

Teacher Identity in a Multicultural Rural School: Lessons Learned at Vista Charter

Kerri J. Wenger

Eastern Oregon University

Jan Dinsmore

Eastern Oregon University

Amanda Villagómez

Eastern Oregon University

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*In this paper, we describe a 30-month qualitative exploration of diverse teachers' identities in a high-poverty, bilingual, K-8 public charter school in rural eastern Oregon. First, we use the perspectives of *saberes docentes* and a situated view of teacher development to document the life histories of monolingual and bilingual teachers at Vista Charter. Next, we identify five core beliefs shared by Vista teachers, and we attempt to trace the links between representative teachers' biographies, beliefs, and their views of themselves as teachers. We examine the role of the school context on teachers' practice and on their constructions of identity in a multicultural rural school. We conclude our paper with some implications for school leaders and teacher educators who support and prepare teachers for work in increasingly diverse rural schools.*

The best part of Vista is wonderful teachers.

-Vista 8th grader, 2011

Schools across the United States, including rural ones, serve increasingly diverse families and communities. The 2011 *U.S. Condition of Education* report shows that between 1989 and 2009, the percentage of Hispanic students in public schools doubled, comprising 22% of the school age population; at the same time, the percentage of White

public school students decreased from 68 to 55% (Aud et al., 2011).

Furthermore, data from the past two decades indicate that the number of students who learn English in public school has risen significantly. Around 21% of children in public schools today speak a language other than English at home; of these children, 5% speak English with difficulty and of these children, Spanish is the most common home language (Aud et al., 2011). By 2009, the number of public school students living in poverty had increased to nearly 20%. In the rural schools in Oregon where we teach, the percentage of cultural and language minority students of the total K-12 student body, and the number of students living in poverty, is much higher—often, the de facto majority in any given school. Also relevant to our current study is the fact that, in the midst of increasing linguistic diversity and children in poverty in our public schools, the number of students enrolled in public charter schools more than tripled across the nation, from 340,000 students in 1999 to 1.4 million students in 2009 (Aud et al., 2011).

As student and family diversity has increased, so has the number of teachers who leave the profession (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Researchers have noted that challenges for new teachers in rural schools may be compounded by lack of resources, and by limited opportunities for meaningful professional development in rural areas (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Wenger & Dinsmore, 2009). While student and community diversity has increased, data suggest that there is

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Correspondence regarding this manuscript should be addressed to Dr. Kerri Wenger, Eastern Oregon University, 676 SW 5th Ave, Ontario, OR, 97918; Phone: 541-889-8333; Email: kwenger@eou.edu.

¹For the purpose of this study, we follow the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), which defines rural as any area outside of an "urbanized" area. The school in this study is located in a small town in the largest county in eastern Oregon, the second-least-populated county in Oregon. The county has a geographic area of 9,930 square miles, with a total county population of 31, 313 people (about 3 people per square mile).

not a proportionate increase in the diversity of the teaching force, particularly in rural areas (Burton & Johnson, 2010). National studies on teacher preparation indicate that preservice teachers may have positive attitudes about teaching culturally diverse students, but significant gaps in preservice teachers' understanding of cultural diversity remain (Castro, 2010). Though studies are few, research in rural teacher preparation suggests that aspiring rural teachers—from majority and minority cultural groups—often enter teacher preparation programs feeling unprepared to work with culturally and linguistically diverse families in rural communities (e.g., Wenger & Dinsmore, 2005; Wenger et al., 2004).

Yet, there are exemplary teachers of diverse students in rural schools. We have much to learn from teachers themselves about their work, their professional identities, and their development in particular schools with particular student and family populations (Ernst-Slavit & Poveda, 2011; Goodson, 1991).

Examining Teacher Identity

Education researchers' examination of what teachers do to help all children learn and grow has always been important. Even in schools with very little teacher autonomy, teachers enact pedagogy in individualized ways.

Equally important, however, may be examination of *who* teachers are: their identities, and how these identities influence how they teach and learn. We need detailed portraits about teachers in our vastly diverse K-12 public education system in the United States, and about how “the structure of schools shape who is attracted to teaching, who prepares to teach, and how long they stay” (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005, p. 8).

Schools can change rapidly. A socio-cultural, situated view of teacher development and teacher practice (Wenger, 1998) has given rise to new areas of research that explore the ethos of teaching. Recently, some scholars have begun to view the complex, context-bound act of teaching not so much as the cognitive work of individuals, but rather as *identity practice* within institutional aims and goals (Bullough, 2008a). In this study, we take Olsen's view that “who one is as a person has a lot to do with who one is as a teacher” (2008, p. 39).

An Under-Researched Field

There is relatively little research on teacher identity, in multicultural settings or otherwise. The narrative inquiry work of scholars like Bullough (2008a, 2008b), Ernst-Slavit & Poveda (2011), Kelchtermans (1993), and Olsen (2010) provide promising directions and a call to expand scholarly and practical knowledge in this area. There is little life history or identity research on rural teachers (Burton & Johnson, 2010), and little of the research in multicultural

education and teacher professional development (Hollins & Guzman, 2005) appears to be conducted in rural settings. Yet rural student and family diversity is increasing significantly in states with large numbers of rural school districts: Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2010) note that in Oregon, where this study takes place, there was a more than 200% increase in limited-English-proficient students between 1993 and 2003.

