DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT: PRESERVICE TEACHERS DRAWING UPON RURACITY TO TEACH GLOBAL ISSUES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

This article examines curriculum decisions that resulted from the professional judgment of 13 preservice secondary social studies teachers from rural communities who wanted to return to rural communities and teach. Data from this case study suggests that these preservice social studies teachers developed professional judgment distinctly based upon their experiences in rural schools and their desire to teach in rural schools. Their professional judgment was best articulated in their development and implementation of global issues lesson plans. The findings demonstrate how preservice social studies teachers developed and implemented curriculum on global issues to connect local rural communities to the world. The preservice social studies teachers faced some challenges in implementing their global issue lessons in rural schools, despite using professional judgments based upon rural school experience. These challenges provided an opportunity for deeper reflection on their intentions to return to rural communities and teach. A discussion of the findings and implications for teacher education are provided.

In the United States, approximately one third of secondary schools are in rural settings, and over 20% of students are educated in rural community schools (Demi et al., 2010). Like many schools in the United States, rural schools are currently facing significant challenges regarding staffing and retention, funding, curriculum, and students’ socio-economic circumstances (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Barrett et al., 2015; Barley, 2009; Eppley, 2009). Despite these challenges, many preservice teachers from rural communities want to return to rural schools to teach. While these preservice teachers are motivated to return to the rural community context for a variety of personal reasons, as Burton and Johnson (2010) noted, we know very little about teachers with intentions to teach in rural contexts, and know even less about how their understanding of rurality shapes their curriculum decisions in the classroom (Azano & Stewart, 2015). This article examines 13 preservice social studies teachers’ (PSSTs) curricular decisions in their clinical experience classrooms, the professional judgment (Hess & McAvoy, 2015) they used to consider the rural context, and their aims to teach global issues.

In this study, the PSST’s professional judgment and the resulting curricular decisions, were rooted in their rurality and rural experiences. All 13 PSSTs came from rural communities and schools that have both similar and dissimilar characteristics of rurality (e.g. primary employment in most rural communities is agriculture, whereas in some it was manufacturing). The concept of rurality often represents generalizations about rural contexts and is frequently used to create generalizations to make rural contexts easy to juxtapose against urban contexts. When attempts are made to deconstruct these concepts, the conceptual strength of rurality “dissipates into the nooks and crevices of particular locations, economic processes, and social identities” (Cloke, 2006, p. 18). For this study, I use the term rurality to recognize the diversity among rural communities and schools as well as the common challenges and possibilities of rural contexts.

PSSTs come to teacher education with beliefs, values, and attitudes that contribute to their aims for teaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). For teachers from rural communities, their rurality and understanding of the rural context contributes to these aims. However, these aims often shift and take on new priorities as
teachers move through their teacher education program, and this can challenge preservice teachers' rurality as they shift and reprioritize their aims (Azano & Stewart, 2015). While there is not a coherent body of literature specifically focused on teacher aims, numerous scholars have recently argued for preservice teachers' purposes for teaching to be of primary concern in teacher education programs (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hammerness, 2006; Hawley, 2010; Kosnik & Beck, 2009).

Teaching aims and purposes are closely related, as Hess and McAvoy (2015) note, with aims representing a set of purposes and values that guide one's teaching (p. 74). Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) described the importance of preservice teachers' purposes and noted that they “should have a conception about what is important to study in the content areas they teach based on social needs and expectations, learning standards, and research about the kinds of understandings that are necessary for further learning” (p. 185). Furthermore, teachers should understand their sociocultural context and "be able to define and defend the goals they select to their students, parents, colleagues, administrators, and themselves" (p. 185). For PSSTs from rural communities, their rurality provides evidence for their teaching aims, and provides a framework for engaging with new experiences and evidence in teacher education that shifts and reprioritizes their aims. The 13 PSSTs in this study developed aims for teaching in relation to their own rural education and their desire to return to a rural school to teach.

**Conceptual Lenses and Related Literature**

This article will use three conceptual lenses to frame the findings of this study: rurality, the local/global awareness brought about by globalization, and professional judgment. As discussed above, rurality is a complex concept that is often generalized into a narrow conception used to represent a multitude of contexts, cultures, and places (Cloke, 2006). Rurality is complex because it encompasses the cultural, economic, geographical, political, and social aspects of rural communities. For this study, I use rurality to recognize the agency, distinctiveness, and vitality of rural communities, which is lost in deficit conceptualizations that most often characterize rural communities (Molestone, 2012). In this way, I think rural schools and teachers should be enabled to develop approaches that acknowledge the complex dynamics and cultural distinctiveness of rural contexts (Gruenewald, 2003) and shift away from deficit conceptualizations of rurality. This is supported by recent research, which reconceptualizes rurality and rural education as a lived and generative concept (Azano & Stewart, 2016; Balfour et al., 2008) that characterizes the challenges and unique needs of rural learners.

