CONNECTING RURAL STUDENTS TO SCHOOL USING CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING

by

Angela Marie Winter

A dissertation submitted to Johns Hopkins University in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Baltimore, Maryland

April 2023

© 2023 Angela Winter

All Rights Reserved
Abstract

In this dossier-dissertation I investigated the problem of rural secondary students’ disconnection from school. A literature review explored factors impacting the problem and identified the two most salient factors: teacher-student relationships and relevant curriculum. A mixed methods needs assessment addressed the constructs of teacher-student relationships and relevant curriculum in one rural midwestern junior high and high school. Survey and interview data were analyzed to reveal that while teacher-student relationships in the school were positive, action needed to be taken to develop a more highly relevant and meaningful curriculum for the rural students in the context. The Culturally Relevant Rural Teacher Guide was a professional development tool designed to help rural teachers learn more about their rural contexts and students and to then design more relevant curriculum and instruction. I created the guide using critical pedagogy, culturally relevant teaching, and funds of knowledge as frameworks. Throughout the program, teachers can engage in critical pedagogy and lesson study. A program distribution plan as well my own reflection on the research process and my doctoral program journey is included.

Keywords: connectedness to school, rural, funds of knowledge, teacher-student relationships
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my best friend, Sam Kelley, who dreamed of attending Johns Hopkins.
Acknowledgements

Firstly, I want to thank Dr. Bonnie Sunstein who changed the trajectory of my life when she appointed me to work at the writing center when I was studying for my M.A.T. at the University of Iowa. Working alongside Dr. Carrie Aldrich at the writing center inspired me to push myself to achieve the highest possible degree. Thank you, Carrie, for teaching me so much about the field of education, including me in your projects, listening to me talk out my wild ideas, and being the most incredible academic role model.

Next, I extend my gratitude to my gracious, patient, and helpful advisor, Dr. Deanna Sands. Thank you, Dr. Sands, for your countless hours of reading my work, providing me thoughtful feedback, and guiding me through the intellectual and emotional journey of this doctorate degree. I also want to thank my committee members, Dr. Honorine Nocon and Dr. Eric Rice, for their feedback, expertise, and supervision. The process of researching, writing, drafting, and responding to feedback has been one of the most rewarding learning experiences throughout the program.

I am also deeply grateful for my dearest and best friends: Leah DeGrazia, Roz Smith, and Amanda Kloser. Thank you for letting me vent, making me take a break, sending me coffees and treats, and for your love throughout this process.

Thank you to my parents, Dan and Connie, and my grandmother, Pat, for your support throughout my doctoral studies. I really could not have done it without you. Thank you for pushing me to the end. I am proud to be the first in our family to hold a terminal degree.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii
Dedication ...................................................................................................................... iii
Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................... iv
Table of Contents ......................................................................................................... v
List of Tables ................................................................................................................ viii
List of Figures .............................................................................................................. ix
Executive Summary ..................................................................................................... 1
Project 1: Rural Students’ Connectedness to School .................................................... 5
  Problem of Practice .................................................................................................... 9
    Defining Connectedness ......................................................................................... 10
  Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................. 10
Literature Review ......................................................................................................... 14
    Factors Beyond the Classroom Affecting Rural Students’ Connectedness to School .... 15
      Labor and Outmigration ....................................................................................... 15
      Rural Consciousness ........................................................................................... 16
      Rural Poverty ....................................................................................................... 17
    Student-Perceived Local Employment Opportunities ............................................. 18
    Relationships between Rural Families and School Staff ....................................... 19
Classroom Level Factors Effecting Rural Students’ Connectedness to School .......... 21
  Limited School Staff ............................................................................................... 21
  Teacher Access to Professional Learning ............................................................... 22
  Teacher’s Beliefs about Rural Students .................................................................. 23
  Curriculum ............................................................................................................... 23
  Access to Advanced Classes ................................................................................. 26
  Student Identity Factors ......................................................................................... 26
Summary ....................................................................................................................... 28
Project 2: Needs Assessment Study ............................................................................ 31
  Context of the Study ............................................................................................... 31
  Purpose of the Study and Research Questions ......................................................... 33
  Researcher Positionality ......................................................................................... 34
  Method ...................................................................................................................... 34
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Survey</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Survey</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Conditions for Learning Survey</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Survey</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Selection Process</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Methods</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions for Learning Survey</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Survey</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings and Discussion</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Perceived Teacher-Student Relationships</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Perceived Student-Teacher Relationships</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarities and Differences in Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationships</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors Considered for Contextualization</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports and Barriers to Contextualization</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project 3: The Culturally Relevant Rural Teacher Guide</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Culture</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Three Overview</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociocultural Learning Theory</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Relevant Teaching</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Pedagogy</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Relevant Literature</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funds of Knowledge</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rural Professional Learning.................................................................................................................. 73
Lesson Study ........................................................................................................................................ 73

The Culturally Relevant Rural Teacher Guide ....................................................................................... 75
Participation and Facilitation ............................................................................................................. 75
Lesson Study ........................................................................................................................................ 77
Reflective Cycles ................................................................................................................................. 77

Guided Professional Learning ............................................................................................................. 78
Module One: Reflections ...................................................................................................................... 78
  Self-Reflection Graphic Organizer .................................................................................................. 78
Module Two: Funds of Knowledge ...................................................................................................... 79
Module Three: Survey .......................................................................................................................... 79
Module Four: Design Instruction ......................................................................................................... 80
Module Five: Lesson Reflection .......................................................................................................... 81
Resource Toolbox ............................................................................................................................... 81
Distribution Plan ................................................................................................................................ 81
Summary ............................................................................................................................................... 82

Final Reflection ..................................................................................................................................... 82

References ........................................................................................................................................... 85

Appendix A: Conditions for Learning Survey Items ........................................................................... 103
Appendix B: Teacher Perceived Teacher-Student Relationships Survey ........................................ 104
Appendix C: Teacher Interview .......................................................................................................... 105
Appendix D: Teacher Survey Recruitment Email ................................................................................ 107
Appendix E: Teacher Interview Recruitment Email ........................................................................... 108
Appendix G: Guided Professional Learning Materials ........................................................................ 113
List of Tables

Table 2.1. *Average Net Promoter Score by Grade Levels* 45

Table 2.2. *Net Promoter Scores by Grade Level for Survey Items* 46

Table 2.3. *Net Promoter Scores by Gender* 47

Table 2.4. *Summary of Responses to Teacher-Student Relationship Survey Items* 51

Table 3.1 *Professional Learning Outline* 76
List of Figures

Figure 1.1. *Framework for Factors that Influence Rural Student Connectedness to School* 11

Figure 1.2. *Conceptual Framework* 30
Executive Summary

This dossier-dissertation explored the problem of rural students’ disconnectedness from school. Secondary students across the nation experience feelings of not belonging in school that increase as they progress through grade levels (Anderman, 2003; Gilleen-O'Neel & Fulgini, 2013; Witherspoon & Ennett, 2010). When secondary students feel connected to their schools, they are more likely to feel motivated in school (Gilleen-O'Neel & Fulgini, 2013), have more positive behavior (Demanet & Houtte, 2012; Gowing & Jackson, 2016), and graduate (Hynes, 2014; Nasir et al., 2011). Hoffman et al.’s (2017) study of rural students’ schooling experiences found that their connectedness to school was especially lacking, even for high achieving students.

A literature review described the factors contributing to rural students’ connectedness to school. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (EST) provided an organizational framework to identify the factors which range from the broad historical and social context inward to the rural students’ classroom. Factors within the rural students’ chrono and macrosystems included outmigration from rural areas, brain drain, and rural consciousness. In the exosystem, the economic factors of rural poverty and students-perceived local employment opportunities impact how rural students’ connectedness to school. The meso- and microsystems included factors closer to the students: relationships between school staff and families, teacher-student relationships, curriculum, limited school staff, access to advanced classes, teacher beliefs about rural students, and teacher access to professional learning. Student identity factors also influence how connected they feel to their rural school; gender, race, age, sexual and/or gender orientation, and socioeconomic status all contribute to students’ connectedness. The contributing factors to rural students’ connectedness to school that were identified as the most actionable to
me, as a doctoral student creating an applied project, were teacher-student relationships and curriculum. A needs assessment was designed to explore those factors in the rural secondary school that I was working in as a teacher.

**Needs Assessment**

To examine how teacher-student relationships and curriculum were influencing student connectedness in one rural school, a mixed-methods needs assessment was conducted. The needs assessment was conducted in one combined rural junior high and high school, which served students from grades 7-12 in one building, with teachers who taught both junior and senior high school courses. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do students perceive teacher-student relationships in their school?
2. How do teachers perceive teacher-student relationships in their school?
3. What are the similarities and differences in the ways teachers and students perceive teacher-student relationships in their school?
4. What factors do teachers consider when planning curriculum and instruction in their rural school context?
5. What do teachers perceive to be the supports and barriers to implementing meaningful curriculum and instruction in their rural school context?

Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered during the needs assessment. Two data collection tools were used to gather quantitative data on teacher-student relationships. I analyzed the state’s Conditions for Learning (CFL) survey data, which was completed by all students in the school. This survey asks students to indicate their agreement to statements such as “Teachers in this school care about students” on a 5-point Likert scale. Items on the CFL that were related to teacher-student relationship quality were analyzed. In addition, I created a survey
similar to the CFL survey intended to measure how teachers perceived the teacher-student relationships in the school. I collected qualitative data through interviews with teachers at the school to find out in what ways they were contextualizing their curriculum and instruction to be relevant to the lives of their rural students.

Net promoter score (NPS) was used to analyze the quantitative data, surveys from both teachers and students. A positive NPS for every survey item, on both the teacher and student survey, analyzed revealed that teacher-student relationships were mostly positive at the school. However, analysis of the teacher interviews revealed that teachers struggled to and/or did not see value in contextualizing their curriculum and instruction for rural students. For some teachers, creating curriculum and instruction that explored the students’ local area was not considered at all. Some teachers in the study had tried contextualizing their classroom by participating in community events. Teachers expressed interest in learning more about contextualizing their curriculum for rural students and discussed barriers and supports to doing so at their school.

**Culturally Relevant Rural Teacher Guide**

In the third project of this dossier dissertation, I present a professional learning experience and resource for rural teachers to begin contextualizing their teaching by incorporating funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005) from their school community into their classrooms. The Culturally Relevant Rural Teacher Guide (CRRTG) is an online guide and resource toolkit for teachers who want to create lessons that are relevant to their rural students’ context. The CRRTG is free to use and contains step-by-step directions for implementing a professional learning experience in five modules.

Culturally relevant teaching (CRT) was used as a framework for guiding teachers through reflecting first on their identities, then discussion and exploration of the learning
opportunities available through school community members. Moreover, the teachers engage in a
lesson study-style process of creating shared goals for lessons, planning together, and providing
feedback for each other on lessons that implement funds of knowledge from the community in
their classrooms. Additionally, Wink’s (2001) reflective cycles are employed throughout the
modules to emphasize growth through reflection. The desired result is to create more meaningful
and relevant learning experiences for rural students.
Project 1: Rural Students’ Connectedness to School

Student connectedness to school refers to the bonds a student builds with their school environment (Blum, 2005). When students are connected to school, they form relationships with students and adults at school and display commitment by investing in their academic success (Monahan et al., 2010). Connectedness to school is grounded in two constructs: teacher-student relationships and meaningful academic experiences (Blum, 2005; Gowing & Jackson, 2016; Klem & Connell, 2004). Connectedness is achieved when students feel that the adults in their learning environment care about students’ learning and lives, as evidenced through their relationships with students and connecting instructional activities to students’ lives (Blum, 2005; Gowing & Jackson, 2016; Klem & Connell, 2004). When teachers maintain positive relationships with students, put forth efforts to make learning relevant to their students’ lives, and hold students to high expectations, students feel more connected to their academic experiences (Blum, 2005; Gowing & Jackson, 2016; Klem & Connell, 2004). Therefore, a robust connection to school is founded in the positive rapport between students and teachers as well as meaningful curriculum and instruction. However, recent research has revealed a growing concern that adolescents in general do not feel strong connections to their school (Blum, 2005; Klem & Connell, 2004). The process of students gradually disengaging from school as they progress through grade levels has been well documented, and research suggests that 40% to 60% of the nation’s students have disengaged from their connection with school (Klem & Connell, 2004).

Student connectedness to school supports positive outcomes in the areas of student overall well-being, feelings of school belonging, social adjustment, classroom engagement, and academic achievement (Blum, 2005; Gowing & Jackson, 2016). When students feel the adults in
their learning environment care about them, they in turn feel that school is a place where they belong and become more invested in their educational experiences (Blum, 2005). Students who feel connected to school engage in their classes by attending more frequently and receive fewer behavior referrals than students who do not feel connected (Gordon et al., 2013). Gowing and Jackson (2016) reported that the more connected students felt to their school, the more likely they were to engage in academic opportunities. For example, students who reported feeling connected to school in Gowing and Jackson’s study participated in more extra and co-curricular activities and formed closer bonds to peers and school staff than those who felt less connected. Additionally, students who feel connected to school are more likely to graduate high school, obtain higher grades, and avoid drug use (CDC, 2018; Hynes, 2014; Nasir et al., 2011).

When students do not feel connected to school, consequences arise in their academic performance and well-being. Monahan et al. (2010) found that students who are less connected to school were more likely to experience mental health problems and substance use. Rudasill et al. (2010) reported that less close teacher and student connections were related to increased risk-taking behavior, such as drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, fighting, and stealing. In fact, Rudasill et al.’s findings supported conclusions from an earlier study by Bond et al. (2007) regarding the relationship between connectedness to school and to teen behavior. Their results suggested student connectedness to school in the early teen years can predict high school graduation, mental health, and substance use (Bond et al., 2007). Middle school aged students in their longitudinal study revealed that connectedness to school was negatively correlated with depression and anxiety, but positively correlated with graduation from high school, and avoidance of marijuana. Moreover, Hynes (2014) illuminated the importance of adolescent connections to adults as they found students who dropped out of school were likely longing for
authentic relationships with people at school, including adults. Schools are places where youth are required to spend much of their time, and robust connections to school can help that time be more enjoyable and therefore more beneficial (Blum, 2005).

Teacher-student relationships are pivotal in establishing connections to school. Klem and Connell’s (2004) seminal study of elementary, middle, and high school students examined the link between school connectedness and school engagement as well as teacher support of students. Their research aimed to find out how teacher support of students impacted how engaged in and connected to school students felt. The author concluded that a multitude of students did not feel engaged at school, but students who perceived higher support from their teachers were more likely to self-report as engaged and connected to school (Klem & Connell, 2004). Klem and Connell’s research findings were supported by Chhuon and Wallace’s (2014) investigation of student relationships with their teachers. Chhuon and Wallace explored how teens’ relationships with their teachers’ mediated feelings of connectedness and belonging in school. Qualitative data from interviews with students revealed that teens felt more connected to teachers who provided emotional support in the form of moving beyond the role of teacher by reaching out to them and getting to know them as individuals. Students expressed that they felt their teachers provided support by noticing their emotions day to day and asking them about their lives. These gestures of care helped students feel they belonged at school; however, these interactions among teachers and students were uncommon. Chhuon and Wallace’s study may provide some explanations for why students in Klem and Connell’s (2014) research reported feelings of disconnection from school. In qualitative interviews, student participants expressed that the teachers “give us the work” (Chhuon & Wallace, 2014, p. 287). Students in this study explained that they wanted to have a deeper relationship with their teachers than simply adults.
who assigned homework. These findings demonstrate how the relationship between teachers and students provides a foundation for connectedness to school.

Meaningful academic experiences are another vital component of connectedness to school. I define meaningful academic experiences as learning activities and opportunities at school that are relevant to students’ lives and foster a positive classroom community that is responsive to students’ experiences and culture (Blum, 2005; Gowing & Jackson, 2016; Hammond, 2014; Klem & Connell, 2004). This means that learning activities and materials are relevant to student lives and presented in environments that honor students’ identities and experiences. While school and classroom culture set the tone for the learning environment, Blum (2005) discussed the importance of relevant curriculum in student connectedness to school.

Blum (2005) asserted that teachers and school administrators must first establish clear, fair, and equitable expectations of student behavior as well as performance for meaningful learning to take place. In addition, teachers must recognize and reward students for a variety of accomplishments at school, creating an environment in which students feel honored for their work and learning (Blum, 2005). As described in Chhuon and Wallace (2014) and Klem and Connell (2004), disconnectedness to school remains a problem experienced broadly by students across the nation. The focus of this dissertation dossier narrows the problem to rural students specifically. Akin to students in urban and suburban schools, secondary rural youth report feelings of disconnection from school (Hoffman et al., 2017; Monahan et al., 2010). Hoffman et al. (2017) revealed that while rural students in their study reported rich peer relationships, their connectedness to school, as measured by a survey, remained low, implying that rural schools need to improve relationships between adults and students as well as students’ access to meaningful educational opportunities. Moreover, research suggested that secondary rural males
feel less connected to school than females and are also more likely to engage in misbehavior in school (Summerset-Ringgold et al., 2015; Witherspoon & Ennett, 2011). Additionally, Witherspoon and Ennett’s (2011) study of rural youth contended that among rural students in general, misbehavior in school increased over time while their feelings of belonging in school decreased. While a sense of belonging is not identical to connectedness, connectedness is a component of belonging, as feeling connections to people at school is an aspect of sensing belonging (Chhuon & Wallace, 2014).

