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Rural Exposures: An Examination of Three Initiatives to Introduce and Immerse Preservice Teachers into Rural Communities and Rural Schools in the U.S. and Australia

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Abstract

One ongoing challenge that educator preparation programs frequently encounter is their limited ability to authentically expose preservice teachers (PSTs) to rural schools and potential careers in rural school districts. To remedy this concern, faculty at three institutions in both the United States and Australia have developed targeted initiatives designed to provide initial exposure to rural schools, build a rural-intensive element within a practicum course, and establish rural immersion experiences for PSTs. A detailed look at the structure of these programs, a comparison of these three diverse approaches, and recommendations for the expansion and sustainability of these efforts are highlighted within this narrative. Through this comparison of activities being advanced in both countries, the authors provide a better understanding of the options and effectiveness related to initial rural school exposure.

Introduction

The typical educator preparation program provides preservice teachers (PSTs) the opportunity to learn and work alongside established teachers in an effort to provide practical classroom experience, as well as to comply with governmental requirements for fieldwork hours and student teaching experiences. Unfortunately, the opportunities provided for PSTs to work in rural and remote environments is limited—due in part to the logistical barriers that come with exposing and placing students in geographically isolated areas. Issues related to housing of students in rural areas, the provision of adequate supervision, and the need to partner student teachers with highly-skilled, experienced educators all play a part in limiting the number of PSTs who are able to experience a rural school placement or rural field experience during their educator preparation program.

For those PSTs who may have interest in pursuing a role in a rural school or remote community, these limitations are significant as they restrict opportunities to learn about the unique structure and teaching methodologies in rural schools. A primary impediment is clearly geographic, as the need to place and monitor PSTs in proximity to

their enrolled university results in reduced rural placement opportunities. While geographically adjacent locations are preferred for fieldwork and practicum experiences, there are few higher education institutions located in rural and remote regions. This geographical challenge results in a process that unintentionally curtails the number of educators who may have an interest and potential aptitude to become an educator in a rural school.

To remedy this concern, several institutions are providing PSTs opportunities to explore rural communities and rural schools through enhanced rural engagement initiatives. This shift is in response to an increasing educator shortage impacting rural locales throughout the world, or as a result of universities addressing regions that have historically been marginalized, and to potentially entice rural citizens to enroll at a specific institution. In some areas, this shift is also a response to requests from rural administrators seeking university partnerships as a method to recruit new educators and develop existing faculty and staff. Recent efforts to expose PSTs to rural schools and communities have been increasing, but it remains difficult to ascertain the extent to which colleges/universities focus on these regions.

This paper presents three distinct approaches, in both the United States and Australia, that result in enhanced exposure for PSTs in rural communities and rural schools. In all three locations, focused and intentional experiences are provided to help PSTs gain a better understanding of the unique nature of rural teaching and rural communities. Through the analysis of these three approaches, we hope to provide a better understanding of the options and effectiveness related to initial rural school exposure, as well as gain a more nuanced understanding of how PSTs experience these initiatives. In our discussion section, we offer a comparison of activities being advanced in all three locations.

Existing Literature

There is a substantial collection of research that focuses on the importance of effective fieldwork and student-teacher placement within PSTs' growth as an educator (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Green, 2016; Hascher et al, 2004; Boydell, 1986, Zeichner, 2010). A considerable portion of existing research emphasizes the importance of a strong mentor teacher to help guide PSTs (Tillema et. al, 2011; Haigh & Ell, 2014). Another subset of research argues that PSTs are prepared for generic contexts (Matsko & Hammerness, 2014; Zeichner, 2010), with too much emphasis placed on university assignments and in-classroom management and curricular foci (Page, 2006), to the detriment of providing time for PSTs to experience the nuances of the school and the community of their placement. Additional studies focus on the timing and placement of pre-service teachers in specific environments and how these individuals can be adequately prepared for a career as an educator with the inclusion of these oft-challenging locations (Weisman & Hansen, 2008; Hill, 2012).

