the field in rural locations. "Preparing rural teachers means teaching about the significance of place, and its relationship to other places and social practices" (White & Reid, 2008, p. 8) and ensuring that rural students have teachers who "understand the importance

of place, value their lifeworlds, and build appropriate teaching and learning opportunities" (Azano & Stewart, 2015, p. 8). Burton and Johnson (2010) highlight the tension created between personal and professional identities for teacher candidates with rural backgrounds when university education programs and field experiences fail to support the identities of rural educators. The geographic disconnect between the location of the training programs and the rural schools makes it difficult for students to experience authentic rural learning opportunities.

Teacher Preparation Programs

Azano and Stewart (2015) suggest that in order to provide long-term benefits for rural schools and districts, teacher preparation programs should create authentic learning experiences in rural areas, providing pre-service teachers with explicit theoretical and pedagogical support in combination with effective recruitment efforts of rural communities. Mitchell et al. (2019) found that allowing pre-service teachers intensive practicums in rural locations and providing them with time to assume the role of a rural teacher and gain experience of identifying as a rural educator gave them authentic experiences to understand what rural teaching entails. There is evidence from these initial exposures that some pre-service teachers (PSTs) have become interested in pursuing potential practicum placements and potential career options in rural schools (Mitchell et al., 2019). Additionally, creating and maintaining incentives, such as rural scholarships and public policies that encourage pre-service teachers from rural areas to gain and retain jobs in rural schools, is a short-term solution to the teacher shortage in rural schools (Cuervo & Acquaro, 2018).

Access Points to Teacher Preparation Programs

Another approach to increasing the number of newly certified teachers who gravitate towards rural communities is “Grow Your Own” programs (GYO). There is often a tendency for people to go to college near where they live and return to their hometowns to teach, thus creating a greater chance for students from rural areas to return home (Swanson, 2011). Using a longitudinal lens to study the attitudes of metropolitan pre-service teachers, Cuervo and Acquaro (2018) reiterate the idea that is prevalent in the research literature, confirming that pre-service teachers who have rural backgrounds themselves are more likely than their metropolitan counterparts to seek out teaching jobs in rural settings (Coffey, Putman, Handler, and Leach, 2019).

According to a literature mining project completed by Gist et al. (2018), school districts have shown an interest in GYO programs for the resources and opportunities the partnerships with colleges and universities provide to middle and high school students. Gist et al. (2018) also reported that the “overall goals of many middle and high school GYO programs are to stimulate an interest in a teaching career while also demystifying the college experience by providing students with academically challenging curriculum experiences and in some cases offering college credit” (p.6).

Numerous efforts are being spearheaded across the nation to end the extreme teacher shortage in rural areas. It is essential to study such efforts to understand what might influence high school students to enter the teaching profession and, more importantly, to examine positive effects on retention in a

teacher prep program. As noted in the Colorado Department of Education [CDE] and the Colorado Department of Higher Education’s [CDHE] Call for Action (2017), there is a significant teacher shortage across Colorado, specifically in rural and remote rural districts. With an aging teacher population, it is necessary to increase the number of qualified teachers in the pipeline. Yet, there has been a decline in enrollment and completion of Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) in Colorado since 2010 (CDE & CDHE, 2020). CDHE’s “Teacher Shortage Across the Nation and Colorado” cites some of the reasons for the teacher shortage as “rising costs of a college education coupled with increased student loan debt,” “high costs of teacher licensure,” “gatekeeping associated with matriculation through EPPs” and “lack of differentiation in the teacher career pathway” (2017, p. 7). While there are many successful programs, such as Teacher Cadet (Teacher Cadet, 2021), that allow high school students to explore the field of education, our experience has shown that many rural high schools cannot support such a program, be it not having enough students to fill a high school class or the lack of a certified Teacher Cadet teacher. The negative consequences of this are that high school students must wait until college to consider or pursue education as a possible career path, when it is vitally important that opportunities exist for all students to have early access to the teaching profession.

Another access point to teacher preparation programs used across the nation is concurrent enrollment programs. Concurrent enrollment allows high school students to enroll in academic courses at an institution of higher education (C.R.S. §22-35-103, The Concurrent Enrollment

Programs Act, updated 2015). “Students that participate in concurrent and dual enrollment have higher college enrollment rates, first-year credit accumulation, grade point averages, and retention rates and are less likely to need remediation” (Paccione, 2019, as cited in Colorado Department of Education, 2019). There is also a 22.9 percent increase in the likelihood of enrolling in college directly after high school graduation for students that participate in concurrent enrollment programs (Colorado Department of Education, 2019). The current trend shows students earning associate degrees while still in high school.

The social construct of rurality “implies a deep connection to place” (Eppley, 2009, p. 8). Accordingly, the experiences of pre-service teachers in teacher education programs ought to include a clear link between rural upbringings and programming. Future teachers should be provided opportunities in their program to connect their professional and personal identities that are both authentic and meaningful. However, more often than not, students experience tension between the rural roots of their identity and their programming, even in programs that aim to fuel the rural teacher pipeline (Moffa & McHenry-Sorber, 2018). Rather than rural narratives that are shared and celebrated, these programs often offer little more than simplistic notions of rurality that do not represent the experiences of aspiring rural educators (Moffa & McHenry-Sorber, 2018). This study aims to address this gap in knowledge by centering the participants’ rural narratives in The Aspiring Teacher Program.

The Aspiring Teacher Program is different from other rural incentive or recruitment programs. It aims to address the “lack of differentiation in the teacher

career pathway” contributing to the teacher shortage (CDHE, 2017, p. 7). This program provides a unique access point that combines concurrent enrollment, summer residency, and pre-collegiate experience. Students were recruited from diverse rural areas and brought together to create a space where their rural narratives and lifeworlds could take center stage as they developed their identities as future teachers and university students. While some of the programs mentioned in the literature review are experiencing success, they alone are not enough to address the teacher shortage, particularly the rural teacher shortage. This study addresses the gap in the research as it pertains to on-campus residency concurrent enrollment programs as a possible pathway for fueling the teacher pipeline. The purpose of our research is to examine the effectiveness and potential of the AT program and add to the existing research on programs and efforts to increase the quantity and quality of future rural teachers.

Therefore, research questions for this study included:

1. In what ways can summer residency, concurrent enrollment programs, such as Aspiring Teacher (AT), support students in becoming college-ready and developing their identities as future teachers?
2. What happens when rural narratives are shared and celebrated in Educator Preparation classroom discourse?
3. How can the AT program support rural students to become effective teachers?