Theoretical Perspectives

While teacher knowledge has historically been examined from individual, cognitive perspectives, there has been a shift to examination of teacher knowledge as constructed and socially negotiated (Husu, 2007). One example is the work of Mercado (2002) undertaken in small schools in Mexico, and her use of the construct of *saberes docentes*, or teachers' pedagogical knowledge, grounded and constructed in teachers' daily experiences with learners. In this view, teachers' knowledge is framed as developing and displayed in contextually bound situations, within particular school cultures. Ernst-Slavit & Poveda (2011) note that a *saberes docentes* perspective “invites educators and researchers alike to carefully consider educators' personal biographies and trajectories as elements that configure their teaching knowledge” (p. 14).

In the 1980s, Latin American ethnographers of education proposed the construct of *saberes docentes*, or teacher knowledge acquired through every day experience and associated reflective processes (Ernst-Slavit & Poveda, 2011). Teaching is viewed as a socially constructed practice rather than a performance of prescribed roles and didactic actions; teachers' knowledge is viewed as multi-layered and intertwined with various domains of social life (Mercado, 2002). As work using the construct of *saberes docentes* has continued in the 21st century, researchers in Latin America, Europe, and the United States have sought to describe and trace the links between teachers' perceptions, beliefs, practices, and the educational materials and teaching contexts that they design (Ernst-Slavit & Poveda, 2011).

In this study, we use *saberes docentes* as a frame for understanding teacher knowledge and practice, with a focus on describing and examining the practical adaptations that teachers make, and the stances that they take, as they interact with students; we seek to show how selected adaptations and stances are mediated by their personal experiences. Ernst-Slavit & Poveda (2011) have shown that the perspective afforded by the notion of *saberes docentes* has been useful in theoretically framing ethnographic research in contexts like the one in this study, where teachers and students in the same school come from a variety of majority and minority cultural backgrounds and experiences. In our attempt to identify shared beliefs, and their impact on individual teachers' practice and stances toward learners among

diverse teachers at a particular school, we also explore what might be viewed as a kind of collective framework for multicultural *saberes docentes* that is supported within this context.

We also frame our analysis of teacher identity within situated perspectives of teacher learning and development (Wenger, 1998). Olsen (2008) asserts that “teacher development is circular even as it is also forward-moving: a teacher is always collapsing the past, present, and future into a complex *mélange* of professional beliefs, goals, memories, and predictions while enacting practice” (p. 24). Similar to *saberes docentes*, then, teacher identity is grounded in teachers’ daily work of learning and knowing their practice (Bullough, 2008b; Bullough & Baughman, 1997). Explaining that teacher identity is a “relational phenomenon,” Husu (2007) states that “teachers form their identity in the social context of schooling and in the ways those contexts enable and limit their meaning making” (p. 46).

Finally, some research suggests that teacher knowledge is grounded in relationships with peers. Musanti & Pence (2010) suggest that “teacher knowledge and identity are intricately interwoven” (p. 87). Seen from this perspective, teacher identities are negotiated even as relationships are negotiated. We may expect that we are not only ourselves—we are those with whom we teach.

To sum up, in this study, we use the lens of *saberes docentes* to examine the adaptations teachers make, the stances with which they approach students and families, and the beliefs that they share. We also work within a situated view of teacher knowledge and development to examine shared beliefs and socially negotiated teacher identity in the particular multicultural, multilingual school context of Vista Charter.

Vista Charter: High-Performing, High-Poverty, Dual-Language

If teacher identity is viewed as situated and socially negotiated, it makes sense to closely examine the identities of teachers in one particular public school. In our county, Vista Charter School² has been a place for diverse teachers to thrive with their students.

Community

The small town home to Vista Charter is linguistically diverse, with a high percentage of its population living in poverty. The median household income for residents of the school’s small town is approximately \$29,000, with over 73% of households earning less than \$50,000 per year (U.S. Census 2000). There are other elementary schools within a 10 mile radius in the county: three regular public schools,

two schools that have converted to district-sponsored public charter schools within the last two years, and two private Christian elementary schools. All students from these lower schools feed into the town’s single public high school.

School Demographics

Vista Charter, a K-8 public charter school, serves over 225 students. It is a high-poverty school that qualifies for Schoolwide Title I, Title III ESL, and the USDA Meal program, among other programs. Over 90% of the student population is Hispanic. About half the students who attend the dual-language charter school speak a variety of Spanish as their first language, or come to school having learned both English and Spanish at home.

School History, Bilingual Model, and Curriculum

Vista Charter opened in fall 2003 after state sponsorship was granted. Vista Charter is based on a dual-language immersion model (Baker, 2006) and is the only bilingual school in a fifty mile radius. At Vista Charter, students in grades K-5 learn content in all required subjects in both English and Spanish. Grades 1-5 have two teachers per grade level; one teaches in English, the other in Spanish. Students are immersed in Spanish, and then in English, in alternating weeks. (In kindergarten, there is alternating Spanish and English instruction week by week, but in this grade only, there is only one teacher, who switches her language of instruction weekly.) There is no translation; rather, each grade K-5 teacher teaches solely in the target language of the week, using a variety of sheltered methods. In grades 6-8, intensive Spanish language arts is continued, but more academic subjects are offered in English than in Spanish. Vista Charter has met federally mandated Adequate Yearly Progress goals in all required content and attendance areas.