Thinking about rural contexts through the lens of rurality aligns well with the purposes of social studies teacher education that focus on diversity, multiculturalism, inclusion, and culturally relevant teaching (Castro, 2013; Ho, 2010; Martell, 2013; Schmidt, 2010). The limited literature on social studies teaching in rural schools demonstrates that there are unique opportunities for learning (Howley et al., 2013; Kissling & Rogers, 2014; Martin & Chiodo, 2007; Teegarden et al., 2013), rural social studies teachers have unique opportunities and challenges (Bostic et al., 2014; Burton et al., 2013; Fry, 2009; Pace, 2008; Washington & Humphries, 2011), and rural PSSTs' purposes and thinking are influenced by the rural context (Hawley & Crowe, 2016; Lanahan & Yeager, 2008; Martin et al., 2013; Wright & Wilson, 2009). Several scholars have recently noted the distinct opportunities in rural contexts to make connections to global citizenship and issues through social studies curriculum (Cuervo, 2015; Rapoport, 2010; Waterson & Moffa, 2015), while others have noted the generative possibilities of place-based and community-based social studies curriculum for making connections between rural and global communities (Blankenship et al., 2016; Myers 2010; Zong, 2015). The PSSTs in this study represent 13 diverse and unique rural communities that embody both the generative possibilities and challenges, as their communities are confronted with global influences that are shifting the local cultural, economic, political, and social character.

Several scholars have advocated for global education to play a significant role in K-12 education (Camicia & Zhu, 2012; Noddings, 2005), preservice teacher education (Hyttten & Bettez, 2008; Merryfield, 2000; Myers, 2010), and specifically in social studies curriculum (Gaudelli, 2014; Krutka & Carano, 2016; Johnson, 2015; Zong et al., 2008). Global economic, social, and political changes that represent trends in globalization are affecting the goals and purposes of education (Edmonson, 2003). Rural contexts and schools have experienced these changes as much as any other context (Edmonson, 2003), and could benefit from global education to understand these global influences (Gaudelli, 2014; Hanson, 2010; Rapoport, 2010). Global influences have reshaped the local-global interface, and subsequently the rurality of people and the places they live (Drainville, 2004; Edmonson, 2003). These global influences have only added to the complexity of rural communities. As Schafft and Jackson (2008) note, “the face of rural communities has been radically transformed by the economic effects of multinational free trade agreements, the proliferation of mass media and information technology, and
educational reforms such as No Child Left Behind” (p. 2). These global influences create opportunities and challenges for rural people, schools, and communities. Rural schools have historically played an important role in rural communities, providing stability in local identity, as well as social and cultural traditions. Rural schools are challenged to dually prioritize their historical role and address the national agenda shifts related to globalization—particularly in culture, education, economics, and technology (Crump & Twyford, 2010). Edmondson (2003) argued that globalization, and the subsequent shifts economically, have created unequal educational opportunities for students in many rural schools. This is a challenge that PSSTs from rural communities must confront upon returning to rural schools. Therefore, global education is needed to create a culturally literate and globally competent citizenry who can analyze and understand these global influences in their community (Gibson, 2010; Zong, 2015). PSSTs from rural communities should be at the forefront in developing global education curriculum to bridge local-global connections in their classrooms (Maguth, 2014). If PSSTs learn about global education in teacher education, they are well positioned to create meaningful lessons connecting their rural experiences to the global community.

PSSTs’ rurality and their sense of the shifting local-global interface contribute to developing professional judgment in making their curriculum decisions. The PSSTs in this study exercised professional judgment in developing and teaching lesson plans on current issues, similar to the teachers in Hess and McAvoy’s (2015) book. Hess and McAvoy (2015) described professional judgment as teachers’ decisions about their practices that take into consideration their options based on context, evidence, and aims. In other words, there are no rules of good judgment or good teaching, but instead necessary considerations in order to make well-reasoned and effective judgments, which ultimately lead to curricular decisions and/or gatekeeping (Thornton, 2005). Hess and McAvoy (2015) related their conception of good judgment to Dewey’s theories on reasoning about practice and decision-making, citing the “relationship between empirical theory (evidence), the constraints and affordances available in particular environments (context), and values (aims)” (p. 12). The PSSTs all used context, evidence, and aims related to rural educational settings to exercise decisions about their practice.