Methods

Context of the Study

The Aspiring Teachers Program took place at our university during the summer

and fall semesters. Grant funds covered all expenses, including tuition and course materials, food and lodging, and social activities. Aspiring Teachers took three foundational teacher preparation hybrid courses, two courses were face-to-face during a summer residency, and one was online with field experiences in elementary classrooms during the fall semester. Students were from 12 different rural communities, and five suburban schools rounded out the home communities.

Goals for the AT grant were: (1) develop and deliver three concurrent enrollment introductory to education courses for high school students interested in the field of education; (2) attract quality high school students into the teaching profession; (3) help future teachers solidify their career choice; (4) create a learning community that would continue to grow and support each other as incoming college freshmen; (5) provide a culturally relevant hands-on engaging learning environment; (6) create avenues to work alongside university teacher preparation faculty; and (7) establish partnerships with rural districts to continue expanding concurrent enrollment.

The Recruiting Process

The goal was to have 30 rural schools participating in the program. After recruiting for over a year, we found it challenging to find 30 rural schools with students interested in teaching and students that would be successful in concurrent enrollment courses at our university. Initially, we met with teachers and district leaders during their BOCES monthly meetings to get feedback on the program's viability and to solicit their help in either directly recruiting students or providing us with contact names in their district who could help advertise the

program and recruit as well. We then contacted initial schools during the fall and spring of the previous school year and quickly recruited 12 high school seniors; the remaining five were recruited throughout the year. We worked with high school counselors and administrators to negotiate school credit, financial obligations for the districts for concurrent summer enrollment, and the necessary paperwork to establish these districts as our university concurrent enrollment partners.

Participants

Participants for this study were a convenience sample and included all students enrolled in the Aspiring Teacher Program. There were 17 students, three males, and 14 females. We worked closely with high school counselors to recruit students. All participants were recommended by their counselors and selected for the program for their potential for success in concurrent enrollment coursework. Students also needed to be flexible enough in their high school schedules to attend a summer residency and complete the elementary field experience and course requirements for the fall. Of the 17, 12 were from various rural areas around the state, including seven from eastern Colorado plains farming and ranching communities, two from rural towns in northern Colorado situated between Denver and Fort Collins, and two from mountain resort towns in the San Juan Mountains. The remaining five were high school students attending schools in suburban areas near the university. The five were invited to attend to create a diverse group of students and support enrollment for the course. After the program, we gave IRB forms to the students to take home and complete with their parents. All students returned IRB forms, granting permission to

use their work and interviews throughout the program. The selection criteria for inclusion into the study was participation in the program but focused on students from rural communities. The other five students' from neighboring suburban areas were included in the study but only as they interacted with the rural students throughout the interviews and focus groups.

Concurrent Enrollment Courses

The program consisted of three innovative hybrid concurrent enrollment courses for high school students interested in the field of education. These courses already existed in the university's Elementary Education program, but we expanded assignments and content to focus on rural education and diversity. Courses were chosen that would be accessible to high school students and those that would transfer to any Elementary Education teaching program in the state. We combined the introductory course to elementary teaching as a profession (101) and the introductory educational technology course (340) for the summer residency. The third course taken during the fall semester was a children's literature course (314). (See Appendix A for Course Descriptions).

Summer Residency Courses

Aspiring teachers spent one week on the university campus. They stayed in a residence hall, ate meals in the dining halls, and experienced life as college students. During the week, students completed three credit hours, one credit for 101 and two credits for 340. They attended classes for eight hours a day, completed course work at night with the support of university teacher candidate ambassadors, experienced field trips, and participated in community-building activities.

The Introduction to Teaching as a Profession (101) and Educational Technology (340) courses were taken simultaneously during the summer. 101 focused on diversity, rural education, and understanding the perceptions of teaching, teachers, learners, and how the words we use with children make a difference. Course readings addressed teaching as a profession, language, place based education, diversity, and children's literature. Students read *Choice Words* (2004) by Peter Johnston and explored the power of words, and the detrimental effects labeling (both seemingly good and bad) can have on a child's learning and self-perception as a learner. The educational technology assignments and projects focused on using technology to further explore and reflect on teaching. For example, using the content and digital platform expectations in 340, the students introduced themselves through community and personal digital projects, sharing information about themselves, their high schools, and narratives where their rural and suburban hometowns took center stage.

Outdoor Learning Center. During the summer residency, students spent one day at a Learning Center on a nearby river. The Learning Center provides outdoor and experiential learning opportunities for the community. During their visit, ATs experienced a full-day demonstration of hands-on science and STEM teaching and learning. Each lesson was demonstrated and then unpacked for highly effective teaching practices by a Master Teacher. These lessons served as a framework throughout the two courses. Students explored pedagogical knowledge of integrating technology across content areas, created lessons, explored technology

tools and applications, and designed digital portfolios.

Fall Virtual Course

In the fall, students took a children's literature course online (314). The course included synchronous online meetings and collaborative activities with small groups. Students were placed in field experiences in their own rural communities to apply new teaching concepts and theories from courses, develop relationships with local elementary students, and learn alongside supervising teachers. In addition to learning about children's literature, course assignments included a visual representation and reflection of students' communities and how community and place impact teaching in rural areas. Students designed culturally relevant lesson plans and then created a text set based on the concepts of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) for their field experience classroom. Students were required to create a text set in which some

of the books would serve as windows, and some could be considered mirrors for children in the classroom. Throughout the fall course, professors conducted site visits, held weekly virtual office hours, and were available to the students via GroupMe, email and text messaging. Site visits provided opportunities for us to observe Ats teaching and to interact with rural elementary students. It also created an opportunity for Ats to celebrate and introduce us to their rural communities.