Vista Charter does not use scripted curricula. Teachers develop integrated curricula in English and Spanish according to Oregon state grade-level standards. In grades K-5, trade books are used rather than textbooks in all subject areas. A great deal of teacher collaboration in curriculum development is expected and institutionally supported. There is an emphasis on development of strong home-school connections.

Vista Teachers

Oregon schools typically report teacher turnover rates of around 37% (Oregon Department of Education, 2006). In the eight years of Vista Charter’s operation, the turnover rate has been low, and in annual reviews of administration from 2005-2009, faculty and staff report a high degree of satisfaction with most aspects of administration at the school.

The 2011-2012 school year is typical in that seven of the school’s 12 certified teaching faculty are bilingual in Spanish and English; these faculty self-identify as bicultural.

²“Vista Charter” is a pseudonym. Names of teachers are also pseudonyms.

Five of the faculty are monolingual English speakers and consider themselves part of the English-speaking majority culture in this agricultural county. Teachers reside in the small town where the school is located, or within 20 miles in smaller rural communities. All but one of Vista Charter's teachers grew up in rural Oregon or Idaho communities, and all are graduates of geographically close teacher education programs.

Study Questions

Within this context, then, an examination of teacher identity and development may shed light on crucial aspects of context, teacher and student relationships, and critical events that shape effective teachers' beliefs and practice in this rural multicultural setting. In this paper, we examine these questions:

1. What are Vista Charter teachers' life histories? As a group, do teachers have shared beliefs and constructions of identity that influence their practice in a linguistically diverse rural school?
2. Does the school context itself play a role in their beliefs and their identities as teachers? How?
3. What are implications of this examination for rural school leaders and for teacher educators?

Methods

Researcher Roles in Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry, life history, and ethnographic methods (Bullough, 2008b, Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Goodson & Choi, 2008; Zeichner & Gore, 1990) are used in this 30-month study. We note that researchers in this study are involved in Vista Charter School in various capacities. Since 2009, there has been a formal teaching and learning partnership between Vista Charter School and Eastern Oregon University.³ While data in this study focuses on the 2009-2010, 2010-2011, and current school year, the researchers have years' worth of experience with Vista Charter as classroom observers, volunteers and teacher mentors. Seven of the school's certified teachers are graduates of the university teacher education program

³Their respective partnership roles: EOU provides local and regional professors from its faculty to engage in instructional coaching, access to resources, and science and literacy professional development opportunities for Vista teachers. Vista provides classroom space for EOU preservice teachers for art and technology methods; provides adjunct instructors from its teaching faculty; and serves as a practicum placement site for some ELL methods courses and selected student teaching practica.

where the first and second authors of this paper teach. The first researcher on the team served on the school's Board of Directors for seven years and is a parent of one graduated and one current student; the second is the school's instructional coach; the third was a teacher for three years at the school, is a parent of two students, and was a part-time mentor for Vista curriculum development during the 2011-2012 school year. She returns as a full-time Vista teacher in the fall of 2012. As researchers and in other roles, we have invested time and energy at Vista, something of which we were always aware as we reviewed study data. However, we feel that these experiences made us uniquely positioned to engage in in-depth interviews and analysis of teachers' narratives. Teachers knew us well. They reported that they felt they could be honest and reflective about their experiences; they trusted us to do the same.

Timeline and Data Sets

Timeline. This is a long-term qualitative study. Data collection was begun in the fall of 2009 and continued until December 2011.

Data sets. Teachers' life history interviews and our observations at the school were important data sets in this study. In our analysis of teachers' experiences across social domains and over their career trajectories, we relied mostly on transcripts from over 25 hours of formal audiotaped narrative interviews of Vista teachers. Over the 30 months of the study we also had many conversations and email exchanges with teachers about their lives and their practice. We observed instruction at Vista in all grade levels: we averaged over 20 hours weekly in the first year of the study; over 10 hours weekly in the second year of the study in all grade levels; and one researcher spent the first five full weeks of school in fall 2011 observing new teachers' classrooms in grades 6-8, while the other two researchers averaged 10 hours weekly in observations in all grades from August-November 2011.

Data sets also included photographs of teachers working in their classrooms; artwork created by teachers (at our request) that illustrated aspects of their teaching identities; grade-level curriculum materials, especially integrated units developed by teachers; Vista Charter Board of Directors meeting minutes; school charter documents; school policy handbooks, information materials, school website information, local print and online news articles about the school and issues of concern to the school, and school schedules.

Data Analysis

We used a grounded-theory approach (Saldaña, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to generate theory from the interview and observation data. After reviewing all the interview transcripts, we coded for recurrent themes. Codes were first generated based on identifying key events

in teachers' past and present lives that influenced their teaching practice. These key events allowed us to create six focus "identity snapshots" that were representative of both monolingual and bilingual teachers' life histories. This first step afforded us a way of organizing the data. Within those broad event categories, we found recurring themes about feelings and beliefs across transcripts.