In contrast, there is limited research available that exclusively examines the experiences of student-teachers in rural environments (Biddle & Azano, 2016; Burton & Johnson, 2010; White & Reid, 2008) and the likelihood of their progression towards full-time careers in remote and rural schools (Gerard et al, 2013; Hudson & Hudson, 2008). Existing literature centered on the unique challenges faced by educators and educator preparation involving rural schools and areas has been developed (Ryan et al, 2012; Mukeredzi, 2014), but specific, structured studies related to the role of rural fieldwork remains limited (Reagan, Hambacher, Schram, McCurdy, Lord,

Higginbotham, & Fornauf, 2019). As such, the field is in need of additional examination regarding what it means to be a teacher in a rural place that is fully situated within the socio-political realm of its state, country, and educational system (Biddle & Azano, 2016). This dearth of material related to rural fieldwork opportunities for pre-service educators is notable and represents additional research opportunities centering on effective rural fieldwork placements, particularly when analyzed across institutions and countries (Reagan et al, 2019).

Study Structure

Researchers across three universities in both the United States and Australia have developed unique strategies for incorporating rural fieldwork in PST preparation programs. At each institution, there is a recognition of the need and unique learning opportunities related to working in rural schools and with rural populations, and each institution has a distinctive approach to providing PSTs rural fieldwork experiences. These approaches span from a short-term, one-time exposure, to rural intensive practicum experiences, and finally, more immersive approaches to providing PSTs extensive exposure and an understanding of rural schools and communities. The specific methods utilized by each university to provide PSTs rural learning opportunities follow a progressive arc that both provides PSTs their initial exposure to rural education and is designed to promote careers in rural education. In this regard, the importance of these rural fieldwork opportunities cannot be overstated. Instead, these efforts have a direct connection to developing a viable and enduring rural education workforce.

Initiative One—Short Term Exposure to Stimulate Interest

Beginning in the Fall of 2016, the University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS) initiated their first rural "field trips" for PSTs interested in learning about rural schools and exploring career opportunities in rural locations. This initiative culminated in a series of five visits by PSTs to rural school districts within 40 miles (65 kilometers) of the university. In most cases, participation was limited to 14 PSTs per trip, based on transportation availability. In total, 52 individual students participated on these trips, with 24 individuals participating in more than one visit. The objective of these visits was to provide

PSTs a glimpse of rural teaching and rural schools, while providing selected school districts an opportunity to feature their district as a potential place of future employment.

Upon arrival at the rural location, PSTs were provided an overview of the school and school district by the building leadership, and were afforded the opportunity to ask questions of these leaders on a range of topics that frequently included queries about school structure, student outcomes, and the role of standardized assessments. Following this initial briefing, PSTs were divided into pairs to observe teachers within their specific classrooms for a period of 30-40 minutes, followed by a second observation in another classroom for an additional 30-40 minutes. At the conclusion of the second observation, the PSTs again gathered in a central location to answer any remaining questions by the school/district leader before returning to the university campus. With travel, these visits lasted approximately four hours and allowed the PSTs to obtain an initial understanding of rural teaching and learning in contrast to the more familiar suburban and urban school locations.

Feedback regarding these short-term experiences was largely positive as PSTs noted their new understanding of the benefits of smaller class sizes and opportunities related to teaching in combined grade levels and/or across academic disciplines. Administrators from the rural schools appreciated the opportunity to address PSTs about potential practicum placements and anticipated teacher vacancies. Several PSTs also commented that they became aware of their disinterest in teaching in rural environments, partially due to the limited social opportunities offered in some smaller communities.