Projects and Assignments

Aspiring Teachers completed a variety of assignments and projects that stemmed from their experiences in their rural communities and schools. These readings, multimodal compositions, and reflections were designed to allow the Ats to envision how they could build on their foundations as rural and suburban residents. Detailed descriptions of some of the major projects are described in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Example Projects and Assignments

AT Assignments	Assignment Description	Guiding Questions
Perceptions of Community Project	For this assignment, students were tasked with creating visual representations of their schools and communities. Students could use any digital tools (images, words/captions and/or symbols) to convey their message. The goal was for them to explore and understand how their rural (or suburban) community in which they live influences who they are as future	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What should we know about your community and school? What makes it special? 2. Who is in the community (demographics, economy, education, etc.)? 3. Where is it located (including geography, distance to a larger city, etc.)? 4. Where are people from? Are they native to the area or relocated? 5. How will your location influence you as a teacher? 6. What role does the school play in the community? 7. How diverse is your community and what

	<p>teachers and how place can impact their perceptions. Developing this appreciation allowed them to envision how they would build on the foundation of their unique community, helping them to build relationships and create safe learning environments for all of their students.</p>	<p>aspects will you need to consider as you teach in this school in the fall?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. What ideas would you have for working with families and the community to support student learning? 9. How is teaching in a rural community unique?
<p>Outdoor Learning Experience Reflection</p>	<p>For this assignment students completed a digital reflection where they documented their learning, posed questions, and made connections to class discussions and readings. In their reflection they were encouraged to consider aspects of place based instruction and how they might implement or connect to their teaching in the fall.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What did you learn about teaching? 2. How did approaching the lesson from a student’s perspective help you to understand science and STEM pedagogy? 3. What did you learn about becoming an effective teacher? 4. How do the readings for this week connect to the pedagogy used by the Master Teacher? 5. What aspects of this learning experience would you want to integrate in your own teaching this fall? 6. What questions do you have?
<p>Video tour of rural classroom</p>	<p>Once students began their field experience in the fall and became familiar with their classroom routines, they created a video tour of their rural (or suburban) classroom. We wanted students to compare and contrast the diverse rural and suburban classrooms. Students highlighted routines, classroom organization and aspects that made the learning environment special. They were also encouraged to include their students in the video to act as another tour</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How is the classroom organized? 2. What are the routines? What is on the walls? Where do students sit and how does this encourage collaboration? 3. If there is a classroom library: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. How do students check out books? b. What genres do you see in the library? c. How are the books displayed? 4. After viewing three other students’ classroom tours, reflect on the similarities and differences across learning environments? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. How do rural and suburban classrooms compare?

	guide for their rural classrooms.	
AT Journey and Final Reflection	In this project, students created digital stories about their personal learning journeys in the Aspiring Teachers Program. The goal was for students to explore and connect their learning across the summer residency, course content learning, and classroom field experiences. Students were required to reflect across courses and experiences and address: Teaching, Building Community, Diversity and Children's Literature, and Community Reflection.	<p>Teaching:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What have you learned about teaching in the Aspiring Teachers Program? 2. What did you learn this summer that you applied in your classroom? (Consider: Reading aloud, Choice Words, building Community, preparation for teaching?) 3. Did the Aspiring Teachers program help you to solidify your interests in teaching? Please explain. <p>Building Community:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What have you learned about building community within our class this summer and semester and 2. What have you learned about building community within your elementary classroom this semester? 3. What should we know about your classroom? What makes it special? <p>Diversity and Children's Literature/Text Sets:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What did you learn about diversity and children's literature? 2. From the work we did with diversity and challenged books what text emerged as a favorite or must-read to my future classroom picturebook/chapter book? What picturebooks are important to you? 3. Share important aspects of your text set for your mentor teacher <p>Community Reflection:</p> <p>View your previous <i>Perceptions of Community Project Visual Representation and Reflection</i>.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has anything changed in your perceptions about teaching or community? Please Explain. 2. Do you see yourself as a teacher in your community? Please explain.

Aspiring Teacher Ambassadors

Three current university students that had completed their junior year and were exemplary elementary education teacher candidates were hired to be Aspiring Teacher Ambassadors. Ambassadors were with the students 24 hours a day, attending classes, eating meals, and living in residence halls. Ambassadors also facilitated community-building activities such as an escape room, dinner at a local restaurant, games, and various evening activities. The ambassadors held nightly meetings and homework sessions where they modeled how to read and respond to their collegiate assignments, essentially introducing Ats to college life and expectations. Ambassadors also created a chat group so students could easily check in with each other and their professors.

Data Collection Procedures

As part of the Aspiring Teacher Program, data was collected during the on-campus summer residency courses and the fall online children's literature course. During the summer residency, we collected recordings of student interviews, course group discussions, focus group reflections, and all course-generated assignments/artifacts through the learning management system as a normal part of the course. During the fall online children's literature (314) course, we collected recorded video discussions, assignments/artifacts through the learning management system as a normal part of the course, and observations of field experiences during site visits. Specifically, the following data were collected: (1) focus group interviews and single interviews with all Aspiring Teacher Program participants (2) observations of participants' field experiences, (3) Aspiring Teacher course artifacts including multimodal and digital

portfolios, reflection papers of teaching experience, etc., and (4) focus group reflection on aspiring teacher's coursework. Researchers also conducted interviews throughout the study for immediate feedback on the program but also to catalog developing understandings of teaching and pedagogy.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis procedures used in this study were consistent with an interpretivist model of qualitative research. Interpretivist research is designed to understand the meaning perspectives of the participants as they interact in their local contexts (Erickson, 1986). With the assumption that researchers want to understand and gain insight from a population in which the most can be learned, all rural student participants in the program were included in the study (Merriam, 1998).

We began the data analysis by doing descriptive coding (Saldana, 2016). We wanted to understand the context of the data, and this first cycle of coding provided essential participant information and contexts for analysis. All data were organized and then coded for summer residency, children's literature, or field experience. In addition, we noticed the transfer of knowledge from one context to another, for example, when students applied knowledge learned in the summer residency field trip or the children's literature course to their elementary practicum. We then conducted value coding (Saldana, 2016) to "reflect the participants' values, attitudes and beliefs, representing his or her 11rogram11ivee or worldview" (p. 131) as it pertained to their perceptions of the11rogramm and rural education. Our research questions also guided this first cycle coding and their community

experiences, both rural and programmatic. We began value coding for all focus group interviews and student video reflection projects, starting with the most recent focus group, and then worked our way backward in time to get their perceptions and reflections on the program as a whole. This focus group provided initial codes: rural communities and narratives, program (AT) community, teaching experiences, perceptions of rural education, early experiences in teaching, navigating college, and perceptions of the program. Our research questions also guided this first cycle of coding within this framework. We sought to understand how the AT program could support students' identity development as capable university students and effective future teachers. It also guided us to understand within this framework how their motivation to teach might be influenced by the inclusion of rural identities and narratives within the elementary education curriculum.