From this constant comparative method, we began to theorize about the ways in which the school context and interactions between its participants influenced teachers' identities, beliefs, and practice. We used other data sets to check our analyses. For example, one initial theme that wove throughout all the teachers' formal interviews was a stated love of trade books (especially children's literature in a wide variety of genres in English and Spanish) as integral to their teaching. We began to speculate that "importance of trade books as a foundation for curriculum" might be a core belief of teachers at Vista. However, as we reviewed our classroom observation data, we saw from their practice that what Vista teachers really seemed to value in beliefs around the importance of trade books was what they learned from their wide variety of reading in trade books, especially about people and history across cultures. As we compared the data from interviews with observation data, we began to see that any shared belief around love of trade books was actually better articulated as part of a shared core belief in learning from diverse students and a diverse teaching staff—including what others were interested in reading and sharing with students. Too, this love of learning from reading is reflected in a view of teaching as collaborative, intellectual work. As we analyzed data and compared themes across data sets, we also made extensive use of member-checking with teachers at the school, in both one-on-one settings and whole-group settings.

Who are Vista Charter Teachers?

We provide here six narrative "identity snapshots" drawn from Vista Charter teachers' own words. These identity snapshots are representative of teachers' life histories and negotiated identities at Vista Charter. Two are immigrant teachers from Mexico who grew up speaking Spanish and then moved to the local area as children; two are teachers who grew up speaking both English and Spanish in the local area; and two are teachers who grew up as native English speakers in the local area.

Two Immigrant Native Spanish Speakers: Eduardo and Elisabeta

Eduardo, bilingual in Spanish and English and in his early 30s, has taught for five years at Vista:

I grew up in rural Mexico. School was not an option for me. I really wanted to go, but until my brother came home and could work on the dairy

for me I couldn't afford to go to school off the rancho. I worked so hard when I was able to attend school in Mexico; I did very well. . . . I entered 6th grade at 15 years of age, when we immigrated to rural Oregon. It was hard. I wanted to do well, but I didn't know very much English and some of the other kids who were around me were getting into trouble. It was an art teacher who told me "I know who you are and I believe in you."

I didn't know what to expect from college, and I couldn't have gone without scholarships. In high school there was a leadership program, statewide, that made all the difference for me. . . . I was always guided, pushed, helped to become a teacher.

This school is a second home. Just as a big house would be. Working with the parents, the kids. I'm willing to do whatever it takes for kids.

Elisabeta, bilingual in Spanish and English and in her mid 20s, has taught three years at Vista:

Here, I am—a bilingual teacher. I was nine years old when we moved to a small town in Idaho, from Mexico. I remember some very hard times, but I learned English quickly even though many teachers were not understanding in my early grades. I did well in school, but it was really my high school teachers who helped to give me confidence, and suggested college, found scholarships. . . . It was very hard to be alone in college. My family is not used to having the women leave, unless they are getting married. But I did, and even when I went to graduate school, took the opportunity that some of my professors let me know about and the chance to go to Chicago for my master's degree and to teach early childhood, it was very hard to be away. Even though I loved the kids, and the school was great.

When I reflect, I am who I am because of my culture. I have my Mexico culture, and also now my husband's Venezuela culture. We met in Boise, Idaho; we both love to dance. . . . Even here at school the other teachers say, "We can tell you are happier, more even now that you are married; it shows. You were happy before, but now you are more open, more grounded."

This school has influenced me. I did my student teaching here even before my graduate school, because I had heard so much about it. And I wanted to come back. It's bilingual; it's home; a place of comfort. This school empowers you to be who you are.

Two Native Bilingual (English/Spanish) Speakers: Veronica and Javier

Veronica has been bilingual from birth, but considers herself dominant in English. She is in her 40s, and has taught eight years at Vista:

I never thought about being a teacher. I grew up in rural Idaho, both Spanish and English speaking. I worked in a bank for many years, and I worked nine years as an aide in a rural Idaho school. No other things are more personal than your kids and your money, right? Those are crucial for families and I respect that.

Why I teach here—of course, it's the philosophy of the school. I felt constricted as a certified teacher in my previous Oregon school; I was there three years and it was a blur. I was scared to go out on a limb for kids.

I appreciate so much what we have at Vista Charter. The coaching on the job, at any time, no matter how experienced you are. I've had buy-in with the way this school is from the get-go; it's good for families, for kids. I feel safe; there is always going to be support that is good for teachers and good for kids.

Javier, grew up with English and Spanish spoken, dominant in English, mid-20's, in first year at Vista.

I grew up here. I went to three schools in three towns in this area. Life was good, I always had both parents involved in my life and they always helped me see things from a long-term perspective, versus living for "here and now". . . . Although money would have made things easier, it showed me that hard work can pay off and it doesn't always pay off right away, but with patience and resilience, it will!

During my middle school years, I tried so hard to be a gangster. I know, it sounds pathetic. With the support of my parents as well as numerous educators...and many others I was able to finally wake up and become the student I was capable of becoming. Before I graduated high school, I knew I wanted to become a teacher.

My identity is made up of the Mexican culture, but I am always true to my American standards and beliefs. However, in this demographic area I teach in, being part of both cultures is paramount because being part of both cultures is expected as well as attainable. I think I bring a mix of old school ways with new ideals to the classroom.

I student taught here. I agree with the school mission: get kids to college!

So far, students have shaped my identity by allowing me to see the amount of poverty that is prevalent in this school. I have worked at other [area] schools where students and their families are poor, but at this school, people are open to saying they are poor which helped fuel their desire to succeed....I will always remember where I come from. I think it is important that students know I am not all that different from them.