**Problem of Practice**

Rural youth make up one fifth of the country’s students, meaning that a multitude of rural students may face the ramifications of not feeling connected to school (Lavalley, 2018). Classroom risk factors, such as resistance to school, were explored by Hendrickson (2012). Resistance to schooling is a student’s refusal to engage in learning at school and a result of rural students’ lack of connectedness with school (Hendrickson, 2012). Hendrickson studied students who resisted education and argued that they because they felt detached from teachers and curriculum. The most concerning consequences of students feeling disconnected from school are associated with higher risks of students in rural areas dying from suicide. Youth who live in rural areas are more likely to die by suicide than their urban and suburban peers (CDC, 2018; Singh et al., 2013). To compound this problem, mental health services, including suicide prevention services, are sparse in rural areas (Goldman-Mellor et al., 2018; Graves, 2020). When students feel disconnected from school, they are at higher Risk for suicide, decreased physical and mental well-being, higher drug use, and criminal activity (Bond et al., 2017; Gowing & Jackson, 2016; Hynes, 2014; Nasir et al., 2011).
The overall objective of this three-part dossier dissertation project was to explore factors that contribute to rural secondary student connectedness to school. This first project posits a theoretical framing of this problem using Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory. The subsequent section provides a literature review of factors related to rural secondary student connectedness to school. The literature review synthesizes contemporary research findings on rural students’ perceptions of school, pointing to the ways in which rural students experience connectedness, especially considering classroom level factors. Finally, a conceptual framework is presented, explaining how the most salient and actionable factors interact in one context and how the problem of rural student disconnectedness from school may be approached empirically.

**Defining Connectedness**

Ashley et al. (2012) contended that connectedness to school is one integral aspect of developing a sense of belonging in school. Although some researchers use the terms school connectedness and sense of belonging interchangeably, I define connectedness by using Blum (2005) and Monahan et al.’s (2010) definition of connectedness to school, which is the bond that students create with school based on two critical factors: positive relationships with teachers and meaningful academic experiences. This definition focuses on the role of connectedness as one among other factors that influence a sense of belonging in school.

**Theoretical Framework**

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory (EST) provides a frame by which to organize and explore factors that may contribute to rural students’ connection to school. This model places the rural student at the center of a nested set of systems that represent the layered environments in which the student lives, accounting for the systems in which the child is directly and indirectly involved. These systems, moving from the outermost circle inward toward the
central individual student, are the chronosystem, macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The lenses of the EST model depicted in Figure 1 illustrate a map for understanding factors across the various contexts that influence rural students’ connectedness to school.

Figure 1.1

Framework for Factors That Influence Rural Student Connectedness to School

The factors within the chrono and macrosystems set the historical and cultural tones for the learner’s environment. According to Bronfenbrenner (1994) the chronosystem includes historical events and changes of significance that occur over the lifetime of a learner and influence the ways in which life is lived. For example, general economic conditions, technological advancements, and social movements impact the daily life of all people in the
world. For rural communities one of the most influential changes that has historically marked the experience of rural life has been the rural brain drain phenomenon, which is the outmigration of highly educated people away from rural areas (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). Outmigration influences the culture and labor opportunities in rural areas. As people leave rural areas, so do opportunities to thrive for those who stay. When highly educated people move away, taking their social and intellectual capital from the community, the overall quality of life for rural communities is altered for those who are left behind. For example, health care workers, small business owners, attorneys, and creative professionals are more sparsely located in rural areas as a result of brain drain, influencing the access to services, employment opportunities, and quality of life in rural towns (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Walsch, 2012).

The macrosystem frames the broad ideological and cultural contexts of the learner (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). A drain of community resources due to outmigration contributes to a resentment towards government programs known as rural consciousness (Cramer, 2016; Walsch, 2012). Rural consciousness refers to a group consciousness among rural communities that influences rural citizens’ political identities. Walsch (2012) argued that people who live in rural areas can exhibit a form of group consciousness when expressing political viewpoints. Walsch (2012) reported in her study of 27 rural communities that rural citizens’ sense of place influenced their opinions on political topics, and some common themes emerged from her interviews with participants. Rural consciousness entails people who live in rural areas identifying with a “perception of deprivation” (Walsh, 2012, p 517) of government assistance and attention in politics and therefore asserting a resistance to political engagement and government entities. A belief that politics benefit urban areas and the political elite pervades rural communities, eroding
their trust in government-funded institutions such as schools. Therefore, people living in rural communities could feel alienated from the institution they send their children to each day.

One is prompted to consider through Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) exosystem and examination of the interactions between two or more settings which impact the student, but in which the student is not necessarily involved. For example, educational policies like state mandated learning standards influence district policies which ultimately affect students’ curricular experiences without their participation in creating the policies. In the literature review below rural poverty and student-perceived local employment opportunities are discussed as part of the exosystem. These factors characterize the setting of rural learning and influence the connections students make to school.

EST’s mesosystem encompasses the relationships between a student’s Microsystems. (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). For example, a student’s parents and teachers are directly involved in the student’s immediate environment, so this relationship is a unique factor explored in the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The relationship between school staff and students’ families influences how connected rural students feel to their school (Sherman & Sage, 2011).

The microsystem refers to the immediate environments the child encounters most frequently, shaping their daily life. People within this system are teachers, peers, caregivers, and families because they are directly involved in the child’s life on a regular basis (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This system will be explored in depth in the literature review because these factors influence student connectedness to schooling directly and daily, especially as they pertain to the rural classroom. Factors that are explored within the microsystem are teacher-student relationships, teacher beliefs about rural students, limited school staffing, commercialized
curriculum, place-based education, access to advanced courses, and access to professional learning.

Finally, the innermost circle of this framework captures the learner themselves. This circle accounts for the variation in students' lives, as gender, age, race, and socioeconomic status each play a role in how rural students connect to their school (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Each of these variations can account for differences in a student’s experience at school and can impact how they relate to the factors within their microsystems. For example, a student’s race could impact how they relate to their peers and teachers (Dobson, 2018). The factors explored in this section are the impact of rural students’ age, gender, sexual and/or gender orientation, race, and socioeconomic status on their connectedness to school.

**Literature Review**

As indicated previously through the application of Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) EST framework, a multitude of factors contribute to rural student connectedness to school. The following literature review uses the EST framework to describe these factors, moving from the broadest factors in the chronosystem to the factors that are closest to the learner in the microsystem, which directly impact a student daily (i.e., teacher-student relationships and curriculum). The factors will be described in more depth, the closer we move toward the student within the EST framework.

There is a lack of representation of rural students in scholarship and research. This lack of research impacted this literature review, as relatively few studies of rural students exist in the empirical literature. Although one fifth of the nation’s students attend rural schools (Lavalley, 2018), Hardré (2008) estimated that only 6% of the published research on grades K-12 has been on the topic of rural schools specifically. Reagan et al. (2019) conducted a content analysis of
high quality and empirical research articles that addressed rural educational settings. Spanning one decade, 2007-2017, their search of the literature revealed only 59 articles. Reagan and colleagues concluded that this relative dearth of research could not garner rich information about rural education (Reagan et al., 2019). Given the dearth of research on rural students’ education, I reviewed literature that discussed variations of connectedness such as sense of belonging and disconnectedness. When my definition of connectedness (defined on page 9) aligned with an author’s definition of these constructs, I considered how their research contributed to the knowledge of how rural students build connectedness with their school.

Factors Beyond the Classroom Affecting Rural Students’ Connectedness to School

In this section contributing factors to rural students’ connectedness to school that exist within the chrono-, macro-, exo-, and mesosystems are explored. These factors impact how students connect to their school even though these contexts are not directly associated to students’ classrooms.

Labor and Outmigration

In the past, rural American industries and agriculture brought employment and resources to rural communities, but a population shifts from rural to metropolitan areas starting in the 1980s redefined the opportunities available to those who stayed (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Pender et al., 2019). The available employment opportunities in rural areas were less likely to require postsecondary education and less likely to offer financial prosperity than employment in urban areas (Pender et al., 2019). As the demand for industrialized labor in the United States declined, so did employment opportunities; similarly, as large agricultural corporations purchased small farms, the number of independent agricultural businesses plummeted (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Pender et al., 2019). The exodus of young, educated people away from rural areas, known as
“brain drain,” reflected the depletion of opportunities available to people in rural communities (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). Carr & Kefalas’ seminal study on the impact of brain drain and outmigration in one rural school district explored how changes in labor demands in one rural area led to changes in how community members, including students, perceived schooling. When education does not lead to what community members see as viable employment, then this may affect rural students’ perceived utility of education, including high school (Van Gundy et al., 2016).

**Rural Consciousness**

Rural citizens’ collective perception that rural areas’ economies are often less lucrative than urban economies contributes to their resentment towards government initiatives, especially those that are intended to relieve economic disparities (Walsh, 2012). The shared belief among rural communities in Walsh’s (2012) study that programs such as welfare are more often used by the urban poor than the rural poor perpetuates perceptions that government programs, funded by taxpayer dollars, are created to assist urban communities over rural ones. Walsh studied 27 rural communities across one midwestern state to find out about the political identities and voting patterns of rural community members. Through qualitative interviews with rural working-class citizens about issues impacting rural areas as well as general political issues at a national level, Walsh revealed that participants believed that a drain of resources away from rural areas has created a rural cultural identification with deprivation of government services and resources. The participants in Walsh’s study expressed frustration with urban political elites, who they believed did not value or respect rural industries such as agriculture; they felt that their tax dollars went towards programs that did not benefit their communities, and therefore they mistrusted political figures who promoted socioeconomic reform. This political outlook potentially influences how
rural students connect to their schools, as public schools are government funded institutions that push government-mandated learning standards for students.

**Rural Poverty**

Rural poverty is unique from nonrural poverty because it is experienced as constant and accompanied by social and physical isolation due to distance from other people and resources. Farrigan (2018) described this phenomenon as follows: “persistent poverty tends to be a rural county phenomenon that is often tied to physical isolation, exploitation of resources, limited assets and economic opportunities, and an overall lack of human and social capital” (para. 8). In a two-part study of the concerns about American rural life, conducted by Harvard University, National Public Radio (NPR), and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2018, 2019), people in rural areas reported problems they believed were greatly impacting their communities. The researchers investigated the experiences of rural people and their opinions about the economic and health problems that impact their communities through a survey distributed over the phone to 1,300 adults aged 18 or older that live in rural areas in the United States. The critical findings of this report were that about half of the participants said that they could not pay off an unexpected bill of $1,000 right away and that four out of ten reported that they had recently struggled to pay for health care, housing, or food.

Poverty can influence how connected students feel to their school (Rudasill et al., 2010). Rudasill et al.’s study of high-poverty sixth grade students explored if their sense of school connectedness was related to their relationships with deviant peers. This study reported that high-poverty students were more likely to show a decline in school connectedness and an increase in association with deviant peers after sixth grade. The researchers pointed out that connectedness to school is especially important to students living in high-poverty neighborhoods that may
present more challenging living situations as schools can be places where healthy and positive relationships are formed (Rudasill et al., 2010). Therefore, students who live in high-poverty rural areas may be impacted by poverty, especially when forming bonds with school.

**Student-Perceived Local Employment Opportunities**

Employment prospects leverage how connected students feel to school. Van Gundy et al. (2016) found that the employment opportunities students in their study perceived as available to them after secondary school influenced their connectedness to school; positive perceptions of local employment were correlated with high connectedness to school. In their study, Van Gundy et al. investigated a connection between students’ perceived employment opportunities and high school students’ school connectedness in a rural county located in the Northeast United States. The rural county in the study had a population of 33,055 people and an unemployment rate of 3.4%. Students from 16 public schools in grades 7-12 were participants in the study, and data was collected using a survey that included questions on students’ connectedness to their school and their perceptions of local job prospects, in four cohorts: 2008, 2009, 2011, and 2013. One cohort had graduated by the third wave, which allowed researchers to see if and how responses changed after high school and into adulthood. Findings indicated students’ perceptions of employment opportunities mirrored the changes in the county’s unemployment rate; as employment rates fell, so did students’ perceptions of opportunities, and so did their connectedness to school.

Perhaps when rural students experience a struggling local economy, they may not view school as a pathway to a robust future, but the research on this shows contradictory results. Agger et al. (2018) reported that as student perceptions of local employment increased, their educational aspirations decreased. This might mean that local employment opportunities may not
require high levels of education (Pender et al., 2019). However, Petrin et al. (2014) explored how local economic health was associated with students’ positive attachments to rural communities, including their school. Their study examined data from the national student survey on rural high school students’ plans beyond high school. Petrin et al. conducted focus groups of high school juniors and seniors who participated in the survey as well as school counselors, teachers, and administrators from their schools. Participants were interviewed about the factors that influenced students’ postsecondary plans. The data revealed that high achieving students experience a crossroads when making plans for their future: they must choose between staying near home and nurturing their strong attachment to their community or leaving to find economic prosperity elsewhere (Petrin et al., 2014). These results supported Petrin et al.’s (2011) earlier study in which they explored high school students’ early stages of future planning. Students in that study indicated that when planning their future after graduation, they reported feelings of needing to leave their struggling communities to find economic relief somewhere beyond their home (Petrin, et al., 2011). When students see their communities thrive, they feel their schooling, as part of a community, can lead to their own successful future. These studies imply that creating curriculum directly related to post-secondary work experiences may not have a clearly positive impact on building student connectedness to school. Alternative curricular focuses are explored sections further below.

**Relationships between Rural Families and School Staff**

Families play an important role in shaping the lives and development of children (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Messages parents send to their children about the value of education can shape how children perceive school (Henry et al.,2011). In their study of how perceived parental investment can mediate rural student graduation from high school, Henry et al. (2011) found that
when students perceived their parents were invested in their graduation, they were more likely to successfully graduate. Sherman and Sage (2011) discussed how working-class rural parents in their study encouraged their children to graduate, but also sent messages to their children that school staff discriminated against them and that they should “do ‘whatever’s required’ to get through high school, but nothing more” (p. 9). As Henry et al. (2011) contended that what parents tell their children about school can impact student performance and graduation from school. Agger et al. (2018) reported that rural students whose parents expected them to aspire to college were more likely to hold that aspiration for themselves.

Rural, working-class families may feel particularly alienated from schools. According to Walsh (2012), rural community members may feel schools are ways in which government authorities exercise power over their community by selecting what and from whom their children learn. Sherman and Sage (2011) pointed out that new rural teachers who came from outside the community with a college degree and little experience were viewed by community members as elite outsiders who did not understand the community. Sherman and Sage gathered data from 55 interviews with rural community members who were employed but making incomes mostly at or below the poverty line. Parents of students in their study believed the teachers working in the school were not qualified to teach and were less professional than teachers employed by the school in the past (Sherman & Sage, 2011). Working class parents complained that their children were discriminated against by school staff and expressed that staff did not value their working-class contributions to the community. However, parents from high socioeconomic backgrounds blamed an influx of working-class families in their schools for a decline in the school quality (Sherman & Sage, 2011). The complexity of how socioeconomic status impacts the way rural families relate with school staff adds nuance to how rural students bond with their teachers.
Classroom Level Factors Effecting Rural Students’ Connectedness to School

Several factors at the classroom level influence rural student connectedness to school. These factors, as part of the student’s microsystem, are also some of the most salient for impacting student connectedness to school: school staffing, teacher beliefs about rural students, and the use of curriculum that does not connect to rural students. These factors are discussed in the following sections.

Limited School Staff

Rural schools, compared to schools in urban and suburban areas, operate with fewer administrative staff such as assistant principals and instructional leaders who provide support, plan professional learning, and take on administrative duties. For example, many rural schools operate with a single principal, limiting the time for tasks such as grant applications, research on professional learning tools, and school improvement efforts (Sanchez, et al., 2017). In some cases, a rural principal may also split their time as the district’s superintendent, stretching their capacity to complete all their expanded administrative duties (Curry & Wolf, 2017). With a limited number of people completing the administrative duties required of a school, issues like student connectedness to school may not be prioritized.

Staffing rural schools is uniquely difficult. Because of limited financial resources, new hires in rural schools are offered low salaries and are typically novice teachers; experienced rural teachers migrate away to earn more money in nonrural districts (Miller, 2012). Both Miller (2012) and Maranto and Schuls (2018) pointed out that the salary gap between rural and nonrural districts can be unattractive to applicants resulting in fewer teachers interested in rural teaching positions. Rural schools are likely to pay substantially less than nonrural schools. This means
that rural schools may have more difficulty in attracting high quality teachers who are skilled in establishing rich connections with students through their instruction.