For the PSSTs in this study, context represents the “relevant characteristics of the classroom, school, and larger community” (Hess & McAvoy, 2015, p. 12) that can influence their curriculum decisions. These characteristics will be different for all teachers, even for teachers within the same school. The PSSTs were not assigned to specific classrooms yet, but all referenced the rural context of the secondary schools they attended as well as the field placement classrooms in which they taught. Several scholars have noted the significant role of context in teaching issues-based curriculum (Clark, 2016; Barton & McCully, 2007; Ho et al., 2014; Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2015; King, 2009; Misco, 2014; Misco & Patterson, 2007; Misco & Lee, 2014), especially in rural settings (Swalwell & Schweber, 2016; Washington & Humphries, 2011). These studies demonstrate that context has a significant role in how teachers decide which issues to teach, how they teach issues in their classroom, and how they disclose about or engage with the more controversial issues in the presence of their students. The PSSTs brought their understanding of a rural context to their teacher education program and used that context similarly to make curriculum decisions about using global issues in their future classroom.

Aims for the PSSTs were woven throughout their decision-making process. PSSTs rely heavily on their culture, experiences, and own knowledge (Baumi, 2016; Blevins & Salinas, 2012; Pitkäniemi, 2010; Salinas & Castro, 2010) to choose and align with educational aims and purposes. The PSSTs’ aims also prioritize the educational outcomes and skills they want their students to attain (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Certain aims were prioritized in certain contexts based on the values of the community and purposes of the school and teacher. Several studies have even highlighted how a teacher’s aims can prioritize their decision to use issues-based curriculum in the classroom (Castro, 2014; Hawley, 2010), which demonstrates the key role of aims in professional judgment.

The PSSTs also considered several types of evidence to make their curriculum decisions (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Meeuwissen & Berger, 2016). The PSSTs were similar to those in other studies, and thought that teaching global issues was important based on their own experiences with global issues (Clark & Camicia, 2014; Colley, 2017). PSSTs also used their experiences and perceptions from rural contexts. Similar to other PSSTs, they wanted to teach in certain ways because views in their community were narrow and based on limited evidence (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Todd & Angello, 2006). Lastly, PSSTs learned about the benefits of teaching and discussing global issues in their teacher education courses (Washington & Humphries, 2011). Specifically, for these PSSTs, they learned about teaching global or controversial issues in at least one social science course and two teacher education courses. The issue discussions in these courses evidently resonated with these PSSTs, and provided further evidence to support their teaching in rural contexts.
Professional judgment continues to develop as a teacher moves through their career, yet it becomes distinct in teacher education as they think and make decisions based on the contexts they have experienced and want to teach in, the evidence gained from their experiences, and the aims they value and prioritize in teacher education.

Methods and Data

This study used a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2009) and focused on PSSTs' experiences in a secondary teaching methodology course. Hatch (2002) described that qualitative research focuses on understanding the meanings individuals construct in order to participate in their social lives. Broadly, this study focused on the meanings that PSSTs construct in developing their purposes for teaching, and initially examined all PSSTs in the course, not just those who wanted to teach in rural schools. The research questions for this study, and specifically the students who wanted to teach in rural schools, asked:

1. How do experiences in rural educational contexts prior to teacher education contribute to the development of preservice social studies teachers' aims and purposes for teaching?

2. How do experiences in teacher education influence preservice social studies teachers' rural educational aims and professional judgments about their curriculum and teaching?

Middle States University (MSU) (pseudonym), a public research university in the Midwestern region of the United States, was the site of the methods course and study. This study examined data from two courses, and it was the same course in two separate semesters. The students were part of the main secondary teacher education program at MSU, which represented the most common path to secondary teaching. Therefore, the sample was purposeful, but also convenient because I was the instructor of the methods course. I primarily chose the participants for the study due to their representation of the average PSST associated with the study's focus, and I chose the participants for this article because of their rural experience and desire to return to rural settings. There were 42 undergraduate participants (out of 56 possible participants) who provided informed consent to take part in the study (see Table 1). Seventeen of these participants identified themselves as coming from rural communities, and 13 of these participants identified that they wanted to return to a rural setting to teach. I chose these 13 participants because of their rural experience and desire to return to rural contexts. Of these 13 participants, there were five students in one semester course and eight students in the next semester course, and six female participants and seven male participants (see Table 2). All participants names are pseudonyms, and are anonymous.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Total Participant Demographics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants were all White and from Indiana where MSU is located. Nine of the 13 participants were born in and went to school in rural contexts, while four participants completed secondary schooling as well as a majority of their schooling in rural schools. The participants were part of two separate cohorts and had been in teacher education courses with their respective cohort for three semesters at the conclusion of my course. The course referred to in this study represented their second and final methods course before entering their student teaching experience, situated in Block III of their teacher education program (see Table 3). This methods course focused specifically on the “how to” of social studies curriculum development, whereas the Block II methods course focused on what is social studies, and why we teach social studies.