Two Native English Speakers: Amy and Kelly

Amy grew up in an English speaking family and learned Spanish as a young adult. She is dominant in English, in her early 30s, and has taught three years at Vista:

I grew up in a tiny Oregon community. Nearly all European American. I loved being involved. We did all kinds of things in school and in the community....I had always wanted to be a teacher, and I saw myself as a teacher.

I taught in two other schools in small Oregon towns before Vista. Each district was influential in helping me to see a range of scenarios in how districts approach meeting students' needs. Both, what I want to do, and what I don't want to do. Dual immersion was a major reason why I wanted to teach here....Also for my kids. My husband is a native Spanish speaker from Mexico.

Here, I am a decision-maker; a school-builder. We share as peers, and mentor each other.

Because I am in a two-culture marriage, sometimes I am able to see and understand things that maybe teachers who only speak and teach in one language might not appreciate right away. It is a real challenge to teach—or learn—in your less dominant language. . . . My students see me and what I experienced growing up can be so different from what they know: "But did you have a quinceañera?" one of the girls asked me the other day.

Kelly is a monolingual English speaker. She is in her late 20s, and has taught four years at Vista:

I had to teach here. I'm a farm girl. I had great teachers growing up. I had it pretty good—great family, so supportive, great time growing up—started college and partied quite a bit before getting serious and going back later for my degree.

Before my teacher ed program, I had worked in

other schools in the area—really similar kids to here—and I remember just always being told no, you can't call the parents with the translator, she's not here til Tuesday. No, you couldn't make a home visit, no this or no that. And I remember arguing—arguing!—with my education professors that there were not any schools around here where you could do those things—connecting with families. And one of my professors was like, well, you can at Vista Charter.

I love schools, and I've had teaching experience in quite a few schools, but here I agree 100% with this school's mission statement. I've always thought of myself as an open-minded person, but now I see my kids, their families teaching me about community, always pulling me beyond my little bubble of how I think families should be or schools should be.

This [she points to school around her] is who I am as a teacher.

The identity snapshots, coupled with interview data and observations of teaching, provide clues to critical incidents in the past and in daily practice that help shape the identities of these effective teachers of multicultural rural students. As we reviewed teachers' life histories, we paid attention to how their experiences and their career trajectories mediated their daily practice—manifestations of their *saberes docentes*. We move next to an examination of core shared beliefs among Vista Charter teachers, and how the school context—its culture and its community members—supports and extends those beliefs in the construction of these diverse teacher identities.

Shared Beliefs and Construction of Teaching Identity

As we analyzed the data, we identified five core beliefs shared by Vista Charter teachers. As we discuss each core belief, we weave in examples of adapted classroom practices, interactions, or individual stances toward educational practice that are mediated by Vista teachers' *saberes docentes*. We also weave in a brief discussion of selected contextual aspects of Vista Charter that support particular beliefs.

Core Belief 1: “We are all valued and valuable teachers here, but we are mindful that we have had very different roads to teaching.”

Minority and majority culture teachers at Vista appear to have had quite different “ways in” to teaching as a profession. The nature of critical events that they identify as part of their decisions to be teachers is markedly different.

On one hand, every native Spanish speaker or native bilingual speaker at the school reports being pushed into

teaching; there were community members who introduced the idea of teaching into the range of their possible professional identities. Often, there were painful incidents associated with schooling. Relationships with peers and adults at school could be fraught with tension. Eduardo remembers:

I was hanging out with some students, Latinos, involved in gangs, for the reason that they spoke Spanish, I didn't speak good English...I didn't understand really. The principal suspended me and my dad said, What's going on? You're like the nicest boy we have! And I said, I'm not doing those things, but I can't make them understand. And my dad said, you know, sometimes in this country, you have to do your best to get away from those things. So, I lost my friends, I became a loner. I mean, I couldn't communicate with the other kids, the Anglo kids. It was tough.

Veronica and Javier worked as paraprofessionals in rural schools for many years. As bilinguals, they were able to make connections for young students between the majority culture of school and the minority culture of the community. Yet, even with this teaching experience, neither considered appropriating the role of “classroom teacher” as a career goal. Neither viewed their bicultural knowledge as a particular strength they might bring to teaching.

For Eduardo and other Vista teachers, developing a bilingual, bicultural identity in their rural communities was difficult.

You know, I was 19 years old, a junior in high school, and I realized I was losing my roots. I was kind of becoming ashamed of who I was. I saw the Latinos around me as causing trouble; I just couldn't figure it out. I said, this is not me, I don't want to do this. By keeping to myself, I stayed out of that trouble. But when my parents wanted to go to fiestas, or quinceañeras I didn't want to go, I didn't want to mix. I had lost that. I had lost everything.