While the full impact of these visits has yet to be realized, as many of the students have not yet completed their teacher preparation program, there is evidence from these initial exposures that some PSTs have become interested in pursuing potential practicum placements and potential career options in rural schools. Several PSTs have indicated that they are interested in completing their student teaching practicum within a rural school, a process that has required a new examination of PST field support in remote locations. This is a departure from the established practice of placing students in schools and districts that have historically been easily accessible to university faculty and supervisory personnel. With the expansion of the geographic distribution of PSTs, university field placement

coordinators have been required to locate supervisors within the rural schools and rural communities, and examine feedback mechanisms to support student development during their practicum experience.

At present, the State of Colorado provides stipends up to \$4000 (USD) to 40 PSTs who complete their summative practicum experience in a rural area. These stipends were designed to increase the number of PSTs completing their practicum experiences in rural districts, with the hope that these candidates will take on teaching roles at their practicum location upon graduation. In order for students to qualify for these statewide competitive stipends, the university was required to develop a coordinated effort to arrange the placement of PSTs in rural regions and document this placement much earlier than in the past. The need for the university to continue to provide resources for rural practicum placements will likely increase in the future with ongoing state initiatives to expand the number of stipends available and increase the funding amount for qualified, individual PSTs.

In 2019, eight individuals who previously participated in these short-term rural visits were involved in the institution's initial longer-term, immersion initiative that provided PSTs rural school and rural community experiences over a two-week span. This new initiative involves university students who expressed interest in rural teaching through the initial half-day rural visits and placed them in a rural setting and school for approximately two weeks. This inaugural immersion experience replicated the efforts by Notre Dame University of Australia (see Initiative Three below) and represented the institution's first practicum experiences in the state's most rural regions. The effectiveness of this second step in rural exposure for UCCS PSTs has yet to be determined due to its recency, but it is anticipated that these two progressive efforts will contribute in the development of a more robust pipeline of rural educators.

Initiative Two—Rural Intensive Practicum Experiences

Montana State University offers PSTs options for their field work hours in schools: regular field placement in a local school (up to 50 miles/80 kilometers from the university) and/or a rural field placement in a remote rural school (270-400 miles/430-650 kilometers). PSTs involved in a unique rural intensive practicum commit to a one-week assignment in a participating host school: resulting in a four-day or a five-day teaching week as determined by local school calendars. During this

Table 1
Rural Intensive Practicum Experience (RIPE): Cohort Comparison

	Spring 2017 Cohort 1	Spring 2018 Cohort 2a	Spring 2018 Cohort 2b	Spring 2019 Cohort 3
Participants	13 Secondary 7 Female, 6 Male	5 Secondary 3 Female, 2 Male	9 Elementary 5 Female, 4 Male	4 Elementary, 9 Secondary 10 Female, 3 Male
Format	Practicum, Rural Intensive; exclusive to rural participants	Practicum, Rural Intensive; Participants embedded within secondary practicum course; specific small group	Practicum, Rural Intensive; Participants embedded within elementary practicum II course; specific small group	Practicum, Rural Intensive; Participants embedded within existing secondary & elementary II course; specific small group
Rural Placement Requirements	Formal Observation; Teach 3 Lessons TWS; Daily Reflections; Evening Debrief; Community Events; On-Site Field Supervisor	Formal Observation; Teach 3 Lessons TWS; Daily Reflections; Evening Debrief; Community Events; On-Site Field Supervisor	Formal Observation; Teach 3 Lessons TWS; Daily Reflections; Community Events; On-Site Field Supervisor	Informal Observation; Teach Lessons by Request; Daily Reflections; University Night; Community Event; On-Site Field Supervisor
Experience Timing and Length	Rural Intensive: 9 Days; Spring/Summer Sessions	Rural Intensive: 6 Days; Spring/Spring Break	Rural Intensive: 6 Days; Spring/Spring Break	Rural Intensive: 6 Days Rural; 5 Weeks Local Spring/Spring Break
# of school districts	7	3	4	2

time, PSTs experience the full school day leading classroom instruction, attending meetings, and participating in other teacher-related duties. Nightly, PSTs reflect on their experiences through both a facilitated group discussion and individual journal assignments. Finally, PSTs undergo a full observation cycle (pre-conference, observation, post-conference) with their field supervisor on one of their lessons during the week.