We then conducted second cycle coding (Saldana, 2016) as the codes were constructed into categories, reflecting on their meaning and how they contributed to answering our research questions. We then compared codes and categories with each other. The third and fourth authors applied the codes we constructed to see how a new set of researchers would apply these codes to the interview and project data. All researchers then read across the data corpus and again constructed codes into categories to compare and analyze. These new categories guided our perceptions and helped us generate additional subcategories for further analysis. After separating the data based on the context of the reflection/interview, we then constructed two overarching categories (teaching and community). We then organized the data

into a framework and began to construct subthemes based on context, teaching perceptions, and community until we reached an agreement on the categories and themes as we looked for connections and "collective meanings" (Saldana, 2016. P. 133). We then analyzed all other reflection projects, multimodal digital projects, and field experiences separately to see if these categories would hold up across the data. Lastly, we each constructed analytic memos for the community, rural narratives, and teaching, and compared across the memos until all data were analyzed and no new codes, categories, or themes were constructed, therefore reaching agreement across the four researchers.

The credibility and trustworthiness of the study were enhanced by interrater reliability with the 3rd and 4th authors, as described in the analysis procedure above. We confirmed coding, categories, and themes throughout the analysis procedure. We also used a triangulation of our data sources. As explained, we began with the focus group and worked backward to establish codes and categories. We then looked across course assignments/projects and class discussions to locate confirming and disconfirming evidence (Erickson, 1986). All four authors also used analytic memos throughout the process to compare coding, categories, themes, and overall findings. Data sources were used to gain perspective on how the aspiring teachers considered teaching and looked for convergence between effective pedagogy and place, specifically for the rural students. We considered how their rural experiences might influence their perceptions and understandings of teaching.

Results

We used our research questions as a guide throughout the analysis process. Based on our coding and construction of categories and themes we found that the program facilitated Aspiring Teachers' transition from rural high school students to future rural educators, and that creating a space for ATs to reflect on their rural lives revealed the uniqueness, realities, and possibilities of rural teaching.

Aspiring Teachers' Transition from High School Students to Future Rural Educators On Campus Residency Provided Scaffolded Initial College Experience.

Helping students to see themselves as college students, as well as them believing they can be successful in a college setting is critical in teacher recruitment and retention (Gist, Bianco, & Lynn, 2018). When ATs arrived on campus in June, after completing their junior year of high school, they were thrown into college life. There were many adjustments, from locating the dining hall, balancing homework with social activities, getting to class on time, and submitting assignments on the university's Learning Management System. As one AT, Pat, said, "It was definitely a learning experience to be able to go through that, and to know that I'll actually be okay when I get to college." In their interviews, at the conclusion of their summer intensive, ATs talked about their fears and expectations as they arrived on campus. They also projected their newfound confidence about starting college in the near future:

Jason: I feel a lot more prepared for college at the same time. Just because, like, I don't know, I always stressed that college was gonna be super hard. And, I'm not saying that it's not gonna be, but it kind of gave me an insight, as, like, hey, these people that you're

gonna be working with, they want to work towards the same goal that you want, and I just think that's cool. It's a lot different than high school.

Kaitlin: I know for the future, having this class and being very rigorous for it only being a week, that college is gonna be a lot more difficult than high school because I could basically do everything at the last minute, and do everything quite easily in high school. But that's not going to be the case for college, but I believe college is going to be a lot more enjoyable for me because I'm going to be around people that enjoy doing the same thing as me and want to do the same thing as me.

Although the program occurred for one week during the summer, we were able to provide a similar college experience to traditional semesters. The rigor of completing three college credits in one week provided a preview of academic expectations and living in the residence hall gave ATs a glimpse of independent living. These experiences helped to establish study habits so they will be successful when they begin their college careers, further contributing to the college readiness of these students.

Developing a Community of Learners Helped to Build Confidence as a Future Teacher. During the week-long summer residency and coursework, Aspiring Teachers, student ambassadors, and professors created a close learning community. The 17 ATs arrived on campus unsure of what their week would hold. As professors, we led introductory activities in the residency hall common room on Sunday evening, noticing nervous giggles and fearful expressions as students waved to their families. The students came to campus as individuals, and many were anxious and

concerned about the program expectations. They became a learning community after homework sessions, karaoke sessions in university vans, and navigating college life as a group with shared future career interests. This theme of creating relationships was evident in student reflections, focus group interviews, and informal conversations. The students continually talked about the friendships they had made, how they all learned from each other, and their shared sense of community. After the weeklong summer residency, students spoke of the Aspiring Teachers community in their Journey into Teaching reflection video:

Ali: I truly feel that our class has become a community. And I feel that this is due to us being able to bond with each other so quickly and how we've pretty much spent this entire time together. The only time we're apart is when we're sleeping. However, I really feel that our class is a safe environment because we're just here to support each other. Every single one of us, I really never feel like I'm being judged, which I think is a very healthy place to develop our teaching skills.

The following transcripts are from a small group final interview reflection on learning during the summer residency:

Natalie: I've made a lot of new friends and these relationships are gonna last for quite a while, and I've experienced a lot of new things that I never have gotten a chance to experience.

Jen: And I think that was also just like super cool that we all could just become one at the end of it.

Justin: I definitely made some friends in the aspiring teachers program...the Brotherhood.

Dominique: I learned that I can make friends out of complete strangers.

The Aspiring Teachers were also sentimental during their focus group session in February as they reflected on the program. Jill reminisced, "...just the bonds you build and the staying up late in each other's rooms and just talking and like, it's like summer camp at a different level. Yeah, like the older version of it." Peyton continued, "I feel like we learned so much about each other. There were so many different personalities in the group".

Other students commented on the intense workload and the camaraderie created with the group's shared experience. As James mentioned, "When you're around people that have the same common goal as you, you're able to push yourself farther than you might have been able to otherwise." And, by Friday, at the conclusion of their stay on campus, the students were hugging and crying, not wanting to leave each other and the residence hall they called home for five days. As they said their goodbyes, they ensured they had connected on Snapchat and numbers for texting with a promise to see each other at the university's upcoming teacher conference. Through various class assignments, our goal was for students to learn about teaching and the importance of a safe, supportive learning environment while understanding the importance of place and how their rural communities and where they come from should be at the heart of their teaching.

As their professors, we also learned a great deal about their lives and the communities in which they live. By honoring students' roots, we could use this relationship to build a safe learning environment. Developing a teacher prep curriculum for students that are highly

motivated and navigating the college experience was important to establish the sense of belonging in a very large teacher prep program at our university. The week-long residency, while challenging, allowed us to create a community of learners with an intense focus on pedagogical knowledge and diversity.