Each native Spanish speaker teacher at Vista identified at least one teacher or adult mentor as a key source of great strength as their bicultural identities developed. Data suggests that adult mentors in their communities took an active role in helping those who eventually became bilingual teachers at Vista to succeed. Eduardo's principal found a way for him to attend a Hispanic leadership institute that “changed my life. Because we saw role models who were Latinos, who were professionals, and that to me was like, wow, they're not just like what I see around my area.” Data suggests that teachers at Vista who are native Spanish or native bilingual speakers do not view their identities as being self-constructed, but as being part of a web of teacher

and caring community member identities. Others in their communities talked them into considering a teaching career, helped them identify university programs, and assisted with negotiating college applications. These influential mentors for academic and bicultural success were from a range of cultural backgrounds; as Eduardo notes, “they didn’t have to be Hispanics; in fact, the most influential mentors of my life were [monolingual English] Americans.” Now, Vista Charter’s executive director is seen as a model and mentor for many native Spanish speaking teachers. And it has been at Vista Charter that Eduardo feels his Mexican roots, as well as his ties to the English speaking majority community, have been nourished.

On the other hand, Vista’s native English speaking teachers report having decided on their own to become teachers, and they do not report any significant barriers to acting on this decision. Reasons for their decisions to become teachers included having loved their own rural school experiences, and having admired key teachers as important and valued members of their communities. While each identifies strongly with European-American, rural western, farming and ranching culture, they speak of their obligation to their communities as making them want to “open up” to teaching all students well. For example, Amy knows that her immigrant students come from a wide range of urban and rural settings, and that their experiences differ: “For example, in my husband’s Mexico community, 9th grade is the highest level of education available; only a small percentage of residents stay in school that long.” She adds that it’s vital to learn “about the level of academic support and access that they had. In some cases, this applies to my students while in others, it refers to considering the level of comfort parents have related to literacy.”

We see here how Amy’s experiences mediate the stance with which she approaches students and families: it is a stance that requires that she never assume she automatically understands a student’s community or school experiences. It requires her to learn about each student, and his needs individually. We see this stance reflected in her *saberes docentes* as she learns about her students by asking them about themselves each morning, by carefully responding to what they share in writing assignments, in class discussions, and by learning to know their parents in home visits and school-sponsored meetings and breakfasts for families.

If a “never assume” stance is part of Amy’s *saberes docentes*, data suggest that all Vista teachers work to bring an open mind to the families whose children they teach, and to their teaching peers. Vista teachers seem to know that different roads have led them—and their students—to Vista Charter every morning. Vista teachers admire compassion and speak of being advocates for students and families. They share a commitment to being—and finding—mentors for diverse students. As Javier put it, “Knowing that these students are aware of the challenges that plague their

families was a way for me to give that extra effort to ensure I help guide them in the right direction.”

Core Belief 2: “We expect to learn from our diverse students, and from our diverse teaching peers.”

Vista Charter’s mission statement includes a focus on fostering student academic and cultural success in a dual-language environment. Kelly says that teaching at Vista Charter is always an exercise that pulls her out of “her little bubble” of the way “she expects families or kids to be”—in other words, teachers are constantly looking at their own assumptions as a necessary part of teaching. Although not all teachers are balanced bilinguals, there is evidence that teachers here have a deep understanding of the challenges tied to learning (or, as Amy notes, teaching) in a second language.

Veronica’s *saberes docentes* around student encounters with a strange new language in her multiage second/third grade classroom leads her to focus playfully and explicitly on what students notice about language. Most mornings a visitor can see students slipping pieces of paper into the “word jar” that they’ve collected and now want to discuss. Students find words in books (like “goose-down”) and the community (“U-Haul,” and “Lion’s Club”). In the second year of the study, Veronica noted wryly to one of the researchers that she had to find another jar, because the students wanted to start a “phrase jar” after one day’s discussion of a phrase reported by one solemn second grader: “One guy told another guy he’s ‘gettin’ a big head!’”

Field notes suggest that there are many formalized routines within school practice that lend themselves to teachers’ individual and collective capacity for learning from students, and for learning from each other as they problem-solve around issues of cultural diversity in school. Teachers open meetings with invitations to share “celebrations” of student or teacher learning from each teacher present. Often, these stories give rise to comment and input from diverse teacher peers about how they might reflect about a given situation. There is an emphasis on building new multicultural understandings as all communicate with parents, students, and each other.

This seeking of shared multicultural understanding surfaces in informal teachers’ interactions as well. For example, one fall day, the pipes in the girls’ bathroom were making a lot of noise. Giggling, half-afraid girls were making a great many trips to the bathroom during class time, telling each other “there is a ghost!” One new native English speaking teacher couldn’t understand the half-fearful concern that persisted in many girls throughout the day, and was thinking of reprimanding them for their behavior. Before she did so, however, she sought out the views of her Hispanic teacher colleague, also a new teacher at the school, about the situation and the girls’ response to it. Her teaching peer grinned and said, “Yeah, they’ve been talking about *la llorona* all day – that is a scary idea!”

The two teachers had a brief discussion of the legend of La Llorona, and in the end both teachers went to reassure the girls that the school pipes were not, indeed, influenced by La Llorona, Moaning Myrtle from the Harry Potter series, or anything but plumbing noises.

The preceding example may seem like a rather trivial anecdote unrelated to classroom instruction. Yet, it does illustrate how culturally diverse teachers, even those new to the school, adopt interaction routines for discussion and cultural analysis to “attend to problems of practice” (Horn & Little, 2010) from individual and shared perspectives. They teach each other and their students from and about various perspectives. We see here how teachers develop their *saberes docentes* as part of their daily interactions with each other and with students; rather than reprimanding the girls, one teacher worked with her teaching peer and the girls to discuss their behavior and get the story behind their reactions. Examples like these can be viewed as adaptations or “reflexive solutions stemming from these educators’ emergent pedagogical knowledge—from their *saberes docentes*” (Ernst-Slavit & Poveda, 2011, p. 14).

