Examining a Place-Based Curriculum for High-Performing Learners: A Place-Based, Critical, Dialogic Curriculum for High-Performing Rural Writers

Erika Lynn Bass

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
In
Curriculum & Instruction: English Education

Trevor Thomas Stewart
Amy Price Azano
Thomas Williams
Brett Jones

March 27, 2019
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Democracy and education, self-efficacy, dialogic pedagogy, rural, place-based education, gifted writers

Copyright 2019

This dissertation research was partially funded by the Jacob K. Javits Grant, U.S. Department of Education PR/Award # S206A140034
Examining a Place-Based Curriculum for High-Performing Learners: A Place-Based, Critical, Dialogic Curriculum for High-Performing Rural Writers

Erika Lynn Bass

ABSTRACT

Students’ connections to place are important to bring into the classroom to help them make meaning. This multimethod study investigated the overarching research question: What is the influence of a place-based curriculum on high-performing, rural students as writers? This was broken into two sub-questions: (a) What is the effect of treatment condition on students writing ability, writing self-efficacy, and concepts of community and place and (b) In what ways do students reference place in their writing? In particular, this study examined students’ writing ability, writing self-efficacy, connections to community/place, and references to place in students’ writing. Working from a larger data set from the Promoting PLACE (Place, Literacy, Achievement, Community, and Engagement) in Rural Schools grant, students’ pre- and post-test writing tasks, self-report writing self-efficacy, and community and place scales were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the ways the curriculum supported students as writers. The sample included treatment and control students, randomly assigned at the district level. The treatment group access to the Promoting PLACE curriculum and the control group received the typical services their district provided. Quantitative analysis gave rise to more questions regarding sample size, gifted identification methods, and modes of instruction. Qualitative analysis gave insight into the importance of connecting to place in the classroom, so students can explore the richness of their rural places. Using a dialogic stance, with place-based pedagogy can provide students with opportunities to critically examine their places and the experiences they have in those places.
Examining a Place-Based Curriculum for High-Performing Learners: A Place-Based, Critical, Dialogic Curriculum for High-Performing Rural Writers

Erika Lynn Bass

GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This study explored how a dialogic, place-based curriculum influences high-performing rural students as writers. The sample included treatment and control students, randomly assigned at the district level, totaling 199 students across both groups. Through quantitative and qualitative analysis, the researcher examined student pre- and post-test writing tasks and self-report writing self-efficacy and community and place scales. Findings suggest that adopting a stance that in the classroom that values students’ lived experiences provides opportunities for students to make meaning using what they know and have experienced and critically examining their experiences as members of their local communities. This study provides insight into writing classrooms that embraces student experience and view students as valuable members of their communities.
DEDICATIONS

For my father, John, who has always taught me to pursue my dreams and work hard to achieve any goal I set for myself. If it weren’t for you and your support, I would not have gotten here.

For my mother, Tiffany, for without your undying support and unconditional love, I wouldn’t be who I am today.

For my husband, Michael, who has only ever known me as a graduate student but has never stopped supporting me and believing in me.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation and all the work involved would not have been possible without my team of supporters. First, I would like to thank my father who has always pushed me to do big things. You have always been my number one supporter; without you I would have never considered a PhD. Watching you go through college while raising me has been an inspiration. You are a Rockstar—my Rockstar. Thank you to my mother, who has always told me how proud she is of me, never faltering in her faith in me. To my loving aunts, uncles, and grandparents, every single one of you has supported me and talked me through stressful times. You are all an inspiration. To my siblings, who have helped me take time off to relax and enjoy life. You will always be my favorite brothers and sister. Thank you to my husband, you have seen me cry real tears over grad school and constantly reminded me that I could do it, even when I felt that I couldn’t.

Thank you to my advisor, Trevor Stewart, who has pushed me harder than I have ever experienced, for making me a stronger writer, thinker, and researcher. I may not have always liked or enjoyed the hard work you pushed me to do, but I certainly would not be the writer and thinker I am without that push; in hindsight, it wasn’t so bad! To Amy Azano, you took a chance on me by hiring me to work on the grant and your support throughout this whole process has been exactly what I needed. Thank you to Brett Jones and Tom Williams for being supportive committee members. Your feedback and help are invaluable. To Carolyn Callahan, whose expertise and insight have been instrumental in this entire process. I am so thankful for everything you’ve all done for me.

To my fellow graduate students, you are all amazing humans and I am so thankful we got to go through this experience together. Pamela Lindstrom and Jim Hill, going
through this whole experience with you has been amazing. You have become great friends and I cannot express how meaningful your friendships have become. Michelle Rasheed, I am so glad you and I were able to work on the grant together. Your friendship and support, especially in all those long trips for grant work, has gotten me here today—you will make it through this process, I promise! Jennifer Maguire, thank you for always offering to bring me coffee when I had my head buried in my work. To all the other graduate students I’ve encountered along the way, who are too many to list, you are amazing people; if you haven’t made it to the end yet, there is an end and you will get there
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACADEMIC ABSTRACT ................................................................. ii
GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT ............................................. iii
DEDICATIONS ............................................................................ iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................. v
LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................. viii
LIST OF TABLES ......................................................................... ix
CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .................................. 1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................... 26
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY & METHODS ................................. 46
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS & FINDINGS ......................................... 64
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION ......................................................... 88
REFERENCES ............................................................................. 113
APPENDICES ........................................................................... 124

  APPENDIX A ................................................................. 124
  APPENDIX B ................................................................. 125
  APPENDIX C ................................................................. 126
  APPENDIX D ................................................................. 127
  APPENDIX E ................................................................. 128
  APPENDIX F ................................................................. 129
  APPENDIX G ................................................................. 130
LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE.........................................................49
LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: Data Analysis Procedures and Questions Examined..........................51
TABLE 2: Descriptive Statistics........................................................................54
TABLE 3: Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matricesa.................................55
TABLE 4: Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variancesa....................................56
TABLE 5: A Priori Codes Generated from Promoting PLACE Curriculum Rubric &
Azano’s (2009) Framework for Analyzing Place Documents...........................58
TABLE 6: Frequency Counts of Place References in Pre-Test Writing Task..........59
TABLE 7: Frequency Counts of Place References in Post-Test Writing Task.........60
TABLE 8: One-way MANOVA Main Effect..........................................................66
TABLE 9: Univariate Tests...................................................................................67
Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

Story of the Problem

When I began teaching high school, I never expected to teach Advanced Placement (AP) students. As a new teacher, I saw myself teaching lower achieving students. I wanted to work with lower achieving students because, in my mind, those were the students I could help the most. Much of this stems from my experience as an advanced student in high school. I did not have a great experience with AP and found little value in those classes. When I was asked to teach AP Language and Composition my second year of teaching, I was given the opportunity to learn instructional strategies to help challenge advanced students, while also preparing them for the May AP Exam. It was then I began to realize that my experience with AP was really based on the teachers I had and not the concept of AP, itself. Not many teachers are given an opportunity to learn instructional strategies to help challenge the high-performing learner (Croft, 2015). The lack of opportunity for professional development for general education teachers to teach high-performing students affects these students because they are not getting the challenge they need to reach their full potential (Croft, 2015).

I taught in a rural community (i.e., a distant town according to the National Center for Education Statistics, 2006) in southside Virginia. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) school locale definitions, “town distant” is a “Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area” (n.p). The town in which the high school is situated has roughly 13,445 residents, many of whom rely on government assistance because only approximately 9,300 residents are employed (US Census Bureau, n.d.). The unemployment rate of the community in which I taught is nearly twice the state (3.3%) and national rates (3.9%), at 6.8% as of November 2017 (Bureau of Labor Statistics,
Students in this community had many opportunity gaps compared to their Northern Virginia peers because of budget deficits that obstructed funding in the classroom, especially in the AP classroom. Even though the VASS grant that provided my AP training paid for extra resources, like mock exams, costs for AP exams, and after-school tutoring, my students still missed opportunities due to their geographic location, which Jimerson (2005) refers to as “‘placism’—or discrimination against people based on where they live” (p. 211). The nearest city was at least an hour away, so if students wanted extra tutoring or educational experiences, they had to travel at least an hour from home, which can be difficult if families do not have reliable transportation. Even when the school provided transportation to tutoring sessions and mock exam sessions, some students still were unable to attend due to their own work schedules, which were important for their families’ financial well-being. My students were given some opportunities to get the challenge they needed, but they still did not have access to as many resources as their more affluent peers. My experience opened my eyes to the opportunity gaps that exist for students who live in rural areas.

Opportunity gaps exist for rural students due to geographic isolation, lack of resources, decreased funding, and limited access to out-of-school educational resources (Azano, Tackett, Missett, & Callahan, 2017; Mattingly & Schaefer, 2015; Richards & Stambaugh, 2015). These opportunity gaps affect rural gifted students because decreased funding means fewer teachers and fewer resources for gifted students to reach their full potential. Often, rural school districts do not have gifted resource teachers and when they do, one teacher is expected to work with several schools (Howley, Rhodes, & Beall, 2009). For instance, some rural gifted resource teachers work with eight elementary schools in a five-day work week, so students only receive gifted services one hour per week, at best (Howley et al., 2009). If districts do not have gifted
resource teachers, the general education teacher is left to find ways to differentiate their instruction to challenge these students, but they may not have the necessary training (Croft, 2015). Students in rural areas, including gifted students, need access to resources, both in and out of school, for them to be able to reach their full potential (Howley et al., 2009).

This chapter sets a theoretical foundation that draws upon sociocultural and dialogic theories that support democratic approaches to writing instruction that values students’ individual experiences. Building on the works of theorists such as Dewey, Freire, Bakhtin, and Fecho, I articulate how writing is an avenue for students to inquire into and express their values and beliefs, which provides a connection to students’ individual experiences. Furthermore, this chapter sets the theoretical framework I have constructed to support my research exploring the overarching question: What is the influence of a place-based curriculum on high-performing rural students as writers? This question was broken into two sub-questions: (a) What is the effect of treatment condition on students’ writing ability, writing self-efficacy, and concepts of community and place and (b) In what ways do students reference place in their writing? to better explore the overarching question. This framework will allow me to accomplish two research goals: (a) to understand how a place-based curriculum might interact with students’ writing ability and students as writers and (b) to theorize the ways in which a critical, place-based curriculum can be augmented to support dialogic, critical inquiry in the future.

A Democratic and Critical Approach to Education

The theories discussed in this chapter provide a larger foundation for my research examining the influence of a place-based curriculum. Gruenewald (2003a) provided a theoretical foundation to place-based education by connecting it to Freire’s (1970) concept of critical pedagogy. These two concepts are connected through the understanding that “the oppressed’s
reality, as reflected in the various forms of cultural production—language, art, music—leads to a better comprehension of the cultural extension through which people articulate their rebelliousness against the dominant” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p.137). This is a natural pairing with dialogic pedagogy because, as Gruenewald (2003a) argued, the concept of place-based pedagogy connects to critical pedagogy by exploring how place can and should be used in critical ways. Gruenewald’s concept of a critical pedagogy was used as a theoretical underpinning to the Promoting PLACE (Place, Literacy, Achievement, Community, and Engagement) in Rural Schools grant (hereafter referred to as Project PLACE). Critical place theories informed research design, identification processes, instrument development, data generation, and analysis. Place was also used to modify the CLEAR curriculum to leverage what Gruenewald calls a critical pedagogy of place. These deliberate efforts align with tenets of social constructionism, which is the first building block of my theoretical foundation.

Social constructionism is grounded in the concept that groups of people socially construct meaning and knowledge—concepts that are outside one’s head and that happen between people in a social relationship (Hruby, 2001). When people interact with one another, the very institutions they interact with and within are changed and they are changed with that institution (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). As groups of people work together to understand their experiences and make meaning with and within institutions, they are constructing what those experiences mean based on past experiences. Past experiences can be common with a social group or with individual past experiences. Even as different groups of people have similar experiences, the ways they make meaning out of those experiences differ. When discussing the reality of everyday life, Berger and Luckmann (1966) indicated that, even though a person’s reality is situated in the “here” and “now,” reality is also made up of realities that have already
happened—that are not “here” and “now” (p. 22). Social groups create a reality that is shared with one another and that is the reality of that group (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

In education, each classroom acts as a social group and within that social group it is important to use each person’s experience to help construct meaning from texts and ideas discussed—to come to a common understanding of the reality that exists within those four walls—for that social group (e.g., students and teachers in that class). Additionally, as experiences are shared and taken into account by creating a space where students and teachers can transact with personal, social, and cultural contexts, new experiences are discovered and constructed as a common language is constructed and used to describe those realities. When teachers take this into account, they are letting their students know that their experiences matter to what is happening in the classroom. For example, Eppley (2011) discussed the writing of a young girl, Amy, who would write about her cat, even if her cat had nothing to do with the prompt. When Amy was given the opportunity to connect her out-of-school life with her in-school life, she “wrote about [her cat] within the context of her life and for an authentic purpose, and she was willing to do so” (Eppley, 2011, p. 99). When students feel that their experiences matter, they are more likely to connect with the material they are learning and are more likely to construct meaning. While this learning takes place, new meaning is constructed by connecting to their past experiences. Because learning is a social act, understanding ways that social groups construct meaning is important for all educational settings.

Teaching with students’ experiences in mind and valuing what students bring to the classroom is a cyclical process: the ideas presented in one lesson can inform the next while also connecting back to previous lessons, continuously. Dewey (1938) advocated for “basing education upon personal experience [because it] may mean more multiplied and more intimate
contacts between the [teacher] and the [student]. . . and consequently more, rather than less, guidance by others” (p. 21). Using students’ experiences as a stimulus for teaching creates opportunities for students to make personal connections to what is happening in the classroom and enhances the meaning making process. If teachers fail to find ways to connect the material in the classroom to students’ lives it will “result in yet another generation of students. . .who will perceive school as a place for serving time and less of a nexus of meaning making of the lives they co-construct” (Fecho, Coombs, & McAuley, 2012, p. 477). All students come to school with different understandings and views of thinking and behaving; using those experiences in the classroom will help students to make meaning out of something that would otherwise seem like compulsory time filler. Education should create opportunities for students to make their own meaning and shape their lives and the cultures with which they identify (Fecho et al., 2012).

Writing instruction, for example, should value student experiences because when students are given opportunities to connect their experiences to the classroom through writing, their writing tends to have more passion, more depth, and stronger developed ideas (Worthman, Gardner, & Thole, 2011). Conversely, when students are writing about things that are seemingly irrelevant to their lives, their writing tends to be flat and their ideas underdeveloped (Graff & Birkenstein, 2010). Moreover, when teachers provide an opportunity for students to get their ideas down without focusing on translating their ideas into the primary Discourse, students will not feel as much pressure to get things “correct.” As students work to connect their experiences through writing, the classroom then becomes that link in meaning making that provides an avenue to co-construct the Discourse community of the classroom.

The concepts of critical pedagogy connect with place-based pedagogy and provides a lens through which I can connect to dialogic pedagogy because dialogic pedagogy provides a means
for exploring the tensions that exist when cultural contexts are brought into dialogue with one another and the content being studied in the classrooms. Thus, dialogic pedagogy embraces and extends critical pedagogy and brings classroom content into dialogue with students’ lives (Fecho, 2001; Stewart, 2010).

Critical pedagogy creates a useful frame for writing instruction because it creates conditions for students to question hierarchies and process experiences with inequality through writing. A critical pedagogical approach to teaching “makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation [which] will be made and remade” (Freire, 1970, p. 48). Critical pedagogy connects to Dewey’s (1938) idea that “Every genuine experience has an active role which changes some degree of the objective conditions under which experiences are had” (p. 39). Taking students’ experiences and culture into account is essential to critical pedagogy because when school reinforces the status quo, it treats all students the same: as empty vessels to be filled with the “contents of [the teacher’s] narration . . . which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance” (Freire, 1970, p. 71). However, this idea of “filling” (p. 71) students with knowledge is simply not how people learn; students are not empty or void of all knowledge that is learned in school. Instead, if knowledge is treated as continuing and is based on inquiry, as Freire (1970) suggested, students will find a way to make meaning out of what they are learning in the classroom.

With writing instruction, for example, teachers can provide opportunities for students to question the hierarchies that exist in their communities—both in-school communities and out-of-school communities—and process experiences with inequality. Especially in rural schools, where students can often be stereotyped as slow, incapable of achieving, and backward (Kettler,
Puryear, & Mullet, 2016), teachers should provide opportunities for students to use writing to process those stereotypes and process the inequities they have experienced. Connecting to students’ place is one way to connect Freire & Macedo’s (1987) concept of critical literacy with Dewey’s (1938) premise that schools should reflect students’ experiences. This connection sets up opportunities for teachers to acknowledge and value the home knowledge students bring to the classroom. In order to help students make meaning, it is important to change the structure of school so that all students are treated with equity (Freire, 1970) and feel as though they are valued and they belong (Dewey, 2012). When students are able to enter into a dialogue with the curriculum and the standards, which begins with inquiry, they can begin to make their own understanding of the lessons in school, which puts them at the forefront of their learning (Stewart, 2010). In turn, these practices help them connect their in-school lives with their out-of-school lives because they are drawing on their own experiences. Working from this perspective creates opportunities for students to explore their own values and beliefs in relation to the content of school. When students are given this opportunity, they are more likely to engage with the curriculum. Additionally, as students explore and inquire into and draw upon their own experiences, students create their own common language through which they construct new meanings and understandings of what is going on in the classroom.

**Sociolinguistics**

Language mediates reality—it is something that social groups have in common (Gee, 2015). For example, Gee stated that “What is important in communication is not speaking grammatically, but saying the ‘right’ thing at the ‘right’ time and in the ‘right’ place” (p. 167). This is what Gee (2014) calls “big ‘D’ Discourse,” or interaction by using language while also
recognizing different social identities—Discourses are much more than just language. Discourses include the nonverbal aspects of communication within a culture (i.e., doing the ‘right’ thing). Discourses are specific to the social group within which they occur. Gee (2015) describes primary Discourses as the “culturally distinctive way[s] of being an ‘everyday’ person” (p. 173).

As social groups construct meaning, they are developing a common language to describe their experiences and to make meaning out of them (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Gee’s (2015) example of going into a biker bar and asking for a match is applicable to this concept. Gee presented this example in two ways:

If I enter my neighborhood biker bar and say to my tattooed drinking buddy, as I sit down, “May I have a match please?” or if I go to the same biker bar and say “Gotta match?” Or “Gimme a match wouldya?” while placing a napkin on the bar stool to avoid getting my newly pressed designer jeans dirty (p. 167).

Both of these are wrong because the Discourse of the group is not used in an appropriate way for the social context. The Discourse of the social context is much more than the words that are said; it is making sure that actions, words, body language, and facial expressions match the social context. In Gee’s example, neither of the situations matched the social context. In the first instance, he used the wrong words, but the right actions; in the second instance he used the right words, but the wrong actions.

According to Gee (2014), social languages are “what we learn and what we speak” (p. 63). Every person and every culture and subculture has a social language; within that social language is intertextuality. Intertextuality is the idea that social languages borrow, and sometimes repurpose, words from other social languages. However, it is important to note that anytime a person chooses to speak, they have to make clear who they are and what they are
doing; they have to make it clear that they understand the Discourse community into which they are entering (Gee, 2015). Everyone has a different social identity to go with any given social context and language is how people make sure their social identity is clear in a social context. Gee’s (2015) example of Jane explicates this point well. Jane insisted that she did not change the way she spoke with different people in her life because she felt that would make her inauthentic, but when she recorded herself telling the same story to her parents and to her partner, she discovered that she did change the language she used to tell the story. Jane was more formal with and omitted specific, uncomfortable points with her parents than she was or did with her partner. What this example shows is there is a three-way interaction between the social or cultural group, the social language (or a mixture of social languages), and the context, which creates a Discourse community (Gee, 2015). If at any point one of these three aspects of the Discourse community doesn’t match the other two, we have a situation similar to that of the biker bar example: The who and the what do not to match up and confusion occurs.