For both methods courses, the PSSTs learned about a wide range of social studies topics, including global education. The participants had discussed global education in some of their social science courses, and in both of their methods courses. For example, in Block II they read the work of Banks (2008) on citizenship in the global age and also discussed global education in their content literacy course. In the Block III course, they read Merryfield and Subedi (2003) to provide a framework for thinking about global education, as well as Merryfield and Kasai (2009) to reflect on the ways teachers address the challenges of globalization. Additionally, in Block III,
PSSTs also had their second clinical experience in a secondary social studies classroom. This experience was one day a week for 10 weeks, roughly 60 hours. Along with a variety of other assignments specific to the clinical experience, the PSSTs were required to teach at least two lessons in their clinical experience classroom. Thus, the students were well prepared to identify their purpose for teaching and had the impetus to think seriously about future curricular-instructional decisions.

Table 2: Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Reason for teaching social studies (as part of purpose statement)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>His love of learning and the application of history to regular everyday life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Positive impact of past teachers and importance of social studies curriculum for diversity and tolerance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Impact of teachers on his life and his passion for history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Impact of junior high history teacher and positive impact of teachers beyond the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perry</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Positive impact of teachers in high school and relevance of social studies for democratic responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>To help students be successful and be a role model in the school and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sasha</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>First member of family to attend college and wants to give back to community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Wants to develop student skills to help them be successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Hopes to help bridge the political divide through better civic education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Parents were teachers and wants to contribute to community in similar ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>To engage students in history and help them understanding the choices of past people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Wants to be community leader and strengthen community through teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Negative and positive impact of former teachers and the role of teachers in the community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Social Studies-Related Teacher Education Course Sequence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block II</th>
<th>Block III</th>
<th>Block IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundations of Social Studies Teaching</td>
<td>Secondary Social Studies Teaching Methods</td>
<td>Student Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies Clinical Experience I</td>
<td>Social Studies Clinical Experience II</td>
<td>Student Teaching Seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies Content Literacy</td>
<td>Secondary Classroom management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper-Level Disciplinary Electives</td>
<td>Upper-Level Disciplinary Electives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Data collection took place over two semesters (fall and spring), and all data were collected within the context of the secondary methods courses and the associated clinical field experiences in each semester. There were five main sources of data including a purpose statement for teaching, student-developed lesson plans and related reflections, in-class activities, reflection on teaching a lesson in their field experience, and individual semi-structured interviews. Purpose statements were composed during the second week of the methods course. The participants developed lesson plans that utilized strategies discussed in the course, such as concept formation, deliberation, resources (primary documents, historical fiction, technology, movies, music, graphic novels), and inquiry. The in-class activities included a variety of elicitation methods focused on the topics of the course and curriculum development decision-making. Each student taught at least two lessons in their field experience, used a lesson they developed for the methods course, and reflected upon it. Lastly, I interviewed each participant...
individually at the end of the semester using a semi-structured interview protocol. Each interview was audio-recorded and ranged from 30-60 minutes in length.

Data Analysis

Constant comparative method was used as the qualitative data analysis procedure (Glaser & Straus, 1967), which allowed me to compare the various data sources collected and identify related themes across the data sources. I analyzed the data of each participant in four distinct stages.

First, I began by analyzing the participants’ statements of purpose for teaching and identified initial codes that would be used to narrow the group of participants, from 42 to 13, based upon their common purposes for teaching. As mentioned above, these codes included rural schools and global issues. Sixteen of the 17 PSSTs that were from rural communities noted in their purpose statement that they would like to teach in a rural community; however, only 13 noted they wanted to give back to, enhance, or change their rural community. There was also a direct correlation to these 13 PSSTs because they all developed a lesson on a global issue and taught the lesson in their field experience classroom. While the students had discussed teaching global issues and methods of discussing or deliberating the issues in my course and two other courses, there was no requirement or incentive to create an issue-based lesson plan. The students could choose to use any method that we discussed in class to create their lesson plans in clinical field experience. Other common codes across the 13 students’ data included student-centered learning, community/community values as curriculum, teacher involvement in the community, and balancing traditional and progressive teaching methods.

Second, I used the codes established in the participants’ statements of purpose to analyze their lesson plans, lesson plan reflections, teaching reflections, and in-class activities. This demonstrated that the participants understood how to articulate their purpose for teaching in their curriculum development and thinking about curricular-instructional decisions. The findings presented here highlight the most explicit connection between the PSSTs’ purpose statement, their lesson development, and their teaching—the implementation of lessons on global issues.

Third, I analyzed the interviews as a means of triangulation to verify the participants’ statements of purpose and their thinking about curricular-instructional decisions, which confirmed the codes that were found across each participant’s data sources. The interviews focused on community, community values, and global issues curriculum.