**Teacher Access to Professional Learning**

Access to professional development and learning opportunities can be a challenge for rural schools because of geographic distance from resources and limited school staff (Hayes et al., 2019). Rural teachers have less access to mentors, especially in their subject areas (Hayes et al., 2019). In addition, a lack of expert professional learning personnel in the school hinders rural schools’ access to professional development (Hayes et al., 2019; Miller, 2012). This is especially problematic as new teachers need professional learning support to meet the demands of teaching multiple grade levels at rural schools (Goodpaster et al., 2012). Access to professional learning and support is a salient factor in student connectedness because it is related to school efforts to improve and enhance instruction and curriculum; barriers to these efforts are also barriers to creating meaningful connections between students and their school by using the latest best practices in teaching.

**Teacher-Student Relationships**

Blum (2005) refers to teacher-student relationships as one of the foundational factors connecting students to school. Positive teacher-student relationships promote student learning, achievement, engagement, and confidence in school, and overall beneficial school climates (Hughes, 2011; Leflot, et al., 2010; Prewett et al., 2019). Although rural teachers report knowing their students’ lives well (Aultman et al., 2009), their knowledge about students does not always translate to having positive relationships with them. Gallagher et al. (2013) studied rural African American students. They found that as early as kindergarten and first grade, rural African American students had poorer relationships with their teachers. In addition, Knoell et al. (2015)
reported that rural students who live in poverty have less trust in adults and therefore weaker relationships with their teachers than their affluent peers. Teachers that best connect with rural students are teachers who grew up and live in the school district in which they are teaching (Starrett et al., 2021). Moreover, teachers who are transplants in their rural school are more likely to struggle with building teacher-student relationships.

**Teacher’s Beliefs about Rural Students**

Research on rural teacher perceptions of students suggests that rural teachers may not hold perceptions of students that are conducive to building healthy teacher-student relationships. Goodpaster et al.’s (2012) study of rural STEM teachers revealed that rural teachers were more likely to perceive their students as lower performing and resistant to progressive instruction than their urban peers. However, one limitation of this study was the small sample size of six teachers. Wilcox et al.’s (2014) study of fifteen teachers and school administrative staff supported Goodpaster et al.’s findings. Wilcox et al. coded 63 interviews and reported that rural teachers in their study believed their students would not be as successful under rigorous academic expectations. When teachers do not believe their students can be held to high expectations, they may not be building healthy teacher-student relationships that help students feel connected to school (Blum, 2005; Goodpaster et al, 2012; Wilcox et al., 2014).

**Curriculum**

In this dossier dissertation, I define curriculum as the learning goals and materials as well as the instructional activities that teachers use to teach students. Some research suggests that rural students do not feel connected to their school curriculum (Waller & Barretine, 2015), a contributing factor to rural students feeling disconnected from their schools overall (Hendrickson, 2012; Summersett-Ringgold et al., 2015; Witherspoon & Ennett, 2011).
Meaningful curriculum and instruction are critical to building connectedness with school (Blum, 2005; Gowing & Jackson, 2016; Klem & Connell, 2004). Rural students in Hendrickson’s (2012) study who expressed dissatisfaction with their school reported that the curriculum did not relate to their lives or help them with their future plans. When rural students do not see themselves or their lives reflected in their curriculum, they can disconnect from schooling or even resist it (Hendrickson, 2012).

Due to small staff sizes in rural schools, rural teachers typically teach multiple grade levels and subjects (Goodpaster et al., 2018; Haché & Williams, 2019; Miller, 2012). This means that rural teachers must access or develop multiple curricula. Teachers and school administration must decide what and if curricula are purchased or created by teachers. The benefits and drawbacks of the most frequent curriculum options discussed in the literature as well as how each impact rural student connectedness to school are described in the following subsections.

**Commercial Curriculum.** Purchasing curriculum offers a solution for rural teachers who are tasked with teaching multiple grade levels, content areas, and/or courses. Commercial curriculum can provide relief to teachers who may not have time and support to develop their own curriculum (Donehower et al., 2007). Moreover, commercial curriculum that is specifically aligned to learning standards ensures that students are exposed to materials and activities that meet those learning standards. However, when curriculum is purchased, it may prioritize mandated standards over authentic connections to students’ backgrounds, cultures, and identities. Eppley (2011) discussed the problem of rural schools’ use of commercial curricula and coined the term “pedagogy of erasure” (p. 3) to describe how this kind of curriculum decontextualizes rural teaching and erases rural cultures. When rural schools adopt commercial learning material that is skills- and mandate-focused, opportunities to make learning more authentic for rural
student are lost, especially for rural students, whose culture is often othered or neglected by these materials (Eppley, 2011; Waller & Barrentine, 2015). A consequence of the pedagogy of erasure is that rural students feel disconnected from the curriculum taught in their schools (Waller & Barrentine, 2015). Waller and Barrentine demonstrated this in their study of rural reading instruction. They found that although rural teachers in their study had rich ties to the communities they taught in, they did not often prompt these connections outside of the lesson plans (Waller & Barrentine, 2015). Gee (2008) explained that a student can become resistant to learning when they experience a “perceived threat or insult to his or her individual, social, or cultural sense of self” (p. 81).

**Place-Based Education.** In literature in which curriculum for rural areas is addressed, place-based education is the most recommended (Azano, 2011; Ajayi, 2014; Budge, 2010; Gruenewald & Smith, 2014; Rearden & Berting; 2019) Zuckerman, 2019). Place-based education is a pedagogical approach that seeks to engage students by using where they live as a tool for educational experiences and inquiry (Azano, 2011; Yemini et al., 2023). Place-based learning includes activities such as students engaging in community events and local service-learning projects, learning outdoors, and engaging with civic leaders, and participating in local events (Powers, 2004; Yemini et al., 2023). Place-based learning has been proposed as a solution to problems in rural education by experts in the field because it creates authentic learning experiences for rural students, strengthens ties between schools and communities, and gives students opportunities to approach problems in their communities critically (Azano, 2011; Budge, 2010; Zuckerman, 2019). Although no studies have examined place-based education’s impact on rural student connectedness to school, Azano’s (2011) case study of one rural English teacher’s use of place-based curriculum suggested that place-based learning increases curricular
relevance. As discussed, curriculum relevance can contribute to students’ connectedness to school (Gruenewald & Smith, 2014).

**Access to Advanced Classes**

Providing relevant and meaningful curriculum to students includes ensuring that students are meeting high expectations. Lavalley (2018) described rural students’ lack of access to course variety, which is likely due to funding and hiring limitations. Lavalley used data from multiple sources, including the National Center for Educational Statistics and College Board, on rural, suburban, and urban schools to show broadly how rural students often do not have advanced courses in their schools, limiting their choices and opportunities. Mann et al. (2017) supported these findings in their study of access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses, which compared the access of 20,368 US public high schools in 2001 with 23,795 US schools in 2014. Rural schools’ access to AP courses did increase in the 13-year period, from 56% of rural schools having access in 2001 to 73% with access in 2015. However, the access in both suburban and urban schools averaged 91% for both cohorts (Mann et al., 2017). Additionally, rural students were significantly less likely to score satisfactorily on an AP test, with a 53% success rate compared to 58% for urban students and 67% for suburban students. Mann et al. (2017) suggest that rural schools’ lack of teaching resources and access to technology contribute to disparities in opportunities to participate in AP exams and pass them. Hoffman et al.’s (2017) study of rural student connectedness to school found that even high achieving students reported low connectedness to school. Because one critical aspect of connectedness includes access to meaningful academic experiences, their findings could be related to a lack of courses available to students who need more challenging learning experiences.

**Student Identity Factors**
Variations in students’ demographics also influence their connectedness to school. Race, sexual orientation, age, and gender all play a unique role in shaping how students connect to their learning environment.

**Race.** Although a quarter of rural students are children of color, assumptions persist that rural areas are homogeneously White (Dobson, 2018). This stereotype contributes to minority students feeling unseen by colleges, organizations, and academics (Dobson, 2018). Additionally, Means et al. (2016) described the unique barriers to career and educational aspirations of rural African American students, who in qualitative interviews reported that while they aspired to attend college, they often did not feel their family members and teachers knew how to support them in preparation for college. Students in this study described their rural context as a barrier to their career and college dreams. Additionally, Witherspoon and Ennett’s (2011) study found that African American students enjoyed school less than White students as they aged but increased their participation in extracurricular activities and placed more importance on educational tasks in comparison to their White peers. Moreover, a lack of empirical research on students of color in rural areas contributes to what Dobson (2018) labeled the “invisible population” (p. 1). A paucity of research and scholarship on how to best serve rural students of color limits educators’ abilities to connect with them at school.

**Sexual Orientation.** Rural LGBTQ+ students are one of the more well-researched subgroups in the rural school climate research literature (De Pedro et al., 2018). Compared to their urban and suburban peers, rural LGBTQ+ students are more likely to be harassed at school (Kosciw et al., 2015). De Pedro et al.’s (2018) study of how schools can support LGBTQ+ students revealed a controversial finding unique to rural schools: the presence of Gay Straight Alliance clubs at school was negatively associated with LGBTQ+-affirming climates. This is
contradictory to findings at urban and suburban schools. However, their research concluded that supportive adult relationships at school were more beneficial for increasing well-being for LGBTQ+ students (De Pedro et al., 2018). This testament to the power of teacher-student relationships in rural schools demonstrates that what works for students in urban and suburban schools may not work for rural schools.

**Age and Gender.** Age and gender identification can also contribute to how connected students feel to their school. In general, as rural students advance in grade level, they are less likely to feel a sense of belonging in school and more likely to misbehave at school (Witherspoon & Ennett, 2011). Both Summersett-Ringgold et al. (2015) and Witherspoon and Ennett (2011) reported that rural boys in their study had more negative perceptions of school. De Lay and Swan (2014) also expressed concern about rural male apathy toward school in their study of rural student motivations. Male students interviewed in Hendrickson’s (2012) study explained that they felt their teachers did not care about their participation in school, their ideas, or their lives.

**Summary**

As indicated through the literature review, multiple factors impact rural students’ connectedness to their schools. Major factors include curriculum, teacher-student relationships, teacher beliefs about rural students, access to professional learning, limited school staff, relationships between families and rural school staff, and student identity factors (Blum, 2005; Chhuon & Wallace, 2014; Dobson, 2018; Eppley, 2011; Goodpaster et al., 2012; Hoffman et al., 2017; Klem & Connell, 2004; Kosciw et al., 2015; Summersett-Ringgold et al., 2015). For the purposes of this dossier dissertation, this researcher designed and carried out a needs assessment study within the context of one rural school. This study is reported subsequently as Project 2. Given the researcher’s role and positionality in this school, two factors were selected as the focus.
of the study as they were most salient to and actionable within this context. Those two factors were teacher-student relationships and curriculum. Robust teacher-student relationships entail the degree to which teachers bond with students, provide academic structure, and demonstrate confidence in students’ abilities (Leflot et al., 2010). The curriculum and instructional choices of teachers in rural schools can make a profound difference in student engagement and connectedness to school (Hendrickson, 2012). Inlay (2016) described the importance of creating cultures of student respect in high school classrooms through instruction that honors and respects students' lives. When students feel their curriculum connects to their lives, interests, and culture, they may have better learning outcomes (Hammond, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

To guide the needs assessment study, a conceptual framework was developed to illustrate the relationship of those two factors to the problem of practice, student connectedness to school, as well as to identify the measures that would be employed to collect data on each factor. The conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 1.2.
The needs assessment study reported in Project 2 was designed to investigate the two primary factors illustrated in Figure 1.2. A mixed methods design was employed. Data addressing the curriculum factor involved conducting teacher interviews. Three different sources were used to collect data addressing teacher-student relationships: the Conditions for Learning Survey, a teacher survey, and teacher interviews. In the subsequent project, the design, context, method, procedures, and findings and discussion are described.
Project 2: Needs Assessment Study

The empirical research reviewed in Project 1 suggested that rural students disconnect from their schools when they have poor relationships with teachers and when school curriculum fails to feel relevant to them (Hoffman et al., 2017; Klem & Connell, 2004; Sherman & Sage, 2011; Summersett-Ringgold et al., 2015; Witherspoon & Ennett, 2011). In this project I present findings from a needs assessment study in which two factors of rural student connectedness to school: teacher-student relationship quality (TSRQ) and the degree to which curriculum and instruction were connected to students’ lives were explored. First, I provide a detailed description of the context of the study and its research questions, followed by a description of the methodology, participants, instrumentation, data collection, and analysis. The findings of each data collection instrument are presented followed by a discussion of the findings.

Context of the Study

This needs assessment study was conducted at a rural public school in a predominately rural midwestern state in the United States. At the time of this study, Prairie Rose Junior and Senior High School (a pseudonym) served approximately 200 students who lived across four rural counties. Grades 7-12 were taught in one building. The school was comprised of approximately 67 junior high students and approximately 133 high school students. The school’s administration was made up of one shared superintendent (split time between this district and another), a principal, a counselor, an activities director, an instructional coach, and quarter-time curriculum coordinator.

The teaching staff was made up of sixteen classroom teachers, three special education teachers, and five classroom aids. There were two teachers each in the science, English, and social studies departments and three teachers in the math department. Prairie Rose offered band,
choir, shop, art, and FFA (formerly known as Future Farmers of America) classes as well as physical education. This school did not provide classes that were leveled (i.e., college prep classes) except for seventh grade math and a scheduling option that allowed high school students to take geometry and algebra at a slower pace across three trimesters instead of two. Advanced Placement (AP) and honors classes were not offered at the school, but once a year, one English teacher taught a college composition course for a nearby community college that Prairie Rose students could take at the school if they passed the community college entrance exam. Students who passed the community college entrance exam were also permitted to leave campus and attend college classes at an outreach center located a thirty-minute drive from the Prairie Rose school building. Prairie Rose was known in the area for its athletic program, having earned state participation and/or championship in nearly every sport in the last decade. The school also produced a musical or play each year and participated in the state’s speech program. Teachers in this school wore many hats; they took on duties as coaches, club advisors, class sponsors, bus drivers, and janitorial staff.

Information from the U.S. Census on this school district’s area provided a glimpse into the economic conditions of the people who live there. Residents across four counties made up the school’s community: three rural counties and a rural portion of one county that contained a metropolitan area. Most families lived in small towns encompassed within the district map, while others lived on farms or acreages. U.S. Census information about these counties documented a decline in population and slight decline in employment in these counties. This implies that this area faced some of the consequences of rural economic decline and outmigration common in rural areas in the United States (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). The rates of people in the district's counties living below the poverty line, as of 2013-2017, were as follows for each of the counties:
15.9%, 5.8%, 11.8%, and 11.2% (County Poverty Rates, 2020). In the same order, the rates of people living below the line of poverty, as of 2018 (the most recent available data), in these counties were as follows: 16%, 12.1%, 6.1%, and 10.9% (County Poverty Rates, 2020). Three out of four of the district’s counties experienced increases in the rate of people living in poverty in the last five years. The area’s largest employers included agricultural and construction companies. While some small businesses held storefronts in the communities, the average commute time to work for residents of these counties was about 22 minutes, implying that residents left their hometowns for work (Census.gov, 2019). The average racial demographics of the four counties were as follows: 89.7% White, 14.1% African American, 1.9% Asian, 2.5% Native American or Alaska Native, .25% Native Hawaiian and/or Pacific Islander, 10.8% Latino, and 2.2% two or more races (Census.gov).

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was two-fold: to investigate student and teacher perceptions of teacher-student relationship quality at Prairie Rose and explore factors teachers considered to be barriers and supports when planning and implementing meaningful curriculum and instruction in a rural school. Prairie Rose, as part of a state initiative, already gathered student data about teacher-student relationship quality (TSRQ) annually on a survey called the Conditions for Learning Survey (CFL); permission to analyze this data was granted from the district superintendent. Additionally, a survey similar to the student survey was developed by the researcher and administered to teachers at Prairie Rose. Examining survey data on TSRQ from both students and teachers provided insights about the current conditions of TSRQ at Prairie Rose, from the perspectives of both the students and teachers. The teacher interview portion of
this study produced qualitative data on if and how teachers contextualized their curriculum and instruction as well as insight on TSRQ.

The research questions guiding this needs assessment were as follows:

1) How do students perceive teacher-student relationships in their school?
2) How do teachers perceive teacher-student relationships in their school?
3) What are the similarities and differences in the ways teachers and students perceive teacher-student relationships in their school?
4) What factors do teachers consider when planning curriculum and instruction in their rural school context?
5) What do teachers perceive to be the supports and barriers to implementing meaningful curriculum and instruction in their rural school context?

**Researcher Positionality**

At the time of the needs assessment, I was a teacher at Prairie Rose School, which could have influenced the research process. I was considered an insider because of my employment at the school; I was also considered an outsider in that I was also a student at the Johns Hopkins School of Education (Banks, 1998). My knowledge of and experiences in the context influenced my perception of the school and therefore may have impacted my interpretation of the data (Guba, 1981).