When individuals interact in any social context, a new language can be created as they connect their prior experiences to the present context. Through the social construction of a new language, the very institution is changed and the people who interact with this institution are also changed—it is an iterative process. There is a transaction within “a personal, social and cultural environment” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 1072) that occurs between the individual and society (or a smaller social group), which creates a relationship that allows for the discussion of ideas and experiences constructing both reality and identity (Hruby, 2001). It is important to pay attention to this transaction because it adds a personal context to the learning situation. When students are able to connect what they know outside of school with what they are learning in school, they are inherently transacting with any given social situation. As students begin to transact with the texts
of the classroom, writing is one way they can begin to understand how their experiences connect to the classroom material. As teachers guide students toward making a personal connection, they can provide intentional ways for students to write about their experiences in connection with the classroom. This can be done with deliberate writing prompts that have students connect to their experiences and what they know and as students become accustomed to intentionally making these connections, teachers can be less deliberate. This transaction with the various environments of which students are a part connects to the idea of understanding and making meaning in a cultural context. Furthermore, it is important for education because, just as it happens outside of school, when students are given the opportunity to connect to other social realities, they are co-constructing a new reality within the classroom.

As Gee (2015) asserted, writing is part of Discourse. There are different ways that people write and develop their writing, which is “reflective of social historical contexts, variable across local contexts, reflective of classroom and pedagogy, shaped by social interactions, tied to social identities, and conceptualized as a nonlinear process” (Schultz & Fecho, 2000, p. 55). Each writer comes to the writing process with different ways of thinking about writing and the symbols they put on the page because

From a semiotic perspective, signs are the bearers of meaning that structure cultural practices. Signs do not have autonomous meaning but rather take on meaning through their role in the cultural history of the people who produce and interpret them (Smagorinsky, 1997, p. 67).

Writing in an academic context is fraught with power codes (Delpit, 2006) because those with power, or the mainstream culture, have an influence on who is permitted to write and what they can write, for whom, and in which contexts (Schutlz & Fecho, 2000). Often in the school setting,
students feel pressure to write in the primary, school Discourse, but teachers can help to reduce this confusion by giving them the opportunities to get their ideas down on paper without worrying about translating into the primary Discourse. When this confusion is reduced or removed, students can engage with ideas and process experience through writing. Because incorporating place into the classroom provides opportunities for students’ home experiences to be valued, it also provides an avenue for students’ rural literacies and discourses to be incorporated into the classroom. Attending to and welcoming these Discourses in the classroom will support concept development in writing.

**Self-Efficacy is Mediated by Language and Mediates Use of Language**

Self-efficacy is an important part of whether people believe they can accomplish writing goals. If students see themselves as being able to successfully achieve writing goals, they can see themselves as being successful in the writing classroom (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016; Gallagher, 2011; Stewart, 2011a). Self-efficacy is defined as perceived “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). In other words, self-efficacy is a self-perception of one’s capability to achieve a goal. Self-efficacy is part of social cognitive theory, which suggests that “human achievement depends on interactions between one’s behaviors, personal factors, and environmental conditions” (Bandura, 1997). Students’ behaviors and the classroom environment are interrelated, while personal and environmental factors are also interrelated (Schunk, 2003). According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy beliefs can be mitigated by environmental, academic, and personal factors; however, these beliefs are not necessarily based on prior achievement of similar goals. One source of self-efficacy is vicarious experience, which indicates that upon seeing other students or peers achieve a goal, students may also believe they can achieve similar
goals (Bandura, 1997). The concept of vicarious experience suggests that self-efficacy is a comprised of social behaviors, among other, personal behaviors. Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (1996) argued that self-efficacy cannot be separated from “the social relations within which it is imbedded [because] personal agency operates within a broad network of sociostructural and psychosocial influences in which efficacy beliefs play an influential regulative function” (p. 1207). Because self-efficacy is embedded within the social structure of the environment, there are social influences that can affect performance; however, because self-efficacy is domain specific, these factors can vary based on various domains (Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007).

Bandura also noted that self-efficacy is highly predictive of behavior—if people believe they have the ability to produce desired results, they are likely to attempt to make things happen. For example, in relation to writing ability, if students have high self-efficacy in their ability to write complete sentences, develop full paragraphs, and convey their ideas to a specific audience, that can be predictive of performance on a writing task—students will be more likely to attempt to produce complete sentences, develop full paragraphs, and convey their ideas to a specific audience. Because self-efficacy has a social component, as students begin to write in the classroom and they see others are succeeding on various writing skills, they can begin to see themselves as having the ability to be successful also. Furthermore, as students co-construct meaning through writing, students will begin to develop a social institution that is inseparable from their personal agency. This concept of the predictive validity of writing self-efficacy, and the research that shows this to be true, will be discussed in detail in the literature review.

Valuing Student Experiences in Education Through Transaction
Through the co-construction of meaning in the classroom, students can explore their beliefs and understandings through writing. When students draw upon their experiences, the concept of a democratic critical approach to education becomes feasible. A crucial part of enacting a democratic critical approach to education is to provide students with an opportunity to transact with the texts in the classroom. Rosenblatt (1995) referred to “transaction,” as a need to transact with texts in a “nonlinear, continuously reciprocal influence of [student] and text” (p. xvi) in order to make sense of what is happening, to make meaning from it, and how it relates to them. Texts are more than just what is written—they can be the texts of students’ lives, the text of the culture of school, or written text.

Interaction versus transaction can best be described through Rosenblatt’s (1985) billiard balls example. Imagine two billiard balls colliding. After they come into contact with one another, the two balls remain relatively unchanged; they are not dented, they are not cracked, they are not affected in any major way—that is interaction. The billiard balls interact with one another, but that interaction does not cause any real change. With transaction, change is unavoidable and “an ongoing process” (Rosenblatt, 1985, p. 98) because as one transacts with a text, the person and the text are changed through a continuous process. Readers bring their past experiences with them when reading a text and transaction allows the reader’s experience to change both the reader and the meaning of the texts they transact with.

In order for experience to be useful in the classroom, teachers need to create an environment that allows for a transaction (Rosenblatt, 1995) between the student and the knowledge being constructed in the classroom. According to Dewey (2012), “Thinking. . . is the intentional endeavor to discover specific connections between something which we do and the consequences which result, so that the two become continuous” (p. 156). Connecting
Rosenblatt’s (1995) concept of transaction and Dewey’s (2012) concept of thinking, education should create an environment in which students can transact with what is going on in the classroom and in the continuous process of thinking they can change themselves and others. When teachers work with students to connect with their experiences it shows students their lives and experiences are valued in the classroom, which creates an atmosphere of mutual respect.

Simply valuing students’ experience is not enough because “meaning is so dependent on context that it remains forever in process, at the intersection of centripetal tensions . . . and centrifugal tensions” (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007, p. 551). Meaning is inseparable from context and students’ experiences are part of that context or place. Teachers need to develop a “well thought-out philosophy of learning through personal experience” (Dewey, 1938, p. 21). A philosophy of teaching that incorporates learning through personal experiences creates opportunities for students to find relevance in the curriculum. A fitting place for teachers to begin to develop this philosophy of teaching is in their teacher education programs. It is important for “teacher educators to make concerted efforts to dig deeply into the concepts of culture and place to explore how individual differences influence teaching and learning” (Azano & Stewart, 2016). When schools and teachers plan and teach with student experiences in mind, there will be more personal contact with teachers and students than commonly occurs in the traditional school setting because “the primary source of social control resides in the very nature of the work done as a social enterprise in which all individuals have an opportunity to contribute and to which all feel a responsibility” (Dewey, 1938, p. 56).

Writing is a prime example of how to give all students an opportunity to contribute. Giving students an opportunity to write and use writing to inquire into and dialogue with the curriculum provides an opportunity for students to contribute and feel responsibility for their
learning and meaning making. When everyone in the classroom has an opportunity to contribute and claim responsibility for the learning that occurs in the classroom, students are more likely to engage if the social organization includes “activities in which all participate [and those activities] are the chief carrier of control” (Dewey, 1938, p. 56).

Transacting with texts is an integral part of meaning making, especially in the language arts classroom where stories from hundreds of years ago seem disparate to students’ lives. Writing is one way to get students to transact with texts; in fact, writing itself is a transaction between the intent of the writer and the interpretation of the reader (Rosenblatt, 1994). Because languages are mediated by culture, so is writing—each reader and each writer comes to the piece with a different interpretation (Rosenblatt, 1994). When the writer sits down to write, they have an intent for that piece—they have a reason for writing—their cultural contexts and past experiences play a part in the words they elect to use (Stewart, 2010); however, when someone else sits down to read it, that intent may or may not be seen by that reader. As students read and write, they become partial owners of those texts because there are as many interpretations as there are readers and writers of texts (Rosenblatt, 1995). Importantly, as writers sit down to write, their personal experiences, their prior knowledge, and the intent with which they write are in constant transaction with their writing and the various texts of the classroom.

**Dialogic Pedagogy Operationalizes a Democratic Critical Approach to Education**

Dialogic pedagogy provides a frame for examining the ways students enter into and use the discourse communities in the classroom and for considering the utility of the place-based curriculum employed by Project PLACE. Moreover, dialogic pedagogy pairs naturally with the place-based curriculum because they both have connections to critical pedagogy. Critical literacy, as discussed by Freire and Macedo (1987), is designed to “lead students to recognize
various tensions and enable them to deal effectively with them” (p. 49). Students entering into dialogue with the curriculum and the oppressive forces that seek to maintain the status quo in the classroom are engaging in a critical pedagogical process by recognizing the tensions that exist in their worlds. As students write, they are entering into a discourse community; a conversation that is ongoing. This is similar to going to a social gathering and joining in a conversation: People don’t enter conversations by repeating what others have already said; instead, they use what others have said and connect to their own ideas and experiences (Graff & Birkenstein, 2010). According to Stewart (2019) “dialogic pedagogy is an approach to teaching that values questioning, examines context, explores multiple perspectives, challenges hierarchical structures, and views learning as a generative act” (p. 213).

Dialogic pedagogy is founded on Bakhtin’s theories of language and culture. Bakhtin (1981) discussed the mythical Adam as the only being who entered into a “virginal yet verbally unqualified world with the first word” who could escape “dialogic interaction,” which cannot happen today (p. 279). It is impossible to escape dialogic interaction because every utterance is connected to the words of others (Bakhtin, 1981). Furthermore, what Bakhtin termed heteroglossia connects what is said to the context, or “the orientation of the word amid the utterances and languages of others” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 300). Because each utterance is shaped by the context in which it is uttered, the tension of heteroglossia is important to writers; they must find a way to express their ideas in connection with themselves, but in such a way that more than just a select group of people have access to that piece of writing.

Freire (1970) discussed his concepts of dialogue, which connect to Bakhtin’s theories of language and culture. Freire argued that “without dialogue there can be no communication and without communication there can be no true education” (p. 93). The purpose of education is to
provide opportunities for people to dialogue about their views and others’ views (Freire, 1970). Because dialogic pedagogy stems from Bakhtin’s theories of language and culture and Freire argued that education needs to provide opportunities for people to dialogue about their views and others’ views, these two concepts connect well with one another.

Bakhtin (1981) discussed the concepts of centripetal and centrifugal forces in language. According to Bakhtin, “Every utterance participates in the ‘unitary language’ (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces)” (p. 272). Centripetal forces in language are those that work to unify the codifications of language; centrifugal forces are those that work toward multiple meanings—the meanings everyone makes for themselves once entered into actual speech. Even though Bakhtin’s context for this discussion was on the Russian novel, these same ideas are applicable in the classroom. In order for students to make meaning of and engage in the texts of the classroom, there needs to be a balanced tug between the centripetal and centrifugal forces of language. This delicately balanced tug between the two forces can be enacted by creating a space for students to express themselves without the pressure of expressing themselves in the primary Discourse of school. Providing students with an opportunity to develop their content before focusing on mechanics and structure will help with cultivating this tug between forces. As students express themselves, while focusing on content over mechanics, they may find that certain words or phrases that are pulled more centrifugally are more impactful in the context, while still revising much of what they are writing to pull more centripetally, unifying the language of the piece to a larger audience. This is important in writing because as students transact with the language they are using to get their point across, they need to have that delicate
balance between the two forces of language so that the utterance matches the context in which it occurs.

Dialogic classrooms are similar to Bakhtin’s concept of centripetal and centrifugal forces—they exist on a continuum; it is neither monological nor dialogical (Fecho, Coombs, & McAuley, 2012). Fecho et al. argued that dialogic classrooms exist on a continuum between monological and dialogical—not reaching either limit. What this means for the classroom is that sometimes the lessons can skew more toward the monological end of the continuum or more to the dialogical end, but they should not skew to one end routinely, but find a delicate balance on the continuum, which is similar to the tug or balance between centripetal and centrifugal forces of language.

Dialogic pedagogy provides a lens through which I can examine student writing and think about the utility of and potential to augment the curriculum by connecting with a dialogic stance. When using dialogic pedagogy to create a dialogic classroom, teachers should remember that, as Freire (1970) asserted, that “dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming—between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them” (p. 88). Everyone’s voice in the classroom is important because “the aim of progressive education [is] to take part in correcting unfair privilege and unfair deprivation, not to perpetuate them (Dewey, 2012, p. 129). If teachers restrict those who can speak or how students speak, they are inevitably alienating groups of students who have valuable contributions to the dialogue.

In order to create an equitable classroom where all students’ voices are valued, Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia, which literally means different tongues, is key to creating equity. When creating an equitable classroom, Fecho (2013) argued that “trying to achieve some modicum of
balance in that tension [between forces]” (p. 117) is what matters in making sure that meaning can be made. Fecho and Botzakis (2007) operationalized Bakhtin’s term “feast of becoming” to show that there is often an existential crisis that can occur when this tug exists between the two heteroglossic forces. When students are given opportunities to transact with the unifying and individual meanings of words and utterances “literacy classrooms . . . become . . . playgrounds, workplaces, and intellectual places of the future” (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007, p. 556).

**Context of the Promoting PLACE Curriculum**

The Promoting PLACE Curriculum is a modification of the CLEAR curriculum. The CLEAR curriculum was developed to provide a resource for teachers to meet the needs of their high performing learners (Azano et al., 2017). The CLEAR curriculum is based on the concepts of differentiation, Renzulli’s Schoolwide Enrichment Model, and depth and complexity. The CLEAR curriculum provides opportunities for students to engage with “big ideas” and understand the language of the profession (e.g., a poet, folklorist, or researcher). Moreover, the curriculum provides opportunities for students to have “deep understanding of complex issues and the real-world implications of those issues” (Azano et al., 2017). According to Azano et al., “the [CLEAR] curriculum was infused with place-based pedagogy, which provided literary texts and cumulating projects that celebrated the students’ unique lived experiences in rural environments” (p. 15) in order to develop the Promoting PLACE curriculum. The developers of the curriculum included places where teachers could connect what they were learning (folklore, poetry, fiction, research) to students’ lived experiences in their rural communities. Project PLACE researchers also provided unique texts for teachers to use in place of the literature provided with the curriculum (Callahan & Azano, 2018). Teachers were asked to fill out a survey about local histories, stories, local places, and local legends. Project researchers then researched
poems, folktales, and fictional tales that related to the stories and knowledge of the community. For example, one district is known for its wild ponies, so teachers were provided access to literature on the wild ponies of the area. This modification helped teachers to provide intentional connections to place that students would have experience with and knowledge of (Callahan & Azano, 2018).

**Critical Inquiry: A Feature of Democratic Education**

Critical inquiry provides an avenue to connect the critical and place-based part of the Promoting PLACE curriculum to dialogic pedagogy. Critical inquiry is a pedagogy grounded in a theoretical framework, which Fecho (2000b) asserted “springs from the transactions with Bakhtin’s sociolinguistic dialogic theories, Dewey’s theories of experience and education, Rosenblatt’s transactional literary theories, [and] Freire’s theories of critical dialogue” (p. 195).

According to Fecho (2000a), critical inquiry encompasses all of these theories, creating a way for the many viewpoints in a classroom to transact with one another to create a strong and positive environment for learning. The concept of critical inquiry connects to social constructionism by incorporating and encouraging the social construction of meaning. Critical inquiry blends these theories into one encompassing theory in order to support an inquiry framework for classroom structures in which all parties are questioning and investigating their beliefs, which helps students and teachers to make sense of the world and its connection to the classroom (Fecho, 2000a). Fecho, Commeyras, Bauer, and Font (2000) stated that this type of instruction is “counter-hegemonic [and] encourages critique, diversity, rigor, and meaning making, especially in terms of considering individuals in their relationships to mainstream authority” (p. 472). Meaning making occurs by challenging the status quo and incorporating diversity and inquiry.
Language arts teachers are in a prime position to incorporate these ideas, especially through writing instruction.

Taking a critical inquiry stance in the classroom provides a way for teacher and student to “inquire into their transactions in the classroom as well as their relationships to the community at large” (Fecho, Price, & Read, 2004, p. 266). What this means is as teachers and students transact with the texts in the classroom, they are also inquiring into those transactions—questioning the new texts created in the classroom and how they can be interpreted and read differently, every day, by every person involved in a transaction. However, using this pedagogic stance can sometimes cause students to feel threatened by the discussions and transactions that occur, but it is important for teachers to use dialogue as a “means for facilitating inquiry as well as a means for calling to the surface the ways class participants may feel threatened” (Fecho, 2001, p. 12).

Language is a way to construct common meaning, and a dialogic classroom uses language as a way to construct meaning. Therefore, understanding Bakhtin’s theory of language and how each language has its own identity—which then transacts with and changes with each utterance (Bakhtin, 1986)—is important to facilitating inquiry and dialogue to give all students the opportunity to question their ideas and understandings and why they see them that way. Crossing boundaries of cultures can be risky and threatening, but it is necessary (Fecho, 2001). In order for students to question their ideas and understandings, they need to cross the boundaries of cultures; they need to understand that there are multiple ways of seeing or understanding the same thing, which will help them understand their own viewpoints while also challenging what they believe.

A Critical Pedagogy of Place and Writing Instruction
A critical pedagogy of place connects the concepts of critical pedagogy and place-based education to develop a new theoretical framework that encompasses the needs of connecting to the local context and the larger, global context (Gruenewald, 2003a). According to Freire and Macedo (1987) “the primary role of critical pedagogy is to lead students to recognize various tensions and enable them to deal effectively with them” (p. 49). Freire and Macedo (1987) noted the importance of reading the word and the world, or the texts of the dominant culture and the context in which a person experiences those texts. Challenging the status quo is largely the foundation of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy connects to place-based education by making the curriculum more relevant to students’ lives. A critical pedagogy of place gives students more agency and “a direct bearing on the well-being of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit” (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 4). Moreover, the concept of connecting education to students’ experiences is not new because Dewey (1938) advocated for connecting students’ experiences to education because “there is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education” (p. 20).

As teachers work to find ways to connect students’ lives understanding that there is a relationship between their actual experiences and education is the first step. A critical pedagogy of place is an effective way of connecting what students know to their education because it is founded on the concept that students’ communities and experiences in those communities are central to the learning process (Azano, 2011); students know their communities, they know what they experience as members of that community, so finding ways to connect what they know and have experienced is key to a critical pedagogy of place. Connecting to place—the concept that students’ experiences and communities in which they have those experiences are central to the learning process and connecting the curriculum connects to those experiences, makes what
students are learning more relevant and provides students with a sense of agency in the communities in which they inhabit—it provides a way for students to inquire into the “place-specific nexus between environment, culture, and education” (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 10).

Moreover, Freire and Macedo (1987) asserted that “Reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world. Language and reality are dynamically interconnected” (p. 29).

Within the context of writing instruction, a critical pedagogy of place provides a framework for understanding that “all [writers] belong to discourse communities” (Nystrand, 1989, p.71). What this means is that writers operate within a conversation that has already started and is ongoing; the utterances they make are connected to past utterances and future utterances (Bakhtin, 1986). Once a writer commits their words to paper, “an exchange of meaning or transformation of shared knowledge [happens] as writers and readers interact every time the readers understand a written text” (Nystrand, 1989, p. 74) and a common meaning is constructed. Because language and reality are inherently connected (Freire & Macedo, 1987), writing is a way for students to connect their reality with the reality of the classroom. Through writing and constructing common meanings through transaction with texts, students are inquiring into and challenging the status quo.

