

Exploring How Pre-Service and Early-Career English Teachers' Negotiate a Rural Sense of Belonging

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MURRAY - Preparing Teachers for Rural Schools

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This paper extends conversations around the complexities implicit with introducing Pre-Service Teachers (PSTs) to rural teaching. As a frontier state, land-grant university, we illustrate how explicit moves to foreground rural English teaching reveal a shift in a deficitized, monolithic representation of rural. PSTs are exposed to rural and placed scholarship, interact with rural students, teachers and administrators and select practicum and student teaching in rural communities. These constellations of experiences have normalized PSTs' understanding of ruralities and their considerations of critical rural English pedagogy. Yet, many choose not to continue or sustain their path in a rural community as early-career teachers (ECTs); this paper looks into varying factors of rurality as we work to understand how English teachers consider place. This multi-year analysis begins by describing our rural practicum, then introduces how PSTs articulated their experiences. Data includes written reflections, interviews, and auto-photography that represent PSTs' understanding of their placement community. We include interviews with PSTs and ECTs who chose rural schools and describe participants' negotiations with space, people, and curriculum as they build their rural sense of belonging. Finally, we investigate choices toward rural communities using research on college students' sense of belonging. Our analysis addresses what is being in/excluded. As PSTs matriculate, do they see themselves in future rural photos? If so, how can we support that reality? If not, what are the barriers to their successes in rural schools? We conclude that a rural sense of belonging led some students to choose rural settings.