Fourth, I re-examined the coded data and organized it in several different ways. Most recently, I organized the data based on Hess and McAvoy’s (2015) framework for professional judgment: context, evidence, and aims. For example, the PSSTs’ purpose statements provided a glimpse at the context in which they went to school and the context in which they wanted to teach; their lesson plans and rationale for those lesson plans demonstrate their aims for their teaching in their field experiences and their subsequent reflections on their teaching provide evidence for their curriculum decisions. The use of Hess and McAvoy’s framework helped me think about how to code the data and organize the findings into sections relative to the PSSTs’ thinking about their professional judgment, and specifically how their rural experiences and teacher education influenced it.

Findings

The PSSTs were from 13 different rural communities, and all chose to develop and teach lessons on global issues in their clinical experience. The PSSTs thought they needed to address the local-global binary in their communities and help students understand connections between their community and the world. Further, they demonstrated professional judgment in developing their global issue lesson plans. Their professional judgment revealed the challenges they faced in exercising their educational aims in a familiar context. These challenges were articulated in their teaching of global issues in the clinical field experience. When the PSSTs developed lessons, they were able to consider the rural context, prioritize their aims, and provide evidence to make professional judgments. This allowed them to reflect on the ways rural communities would enable and constrain their teaching of global issues.

Considering the Context: PSST’s Experiences in Rural School Settings

The PSSTs all talked positively of the rural schools they attended and their experiences; however, they also noted three predominate ways in which the context potentially shaped their judgment to use discussion and global issues in rural schools. First, all 13 of the PSSTs noted that they did not discuss global issues regularly in their own rural community high schools. They each wished they could have discussed global issues, or just been
able to engage in discussion more often. All the PSSTs placed some importance on the lack of opportunity to discuss issues in their own experiences in rural schools. The PSSTs’ rationales ranged from simply the desire to have experienced student-centered learning in courses, to the more complex desire to understand what makes an issue global in a democratic society.

Table 4: Findings in Relation to Professional Judgment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context: PSSTs’ experiences in rural schools</th>
<th>Aims: Rural aims shaped by teacher education</th>
<th>Evidence: Challenges to global issues curriculum as evidence to reflect for future action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not discuss global issues in their own rural schools</td>
<td>Students need to understand multiple perspectives</td>
<td>Students were not prepared for the process of discussion and deliberation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of global issues needed in preparation for post-secondary</td>
<td>Students need to understand multicultural perspectives</td>
<td>The use of multiple and multicultural perspectives were not reinforced by colleagues or community norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of global issues needed to be active members of community</td>
<td>Students need to understand national and global social and political movements</td>
<td>Cooperating teachers thought discussion and deliberation of global issues was only suitable for high ability students, not all students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Second, PSSTs were also concerned with their students’ academic achievement after leaving high school. Eleven of the 13 PSSTs noted that they would have been better prepared for their university coursework if their rural high school experiences had included more deliberation or discussion, and six specifically mentioned discussion of global issues. For example, Ryan recalled his feeling initially in college, “I knew about some international issues, but only from a kind of narrow view, so global perspectives and discussing big world issues were two big jumps for me as a student” (Interview). Based upon their own experiences, PSSTs wanted to use discussion of global issues in their future classroom because they thought that it would better prepare their students to actively participate in educational and social settings outside of their rural community.

Third, PSSTs were concerned about their future students as active members of their communities and society. Twelve of the PSSTs thought that they would have had a better understanding of politics and how to participate in society if they had discussed more public issues and/or global issues in their own high school courses. For example, Shaina wrote, “I would have cared more about issues in our community if I knew there were other perspectives out there, and ways of addressing the issue” (Purpose Statement). PSSTs’ experiences provided motivation to use global issues in their future classrooms because they had felt ill prepared, and that it was unnecessary, to participate in their own community and society as a result of their high school experiences. PSSTs wanted to use the global issue discussions as one way to better prepare their future students to be active members of their community, by understanding the local, global, and common perspectives on an issue.

Overall, the PSSTs thought their rural school contexts had constrained their ability to deliberate or discuss issues, especially issues of global relevance. Their experience in the rural context shaped their judgment in developing lessons on global issues.