**Conclusion**

This theoretical framework has set a larger foundation through which I can examine student writing crafted during the context of this study. Using the broad concepts of social constructionism combined with a critical, place-based, democratic, dialogic stance, this theoretical framework will provide a way for me to examine student writing, while also connecting the concepts of a place-based curriculum with dialogic pedagogy to consider ways in
which the Promoting PLACE curriculum might be augmented the future. The critical, place-based foundation of the Promoting PLACE curriculum creates opportunities for students to connect to their place and examine the oppressive forces that limit conceptions of their communities. The curriculum provides ways to confront the way traditional schooling oppresses students in rural areas and the concepts of rural literacies, but the addition of a dialogic stance provides additional opportunities for students and teachers to bring their experiences and understandings into dialogue with the content of the classroom and creates further opportunities for students to construct their own meaning. In the next chapter, I review the relevant literature on writing self-efficacy, place-based pedagogy and writing instruction, and high-performing rural writers.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Attending to gifted students in rural settings can be challenging in multitude ways. While there are opportunity gaps that exist for all rural students, such as lack of resources, some school districts do not have the personnel to provide gifted pull-out or push-in services every day of the week; sometimes districts do not have the resources to offer any gifted services at all (Azano, Callahan, Missett, & Brunner, 2014; Howley, Rhodes, & Beall, 2009; Mattingly & Shaefer, 2015). In fact, many rural school districts, if they do have a gifted resource teacher to provide gifted services, can only provide pull-out services once a week for about an hour because, often, the gifted resource teacher is left to travel to several schools in one week to provide services across spread out districts (Azano et al., 2014; Howley et al., 2009). This chapter focuses on literature in the areas of writing self-efficacy, place, rurality, rural literacies, and gifted rural students and writing instruction. The purpose of reviewing the literature in these areas is to provide a picture of the field of rural gifted education and writing self-efficacy and provide a literature base for answering the question: What is the influence of a place-based curriculum on high-performing rural students as writers? In order to answer this question, I will first see what is present in student writing samples that follow the implementation of the Promoting PLACE curriculum so I can learn how students connect to place in their writing and how that connection may enable me to think about future work that includes a dialogic, critical, place-based curriculum.

Writing Self-Efficacy

In this section, I define self-efficacy as it is used and operationalized in studies about writing instruction. I discuss the three foundational studies (Pajares & Johnson, 1996; Schunk &
Swartz, 1993a; 1993b) about writing self-efficacy and three studies that provide a further understanding of the effects of self-efficacy on students’ writing achievement.

Writing self-efficacy is important for all writers because if students do not see themselves as capable of achieving writing goals, they are less likely to work to achieve those goals (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016; Gallagher, 2011; Stewart, 2011a). Schunk and Swartz (1993b) conducted a study that focused on the writing self-efficacy of gifted elementary students, which is now known as a foundational piece in the field of writing self-efficacy. The participants of Schunk and Swartz’s study were 33 fourth graders from two classes in one elementary school. The study consisted of a writing self-efficacy pre-test that asked questions about their perceived ability to write five, single-paragraph writing tasks, generate ideas, decide on the main idea, plan the paragraph, write the topic sentence, and write the supporting sentences. After pre-testing, students were then randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: paragraph goal, strategy goal, and strategy goal plus progress feedback. For the two experimental conditions (strategy goal and strategy goal plus progress feedback), students received a specific goal they were to achieve in their paragraphs, but students who received progress feedback received feedback on the progress they were making on the given strategy three to four times each session. The post-test results indicated that students who were assigned to the strategy goal plus feedback condition judged self-efficacy higher than students assigned to the paragraph goal condition or the strategy goal condition. Overall, Schunk and Swartz (1993b) found that writing self-efficacy is positively related to skill and is influenced by performances, but not necessarily a reflection of them. In other words, self-efficacy is tied to performance because students were completing the same number of paragraph tasks (Schunk & Swartz, 1993b), but that does not mean that prior performance will always suggest current ability to perform a task.
To improve students’ writing self-efficacy and their writing achievement, teachers should provide goals for students to achieve in their writing, help them understand the purpose of those goals to writing or the writing process, and provide process feedback while they are working on achieving the goal set for them. These instructional strategies are not different from what effective writing instruction should include, but when students feel they are making progress toward a goal, they are more like to believe they can achieve that goal (Bandura, 1997). These findings were furthered in Schunk and Swartz (1993a), where they found, with 60 fifth grade students from three classes in two schools, students assigned to the process goal plus progress feedback scored self-efficacy higher than the other two conditions (these were the same as the study with gifted students). However, they found that while post-test self-efficacy was a predictor of writing achievement, it is also influenced by experimental condition (Schunk & Swartz, 1993a). Schunk & Swartz recommended a replication of their study with a larger sample size to confirm the results of their study.

Pajares and Johnson (1996) conducted a study with 181 ninth-grade students, who were enrolled in “regular or advanced English classes during two class periods” (p. 166) and found that self-efficacy and writing performance were highly correlated ($r^2=.60$), but this can be attributed to the use of self-efficacy items as the criteria for scoring the essays because the scoring rubric was created using the types of writing skills on which students were asked to rank their self-efficacy. Pajares and Johnson (1996) did not provide information on each of the eight items that students rated their self-efficacy on, nor the breakdown of those items in the scoring of the “My Idea of a Perfect Day” essay (Pajares & Johnson, 1996, p. 166). Overall, Pajares and Johnson found that self-efficacy and writing performance are highly correlated, but they acknowledge that it may be due to the rubric being based on the self-efficacy questions. The
survey used in this study is based on Pajares et al.’s (1999) self-efficacy scale, but the rubric used to score students does not correlate one to one with the items on the self-efficacy scales.

The finding that when scoring students’ writing on the same items used on the self-efficacy scale, students’ writing performance is highly correlated with their writing self-efficacy relates to Caropreso, Haggerty, and Landenheim’s (2016) study of advanced college students. Caropreso et al. found that when students are enrolled in an honors, writing intensive, four-course sequence that emphasized “critical-thinking writing. . . which is the ability to construct a thesis, build an argument, support arguments with empirical data, acknowledge alternative positions, synthesize, analyze, and draw conclusions” (p. 258), students’ writing self-efficacy improved. Moreover, Webb, Vandiver, and Jeung (2016) found that when talented students are given an enriched curriculum—classes that are not required by students’ school districts—students reported higher levels of confidence in their writing at the end of each of the six writing tasks offered; no analysis was run with writing self-efficacy and writing achievement in this study, but the results of their study shows that an enriched curriculum can help to increase students’ writing self-efficacy. Additionally, McCracken & Ortiz (2013) also found that when “at risk” students are given a curriculum on writing about writing, their writing self-efficacy improves. Neither of these last two studies makes a connection to writing performance, but they do provide evidence that a curriculum can have an influence on students’ writing self-efficacy. When a curriculum focuses specifically on improving students’ writing self-efficacy, it is likely to have an impact on students’ self-efficacy over time.

**Place-Based Pedagogy and Its Use in Writing Instruction**

In this section, I define place-based pedagogy, explain its origins and Gruenewald’s (2003) adaptation with a critical pedagogy of place, and discuss six studies where place has been
studied in language arts settings (Azano, 2011; Brooke, 2011; Charlton et al., 2014; Comber, Thompson, & Wells, 2001; Donovan, 2017; Eppley, 2011; Waller & Barrentine, 2015). This section provides a background of place-based pedagogy in order to understand the importance of using students’ experiences outside of school to making meaning in the classroom. Furthermore, this section provides a discussion of ways to connect to students’ place through writing instruction.

Place-based pedagogy originated in fields outside of education, such as anthropology and environmental studies (Gruenewald, 2003a). Gruenewald (2003a) indicated that because place-based pedagogy originated in fields outside of education it lacked a theoretical foundation and, through wedding it to critical pedagogy, he created a space to “[encourage] teachers and students to reinhabit their places, that is, to pursue the kind of social action that improves the social and ecological life of places, near and far, now and in the future” (p. 8). According to Gruenewald (2003b), place-consciousness can be broken into five categories, all of which can be incorporated into the classroom: “perceptual, cultural, ideological, ecological, and political” (p. 623). Each of these dimensions of place-consciousness is important for the classroom because they are often neglected in schools (Gruenewald, 2003b). Moreover, as students learn about local issues, these local issues inevitably “spiral out” into larger, global issues “because local reality is almost always shaped by much more widespread cultural, natural, and economic forces” (Brooke, 2011, p. 164).

**Rural Literacies and Deliberate Connections to Place**

The notion of rural literacies has evolved since the first occurrence of rural literacies in the 1980s (Corbett & Donehower, 2017). One important result of this evolution is that the term has moved to mean something that is dynamic and socially constructed (Corbett & Donehower,
2017). Moreover, Donehower, Hogg, and Schell (2007) argued that their work on rural literacies is designed to “highlight the need for continued use of literate action to affect social change for rural peoples and rural communities” (p. 18). Donehower et al.’s argument is rural communities need sustainability and literacy is a form of sustainability. The term sustainability is often used to describe nature, but their concept of sustainability is cultural sustainability. Cultural sustainability, according to Donehower et al., “requires adapting cultural practices to changing economic, political, and social circumstances ensure the survival and sustainable development of a community” (p. 20). Because literacy development occurs both inside and outside of schools, teachers have opportunities to change students’ thinking about rural literacies. Moreover, this expanded view of literacies includes rural communities as global change agencies and as a part of a complex global economic and social network. Rural literacies in this context “becomes a matter of attending to text(s) and context(s)” (Green, 2013, p. 29). Literacies, including rural literacies, are social constructions and it is important to find ways to connect the work done in the classroom to students’ lives, communities, and place, while also connecting students to the larger, global economic and social networks in which their community operates, to reinforce the cultural sustainability of rural communities.

The use of basal readers and commercial programs are common in many public schools (Cutler & Graham, 2008), so it is often up to the teacher to make the intentional connections to community and place (Waller & Barrentine, 2015). Teachers are members of the local community and they have a store of community-based examples at their fingertips. Waller and Barrentine studied teachers’ use of community-based connections while using commercial basal reading programs in one community. In their study, they conducted interviews, observations and analyzed documents of three elementary teachers who were given almost full autonomy of their
curriculum. During their observations, the researchers observed teachers who had deep roots in their local community and noticed that these teachers were making efforts to connect to that community. Of the three teachers observed in this study, they all made intentional connections to community and/or place, but most of those connections were superficial. The fourth-grade teacher observed in this study “appeared to help students weave complex place-based connections” (Waller & Barrentine, 2015, p. 7) into their reading. When reading a story about Lou Gehrig, these students were asked to identify personal heroes. One of the activities students did was write a short description of their hero and reflect on why that person was a hero—prior to this writing assignment the teacher showed examples of heroes from all walks of life from Barack Obama to a local veteran who had cancer. The teacher’s customized the basal reading program by “opening up the theme of heroes to be community based” (Waller & Barrentine, 2015, p. 8). Overall, what Waller and Barrentine found was teachers are rich sources of community knowledge, and if they check their connection to the community at the school doors, there are “missed opportunities” (Azano, 2011, p. 11) for making stronger connections between students and their communities (Waller and Barrentine, 2015). When teachers are open to using their own stories to make connections between school and the community, they can help students see their own stories as valuable and impactful on their community; it shows students their stories matter and that they can be change agents in and for their communities (Donovan, 2017).

Charlton et al. (2014) studied an elementary class in rural England where the teacher used a book entitled My Place to make deliberate connections to students’ communities. In this study, Charlton et al. (2014) worked with one elementary class whose teacher made intentional connections to the students’ community while they read My Place. The book centers around one house and its surrounding community; it tells the story of this community from the perspective of
a child who lives in the house, moving backward in time from 1988-1788. As students read the text, discussion centered around how students would react to the various changes in the community discussed in the book over two hundred years. One of the activities students were asked to do was to map “their place” (p. 161). Through this mapping of their place, the researchers discovered that students were including in their maps indications of things that were part of their daily lives; for example, there were mosques, churches, and stores, which “represent[ed] spaces formed by the coming together of people and places” (Charlton et al., 2014, p. 164). Through students’ transactions with the text, they were able to generate products that were a result of that transaction. Teachers have the necessary knowledge to make connections to place and by doing so they can help rural students see they matter in their community and their stories are valued in the classroom.

**Place-Based Pedagogy and Writing Instruction**

Writing instruction is one avenue for students to explore the connections between their experiences and the curriculum, especially when teachers provide deliberate, intentional connections to community and place in the classroom. Writing is a way for students to express their ideas, especially when students are allowed an opportunity to get their ideas on paper without worrying about grammar, punctuation, and form (Donovan, 2016). When exposed to place-based writing instruction, students write about things that matter to them and they have authority and voice in their writing (Donovan, 2016). Place-based pedagogy provides an avenue for students to express themselves in writing and to become an authority in the classroom.

Brooke (2011) discussed an operationalization of Nancy Welch’s “rhetorical space” (p. 161). Rhetorical space is
public space with the potential to operate as a persuasive public sphere. . . ordinary people make rhetorical space through concerted, often protracted struggle for visibility, voice, and impact against powerful interests that seek to deny visibility, voice, and impact (Welch, p. 477, as cited in Brooke, 2011).

Using this public space, Brooke describes a project of high school seniors in rural Nebraska. These seniors created TV segments for a local station that focused on rural issues that impacted their lives. Most students wrote about the decline in family farms or closing of factory jobs and the impact that had on their families. One student was even invited to read her essay at a forum that was dedicated to reimagining the Homestead Act, which Senator Chuck Hagel (R-NE) attended. This student’s invitation to read her powerful essay in front of dignitaries shows the impact discussing local issues can have on a larger audience. As Brooke noted, “local reality is almost always shaped by much more widespread cultural, natural, and economic forces” (p. 164). When students are given an opportunity to connect to place in their writing, they can move from the local to the global, sometimes without realizing the impact the global has on the local until exploring those connections (Brooke, 2011).

**Place-based pedagogy and critical literacies.** Place-based pedagogy also provides a way for students to engage in critical literacies, even at a young age (Comber, Thomson, & Wells, 2001). In their study, Comber et al. observed a teacher who asked students to respond to four prompts with a drawing and a caption for the drawing. The prompts moved students from the personal (the best things in their lives) to the global (whether they thought young people had the power to change things) After students completed their drawings, the teacher noticed students responded to the third prompt (what they would wish for if they could have three wishes) with wishes for better neighborhood conditions and took this as an indication that this would be a
powerful way to connect the curriculum to students’ lives. Students were now guided toward doing research that impacted change in their community. For their final project, students were asked to draw pictures that showed the improvements they would like to see in their neighborhood. The teacher sent those ideas on to the local government, so students would see that they can make a difference in their community. Through this project, students felt empowered to act on change, rather than be passive observers of problems in their community. By connecting students with their community, the teacher focused on the social aspect of the neighborhood; students learn what they know in their neighborhoods first, then they come to school with those experiences and understandings, which can be used to enact critical literacies (Comber et al., 2001).

The concept of critical literacies through writing instruction is further exemplified by Eppley (2011). Even though Eppley’s study focused on preservice teachers learning how to enact place-based pedagogy, the findings are important to connecting to place in the classroom. In this study, Eppley asked her preservice teachers to read three books in common with a local elementary classroom and write pen pal letters back and forth with students in that classroom about the books they were reading. Through the pen pal experience, Eppley observed that the elementary students were able to demonstrate their literacy and even struggling writers engaged with writing and reading. This study shows when students are given ways to connect to the literature through their own experiences, they are engaging with writing and reading in more critical ways. When students are given an opportunity to connect with what they know and express themselves in writing without worry of grammar and form, they are able to become the experts and the authority in the classroom (Donovan, 2016).
Place-based pedagogy provides a way for students and teachers to “develop stronger ties to their community, enhance [their] appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens” (Sobel, 2005, p. 7). When teachers create a space for students to engage with the experiences they have outside of school, what they do inside of school becomes much more meaningful.

**Rural Gifted Education**

In this section I review the literature on rural gifted education with the following goals: to provide a rationale for the importance and context of this work and to review empirical studies that have looked explicitly at gifted education in rural settings.

The concept of giftedness is socially constructed because gifts and talents do not always manifest themselves as academic gifts; sometimes gifts and talents are factors of “human activity that manifests itself in socially useful forms” (Renzulli, 1978, p. 181). Cross and Coleman (2005) define giftedness as “a combination of advanced development and creativity. . . that begins as potential, evolves into achievement within recognizable domains during the school years, and becomes increasingly advanced through the nonuniversal development of the individual” (p. 62).

Because gifted education is not federally mandated, like special education, school districts often do not fund gifted education, or they allot small budgetary amounts to these programs (Croft, 2015). Gifted students in rural communities are often the students who do not get much attention. As a result of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the emphasis on high-stakes testing, the focus in the classroom has shifted to students “below the bubble” who are likely to move from “below the required ‘cut score’ to above that score” (Howley et al., 2009, p. 526), in order to raise standardized test scores. However, high-performing students need challenges to their higher-level thinking skills, such as sentence combining and opportunities to work on creative pieces,
while also understanding the purpose for the activities they are completing (Stoddard & Renzulli, 1983).

**Rural Gifted Teachers**

Gifted education in rural areas can be a point of contention within the community, which provides a responsibility for connecting what gifted students are doing in school to their place (Petrin, Schafft, & Meece, 2014). Parents, teachers, and administrators all want to educate gifted students in ways that challenge their abilities, but often this means encouraging high-performing students to leave their community to attend higher education institutions and find jobs in their field elsewhere (Howley, Howley, & Showalter, 2015). While “rural brain drain” (Petrin et al., 2014, p. 297) isn’t something that will affect elementary students immediately, students’ leaving the community to achieve their goals is not the only option. Teachers can help to reinforce ways for these students to return to their communities after getting a higher education.

However, leaving the community for better educational and vocational options is often just a fact of life in rural communities (Petrin et al., 2014). Petrin et al. found that teachers and adults in students’ lives are not complicit in their encouragement of outmigration. Although they are encouraging students to leave, adults in students’ lives are doing so critically, with the goal of having students leave and learn skills they can bring back to their community. When schools and teachers accept that giftedness manifests itself in ways that may not necessarily be academic, rural communities can provide “developed vocational paths that lead to skilled employment in practical occupations” providing avenues for “capable students who demonstrate ‘giftedness’ for practical endeavors” (Howley et al., 2015, p. 338). Even though providing other avenues for students to show their gifts and talents in other, non-academic areas is important, it is also important that schools provide a strong connection to place and community in the curriculum, so
they support students returning to their communities after receiving higher educational training, or live in a rural community similar to their home community (Petrin et al., 2014).

In many rural areas, the gifted education teacher can only meet with students once a week for an hour or two at a time (Azano et al., 2014; Howley et al., 2009). In their study, Azano et al. (2014) sought to understand gifted teachers’ experience with implementing a gifted curriculum with fidelity. One teacher in this study said, “I really enjoyed the poetry unit, but with only having my students one day per week I was required to cut many parts out. There wasn’t enough time to teach both units” (p. 95). This is common in rural areas, which emphasizes the lack of resources for rural gifted students—teachers are stretched thin, asked to do many different jobs, and only get to see their students one hour per week (Azano et al., 2014). However, this factor is not necessarily detrimental to students’ achievement. In fact, Azano et al. (2014) found that even though rural teachers cited many barriers to implementing the curriculum, their students did not underperform in comparison to their nonrural peers. It is possible that while rural teachers may not have implemented the curriculum with high fidelity, their modifications actually helped their students gain in achievement (Azano et al., 2014). The use of modification and students performing just as well as their nonrural peers suggests that when teachers know their students’ needs and can connect what they are doing in school to students’ lives, student achievement can increase.

Effective Strategies for Teaching Rural Gifted Students

There are strategies that exist for teachers to provide the challenges their gifted students may need. For example, Smith (2014) suggests that teachers use modeling and scaffolds to help students move from knowledge telling in their writing, where they simply repeat what they know, to knowledge transformation, where they transform what they know into something new
by analyzing or creating something original. In Smith’s (2014) example, students used what they knew about Native American literature to write their own story that followed the same format they discussed throughout reading a Native American story. The structure of Smith’s (2014) lesson is similar to the Promoting PLACE curriculum. In the Promoting PLACE curriculum, students spend time learning about the form and function of a genre, such as folklore or fiction, and by the end of the unit, they are expected to produce their own folklore or fiction story that follows the forms they have learned about. Furthermore, Spanke and Paul (2015) suggest that because writing is a social construction, teachers should use inductive teaching methods that connect to real-world learning methods to foster “students’ intellectual curiosity” (p. 180); that real-world connection can come through in using connections to students’ community and place. VanTassel-Baska and Hubbard (2016) suggest strategies that can be implemented easily across a variety of rural areas because what works in one rural community, in regard to place connections, will not necessarily work in another rural area because the communities are quite different. Teachers can provide questions that address higher level thinking skills, project or problem-based learning, accelerated curriculum, or inquiry-based learning for their higher performing students (VanTassel-Baska & Hubbard, 2016). Gifted students are in need of these strategies to ensure the curriculum will challenge their abilities.