To date, the teacher education program (TEP) has facilitated three cohorts of the rural intensive experience for its PSTs (Table 1).

As a way to study cohorts over time, researchers asked PSTs for photographs “that capture how you experience the practicum school, curriculum, community, and your own feelings, tensions, and relationships.” PSTs’ photographs were coupled with three short response journal entries – before, during, and after their intensive experiences. In addition, PSTs participated in a researcher-led debriefing—an experience of photo elicitation (Collier, 1986)—where they shared photos within their cohorts. The focus on an autophotographic influence (Thomas,

2009) supplements data with PST voices and vision—integral voices in understanding these rural intensive experiences.



Figure 1. *PST Preparing Upcoming Instruction in Rural Classroom*

Findings indicate that the rural intensive practicum allowed PSTs to observe rural teacher identity in action and provided them opportunities to assume a rural teacher identity for a brief time. Key to this identity were the intersections between teaching, academics, and community. Several photos were comprised of individual or group selfies which show the PSTs in their newly donned professional persona. Figure 1 portrays a PST planning and preparing for an upcoming lesson within her rural classroom setting. Collectively, this group of photos consistently conveyed clear, positive expressions of PSTs having the opportunity to “do” teaching in a rural location.

PSTs also used photos to display their curiosities about how teachers used their classroom spaces. Figure 2 foregrounds how one rural teacher used her classroom space as a way to visibly recognize classroom and community involvement for her and for her students. On the “Wall of Fame,” the teacher displays connections between students and their teams (e.g. tennis) as well as their appearances in newspaper articles and other community moments. The “Power of Yet” wall is filled with motivational quotes and texts read by classes of students in this room; it is also bordered, on the top, with masks the students created.

This focus on classroom accomplishments, community connections, and future successes serve as a reminder to students of what they achieve together, through their community involvement(s), curriculum, and school work. Together, community and school successes are shared. Given the small number of students, and close interactions of most rural communities, rural teachers often have more opportunities to interact with and celebrate students over time.

Relatedly, PSTs spoke about the pride they felt while in their designated rural schools and



Figure 2. Recognition of Classroom & Community Involvement



Figure 3. Artifacts of Pride in a School Hallway

photographed images of mascots, trophy cases, district-mission statements, celebratory posters, common spaces, locker decorations, and walls lined with pictures/names of graduates (Figure 3).

PSTs also documented the existence of compelling civic pride through rural community photographs across a wide range of subjects: community museums, restaurants/bars, farm houses/silos, transportation systems, trucks/farm equipment, churches, storefronts, and a city hall. The images selected by the PSTs suggest that it was not the newness of these places that made them important to the community, but rather their longevity across time and circumstances. From what appears to be a weathered foundation of a home (Figure 4), to pictures of highways, to downtowns, to a plaque indicating the centennial year, PSTs demonstrated interest in how age represented rurality.



Figure 4. Weathered Farm Site Near Practicum Location



Figure 5. A Highway Outside of a Host Community

Physical environment photographs also played a significant role in the framing of rurality for PSTs. Extreme weather and the vastness of landscapes in both Northern and Northeastern Montana had an influence on PSTs' interpretations of rurality. Figure 5 portrays a United States highway that is seemingly engulfed by the vast blue horizon. Images of weather assisted in conveying emotion in regard to the rural setting, appearing to have a certain element of severity, which may, or may not, have corresponded to what PSTs were used to back "home." Taken together, PSTs' photos seemed to reveal how age, physical environment, and weather become integral components in the development of a rural teacher identity and as such, become a factor in the PSTs' consideration of teaching in a rural school/community.