Rural Aims Shaped by Teacher Education

Since the PSSTs were predominately from rural communities, they did not have the same misconceptions as Todd and Angello’s (2006) students, who thought that rural schools were disconnected from the national and global community. While the PSSTs did not hold this misconception, they still thought that it was important to emphasize a rural community’s connection to the larger national and global communities. The PSSTs thought that discussing nationally and globally relevant issues was an excellent way to help students understand two primary aims: Understanding multiple (7 PSSTs) and multicultural perspectives (9 PSSTs) and understanding national or global political or social movements (12 PSSTs). For example, Kim developed lessons that focused on social justice and multiple perspectives, and thought that an issue-based discussion was the most effective way for students to engage with multiple perspectives. Kim wanted her students to understand multiple perspectives because she believed it was a vital attribute of an active citizen in a democratic society. For Kim, it was important to connect the content to the nation and world, in order to expose her students to perspectives different from their own.
Kim knew from personal experience that sometimes there are only a limited number of perspectives represented in rural communities, especially in comparison to other contexts in the nation. For one lesson plan, Kim wanted to address immigration in the United States. To provide her students with multiple perspectives, she used the PBS series “The New Americans,” which followed five distinct groups of American immigrants (Ogoni-Nigerian refugees, a Palestinian bride and her family, Dominican baseball players, Mexican laborers, Indian technical workers). Kim’s issue-based issue lesson helped students expand their conceptual understanding of immigration with multiple perspectives and connected the issue to the broader democratic and global society.

Similar to Kim’s emphasis on multiple perspectives, nine PSSTs wanted to use global issues to engage their students in discussions about multicultural issues. These PSSTs thought that homogeneity and relational characteristics of many rural communities would limit their students’ opportunities to talk about multicultural issues. Furthermore, they thought that talking about multicultural issues would prepare their students for the university and connect them to larger debates in the nation. For example, Heather wanted her students to think about multicultural issues that were possibly not as prevalent in rural communities, but that were relevant on a national and global level. For example, Heather created a lesson plan on the topic, “Should rural communities be safe havens for refugees from countries where the U.S. military has operated?” In her reflection, Heather discussed the rationale behind her lesson, “I feel like talking about war in terms of refugees allows students to get away from the religious or power perspectives often used. This will help them to think more deeply about people that most students don’t have any experience with” (Lesson Plan Reflection). Heather, like many of her classmates, wanted her students to engage with global issues in order to think critically about multicultural issues and connect them to the rest of the nation.

Twelve PSSTs also wanted their students to be aware of larger national and global groups and movements associated with certain issues. They thought that if their students could understand the issues as part of a larger global concern it would be more impactful. Shaina noted this and wrote, “One of my purposes for teaching is for students to be informed of larger societal concerns with environmental issues in their community because it is for the betterment of society that they can discuss the details with others” (Shaina, In-class Activity). Shaina developed a lesson on the topic, “Should organophosphates be banned in agricultural fertilizers and pesticides?” Shaina taught the lesson in her field experience classroom and noted the students’ engagement, “I think they thought it was going to be another lesson on global warming, but I think this was more concrete and something that could be affecting them right now . . . [and] other people in the world” (Interview). Shaina wanted her students to connect the issues, environmental and otherwise, and compare them to similar issues that are affecting people in other parts of the nation and world. More importantly, she wanted to empower her students to think about ways of resolving these issues for the betterment of their democratic society through deliberation and discussion, in both their rural community and the world. Shaina wanted to challenge her rural students to care about issues that affect people outside of their own community relations, and to equally understand the primacy of similar issues in their community.

All of the PSSTs wanted to use global public issues to connect the values of rural communities to larger national and global discussions. The desire to make this connection was a major aim in their professional judgment and demonstrated how teacher education coursework had shaped their rural aims for teaching.

Using the Evidence: Reflecting on Action for Future Action

All of the PSSTs had the opportunity to teach at least two lesson plans in their clinical field experience classroom and they also all chose to complete clinical field experience hours in small schools within an hour of the university. While each of the PSSTs wanted to teach a global lesson in their clinical classroom, each PSST reported resistance from their cooperating teacher. The cooperating teachers were concerned about the possible controversy around the issues, not necessarily the global aspects of the lesson. Nine of the PSSTs mentioned that their cooperating teachers encouraged them to teach global education topics, and five mentioned that their cooperating teachers told them that they felt unqualified to teach global issues. Despite the resistance, the PSSTs were resilient and provided rationales for their lessons (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005), which resulted in 11 of the 13 PSSTs successfully teaching their global issue lesson plans in their clinical classrooms. In addition to the experiences in rural schools and teacher education courses, the ability to teach their lessons provided evidence for the PSSTs to consider and reflect upon the ways in which teaching about global issues could be enabled or constrained in a rural community. This opportunity to reflect on their teaching of global issues was important because it allowed the PSSTs to consider the viability of their professional judgment, which also revealed some
challenges for their aims in the context of rural schools. While the PSSTs thought that their global issue lesson plans were successful, they also noted several challenges for engaging rural students in global issues.