Ambassadors Were a Key Feature in ATs Successfully Navigating Their First Experiences with College Life. The three university Ambassadors supported ATs in every aspect of college life and were instrumental in helping students to see themselves as college students and future teachers. Ambassadors reported back each morning and reflected on their evenings with ATs. Cameron stated, “Through their coursework, students experienced the kind of reading and reflecting that is necessary to be successful college students. We taught them how to balance classes, assignments, and projects and introduced them to residence hall life even if it was just for the week” (Ambassador Interview). With the ambassador’s support, the ATs spent each evening preparing for the next class and reflecting on their learning from the day. We observed that their reflections and course assignments were of high quality as Layla, Cameron, and Amy, the ambassadors, shared, “we modeled for them how to read, reflect and extend their learning through course assignments.”

In addition to scaffolding the students learning and reflecting, they acted as TAs for us, the instructors. Each morning we reviewed the previous day’s learning activities and assignments and we collaborated with them to plan lessons and activities. In addition, Ambassadors provided feedback on how students were accessing the assignments and whether they had questions, complications, and/or

misunderstandings so we were able to adjust and/or reteach as necessary. Ambassadors were part of each class session, and often led breakout sessions. They were able to support the nightly homework assignments to a much higher level because they were part of the teaching and learning activities. When we asked the students to become ambassadors, we really thought it would just be a support to the program, but, in the end, we learned about the power of collegiate mentoring and the influence preservice teachers can have on incoming future teachers, as demonstrated in the quote below:

Layla: Our Ambassadors made a huge difference. Like every day, so many people would have gotten distracted, and a lot of the work wouldn’t get done. But I think because we had the like, designated hour, like after we got home from class to work on homework, and then everything needed to be done by the time that we went to dinner. I think because we had such a strict schedule, a lot of things got done quicker. I think that helped tremendously and modeled for us how we might do this on our own.

Ambassadors modeled behaviors of successful college life and successful PSTs. They shared experiences, insights, study abroad opportunities, and realities of life as a PST at our university.

Our university student ambassadors also designed and implemented social activities. The ambassadors were intentional in their planning and chose destinations and things to do that would continue to build the learning community by fostering relationships, communication, and trust. As Jen commented, “I really liked the escape room. That really helped with

the communication". Late night snack sessions provided a reprieve from homework and opportunities for casual conversations and for ambassadors to further share their own experiences and insights about the teacher education program at our university. The ATs commented that developing these relationships with the ambassadors and spending so much time together throughout the week really supported them. Justin stated, "They [ambassadors] always helped us whenever we needed help and were there to answer any questions and more importantly to be friends at the same time".

Modeling and Scaffolding Effective Pedagogy Supported Beginning Identities as Future Rural Teachers. Throughout the program students developed foundational pedagogical understandings about effective teaching practices in all settings. Our curriculum was based on early understandings of teaching and foundational knowledge in constructing effective engaging lessons. We also focused on various instructional structures that support learning and diversity and strategies that will help them understand the students they will be teaching. We spent one entire day at an outdoor learning center to model placed based instruction and to have a master teacher model effective teaching practices. Students benefited when they experienced the lesson as students, then shifted their perspectives to that of the teacher as they unpacked the highly effective strategies she employed in various lessons across the day.

ATs provided digital video reflections of their day. Many commented on their appreciation for the intentionality when planning engaging lessons. Kaitlin's

reflection captures the themes of many ATs reflections when she said:

At the Learning Center, we learned that you have to have a physical representation of something whenever you want students to learn. It will help create a memory with a student to help them actually want to remember what they learned and instead of just like being something they read about and forget about. Also, that you have to make sure not to keep lecturing because they're going to lose interest, you have to kind of change the direction or like to re-engage them in a different way to get them to keep wanting to have interest in what you're talking about and what you're teaching. And also, how to build, like, a bond with team building exercises that you have to kind of step back and let them work on their own but then also guide the communication that they are having and make sure it's not like one person doing everything. And kind of controlling, you have to make sure everyone's talking together and thinking through what needs to be changed.

Ali: Ann [master teacher at the Learning Center] pointed out the importance of engagement and how you keep kids engaged for each minute for their age. And, like how long they stay engaged, she showed us how to know when you're losing them and how to just quickly get them back on track and engaged. It's crazy!

After their time at the Learning Center experiencing the many STEM and literacy learning activities in class, surprising to us, ATs continually discussed in class and in their reflections how surprised they were at the large quantity of time and effort that

goes into designing lesson plans and creating classroom activities. As Jason commented:

It kind of opened my eyes to like, the work necessary, and the kind of behind the scenes of what teachers do like the whole process of making a lesson plan and all that sort of thing. And just kind of like the way you have to put in everything you do, because you never know how it could affect us.

And Beth also explained: It kind of opened my eyes to the work necessary and the kind of behind the scenes of what teachers do like the whole process of making a lesson plan and all that sort of thing. And just kind of like the way you have to put in everything you do, because you never know how it could affect students. And you have to follow the standards, you know, that the kids have the knowledge that they need to have in order to go to the next grade level. There's so much more and I didn't really know that the teachers did that.

For a culminating assignment, ATs were tasked with identifying and analyzing six specific teaching strategies that were modeled for them across the week. As instructors, we were intentional in modeling various teacher strategies while providing foundational pedagogical knowledge. After the lessons, we reflected on each strategy to understand the affordances and constraints. The assignment required students to identify and describe/define the strategy, and then provide specific examples of how the strategy was implemented throughout the week of learning and teaching. ATs also highlighted these strategies and provided evidence in their digital portfolios. Table 2 is an example of how students reflected on the teaching strategies and the resources they drew upon from their learning experiences throughout the week.

Table 2
Teaching Strategy Reflection

Teaching Strategy	Describe/Define	Examples from this week
Lecture	Lecture is where the information is being given to the student passively. Lecture is a one-way form of communication that doesn't allow for verbal feedback from students. Teachers must activate instinctual mindfulness and be aware of any student problems.	We used lectures in our classroom during the introduction of projects due and the meaning of illustrations in children's literature. When S was discussing certain aspects of the symbolism in children's books
Demonstration/ Modeling/ Guided Practice	The concept of I do, we do, you do which is where the teacher does it in front of the class, the class does it together, and then the individual does it together	Teachers presented their 10 Facts About Me and What Bugs Me. From their model we learned what they wanted and needed us to accomplish.