Emphasis on the importance of learning with diverse individuals is seen in the visual aspects of the school. Children’s art and writing are present on all the school walls, in both English and Spanish. One child’s poster with the large words “We are all a community!” depicts children holding hands in a semi-circle line doing dance steps, with all their different kinds of hair blowing out to the same side. Hair, skin, and eye colors are distinctly different shades on each child. Also on the school walls are teacher-created posters with quotes and photos from noted authors, writers, and artists of different cultures about the importance of reading and learning. These inspirational quotes are changed frequently; they even appear on the walls of the “adults only” bathroom. These visual reminders underscore the shared belief that learning from diverse people is part of the path to achievement.

Core Belief 3: “We expect that we will collaborate for professional development, since all of us view teaching as important intellectual work.”

We have seen how teacher experiences, cultural knowledge, and routes to teaching differ. Regardless of diversity in age and cultural background among Vista Charter teachers, however, remarkably similar views of themselves as teachers appear to exist. There is a view of teaching as service, an expectation of teaching as a profession which involves continual growth, and an expectation of being part of a professional learning community. Among teachers with experience in other schools, there is a belief that this expectation, in part, is what makes them, and their school, somewhat unique. A high level of support from their administrator and from fellow teachers is expected, with requests for coaching and collaboration seen as the

norm. During their time at Vista, most teachers have taken graduate classes in education. They discuss their coursework with each other. Several schoolwide literacy and technology practices have originated out of such discussions.

Community is a key term with respect to collaboration as well. As they talk about their school, teachers describe a sense of the school’s responsibility to its neighbors, to the surrounding town, and to itself as a special community. Amy explains how her previous experiences as a student in her rural community primed her for collaboration with both teachers and families:

I grew up in a close-knit rural community where there was a seemingly mutual sense of comfort between teachers and families, as well as among classmates. My elementary and secondary experiences in that district were very positive, providing me with a strong foundation and a sense of self. While the community lacked the diversity that all of the schools where I have taught have, it provided me with a desire to collaborate with colleagues in order to create a sense of community within my classroom and overall school culture.

We see how a collaborative stance manifests itself in Amy’s *saberes docentes* in her decision-making processes around the challenge of raising money for the eighth graders’ trip during the 2010-2011 school year. In order to fund their five-day bus trip to visit three of Oregon’s universities, each student needed to come up with about two hundred dollars. Amy decided to collaborate with her students and their parents to create a bilingual cookbook to sell to community members. Students worked to gather recipes in English and Spanish of special dishes from their parents and grandparents; they earned points in Spanish and English class for researching ingredients and for translating each recipe; and they included not only information about food, but also their own bilingual advice for success in school and in life. Many copies were sold.

Amy and her eighth graders had many options for raising money in the community, but she chose to enact an option that required an intersection of knowledge from the domains of school and the community. From a *saberes docentes* perspective, we see in a project like this how “teachers’ accumulated personal, professional, and social experiences play a role in how they organize and adapt their instruction and materials,” as well as creating spaces “where minority language students’ knowledge is valued and validated” (Ernst-Slavit & Poveda, 2011, p.14).

Core Belief 4: “At Vista Charter, we teach who we are.”

Vista teachers at every grade level share a student-centered focus and an emphasis on small group, hands-on projects that require a great deal of student talk as they learn. Yet, teachers report that they like the ways that their

unique teaching styles are appreciated at Vista. How does this happen?

Data suggest that there is a culture of appreciation of various teaching strengths at Vista Charter. Teachers expect to learn more about what they love in different content areas, and then to share what they have learned. Amy gives this example:

...my first year at Vista, Veronica created a folder for each teacher focusing on reading comprehension that she shared with all the staff. Last year, another teacher and I did the Word Study support on a staff development day, and those that went to the technology conference in Portland presented for the other half of that day—to share what we learned.

Other teachers describe an emphasis on long-term, ongoing collaboration across grade levels with respect to how various teachers support workshop approaches in language arts, or in differentiating instruction for students with special interests and talents, or in push-in approaches for struggling students across content areas.

The shift to a project-based learning model in grades six through eight seems to have encouraged upper-grades teachers to think about their “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), and to build these funds into their teaching. Teachers designed courses around topics that could be integrated across content areas, and then gave students the chance to direct certain projects and areas of inquiry. Students were allowed to choose which of four courses they wanted to take. In the fall of 2011, each course designed by teachers reflected their own funds of knowledge and areas of community expertise: 1) Teen Violence in Our Community; 2) Everyday Engineering; 3) Positive Impacts—for Our School and Our Community; and, 4) Young Entrepreneurs.

Field notes from these courses suggest how each teacher’s community knowledge, and aspects of each teacher’s identity, were layered into these courses. For example, Javier spent time in his engineering class with students who investigated different models of cars and how their similarities and differences influenced fuel efficiency, consumer demand across different cultural markets, and the role that cars played in their own community. This 18-week course grew out of Javier’s community identity as a “Lowrider.” Javier explains how his love of Lowriders is both part of his background knowledge and something that he hopes will help students develop their critical analysis skills:

My community influences me because I am part of the low rider community. Although low riders tend to have a stigma of being associated with gangs and thugs, I hope to change that persona.