**Method**

In the following section information is provided about the study design, participants, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. In the section on participants, the study’s sampling methods are explained. In the instrumentation section, the survey and interview
protocols are described. The process of how data was gathered and analyzed is chronicled in the data collection and analysis sections.

**Research Design**

This study employed a mixed methods research design: a methodology that included the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The needs assessment used a quantitative-leading mixed methods approach to collect data. In a quantitative leading design, quantitative data is used to establish an understanding of the problem broadly. I used qualitative data to deeply explore how teachers were contextualizing their curriculum and also to find out more about their perceptions of teacher-student relationships at the school (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). This design was chosen because the existing data on TSRQ gathered by the Conditions for Learning survey provided a broad glimpse into how teacher-student relationships were contributing to student connectedness to school. However, the Conditions for Learning data did not provide any data on teacher perspectives of TSRQ or teachers’ use of curriculum and instruction, another critical construct in connectedness to school. The study was designed to gather data on both TSRQ as well as curriculum and instruction.

**Participants**

Due to a small sample size, teacher participants are minimally described in this section to protect their identities. Moreover, participant information about gender, race, and ethnicity was not collected in order to the need to protect potentially identifying information.

**Student Survey**

At the time of this inquiry, approximately 243 students attended Prairie Rose Junior and Senior High School, and all 243 of them participated in the annual Conditions for Learning Survey. According to the Department of Education website, as of 2019, the students at this
school were 95.8% White, 2.3% Hispanic, .5% Asian, and .5% multi-racial; 49.8% of the students in this school identified as male and 50.2% identified as female. Students with disabilities made up 15.8% of the student population and 100% of the students spoke English as a first language. Students who received free and/or reduced lunch, a proxy for low socioeconomic status, made up 31.6% of the student population (Performance Profiles).

**Teacher Survey**

Twelve teachers at Prairie Rose School participated in the teacher survey. Nine of those teachers held bachelor's degrees and three held master’s degrees. Six respondents had 0-5 years of teaching experience, one had 6-10 years, and five had 20+ years of experience in the classroom.

**Teacher Interview**

Nine teachers at the school participated in the interview portion of the study. All nine of the teachers held a minimum of a bachelor’s degree. The teachers’ years of experience ranged from less than five years to over twenty years of teaching. Two of the teachers interviewed attended the school as junior high and high school students.

**Instrumentation**

This section contains information about the instrumentation and protocols used to collect data for this inquiry. Three different data sources were employed to explore the constructs of TSRQ and curriculum: student Conditions for Learning survey data, teacher survey data, and teacher interviews.

**Student Conditions for Learning Survey**

Secondary student data from the 2018-2019 school year Conditions for Learning (CFL) survey was analyzed to find out how students perceived teacher-student relationships at the
school. The CFL survey was administered annually and online to all public-school students. The survey was accessed through a link sent via email to students by the school administration. All students were required to complete the survey, which is proctored during the school day by teachers on a scheduled date and time. Students who were absent on that date and time were recorded so that they could complete the survey on a different day. Some data from this survey was published online on the state’s Department of Education website and used to evaluate the school’s overall performance.

The CFL survey measures student perception of multiple constructs related to a healthy learning environment: teacher-student relationships, student-student relationships, expectations and boundaries, emotional safety, and physical safety (Performance Profiles). The 40-item survey prompts students to rate their agreement with statements such as “My teachers care about me” on a four-point Likert-type scale using the following statements as answer options: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. For this needs assessment, only items on the CFL survey that were related to teacher-student relationship quality were analyzed. Those items were the following: (1) “My teachers care about me,” (2) “My teachers tell me when I am doing a good job,” (3)“Adults who work in my school treat students with respect,” (4) “There is at least one adult at school that I could go to for help with a problem,” (5)“Adults in this school respect differences in students (for example, gender, race, culture, learning differences, sexual orientation, etc.),” and (6) “My teachers are available to talk with students one-on-one.” These items can also be found in Appendix A.

The survey also gathered descriptive data on students such their gender and race, as well as whether they participated in the free and reduced lunch program, were currently in a foster home, had an Individualized Education Plan, spoke English as a first language, or were in
families associated with the military. Due to the small sample size of students at Prairie Rose who may have been representative of one or more of those delineations, most of the descriptive information was not available for data analysis, as it might have revealed identifying information.

**Teacher Survey**

To measure how teachers perceived teacher-student relationships at the school, the researcher created a survey by adapting the language and items intended to measure teacher-student relationships on the Conditions for Learning Survey. The new survey items were modified to better suit teachers, as these items were originally created to measure student perceptions. The survey for teachers mimicked the four-point Likert style scale items on the Conditions for Learning Survey; however, teachers were given a “neutral option” to avoid forcing a stance on participants. Another change was the item on the CFL survey, “My teachers care about me” which was altered to “Teachers in this school care about students.” The researcher also added descriptive items that gathered data on the teachers’ experience and education level. The full survey is in Appendix B.

**Teacher Interview**

The teacher interview was used to gather qualitative data on teachers’ process of designing and implementing curriculum and instruction to find out the ways in which teachers considered the rural context of their students when planning curriculum and instruction. In addition, the interview protocol prompted participants to speak more on their relationships with students. Azano (2011) discussed the importance of making curriculum relevant and meaningful to rural students’ lives by creating contextualized learning experiences that use rural students’ community to engage and connect students. The items in this interview were created based on
Howley et al.’s (2012) study of rural teachers’ use of place-based education in distance learning situations. Howley et al.’s (2012) interview questions provided a basis for exploring how teachers considered their context of teaching when planning and implementing curriculum and instruction. These interview questions are included in Appendix C.

**Procedures**

The following section contains information on the needs assessment procedures. The procedures are explained for data collection of each instrument: CFL survey, teacher survey, and teacher interview.

**Participant Selection Process**

To analyze students’ CFL data permission, I emailed the district superintendent to ask for permission. Data was collected after obtaining permissions through the John Hopkins Homewood Institutional Review Board. Permission was granted after the submission of an application which included the survey and interview questions. The superintendent wrote a letter granting me permission to analyze the data. Participants in the teacher-survey were self-selected. I sent an email, which can be found in Appendix D, using Qualtrics to all the classroom teachers in the school. The email contained a link to the survey. To obtain participants for the teacher interview, I emailed classroom teachers at the school a letter of invitation, which can be found in Appendix E.

**Data Collection Methods**

This section contains information on how data was collected for each of the instruments in the study.
Conditions for Learning Survey

A summary of the CFL data for each public school in the state is published online on the state’s department of education website. I accessed this secondary, public data through the website to obtain the following descriptive information about the students in the school: race, socioeconomic status, and the number of individualized education plans. The state website also featured a published summary of the CFL survey results for each school. I obtained more detailed data by inquiring about it through an email to Prairie School’s curriculum coordinator. A letter of permission to analyze the data was granted by the superintendent of the school district, and the curriculum coordinator emailed the student data to the researcher as a PDF document. The additional data consisted of student responses to survey items in the form of aggregated grade level groups as well as aggregated groups by gender by grade level.

Teacher Survey

Teachers at Prairie Rose were surveyed to collect data on their perceptions of teacher-student relationships. Nonprobability sampling was employed due to the small number of staff at the school. There were 16 classroom teachers at the school, 11 females and five males, with a variety of experience levels and educational backgrounds. All teachers in this school taught both junior and senior high school level classes.

I sent a recruitment email to all teachers at the school that included a link to a Qualtrics survey (Appendix D). Three reminder emails were sent by the researcher: the first three days after the initial recruitment email, the second seven days after the initial recruitment email, and the third eight days after the initial recruitment email. The teacher email information was obtained from the staff directory on the school’s website. All 16 teachers received the survey, with three reminders to complete the survey in the nine days it was active. The survey included a
consent statement as the first item. Immediately after participants completed and submitted the survey, Qualtrics delivered a thank you email to the participant. The identities of the survey participants were not revealed.

Although many teachers did choose to participate in the survey, full participation in the survey was likely not achieved due to two of the 16 teachers who retired from the school shortly before the recruitment email was sent and one teacher who was in the process of moving to a different school. Additionally, the recruitment email was sent during the summer break for students and teachers, when teachers may not have been checking their email. Twelve teachers participated in the survey.

**Teacher Interview**

The researcher sent a recruitment email to the general education classroom teachers at Prairie Rose to invite them to participate in an interview with the researcher. The recruitment email for the interview is in Appendix E. A reminder email was sent ten days after the initial recruitment email. Nine teachers responded to the recruitment email. Due to concerns regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher conducted interviews using Zoom, which were audio recorded. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. The audio recordings were transcribed using Otter.ai, which created Microsoft Word documents of each transcript.

**Data Analysis**

In this section the process of coding and analyzing data is described. The section is organized by data source.

**Conditions for Learning Survey**

The CFL survey data was analyzed to address the first research question: How do students perceive teacher-student relationships in their school? This secondary data was obtained
in aggregate form, meaning that individual responses were combined to form collective responses according to grade level and gender. This data format limited opportunities for descriptive statistical analysis. Presentation of data in aggregate form is popular in health and social research, but limits data analysis because individual level data is not available to run traditional descriptive statistics tests (Tavarageri et al., 2018). The CFL data was aggregated by grade level to reveal a percentage of the group that answered each survey item by each response-option category: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Due to these limitations, an alternative method for analyzing the quantitative data was used.

Net promoter score (NPS) was calculated for each survey item. NPS refers to a type of descriptive statistics commonly used to calculate the satisfaction of a group’s experience and can be applied to aggregate data (Brendan, 2016). In NPS calculation, scores that indicate agreement (strongly agree and agree) are labeled as promoters, scores that indicate disagreement (strongly disagree and disagree) are labeled detractors, and neutral scores are labeled passive (Brendan, 2016). After totaling the number of the sample size, a percentage is calculated for the promoters and detractors. The aggregate data arrived already divided into two groups: student responses by grade level and student responses by gender. Due to the data arriving in aggregate form, the percentage of each grade level and gender group was already identified, eliminating this step in the calculation process. The following formula was used to calculate the NPS for each CFL item relevant to the needs assessment:

\[
\text{(Percentage of promoters - Percentage of detractors)} = \text{NPS}
\]

To interpret the final NPS for each item, any score above 0 was considered positive as it meant there were more promoters than detractors. In the case of teacher-student relationships, scores above 0 meant there were more students who identified an aspect of teacher-student
relationships at their school as positive than negative. Analysis of the aggregate data using NPS was used to examine the first research question by calculating the NPS of each survey item related to teacher-student relationships at Prairie Rose. In addition, I provided a description of the frequency of responses.

**Teacher Survey**

The teacher survey data was analyzed to address two research questions: what are the teacher perceptions of teacher-student relationships and what are the similarities and differences among teacher and student perceptions of teacher-student relationships? To address the research question on the similarities and differences among perceptions of teacher-student relationships, the researcher calculated the NPS for each teacher survey item to then compare teacher responses to the student NPS item scores. These analyses allowed the researcher to compare the ratios of positive to negative perceptions among students and teachers. Details of these analyses is located in the findings section.

**Teacher Interview**

The teacher interview was developed to explore the fourth and fifth research questions: What factors do teachers consider when planning curriculum and instruction in their rural school context? And what do teachers perceive to be the supports and barriers to implementing meaningful curriculum and instruction in their rural school context? During the first cycle of coding, the teacher interview transcripts were analyzed using conventional content analysis. Conventional content analysis is a type of inductive coding that requires the researcher to fully immerse themselves in the qualitative data through a process of reading each word of the data, marking phrases that capture the main ideas of the data as related to the research questions,
organizing those marked quotes into common categories, and finally creating codes that emerge from those categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

In addition to descriptive codes, subcodes and magnitude coding were used to capture details in the data. Magnitude coding is a technique of sub coding that allows the researcher to label the intensity of the content being evaluated (Onwuegbuzie, 2016). Magnitude coding was used to subcode how much teachers considered their rural context when planning curriculum and instruction. In this case, magnitude coding was used to code teachers’ high, medium, or low contextualization of curriculum and instruction. Low magnitude of contextualization was defined as little or no consideration of the local, rural context; for example, if a teacher expressed that there were no learning opportunities for their classroom in their rural area, that was coded as low magnitude. Medium magnitude of contextualization was defined as a mention of superficial and/or one-time experiences that were not unique to the school community or its members; for example, class participation in a local parade was coded as medium magnitude. High magnitude was defined as use of activities that involved school community members, businesses, or events, that sustained beyond a single event; for example, if a teacher described an activity that presented a rich connection to their community and involved multiple community members and/or businesses, that content was coded as “high contextualization.”

The second cycle of coding consisted of pattern coding. Pattern codes emerge as a researcher groups codes together based on similarities, or patterns, that arise in the data and code book (Miles et al., 2014). Pattern coding allowed for the categorization of like codes together; for example, teachers discussed multiple reasons that they believed students disconnected from school. Each of these reasons was coded individually in the first phase of the coding process, but in the second phase, these codes were grouped together into one category.
In addition to coding, the researcher created memos throughout the coding process. Miles et al. (2014) referred to memos as “breadcrumbs” (p. 95) that the researcher leaves throughout the coding process that reflect on the data. I recorded memos on a spreadsheet during the coding process, which she referred to at the start, during, and the end of each coding session. These memos noted important or curious quotes from participants as well as possible codes or themes I thought were emerging from the data. These memos were consulted during the first and second phase of the coding cycle. Codebooks for cycles one and two are in Appendix F of this project.

**Findings and Discussion**

The following section describes the findings of the data analysis and discusses how the findings relate with the literature discussed in Project 1. The findings and discussion are organized by research questions.

*Student Perceived Teacher-Student Relationships*

The CFL survey data was analyzed to investigate the first research question: How do students perceive teacher-student relationships in their school? Each CFL survey item’s NPS resulted in a positive score. As shown in Table 2.1, average NPS scores decreased between grades 9 and 11, but increased in grade 12.

**Table 2.1**

*Average Net Promoter Score by Grade Levels*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average NPS</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2 shows results of promoter scores by grade level and survey item. NPS scores of 100 occurred twice: tenth graders for item 1 (“my teachers care about me”) and ninth graders for item 4 (“there is at least one adult at school that I could go to for help with a problem”) (Table
The lowest NPS score occurred in the 12th grade for item 2 ("my teachers tell me when I am doing a good job"). The next lowest NPS scores both occurred in the 11th grade for items 2 and 3 ("adults in this school treat students with respect"). Gillen-O'Neel and Fuligni (2012) reported that students feel less connected to school as they progress through grade levels. The findings in this needs assessment support that finding somewhat. Decreased NPS scores from ninth to eleventh grade indicate that students may feel less connected to their teachers, but an increase in scores in the twelfth grade complicates that finding.

Table 2.2
Net Promoter Scores by Grade Level for Survey Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 1: Care NPS</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 2: Good Job NPS</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 3: Respect NPS</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 4: Help NPS</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 5: Differences NPS</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 6: Available NPS</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Items in this table were given keywords.*

When considering NPS scores by gender overall, female students provided more promoting scores than males, apart from survey item 2, ("My teachers tell me when I am doing a good job"). Findings for item number and gender are presented in Table 2.3. In every item, except for number 5, the female group NPS score was higher than the male score. Males and females responded to item 5, "Adults in this school respect differences in students" the most similarly.
Table 2.3

*Net Promoter Scores by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>82.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, all NPS results were positive, indicating that students perceived their relationships with teachers to be positive. Some variations existed among grade levels and by gender. These findings support Summersett-Ringgold et al.’s (2015) and Witherspoon and Ennett’s (2011) research that revealed rural boys enjoyed school less than girls and had more negative perceptions of school.

**Teacher Perceived Student-Teacher Relationships**

The teacher survey explored the second research question: How do teachers perceive teacher-student relationships in their school? NPS score calculations for all six teacher survey items resulted in a score of 100. This was due to all teachers responding to each survey item with “strongly agree” or “agree,” except for five neutral responses. Zero participants marked “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” on any survey items, implying that teacher perceptions of teacher-student relationships are all positive. The item “teachers in this school care about students” was the most strongly agreed with survey item, as 58% of participants marked that they agreed strongly with that statement. The statement with the most neutral responses was “there is at least one adult in this school that a student can go to for help with a problem.” Subtle differences in the descriptive variables revealed more about teacher perceptions. Teachers with a bachelor's degree were more likely to strongly agree with the survey items, whereas teachers with master's degrees tended to mark “agree.” Only teachers who were in their first five years of
teaching marked “Neutral” on any survey item; all other experience groups never marked “Neutral.”