	The teacher is prepared with a procedure to follow about their lesson	The teachers showed it to us, we discussed it, and then each student made their own.
Questions/Discussion	<p>Questioning is used as a diagnostic tool in determining the level of the level of instruction students need at the beginning of a unit.</p> <p>Teachers ask questions to generate interest, gain student attention, check for understanding, encourage student thinking, and to structure and redirect learning.</p> <p>Questions asked to manage student behavior or classroom organization are usually intended to help students remember rules</p> <p>Some questions allow students to express their own feelings and opinions</p> <p>Questions help bring together the classroom during discussions</p>	<p>Anna started the beginning of our experiments with a question. The students become engaged in the conversation by the essential question.</p> <p>When Anna walked around with the apples to facilitate discussion between group members and asked questions to encourage a certain direction</p>
Group Work	<p>Grouping students usually is based on the student's ability. The purpose is to accomplish a particular goal. An additional bonus is that the students can learn about the topic and have participation in a group setting.</p> <p>Usually used to accomplish a specific goal and to provide students increased opportunity to learn both academic content and group participation skills</p> <p>Puts students in a group, allowing them to learn together on certain subjects</p>	<p>The Meme project was an example of group work. My group and I created a parody meme to the Mallard good advice duck.</p> <p>When we did the certain stations yesterday, like the Choose Your Own Adventure, we experienced group work.</p>

<p>Role Play/ Simulation</p>	<p>Allow students to experience hard, real-life problems in a controlled environment. Simulations can help students learn empathy.</p> <p>Students learn how to act in places they've never been and how to negotiate unknown territory</p> <p>Allows students to see themselves in a different world or in different situations</p>	<p>Through the week we have been asked to put ourselves in the teachers shoes and think, act, and behave as a teacher.</p> <p>The Predator/Prey game is a perfect example of role play, as it put students into a new situation.</p>
<p>Reflective Learning/ Inquiry</p>	<p>The purpose is for students to discover things by themselves as individual learners.</p> <p>Students develop hypotheses to compile evidence supporting or refuting a solution</p> <p>Lessons where students are the driving force and teachers provide limited instruction</p>	<p>We used Inquiry when the class played Predator and Prey. We played along as a group and as we played, we learned how to create a sustainable ecosystem.</p> <p>During the water line activity, the students were required to come up with new ideas, and the teacher was more of a moderator</p>

At the end of the summer residency program, ATs were required to add a goal setting page to their digital portfolios. Their assignment was to reflect on their learning across the week, and to establish goals for themselves for the fall when they were scheduled for practicum experiences in elementary classrooms. Across the goal setting assignment, we noticed that, although students' rural and suburban narratives took center stage, their goals focused on foundational understandings of teaching and learning. In the following excerpts from their portfolios, Jason, Maddie, and Kaitlyn share their thoughts on the importance of creating an engaging and supportive learning environment, advocacy, and the words we use when talking to

young learners. Their comments further highlight their visions of themselves as effective future teachers.

Jason: As a teacher, I would like to accomplish many things. These things include creating a safe and fun learning environment for my future students. Above all, my main goal is to become a role model for all the children that I will teach and to teach them about the rural areas we live in. The feeling of security and identity that is given from great teachers to young minds is something that I wish to achieve through careful word choice, and keeping my students engaged and amused.

Ali: To make a difference in a student's

life personally or scholarly. To be engaging and productive. To have an open line of communication: Me to students, students to me, me to teachers, teachers to me. To help students find their voice to advocate for themselves within the classroom and outside of it. To take pride in my work.

Kat: As a teacher, there are many goals that I have set for myself. I want to be able to create an environment for my students where they feel safe and able to be creative and engaged. Something very important that I would like to expand on is choice words. I need to start becoming more self-aware of what I am saying and how I word things. **Layla:** One of my goals is to really consider the words that I use in the classroom. For example, I need to move beyond using the term “Good Job.” I need to stop and consider if I could say something else that would move their learning forward or if I could say something that wouldn't make it so that I'm just validating their work.

Justin: One of my goals is to ask super open-ended questions to students. I learned that the more you teach students and if you give them the tools to analyze a picture book, then they'll start. They will begin to share and analyze. You don't always have questions like what color was the dress? Or who's the main character? Those kinds of questions, you can get around to analysis in different ways.

ATs recognized the many roles and responsibilities that teachers have in the lives of their students. When students returned to campus eight months later, they continued to share their new

understandings about the teaching profession.

Insights from Rural Narratives

As instructors, we learned so much from listening to ATs discuss and share their insight to the realities of rural teaching. When comparing their schools and districts, the ATs made many connections regarding the uniqueness of their own communities, the roles, and responsibilities of their teachers and what their futures would look like if they returned to their hometowns to teach. This final section highlights all that we learned about rural teaching and communities from the ATs across assignments, reflections and focus group interviews.

Lessons Learned: Students Embrace Their Rural Roots. When reflecting on their education experiences thus far, ATs were insightful in discussing their teachers, schools, districts, and larger communities. The ATs from rural areas had solidarity and pride when discussing what made their lives and circumstances unique. When referring to themselves, Natalie jokingly said, “So we're all just nerdy farmers.” In our final focus group interview, ATs proudly shared stories to the other suburban students about having classes get canceled for a tractor parade or attending their school's annual donkey basketball fundraiser, where students played basketball while riding donkeys. Several students spent their school days over the past 14 years in the same place, attending preschool through 12th grade in one building, and recognized the many benefits and challenges of learning in a rural space. Peter talked about his high school class size of 16 students:

I mean, it's so small...I think five or six of them have been there since preschool. So, it's kind of like you're growing up with the people. So, if

you're in a class, it's, I mean it's hard to be a new kid in that sort of situation, but if you're in that class, you become a family almost because it's just you. You're together all the time and just so close. (Perceptions of School and Rural Community Project)

Molly and Peter interviewed each other as part of the project as well. In this exchange, Peter shares details about his rural community:

Molly: How will your location influence you as a teacher?

Peter: Well, it kind of influences me a lot because a lot of background of these students is agriculture-related, and they come from families who are the ranchers or they work on ranches or their grandparents are ranchers, and it's really a big, and just kind of like the and the location has a lot.