First, eight of the 11 PSSTs that taught their global issue lessons thought that the students were not prepared to engage in deliberation or discussion. Each PSST noted ways in which the curriculum, social context, or cooperating teachers constrained the students’ ability to construct well-reasoned responses during a deliberation. For example, Jim taught a lesson on the building of an Islamic Cultural Center in New York City. He noted two aspects that could have improved the lesson:

My [cooperating] teacher doesn't use discussion much in her classroom. . . . The students didn't seem comfortable enough or didn't know how to engage with each other to share their views in-depth. I think I related to this, the students also struggled to add their own perspectives to the arguments and points supplied in the reading. (Field Experience Lesson Reflection)

Jim and the PSSTs realized, through their clinical field experience, the degree to which deliberation and discussion was a skill. They fully realized that deliberation wasn’t just a method for teaching, but a mode of interaction that was not commonly used in schools. The PSSTs realized that the challenge was not necessarily embedded in the background knowledge of the issue, but instead the challenge was how to teach students new ways to interact with new knowledge. I even asked Jim in his interview if the religious nature of Islam was part of the problem for students, and he replied, “No, both me and my teacher had whole class discussions before this about Islam. They just didn't do well with each other” (Interview). While only eight PSSTs noted this challenge in their classrooms, the abilities to deliberate with others and synthesize perspectives were considered by all PSSTs as skills important for their future students. This evidence would play a role in their future curriculum decisions and professional judgments.

Second, 10 of the 11 PSSTs noted the lack of multiple perspectives shared by their cooperating teachers, and the subsequent reinforcement of community norms. They also thought that their cooperating teachers had not prepared the students to think about perspectives different from their own or global issues at all. The PSSTs demonstrated that while they wanted to preserve their own community values and norms, they thought students should also understand perspectives from outside of their community regarding global and/or national social issues. For example, Heather used her refugee lesson in her field experience classroom as a way to talk about human rights. In her reflection, she noted that students interacted differently on this issue due to their religious views. In discussing how to improve the lesson, Heather wrote:

I need to find ways to get all students to talk. I feel like some of the students were shut out because they did not share the same religious views. Even the debate kids didn't talk as much. Even though it was not about religion, no one in the class challenged the more religious students' comments . . . and when I started to provide a counterpoint, Mr. Rooks shook his head at me. (Field Experience Lesson Reflection)

Heather thought that the students’ strong familiarity with community norms, such as religious beliefs, and lack of experience with different perspectives constrained her use of a global issue in the classroom. Furthermore, her cooperating teacher shut down the multiple perspectives Heather was trying to interject into the discussion. This demonstrated that even the PSSTs’ colleagues might not support integrating multiple perspectives into the curriculum, due to the potential repercussions associated with the normative constraints of rural communities. All of the PSSTs realized that integrating multiple perspectives into the curriculum would be a challenge in rural schools given the strong community norms that they, themselves, valued. For most PSSTs, this lack of multiple perspectives in other classes provided more evidence of the need for teaching global issues.

Lastly, seven PSSTs noted that their cooperating teachers wanted them to use the global issue lesson with only a select group of higher ability students, as a way to differentiate the curriculum among a wide-range of student ability. In general, the choice to separate students from an activity, such as deliberation or discussion, surprised the PSSTs because they believed that all students’ public voice needed to have an opportunity to develop—regardless of the students’ ability level. The PSSTs also thought that rural communities would provide more continuity among the experiences of the students beyond ability level, which would help facilitate their deliberations and discussions. For example, Kim thought that her students’ common experiences as rural White United States citizens made her lesson more impactful, and helped facilitate the use of multiple perspectives. She reflected on her immigration lesson, and wrote:
My favorite part of the lesson was that the video challenged all of the students to reconsider the concept of an immigrant. The multiple perspectives help them discuss the topic well beyond their own experiences with immigrants, which for them was almost all with Latina/os. (Field Experience Lesson Plan Reflection)

For this specific lesson, Kim thought that the students’ common social links of race and citizenship, their rural relational connections that exclude immigrants, and their lack of experiences with people who are different from them enabled her use of the lesson and intensified the students’ engagement with the topic—regardless of their ability level. While differentiated curriculum is a necessary challenge for many classrooms, the PSSTs saw evidence that the deliberation of global issues was a way to engage all students in a mutual activity to develop skills, which all community members would need to be active citizens.

**Discussion**

The significance of this study and this particular group of PSSTs is their distinctive professional judgment to teach global issues in rural communities. The PSSTs had learned about global issues in a variety of education and social science courses while at the university, and they had thought about discussion or deliberation of global issues as a strategy in at least three education courses. Therefore, the fact that a majority of students from rural communities chose to develop global issue lesson plans is a minor point in comparison to how well they developed and rationalized the use of their global issue lessons in a rural or small community. These PSSTs were able to use context, evidence, and their aims to make judgments that developed relevant and purposeful lessons.