Olthouse’s (2014) study of gifted students’ relationship with writing exemplifies some of these strategies. In this study, Olthouse did a collective case study with ten gifted children in grades three through six. Students in the study were chosen for a creative writing workshop that took place over one week, for three hours each morning. Throughout this workshop, students wrote one creative story that “was a reinterpretation of a classic tale from the villain’s perspective” (Olthouse, 2014, p. 175). As students wrote their stories, Olthouse observed
students in the workshop and interviewed them about their relationships with writing. During the workshop, students received both holistic and skills-based feedback, from which their writing benefited. Students were also able to choose freely from any classic tale they wanted to reimagine. What Olthouse found was advanced writers need both holistic and skills-based feedback, that they understand revision is much more than surface level corrections, and students need a variety of complex models and prompts that challenge their writing abilities. Olthouse’s (2014) study suggests that giving students options to connect their writing to their own knowledge and using models helps advanced writers understand the “importance of revision, technical aspects of narrative and genre, as well as how to be more flexible in their writing” (p. 185).

Gifted writers can benefit from opportunities to connect their learning to real-world problems and from learning the knowledge transformation approach, so they can apply what they have learned to community or place. Bruce-Davis and Chancey (2012) studied underperforming gifted students and found that when students were engaged in an interest-based service learning project their performance increased. The focus of this study was on bringing out gifts and talents in underperforming students, but their findings suggest that connecting students to place could provide a way to increase student performance. Furthermore, Honeyford (2017) argued that “place can be powerful catalysts for writing, inviting us to explore and understand our individual and collective relationships with one another and the world” (p. 279). In her study, Honeyford (2017) invited a group of teachers to a local meeting place and invited them to “write in place” (p. 279). Throughout this activity, teachers wandered around the local meeting place and wrote about that place. Honeyford (2017) found that using multimodalities can “evoke possibilities for the writing we do with our students in school, giving them an audience and consequential
significance in the real world” (p. 281). Even though her study was done with a group of teachers, this particular project could be used in the gifted classroom to help students feel a “consequential significance in the real world” (p. 281).

**Adding to the Literature**

The research discussed in this chapter provides a literature base for answering the question: What is the influence of a place-based curriculum on high-performing rural students as writers? The foci of these studies are rural literacies, place, or gifted writers in one classroom, school, or district. My study analyzes data across several different rural districts.

My study sought to add to the literature on high-performing rural writers. First, my study sought to understand how high-performing students’ writing self-efficacy and connections to place influence their writing ability. Moreover, I sought to understand the influence of a place-based curriculum on students’ notions of and connections to place in their writing. The studies focused on place-based instruction indicate that when teachers make a deliberate connection to place, students make stronger connections to the learning that is taking place in the classroom; however, only one of the studies discussed in this chapter examines the ways students reference place in their writing (Azano, 2011). By connecting self-efficacy, place, and writing ability through a mixed-methods approach, my study sought to answer the question: What is the influence of a place-based curriculum on high-performing rural students as writers? This study connects students’ writing ability with community/place, to better understand how a curriculum, that makes intentional connections to place, might impact students as writers. Additionally, understanding students’ connections to place in their writing will help to inform the ways a dialogic stance can be incorporated with a critical, place-based curriculum to highlight the inequities that exist for rural students.
In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology and methods I used to conduct my study. The chapter discusses the data collection procedures, data analysis steps, and limitations. I end the chapter with a final connection to my theoretical framework, to emphasize how I used the data to provide a rationale for enhancing a place-based curriculum with a dialogic stance.
Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

Context of the Study

This study sought to understand the influence of a place-based language arts curriculum on high-performing rural students as writers. Writing ability in this study is defined by students’ scores on the pre- and post-test writing tasks. The data used for this study was collected as part of a larger, federally funded, five-year, Jacob K. Javits grant (Callahan & Azano, 2018). Three cohorts of students participated in the Promoting PLACE in Rural Schools grant. Cohort 1 students attended classes in one of two school districts, which served as the pilot districts (one treatment and one control), cohort 2 students were enrolled across nine districts (four treatment and five control), and students in cohort 3 were drawn from 10 districts (six treatment and four control). Students in the treatment group receive a critical, place-based curriculum while students in the control group received whichever services their district typically provides for gifted students.

The Promoting PLACE grant has five goals: (a) implementation of an identification process to identify increased numbers of gifted students in rural schools, particularly those who are of high poverty, (b) the development of high quality, place-based 3rd and 4th grade language arts curriculum based on the CLEAR curriculum model, (c) the adaptation of effective strategies developed by Carol Dweck and Joshua Aronson (and their colleagues) to increase belief in a growth mindset among identified students and reduce the impact of stereotype threat in identified rural gifted students, (d) increased achievement in reading and writing by the identified gifted rural students, and (e) increased student engagement and self-efficacy in identified gifted rural students (Callahan & Azano, 2018).
Using the Promoting PLACE project as the base, I designed this study to contribute to understanding students’ connections to place, how students use place to make meaning in the classroom, and the influence of a place-based curriculum on academically gifted students as writers. These concepts are important to understanding academic gifts and how districts can help students make a deeper connection to what they are learning in the classroom. Teachers need to know how to work with high-performing students, students need opportunities to connect what they are learning to place, and students need opportunities to examine and question the hierarchies and inequalities that exist in their communities.

**Research Question**

What is the influence of a place-based curriculum on high-performing rural students as writers?

**Instrument Development and Scoring**

I used a portion of the Promoting PLACE data: scores on pre- and post-test writing tasks pre- and post-test self-report assessments of self-efficacy, and pre- and post-test scales on concepts of community and place for cohort 2: students in nine districts, four treatment and five control.

The self-report scales were part of a larger instrument that asked students to assess their reading and writing self-efficacy, who they are and how they learn, and concepts of community and place. I used two subscales from that instrument. The self-report scales were developed by researchers on the project by modifying Pajares et al.’s (1999) self-efficacy instrument (Callahan & Azano, 2018). The researchers included questions on reading and writing self-efficacy, totaling 15 items. To get Pajares et al.’s (1999) scale down to 15 items (of which this study used seven—those related to writing self-efficacy), redundant items were eliminated, but items that
reflected important skills in Language Arts were kept (Callahan & Azano, 2018). The scales were piloted with a local school district to ensure the reliability and validity of the scales (Callahan & Azano, 2018). Cronbach’s alphas for the 7 pre- and post-test writing self-efficacy questions were α=.81 and α=.82, respectively. The community/place subscale consisted of 6 items and the pre- and post-test Cronbach’s alphas were α=.47 and α=.43. Based on those results, items were changed to ensure that the scales were addressing self-efficacy and connections to community/place and were finalized for use.

The two general writing tasks were developed by researchers on the project, who aligned the skills assessed with the third- and fourth-grade Standards of Learning (SOLs) for the state of Virginia (Callahan & Azano, 2018). This ensured that students in the control districts were not expected to undertake a task that is not offered in the curriculum for their grade level. In other words, aligning the writing tasks with the SOLs provided a way to ensure students were being assessed on what they should learn up to and in their respective grades. After the writing tasks were developed, they were sent to expert reviewers who recommended changes to the tasks based on their expertise (Callahan & Azano, 2018). The writing tasks were revised based on reviewers’ feedback and piloted in two districts, one treatment and one control. Responses on the pilot assessment indicated students were not providing the type of writing expected from the prompt as written; hence, the writing task prompt was revised to include the necessary criteria for genre and form (Callahan & Azano, 2018). Once those changes were made, the final writing tasks were used to assess writing in the next two cohorts of schools (Callahan & Azano, 2018).

To ensure that student products were reliable and focused on the skills that the task was designed to assess, project personnel developed a rubric for scoring the writing tasks (Callahan & Azano, 2018). The rubric has four categories on which students are scored: focus, word
choice/voice, mechanics, and structure (the rubric can be found in Appendix G). Responses to the prompt were scored in each of the categories is on a scale of 1-4 (novice to master). To ensure that mechanics and structure were not receiving more attention than focus and word choice/voice (the focus of the writing aspect of the curriculum) the latter two categories were weighted three times more (students can receive a total of 12 points for each of these categories instead of 4) than the mechanics and structure categories. Students can receive a total score from 0-32, with zero indicating that the student left the writing task blank or did not answer the prompt. Each writing task, both pre- and post-test, was scored using the same rubric, to ensure scoring consistency across pre- and post-tests.

Once the writing tasks and rubrics were finalized, I developed a training for the four scorers, two of whom were hired for scoring purposes and the other two were researchers on the project. It is important to train scorers before scoring any performance assessment to ensure the scorers understand the rubric and how to apply that rubric to student writing (Renzulli & Callahan, 2008). The training was based on trainings developed for pilot testing, but was modified for changes made to the rubric and prompts based on the pilot test results. The training consisted of student examples, exemplary, average, and non-exemplary, so scorers had anchor papers to refer to when scoring (Wiggins, 1996). The anchor papers used for the training were from the pilot test group.

The training was designed to direct scorers’ attention to each individual category on the rubric to ensure focus on the relevant criteria. To ensure inter-scorer reliability, anchor papers were scored by each scorer in the training. The first example was scored as a whole group, with a subsequent discussion about the way each individual scored that paper, in a low-stakes environment. Next, each scorer read the second example independently, scored the example on
the rubric, then each scorer’s scores are shared with the whole group. Any discrepancies in scores were discussed and scorers came to a consensus on the best way to address issues that caused a discrepancy. This process continued until there are no discrepancies in scoring, which usually required two or three more examples. After the training was completed, scorers were assigned to either pre- or post-test writing tasks. The writing tasks were split between two scorers, such that two scorers worked on either pre- or post-test writing tasks. Each scorer scored half of the writing tasks, so all writing tasks were assigned to a trained scorer. To maintain fidelity of scoring, each scorer scored 10 tasks individually, then the 11th task was scored by both scorers. The scores for the overlaps from each scorer were shared between the two scorers, which allowed for scorers to check their scoring process and make sure they are still scoring in a similar manner. Any discrepancies on the score for the overlap were discussed between scorers and a consensus was reached before additional papers were scored, with the discrepancies in scores noted for reference, if needed. It is important to note here, for the pre-test writing task scoring, one of the scorers was unable to complete their scoring, so they scored 37 of the writing tasks that were assigned to them and the remaining 30 assigned were scored by another scorer, who received the training.

**Data Collection**

In this section, I describe the sampling procedures used in this study, I explain the collection of the data sources I am using from the larger set of project data, and I provide a timeline figure of data collection.

**Sampling Procedures**

Eligible districts for the project were those districts with a rural NCES code (fringe, distant, or remote) and districts considered high-poverty by the Commonwealth (more than 50%
of the students in the district receiving free/reduced lunch). Of the 40 districts contacted, 11 agreed to participate. These districts varied in size, ranging from those with one elementary school to those with eight. Random assignment was made at the district level to prevent carry over, which was of particular concern in this study because in some of the school districts one gifted and talented teacher delivered instruction to all identified students. Students in the treatment schools were taught by teachers who were provided the Promoting PLACE curriculum and students in districts assigned to the control group did not receive instruction in the PLACE curriculum, but were provided instruction in the curriculum their school would typically offer.

The data used for this study were mined from the larger data set using the following criteria: students in cohort 2 for whom I had a complete set of data. Students in the sample have completed the self-efficacy and community/place questions on the scales, have pre-test data for the writing task, and were involved in the program during their third and fourth grade year. Of the 232 students in cohort 2, only 199 of those students have data because two districts dropped out of the study, students transfer to other school districts, drop out of their gifted program, or students transfer into the district after pre-testing data has been collected.

**Data Sources**

Quantitative analysis was based on control and treatment students’ pre- and post-test scores on the writing tasks (3rd and 4th grade, respectively; see Appendices A & B for writing task prompts), and the two scale sections (self-efficacy and community/place; see Appendices C & D for scale questions). See Figure 1 for a timeline of data collection.
Figure 1. Data collection timeline for each data point. Scales were completed fall 2016, then writing tasks pre-test in spring 2017, writing task post-test in spring 2018, and scale post-testing completed in spring 2018.

At the beginning of students’ third grade year, they completed a self-report scale, developed by project staff, which asked them questions about intelligence and how they learn, self-efficacy in reading and writing, community and place, and how they perceive people’s views of them as students in their community. This study only used the data from the writing self-efficacy (a portion of the self-efficacy section of the scales) and community and place portion of the scales. Students were instructed to read through each statement and circle the answer that best fit their viewpoint. For the self-efficacy questions the answers ranged, on a five-point Likert scale, from “I am sure I can’t do it” (lowest) to “I am definitely sure I can do it” (highest). On the community/place section, answers ranged from “Strongly Disagree” (lowest) to “Strongly Agree” (highest) with the middle option being “Neither Agree nor Disagree.” Students’ scores for the two sections were totaled, so each student had a writing self-efficacy score and a community/place score. Totaling these scores provided a data point that is continuous, which is a requirement for dependent variables in MANOVA (MANOVA, 2018). The data from this
portion of the scales allowed me to understand how students’ writing self-efficacy and connections to and views of community/place are affected by treatment condition (receiving a place-based curriculum). Students completed the same scale at the end of their fourth-grade year (Spring 2018), which provided the post-test data for the scale items. The post-test items are included in the MANOVA analysis to assess growth from pre- to post-test relative to treatment condition.

Between January and March of students’ third grade year (Spring 2017) they completed the pre-test writing task. The pre-test writing task asked students to write a letter to new students that would attending their school in the upcoming school year. Students were asked to include both educational and non-educational activities new students can expect to participate in when they come to their school and that make their school special. Students completed this in one session of about 30-40 minutes. The scores on the pre- and post-test writing tasks allowed me to compare students’ writing ability, as defined by their scores on the rubric, over a one-year period.

Between January and March of students’ fourth-grade year (Spring 2018) they completed the post-test writing task. The fourth-grade post-test writing task instructed students to think about a place they have been to that is special to them. This place can be anywhere, but students have to have actually been there. Students are instructed to describe what a great day is like in this place to someone who has never been there, using as much descriptive language as they think they need to paint a picture for their reader. This writing task was administered in the same format as the pre-test: one session of about 30-40 minutes. Students’ scores on the writing post-test allowed me to understand students’ growth in writing ability because both tasks are scored using the same rubric. The quantitative data for my study allowed me to assess gains in students’
writing ability, as scored on the rubric, which allowed me to assess the utility of the curriculum related to students’ writing ability.

For my qualitative data I used students’ pre- and post-test writing tasks. Instead of focusing on a score for students’ writing, I analyzed students’ writing for instances of place. The qualitative data helped me to examine how the curriculum may have encouraged students’ thinking relative to concepts of place and to inquire into hierarchies in their community and the ways they create other social constructions of community and place. Each student’s writing task was coded for references to place in their writing to get a better understanding of how students reference place and community in their writing. Specific data analysis procedures for this step are described in the next section.

Data Analysis

I originally designed this study as a mixed methods study because using a mixed methods design allows for the use of both quantitative and qualitative measures to provide a better understanding of the research problem than either one alone (Creswell, 2012). However, after careful consideration of the questions to be answered and the convergence of the two data analyses, a multimethod study was more appropriate because the two analyses are “interrelated within a broad topic…to solve an overall research problem,” but the analyses remain independent of one another (Morse, 2003, p. 196). In this section, I outline what procedures have been carried out for each data analysis phase. Table 1 summarizes data analysis procedures and questions each step will examine.

Table 1

Data Analysis Procedures and Questions Examined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Analysis Method</th>
<th>Data Sources Used</th>
<th>Questions Examined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

51
MANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variables:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment condition (IV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing task pre-test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing task post-test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Self-efficacy pre-test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Self-efficacy post-test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community/place pre-test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community/place post-test</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How does the treatment effect students’ growth in writing, writing self-efficacy, and concepts of community and place?

Qualitative

| Writing task pre-test |
| Writing task post-test |

In what ways do students reference place in their writing?

Quantitative Data Analysis

The first data analysis procedure I ran was a regression with total scores on the writing self-efficacy pre-test items with the writing task pre-test scores. I ran this analysis as a pilot analysis in order to better determine which data were most applicable to my research question. The regression allowed me to determine whether writing self-efficacy was a good predictor of students’ writing ability. This analysis provided me with a way to summarize the relationship between students’ writing self-efficacy and their writing ability (Keith, 2015). I found that, for these students, their pre-test writing self-efficacy scores were not good predictors of their pre-test writing task scores.

First, I calculated the total score of all seven writing self-efficacy questions. This score was used for the regression analysis because it allows a Likert scale to act as a continuous variable, which is needed for regression purposes. Students’ writing self-efficacy scores were regressed on their writing pre-test task scores. The overall regression was not statistically significant ($R^2=.005, F[1, 99] = .478, p=.491$), and self-efficacy accounted for 0.5% of the variance in writing task scores. This finding suggests that for this sample of students, writing self-efficacy is not a good predictor of writing achievement. While Pajares and Johnson (1996) found that when student writing is scored on a rubric developed from the self-efficacy questions,
writing achievement and writing self-efficacy are highly correlated; this was not the case for these students.

Because I am interested in understanding the influence of a place-based curriculum on high-performing rural students as writers, I ran a MANOVA with all six dependent variables included in the analysis. I used a MANOVA because it compares multiple dependent variables on one independent variable. Moreover, conducting a MANOVA suggests that the dependent variables are more meaningful if they are taken together than if considered separately (“MANOVA”, 2018). For the purposes of this study, MANOVA is appropriate because I am interested in the way a place-based curriculum influences students on a variety of interrelated areas: writing ability, writing self-efficacy, and concepts of community/place. This analysis allowed me to examine whether the dependent variables are altered by the manipulation of the independent variable (“MANOVA”, 2018). In other words, this analysis allowed me to examine how treatment condition (receiving a place-based curriculum) influenced students’ writing ability, writing self-efficacy, and concepts of community and place.

For the quantitative analysis, I used SPSS (version 25) statistical software. First, I ran descriptive statistics for each of the dependent variables, for the sample of students in the MANOVA to examine means for all dependent variables. Next, it is necessary to check the assumptions of this test (“MANOVA”, 2018). The first assumption of MANOVA is of sample size. For MANOVA, the number of cases should be more than the number of dependent variables. To test this assumption, I ensured the sample size was larger than the number of dependent variables. Another important assumption of MANOVA is multivariate normality, which means that the scores of the dependent variables are normally distributed (“MANOVA”, 2018). In order to determine the normality of the data, each of the dependent variables were
plotted on histograms. The next step in checking assumptions is to examine the homogeneity of variances ("MANOVA", 2018). I examined the Levene’s test to check this assumption. The results of each of these tests is outlined in Chapter 4. Once I tested for violations of necessary assumptions and confirmed the data set did not violate any of those assumptions, the results from the MANOVA were analyzed to determine if there was a main effect between treatment condition and the six dependent variables. I used this analysis to determine whether there is an effect of the treatment condition on each of the dependent variables. This information allowed me to examine growth in students’ writing ability, writing self-efficacy, and concepts of community and place between my two experimental groups. I was able to use this data, parallel to my qualitative data analysis, to examine the influence of the curriculum on students’ writing ability, self-efficacy, and their connection to community and place. Once I ran the MANOVA and analyzed the results, I analyzed students’ writing tasks qualitatively.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

For the qualitative portion of my pre-test data analysis, I used *a priori* codes. I used *a priori* codes, so the place-based codes were tied to the place-based focus of the curriculum. Using the language from the curriculum is important to examining the connection between the curriculum and students’ writing because my study sought to understand the relationships between the curriculum and the writing of high-performing rural students. Codes were developed using the PLACE rubric (Appendix F) used by experts in the study of PLACE to review the curriculum to ensure that it was meeting the goals of PLACE (Callahan & Azano, 2018). I developed codes from the Place and Community sections of the rubric because those sections were specific to incorporating community and place into the curriculum. I also used Azano’s (2009) Framework for Analyzing Place Documents to make sure that I have covered the
necessary references to place in students’ writing. The codes that were created from this rubric are outlined in Table 5.