Throughout this focus group rural students shared their lived experiences with the other 5 suburban students. It was interesting to watch the exchange as they put rural life worlds center stage and these narratives and experiences became the norm in the conversation. There was no better advertising for teaching in a rural space than these students who clearly love their small rural communities.

Lesson Learned: Early Community Experiences Can Foster a Desire to Teach.

Through students' reflections and focus group interviews we learned a great deal about how many of the students in the AT program were afforded opportunities to gain early experiences in their communities, working in school classrooms or classroom-like settings. WE learned how these experiences moved them toward becoming teachers and pursuing the AT program. They referred to these experiences and applied them to class discussions,

assignments, and reflections. While their circumstances working with young children varied, many ATs had the opportunity to work in elementary classrooms. As Jen stated:

I volunteered in this kindergarten teacher's classroom for a year. And I thought it was the most fun thing I'd ever done. And I really enjoyed it. Like every day, I went in, and I was excited to be there. I like interacting with all the kids.

While the classroom environment allowed Jen to envision a future in teaching, other ATs had much different experiences. Whether acting as an assistant coach for the swim team, volunteering at church, or babysitting, all had some involvement in working with younger children. As one AT, Molly, said, "My mom works at a school, so anytime she didn't have a babysitter, I would go with her." Another participant, Beth, commented, "I kind of grew up around it...I helped out at my church because of my grandpa and my grandma. They do paster-ing. So, I always help them out." Further, the participants spoke of their experiences working with children with a sense of nostalgia and fondness. Kaitlin continued, "So I kind of grew up around kids and it kind of just seems right. I started looking and going through different classrooms and checking it out in different age groups, and I fell in love with it."

Some ATs discussed a specific teacher that was an inspiration for them to seek out opportunities to pursue the field of education. Jen also said, "I've had some pretty cool teachers, and I think they're like a good influence in my life. And so I kind of want to be like them." Jill had a similar experience:

When I was in fourth grade, I had a teacher that really impacted me. Like

she was passionate and caring. And she is who I've looked up to. And I guess my two years now teaching with Teacher Cadet. I just wanted to be like her.

Through the Teacher Cadet program, Jill spent time with elementary students in her district each week of her junior year of high school. This opportunity to work in the field further solidified her career choice.

Lessons Learned: The Realities of Rural Teaching. In this final interview ATs spoke about the relationships they've built with teachers because they have known them for so long, and because they have smaller class sizes. Peter has had the same teacher for all four years of high school English. He stated, "You talk to them [teachers] every day, and you have the time to really get to know them and who they are." Further, students shared that many of their teachers live in the same rural community as the school, so students see them around town, know where they live, and have relationships with their families. Natalie mentioned, "We see them [teachers] everywhere. Like, my math teacher helps me with math at church sometimes." Focus group conversations further revealed that students had many teachers that were family friends or relatives. ATs recognized this as a lack of privacy as school and home lives often overlapped.

These ATs also identified the many responsibilities and hardships of their teachers' jobs. Many talked about the unfilled positions in their schools and the high teacher turnover. In the focus group session, they discussed how some teachers come [to rural schools] for a few years to gain the necessary experience to get hired in larger districts in urban and suburban areas. Justin explained, "My teachers often share positions or have to fill in for other

teachers because of these shortages." He recognized that his teachers have tough jobs and that the most qualified person is not always teaching him. He said, "Our elementary teachers have to go to the high school to teach classes. And then our science teacher is actually an English teacher. He knows nothing about science." Susan added, "We don't have a Science or Math teacher."

When asked why they thought these positions were hard to fill and why teachers don't stay long in their districts, they all brought up low pay and understood that some districts nearby paid much more. They also shared that not everyone wants to live in a rural area, or, as Mariah mentioned, "No one really wants to live in...". While this response was said in jest, you could also hear a hint of sadness in Mariah's comment. She later revealed that although she did want to teach in a rural area, she was also anxious to leave her hometown. Mariah continued, "I think the teachers kind of talk to me a lot because they know I want to go into teaching. And so, they tell me the inside scoop...just compared to the district that is 30 minutes away from us. They pay almost double what the teachers in my district get paid."

The goal of the AT program was to recruit quality future teachers into teacher preparation programs so they might one day return to either their rural community or a rural area to teach. Our final focus group interview occurred two months after the online course ended. We invited all the students back to campus to attend the teacher conference scheduled for the next day. We had pizza and talked about their field experiences and overall attitude and motivation for teaching. At the end of our reunion time with the students, we asked the essential question to all our students,

both rural and suburban (eight of the 17 were present for this focus group): Would you return or consider teaching in a rural area? Their responses also included the challenges of teaching in rural areas despite wanting to teach there. The following transcript is an excerpt of their responses to this question:

Beth: I don't know how I'm gonna, like, survive there [in a bigger city]. Well, they pay \$5,000 extra if you teach in a rural area. Um, I think I'd probably go back to a rural area.

Ali: So, like, teachers come out [rural area] for a couple years, and they go onto the Front Range because they want to have more teaching experience on their resume.

Peter: Yeah, because it's easy to get hired in rural areas.

Justin: We don't have a science or math department. But you get teachers that are often newer.

Kat: I mean, I've never really had an experience with teaching in rural areas, but I definitely would go and check it out and see if it's something I'm interested in. You miss school for a tractor parade?

Jason: Like, I have friends that plan on leaving when they graduate but a lot of people say, no and will return. Most people, like, their grandparents homesteaded. Yeah. So then they just stay and go back and farm. A lot of people are getting a farming degree. So like, they're studying soil, and then they're gonna come back here.

Molly: You know, everyone, yeah, like you know, their personal lives and you can deal with that. Because in larger schools, you don't get to know every student personally. But in rural schools, especially, with, like, smaller

classrooms, you talk to them every day, and you have the time to really get to know them and who they are, so yeah, I will teach in a rural area, maybe not mine but in a rural area.

We designed our program to introduce high school students to the expectations of a degree, and career in education early in their decision-making process. The above exchange between rural high school students highlights the challenges of teaching in rural areas. These students understand the realities and complexities of teaching in rural schools and these understandings are embedded in their life experiences and ultimately influence their desire to teach in rural areas. Listening to their experiences provided a great deal of insight for us as educators and researchers as we try to end the teaching shortage and fuel the rural teaching pipeline. While a diverse teaching force is a goal for any school or district, having highly qualified teachers that embrace rural communities and understand the importance of place in their pedagogy has been an essential factor in recruitment and sustaining a rural teaching force.