The PSSTs used context to make decisions and create lessons on global issues that were relevant to rural communities. The PSSTs’ experiences in rural schools, their experiences in higher education and teacher education, and their critical reflections helped them determine the content that would be relevant for students in a rural context. The PSSTs all came from different rural communities, and inevitably have different concepts of rurality and rural schools, and they each chose different global issues based on the perceived relevance and importance to their own perceivable rural community. The fact that the 13 PSSTs developed lessons on 13 different global topics demonstrates the vital role of context in their professional judgment and decision-making process (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Yet the challenges they each faced in implementing their lessons in rural communities, which weren’t their own communities, initiated a deeper reflection about their own sense of rurality. Most PSSTs, realized that characteristics of specific place and context matter more than the simple distinction of rural when making professional judgments.

The impact of the rural context on PSSTs’ professional judgment could also be seen in how they articulated their aims. The PSSTs’ aims represented a blend of both their rural aims, based on context and evidence, and broader educational aims prioritized in teacher education courses. As Hess and McAvoy (2015) noted, aims often represent a teacher’s conception of what it means to be an educated person. It was evident in the PSSTs’ purpose statements and reflections that their aims represented how they wanted their fellow rural community members to be educated. For these PSSTs, the aim was to address the local/global binary and situate the local rural community in the global community (Myers 2010; Zong, 2015). When the PSSTs were making professional judgments about their lessons, they all, to some extent, wanted to expose students to perspectives and/or issues outside of their community to make some connections. The blend of rural and teacher education experiences helped the PSSTs develop focused and powerful aims and lessons.

The PSSTs used a variety of evidence in their professional judgment at a particularly important time in their development as a teacher. The PSSTs developed lesson plans on global issues based on evidence from both their rural and teacher education experiences. Hess and McAvoy (2015) note that teachers use evidence to make decisions because it helps them test assumptions and identify constraints within contexts. When the PSSTs taught their lessons in their clinical field placements, it provided one last set of evidence (beyond rural experience and teacher education courses) for the viability of global issues discussion/deliberation in a rural classroom. This last set of evidence tested their assumptions and brought the constraints of the classroom to the forefront of their professional judgment. This was significant because the PSSTs developed lessons for what they expected to be a familiar context, where they felt accustomed to the norms, yet they were surprised and frustrated by the rural relational norms of the classroom.
Implications

The findings suggest that teacher educators should help PSSTs think about the contexts in which they want to teach. The PSSTs’ ability to clearly envision or imagine the context in which they wanted to teach contributed to strengthening their intentions, purpose, and aims in developing lessons. Teacher educators should think about ways to help PSSTs focus on contexts in which they would want to teach and identify characteristics of those contexts that would affect their teaching. Identifying these contexts and characteristics could potentially help PSSTs focus their work, and thus development, in teacher education more authentically to a context. The benefits of such a strategy can be seen in the purposeful lessons developed by PSSTs.

Teacher educators should help PSSTs think about their clinical field experiences as evidence to test their assumptions. If they spend their time in their experiences testing their assumptions, they can use the evidence to revise their purpose, intentions, and aims for teaching specific lessons. This requires PSSTs to enter their experiences much like the PSSTs in this study, with teachable lesson plans that represent their aims for teaching. This was the primary reason the clinical field experiences were so beneficial to the PSSTs’ development of professional judgment. If PSSTs can think about their clinical field experiences as evidence, they could better understand the importance of their time in their placements.

Lastly, PSSTs should have an opportunity to engage in reflection after testing their assumptions and develop ways to generatively revise their aims. It would be particularly helpful for PSSTs to think about and sort the different types of evidence they use to develop their aims and make decisions. This would be qualitatively different from the evidence they typically collect for portfolios in many teacher education programs. Evidence in this sense would include context, assumptions, all educational experiences, and all teaching experiences. For example, the PSSTs developed evidence from their teaching that specific global issues have varying relevance in different rural communities. They realized that to develop lessons that authentically connect the local to the global, they would need to engage in community-based inquiry to learn more about the context and characteristics of the place (Blankenship et al., 2016; Zong, 2015).

While the PSSTs relied on their contextual understanding of rurality to develop lessons related to their own experiences and understanding of rural contexts, when they developed lessons on global issues, they generalized about rural contexts in a manner that did not recognize the distinctive ways global issues affect rural communities (Cloke, 2006; Gruenewald, 2003; Moletsane, 2012). This was a valuable realization for the PSSTs because most of them will not get a job in their home rural community and will have to test new assumptions and learn the nuances of the local community in which they teach to provide evidence for their professional judgment. Sorting their evidence and thinking about the ways it influences their decisions will help them use and analyze evidence in the future, and contribute to informed professional judgment throughout their career.

References