Table 5

*A Priori Codes Generated from Promoting PLACE Curriculum Rubric & Azano’s (2009) Framework for Analyzing Place Documents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place-based Codes</th>
<th>Criteria (Writer includes…)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family/heritage</td>
<td>Language to describe and/or mentions family (mother, father, siblings, cousins, etc.) and/or information about family characteristics (ethnicity, country/region of origin, family history stories, traits), living situations, family backgrounds hobbies, and values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local people</td>
<td>Language to describe and/or mentions local people (shop owners, neighbors, teachers, police officers, politicians).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local places</td>
<td>Language to describe and/or mentions local places (local hangouts, parks, museums, stores, events).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local histories</td>
<td>Language to describe and/or mentions local histories (local folklore, legends, historic information (coal mining, civil war, etc.)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community involvement</td>
<td>Language to describe and/or mentions participation in community events (fairs, contests, community clean-up, volunteer work).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Connects to community and/or place in their writing, but doesn’t fit into previous category. This category was used to identify connections to nature or the environment, as well as language to describe these places.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once I developed the codes, I created a framework for analyzing the writing tasks based on Azano’s (2009) Framework for Analyzing Place Documents (see Appendix E). This document was used to analyze each pre- and post-test writing task for instances of place in student writing. This document allowed me to have all students’ important references to place in one place, so that I could begin to understand the influence of a place-based curriculum on students’ connections to place in their writing.
To better understand the way students write about place in their writing, I analyzed students’ writing qualitatively, using a priori codes. I read through each student’s pre- and post-test writing task identifying the way they referenced place in their writing. Each student’s references to place were noted on the Framework for Analyzing Place (Appendix E) for that student, entered into a spreadsheet for organization, and counted. Each instance of place in their writing was organized by frequency count, first, to examine how differently students in each experimental condition were referencing place. Next, frequency counts were added for number of students who made reference to place, so I could examine how many students made references to place across both experimental conditions. Frequency counts were used to determine if students in the treatment group were making more references to place, or if they were making different references to place than students in the control group.

The last step in my data analysis procedure was a qualitative analysis of the post-test writing tasks. I used the same framework and codes as I did for the pre-test analysis. I also made note of each type of place instance in students writing and the frequency of each place code. Once I completed the types and frequencies, I compared these results with the pre-test results.

Once I analyzed students’ writing for frequency counts, I realized that the frequency counts were not giving me information about the change in the way students were writing about place. The frequency counts only gave me information about the number of references students were making. This analysis did not yield different results between treatment and control; mostly, the results were similar across both groups (see Tables 6 & 7 for summary of frequency count results).

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency Counts of Place References in Pre-Test Writing Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

56
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Characteristics/Heritage</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local People</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Places</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Involvement</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local History</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After reading through both the pre- and post-test results, I made a connection between place-based pedagogy, which was founded on environmental education (Sobel, 2005), and students referencing nature or environment in their post-test writing tasks. I did not have a code for these types of place references in the Framework for Analyzing Place, so I went through students’ post-test writing a second time, looking for ways they referenced place, using the “other” category to identify nature or environment-based references. This second round of analysis allowed me to examine the way students were writing about place in a different, more complex ways.

**Multimethod Analysis**

A multimethod study uses two analyses, in parallel with one another to answer a larger, overarching question (Morse, 2003). The MANOVA results allowed me to examine growth in students’ writing ability, writing self-efficacy, and concepts of community/place, based on treatment condition. The qualitative analysis allowed me to examine the ways a place-based curriculum influences students’ references to, thinking about, and are discussing place in their writing. Moreover, I was able to examine whether the curriculum had an influence on students’ concepts of community/place. Because students in the treatment group received intentional, critical, place-based units, that helped me to understand how a curriculum, which makes an explicit effort to connect students’ work in school to their community and place, influences the way they view their community and how they express what they know about that community in their writing. Additionally, I used the information I gleaned from this multimethod procedure to provide a rationale for including a dialogic stance with the critical, place-based concepts of the Promoting PLACE curriculum for future use.

**Possible Limitations**
Self-efficacy, in this study, is limited to seven questions on a self-report scale, which does not match up one to one with the rubric that was created for scoring students on their writing tasks. This may result in the MANOVA for self-efficacy to be non-significant because the writing task scores and the self-efficacy scores will not correlate. There is some overlap, but the self-efficacy questions are a bit more specific than the broad categories on the rubric, so that may have an effect on self-efficacy as a predictor of writing ability, in connection with Pajares and Johnson’s (1996) study that used self-efficacy questions to develop their rubric. Additionally, I do not have specific data for which students write about their writing self-efficacy, so my analysis is limited to writing task scores. A follow-up study might add a pre- and post-test writing task that includes writing about self-efficacy that can be used to further triangulate inferences of writing curricula on self-efficacy.

The writing task was moved from the beginning of students 3rd grade and end of 4th grade years to January through March of each of the respective school years. This was done because feedback from the pilot districts indicated that there was too much pre-testing happening at the beginning of the school year, so to accommodate their needs, the tasks were moved to January through March. This means that students’ post-test data on the writing tasks for treatment districts included only a year and a half of the Promoting PLACE Curriculum instead of completing all four units prior to post-testing. However, students will have completed all four units before completing the post-test self-efficacy and community/place items.

MANOVA does not allow for eliminating missing data for each of the dependent variables, instead it only runs data on the cases which have a complete set of data. Because students in this study are often transient, there is a lot of missing data, which could result in a lower n than the entire sample includes.
Summary

This chapter outlined the data collection timeline and analysis procedures. Using a multimethod approach, I used quantitative and qualitative analyses, in parallel to one another, to understand the impact of the curriculum on high-performing rural students as writers. Combining the concepts of critical and place-based pedagogy with dialogic pedagogy provided a way for students to be at the forefront of their learning and enter into dialogue with the curriculum, while inquiring into and questioning the hierarchies that exist in their communities and the connection to a larger global society.
Chapter 4

Results & Findings

In this chapter, I present the results of my quantitative and qualitative analyses. I discuss the results of each analysis separately in the following sections. I conclude the chapter by summarizing my findings and understandings and offering a discussion of the meaning I have made from my analysis to provide a transition to my discussion of the implications of this study in Chapter 5.

This study was designed to answer the research question: What is the influence of a place-based curriculum on high-performing rural students as writers? I had to divide this question into two sub-questions for each of my analyses because, as Morse (2003) suggested about multimethod research design, the two analyses were used to “solve an overall research problem” (p. 196) and are interrelated under the overarching research question, but the findings do not inform one another as they would in a traditional mixed methods study. In essence, the two analyses remain independent of one another.

For the quantitative analysis, I answer the following question: How does the treatment condition affect students’ growth in writing, writing self-efficacy, and concepts of community and place? In order to answer this question, I analyzed students’ writing scores, self-reported writing self-efficacy, and concepts of community and place. For the qualitative analysis, I answer the following sub-question: In what ways do students reference place in their writing? To answer this question, I used a priori codes to analyze the use of place in students’ pre- and post-test writing tasks.

Quantitative Findings: Control Students Made Greater Gains in Writing Ability
First, I present quantitative findings organized around changes in writing ability, while also presenting sub-findings in the domains of self-efficacy and community and place. To examine the influences of a place-based curriculum on high performing students as writers, I analyzed students’ pre- and post-test writing tasks, writing self-efficacy scales, and scales on concepts of community and place using quantitative tools to examine how the treatment condition affected (or not) students’ growth in writing, writing self-efficacy, and concepts of community and place. The null hypothesis for this analysis is that there are no differences in students’ writing ability, writing self-efficacy, and concepts of community and place between the two experimental conditions (i.e., the results can happen by chance). The research hypothesis is that there is an effect of the curriculum on students writing ability, writing self-efficacy, and concepts of community and place. Based on the research hypothesis, the proposition for this analysis is treatment students will have greater growth in writing ability, writing self-efficacy, and concepts of community and place. The project and the curriculum were designed to increase achievement in reading and writing, reading and writing self-efficacy, and to help students think about place in more nuanced ways (Callahan & Azano, 2018), so it was expected that treatment students would increase their writing achievement, writing self-efficacy, and concepts of community and place. A one-way MANOVA was run to test the research hypothesis and proposition.

First it is important to examine the descriptive statistics of the dependent variables. An examination of the descriptive statistics for each of the dependent variables indicates that there are differences in the means of the pre-test (3rd grade) writing task and the post-test (4th grade) writing task. Descriptive statistics can be found in Table 2. Conversely, examining the means for pre- and post-test writing self-efficacy and community and place, there is not much of a
difference between treatment and control, nor is there much of a difference between pre-and post-test results. An initial examination of the descriptive statistics indicated that there is only a difference in means for the pre- and post-test writing task. Running a MANOVA indicates whether these differences are statistically significant.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>COND</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test Writing Task</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>21.25</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>17.43</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19.37</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test Writing Task</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>19.36</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>21.60</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20.46</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test Writing Self-efficacy</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>26.83</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>28.80</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27.80</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test Writing Self-efficacy</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>28.39</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>29.06</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28.72</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test Community/Place</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>16.53</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>17.43</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16.97</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test Community/Place</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>16.61</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>16.40</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16.51</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before running a MANOVA, it is necessary to check the assumptions of this test (“MANOVA”, 2018). The first assumption of MANOVA is of sample size. For MANOVA, the
number of cases should be more than the number of dependent variables. For this study, there are six dependent variables and the number of students was 71, so this assumption was met.

Another important assumption of MANOVA is multivariate normality, which means that the scores of the dependent variables are normally distributed (“MANOVA”, 2018). In order to determine the normality of the data, each of the dependent variables were plotted on histograms. The histograms showed that the data is normally distributed, so this assumption was met.

The next step in checking assumptions of MANOVA is to examine the homogeneity of variances (“MANOVA”, 2018). Box’s M indicates whether this assumption was violated. If this statistic is non-significant, the data met the assumption, as that indicates that the matrices are the same. The Box’s M for this MANOVA had a p-value of .376, which is non-significant. This indicates that the matrices for this data set are homogenous. A summary of these findings can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matricesa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box's M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tests the null hypothesis that the observed covariance matrices of the dependent variables are equal across groups.

a. Design: Intercept + COND

The final step in testing assumptions in MANOVA is to check the equality of error variances. This assumption can be verified by examining the Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances (“MANOVA”, 2018). In examining this table, it is important to look for p-values that are smaller than .05, which indicate that this assumption has been violated. A summary of these
findings can be found in Table 4. There are no dependent variables for which this assumption has been violated. For every dependent variable, the p-value is greater than .05, so none of the dependent variables violate the assumption of equality of error variances.

Table 4

*Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene Statistic</th>
<th>df1</th>
<th>df2</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WT3</td>
<td>Based on Mean</td>
<td>.336</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on Median</td>
<td>.496</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on Median and with adjusted df</td>
<td>.496</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>68.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on trimmed mean</td>
<td>.379</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WT4</td>
<td>Based on Mean</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on Median</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on Median and with adjusted df</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>63.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on trimmed mean</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOT_SE_Wr</td>
<td>Based on Mean</td>
<td>2.078</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on Median</td>
<td>2.019</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on Median and with adjusted df</td>
<td>2.019</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>57.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on trimmed mean</td>
<td>2.084</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tots_WSE_Po</td>
<td>Based on Mean</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on Median</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on Median and with adjusted df</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>66.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on trimmed mean</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOT_Comm_PL_pr</td>
<td>Based on Mean</td>
<td>.666</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on Median</td>
<td>.583</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on Median and with adjusted df</td>
<td>.583</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>62.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on trimmed mean</td>
<td>.668</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tot_CP_Po</td>
<td>Based on Mean</td>
<td>.229</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on Median</td>
<td>.175</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on Median and with adjusted df</td>
<td>.175</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>68.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on trimmed mean</td>
<td>.223</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Design: Intercept + COND

A one-way MANOVA revealed a significant multivariate main effect for experimental condition, Wilks' $\lambda = 7.41$, $F (6, 64) = 3.723$, $p < .05$, partial eta squared = .259. Power to detect the effect was .943 (Table 8). In other words, there is a statistically significant effect of treatment condition on at least one of the dependent variables.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Hypothesis df</th>
<th>Error df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
<th>Noncent Parameter</th>
<th>Observed Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COND</td>
<td>Wilks' Lambda</td>
<td>.741</td>
<td>3.723$^b$</td>
<td>6.000</td>
<td>64.00</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.259</td>
<td>22.336</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, the hypothesis that there is a significant impact of experimental condition on the six dependent variables was confirmed. This means at least one of the means for the six dependent variables are different among the two experimental conditions. Since the overall $F$ test is significant, it is common practice to examine the dependent variables with separate tests. Given the significance of the overall test, the univariate main effects were examined.

Significant univariate main effects for experimental condition were obtained for the pre-test (3rd grade) writing task, $F (1, 71) = 12.389$, $p = .001$, partial eta square = .152, power = .935 (Table 9). This significant result indicates treatment students had a statistically significant difference in their pre-test writing scores from those in the control group. Since the pre-test was essentially a benchmark of students’ writing ability, these results indicate that students in the treatment group were writing at a higher level than control students, at the time of pre-testing. This could be a result of students in the treatment group receiving approximately a quarter of the curriculum at the time of pre-testing.
The post-test results ran counter to the proposition that treatment students would have greater gains in writing ability because they received the Promoting PLACE curriculum, which has a heavy writing emphasis. The scoring rubric (Appendix G), shows the treatment students had lower scores on their post-test writing task than on their pre-test writing task. The difference in means between the treatment and control students was statistically significant, $F(1, 71) = 4.118$, $p = .046$, partial eta square $= .056$, power $= .516$ (Table 9). It was unexpected to find students in the control group made greater measurable gains in writing ability, as scored on the rubric. This was unexpected because the treatment students received the place-based curriculum, which had a heavy emphasis on writing. The control group did not receive the curriculum. Therefore, the control group received less explicit writing instruction than the treatment, which makes this disparity all the more surprising. I will discuss the meaning I can make from this result and the potential implications in Chapter 5. First, though, I present the sub-findings of the domains of writing self-efficacy and concepts of community and place. No post hoc tests were needed because there are fewer than three experimental groups.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>DV</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
<th>Noncent. Parameter</th>
<th>Observed Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COND</td>
<td>Pre WT</td>
<td>259.16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>259.16</td>
<td>12.389</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.152</td>
<td>12.389</td>
<td>.935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post WT</td>
<td>88.96</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>88.96</td>
<td>4.118</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>4.118</td>
<td>.516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre SE</td>
<td>68.64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>68.64</td>
<td>3.047</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>3.047</td>
<td>.406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post SE</td>
<td>7.93</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.93</td>
<td>.336</td>
<td>.564</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.336</td>
<td>.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre CP</td>
<td>14.40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.40</td>
<td>1.981</td>
<td>.164</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>1.981</td>
<td>.284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post CP</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>.747</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>.062</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WT= Writing Task
SE= Self-efficacy
CP= Community and place
The Promoting PLACE project was also designed to increase students’ self-efficacy in the domains of reading and writing (Callahan & Azano, 2018). This study only included an examination of students’ writing self-efficacy. Because the project was designed to increase writing self-efficacy, it was expected that treatment students would increase their writing self-efficacy after receiving the curriculum. There was no statistically significant difference between treatment and control students’ writing self-efficacy on the pre-test (p = .085; see table 9), nor was there a statistically significant result on the post-test (p = .564). Because the self-efficacy scales yielded insignificant results, they did not warrant further analysis.

It was also expected that treatment students, after given opportunities to inquire into the roles they play in their community and the way place is important to their lives, would increase their viewpoint on their community and place. However, there were no statistically significant results between treatment and control students on either the pre-test (p = .165; see table 9) or the post-test (p = .747; see table 9) community and place scales. Because the community and place scales yielded insignificant results, they do not warrant further analysis.

It is important to note here about the n for the MANOVA results because there are 199 students in the sample, but the MANOVA did not run analyses on all students. SPSS only uses data for students who have a complete set of data for all six dependent variables. There is no way to eliminate missing data pairwise, which means that if a student has just one missing variable, their data would be excluded. This analysis, in SPSS, eliminates missing data listwise, so if a student has one missing variable, their entire data set is eliminated from analysis. The sample population for this study includes 199 students across both treatment conditions, however, there are only 71 students who have data points for all six variables (36 treatment and 35 control). This low n could be a possible explanation for the non-significant results of four of the dependent
variables, as well as why treatment students’ writing scores went down while control students went up.

There are several reasons for these results to have occurred, other than the low $n$. The data for this analysis is only one of several writing tasks students were expected to complete over the two years they were participants in the Promoting PLACE grant. The treatment students also had formative assessments at the end of each unit, which were writing based. The findings of these analyses, alone, are inadequate for discussing writing gains; this is simply one metric of writing ability. Moreover, the writing tasks were originally designed as a traditional pre-/post-test design but were moved to January based on feedback from pilot teachers that indicated the pre-testing at the beginning of third grade was too much testing at one time. This means that the results of this analysis are only one year apart, instead of two years apart as they were originally designed. Finally, students in the control group, by simply being identified as gifted with the project’s alternative identification process could have boosted their academic confidence, thus they were putting forth the effort that they felt warranted that identification. These implications will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The proposition of Project PLACE was that the curriculum would yield some differences in the way students thought about place because they were introduced to the concept of place while receiving focused writing instruction. However, examining the potential changes in the way students understand the concept of place and how that understanding might show up in their writing required a different kind of analysis because of the complexity of the content that I was looking to understand. In order to understand the way students were writing about place and whether their discussion of place in their writing changed from pre- to post-test writing, as a
result of receiving the curriculum, I analyzed their writing qualitatively. I discuss this in the following section.

**Qualitative Understandings: Unpacking Sense of Place and Exploring it Through Writing**

Even though the quantitative findings were limited to the handling of missing data in SPSS, resulting in a limited \( n \) (from 199 to 71), the qualitative data represent pre-test data from 149 of 199 students in cohort 2 and post-test data from 158 of 199 students in cohort 2. With the qualitative analysis, I was interested in examining the way students conceptualize place and how they conceptualize their feelings about their community. I was also interested in what place means to them and how they put words to that meaning or make it explicit in their writing. Freire and Macedo (1987) emphasized the inherent connection between language and reality. Hillocks (2007) and others (Stewart, 2011a; Glenn & Goldthewaite, 2008) have argued that writing is a key tool for processing experience. Thus, examining student writing gives us a window into how they are processing their experiences and communicating potential shifts in understanding of concepts and contexts. Seen from this perspective writing is a means of meaning-making, which, as Bakhtin (1981) argued, requires understanding and response.

If you examine student writing, you can see understanding and response in dialogue with each other. Examining student writing for their conceptualizations of place, attending to the individual words and phrases used to make meaning, allowed me to understand the ways students use language to connect to the reality of their place in ways that a score on the rubric created for Project PLACE cannot represent. Hillocks (2007) argued that there are feelings and beliefs that cannot be revealed without the use of writing. Hillocks’ point here is that writing is a way to make meaning and process experience. In making meaning, according to Bakhtin (1981), understanding one’s experiences cannot be separated from response; writing is a way for
students to understand their experiences using their own “conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional expressions…it creates the ground for understanding, it prepares the ground for an active and engaged understanding” (p. 282). I was also interested in analyzing student writing using codes to index tool usage and more sophisticated conceptualizations of place, which are not as easily parsed out by the use of only an analytic rubric. Those codes informed my analysis in a way the project’s rubric could not.

My dialogue with student writing through the qualitative analysis allowed me to develop three key categories that indexed how the curriculum was influencing students as writers. The three categories are: (a) treatment students used more descriptive and vivid language in their writing about place, (b) treatment students shifted their understanding of the important role people play in their places and the stories of their lives, and (c) treatment students expanded their concepts of place to those outside the immediate building, locale, or structure. These changes worked together, as part of the treatment students’ more complex understanding that transcended the boundaries of their school. This shows a larger concept of place than just the local, immediate place as being limited to the school building, which is emphasized through the curriculum, where each of the units has explicit ways for students to connect what they are learning to their community and region. I discuss the findings of these analyses in more detail in the next sections.

**Treatment Students Used More Descriptive, Detailed, and Vivid Language**

The first significant influence of the curriculum on the participants as writers could be seen the shifts of their use of descriptive, detailed, and vivid language. This is significant because the curriculum emphasized showing and not telling as a tool of writing, which allows a writer to better articulate their experiences and understandings (Jensen, 2004; King, 2000). According to
Jensen, “Paying attention to the proper details is…probably the fundamental lesson of writing (you constantly need to choose which details to include to take the reader with you and which to leave out so as not to bore the reader…)” (p. 58). This shift in the use of detail in the treatment groups from pre- to post-test shows that students were able to use the tools of the discipline (writing) to share their experiences with others; they were “paying attention to the proper details…to take [their] reader with [them]” (Jensen, 2004, p.58). The following codes were used to index this shift: “local people” for the pre-test results, where students used the most description in their writing and in the “other” category for the post-test, where students used description to describe nature and the environment. (Note that, in this document, spelling is maintained for all student examples provided, so writing errors are the student’s errors; additionally, all names used are pseudonyms.) On the pre-test writing task, both groups of students did use adjectives and few instances of figurative language, but their use of descriptive language was similar. For example, treatment student 1 (TS1), in describing the teachers at their 1 school says

The teachers are really friendly. In Kindergarten the classes have extraordinary teachers.

