

Thresholds in Education (ISSN 0196-9641)

CALL FOR PAPERS

Guest Editors:

Tammy LaPrad, Monmouth College and Jim LaPrad, Western Illinois University

Special Issue: Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities in Rural Education

The Thresholds Story

Thresholds in Education (originally *Thresholds in Secondary Education*) was first published in 1975 by faculty members at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. Their intention was to “explore fresh ideas and viewpoints that may become the pathways to the future,” and for 35 years this venerable journal published four thematic issues a year. In those 35 years, articles by well-known educators and non-educators including Theodore Brameld, Benjamin Spock (yes, Dr. Spock), Linda O’Neil, Bill Ayers, William Schubert, Jan Woodhouse, Deron Boyles, Ming Fang He (to name just a few) appeared in the pages of *Thresholds* doing exactly that: exploring fresh ideas and viewpoints. However, in the face of rising publication costs and the growing contemporary online publication milieu, the last print version of *Thresholds* was published in 2010. Fast forward to 2014. In discussions between the *Thresholds* Foundation executive board and representatives of the *Academy for Educational Studies*, a plan was hatched: re-launch *Thresholds in Education* as an open access online journal and house it at the *Academy for Educational Studies* web site. In addition to resurrecting *Thresholds*, it was decided that the new *Thresholds* would take on the look, feel, and substance of a slightly more traditional scholarly journal—the original *Thresholds* having had a more “magazine-like,” short-article, look and feel.

The *Thresholds in Education* editorial board was pleased to have Dr. Tammy LaPrad of Monmouth College and Dr. Jim LaPrad of Western Illinois University accept an invitation to guest edit this issue of *Thresholds in Education* on the topic of contemporary challenges and opportunities in rural education. We hope you will join us in this endeavor—submit proposals to this issue; visit the *Thresholds* archive at [the Academy for Educational Studies](#) web site; suggest future theme issues and guest editors; in short, join us in bringing back into existence an important venue for sharing educational ideas.

Background for this special issue

As educators since our mid-twenties, we have both been lucky to have numerous experiences in both K-12 and higher education. Jim’s first job out of college was as a USMC Infantry Officer, which is a unique form of education that has in many ways informed his ideas regarding teaching and learning. Both together and before we met, we’ve lived in rural spaces from Ionia Michigan and Kellner Wisconsin as children to Spotsylvania Virginia where we taught elementary and middle school in both Spotsylvania and Orange Counties. In 2003, we moved with our young family to rural Illinois and have been teaching and working with educators and educational leaders in many rural spaces across west-central Illinois. Many if not all teachers we have encountered not only put their students first but also know they serve the needs of their communities by teaching. Many of the teachers that have long careers in rural schools also have a deep understanding and

love of their rural communities. These rural schools and communities, like so many others, are unique, diverse, and complex, and thus part of the web of our still young and fragile democracy.

As we were invited to construct this special edition call for *Thresholds in Education*, we have both been reading and reflecting on the essays in *Public Education: Defending a Cornerstone of American Democracy* edited by David Berliner and Carl Hermanns. Some of these essays helped shape the context of this call. Peter Greene, a life-long rural educator, echoes what many of us already believe, in his recent essay titled *Our Schools and our Towns Belong to Each Other*, that is

a promise of public education in the United States: that every single child will be given the chance to get as much help, as much training, as much knowledge as they can to help them build a life. They will be given time, resources, and expert support to figure out how to become more fully themselves, to understand what it means to be fully human in the world.¹

He follows this by acknowledging that we have not always fulfilled this promise. Many of us recognize that there are competing interests and biases that hinder this promise, we also recognize the need for teachers and educational leaders to disrupt and correct the injustices that continue to affect rural public schools. We can easily assume that there is not a rural space that is exempt from teachers and education leaders in positions that while the goal is to serve all kids, also hold the tension between the political and ethical challenges within their own contexts.

Mike Rose in his essay, *Reflections on the Public School and the Social Fabric*, acknowledges that in the United States, while schooling is a foundational element of our society's structure there exists these tensions and challenges as

there is an urban – rural divide, involving economic, cultural, and geographic differences. Deeply embedded in this conflict is pride of place, and emotional attachment to landscape in people . . . there is an important reminder that even in the most easily definable regions, the bluest of blue states, the reddest of red, there is complexity—that here in the heart of coal country, there are the conflicting political opinions, not infrequently held within the same person. Local schools exist within this regional social and political ecology.²

Rose reminds that many individual struggles are also broader community struggles and we all share the opportunity and responsibility to examine individual conflict as well as the social implications. As an educator who has always taken on the opportunity to champion democratic practices Deborah Meier advises us on how we can address injustice, tension and issues in education.

She reminds us “schooling for democracy guides children to discover and develop their individual passions and strengths while also enhancing their sense of belonging and responsibility to a greater society,”³ this is no more true than in our rural schools and in our rural communities. Debbie concludes,

¹ Peter Greene, “Our Schools and our Towns Belong to Each Other” in *Public Education: Defending a Cornerstone of American Democracy*, eds. David Berliner and Carl Hermanns (New York: Teachers College Press, 2022), 62.