Through autophotography, researchers have learned how PSTs' images offer insight into their teaching experiences within particular, rural spaces, and do so in a way that allows for considerations of teacher identity. The rootedness of rural teachers is embodied in the history of the school, whose identity lives within the community even as teachers and administrators come and go. These intersecting identities were perceived by PSTs in their short time in the rural communities and serve to widen their understanding of teacher identity—a concept that is generally formed by more traditional images and descriptions of suburban or urban schooling. These photos help bring rurality into pedagogical

conversations back on the university campus in a way that disrupts dominant narratives about rural schools and places.

In response to PST feedback and longitudinal research, MSU has made a course requirement modification, and the intensive experience has evolved into a more community-centered model for future rural experiences. PSTs will no longer complete prescribed university curriculum during the rural intensive, but are now encouraged to participate in activities, including the facilitation of a "university experiences are shifting conversations about rural education at Montana State University to include rural voices and PSTs' experiences in decision making.

As of 2019, nine of the seventeen students who participated in the rural intensive experiences requested student teaching placements in rural schools and/or are taking jobs in rural districts. Conversation is also occurring in a positive, curious manner among PSTs, professors, rural administrators, teachers, students and other rural stakeholders in Montana about the university's ability to sustain the interaction and engagement of these mutually beneficial partnerships beyond the intensive PST experience.

Researchers recognize that rural intensives do not direct all PSTs to rural teaching positions, nor are the intensives intended to create a message that rural schools are immune to problems impacting public education in Montana. Yet, the positive messaging about the intensives is dominating campus conversations about rural education and rural communities. By making a rural placement a priority choice for student teaching, PSTs are changing the narrative on campus about the desirability of teaching and residing in rural schools and communities.

Initiative Three—Remote Immersive Experiences

While the number of students entering initial teacher education programs in Western Australia continues to grow, schools in the regional, rural, and remote (RRR) areas of the state remain some of the hardest to staff (Halsey, 2018; Commonwealth of Australia, 2013). Exact data on the numbers and areas of staff shortages in Western Australia's RRR schools is difficult to determine, however it is evident that in Western Australia, as in other Australian states and around the globe, there is a notable shortage of teachers prepared to work in RRR schools (Halsey, 2018).

In 2017, the Australian Government commissioned a review of RRR education to examine the key issues, challenges and barriers that impact the learning outcomes of rural students. A major focus of the review related to teacher attraction and retention in RRR areas. The subsequent report, titled the Independent Review into Rural, Regional and Remote Education (IRRRRE), identified several factors that have a major impact on RRR student learning outcomes. These include school leadership, curriculum choices, assessment practices, and most significantly, quality teaching (Halsey, 2018). The review goes on to recommend that initial teacher education providers ensure that RRR contexts, challenges and opportunities are explicitly included in the selection and pre-service education of teachers (Halsey, 2018). This recommendation has significance for initial teacher educators in addressing the question – how best to prepare teachers to undertake teaching roles in a diverse range of RRR settings?

The University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) advocates the use of workplace learning approaches in offering targeted initiatives designed to provide PSTs exposure to RRR teaching contexts. This has led to the development of an innovative service-learning immersion in a remote Aboriginal community.

The service-learning immersion program has been operating in partnership with Tjuntjuntjara Remote Community School since 2013. The Tjuntjuntjara community is located within the Great Victoria Desert approximately 1300 kilometers/800 miles east of Perth. Participants in the immersion experience travel to the community by four-wheel drive vehicle as approximately 700 kilometers/450 miles of the journey is on unpaved roads. The Tjuntjuntjara community has a population of approximately 160 people and is one of 274 remote

communities in Western Australia. Typically eight days in duration, the immersion program offers PSTs an opportunity to learn from the school staff and community members, contribute to the school and community, and in doing so, develop insight into what it means to teach in a remote Aboriginal school.