Mr. Gill helps you really learn math! The science teacher (Mrs. Panetta) even has pickled bugs! In 3rd, 4th, and 5th you take SOL (stander of learning) but the teachers help you learn your stuff!” (TS1, PreWT).

This student is using several examples of descriptive language with the use of words like “friendly” and “extraordinary.” The student’s use of descriptive language is describing the personality of the teachers, but does not provide enough detailed description to allow the reader to imagine what the teacher is like. Their use of descriptive language to describe the teachers’

---

1 I use they/their as a singular pronoun throughout because student data were deidentified prior to my analysis, so gender is unknown.
personality traits suggests that knowing the personality traits of their teachers is what makes their school special. Occasionally, students would elaborate on the reasons they felt teachers showed those personality traits. Control student 1 (CS1) wrote,

The things that make this school very fun because they are fun teachers and principals too. The principals will play music sometimes. And my teacher Mrs. Merindino makes learning fun she plays vocabulary games with us (CS1, PreWT).

This student mentions that the teachers and principals are “fun,” which is the only descriptive word used; however, the student continues with evidence of how those people are fun: “The principals will play music sometimes” explains the principals do that make them “fun,” which adds to the description. The student does the same with the teacher, by describing what she does to make her teaching fun “…she plays vocabulary games with us.” Students use of descriptive writing on the pre-test writing task was limited in their use of adjectives or detailed language; students used words like “friendly,” “fun,” and “nice” to describe their teachers or other school personnel. The description of their teachers or school personnel was the most descriptive language used in their writing across both groups, but shows a limited understanding of the tools of the discipline (i.e. showing and not telling).

For control students, their use of descriptive language was not as detailed in their post-test writing, nor did it reflect the use of showing rather than telling to share experiences. Control students’ use of detailed, descriptive language was similar to their pre-test writing. They used adjectives or figurative language to describe their experiences, but they were not using them in the same way as treatments students; they were telling rather than showing. In describing their special place, students in the control group did not evoke the senses or paint a picture with their
description, as the treatment students did. Control Student 2 (CS2), for example, in describing their yard wrote

When you walk in you can hear leaves rustling in the wind and you can hear the faint sound of twigs breaking as dozens of deer run through the woods behind my house. They have white tails that whenever they are startled they go up like flags as they sprint away. When you walk in you smell lushing green pine cones. You see a squirrl up in the tree top climbing over branches about to jump on your tree house. It’s mouth is full of nuts its about to go and get more. You hear the stream running in the back in the woods. You want to go see its aqua blue colors very badly (CS1, PostWT).

This student’s description of their yard uses several adjectives and figurative language, such as “leaves rustling in the wind” and “white tails that go up like flags.” This student is trying to describe their yard in a way that evokes the senses, but they are just telling the reader what they are seeing, smelling, hearing, or touching. The control students were not using the tools of the discipline to show rather than tell, something writers do to share their experiences with the reader. This is different from the treatment students, who used descriptive language as a tool of the discipline to paint a picture for the reader; to let them imagine the place, instead of telling them what they are seeing, hearing, smelling, etc.

There was a distinct shift in the use of descriptive language in the post-test results with students in the treatment group. Students in the treatment group shifted their use of descriptive, detailed, and vivid language, showing they are using the tools of the discipline to share their experiences in their places. When describing a place that is special to them, Treatment Student 2 (TS2) wrote about the woods in their backyard.
Sometimes I go up into the beautiful, warm, and colorful woods. The trees are tall and extremely colorful in the fall. They are like nature’s firework show booming red, yellow, and orange leaf. I ride my fast dirt bike up there and then back down the muddy, dirty hill. Even though the hills are muddy dirty and you often have to go off trail to get by logs…Another time in woods I went up into a hunting stand and sat down. It was dirty and smelly like old socks…First of all we had to hike through the painful and clingy sticker bushes. Then we had to trek through the woods that were prickly and taller than me! (TS2, PostWT)

This student’s description of the woods in their backyard uses lists of several different adjectives: “beautiful, warm, and colorful woods” and uses figurative language like “They are like nature’s firework show booming red, yellow, and orange leaf.” They thread their use of descriptive language through every point of their discussion of the woods and their surroundings. Their use of descriptive and figurative language, even in mentioning the tree stand being “dirty and smelly like old socks” is threaded throughout their discussion of their special place. This suggests that students are thinking about place in a more nuanced way, focusing on the description of the place, so the reader can imagine what they are reading. Moreover, this shows the student’s use of the tools of the discipline; they are showing their place through their use of descriptive and figurative language. The use of these tools throughout their description of the woods exemplifies the way writers use description to share their experiences with others.

These two post-test examples show the discernible difference in the way treatment and control students used descriptive language. The treatment student (TS2) describes their special place in a way that evokes the senses, without expressing which sense they are trying to evoke. Their use of descriptive language shows the reader what their place is like using the tools writers
use, while the control student (CS2) is telling the reader what they should experience at that place. Students in the treatment group, by using their descriptive language to show the reader, are giving the reader the opportunity to create their own image, which connects to the instruction in the Promoting PLACE curriculum.

The Promoting PLACE curriculum emphasizes, throughout all four units, the importance of showing instead of telling as a tool writers use. For example, in the Poetry unit, which is taught as part of the 3rd grade curriculum the first four lessons are dedicated to imagery, abstract and concrete words, and evoking the senses. Even though that is the emphasis of the first four lessons, those concepts are reinforced throughout this unit and the remaining three units. Students are continuously asked to analyze readings for descriptive language, while also using those tools in their writer’s workshops.

Throughout all four units, students are taught the language and tools of the discipline; that writers use descriptive language to evoke the senses and paint a picture for the reader. This suggests that treatment students are using the tools of writers, as they implement the skills writers use in the profession. Students using descriptive, detailed, vivid language as tools of the discipline shows they are gaining confidence as writers, and are able to see themselves as members of the elusive “writer’s club” (Stewart, 2011a). Students are given opportunities throughout the curriculum to discuss images, how writers evoke the senses, and the importance of showing instead of telling in writing. Treatment students using more descriptive, detailed language in their post-tests is a result of them receiving constant reinforcement on these skills, via the Promoting PLACE curriculum.

**Treatment Students Showed a Shift in Conceptualizing the Importance of People to Place**
The next significant influence of the curriculum on treatment students as writers is shown in the shift of their conceptualization of the importance of people to their place. This is significant because the curriculum provided opportunities for students to discuss place as it relates to the curriculum, including the importance of people in their communities. Additionally, the curriculum provided instruction on the various forms of characterization (i.e. direct/indirect characterization; round/flat characters). The shift in the way treatment students discuss people in relation to place show that students were thinking more complexly about the way people function as characters in the stories of their lives, while also shifting their concept of place away from the immediate place: their school. The “local people” code was used to index this shift. Students wrote about local people associated with their schools for the pre-test results, but there was a shift in the way treatment students conceptualized local people in their post-test results.

On their pre-test writing tasks, students wrote about local people associated with their school, which is not surprising, given the prompt asked them to write about what makes their school special. When students wrote about people in their pre-test results, they would list many people or groups of people associated with their school. For example, Treatment Student 3 (TS3) wrote

We also have super fun teachers to, some of them let you do games if you finesh. Mrs. Ogelsby is a fun teacher she is my best friend she likes to draw pictures with kids and for kids she is assistant teacher she helps when we go to lab. Mrs. Hallanack is nice teacher to she teaches pre-k (TS3, PreWT).

TS3’s discussion of several teachers in the school is an example of the way treatment students were writing about local people associated with their school. Mostly, students would mention teachers who were “super fun” or “nice,” indicating that those teachers are what make their
school special because they are nice and/or fun. Mentioning several teachers suggests that students are thinking about the importance of people to their school. This indication that people are important to the school also shows up in control students’ writing. For example, Control Student 3 (CS3) wrote,

There are 4 wonderful teachers. Their names are Mrs. Kunkel, Mrs. White, Mrs. Kellogg, and Mrs. Humphrey. Teachers are very nice. Mrs. Chalfant is our Guidance Councilor. Coach Smith is our instructor for P.E. Mr. Copeland is our music teacher. And last but certainly not least Mrs. Rice our librarian. They are all wonderful resource teachers (CS3, PreWT).

CS3’s discussion of several teachers in their school suggests they recognize the important role those people play in their school. Similar to TS3, mentioning the teachers who are “wonderful” or “very nice” suggests that wonderful and nice teachers are important to their school culture. For the pre-test results, there is not much difference between treatment and control students’ conceptualizations of local people and the important role they play in place (i.e. their schools).

Control students also wrote about local people in their post-test writing and those local people were typically family members. However, their discussion of local people did not indicate that those people were what made that place special, instead, they were part of the story being told; they act more as background characters in the story instead of connecting them to place in the way treatment students did. For example, Control Student 4 (CS4), when writing about their home, wrote

My sister Alex which is 5 sleeps on the bottom and her stuffed animals and owl sheets cause she loves owls. Next my sister Tiffany sleeps on the top bunk with dolls and
stuffed animals and has Descendants sheets and pillow cause she loves Descendants (CS4, PostWT).

CS4 is writing about their home; however, they do not suggest that those people are what help make their home special. This student’s letter is describing the lay-out of their home, moving from room to room. They describe their siblings’ bedroom and who sleeps where. CS4 does mention some personality traits, such as “she loves owls” and “she loves Descendants,” however, this is different than treatment students’ discussion of local people. CS4’s family is functioning in their place as other people who occupy that space, not as part of what makes that place special to them.

There is a noticeable shift in the way treatment students are conceptualizing local people and the important role they play in their place. Treatment students wrote about their family members, which suggests their thinking about local people has expanded to include their families. This suggests that treatment students find places special, as long as their family is there with them. For example, Treatment Student 4 (TS4), when writing about their trailer, wrote

I live in the trailer with my dad, mom, golden lab, and my two little sisters Rachele who is four and Elora who is five months. A few things that make our trailer special are my sister Rachele who is always playing with my chubby funny other sister Elora. Some other stuff that makes our trailer special is my dad because his like our crew chief. My mom on the other hand can be somewhat annoying! She is always demanding for a lot of stuff like clean your room, fold your clothes, GET OFF THE COMPUTER!!! ... Sometimes my sister Rachele can be soooooo annoying. She is always saying stuff like [TS4] you need to stop doing that or I’m gonna tell mommy! (TS4, PostWT).
TS4 is writing about their family members and providing characteristics of them that show the family dynamic. By describing the personality traits in various ways and providing examples of how those personality traits manifest themselves, the treatment students are using the tools of characterization to show how important their family is in their place and the stories of their lives. TS4’s discussion of their family members provides both direct and indirect characterization that reinforces the roles each person plays in their family and their place. Even though this student discusses things that are not always positive, such as “My mom on the other hand can be somewhat annoying!” and “Sometimes my sister Rachele can be sooooo annoying!” the student still finds their family important to their place. Their family plays an important role in the story of their lives; they are important to how students conceptualize the people in their place. This student’s family is what makes their homes and the stories of their lives special. This example is suggestive of the way treatment students wrote about local people showing their shift in thinking about the importance of family to their place. As long as their family is involved, the place is special to them; family is what makes their place special.

The Promoting PLACE Fiction unit, which is taught as part of the 4th grade curriculum, has three lessons dedicated to characters and characterization. The focus of these lessons is identifying the basic characters (i.e. round/flat, protagonist/antagonist) and forms of characterization (direct and indirect), however, students’ conceptualizations of people in their writing tasks shows they are thinking about the way they characterize those people and the important role they play in the stories of their lives. In lessons dealing with characters and characterization, students are given several opportunities to describe characters in different ways, so they get used to describing people in various ways to show their importance to the story. This shows up in their writing, as they connected their people to place in more dynamic ways, by
describing the ways they are important to their place. The emphasis on the importance that characters and people play in the stories they read and write, has influenced these students as writers, in that they expanded their view of who is important to their place from just listing those people to describing their connection to that particular place; these people are functioning as important characters in the stories of their lives. Hillocks (2007) suggested that anyone can write about things as small as “mothers and morning glories and moonpies” (p. 48) because “even the smallest experiences are worth writing about” (p. 37). Students connecting local people to their place in a more nuanced way exemplifies Hillocks’ concept.

**Treatment Students Expanded Their View of Place to a Larger Concept of Place**

The third significant influence of the curriculum on treatment students as writers was shown in their expanded view of place. The “local places” and “other” codes were used to index this shift in discussing place in their post-tests to that outside a building or structure. This code was used to index students discussing nature or the environment because there was no code for that in the original coding dictionary. The Promoting PLACE curriculum provided opportunities for teachers to connect the lessons to students’ place, which provided a space for students to think about the larger conceptualizations of place; students are thinking about place in terms of nature and the surrounding environment. Students in the treatment group expanded their view of place to a larger concept of place; their concept of place expanded to include places beyond their local or immediate place.

The pre-test results were essentially the same for both treatment and control groups in their discussion of place; the places they mentioned were their schools. For example, Treatment Student 5 (TS5) wrote, “Welcome to [my school]” (TS5, PreWT). Students mentioning their schools, across both groups, were similar to this example. Students would mention their school,
then go on to describe the things that make it special. Usually, the only local place that was mentioned was their school. Students were limiting their place to school, even though the prompt asked them to discuss both educational and non-educational activities that make their school special, which provided an opportunity for students to write about places outside their school as well.

Control students showed some connection to nature or places outside their immediate place on their post-tests, but those were not typically grounded in the local place. Some students would write about their yards or local parks, but for the most part, when students were discussing nature or the environment, they were places students went on vacation. For example, Control Student 5, when describing a trip to the beach, wrote

So it was a sunny day at the beach. It was beautiful so what I done was fish, swim, body surf, and it was sandy so it was perfect for crawdaddy catching…So one day I was fishing at a dock and I [caught] the most ugly fish ever known to mankind. A robin fish, they have legs and they can fly (CS5, PostWT).

This student’s description of their trip to the beach has some description of the environment and the surrounding nature, but they are describing a place that is not local to their communities. Instead, they are describing a place that is beyond the borders of their locale. This vacation spot is important to this student, but the emphasis of the place-based curriculum is on students’ local place. The control students connecting to places beyond the borders of their locale suggests that without a connection to place in the curriculum, students are not given opportunities to connect their learning to their place, thus not seeing what makes their local place special.

The shift in the way treatment students are conceptualizing place suggests that treatment students are thinking about place in more complex ways. Place, for them, does not have to be
grounded in their homes or schools, instead they are grounding their concepts of place in nature and the environment. The nature and environment students connect to in their post-test writing is grounded in their locale; they are describing the environment, nature, or outdoors in their communities. For example, Treatment Student 6 (TS6), when writing about the evergreen trees in their yard, says

There are about 4 big, full evergreen trees. They are about 50 ft. tall. I like to climb the soft, brown, strong, branches. When I get about halfway up there is this opening where I like to hear the birds chirping and see the beautiful sky. When I climb the trees the green thick firs tickle my skin…. We sat down on the strong branches until it got dark and we climbed down the big, thick, sturdy, brown branches. Then we jumped down the soft, thin, brown branches crunched at our feet. We walked out of the prickly green firs and found ourselves in the tickly green grass. Now you know why I love these big, tall, sturdy, awesome, green trees. I love those trees (TS6, PostWT).

This student’s description of the evergreen trees in their yard suggests that these trees are important to them. They climb the trees and “like to hear the birds chirping and see the beautiful sky,” which suggests that these trees are a place they find solace in nature. For this student, place is connected to the outdoor environment and nature; they have a connection to these trees.

Students in the treatment group are describing places that are near their homes or local communities, such as trees and parts of their yard, but they are connecting those places directly to the environment and surrounding nature. This shift from the immediate place, such as their school, to places beyond their immediate scope suggests they are thinking about place in more complex ways, describing special places connected to nature.
Students in the treatment group had the chance, throughout the Promoting PLACE curriculum, to connect what they were learning to their place. For example, in the Research unit, which is part of the 4th grade curriculum, students are encouraged to research something that is connected to their locale. In Lesson 2, the Place connection suggests teachers encourage students to think locally for their areas of interest. For example, a student who wrote about a musical instrument might be interested in the history of Appalachian music. A student who wrote about a family heirloom may be interested in how their family came to this region of the state (Callahan & Azano, 2018).

This example from the Research unit is one of the many opportunities students have to connect what they are learning about research to their hometowns and families. This type of deliberate place connection is threaded throughout all four units the treatment students receive. There are suggestions for teachers, throughout all four units, to connect what students are discussing or learning to their communities and places. Providing opportunities for students to connect what they are learning to place has influenced the way they write about place and provided opportunities for students to think about the larger conceptualization of place. Place does not have to be a building or a structure; students are thinking about place in terms of nature and the environment and the meanings and feelings ascribed to those places, shown by TS6 mentioning “I love those trees” or TS7’s love of their big field.

Shifts in people and place worked together shows that people and locations are ways of understanding place and thinking about place in more complex ways. For example, Treatment Student 7 wrote

My special place is a place I go with four special people. Those people are my cousins, Amelia, Judy, one of my brothers, Auston, and I. This place is a lush field. Beautiful
cows graze there sometimes, so we have to be very careful...once we get to the field, it’s almost complete bliss. The best time to play there is in the fall. It’s crisp and cool and perfect...This is a place we can play in harmony, something we can’t do often. It’s special, and I love our big field, a place where we can get along (TS7; PostWT).

This student’s example shows how people and place function together to create a more complex concept of place. TS7 is describing a place where their family members and they can play together. The field is a harmonizing place for their relationship. People and location matter to the importance of place; when these two things function together students see those places as special. This is connection between people and place is emphasized throughout the Promoting PLACE curriculum as a way for students to connect what they are learning to their experiences.

**Summary of Findings**

To answer my research question: What is the influence of a place-based curriculum on high-performing rural student as writers, I analyzed students writing both quantitatively and qualitatively to look at aspects of quality as well as conceptualizations and thinking of place. This study was originally designed as a mixed-methods study, where the qualitative results were to be used to further explain the quantitative results. However, after careful consideration of the questions to be answered, a multimethod study was a better choice. I used the quantitative results to examine growth in writing achievement, writing self-efficacy, and concepts of community and place, but I used the qualitative results to examine student writing with a finer grain of magnification: to examine changes in how students used writing to discuss experience and the changes in the tools they used to communicate their wider understanding of place.

The quantitative findings were unexpected in that they ran counter to the proposition that treatment students would increase their writing achievement, writing self-efficacy, and concepts
of community and place. Treatment students had lower scores on their post-test writing task than they did on their pre-test writing task. Furthermore, students in the control group were outscoring students in the treatment group on the post-test results. These results were unexpected because students in the treatment group received regular writing instruction as part of the curriculum. That does not mean control students did not receive writing instruction, but they did not receive regular writing instruction, in the same way that treatment students did or in ways measurable by the project. Because the quantitative results yielded non-significant results for writing self-efficacy and concepts of community and place, those results were not analyzed further; however, the qualitative results can point to a change in conceptualization of place.

The qualitative understandings fell into three categories. The first is treatment students used more descriptive and detailed language in their writing, after receiving the majority of the curriculum. This finding suggests that students learning the language of the discipline and the skills that writers use as part of their profession has an influence on students as writers. Focusing on these being skills that writers used helped students to use those tools as writers, which is evidenced by their use of descriptive language to paint a picture for their readers. The second understanding is treatment students shifted their conceptualization of place to show the importance of people to place and to the stories of their lives. The pre-test results showed that students were aware of the importance of teachers and other school personnel to their schools, but the post-test results suggest that family is important to the conceptualization of place. Treatment students connected their special places to their family, suggesting that family is important to the stories of their lives. The third understanding is treatment students expanded their concepts of place to places outside the immediate building, locale, or structure. Instead, students were connecting their places to nature and the environment, suggesting that providing
opportunities to discuss place and connect the curriculum to place provides students with ways to think about the broader conceptualization of place to nature and the environment. The function of people and place together in student writing suggests that when given opportunities to connect what students know and experience as members of their communities to the curriculum, they construct a more complex, nuanced understanding and viewpoint of their places.