The teacher interview also gathered data on teacher perceptions of teacher-student relationships. The interviews revealed that teachers prided themselves on “knowing” students. Teachers discussed the small size of the school as one advantage to building relationships with students. One participant said that “our district is so small, that it does definitely benefit, I think, knowing your kids.” Another teacher commented that “what we lacked in that [other resources] maybe we make up in knowing our students,” meaning that although rural schools have some disadvantages, they felt that their knowledge about students as individuals made up for those disadvantages. Multiple teachers expressed that they felt their knowledge of students was a unique strength of the school. However, based on some comments, these connections with students may have been superficial. One teacher said:

I would say that I have a great relationship with all the students. But I might be saying that having a relationship means that I know about them, that I can tell you something about them, that I know what their likes and dislikes are, it might not necessarily be the way that the student sees it.

Another teacher commented that:

I don't think that teachers realize what state these kids are in. You know, we spend a lot of time with these kids, spend 180 days with these kids, but it's still hard to read [how connected students are] when you only have them for an hour a day.

In one case, a teacher expressed that students sometimes do not want to have a relationship with teachers. She said:
I do think that there's those kids who don't want to be really reached on an emotional level, they don't really want a connection. And I think some of them really work hard at trying to make that happen.

This quote demonstrates that teachers could perceive their relationships with students to be negative for some students because those students choose to not be “reached.”

The survey findings for this research question indicated that teachers perceived their relationships with students to be completely positive. Not a single response was “disagree” or “strongly disagree.” However, the interview data provided some insight into these results. Teachers perceived knowing their students well was a strength for building relationships with them. For one teacher, any negative relationships with students were caused by students who did not want to have a relationship with a teacher.

When asked about factors that contribute to students feeling disconnected from school during the teacher interview, several subcodes emerged from teachers’ responses, including differences in teacher and student interests, age, personalities, and expectations. In addition, a lack of time to get to know each student, a lack of variety of school clubs, lack of student enjoyment of school, lack of student valuing of school, outdated curriculum, and irrelevant curriculum were also discussed as possible reasons for students to disconnect from school. Most often, teachers expressed that factors related to instruction or curriculum were the most problematic. For example, one teacher said: “You know, I think sometimes kids are just bored to death with what's going on.” According to some teachers, students feel bored and disinterested. In one case, a teacher blamed the standards to which teachers must adhere for a lack of excitement and relevance to students’ lives. That teacher stated:
[Students] may not always perceive what we're doing as necessary, entertaining, meaningful, whatever. But we have to teach to our standards and our content. And that's not always exciting stuff.

Another teacher expressed that the students and teachers had different approaches to learning and teaching.

A lot of these kids, I just feel like they, they have a different idea of how they want to learn. And they don't know how to express that... When my students complain about a teacher, which is not often, but the ones they do complain about, they talk about, they always say, well, she did this, or he did this. And they're handing me this assignment, or they gave us this test, or they're teaching me this way, but I understand this way.

This quote demonstrates one teacher’s belief that students and teachers sometimes have mismatched expectations for teaching and learning, which can cause some conflict for students in the classroom.

**Similarities and Differences in Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationships**

The teacher and student survey data as well as interview data were compared to address the third research question: What are the similarities and differences in the ways teachers and students perceive teacher-student relationships in their school? Table 2.4 provides a side-by-side comparison of both the teacher and student survey data in aggregate form. Students responded in agreement more frequently than disagreement; however, teachers never responded with disagreement. The findings for this research question are that teacher and student perceptions are mostly in agreement that teacher-student relationships are positive.
### Table 2.4

**Summary of Responses to Teacher-Student Relationship Survey Items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher survey items</th>
<th>Student survey items (CFL Survey)</th>
<th>Teacher Responses</th>
<th>Student Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in this school care about students.</td>
<td>My teachers care about me.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in this school tell students when they are doing a good job.</td>
<td>My teachers tell me when I am doing a good job.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in this school treat students with respect.</td>
<td>Adults who work in my school treat students with respect.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is at least one adult in this school that a student can go to for help with a problem.</td>
<td>There is at least one adult in this school that I could go to with a problem.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in this school respect differences in students (for example, gender, race, culture, learning differences, sexual orientation, etc.)</td>
<td>Adults in this school respect differences in students (for example, gender, race, culture, learning differences, sexual orientation, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in this school are available to talk with students one-on-one.</td>
<td>My teachers are available to talk with students one-on-one.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

51
Note. The option of “neutral” is not shown in this table.

Factors Considered for Contextualization

The teacher interview was used to address the fourth research question: What factors do teachers consider when planning curriculum and instruction in their rural school context? Magnitude coding was used to code high, medium, and low instances of contextualization in teachers’ curriculum and instructional planning and teaching. When asked how teachers considered their rural school context when planning and implementing curriculum and instruction, they typically responded in the low or medium ranges. Some teachers admitted that they did not contextualize their curriculum. For example, one teacher stated: “I really typically don't [contextualize].” In response to the same question, another teacher said: “I never really blatantly think about that,” and another said, “I don't know if I consider myself tailoring it to rural students.” In two cases, teachers expressed that they did not see value in contextualizing. One teacher stated that: “there's not enough information that I want to teach these kids about their county,” and another teacher said: “Do I necessarily tie everything I do to a small school rural setting? I mean, I hope not.”

Teachers who expressed that they considered their context when planning and implementing curriculum and instruction most often referenced their class participation in local events, community service projects, class discussion of local wildlife, or job shadow experiences arranged for individual students. These were labeled as “medium” magnitude, because while they did involve the community, these activities were often one-time experiences that were loosely tied to the classroom and/or the community and/or the local area. One example of a medium magnitude of contextualization was described when one teacher discussed a community project:
We do a community project with our art festival in town, where they learn how to draw with grids and scaling from size. And then we go and we chalk the walk downtown in [town name] and they decorate pretty much with their drawing that they started in the classroom, on the sidewalk. So, they learn how to draw from really small, you know, size paper, like a 12 inch by 12 inch to a 12, you know, 12 foot by 12 foot drawing. So, they get that chance to really be part of the community that way.

While participation in community events is one way to bridge the connection between the classroom and the community, not all teachers expressed that this was authentic for students or community members. Another teacher who regularly attended local events with her class stated:

I don't know if it's me not necessarily doing a good job of making that connection for them but being able to perform just for the sake of getting together as a community, I'm not sure if a lot of kids necessarily understand. And I don’t know if the community necessarily... I don’t know if it’s appreciated as much as it should be.

The only example of a statement coded as representing a high magnitude of contextualization was this description by a social studies teacher:

One of the things that we do every year, which is kind of this is a local government thing is we go to the county government day and bring our kids down there and get to see local government, and we get to talk about it. And the kids get to get a feel of what, you know, what's kind of out there for them as we talk about where their tax dollars go to and how roads are fixed. And they get to meet the magistrate.

Overall, the data presented little evidence that teachers considered their rural context when planning and implementing curriculum and instruction. Most examples of contextualization were of a low or medium magnitude and lacked a robust connection to the
community. To address the research question of what factors are considered to contextualize, the interview data revealed that some teachers do not consider factors that can make their curriculum and instruction more contextualized. Some teachers consider school, community, and county events when planning instruction for their rural students.

Teachers in the interview often reported that they believed it was important to broaden their rural students’ perspectives of the world beyond their rural area. Exposing students to lives and worlds beyond their context is an important role of education, and it is also important that students see themselves reflected in their curriculum (Bishop, 1990). Bishop wrote about giving students the opportunity to look through “windows” at characters and people unlike themselves as well as “mirrors” at characters and people who look like them. Rural teachers in this study may be struggling to balance “mirror” and “window” opportunities with their students, as contextualizing their curriculum was either something that was not often done or sometimes not even considered. When rural students do not see themselves reflected in their curriculum, they can feel disconnected from their school (Hendrickson, 2012).

**Supports and Barriers to Contextualization**

The teacher interview was used to address the fifth research question: What do teachers perceive to be the supports and barriers to implementing meaningful curriculum and instruction in their rural school context? Teachers discussed a range of barriers to and supports needed to contextualize their teaching. Some teachers in the interview had a desire to contextualize their curriculum and instruction and they discussed multiple supports and barriers to contextualizing their classroom curriculum and instruction.

**Support from Administration and Staff.** The most frequently cited barrier was that they needed administrative support to create lessons that connected their classroom curriculum
and instruction to their community. One teacher suggested that their school or community had one “direct person” who focused on connections between classrooms and the school community. Two teachers mentioned that the district’s instructional coach would be a resource for executing this goal. Another teacher discussed the importance of support among the teaching staff, such as transparent modes of communication about where and when events or special outings were happening. Moreover, one teacher expressed that they would want more support from parents and local professionals; another teacher expressed that there was a lack of local professionals to work with and explained that in the past, he had networked with parents and local businesses to find opportunities for his classroom but didn’t keep up that practice.

**Lack of Time to Plan.** In addition to needing support, teachers often expressed that time and academic expectations hindered their ability to plan contextualized curriculum and instruction. One teacher described her teaching load as a hindrance to planning contextualized curriculum:

> Being a rural teacher, I think what people don't understand, is we teach four or five different subjects a day with one prep period. So, I have six total periods in a day, and I teach four different topics out of those five periods that I teach. So, trying to plan for four different classes in your hour prep, it's hard.

Teachers described how their multiple roles, besides teaching, at the school took away time to plan contextualized instruction. One teacher discussed how he recently quit coaching to focus on his teaching and explained how this could be a factor in preventing teachers from planning more contextualized lessons. He stated:

> So, you know, having more free time. I mean, I love coaching, I loved every minute of the coaching. But now it allows me... I think it makes you a better teacher, because, you
know, there's only so many minutes in a day. And having that free time after school just
gives you that much more time to perfect what you're doing.

All teachers interviewed were coaches and/or club advisors for extracurricular activities. One
teacher was also serving as a bus driver and janitor for the school, on top of advising the speech
club and the school musical. Constraints on teacher time are likely a barrier in any context, but
teachers in this rural context who teach multiple grade levels and subjects on top of coaching and
club advising have unique barriers to their classroom planning time. A teacher summed this
theme up best with her statement:

It's a really hard balancing act that I have to do... Some of our teachers are so stretched
thin, that we just... It's hard for us to take on another task. And so, I think, unfortunately,
then those kids suffer from that.

The lack of time to plan for multiple courses reported by teachers in the interview supported
previous findings in the literature that rural teachers must often prepare for many classes
(Goodpaster et al., 2018; Haché & Williams, 2019; Miller, 2012). Donehower et al. (2007)
discussed how this stress could lead to a reliance on purchasing commercial curriculum, but that
this kind of curriculum may not be inclusive for rural students.

**Deficit Beliefs about Rural Students and Areas.** An important part of education is
learning about new perspectives and viewpoints (Bishop, 1990); however, it is also important
that teachers help students connect with and reflect on their own lives and contexts. This can be a
difficult balancing act that many teachers in this needs assessment indicated they were not
attempting. A theme that emerged from the teacher interview data was that teachers felt that their
students needed exposure to the world outside their school community. Exposure to the world
took precedence to contextualizing their curriculum and instruction to a rural setting for rural
students. Every teacher interviewed commented on students’ lack of knowledge of the world beyond their school district. In many cases, teachers described their philosophy of teaching as “exposing” students to the world beyond the rural area. For instance, one teacher stated that she believed her goal as an educator: “I want to give them a broad exposure.” In some cases, teachers commented on how the ignorance of students in their context impacted the decisions she made about teaching. For example, one teacher explained that:

I try to bring lots of different things in for them. Because I know some of them, being in a small town don’t get outside of our little area...I don’t want to call them small-minded but not broadened.

In some cases, teachers expressed that their rural context may influence them to lower their expectations of students. One teacher stated that: “We don’t always have great students, but we got great kids.” Another teacher commented on the value students placed on school when she said:

Some of our kids really struggled to understand why they have to be in school or what they’re getting out of it.

These comments indicated that teachers might have deficit assumptions about students’ abilities and valuing of education. In addition, the teachers expressed beliefs about a narrow rural mindset. These deficit statements have problematic implications for teacher beliefs about students. Wilcox et al. (2014) found that these deficit beliefs were accompanied by beliefs that rural students could not be successful under rigorous academic expectations, and teacher deficit mindsets about students can negatively influence they ways students feel about school (Henry et al., 2011).
Overlooking Diversity. Another theme to emerge from the data was teachers’ beliefs about the lack of diversity in the student population. The school’s demographic information showed that the school was mostly made up of students who were racially 92% White, 4.4% Latino, .4% Asian, and 3.1% Multiracial. Additionally, 17.7% of the students received special education services for learning disabilities and 33.2% had a low socioeconomic status. This means that students of varying neurodivergence, racial backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses were present at the school. Despite these demographic data, teachers in the interviews did not acknowledge that a diverse range of students attended the school. Some teachers insisted on a lack of diversity being one factor sheltering students from the world beyond their community. For example, one teacher stated that the school “[doesn’t] have that mixture of kids” to expose rural students to a diverse range of people.

Conclusion

Connectedness to school is built upon positive teacher-student relationships and meaningful curriculum and instruction. This needs assessment brought to light that the school of interest had mostly positive teacher-student relationships, but teachers struggled to provide relevant and contextualized learning to rural students. This implied that teachers in the context need support enacting change in the areas of curriculum and instruction to increase students’ interest in and connection to school. A project addressing that need is presented subsequently.
Project 3: The Culturally Relevant Rural Teacher Guide

Introduction

Rural secondary students risk disconnection from their schools (Klem & Connell, 2004; Summersett-Ringgold et al., 2015; Witherspoon & Ennett, 2011). Connectedness to school is founded in positive teacher-student relationships and meaningful and relevant curriculum for students (Blum, 2005; Monahan et al., 2010). The needs assessment described in Project 2 explored both constructs that make up connectedness in the rural school of interest: teacher-student relationships as well as how teachers contextualize curriculum and instruction to connect to their students’ lives. Teacher and student survey data were analyzed to explore how both teachers and perceived teacher-student relationship quality. These data indicated positive teacher-student relationships.

In addition to the survey, teachers were interviewed to examine the ways in which they developed curriculum and delivered contextualized instruction that is meaningful and relevant to their rural students’ lives. An important theme that emerged from these data indicated that when planning their classes, teachers did not usually consider the context in which they teach and/or they did not believe that their context provided opportunities for their classroom. Teachers expressed that their students needed exposure to the world outside their rural community more than learning about and from their rural community. In contrast, another theme gleaned from the data was that teachers prided themselves on knowing their students well; the teachers described their rich knowledge about students’ lives. Most teachers attributed this to working in a small school. A related theme that emerged from the data was that teachers described their rural students as not diverse and cited this as a reason for needing to expose their students to the world beyond the rural school’s district. However, the school’s state profile reported that multiple
forms of diversity existed in the school including racial, socioeconomic, and neurodiversity. In summary, teachers expressed that they had close relationships with students, but were not aware of and/or did not value the ways in which their context could contribute to their classrooms. However, teachers did expect their curriculum and instruction to help students understand the world beyond the rural community.

These findings are problematic because one critical component of building student connectedness to school is providing curriculum and instruction that is relevant and meaningful to students’ lives (Blum, 2005). Bishop (1990) described the importance of providing learning opportunities for students in the form of “windows” and “mirrors.” The concept of windows refers to the need to learn about people whose lives are different from theirs and the concept of windows refers to the need for students to see themselves reflected in their learning. Hendrickson (2012) contended that when rural students do not see themselves and their lives reflected in their curriculum, they begin to resist school. The teachers in the study reported that it was important for students in rural schools to be exposed to the world beyond their rural community and this was prioritized in their curriculum and instruction. One goal of this project was to help rural teachers find balance between exposure to the world and learning from the local community by introducing teachers to one new ways of thinking about rural students and finding “mirror” opportunities within their context.

The needs assessment indicated that teachers held a deficit mindset about their school context, which may impact how teachers relate to students (Biag, 2016) as well as how connected students feel to their school (Hattman & Prosser, 2008). In addition, teachers described that they knew each of their students, but the findings also implied that teachers may not have been able to translate that knowledge of students into meaningful curriculum and
instructional practices. Teachers also described their school as not diverse, despite evidence that students in their school came from diverse racial, neurodiverse, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Performance Profiles). The demographic data on the students in the school showed evidence of multiple types of diversity (socioeconomic, neurodiversity, etc.) and demographic data on the counties served by the district presented a range of racial diversity with populations averaging 89.7% White, 14.1% African American, 1.9% Asian, 2.5% Native American or Alaska Native, .25% Native Hawaiian and/or Pacific Islander, 10.8% Latino, and 2.2% two or more races (Census.gov).

**Defining Culture**

For the purposes of this dossier-dissertation, I used Ladson-Billings’ (2014) definition of culture. She defined culture as a an “amalgamation of human activity, production, thought, and belief systems” (p. 75) that is ever changing and dynamic. Although Ladson-Billings’ definition of culture is difficult to measure, the data from the school and school district population offered multiple facets of students’ lives and identities that constitute cultural diversity, as they come from a range of racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, and neurodiverse backgrounds. Ladson-Billings’ broad definition of culture suggests that the various aspects of a student’s identity as well as the various contexts in which they operate bring an amalgamation of cultural identities, belief systems, and experiences that teachers can draw on to connect students more meaningfully to their curriculum and instruction.