Discussion and Implications

The goal of the Aspiring Teacher program was to provide an additional and accessible pathway to teaching to fuel the teacher pipeline in rural areas. Our goal was to create a program with a different and unique access point to address the shortage of pathways contributing to the rural teacher shortage (CDHE, 2017). We specifically examined how a summer residency and concurrent enrollment program that centered rural narratives in classroom discourse with collegiate mentoring and a community of learners might influence and/or increase the

quantity and quality of future rural educators.

According to Azano and Stewart (2015), previous research demonstrates that students are motivated to become teachers based on their experiences working with children (Azano and Stewart, 2015). The experiences of participants in this program range from volunteer opportunities at church and babysitting to the field experiences in elementary classrooms provided through this program. Aspiring Teachers often spoke of these experiences, their connection to children in these classes, and how motivated they were by these positive interactions. However, it is important to note that while experiences working with children prior to participating in the program laid a foundation we were able to build on, the additional opportunities afforded through this program only strengthened their desire to pursue post-secondary options that will lead to careers as effective rural educators. Possibly the most critical implications of the AT program is the early pathway it provides: a pathway that did not previously exist for students to realize any previously acquired motivation to become educators.

There are many additional implications for rural education including increasing rural students' interest in pursuing education, supporting rural students in successfully entering preparation programs, and attracting teachers to work in rural areas. There are also implications for EPPs in successfully preparing all students for coursework, field experiences, and their future careers. Large-scale implementation of this program would address so many barriers to rural students' successful enrollment and completion of teacher education programs: space would be created for rural narratives to be centered

as the norm rather than marginalized, as they often are, in teacher preparation programs. Young residents of rural areas could be provided with a clear and supported pathway to becoming future rural educators and the disconnect between geography and learning institutions would be addressed. All of this is critical to fueling the teacher pipeline for rural education as it addresses the tension we know exists between personal and professional identities of teacher candidates with rural upbringings (Burton & Johnson, 2010). Additionally, this pipeline has the potential to be strengthened without having to convince candidates that living in a rural area is filled with opportunities. The candidates for such a program already understand the complexities, uniqueness, and realities of rural teaching- we just needed to help them take their first steps as future teachers.

Despite students' interest in teaching and their experiences working with young children, the research shows that high school students are often unclear what a teacher's job fully encompasses (Mitchell et al., 2019). At the very least high schools can connect these students interested in education with teacher mentors or advisors to educate potential recruits further. Mentors and advisors should be transparent in what it is like to be a teacher, sharing their process in planning and preparing lessons, conducting assessments, communicating with families, and the many other roles and responsibilities teachers have. By revealing the intricacies and effort necessary to be an effective educator as we did in the Aspiring Teachers program, students will have a realistic expectation of the job and teachers' significant impact on students (Mitchell et al., 2019).

This study revealed that spending time on the university campus and experiencing the lives of college students led to AT's beliefs that they would be successful in college, which aligns with findings in previous studies (Sleeter & Milner, 2011; Tandon et al., 2015; Gist et al., 2018). While many colleges and universities offer orientation experiences, the ATs had a unique experience during their summer intensive courses as they were in classes together and were pursuing the same major and career. The ATs were able to navigate this transition with other like-minded peers. Further, university ambassadors were instrumental in supporting the ATs in developing the work habits and study skills necessary to succeed in the courses. The ambassadors' guidance and mentorship help students process and envision what it would be like to live in a residence hall, balance class expectations and social opportunities, and experience courses with students with similar career goals. This mentorship could provide a new niche for research in the recruitment of rural teachers.

The Aspiring Teachers, Ambassadors, and professors built a strong learning community. This community allowed students to share intimate details of their rural lives, ask challenging questions, and admit faults in their own educational experiences. The students shared each other's successes and felt a strong sense of camaraderie after their week of living on campus and learning together. Positive outcomes have been documented about the power of participation in learning communities (Lichtenstein, 2005). Teacher preparation programs can create learning communities by developing cohorts of students that share classes, participate in field experiences together, and have

education-related volunteer opportunities. Adjustment to college, interaction among students and faculty, skill-building, and a sense of belonging contribute to student college success (Lichtenstein, 2005).

Conclusion

This study shows that teaching in a rural area is unique, with many benefits and challenges (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Cuervo & Acquaro, 2018; Miller, 2012; Maranto & Shuls, 2012). Rural schools are distinctive in their geographic location, population, industry, and more (Miller, 2012), but all students need high-quality teachers. Further research should include a much broader and diverse group of students. The long-term effectiveness of the Aspiring Teachers program is unclear, and we would like to follow these students throughout their college experience and then on into their rural classrooms to determine how participation in this program may have contributed to their successful completion of their teacher preparation program, as well as their classroom pedagogy as rural educators. While participants completed six credits of educator preparation coursework, further research is needed to observe the transference of knowledge from this course to the rural classroom to determine how the AT program supported them in becoming effective educators.

Ultimately, 17 students successfully completed six credits of university teacher preparation coursework, and 16 of them plan on pursuing a career in education. While the grant provided the funds for coursework and living expenses for one week in the summer, we were able to use this opportunity to build a learning community where students supported each other in their first steps as future rural educators. The Aspiring Teacher program

was a unique opportunity that drew on the lived rural experiences of the high school students to support their common goal of becoming future rural educators. In addition, the program made a career in teaching more accessible to Aspiring Teachers. We will continue to explore the potential of bringing rural high school students to the college campus, where their rural discourse can take center stage. All students deserve highly qualified teachers who will engage and inspire as they embrace and celebrate the rural communities in which they teach.

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Appendix A

Aspiring Teachers Courses and Descriptions

EDEL 101 Elementary Teaching as a Profession	Introduces the Interdisciplinary Studies Elementary Teaching major (ISET) and the Elementary Professional Teacher Education Program (PTEP). Examines professional expectations of today's elementary teachers and how coursework prepares candidates for teaching. 1 credit
ET 340 Integration of Technology into Content and Pedagogy	Explore theories/frameworks that support integration of technology in teaching and learning. Apply practices to promote seamless integration of technology that adds significant value to students' learning of elementary curriculum. 2 credits
Fall Virtual Course- EDRD 314 Literature for Children, Adolescents and Young Adults	Consider interests and abilities governing choice of literature from kindergarten through young adult. Survey literature. Emphasize modern literature, uses of literature in curriculum and multiple responses to literature. 3 credits