The two analyses tell very different stories about the influence of a place-based curriculum on students as writers. Overall, treatment students are employing skills writers use as a part of the profession, showing they are developing as writers, their places are important, as long as their family is with them, and they are broadening their concepts of place to that outside of the immediate place; place is grounded in nature and the environment. The function of people and places together suggests a more complex viewpoint of place, as a result of the curriculum. The implications of these findings are discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 5

Discussion

This study created an opportunity to examine the ways in which employing a place-based curriculum might influence high-performing rural students as writers. Even though the quantitative findings produced more questions, they also provide some insight into opportunities for underserved rural gifted students. On the one hand, the quantitative analysis did not show measurable growth in writing ability, writing self-efficacy, or enhanced concepts of community and place. On the other hand, qualitative understandings suggest that treatment students receiving the Promoting PLACe curriculum used more detailed and descriptive language in their writing about place. They moved beyond superficial explorations and connected place important people who make those places special and nuanced their discussion of place by moving beyond the immediate building or structure to a discussion of nature and the environment. Donovan (2016) argued that exposing students to a place-based curriculum provides them with opportunities to write about things that matter to them and have authority in their voice. The findings suggest that writing, as a way to process experience and provide a glimpse into students’ experiences (Hillocks, 2007), helped treatment students “develop stronger ties to their community [and] enhance [their] appreciation for the natural world” (Sobel, 2007, p. 7). Even though the treatment students demonstrated deeper and more descriptive understandings of place, those understandings did not translate to growth in writing ability, as measured by the rubric employed by Project PLACe. This chapter will explore the possible reasons for this, along with the significance and implications of the findings and understandings.

In this chapter, I discuss the significance and implications drawn from analyses and findings of this study. First, I explore the nuances and potential lessons to be learned from the
quantitative results, which ran counter to the propositions informing this study. In particular, I discuss those results as they relate to as gifted rural students and Project PLACE. Second, I explore the implications and significance of the qualitative results for teachers who wish to employ a place-based curriculum. Third, I address the limitations of this study. Finally, I use the meaning I have made from the analysis of the larger data set to make recommendations for other iterations of this study and future research on place-based curricula and gifted students.

**Quantitative Significance and Implications**

In designing this study, I originally planned for a mixed methods study, where the qualitative data would be used to further explore the quantitative results, giving more detail about how the curriculum influences students as writers. However, after my initial analysis, it became evident the methods would not work together in that capacity. Instead of confirming the initial hypothesis, the quantitative results countered expectations and, thus, shifted to a multimethod study. The two analyses were used in parallel with one another to answer the different sub-questions to “solve an overarching research problem” (Morse, 2003, p. 196). Distinct from a traditional mixed methods study, the two analyses were used independent of one another, but fall under the overarching research question of this study.

I began this study working from the proposition that the curriculum would support treatment students to have greater measurable growth in writing achievement, writing self-efficacy, and concepts of community and place because that assumption aligns with the major goals of Project PLACE. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, the quantitative results showed that control students had greater measurable growth in writing achievement and neither group had significant changes in writing self-efficacy or concepts of community and place. There are a number of possible reasons to explain these results, which I discuss in detail in this section. I also
expected treatment students to discuss place in their writing in more nuanced and complex ways as a result of the curriculum; the qualitative analysis confirmed this proposition. In this section, I first tease out possible reasons for the unexpected quantitative results, then, in the next section, I discuss how the qualitative understandings can inform future instruction.

**Nuancing the Quantitative Results**

In this section, I discuss and articulate the significance of the lack of growth related to writing shown in the quantitative data. First, it is important to understand that this writing task is just one metric of writing ability. Students in the treatment group completed written assessments at the end of each unit, which were also used to assess writing ability, as it relates to the Promoting PLACE curriculum. While writing was part of the language arts instruction used in the study, the primary goal of the project was to develop and implement an alternative identification process to identify more students as gifted in rural, high poverty schools. Once identified, a place-based curriculum was created and used with treatment students to increase students’ writing self-efficacy and affect their concepts of community and place, but writing was not the sole or primary focus of the project. Additionally, it is also essential to understand how the design of the pre-/post-test writing tasks was modified after pilot data in year 1 of the project might have affected the results. Finally, I discuss the importance of fidelity of implementation and instructional methods and how they could have impacted the results. I discuss each of these in detail in this section.

The quantitative results showed that the control students made measurable growth in writing ability, even though they did not receive the Promoting PLACE curriculum. To better understand the significance of this, it is important to understand the first goal of the project. The Promoting PLACE grant’s primary goal is to develop and implement an alternative identification
process for gifted students in rural, high poverty areas (Callahan & Azano, 2018). This alternative process was designed to identify students based on local norms and rural gifts and talents that may not manifest themselves in traditional ways. The first phase in this process was to administer a universal screening to all students in participating school districts to mitigate inequities related to funding for gifted testing. Students were given a standardized test at the end of 2nd grade, the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), in the areas of Language Arts (e.g. reading comprehension and vocabulary). These students’ scores were then used to create local norms to compare students only to other students in that same district; instead of using national norms which would compare Project PLACE students in rural Southwest Virginia, for example, to students in metropolitan or more resource rich areas. Furthermore, second grade teachers in participating districts were provided with focused professional development on rural giftedness and then asked to complete the Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students (SRBCSS) for each of their students. Teachers rated students’ creativity, motivation, and reading characteristics. The focus of these scales is on characteristics of giftedness that do not rely solely on achievement. This is an important step in the identification process because, as Renzulli (1987) asserted, gifts and talents manifest themselves in “socially useful forms” (p. 181). This alternative identification process could help explain some of the surprising outcomes in the quantitative data. The quantitative results indicated that control students made measurable gains in their writing ability, which could be a result of having been identified as gifted. It is possible, because these students were identified as gifted, they had a more engaged or vested interest to complete school tasks at the level they perceived warranted their gifted identification. It is possible that control students’ writing ability improved as a result of the effort they put forth to “prove” they deserve gifted identification.
Another consideration of the quantitative findings is the modifications made to the design of the pre-/post-test writing tasks, which could also provide an explanation of the quantitative results. The original design of the Promoting PLACE grant was the writing tasks would be administered to students at the beginning of 3rd grade, before treatment students received any of the curriculum, and at the end of 4th grade, after treatment students completed all four units. However, after the pilot districts completed pre-testing, the gifted coordinators indicated that administering the Iowa, scales, and writing tasks all at the beginning of 3rd grade was too much testing at once and expressed concern about over-testing their students. This was the same response received for post-testing, as well. As a result of this feedback, project personnel decided to move the pre-test writing tasks to midyear of grade 3 and the post-test to midyear of grade 4, to offset some of the testing. This meant the results of student writing were actually only one year apart, as opposed to two years, as they were designed. Since they were only a year apart, students in the treatment group did not receive the entire Promoting PLACE curriculum. The quantitative results do not show the full influence of the curriculum on students’ writing ability. The writing tasks are the only assessment administered in this way, therefore, do not necessarily show the influence of the entire promoting PLACE curriculum on students as writers.

Another important consideration in interpreting the quantitative analysis is fidelity of implementation. In addition to extensive observations in the treatment classrooms, teachers kept a daily fidelity log to monitor their adherence to the curriculum and reasons for modifications. Analysis of fidelity of implementation data indicated that some treatment teachers were not teaching the writing portions of the curriculum, instead using a discussion in place of student writing to save time or because they felt their students did not have the foundation to complete the writing workshops as indicated in the curriculum, or they were working with large groups of
students, so a discussion seemed more feasible than writing (Caughey, 2018). Moreover, treatment teachers reached out to project personnel multiple times requesting support with lessons involving writing instruction. One district explained that writing instruction was virtually dropped from Language Arts classes because it is no longer tested (“Virginia Department of Education,” 2014). As a result, project staff wrote and provided mini-lessons as scaffolds for the writing instruction. These scaffolds and additional supports were implemented in Cohort 3 classrooms (not included in this study) and only partially in some grade 4 classrooms from Cohort 2. The teachers realized their students did not have the foundations necessary to complete some of the writing tasks the curriculum asks for, which indicated their students needed some extra support to get to that level.

The fidelity of implementation data further indicated weak treatment in that not all treatment students received treatment daily. Since Language Arts classes were not teaching regular writing instruction, and many treatment students were receiving writing instruction only as a part of the curriculum, this lack of reinforcement and weak treatment could explain why treatment students had lower scores on their post-test writing tasks. There was also wide variability in how instruction was delivered programmatically (either whole class, cluster grouping, or pull-out services). Therefore, weak treatment was further complicated by difference in program delivery.

The Promoting PLACE curriculum provided students with opportunities to process their experiences in writing. The writing tasks used in the project were not designed to examine how students process experiences through writing; they were designed as one metric of writing ability. Writing is important for students to process their experiences and think through the material they are learning and experiencing in the classroom (Hillocks, 2007; Stewart, 2011a).
Moreover, gifted students need a challenge to their higher-level thinking skills, as well as understanding purpose for the activities they are completing (Stoddard & Renzulli, 1983). The Promoting PLACE curriculum provided these challenges to students, but further analysis of all students participating in the project (i.e. all three cohorts) is needed to better understand the results of the quantitative analysis. Cohort 2 was the only group analyzed in this study because they are the largest cohort and the only cohort of students to have completed the entire curriculum. Cohort 1 was the pilot group and Cohort 3 is still receiving the Promoting PLACE curriculum. There are several possible reasons for understanding why the writing tasks did not reflect how the curriculum influenced students as writers. Whereas some lessons had writing instruction (that may or may not have been taught as designed), the focus of the entire project was built on the principle of place-based pedagogy and its possibilities to support achievement with underserved rural gifted students. Therefore, the data had to be examined another way, qualitatively, to understand how the curriculum and its focus on place and rurality might have influenced students as writers.

**Qualitative Significance and Instructional Take-Aways**

In this section, I discuss the significance and instructional take-aways of the qualitative understandings. The take-aways discussed first are based on the understanding that showed treatment students using the tools of the profession (descriptive, detailed language) to discuss place in a more nuanced and complex way and what teachers can do to implement this in their classrooms. Next, I discuss how the deliberate place connections from the curriculum provided opportunities for students in the treatment schools to “weave complex place-based connections” (Waller & Barrentine, 2015, p. 7) into their writing, which was shown through their connection of people and places outside the immediate building or structure, to show the importance of those
concepts working together to make their place special. I conclude this section with a discussion of how including a dialogic stance to place-based curriculum can help students use writing to process experience and develop more complex views of place.

**Using Tools of the Profession as a Common Language**

The understanding that treatment students shifted their use of descriptive and detailed language to show their readers the place they were describing (rather than telling the readers what to experience in that place) shows the importance of teaching writing skills as tools writers use to share their experiences through showing and not telling to “take [their] reader with [them]” (Jensen, 2004, p. 58). The Promoting PLACE curriculum continually reinforces the skills and elements of writing students are learning as tools writers use. When the lesson calls for a discussion on descriptive language and evoking the senses in writing, for example, the discussion is based around those elements of writing being things that writers do, as members of that “club” (Stewart, 2011a). For example, in the grade 3 unit, “Poetry of Place,” students learn the difference between abstract and concrete words and images. This connection to the profession in the curriculum shows up in student writing as they used more descriptive language in their writing. Connecting instruction and lessons to the work of professionals is one of the primary underlying philosophies informing the development of the CLEAR curriculum, on which the PLACE curriculum was written (Reis & Renzulli, 2003). Students in the treatment group used descriptive language to show their reader the place that is special to them, which shows they are using the tools of the profession and becoming members of the writer’s club (Stewart, 2011a). For example, in TS2’s discussion of the woods behind their house, they thread descriptive language throughout, while also including figurative language: “They are like nature’s fireworks booming red, yellow, and orange leave” (TS2; PostWT). They use descriptive
and figurative language as a tool of the profession to show rather than tell to better articulate their experiences (Jensen, 2004; King, 2000). The focus of the curriculum on tools of the profession helps students to create a common language to describe their experiences as members of their community. This common language, in the form of tools writers use (e.g., descriptive language, figurative language) to express and share their experiences, helped students to view themselves as members of the writer’s club (Stewart, 2011a) because they have constructed a common language of what writers do. In the next section, I discuss ways teachers can provide opportunities for the co-construction of a common language to help students process experiences through writing.

**Instructional take-aways.** In writing instruction, teachers can provide opportunities for students to write about their experiences, without worrying about form and function, so there is less stress to get things “correct” (Donovan, 2016). As treatment students wrote with more detailed and descriptive language, like TS2’s description of their woods, their writing suggests they were focused on content first, by showing what the woods are like. As students process their experiences through writing, the focus should be on getting their ideas onto paper (or computer screens) first, so the classroom can become the link in meaning making that provides opportunities for students to co-construct the Discourse Community of the classroom (Gee, 2015). Treatment students’ use of descriptive and detailed language suggests the Discourse community in the classroom led them to the common understanding of the importance of this tool writers use. As students use tools of the profession to write about things that are important to them, they are writing with more passion and depth (Worthman, Gardner, & Thole, 2011). Providing opportunities for students to process their experience as members of their communities and connecting classroom instruction to place connects the concepts of critical literacy (Freire &
Macedo, 1987) and the importance of schools reflecting student experiences (Dewey, 1938). Using place as a foundation of experience, and connecting to the curriculum, while also providing a space for students to enter into dialogue with the curriculum and their experiences helps them to make their own understandings, using the tools of the profession (descriptive language, diction, showing and not telling) of the lessons in school (Stewart, 2010). To enact this type of instruction, to help students develop as writers, teachers can:

- **Identify ways writers show their experiences in readings and connecting to students’ experiences:** Teachers can help students develop their understanding of tools writers use by analyzing the texts in the classroom. As students are reading a passage, story, novel, or article, have them identify the tools writers are using for that particular genre. For example, have students read a fictional story or a poem, annotating the text identifying the ways the author uses descriptive, detailed, and figurative language to articulate their experiences. As they annotate the text, they can also look for place connections or how they have had similar experiences. For example, in the folklore unit, as a part of the Promoting PLACE 3rd grade curriculum, students are encouraged to discuss how their experiences relate to the stories they read, while also focusing on how writers share those experiences.

- **Brainstorm experiences students want to explore:** Have students brainstorm experiences they want to explore through writing by choosing the tool of writing about what they know and what matters to them (Jensen, 2004; King, 2000; Donovan, 2016). Teachers can create classroom experiences that help students identify and call attention to what matters to them. They can help students connect those experiences with concepts being taught in the classroom through discussion,
conferencing, or writing. In the Promoting PLACE curriculum, students did this by taking an interest inventory as it relates to their sense of place by looking at artifacts or mementos in their homes or rooms, so teachers could connect the curriculum to students’ place.

- **Outline descriptive language students can use to focus their writing:** Students can make a list of all the important elements of their experience and how they can connect those to the senses, to show the reader their experience. Organize important elements into categories that reflect the five senses. Then, students can brainstorm descriptive language (tools of the discipline) they can use to show the reader their experiences. Students are asked to do this in the poetry unit of the Promoting PLACE curriculum as they work on their poetry workshops, to better direct their writing toward showing instead of telling. Students can connect their experiences to their places by thinking about special experiences they’ve had in their communities and how they can describe that to someone who has not had those experiences.

- **Provide opportunities for students to write, focusing on content over form and function:** Teachers can provide opportunities for students to work at description on a finer level, focusing on individual word choices that can draw upon the fabric of language (Bakhtin, 1981). As students write about their experiences in their places or communities, emphasize the importance of getting their ideas out first, so they can focus on making their content detailed and descriptive. The Promoting PLACE curriculum provides writing workshops throughout, which allow students to write, focusing on ideas over form and function, allowing
students to revise later, if necessary. This can help students draw upon their own cultural contexts to choose words that convey particular meaning to them as a part of a speech plan; using word choice (diction) as a tool of the discipline. They can go back and revise and edit for more mechanical and form-based elements later; content should come first.

**Deliberate Connections to Place Supports Student Thinking About the Value of Place**

The finding that treatment students nuanced the way they discussed people and places, as well as bringing those two concepts into concert with one another suggests that a deliberate connection to place provides opportunities for students to “weave complex place-based connections” (Waller & Barrentine, 2015, p.7). Students in the treatment group received the Promoting PLACE curriculum, which provides opportunities for teachers to make a deliberate connection to place in the classroom. Throughout the Promoting PLACE curriculum, teachers are provided with suggestions to provide this deliberate connection. The influence of this connection to place was evident in treatment student writing, as they nuanced the way they discussed place in their post-test writing tasks. For example, treatment students expanded their view of place to include places outside the immediate building or structure; they were connecting their conceptualizations of place to nature and the environment. TS6 wrote about the evergreen trees in their yard and expressed the solace they feel when they climb those trees, which suggests the influence of the curriculum provided opportunities for students to connect to place in more complex ways. This discussion of nature suggests that providing opportunities for students to think about and discuss place in the classroom, as it relates to the curriculum, helps students to nuance the ways they discuss and think about place—meaning “place” is not simply the building one happens to be in or even where one lives, rather the connections people have to those places,
like feeling solace when climbing a tree or being a part of nature that holds personal meaning. Using students’ experiences as a stimulus for teaching creates opportunities to make personal connections to what is happening in the classroom and enhances the meaning making process (Fecho, Coombs, & McAuley, 2012); this connects to a deliberate connection to place by giving students guidance on how their experience as members of their local communities connects to the classroom.

Connecting curricula to contexts students are familiar with provides them with opportunities to socially construct meaning and knowledge together, as members of their school communities, and the larger out-of-school communities. Students have individual experiences and common experiences as members of their communities and that affects the way they make meaning in the classroom; those differences are a part of the social construction of the classroom reality. Through writing, students are co-constructing the reality of the classroom and showing a “bearing on the well-being of the social and ecological places [they] inhabit” (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 8). The finding that students are nuancing the way they discuss place by moving away from the immediate building or structure and connecting those places to the people who help to make those places special suggests they care about how people and places function together and in the stories of their lives. TS7’s connection to family in their special place exemplifies this.

This student wrote about a place where their family can “play in harmony something [they] can’t do often” (TS7; PostWT). This example suggests a place-based pedagogy provides an avenue for students to express themselves in writing and become an authority in the classroom by writing about things they know. In the next section, I discuss how teachers can use this deliberate connection to place in their classrooms to provide students with opportunities to express themselves in writing and become an authority in the classroom.
**Instructional take-aways.** Providing students with a space to connect their out-of-school experiences gives them an opportunity to think about and process experiences in critical ways (Hillocks, 2007). With rural literacies in mind, which are a “matter of attending to text(s) and context(s)” (Green, 2013, p. 29), students’ experiences can connect to the texts in the classroom, while providing context to help students make meaning. Furthermore, rural literacies are a social construction, meaning that all rural places are different, so the literacies of the texts and contexts of those places are constructed by the people who live there. Providing a deliberate connection to students’ place will help them understand how texts and contexts work together to make meaning. VanTassel-Baska and Hubbard (2016) suggested that teachers use students’ experiences in the classroom, while challenging students higher-order thinking skills, using problem-based learning, or inquiry-based instruction for gifted students in rural areas. These strategies allow teachers to attend to the specific rural context in which they teach.

Teachers can also use their own experiences and stories to help students make connections, while also showing them that their stories are important to their communities (Donovan, 2017). Teachers using the Promoting PLACE Curriculum were encouraged to work along with students, providing their work as a model, using their own stories or interests. For example, with the research unit in the Promoting PLACE curriculum, teachers are encouraged to develop their own research topic to use as an example for students as they work through their research projects. This connects to a critical pedagogy of place, which was a theoretical frame for the design of the curriculum, by providing students with opportunities to bring their lives into dialogue with the curriculum. To enact this deliberate connection to place, teachers can:

- *Connect themes in readings to cultural and local themes:* Teachers can provide opportunities for students to connect the texts of the classroom to what they know.
As students read texts in the classroom, provide opportunities for students to discuss how the themes of the readings connect to the cultural and local themes. Students can be asked to bring in a family heirloom, photo, or other personal item that a text makes them think of. Students can use these items as a catalyst for discussion or a guided free-write, to help students make meaning with the context of the reading, in connection with their personal items (Stewart, 2011b). The Promoting PLACE curriculum emphasizes teachers connecting readings to students’ experiences; in folklore unit, as a part of the 3rd grade curriculum, has students examine local stories they know as part of learning about folklore. This discussion can also take the form of a guided free-write, where students write for five minutes on the themes and how they connect, opening up opportunities for students to get their ideas out before having a discussion.