**Project Three Overview**

For my third project, I designed a series of professional learning modules that targeted a shift in rural teachers’ mindsets about rural communities and instructional practices. The professional learning experiences described in this Project can help to guide rural educators who
want to increase their students’ connectedness to school by addressing the disparities in rural school’s curricular, instructional, and cultural relevance to students’ lives. The modules provide resources and examples for teachers to utilize and incorporate assets in their rural communities as multicultural sources of educational opportunities in their curriculum with the goal of building more robust student connectedness to school.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

The design of the applied project was guided by theoretical frameworks that provide a lens on teacher practices and, in turn, students’ connectedness to school. Firstly, sociocultural learning theory is applied to inform the project’s approach to teaching and learning. Culturally relevant teaching is then used as a guide to transform teacher practices that can impact students’ connectedness to school.

**Sociocultural Learning Theory**

Sociocultural learning theory (SLT) serves as a framework for understanding how and why meaningful and relevant curriculum and instruction bonds students to school. SLT posits that learning is a socially interactional process that occurs among learners, teachers, and the learning environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Gee (2008) expanded on the theory by describing the ways in which a culture can shape a learner’s experiences through the opportunities provided by the environment, which includes cultural practices and language. In addition to emphasizing the importance of social interactions, sociocultural theories of learning posit that learning should involve students in real-life problem solving and civic involvement and address salient problems in the school’s community (Raphael et al., 2014). Moreover, Lim and Renshaw (2001) contend that the act of becoming educated is not acquiring knowledge, but the process of becoming an engaged member of a community.
In sociocultural theory, the context for learning extends beyond the classroom to also encompass the various cultures represented in the community of the child (Vygotsky, 1978). Each student participates in multiple and sometimes intersecting cultures that can impact how they learn, as each culture provides tools for adapting their learning into practice. Teachers are mediators between what students’ prior knowledge from their lives and experiences and what they will learn in the classroom. When curriculum and instructional practices are inclusive of a broad range of cultures, students from many cultural backgrounds are empowered to learn (Lim & Renshaw, 2001).

**Culturally Relevant Teaching**

Culturally relevant teaching (CRT) refers to the use of pedagogy that is related to and significant to students lives, experiences, customs, languages, and values are integrated into classroom instruction (Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested that educators embrace the opportunities to learn that each culture brings to the classroom. The three main goals of CRT are that all students experience academic success, gain skills that affirm their own cultural knowledge while also honoring other cultures that may be unfamiliar to them and develop critical consciousness to approach inequities in their communities and the world (Ladson-Billings, 1995). When educators use culturally relevant approaches to design curriculum and instruction, they ground student learning in practices that honor the lives of students. The CRT approach bridges the sociocultural notion that learning occurs in social environments, embedded in culture and language, to the application of learning experiences that bond students to school. Thus, this framework provides a model for guiding the design of curriculum and materials that can improve all students’ connectedness to school.
To guide the creation of a professional development experience that helps rural teachers to create more connected and relevant curriculum and instruction for all rural students, this project applies Gay’s (2000) essential elements of culturally responsive teaching as a framework. Gay’s method for preparing teachers to work with a racially and culturally diverse range of students using the principals of CRT includes five elements: developing a cultural diversity knowledge base, designing culturally relevant curriculum, building learning communities, cross cultural communication, and culturally relevant instructional practices. This project will specifically target the first two elements of Gay’s model: developing a cultural diversity knowledge base and designing culturally relevant instruction. The choice was made to focus on these first two steps because they lay a foundation for moving forward with CRT in rural schools. This project will deeply focus on these two steps, as there is much work to be done in the initial development of a cultural knowledge base and the designing of rural and culturally relevant instruction.

The first element of Gay’s (2000) framework is for teachers to develop a culturally diverse knowledge base and the second is then to apply that knowledge into designing culturally relevant curriculum. According to Gay, developing a culturally diverse knowledge base means to deepen teachers’ understanding of the many cultures their students participate in by investigating each the characteristics, values, traditions, communication, relationship patterns, politics, art, history, and the contributions of each culture to humanity (Gay, 2002). Gay warned against tokenizing historical figures and generalizing cultures and instead argued for the value of deep multicultural understanding through investigation of a culture through the lens of multiple disciplines and viewpoints. After establishing a depth of cultural understanding, educators should then use that knowledge to design relevant curriculum for their classrooms. Gay (2000)
suggested that teachers approach topics of race, culture, and ethnicity by considering the three types of curricula that students experience: the formal, symbolic, and societal curricula (Gay, 2002). Gay defined formal curricula as the learning standards dictated by governing bodies, symbolic curricula as the images and values conspicuously promoted in the environment (i.e., bulletin boards, posters, social norms), and societal curricula as the messages about ethnic groups that are promoted by media, which are often stereotypical. Culturally responsive teachers can harness all three types of curricula to promote learning, cultural understanding, and connectedness among students.

**Critical Pedagogy**

Wink (2011) explained that educators can engage in critical pedagogy through reflective cycles that encourage them to grapple with complex experiences or situations, which she refers to as a “mess” (p 160) encountered in the school setting. A “mess” refers to a complex experience or situation that challenges one’s perspective, bias, and/or expectations of culture, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Mezirow (1997) also identified these critical moments as “disorienting dilemmas” (p 7); when one’s perspective of the world is challenged, one has the option to confront one’s own perspective and grow from the experience.

Wink’s (2011) reflective cycle process entails naming and describing a complex situation. After thoroughly describing an experience, the educator should then analyze the situation by considering the situation from multiple viewpoints and investigate the topic further, filling any holes in the knowledge or understanding of the circumstances. After learning about and considering the issue from a range of perspectives, the educator should interpret the situation by drawing some conclusions about what happened. These conclusions should encompass a compassionate understanding of the entire experience from multiple viewpoints. Finally, armed
with a clearer and fuller picture of the situation, the educator should then create an action plan for sharing and enacting their learning. This intervention pushes rural educators to confront issues of race, culture, representation, and identity that are likely difficult, controversial, and uncomfortable. Due to this, Wink’s process of reflective cycles is used to help teachers in the intervention to navigate their reflection and growth.

**Literature Review**

In 2005, Blum urged researchers to further investigate how connected students felt to school, citing Klem and Connell’s (2004) finding that 40 to 60 percent of the high school students in their study were “chronically disengaged from school” (p. 16). Blum argued that students’ connections to school were one way that schools could be improved. Because the dossier’s needs assessment study described in Project 2 revealed a need to intervene on curriculum and instructional practices, this literature review explores those factors specifically. This literature review distinguishes between curriculum and instruction by referring to curriculum as the texts, materials, and learning goals used in a classroom and instruction as the teaching practices and learning activities that guide students through the curriculum. The following literature review includes research that individually applied the theoretical frameworks discussed in the previous section to classroom contexts. The exploration of each of these applications allowed me to combine the best practices that are were also most appropriate for rural teachers to apply in their contexts for the Culturally Relevant Rural Teacher Guide.

**Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Instruction**

Researchers have primarily implemented a CRT approach to curriculum and instruction to improve academic disparities among culturally, ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse groups of students (Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nelson & Guerra,
While CRT’s purpose is to improve academic factors for students of color, this model may also impact student connectedness to school. In Khawaja et al.’s (2017) study of 237 migrant and refugee students, one Australian school offered a specialized program that allowed the migrant students to engage in discussions and activities that prompted recognition and reflection on their own cultural background as well as their host country’s culture. While the program did not explicitly use the CRT model, aspects of the program were grounded in the intention to use students’ existing cultural knowledge, a key practice in CRT, in the instruction of English as a Second Language.

Students in Khawaja et al.’s (2017) study were asked reflective questions about culture and their native language throughout instruction to make authentic connections to the class content. For example, students were asked to discuss similarities and differences in their native and their host country’s culture as well as differences in language and expression. Participants in the study completed pre- and post-program surveys designed to measure their connectedness to school and social supports. Comparison of the pre- and post-survey results revealed that participants in this program increased their connectedness to the school over time. Although the overall population of this study’s sample is different from most rural American high school student populations, Khawaja et al.’s research exemplifies how students’ connectedness to school can be increased using culturally responsive teaching techniques such as authentic connections between students’ lives and school materials and instruction.

CRT includes implementation of instructional strategies as well as curricular resources, which were both demonstrated in Bui and Fagan’s (2013) research. Bui and Fagan conducted a study of the effects of a culturally responsive approach to teaching reading comprehension to fifth grade students using the Integrated Reading Comprehension Strategy (IRCS). The IRCS
strategy used in their intervention included the use of culturally responsive instruction and curriculum. The instruction activities activated students’ prior cultural, linguistic, and experiential knowledge. The instruction included cooperative learning, a strategy in which students work together to support each other's learning. Additionally, the intervention included culturally responsive curriculum materials in the form of multicultural literature for students’ reading comprehension lessons and activities.

The participants were 49 fifth grade students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, divided into two groups: one group completed the IRCS strategy and the other completed the IRCS Plus strategy. Both the IRCS and IRCS Plus strategies were designed using the CRT model; however, the IRCS Plus program included more multicultural texts. Each group completed a pre- and post-intervention reading test. The students in both groups completed reading comprehension, word recognition, and story retell lessons that centered around concepts of community. All students read stories from multiple cultures and settings and discussed connections between the stories they read and their own communities.

The differences between the pre- and post-reading tests indicated increased reading comprehension, word recognition, and story retell skills for both the IRCS and IRCS Plus groups, with a slightly higher increase in reading comprehension for the IRCS Plus group. This means that the students who read more multicultural texts demonstrated better reading comprehension. Additionally, students that participated in both the IRCS and IRCS Plus groups displayed more positive attitudes about reading during the test. The measurement used for the reading comprehension test was an informal reading inventory that also accounted for student frustration throughout the test. Levels of frustration decreased from the pre-test to the post-test. Student participation in this reading curriculum increased skills and decreased frustration.
Moreover, the researchers noted that students in the IRCS Plus group showed excitement for the story materials and even repeatedly “begged to listen” (Bui & Fagan, 2013, p. 66) to a song that was included in the curriculum materials; these students also provided more authentic and expansive answers on their written assignments. Students in the IRCS group that read fewer multicultural texts did not show as much excitement for the texts and tended to provide more superficial responses on written assignments.

Although Bui and Fagan’s (2013) study did not set out to measure connectedness, evidence of bonding can still be gleaned from their data in the form of student enjoyment for the learning materials provided to them. Gorard and See (2011) found a relationship between students’ enjoyment of school and positive relationships with teachers. While more research is needed on how school enjoyment impacts students’ attachment to school, it makes sense that students who enjoy school would also form healthy connections with their teachers. Using culturally relevant learning tools could help students connect to the learning experience and as evidenced by Bui and Fagan, may also result in positive academic outcomes.

**Culturally Relevant Literature**

Culturally relevant literature refers to reading material that reflects the experiences and lives of the students that read it (Scullin, 2020). Bishop (1990) argued for the inclusion of mirroring texts: texts in which students can observe lives and characters similar to themselves. Texts that reflect students’ lives reinforce that students' experiences are legitimate and important. Azano (2014) argued that literature that takes place in a rural setting is often absent from the shelves of school libraries, denying rural students the reflection of their lives in literature. Azano viewed this absence as a missed chance to include culturally relevant materials for rural students, who are also diverse groups. Raymond-Flesch (2021) explained that Latinx students are among
the fastest growing minority groups in rural areas and are at high risk for experiencing depression, which can be mitigated through protective environments that promote connectedness between students and school.

Nash et al. (2019) described a Kindergarten and first grade teacher in an urban school whose practice of student-created book baskets was an effort to create a more culturally responsive classroom that honored the diversity of her students. Over the course of one week of lessons, students in this classroom curated their own collection of books that communicated their culture and/or life experiences. While the students were not interviewed or surveyed in this article, the teacher reported that students’ ownership of the space created excitement and inquiry about student lives (Nash et al., 2019). Although this article examined an urban classroom, this concept can be applied to a rural classroom in a culturally responsive intervention.

Scullin (2020) observed the connections to reading materials in book clubs that offered culturally relevant reading materials to a group of eight African American eighth-grade males in an urban school. The researcher designed a book club style study of books featuring African American males as main characters and asked students to track their text-to-self connections as they read and report back during their book club sessions, which occurred two or three times a week. Data was collected using pre- and post-intervention semi-structured student interviews, audio transcriptions of book club meetings, student reflection journals, as well as researcher field notes. The qualitative data revealed that students in the book clubs expressed strong connections to the African American male characters and requested extra reading material for free reading time. The students expressed frustration when their teacher and library did not have books like the ones read in the club (Scullin, 2020). In an interview, one student stated that “I think Black books is way more interesting and I just want to read them” (Scullin, 2020, p. 96). Students that
participated in the book club showed growth in their ability to discuss texts and make connections to the reading. In addition to these improved reading abilities, this intervention created a positive school experience for the students, which is conducive to promoting connectedness to school.

**Funds of Knowledge**

Funds of knowledge refers to the competency that all people possess and the learning that happens in everyday living and home practices (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Gonzalez et al. posited that all people in a school’s community possess funds of knowledge that can be used in the classroom and contended that educators have a responsibility to make learning meaningful by connecting their teaching to students’ lives at home. Roe (2019) explained that using school community members’ funds of knowledge in the classroom is one way of practicing culturally relevant teaching because it can help to establish mutual respect between teachers, students, and families. By integrating school community members’, including parents’, funds of knowledge in the classroom, teachers facilitate mediation between students’ home and/or community and the classroom (Cruz et al., 2018).

Castillo-Montoya and Ives (2020) conceptualized ways in which teachers can practically apply a funds of knowledge approach that interrupt traditional “sit and get” models of instruction. Castillo-Montoya and Ives demonstrated that using students, families, and community members as well as popular culture provide rich sources of knowledge that can be implemented in classroom content and instruction. By inviting a range of culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse families and community members into the classroom, students from a range of backgrounds can connect with the class. Castillo-Montoya and Ives proposed that educators follow a four step model to activate a school community’s funds of knowledge in the learning
process: (1) teachers must first recognize students’ funds of knowledge, (2) teachers reconstruct
the learning environment to facilitate learning activities that promote student expression of the
funds of knowledge, (3) teachers then explicitly teach students how to capitalize on their funds of
knowledge, and (4) teachers teach students how to use their funds of knowledge in learning
processes to access content skills. This process requires teachers to possess a depth of knowledge
about their students and a willingness to relinquish some control of the learning process.

Hogg (2016) conducted a six-month intervention that integrated a diverse group of
students’ funds of knowledge in a New Zealand high school to support academic learning. Five
teachers, 11 students, and five parents participated in the case study that was intended to explore
how teachers learned about students’ funds of knowledge and implemented funds of knowledge
in the classroom as well as the impact of these processes on culturally and ethnically diverse
students. Qualitative data was gathered in the form of interviews, focus groups, recordings of
teacher team meetings, written reflections, and student work. Students and parents reported
positive experiences participating in the intervention; one parent remarked that without the
intervention she didn’t think her child would have “made it through the year” (Hogg, 2016, p.
52). Students expressed increased confidence, engagement, and enjoyment in the classes that
were integrating funds of knowledge. The findings indicate that teachers found multiple ways to
incorporate students’ funds of knowledge in their classrooms, and some of the teachers expressed
that they would continue to integrate this concept into their future lesson planning.

Hogg’s (2016) study exemplified ways that educators can learn about and integrate funds
of knowledge in the classroom. To gain insight about students’ funds of knowledge, teachers
observed students outside of class in activities and sports, prompted students to respond to
creative writing prompts that drew out their specialized knowledge, and asked students about
their family history and personal goals. Teachers in this study used students’ funds of knowledge to guide a personalized behavior management and learning processes, engaging students in the lesson planning process, and designing class activities that help students identify their own funds of knowledge. These practices allow educators to not only know their students but operationalize their knowledge into meaningful learning experiences.

**Rural Professional Learning**

Multiple barriers prevent rural teachers from participating in high quality professional learning experiences. Limited school staff, geographical distance from in-person trainings, and over-stretched administrative leaders are all contributing factors to this problem (Donehower et al., 2007; Eppley, 2011; Hayes et al., 2019; Hendrickson, 2012; Lavalle, 2018; Waller & Barrentine, 2015). Ajayi (2014) described how preservice teachers in her study reported that they felt unprepared to teach in rural communities and make learning relevant to rural students. Eppley (2015) added to Ajayi’s findings by describing how rural schools rely on teacher learning models that do not contextualize teacher learning for rural areas. There is a need for professional learning experiences that are easily accessible and affordable, and that require little administrative assistance.

**Lesson Study**

Lesson study refers to a structure of professional learning that entails collaboration among teachers to expand content and curriculum knowledge as well as increased leadership and reflective opportunities throughout the course of the professional learning experience (Youngs & Lane, 2014). In lesson study, teachers examine high quality lessons and work in small collaborative groups to plan, practice, and provide feedback on one another's lessons (Youngs &
Lane, 2014). This method emphasizes the importance of a shared goal among the team of educators with less direct leadership from administrators.