Since 2013, 55 PSTs have completed the service-learning immersion experience in Tjuntjuntjara. Preparation for the immersion begins with planned orientation sessions conducted by UNDA faculty to familiarize the PSTs with the specific historical, social and cultural contexts of the Tjuntjuntjara community. Participants are required to consider the unique language, history and cultural protocols of the community, and in doing so they deepen their understanding of the Tjuntjuntjara people. Through directed reflection, they also gain an appreciation of the unique social and cultural dimensions of the community. The number of PSTs who can participate in the immersion project each year is restricted due to the small nature of the community. For supervisory support, four UNDA faculty accompany the PST during the immersion experience. Table 2 provides an overview of the number of PSTs who have completed the course.

There are three elements to the service-learning immersion program. The initial element requires PSTs to work with children in a classroom setting, either one-to-one or in small groups, with an emphasis on supporting students' literacy and numeracy learning. The second element of the program entails PSTs undertaking service activities within the school or community. Past service activities have included painting classrooms, landscaping, minor building projects, school maintenance and community maintenance. The third element of the immersion focuses on building the PSTs cultural awareness through activities such

Table 2:
Immersion participants 2013 – 2018

Year	Early Childhood	Primary	Secondary	Total
2013	-	6	-	6
2014	2	8	1	11
2015	-	7	3	10
2016	2	5	1	8
2017	-	12	-	12
2018	1	6	1	8
Total	5	44	6	55

as visiting the Women's Centre within the community, finding and cooking traditional foods with the aid of local community members, learning to buy and prepare a meal with a restricted 'remote' budget, and camping out in the desert over a number of nights.

The service-learning immersion program has been developed to augment other fieldwork experiences; however, this experience differs from other fieldwork opportunities as PSTs are guided using a service-learning foundation to learn the intended attitudes and skills using four of five interdependent stages associated with implementing a service-learning program. These include preparation, action, reflection, and demonstration (Kaye, 2014). The inclusion of service-learning opportunities are intentional, as faculty seek to help PSTs understand the links between rural communities and the rural school at a significantly deep level. During the immersion experience, students are required to write reflections within provided journals to document both their learning and their perspectives on rural schools and rural education.

The key findings of this research highlight how service-learning immersion has promoted pre-service teachers' development of cultural competence in the area of Aboriginal education. Based on feedback from the participating PSTs and on longitudinal research (Lavery, Cain & Hampton, 2014), student competency has been enhanced regarding the themes of: appreciation of the remoteness of the school and community, classroom experiences, Aboriginal culture, importance of relationships, and implications for future teaching.

The Tjuntjuntjara Rural Community School is quite small with only 35 enrolled students (primary and secondary), and two teachers, two staff members and one principal. The small size of the school and the community has presented some challenges related to immersion logistics, but these issues are largely overcome by the students involved in the immersion experience themselves. For example, the community does not have a boarding house or any other accommodations for students involved in this experience, so the students establish sleeping spaces in the library of the school. As grocery stores and restaurants are not available, the students utilize the school and the school kitchen to make and consume meals. The need to utilize available resources within the community has become a hallmark of the program, and a unique learning opportunity for those

students that may not be familiar with living in remote locations.

While the structure of this immersion experience is not unique, it does provide some significant learning opportunities for the students traveling to Tjuntjuntjara. For many students, this is their first opportunity to visit and be involved with Aboriginal peoples within an Aboriginal community. While selected students may have worked and learned alongside Aboriginal students during their time at university, the experience of becoming immersed in a remote Aboriginal community was largely unknown to the students. It is this type of learning opportunity that not only signifies the importance of this immersion experience, but also will help form more inclusive teaching methods for students that choose not to teach in rural locations. In this manner, the immersive experience supports education in Australia in a comprehensive nature.

For the students and community members of Tjuntjuntjara, this immersion experience has also been largely beneficial. Not only are students in the school exposed to innovative and newly-developed teaching approached by the PSTs, but they benefit from the intangible properties possessed by these PSTs, such as increased enthusiasm for teaching and learning and new voices to provide unique avenues for student learning. The community itself has also embraced this project as they recognize the benefits for having these young PSTs in their community and supporting student learning and numerous service-learning projects that directly impact the town. School administration continues to be supportive of the program, as has UNDA as the need for strong rural teachers in Australia continues to be a concern at the territorial and national levels.