- **Interview family members to understand family stories:** Teachers can provide students with opportunities to understand their family stories by interviewing parents, grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, or even neighbors, asking them about the stories that have been passed down in their families. As students conduct these interviews, they are using their “funds of knowledge”—the experiences that have given them the knowledge they have (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005)—and cultural context to shape the fabric of language and make meaning (Bakhtin, 1981). Then, students can write those stories or a version of those stories that connects to their own experiences. This is similar to the folklore unit as part of the Promoting PLACE 3rd grade curriculum, where the focus is on
how stories in their communities become folklore or legend, so students can connect what they know to the curriculum.

- **Students write about subjective and objective culture:** Teachers can create opportunities for students to further consider the nuances of place by writing about how a newcomer or visitor to their community may perceive their community and culture. Students can go to a local place or walk around their neighborhood viewing it as a newcomer of visitor, taking notes on their surroundings, the people they see, and what happens as they explore. Students are taught subjective and objective culture throughout the Promoting PLACE curriculum, as it relates to the four units: Fiction, Research, Poetry, and Folklore. They can then write their experiences from the perspective of a newcomer or visitor, focusing on the objective and subjective things they noticed that would show something about their culture.

**Including a Dialogic Stance to Enhance Curricula**

When I examined the qualitative understandings, I came to the suggestion that dialogic pedagogy can work in concert with a place-based curriculum to help students use writing to process experience and develop more complex views of place. The findings that students understand the importance of people to place and expanding their concept of place to a larger concept illuminated the potential for blending dialogic pedagogy and place-based pedagogy for teachers who work with gifted rural students and writing is a way to blend these two concepts. Dialogic pedagogy provides opportunities in the classroom for students to inquire into multiple viewpoints and explore context (Stewart, 2019). Students making the connection between people and places, and how they work in concert with one another to make places special, opens the
door for a more dialogic stance and conversation to happen in the classroom. The curriculum has opportunities for students to dialogue about place but including a more deliberate dialogic stance to the curriculum can help students think more critically about place. Dialogic pedagogy provides a lens through which the instruction in the classroom can value inquiry, explore context and multiple viewpoints, providing opportunities for students to co-construct meaning in the classroom. Teachers can use a dialogic stance in the classroom to provide opportunities for students to bring competing beliefs into conversation with one another and the curriculum, while exploring tensions that exist between the classroom, their experiences, and the status quo (Bakhtin, 1981; Stewart, 2019).

Creating an environment where students can connect to place also opens up the conversation to global issues. All places, local, rural, metropolitan, suburban, near and far, are connected to and shaped by larger global forces (Brooke, 2011). Brooke asserted that “local reality is almost always shaped by much more widespread cultural, natural, and economic forces” (p. 164). Moreover, students understanding their sense of place is key to understanding and caring about more distant places (Azano, 2019). Treatment students’ nuancing their discussion of and connecting people and places together in complex ways suggests that using a dialogic stance, in tandem with the critical place-based nature of the Promoting PLACE curriculum, creates a classroom environment that encourages students to use their experiences to connect with the curriculum, while hearing varying perspectives (i.e. their classmates’ experiences) and using those conversations to examine their own perspectives and experiences (Stewart, 2019). Using students’ experience as a catalyst for developing students as change agents can start with writing instruction, connecting what they experience in their communities to larger, global context and the systems of oppression that exist. The issues students experience
as members of their communities connect to the larger global context because, as Azano (2019) asserted

To think globally is to think locally…students would learn to recognize and value [the global] in their local communities, privileging the spaces where they learn and live now…Place has the opportunity to bring meaning to what might…otherwise serve as idle chatter (p. 110).

Providing a space for students to value their local communities through a dialogic, place-based curriculum helps students to use that context to make meaning in the classroom. In the next section, I discuss ways teachers can employ a dialogic, place-based curriculum.

**Instructional take-aways.** Expanding on the critical nature of the Promoting PLACE curriculum, dialogic pedagogy provides a space for students to question hierarchies and process experiences with inequalities through writing. The curriculum used in this study is designed to address and combat stereotype threat by giving students an opportunity to discuss stereotypes and how stereotypes affect them and their communities. By including a more dialogic stance—providing opportunities for students to inquire into the hierarchies or inequalities that exist and reinforce the stereotypes and the oppression rural communities might experience and inquiring into their own belief systems—will provide a more critical discussion of what students can do to act as change agents in their communities. To enact a dialogic, place-based stance in the classroom, teachers can:

- **Have students write about stereotypes they experience:** Teachers can bring the concept of place into dialogue with students’ experiences by having them write about how they have been influenced by or subjected to stereotypes ascribed to them by others in relation to their community and the people who live there. After
writing, discuss stereotypes that surround rural students, allowing students to
dialogue with one another and their own beliefs in discussion or through writing
to examine multiple perspectives, and providing opportunities for students to
examine their beliefs and the implications of those beliefs on their communities.

- *Inquire into and dialogue with opportunities and limitations in rural communities:* Teachers can guide students as they write to bring their lived experiences into dialogue with the concept that being part of a rural community can be a positive and powerful factor in their lives. Instead of positioning challenge and/or systems of oppression as insurmountable challenges, teachers can use writing to help students explore pathways to success when they meet challenges or systematic oppression. Helping students use the opportunities afforded to them by being a part of a rural community, they can then consider how the fabric of their community might serve as a resource when they encounter systems of oppression (e.g., school funding, access to healthcare). For example, writing prompts and discussion questions can be centered on things like: What opportunities to do they experience as members of a rural community? Are there systems of oppression at work in their local community and, if so, how has that affected them personally? What place-based solutions might you propose for those challenges based on local support systems? Exploring these ideas, and the beliefs students have about them, while inquiring into beliefs (and even challenging them) will bring a more critical understanding of what place means to them.
• *Inquire into the opportunities and richness of rural life students have experienced:* Teachers can use writing as a means of helping students call attention to the richness of their own cultural and geographic contexts. Students can also write about the ways they and their families have experienced community life. What do they value? How would they offer a critique of the relationship their place has with the rest of the state or country? Are there inequalities or systems of oppression that have affected them personally and how would they promote place-based solutions to those challenges? Their experiences can help them also dialogue with their values and beliefs as members of their communities.

**Limitations of This Study**

In this section I discuss several limitations to this study. First, I discuss the limitations of the quantitative analyses, then I discuss the limitations of the qualitative analyses, and I conclude with how instruction in both conditions may have affected the results.

One limitation of the quantitative results is the low $n$ used for the MANOVA. The MANOVA analysis required that every student in the sample used to run the analysis had a complete set of data; each student had to have a pre- and post-test score for the writing tasks, writing self-efficacy scales, and the community/place scales. If a student was missing one of these data points, they were eliminated from analysis. This resulted in 36 treatment students and 35 control students being included in the final analysis. This is a limitation to this study because there are 199 total students in Cohort 2, after eliminating students from districts who have dropped from the project; 93 treatment students and 106 control students. The MANOVA only ran data for less than half of the students in each condition, which may not provide an accurate
depiction of the growth in writing, writing self-efficacy, and concepts community/place for the entire cohort. This limitation might be attributed to the statistical package used to run this analysis, and other packages may be better at handling missing data.

The writing tasks used for analysis were designed to measure writing ability. However, I used them to analyze not only writing ability, but also for ways students wrote about place. Because the writing tasks were not designed to have students talk about place, even though the prompts are broad enough for students to discuss place, the way students talked about place can be limited. This was evident in the pre-test results where students only discussed place in relation to their school buildings. Using a prompt that is more deliberately connected to place or provides a broader scope, allowing for a discussion of place may result in students writing about place in different ways than shown in this study.

After reviewing fidelity logs from treatment teachers in Cohort 2, project personnel realized that teachers were not using the suggested place inserts in the curriculum. Teachers were given place related readings to replace some of the more universal readings (e.g. excerpts from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* or *Peter Pan*), to provide more opportunities to discuss place in relation to the curriculum. Instead, teachers were following the lessons as scripted, without access the supplementary materials. Since the teachers were not using the place inserts as suggested, project personnel revised the curriculum for Cohort 3, removing the option to select place-based inserts; they were scripted into the lesson by region. Students in Cohort 2 may not have had as many opportunities to connect the curriculum to their experiences, which could have impacted the way they discuss and conceptualize place.

The writing instruction for the control group is virtually unknown, when only examining the data used in this study. The project staff conducted multiple observations of control
classrooms, but that data was not used for this study. The focus of those observations was to measure program differentiation, for example, therefore we know very little about writing instruction in control classrooms. The evidence I do have of control students’ writing instruction is from email correspondence with district personnel. Because the writing instruction they received is unknown, without looking at observation data from those sites, I am unable to make any inferences about why these students showed measurable growth in writing. Not using observation data from control districts is a limitation to the results of this study, as I cannot make inferences about their writing in relation to curricula, in the way I can for treatment students.

**Implications for Future Research**

There are several implications for future research based on the findings and understandings of this study. One opportunity for future research is based on the nature of the prompts used. The prompts for this study did not provide opportunities for students to examine how they see themselves as writers; their writing self-efficacy was based solely on a self-report scale. Modifying the prompts or developing prompts that provide opportunities for students to discuss place and who they are as writers may provide more insight into their writing self-efficacy and its relation to place. A future study could include such a prompt and would lead to understandings about how students feel about themselves as writers, in ways a self-report scale cannot illuminate. Providing a space for students to discuss their perceptions of themselves as writers, using their own language and experiences, can provide deeper understanding of their writing self-efficacy.

Other opportunities include future iterations of this study. Since the data from this study is only from Cohort 2, a future iteration could include Cohort 3 for qualitative analysis. Including this cohort could provide deeper understanding of the influence of the curriculum on how
students think about and write about place. Because Cohort 3 was the only cohort to receive a more deliberate connection to place based on the revision to the fourth grade curriculum, their writing can be analyzed qualitatively using the same a priori codes used in this study, then compared with Cohort 2 to better understand the influence of the revisions to the curriculum and a deliberate connection to place threaded throughout the units.

Another study could focus on instructional methods and fidelity of implementation of the Promoting PLACE Curriculum. Analyzing student data based on the instructional method (i.e. pull-out, push-in, cluster grouping, or whole group) may shed light on the way instruction is delivered (and by whom—a gifted resource teacher versus a general education teacher) relates to writing achievement. Including observation data from the control sites and fidelity of implementation data from the treatment sites will also provide more information on how writing instruction was taught to these students. This will help to understand how instructional method affects these students as writers, and how it affects the fidelity of implementation. Caughey (2018) found that teachers were choosing discussion over writing in some of the treatment schools, which could influence student writing ability. Due to varied funding limitations in rural districts, project personnel found that some districts had gifted resource teachers to work with students and others relied on general education teachers for this support. Another iteration of this study would take into account the modes of instruction (program delivery) and also the instruction (general education versus gifted resource teacher) by nesting the data within classrooms. If students are not writing, their writing cannot improve. Analyzing the data used for this study in connection with instructional method and fidelity of implementation could provide a deeper understanding of the influence of the Promoting PLACE curriculum on students as writers.
Conclusion

The findings and understandings from this study indicate that providing opportunities for high-performing students to connect to and discuss place in relation to the curriculum helps them to think about place in more complex ways. Connecting to place in the classroom emphasizes the importance of communities in shaping who students are and how they learn, valuing students’ experiences in those communities.

Bakhtin’s (1981) theories of language and culture provided the foundation of dialogic pedagogy, which provides a space for students to transact with the unifying and individual meanings of words and utterances. Using this concept in the literacy classroom creates a space where these classrooms are “playgrounds, workplaces, and intellectual places of the future” (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007). Connecting dialogic pedagogy with Freire’s (1970) concept of dialogue and its purpose in education—to provide opportunities for people to dialogue about their views and others’ views, creates a space where students can dialogue with the curriculum and the opportunities in local contexts, as well as the oppressive forces that maintain the status quo, engaging in a critical pedagogical process to recognize and examine tensions that exist in their worlds. This illuminated my findings by providing a way for teachers and students to connect to place in more critical ways, to think about place in more complex ways.

Writing instruction that connects to place provides opportunities for students to enter into a discourse community, entering into a conversation that is ongoing. As students enter into this ongoing conversation through writing and dialoguing with their experiences, they are transacting with other viewpoints and other classmates’ experiences to create a strong and positive environment for learning (Fecho, 2000). As students transact with the various texts in the classroom, they are also inquiring into those transactions, questioning the new texts created
through these transactions and how different people can interpret and understand things differently. As Freire and Macedo (1987) asserted, “Reading does not merely consist of decoding the written word or language; rather it is preceded by and intertwined with the knowledge of the world. Language and reality are dynamically interconnected” (p. 29). Using dialogic pedagogy, critical literacies, and a critical pedagogy of place, the classroom then becomes a space where there is an understanding that “all [writers] belong to discourse communities” (Nystrand, 1989, p. 71) and where students can use writing to connect their reality with the reality of the classroom. Through writing, co-constructing meanings and experiences, and transacting with texts, students are inquiring into and challenging the tensions that exist in their communities and lives.
References


http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/va_assessment_program_changes.pdf
Appendix A
Writing Task (Grade 3)

**Directions:** Read the prompt below and then write the best letter you can. Try to use as many details as possible.

**Writing Prompt:**

The principal has asked you to write a welcome letter to all the new students who will be joining your school in the fall. You should describe the things that make your school special. Include interesting things that you have learned, features of your school’s classrooms or characteristics of your teachers, and your school experiences outside of the classroom (for example, fun activities) that make students like your school. Your writing should make the new students look forward to coming to your school!

Your letter should include descriptions of both learning and recreational experiences and should make a new student look forward to school. Make sure it is engaging and interesting. Your letter will be most powerful if you are careful with your word choice, grammar and spelling, and the organization of the letter.
Appendix B

Writing Task (Grade 4)

**Directions:** Read the prompt below and then write the best letter you can. Try to use as many details as possible.

**Writing Prompt:**

Think about a specific place where you live or visit. This could be your home, school, or an outside area that you explore or where you play.

Now think about what a really great day is like for you in that place. Draft a letter to a friend who has never visited this place and write about what that great day was like. Your letter should be descriptive enough that your friend feels like he or she is right there with you during that day.

Your letter should include a description that is clear and specific enough that the reader can visualize the place and what made your day so great. The letter should be interesting and engaging for your friend to read. Your letter will be most powerful if you are careful with your word choice, grammar and spelling, and the organization of the letter.
## Appendix C

### Self-efficacy Scale Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>I am sure I can’t do it</th>
<th>I don’t think I can do it</th>
<th>I think I might be able to do it</th>
<th>I am pretty sure I can do it</th>
<th>I am definitely sure I can do it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I can write a good story that a reader can easily understand.</td>
<td>I am sure I can’t do it</td>
<td>I don’t think I can do it</td>
<td>I think I might be able to do it</td>
<td>I am pretty sure I can do it</td>
<td>I am definitely sure I can do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I can correctly use the writing strategies that I have learned in class.</td>
<td>I am sure I can’t do it</td>
<td>I don’t think I can do it</td>
<td>I think I might be able to do it</td>
<td>I am pretty sure I can do it</td>
<td>I am definitely sure I can do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I can correct my own work to make sure anyone who reads it will understand what I’m trying to say.</td>
<td>I am sure I can’t do it</td>
<td>I don’t think I can do it</td>
<td>I think I might be able to do it</td>
<td>I am pretty sure I can do it</td>
<td>I am definitely sure I can do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I can correctly spell all the words in a one-page story.</td>
<td>I am sure I can’t do it</td>
<td>I don’t think I can do it</td>
<td>I think I might be able to do it</td>
<td>I am pretty sure I can do it</td>
<td>I am definitely sure I can do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I can write a simple sentence using correct rules for writing.</td>
<td>I am sure I can’t do it</td>
<td>I don’t think I can do it</td>
<td>I think I might be able to do it</td>
<td>I am pretty sure I can do it</td>
<td>I am definitely sure I can do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I can find information that I need from more than one source, such as the Internet, books, magazines, or people.</td>
<td>I am sure I can’t do it</td>
<td>I don’t think I can do it</td>
<td>I think I might be able to do it</td>
<td>I am pretty sure I can do it</td>
<td>I am definitely sure I can do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I know how to show that information in my writing has come from different sources, such as the Internet, books, magazines, or people.</td>
<td>I am sure I can’t do it</td>
<td>I don’t think I can do it</td>
<td>I think I might be able to do it</td>
<td>I am pretty sure I can do it</td>
<td>I am definitely sure I can do it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Community/Place Scale Questions

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I know many things about my community.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>My community is very important to me.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>People think I act a certain way because of the community where I live.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Where my family lives and the things my family has influence what I can become in my future.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>My teachers think I act certain ways because of the community where I live.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Other people judge me because of the community where I live.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

Framework for Analyzing Writing Tasks for Place

This instrument addresses the following questions:

1. How does the student use place in their writing?
2. How frequently does the student use place in their writing?
3. What types of place references does the student make in their writing?

Student ID number: __________________________
Pre-test/post-test (highlight one)

Evidence of place (with significant quotes):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family and/or Heritage</th>
<th>Local People</th>
<th>Local Places</th>
<th>Local Histories</th>
<th>Community Involvement</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Rubric is based on Azano’s (2009) “Framework for Analyzing Place Documents” and represents a synthesis of place references from the Promoting PLACE Curriculum Rubric and Azano’s (2009) codes.
Appendix F

PLACE Curriculum Rubric
Evaluating Place-based Pedagogy

- Please score each PLACE component on the rubric below using the following scale:
  1 – Very weak. I did not see any evidence of this.
  2 – Weak. PLACE was alluded to, but it took a lot of effort to see the connection
  3 – Average. I can see it, but it does not “wow me.”
  4 – Strong. Yes, it is very evident, and I am impressed.
  5 – Very Strong. This does “wow me.”

Lesson Number/Title: __________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Assessment Criteria</th>
<th>Possible Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Efforts made to integrate prior local knowledge and to embed place-specific characteristics into content</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>*An expert reviewer familiar with the CLEAR Curriculum Model will assess for these components.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Opportunities are provided for community outreach and involvement</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Student engagement and interaction is encouraged through a variety of activities</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Quality Points: _______/15

- Please answer the following open-ended qualitative questions using specific examples from the curriculum.

1. Rural, poor students are at risk for stereotype threat, and intentional efforts have been made within the curriculum to address some common stereotype threats. How well does the curriculum address these threats and do you feel these attempts are successful?

2. Please identify some of the strengths in the curriculum, particularly in relationship to place and how it relates to and enhances student identity; does the curriculum emphasize rural strengths or does it unintentionally focus on deficits?

Do you have any additional feedback or suggestions of components to add to strengthen the overall content of the lessons and/or their connections to place?
## Appendix G
### Writing Task Rubric (Grade 3/4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WRITING TASK RUBRIC</th>
<th>1 Novice</th>
<th>2 Apprentice</th>
<th>3 Journeyman</th>
<th>4 Master</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOCUS</strong></td>
<td>There is no connection to the task stated in the prompt. No intended audience apparent.</td>
<td>Connection to the task is not easily identifiable (e.g., no supporting details). May write for an intended audience, but audience is difficult to discern.</td>
<td>Includes a connection to the task with some supporting details. Writes for an intended audience, but is inconsistent.</td>
<td>Includes a clear connection to the task and many relevant supporting details. Clearly and consistently writes for an intended audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WORD CHOICE/VOICE</strong></td>
<td>Does not use figurative language or adjectives. Sentences are incomplete or not varied. Writing is lifeless and not engaging.</td>
<td>Uses minimal (1-2/paragraph) instances of figurative language and few adjectives. Sentences lack variety. Writing is flat at times.</td>
<td>Uses some (3-4/paragraph) instances of figurative language and adjectives. Sentence variety is inconsistent. Writing occasionally engaging.</td>
<td>Figurative language and many (5 or more/paragraph) instances of descriptive adjectives are used. There is consistent sentence variety. Writing is lively and engaging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MECHANICS</strong></td>
<td>Writing has 7 or more significant grammar or punctuation mistakes per paragraph.</td>
<td>Writing has 4-6 significant grammar or punctuation mistakes per paragraph.</td>
<td>Writing has 1-3 significant grammar or punctuation mistakes per paragraph.</td>
<td>Writing has appropriate grammar that clearly conveys the author’s message and punctuation with no significant mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STRUCTURE/ORGANIZATION</strong></td>
<td>Does not contain an introduction/salutation, body, or closing/signature.</td>
<td>Writing sequence is illogical and contains one of the following: an introduction/salutation, body, or closing/signature.</td>
<td>May lack a logical writing sequence, but contains two of the following: an introduction/salutation, body, or closing/signature.</td>
<td>Contains logical writing sequence with all of the following: an introduction/salutation, body, or closing/signature.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>