Lee and Madden (2019) explored whether and how a lesson study intervention would increase teacher content knowledge across eight secondary schools with 37 middle and high school teachers of English and social studies. The researchers were especially concerned with the opportunity for teachers to implement new content standards in an atmosphere of collaboration and school-embedded learning. The participating teachers carried out the lesson study structure throughout the school year. To evaluate the intervention, the researchers collected artifacts in the form of audio recordings of conversations throughout the lesson study rounds, transcripts of discussions and focus group interviews, pre- and post-intervention surveys that were reflective in nature, and blog posts written by principals throughout the intervention process. Their findings presented positive results: the lesson study structure supported an environment for teachers to explore new curriculum. Teacher participants described that their conversations with their collaborative groups were productive in promoting collegiality and production of quality lessons for their own classrooms. This format required some administrative involvement, but mostly allowed for teachers to collaboratively lead their own learning.

In summary, the literature review provided examples of how CRT can be used to help students connect with their schools and/or learning, especially when methods specifically active students’ prior knowledge and experiences. Moreover, the literature suggested that teachers in rural contexts have barriers to receiving professional learning that could train them in multiple skills, including implementation of CRT. However, one possible solution to these barriers is finding affordable, online, and teacher-directed methods of professional learning.
The Culturally Relevant Rural Teacher Guide

Building from the previously reviewed theoretical frameworks and literature review, I designed the Culturally Relevant Rural Teacher Guide (CRRTG) as a professional learning experience and toolbox for developing culturally relevant curriculum and instruction in rural school settings. To create the guide, I used principles from the theoretical frameworks described in the previous section. One important guiding principle of its design was an adherence to sociocultural theory by relying on learning about and from their teaching context through social interaction, especially discussions (Lim & Renshaw, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, with the knowledge that rural teachers experience barriers to accessing professional learning experiences (Donehower et al., 2007; Eppley, 2011; Hayes et al., 2019; Hendrickson, 2012; Lavalley, 2018; Waller & Barrentine, 2015), I decided to make the guide free and accessible online using a Genial.ly website that was also free for me to create. Another guiding principle to the design of the CRRTG was providing lesson examples and observations from peers to model instructional practices, which is one of Darling-Hammond et al.’s (2017) recommendation for effective professional development. In this section I review key aspects of the CRRTG including an overview of participation in and facilitation of the guide, incorporation of lesson study, and the use of reflective cycles.

Participation and Facilitation

The targeted users for the CRRTG are rural teachers of any level of experience who would like to begin laying a foundation for culturally relevant teaching in their school. Ideally, teachers at their respective schools would work through the guide as a learning community, following the site’s guided experience manual. However, the toolbox tab of the online site features all of the materials used in the guided professional learning would be available to all
rural teachers looking for helpful resources and information about culturally relevant teaching practices for rural students. The online guide includes step-by-step instructions for implementation as well as all necessary materials. The entire guide can be found in Appendix G, which includes screenshots of each page of the guide and a link to the online site. Table 3.1 provides an outline of each module’s duration, activities, and materials.

**Table 3.1**

*Professional Learning Outline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Reflections</td>
<td>Reflect on identity. Share reflections and discuss identities. Complete a reflective cycle form</td>
<td>Identity graphic organizer, identity group discussion questions, reflective cycle form</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Funds of knowledge</td>
<td>Watch funds of knowledge video. Discuss video. Create shared goals.</td>
<td>Funds of knowledge video, video discussion questions, shared goals form</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Survey</td>
<td>Create a funds of knowledge survey using shared goals as a guide. Send survey. Complete a reflective cycle form.</td>
<td>Editable funds of knowledge survey, reflective cycle form</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Design instruction</td>
<td>Read and discuss survey data. Begin planning a lesson that integrates a fund of knowledge from the survey. Develop a plan to observe a peer.</td>
<td>Survey data, survey data group discussion questions, rural teacher toolbox, peer feedback form</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Lesson reflection</td>
<td>Share feedback on observed lessons. Discuss lessons and the funds of knowledge process. Complete a reflective cycle form.</td>
<td>Final group discussion questions, completed peer feedback form, reflective cycle form</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: All materials are located in Appendix G.*

The ideal way to use this site is as a professional learning experience for a small team of teachers working together as a learning community in the same rural school district. Rural teachers can struggle to find accessible professional development because rural schools often
lack the advantage of multiple staff members and funding for onsite professional learning experts (Sanchez et al., 2017; Miller, 2012). Jensen et al. (2016) described how high performing professional learning systems provide leadership opportunities to multiple staff members and honor staff members’ expertise and experience and advocate for teachers’ shared responsibility for professional growth among school staff.

**Lesson Study**

I created the program to adopt a lesson study model for planning, discussing, and obtaining feedback for lessons. Each participant will be invited to host a lesson study and be a participant for another colleague’s lesson study session. Young and Lane’s (2014) format was used to structure this aspect of the program. First, teachers will create shared goals for their lessons, plan and discuss lessons together, and then observe and provide feedback for each other’s lessons. The lesson study model is used throughout the CRRTG process.

**Reflective Cycles**

Young and Lane’s (2014) model of lesson study includes teacher reflection. The reflective opportunities in this program include Wink’s (2011) reflective cycle. To avoid reflection overkill, participants are prompted to reflect three times throughout the entire guided learning process. After the first, third, and fifth steps participants will be prompted to access a reflective cycle form. The form is modeled after Wink’s reflective cycle, but the questions prompt participations to reflect on that step specifically. In addition, an informational overview about reflective cycles is available on the program site for any participants who want to learn more about this process. This overview was taken directly from Joan Wink’s website, which is intended for teachers to use for free (Wink, 2009). A copy of the reflective cycle form can be found in Appendix G.
In the following section the plan for the guided professional learning program is described. This section includes information about how the professional learning experience will direct teachers to participate, collect data, socialize over their learning and findings, reflect, and design curriculum and instruction.

**Guided Professional Learning**

In this section I provide an overview of the five professional learning modules. Details regarding the purpose, facilitation, and materials of each module are described. Additionally, the resource toolbox, an element of the online CCRTG is reviewed. Finally, a plan for distribution of the guide is explained.

**Module One: Reflections**

In this module of the program, participants will reflect on their own identities and cultures using a graphic organizer that prompts them to record information, symbols, and images that reflect their own culture, ethnicity, language, and identity. Then, these reflections are shared with the group. After sharing individually, the group will discuss their reflections using a provided list of discussion questions. These questions aim to expand participants’ discussion from individual reflections to explorations of how their rural context impacts their personal and professional identities and lives. The discussion questions can be found in Appendix G. After the discussion, the participants will individually complete a reflective cycle form.

**Self-Reflection Graphic Organizer**

To provide an online and enjoyable activity for participants, the graphic organizer is on Google Jamboard. A copy of the graphic organizer can be found in Appendix G. Additionally, users can find a brief video on how to use Google Jamboard on the program site, if needed. The purpose of the self-reflection graphic organizer is to help teachers reflect on their personal and
professional identities. Beijaard et al.’s (2004) quadrants of teachers’ professional identity formation were used to guide the questions on the self-reflection organizer, which is mainly focused on teachers’ individual and public identities. The questions on the activity prompt teachers to reflect on aspects of their life as an individual, as a teacher, and moments that school has been enjoyable to them as both a teacher and a student. This information will be used later in their discussion.

**Module Two: Funds of Knowledge**

Castillo-Montoya and Ives’ (2020) model for gathering and implementing funds of knowledge in the classroom in this module. Participants will first learn about the concept of funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005) through an informational video (Marcias, 2020). After viewing the video, the participants will be prompted to discuss the information in the video as well as what funds of knowledge they would like to investigate in their school community. The participants will be prompted to create shared goals for their funds of knowledge inquiry. Creating shared goals is an important aspect of the lesson study model because it helps educators to focus their attention and efforts on a single problem or topic (Youngs & Lane, 2014). The resource used to help the participants create shared inquiry goals is in Appendix G.

**Module Three: Survey**

Module three of the professional learning experience guides participants in creating and a survey that gathers funds of knowledge from members in their rural community. The survey creation resource provided to participants recommends they write five to ten survey items to ensure the survey is not too time consuming for the survey participants. Additionally, the resource in this module provides survey item examples that they may choose to use. The professional learning guide does not require that surveys be mailed, but suggests mail, email, or
even contacting school community members via phone to distribute the survey. At the end of this step, participants will be prompted to complete a reflective cycle form.

**Module Four: Design Instruction**

In this module, participants create lessons that integrate data from the funds of knowledge survey data. After distributing the surveys and receiving data, the participants meet to analyze and discuss their data and how it can meet their shared goals for instructional planning. Participants then design a lesson that includes one or more resources identified through those data. They will have access to the site’s rural curriculum materials page and a universal design lesson plan template to create instructional plans. By the end of this module, participants will create a plan based on the lesson study format to both host a lesson study session and observe another participant’s lesson study session. When observing, each participant will complete a peer review feedback form (found in Appendix G). The peer feedback form models concepts from Regen et al.’s (2016) lesson study research by asking observers to identify the lesson’s strengths and opportunities for stronger engagement.

This module contains a link to three example projects that incorporated funds of knowledge from a rural community into the classroom; the first two were created by me. The first example project is a twist on “urban” legend writing and asks students to interview a community member to learn about a local “rural” legend that they will expand on in a creative writing piece. The second example is a community service collaboration for a food drive to establish a food pantry in the school. Students used online resources to research and create informational posters for the food drive. The links have been removed to protect the location from identification. The third example was taken from the Washington Office of Superintendent
of Public Instruction is an example of one math teacher’s project that incorporated a local cherry farm.

**Module Five: Lesson Reflection**

In this final module, participants will discuss the lessons they observed as well as the process of gathering and implementing funds of knowledge into their lesson. A set of group discussion questions (included in Appendix G) structure this reflective discussion. Additionally, participants will individually complete a reflective cycle form to finish this professional learning experience.

**Resource Toolbox**

The Resource Toolbox is a tab on the site that is not mandatory for participants to access but that provides a set of resources that rural educators can use at any time. All materials used in the guided professional learning experience are also available in the toolbox. Moreover, other helpful links and lessons are included in the toolbox for rural teachers.

**Distribution Plan**

The Culturally Relevant Rural Teacher Guide can be easily accessed through a link. It is free and available to all people. The link can be shared through social media and email. To effectively distribute this link to the public, I plan to share it on the many social platforms I access that are relevant to rural teachers for example, online groups I associate with such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the Iowa Council of Teachers of English (ICTE) Facebook groups and Instagram profiles.

I can use my positionality as both a researcher and a teacher to share the CRRTG. As a teacher, I can share my project with my rural teacher peers during our school’s professional development time and even help teachers in my context start using the guided professional
learning. Currently, the state in which I teach offers a small bonus for teachers to set and complete their own professional learning goals, evidenced by completed curricular materials and personal reflections; the CRRTG is a perfect fit for that opportunity. In addition, I have presented at NCTE national conferences and an Iowa ICTE conference on teaching in rural contexts. The CRTTG is a resource I can incorporate in my future presentations. In addition, I plan to seek publication of the needs assessment findings and seek other publication opportunities for any of the work done in this dossier-dissertation.

Summary

The CRRTG will be updated and maintained as I discover more and/or improved rural teaching resources. I added a link to the site that encourages participants to share their experiences using the guide and/or resources. I can use participant feedback to improve the guide. I would also like to include more examples from participants in the toolbox so future participants have more models to learn from while they plan. In addition, I would like to add more engaging technology tools such as an online journal for the reflective cycle forms and a forum or networking tool for participants in different locations to share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences with each other. With enough traffic on the site, I could justify creating a website with more capabilities for users in the future.

Final Reflection

As the first in my family to receive a terminal degree, I did not know what to expect from a doctoral program when I began in 2019. I did not know what the journey would entail, but I knew I was eager to learn more about improving my practice as a teacher. I was two years into my first high school teaching job in a rural area and one year into presenting at conferences about topics in rural education. I had a lot of ideas and a lot to say about teaching rural students.
My professors and advisors helped me to focus on a single problem of practice, which was a challenging process amidst taking the most challenging courses I had yet experienced. Learning about school improvement science, neurobiology, research methods, program evaluation, and educational politics were all new topics for me, and I worked hard to ensure my success in my classes. I found and formed study groups and writing groups with my peers and dedicated most of my free time for four years to my studies.

The process of researching and writing about rural students will likely be one of the most challenging and rewarding endeavors of my life. The greatest obstacles in this process also have important implications for the research and practice of teaching rural students. Firstly, my struggle to find empirical, peer-reviewed, and current research that investigated rural students specifically characterized my first year of my doctoral program. When I found Hardré’s (2008) study on the paucity of research on rural students, I was not surprised, but I was also discouraged. I urge educational researchers to take more of an interest in our nation’s rural youth.

My second critical take away from this process is that culturally relevant pedagogy should have no bounds. Throughout my doctoral studies, many people asked me why culturally relevant teaching should be used for White students. I realized they believed that rural schools were heterogeneous spaces, devoid of diversity. Dobson’s (2018) article pointed out how dangerous this stereotype can be for the many students of color in rural schools; they feel unseen. Rural areas are becoming increasingly more ethically and racially diverse. Now is the time to put away stereotypes about rural students and rural people, especially educators. To combat these stereotypes, I worked to design a needs assessment study and a program that brings the opportunities of rural areas to light.
My future plans are to continue teaching in a rural public-school setting for a few more years. I now have a fabulous educational background I can use to help advance students in my rural area by providing and leading other rural teachers in creating more connected curriculum and instruction for rural students. I want to continue to use my platform to promote best practices for rural curriculum and instruction.
References


85


[https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02766777](https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02766777)


[https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001)


Bishop, R. S. (1990). Windows and mirrors: Children’s books and parallel cultures. In California State University reading conference: 14th annual conference proceedings (pp. 3-12).


https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2012.664581


https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1263243


https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v37i2.267


https://doi.org/10.1080/08878730.2014.975061


Gowing, A., & Jackson, A. C. (2016). Connecting to school: Exploring student and staff understandings of connectedness to school and the factors associated with this process. *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist, 33*(1), 54-69. [https://doi.org/10.1017/edp.2016.10](https://doi.org/10.1017/edp.2016.10)


[https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED602971.pdf](https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED602971.pdf)


[https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-010-9616-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-010-9616-4)

[https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdx010](https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdx010)

[https://doi.org/10.15663/tandc.v16i1.108](https://doi.org/10.15663/tandc.v16i1.108)


Iowa county poverty rates. (2020). Retrieved from
https://www.iowadatacenter.org/data/acs/econ/poverty/couty-poverty-map

Iowa school performance profiles. (2019). Retrieved from
https://www.iaschoolperformance.gov/ECP/StateDistrictSchool/SchoolDetails?DetailType=ConditionsForLearning&DataDisplayType=Accountability&k=9835&y=2019


https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-014-9642-6


Lavalle, M. (2018). Out of the loop: Rural schools are largely left out of research and policy discussions, exacerbating poverty, inequity, and isolation. *Center for Public Education*.  

https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636519826717

https://doi.org/10.1002/icd.672

https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1016625432567

https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831203200346


[https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2010.05.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2010.05.001)


https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12267


https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2016.1151748


https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055412000305


https://doi.org/10.1348/000709909X484479


Witherspoon, D., & Ennett, S. (2011). Stability and change in rural youths’ educational outcomes through the middle and high school years. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 40*(9), 1077-1090. [https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-010-9614-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-010-9614-6)


Appendix A: Conditions for Learning Survey Items

1. My teachers care about me

2. My teachers tell me when I am doing a good job

3. Adults who work in my school treat students with respect

4. There is at least one adult at school that I could go to for help with a problem

5. Adults in this school respect differences in students (for example, gender, race, culture, learning differences, sexual orientation, etc.)

6. My teachers are available to talk with students one-on-one
# Appendix B: Teacher Perceived Teacher-Student Relationships Survey

Adapted from the Conditions for Learning Survey (Iowa Performance Profiles)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>Bachelor’s Degree</th>
<th>Master’s Degree</th>
<th>Doctorate or PhD.</th>
<th>0-5</th>
<th>5-10</th>
<th>10-15</th>
<th>15-20</th>
<th>20+</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your level of education?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many years of experience do you have teaching?</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in this school care about students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in this school tell students when they are doing a good job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in this school treat students with respect.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is at least one adult in this school that a student can go to for help with a problem.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in this school respect differences in students (for example, gender, race, culture, learning differences, sexual orientation, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in this school are available to talk with students one on one.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Teacher Interview

Adapted from (Howley, Howley, Hendrickson, Belcher, & Howley, 2012)

Script: Say, “Thank you for agreeing to do this interview. I hope that you will feel comfortable sharing your experiences and thoughts with me.

If you have any questions or concerns at any time and would like to stop the interview, please do not hesitate to let me know. With your permission, I will be recording the session using the Zoom audio record feature.