It is both hoped and anticipated that this immersion experience will continue as the learning opportunities for all stakeholders in the project are significant. For students who have completed this fieldwork, they frequently cite this learning opportunity as a formative experience that continues to impact their teaching and their lives well after they have returned to campus and the urban/suburban areas of Australia. The importance of providing students the opportunity to teach and live in small, rural areas is critical, particularly as we expect rural students to achieve at levels that match or surpass their urban/suburban peers. This immersion project is a critical first step in meeting these high levels of expectations.

Limitations

This review of three specific initiatives related to PST exposure and involvement in rural schools is subject to significant limitations. Definitive conclusions about the long-term effectiveness of these programs, for example, are difficult to ascertain due to the recency of their application and lack of definitive analysis centering on experienced alumni. Further, these initiatives span three unique geographical locations and exist within different, if similar, K-12 school environments. Despite these limitations, however, the opportunity for international comparative analysis regarding three approaches to rural education exposure is beneficial.

Discussion/Summary

Building awareness for future educators about the possibilities of teaching and living in rural communities continues to be a challenge for many colleges and universities throughout the world. Not only is finding and coordinating experiences labor intensive, but it can also come at a sizeable cost when including expenses such as transportation, meals, and accommodation. Despite these challenges; however, there is a substantial benefit for the entire education community in exposing PSTs to rural environments. The exposures are not only critically important to determine which individuals would make an effective rural teacher, but also to filter out those individuals who may not excel at teaching in a rural environment. In all three of the documented field experience processes, university staff and faculty are able to help identify potential rural teachers based on their rural field experiences. As such, these exposures also promote interactions with and explorations of a rural teacher identity, a way of being and approaching rural teaching that PSTs can draw upon in developing their own emerging identity as a rural teacher.

Given the privileging of suburban and urban voices in most all aspects of teacher education, intentional experiences in rural education work to diminish existing deficit views related to rural teaching, learning, and community life in emergent teacher populations. Rural teachers, administrators, and community members acquire the opportunity to tell their own stories, and PSTs gain the opportunity to experience rural education and communities first-

hand, thus providing a stronger representation for everyone. These experiences also carve out a professional space that cultivates a shared experience and professional relationship between the instructor, field supervisor, and pre-service teachers.

The three options described above also represent a progressive approach to providing rural field experience for PSTs. At UCCS, students are given a glimpse of rural teaching through half-day trips to local rural areas, while at MSU students are provided an opportunity for a more in-depth experience that allowed for significant student reflection and autophotography. Finally, a true immersion experience is provided in Australia through UNDA that allows PSTs to obtain deep knowledge about rural teaching, rural schools, and the interconnection between schools and the local community. In all these experiences, most students are introduced to environments and situations to which they previously had little or no exposure before their travels into the rural communities.

Moving forward, each institution plans on continuing these rural fieldwork experiences, with significant modification based on past success and interaction across national borders. For example, students at UCCS recently participated in the institution's initial rural immersion experience - an initiative that was introduced and refined by collaboration with faculty from UNDA. By expanding the rural fieldwork opportunities to include short-term, introspective, and immersive experiences, it is anticipated that the number of PSTs assuming teaching positions in remote and rural locations will increase. In addition, stronger collaborative partnerships between the institution of higher education and rural schools will be developed. Enhanced rural school-university partnerships can and should be developed for the benefit of the rural students themselves. Despite the logistical and financial obstacles involved with providing these opportunities, these experiences are essential in ensuring that a consistent and well-qualified teaching force is established and maintained in our rural schools. Finally, we hope that through our continued research efforts in each of our programs we will be able to investigate whether PST participation in these various rural practicums work to increase rural teacher placement and reduce teacher turnover in rural schools.

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