² Mike Rose, “Reflections on the Public School and the Social Fabric” in *Public Education: Defending a Cornerstone of American Democracy*, eds. David Berliner and Carl Hermanns (New York: Teachers College Press, 2022), 53.

³ Debrah Meier and Emily Gasoi, *These schools belong to you and me: Why we can't afford to abandon our public schools*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017), 169.

despite all, I still stand with my words written over 20 years ago and the conclusion of the *Power of Their Ideas*: “no matter how bad things seem today or what bad news may come tomorrow, what makes me hopeful is our infinite capacity for inventing the future, imagining things otherwise.”⁴

The reality, as Debbie states, is that there are and will continue to be issues and problems but that there is hope. Hope often sustains action when issues can collectively be named and addressed. What are they and how will rural schools and communities find the capacity for inventing or reinventing their future? Getting specific, Carol Lee points out that complexity of problems our communities, nation and planet face as per curriculum challenges and unruly school board meetings to the public health concerns of a global pandemic to the facets of climate change and in the ever-changing economic woes of rural spaces. She returns to schooling and education reminding us, “The question before us: what role can public education play in preparing young people, each new generation, to interrogate these persistent conundrums into engaging in civic reasons and civic discourse, informed by the commitment to democratic values.”⁵

Thinking about these values and the rural spaces we have lived and taught in from West-Central Illinois, to Spotsylvania and Orange Virginia, or our childhood memories of Ionia, Michigan and Kellner Township, Wisconsin, these spaces are all different, yet an element that is in common is that they all have schools that can be ‘home places’ for the students and for their communities. These places all have stories that need to be shared and learned from because they are the fabric of our society and when we lose even one story or community, there is a tear that if left unattended leaves a gap and subsequently a less than whole community. We are honored to help share the stories and this special edition of *Thresholds in Education*.

Overview

This special issue seeks to elaborate on the theme: contemporary challenges and opportunities in rural education. Authors are free to engage the theme discretely or simultaneously.

Why do contemporary challenges and opportunities in rural education matter? There is a long history of considering rural spaces as lacking. Rural spaces are unique unto themselves and thus can support the changes and innovations that are necessary for their sustainability. When rural places are resourced and supported, they can find ways to flex and adapt to all kinds of hardship by using assets to foster innovation and create positive narratives of community viability and sustainability. What are the issues that rural communities face both historically and currently? What are the narratives that have supported their growth and those that must be countered to shed new light on what it means to be from and a part of a rural place? What are the pedagogical approaches introduced and studied that build on rural and small community assets and successes? What efforts, on local, state and national levels are being leveraged to engage rural communities and improve rural schools?

Possible areas of investigation/analysis for manuscripts include the following:

Challenges:

Teacher turnover, retention, shortage, isolation

⁴ Meier and Gasoi, 167.

⁵ Carol D. Lee, “The Role of Public Schools in the preparation of Young People to Engage in Civic Reasoning and Discourse” in *Public Education: Defending a Cornerstone of American Democracy*, eds. David Berliner and Carl Hermanns (New York: Teachers College Press, 2022), 167.

Rural population and demographic shifts
Community development, philanthropy and growth
Infrastructure, resources, and technology accessibility
Curriculum controversies
School boards and local governance
Barriers/obstacles to social justice in rural places
Rural complexities/contexts
Assumptions about rural education

Opportunities:

Rural Innovations
Power of PLACE
Schools as democratic and civic teaching and learning spaces
Preparing for future...Rural Teacher Corps and Teacher Pathways
Rural Advocacy
Rural Philanthropy
School / Community Partnerships
New Rural Narratives
Rural Community Ethos/Relationship Capacity

Author Guidelines

Proposal Format

Please email an extended abstract/proposal (500-1000 words), short reference list, 4 keywords, and 3-5 sentence author(s) bio(s) to ThresholdsinEd2023@gmail.com by **August 15, 2022**. (Note the email address is case sensitive.)

Final Manuscript Formatting

- Manuscripts should be between 6,000 and 10,000 words, including abstract, list of keywords, appendices, footnotes and references. We reserve the right to return any manuscript that exceeds that length (In APA or Chicago style).
- All text must be double-spaced; type size must be 12 point with 1-inch margins on all sides.
- Authors should refer to [APA Publication Manual](#) or [The Chicago Manual of Style](#) for general questions of style, grammar, punctuation, and form, and for footnotes of theoretical, descriptive, or essay-like material.
- The journal defers to author preference in decisions about the naming and capitalization of racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. Manuscripts should be internally consistent in this regard.

General Timeline

Call for papers: May 1, 2022
Proposals Due: **August 15, 2022**
Accept/Reject: September 15, 2022
Draft Articles Due: January 9, 2023
Feedback to authors: March 13, 2023
Final Drafts Due: May 12, 2023
Published: Summer 2023

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