The audio file will be transcribed and saved to my computer, which is password protected. I will not be sharing the data with anyone other than the advisors on my dissertation committee. At no time will I share your name or other identifying information. A pseudonym name will be used to protect your identity. This work will be reported in my dissertation. Do you have any questions before we begin?”

1.) Tell me about yourself and your connection to this school, including how long you have been teaching.

2.) Describe your philosophy of learning and teaching.

3.) Can you tell me about the curriculum standards you teach to, where they come from, and how you ensure that students are meeting those standards?

4.) Describe where curriculum comes from in your department. Is it purchased through a company? Designed by you? A mix of both?

5.) What connections do you see between your instructional strategies and curriculum to what and how students learn?

6.) Describe how you consider the rural context in which your students live when you plan and deliver your curriculum and instruction?

Possible probing questions:
In what ways do you think teaching rural students is unique from teaching urban or suburban students? How do you tailor your teaching to that?

6.) What are specific instructional strategies or curriculum approaches that you use that reflect the rural context in which you teach?

Possible probing questions:
Can you describe one of your units or lessons that connects your classroom and your students’ community?
What resources does your school offer to help teachers plan curriculum that connects your classroom to the community?

7.) What hinders your ability to plan and use instructional strategies and curriculum that connects to the rural context that you teach?
8.) In a survey I conducted recently, I compared how teachers perceived student-teacher relationships at this school to how students perceive student-teacher relationships at this school. I found that all teachers, but not all students, reported positive perceptions of student-teacher relationships.

Possible probing questions:
Why do you think the teacher and student reports were different? How might you explain results that indicated that some students did not feel they experienced positive relationships with teachers?
Possible probing question:
What factors do you think contribute to students feeling disconnected from teachers and adults at school?
What steps do you think could be taken to reveal more broadly that some students in this school feel that they do not have meaningful relationships to teachers in this school?
Appendix D: Teacher Survey Recruitment Email

Good afternoon,

I am a student researcher at Johns Hopkins University. Currently, I am researching rural students' connections to their school and relationships with teachers. I want to learn more about what factors contribute to students’ positive school connections and relationships with their teachers. I invite you to participate in a brief survey designed to explore teacher relationships with students in your school.

The survey will take 10-15 minutes. Please share your experiences about teacher relationships with students in your school. Your anonymous responses will provide insight for analyzing teacher-student relationships.

All information you provide is strictly confidential. No individual respondents will be identified in this study. Should you have any questions, please contact Angie Miller at amill192@jhu.edu or 712-310-3646.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Respectfully,

Angie Miller

Ed.D. Student

Johns Hopkins University

Follow this link to the Survey:

${l://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}$

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

${l://SurveyURL}$
Appendix E: Teacher Interview Recruitment Email

Dear [insert name],

My name is Angie Miller and I am a student at the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about student-teacher relationships and rural school curriculum. You are eligible to be in this study because you are a classroom teacher in a rural school. I obtained your contact information from the [Prairie Rose] school directory.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to discuss your experiences teaching in a rural school over a Zoom meeting with me that will last approximately 30 minutes. I will audio record the interview only for analysis purposes and your identifying personal information will be erased and never shared.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions, please email, or contact me at amill192@jhu.edu. If you would like to participate in this interview, please respond to this email and I will work with you on a date and time that fits into your schedule.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Angie Miller
Student, Ed.D.
Johns Hopkins University
# Appendix F: Codebooks

## First Cycle Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Value beyond school&quot;</td>
<td>Teacher belief that school curriculum be practical to life outside school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;modify...to fit every learner’s needs&quot;</td>
<td>Differentiating teaching practices for multiple learning abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Standards&quot;</td>
<td>State or federally mandated learning goals for students that dictate curriculum and instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Everything is designed by me&quot;</td>
<td>Lesson plans and materials made by teachers; not drawn from a textbook or other curricular resource.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Teachers Pay Teachers&quot;</td>
<td>Content purchased from the TPT website that sells teaching resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I really typically don’t” [consider the rural context]</td>
<td>Teacher expression that they do not take their rural teaching context into account when planning, designing, and/or implementing curriculum and instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;there’s not that much I want to teach&quot;</td>
<td>Lack of teacher desire to educate students about their rural context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;They think they don’t need” [school]</td>
<td>Teacher beliefs that students do not value their academic experiences at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Don’t want to be here”</td>
<td>Teacher beliefs about the bonds formed between students and their school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;don’t have that mixture of kids”</td>
<td>Few people of diverse backgrounds and races at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;not very worldly”</td>
<td>Teacher belief that rural students are naive about life outside of their own community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;can’t say things outside our community”</td>
<td>Teacher belief that rural students cannot express beliefs to others without a rural background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of teaching resources</td>
<td>Few material and intellectual assets available to teachers when planning curriculum and instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;time”</td>
<td>Deficiency in teacher time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;kids suffer”</td>
<td>Impact of teacher stress on students’ emotional or physical well-being and/or learning environment or learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;food pantry”</td>
<td>Food resource available to students at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;cost”</td>
<td>Obstacles in planning curriculum and instruction that considers the rural context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;hassle with driving”</td>
<td>Teacher expectation that students will leave the community after high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I wish I could give them more”</td>
<td>Teacher expressions that indicate want for growth in their curriculum and instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Preparing for a career”</td>
<td>School as a site for workplace readiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Exposure”</td>
<td>School-provided opportunities for students to learn about life, work, or academics outside of the rural area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Canned curriculum”</td>
<td>Purchased learning materials and lesson plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;lack of upper level classes”</td>
<td>Few resources for students to advance or explore school content and/or skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;don’t have all the...extracurricular stuff”</td>
<td>Few clubs and organizations for students to join.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Flexibility”</td>
<td>Teachers’ ability to change and adapt instruction and curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;community events”</td>
<td>Classroom involvement in community functions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Guest speaker”</td>
<td>Classroom visitors from the community as a resource for the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;wildlife”</td>
<td>Curriculum and instruction made relevant to the area’s animals, plants, and landscape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Local government”</td>
<td>Curriculum and instruction made relevant to the area’s political representatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Community service”</td>
<td>Curriculum and instruction made relevant to the needs of people in the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Agriculture”</td>
<td>Curriculum and instruction made relevant to the area’s livestock and farming industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“bored to death”</td>
<td>Teacher perception that students do not enjoy being at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“entertain”</td>
<td>Teacher belief that students should feel their educational experiences provide amusement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“likes and dislikes”</td>
<td>Teachers’ hobbies and curiosities that do not align with students’ hobbies and curiosities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“perception”</td>
<td>Teacher and student definitions of a beneficial and affirming connection do not align</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“don’t really want a connection”</td>
<td>Student refusal to engage in a teacher-student relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“age gap”</td>
<td>Disparity in teacher and student age that prevents positive teacher-student relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“how they’re teaching”</td>
<td>Students’ dislike of teaching methods that prevents the development of teacher-student relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“know my kids”</td>
<td>Teachers’ expressions of knowing students by name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codes</td>
<td>Categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Value beyond school&quot;</td>
<td>Utility of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Preparing for a career&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“don’t have that mixture of kids”</td>
<td>“Exposure”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“can’t say things outside our community”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Exposure”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“not very worldly”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Everything is designed by me”</td>
<td>Teacher-created curriculum and instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Flexibility”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;modify...to fit every learner’s needs”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Teachers Pay Teachers”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I wish I could give them more”</td>
<td>Teacher stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“time”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“kids suffer”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“cost”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“hassle with driving”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“lack of upper level classes”</td>
<td>Challenges of the rural school context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;don’t have all the...extracurricular stuff”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I really typically don’t” [consider the rural context] “there’s not that much I want to teach”</td>
<td>Lack of consideration and knowledge of rural context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“community events”</td>
<td>Classroom involvement with community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Guest speaker”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“wildlife”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Local government”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Community service”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Agriculture”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“food pantry”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

111
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“They think they don’t need” [school]</td>
<td>Teacher deficit beliefs about rural students</td>
<td>Teachers know their students, but struggle to see their role in making a deep connection with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Don’t want to be here”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“not very worldly”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“don’t really want a connection”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“bored to death”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“entertain”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher-student relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“likes and dislikes”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“perception”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“don’t really want a connection”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“age gap”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“how they’re teaching”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“know my kids”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G: Guided Professional Learning Materials

Link to site with all materials and full interactivity:

https://view.genial.ly/63b365782e04480013a10cb5/guide-crrt

Reflective Cycle Form

Step:

1. Describe an experience (by yourself or in the group) during this step that stands out to you. What makes this experience stand out? Are there any phrases, images, or moments that were particularly interesting to you?

2. What makes this experience stand out? Why do you think it might be important?

3. What can be learned from this experience?

4. How can you put your learning from this experience into action in your personal life/and or classroom?

5. What new questions or interests have emerged from this experience?
Self Reflection on Your Identity

Include images, text, links, etc to your Jamboard that help show your identity. Include one image, text, etc for each of the following:

- Where are you from?
- What is your next big goal?
- What makes you unique as a teacher?
- What is the most important thing you want to teach students?
- Who is your family?
- How do you spend your free time?
- Who inspired you to teach?
- What are your strengths in the classroom?
- What accomplishments are you proud of?
- What experiences prepared you best for teaching?
- One of your favorite teaching moments.
Create Shared Goals

Use the sentence starters to get you started on writing at least two shared goals as a group. What information do you want your survey data to target? What kind of learning activities do you want to

We want to learn more about how to serve students who…

We want to find opportunities for our students to learn about…

We want to invite people into our school who can teach our students about…

Our students get excited about… so we want to learn more about…

We want to learn more about families in our district that…

Students who are currently disengaged from school might want to learn more about…
Audio instructions script: Welcome to the funds of knowledge survey resource. On the document, you will find some survey items to help you get started. You don’t need to use all of them, in fact, you should focus your survey to 5-10 items that reflect your shared goals. Feel free to write your own survey items as well.

You can mail, email, or even speak with family members using these survey items. Reach out to some families that maybe you don’t know very well. The goal is get out there and learn more about your school community. Find out what knowledge, experiences, and skills you can bring into your classroom.

What countries have you traveled to or lived in?
What work experiences have you had?
What unique skills could you share with students?
What language does your family speak at home?
What languages do you speak?
What are your hobbies/interests?
What educational activities does your family enjoy doing?
Do you own or work for a local business?
If you were a guest speaker at our school, what could you speak to students about?
Where did you go to college?
What degrees do people in your family hold?
What special knowledge do you have about our local area?
What is something you would like students to know more about?
Would you consider letting a student shadow you at work?
What occupations do the people in your family have?
Do you own or work on a farm?
Do you own or work with livestock?
What community organizations are you a part of?
What community events do you help organize?
What community events do you enjoy attending?
Peer Feedback Form

Subject and teacher observed:

Describe how funds of knowledge from your school community was integrated in the lesson.

What did students learn during the lesson?

What did students do during the lesson?

To what extent were students engaged with the lesson?

What were the strengths of this lesson?

In what ways could engagement be increased if this lesson was done again?

General Notes:
THE RESOURCE TOOLBOX

Guided Professional Learning Resources
Lesson Planning Resources
Rural Teaching Resources

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING HOMEPAGE

1. Reflections
2. Funds of Knowledge
3. Survey
4. Design Instruction
5. Lesson Reflection
STEP 1: REFLECTIONS

In this module you will:

- Individually reflect on your own identity
- Share your reflections with others
- Discuss your identities with your peers
- Complete a reflective cycle form

You will need:

- Identity Graphic Organizer
- Identity Discussion Group Questions
- Reflective Cycle Form

DIRECTIONS

1. Complete the identity graphic organizer on your own.
2. Meet with your group and take a few minutes each to share your graphic organizers with each other.
3. Use the discussion questions to guide a discussion.
4. Individually, complete a Reflective Cycle Form.

STEP 2: FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

In this module you will:

- Learn about funds of knowledge
- Discuss funds of knowledge available in your school community
- Create shared inquiry goals with your group

You will need:

- Funds of knowledge video
- Funds of Knowledge Group Discussion Questions
- Creating Shared Goals

DIRECTIONS

1. Watch the video about funds of knowledge
2. With your peers, discuss the video using the Funds of Knowledge Group Discussion Questions
3. Use the Creating Shared Goals resource to create a list of goals for gathering and implementing funds of knowledge from your school community.
**STEP 3: SURVEY**

In this module you will:
- Use your shared inquiry goals to guide your selection of a survey
- With your peers, create a funds of knowledge survey for your school community
- Complete a reflective cycle form

You will need:
- [Editable Funds of Knowledge Survey](#)
- [Reflective Cycle Form](#)

**DIRECTIONS**

1. With your peers, revisit your shared inquiry goals from the previous step. This will guide your selection of a survey for this step.
2. With your peers, use the Funds of Knowledge Survey resource to find a survey that works for your school community.
3. Send your survey out to families. You will need the returned survey data for Step 4.
4. Individually, complete a Reflective Cycle Form.

**STEP 4: DESIGN INSTRUCTION**

In this module you will:
- Examine and discuss your survey data
- Use survey data to design instruction that meets your group’s shared goals
- Plan a lesson that integrates funds of knowledge from your community
- Access resources to help you plan
- Observe a peer and provide feedback

You will need:
- Your group’s shared inquiry goals
- Funds of Knowledge Survey Data
- [Survey Data Group Discussion Questions](#)
- [Rural Teacher Toolbox](#)
- [Peer Feedback Form](#)
- [Helpful funds of knowledge resource](#)

**DIRECTIONS**

1. With your peers, read through and discuss the survey data using the Survey Data Group Discussion Questions.
2. Each group member should begin to plan a lesson that integrates funds of knowledge from your community.
3. Use the Rural Teacher Toolbox to access a planning template, inspiration, and helpful resources you can integrate into your lesson.
4. Communicate with your peers when you will implement your lesson.
5. Arrange to observe at least one peer integrate their lesson. Complete a Peer Feedback Form after you observe. Save your completed form for your meeting in Step 5.
**STEP 5: LESSON REFLECTION**

**DIRECTIONS**

1. Bring your feedback for your peer observation.
2. Use the Final Discussion Group Discussion Questions to guide your final discussion.
3. Complete your final Reflective Cycle Form on your own.

**GUIDED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING RESOURCES**

1. **SELF REFLECTION GRAPHIC ORGANIZER**
2. **FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE VIDEO**
3. **SURVEY RESOURCE**
4. **IDENTITY GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**
5. **REFLECTIVE CYCLE FORM**
6. **SURVEY DATA DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**
7. **PEER FEEDBACK FORM**
8. **REFLECTIVE CYCLE OVERVIEW**
9. **CREATING SHARED GOALS**
10. **FINAL DISCUSSION**
11. **REFLECTIVE CYCLE FORM**
12. **RESOURCE TOOLBOX**
Step 1: Group Discussion Questions

AFTER LISTENING TO EACH GROUP MEMBER EXPLAIN THEIR GRAPHIC ORGANIZER, DISCUSS EACH OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. What commonalities and differences did you see among your group members’ graphic organizers?
2. Did anything surprise you from a group member’s reflection today?
3. How might your students’ graphic organizers look similar and/or different from yours?
4. In what ways did your teaching context, a rural school, impact your individual reflection?
5. If students were given this reflection activity, how might their rural context impact their answers?

Step 2: Group Discussion Questions

AFTER WATCHING THE VIDEO ON FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE, DISCUSS EACH OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. What are deficit beliefs? In what ways might educators have deficit beliefs about rural students? Students of color? Students who live in poverty?
2. How might using a funds of knowledge approach help educators have more positive beliefs about students? How might it help students feel more engaged at school?
3. In what ways does your school already use your community’s funds of knowledge?
4. Thinking back on your self reflection graphic organizer, did you reveal any of your own funds of knowledge?
5. What funds of knowledge might you find in your school community?
Step 4: Survey Data Discussion Questions

AFTER GATHERING AND READING YOUR SURVEY, DISCUSS EACH OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. What did you learn about your school community through this survey data? What surprised you?

2. What survey item collected the most useful data?

3. What would you ask differently/add if you did the survey again?

4. Comb through the survey data with your group and begin identifying possible fieldtrip, guest speaker, lesson, and project opportunities.

Step 5: Final Reflection Group Discussion

1. Share what you observed in the lesson you watched. Include the lessons’ strengths in your description.

2. Would you teach your lesson again? How would you do it differently? What would you keep the same?

3. To what extent were students engaged in your lesson? How could engagement be increased?

4. What were the biggest challenges to integrating funds of knowledge in your classes? What supports would help you if you were to do this again?

5. How can rural educators use funds of knowledge to help their students feel more connected to school?

6. What are your next steps?
RURAL TEACHING RESOURCES

- WHIPPOORWILL AWARDS
- RURAL VOICES RADIO
- MATH ON THE FARM
- AGRICULTURE LESSONS
- PBS VIDEOS & LESSONS
- RURAL LENS