Scholarly Research Agenda

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Teacher voice • Rural context • Professional growth

My scholarly interests have grown from nearly two decades of teaching and leading in rural Alaska and Minnesota, as well as my work preparing educators in colleges and universities. Across these roles, I have returned to one question: What allows educators to experience professional learning as meaningful, credible, and worth carrying into their practice? I am particularly interested in the relationships between teacher voice, instructional feedback, leadership decisions, and the realities of working in smaller school systems.

My dissertation, The Experiences of Teachers in Rural Schools with Feedback from Formative Observations by School Leaders, provides an initial foundation. Using descriptive phenomenology, I examined accounts from 10 teachers through 10 semi-structured interviews and nine reflective journals in one rural Minnesota district. Six interconnected findings highlight relational trust, professional judgment, usable feedback, reflective dialogue, organizational conditions, and ongoing professional becoming. These findings provide directions for further inquiry rather than conclusions about all rural teachers or evidence of intervention effectiveness.

Research Priority 1 | Teacher Voice, Feedback, and Professional Agency

My first line of inquiry examines how teachers decide which feedback is credible, relevant, and worth acting upon. I want to understand how trust and the observer's role influence openness; how teachers accept, adapt, question, or defer recommendations; and what forms of dialogue contribute to sustained reflection. A central question is: Under what conditions does feedback become a professional learning experience rather than simply an evaluation requirement?

I envision extending the dissertation through qualitative studies involving teachers at different career stages and in varied school contexts. Comparing accounts across sites, and where appropriate following feedback experiences over time, would help distinguish shared experiences from conditions specific to one setting. I am especially interested in teachers' own descriptions of growth, including changes in perspective that may not be visible immediately in classroom practice.

Research Priority 2 | Rural Leadership and Conditions for Educator Development

A second priority examines how rural organizational conditions shape opportunities for teacher learning. Small schools often bring close professional relationships and deep knowledge of community, while staff may also manage overlapping roles, limited time, and uneven access to specialized support. My interest is in understanding how these conditions operate in particular places without treating rurality as a deficit or assuming rural districts are alike.

Future multi-site case studies could explore how leaders and teachers navigate the boundary between coaching and evaluation, protect time for substantive feedback, and design consistent yet flexible professional learning systems. I would welcome partnerships with rural schools in Minnesota and Alaska, using interviews, document analysis, and observations of voluntary professional-learning processes. The goal would be to identify practical organizational choices that educators view as both feasible and supportive of professional growth.

Research Priority 3 | From Research to Practice and Teacher Preparation

I also want to study how findings can be responsibly translated into tools that educators can use. TRUST: The Rural Feedback Toolkit is a developing, self-guided resource informed by my dissertation. Its proposed health check, teacher voice and choice guide, and feedback conversation resources offer a starting point for collaborative design and local testing; they are not yet validated interventions.

A next step would be to work with teachers, school leaders, and instructional coaches to refine the tools and examine their clarity, usability, feasibility, and perceived value. If early pilots support further study, later research could examine changes in feedback experiences while using appropriate measures and comparison designs. In higher education, I am also interested in how teacher-candidate supervision, mentoring, and induction prepare beginning educators for the relational and organizational realities of rural schools. My Fulbright-Hays experience in Finland provides an additional comparative perspective on trust, well-being, inquiry, and place-based learning, with future cross-context work dependent on genuine research partnerships.

Methods, Partnerships, and Research Ethics

I expect qualitative inquiry to remain central to my scholarship because it makes space for teachers' experiences and differences across contexts. Depending on the question, I would pair interviews and reflective accounts with case studies, participatory design, and carefully selected mixed methods. I will maintain explicit attention to reflexivity, participant confidentiality, and the power relationships that arise when a researcher also has leadership or coaching responsibilities. Future studies would require appropriate review and clear separation of research participation from employment or evaluation processes.

Near-Term and Longer-Term Goals

In the near term, I aim to prepare peer-reviewed and practitioner-oriented manuscripts from the dissertation, communicate the findings to rural educators and leaders, and establish a collaborative pilot for the TRUST resources. Over the following several years, I hope to develop a multi-site research partnership examining teacher feedback and professional learning across rural contexts, while involving teacher candidates or graduate students in appropriate aspects of inquiry. Publications, conference presentations, accessible research summaries, and freely available tools would be complementary forms of dissemination rather than ends in themselves.

Contribution to Higher Education

As a faculty member at a college or university, I would bring this agenda into teacher preparation, educational leadership coursework, clinical supervision, and partnerships with local schools. My broader aim is to connect rigorous inquiry with the professional judgment of educators and to develop scholarship that helps schools create more meaningful opportunities for teachers to learn and grow. Rural education is the grounding for this work, and the questions of trust, agency, feedback, and learning have relevance across educational settings.