If a successful, educated Latino can drive a low rider and he is not a thug or a gang member, then hopefully it will prompt others to rethink their stance about the community of Lowriders.

In this class, students put together model cars, discussed the role of cars in their communities, investigated various types of fuel, researched world oil markets, worked on Javier’s car, explored local gas stations and auto mechanic shops, and moved into an investigation of how propane works as a fuel by assembling a gas grill. (A farm parent donated part of a butchered steer so they could test out the grill.)

The fact that teachers often feel tension between the way they see themselves as teachers and the contextual constraints of the schools in which they work is well documented in the literature (e.g., Bottery, 2003; Bullough, 2008b; Coldron & Smith, 1999; Namaghi, 2009). However, this does not appear to be the case with Vista Charter teachers. Many teachers share the belief of Kelly, who says “we teach who we are.”

Core Belief 5: “Vista Charter is a safe place for me to grow as a teacher.”

For native Spanish speaking and native bilingual teachers, there is a theme of “safety” at Vista Charter. They describe this sense of safety as enabling them to perform in highly effective ways as teachers for both majority and minority culture students. They describe their sense of security as important to the identities they negotiate at school and as teachers. We remember Elisabeta’s and Eduardo’s descriptions of Vista Charter as a second home, and a place of security. For the Vista Charter teachers who have taught in other schools before coming to Vista, this stands in sharp contrast to other school contexts they have known—as students and as teachers.

Veronica has strong feelings about aspects of Vista that enable her to grow in the way she prefers as a teacher. When one researcher remarked to her one day about Veronica’s habitual practice of listening intently to each child during group work time, and of keeping her teacher comments to a minimum in order to let a child talk in an uninterrupted way, Veronica laughed and said, “You’re right, I guess I do give kids a lot of room to talk, to use the language. I’ve learned you can’t hear what the needs are if you are doing the talking!” She thinks for a moment and then speaks reflectively about her past work experience and how it mediates her teaching practice:

For me—this will sound weird—it goes back to that customer service thing, working at the bank for so many years. You really have to hear what the needs are, you listen to families. You know that situations can arise, that families are frustrated sometimes and desperate, with their money, and with their kids. When the bank switched from

a customer service mode, a helping mode, to a sales mode, that's when I left there. And I started work as a para in school. You have to be about the customer service, because you can't meet needs if you don't listen for what they really are.

We see here how a "customer service" stance influences Veronica's interactions with students, causing her to make sure she plans space in the educational day to listen individually to each student. She uses this practice of listening in her interactions with parents, as well, especially during home visits and parent conferences at the school. "You have to listen in order to get the story," Veronica said frequently to new teachers; we see her explicitly outlining a key aspect of her *saberes docentes*.

Teaching in other schools left both Veronica and Kelly feeling that they couldn't practice a customer service orientation to their work with students and their families; each felt constrained by not being able to easily schedule home visits, or in trying to advocate for students. Vista Charter, says Veronica, supports her in her desire to enact this aspect of her *saberes docentes*, even if many of the surrounding county residents do not always value or validate minority students' languages or cultures. In fact, Veronica's "customer service" stance has been taken up by the school's executive director, who used the phrase frequently in her mentoring of new teachers in the third year of the study: "Customer service, it's why we're different from other schools; we're about great customer service for all the families in our school."

There are also non-work related connections between Vista Charter teachers that strengthen personal relationships and a feeling of safety in learning and growing for teachers. During the one summer, Amy described one of these connections: "This week we met for our book club.... Teachers just choose books they are interested in reading and talking about. Come to think of it, even having a just for fun book club says something about the staff here."

Collegiality helps communicate shared beliefs about teaching and learning at Vista Charter. Some research suggests that collegiality is particularly important in supporting the work of rural teachers (Jarzabkowski, 2003).

One final aspect of support for individual teacher growth and collegiality at Vista Charter is the instructional coach. The coach is a part-time Vista Charter faculty member, whose role is to support teachers in teaching well and in identifying and meeting individual professional development goals. Based on their own interests, teachers work with the coach. Data show that teachers make frequent use of the coach to explore issues of classroom management, to try out new integrated curriculum approaches, and to talk over challenges. They also expect her to provide information about professional development resources, area seminars,

and graduate school options.

Possible counter-examples. As we attempted to identify teachers' core beliefs about themselves as teachers, and how the Vista Charter context supported and extended those beliefs, we also looked for aspects of the context that did not support those beliefs.

Schools and school cultures are in a constant state of flux (Wenger et al., 2004). For the 2011-2012 school year, four new Vista Charter teachers were hired in grades six through eight. Throughout the summer, these new teachers worked together to plan for the school year and their new project-based learning classes. At the same time, they understood the unique expectations at Vista Charter. While strongly committed to meeting those high expectations, they were worried about their abilities as brand new teachers. During the first months of the new school year, data suggest that new teachers did not experience the same feelings of safety in their learning and development as typically described by other teachers. Instead, data show they experienced anxiety about performing up to Vista Charter standard while they tried their best to manage all the new things about teaching in their first positions. As the school year progressed, the instructional coach and the two other members of the research team worked with the new teachers, as well as administration and experienced teachers, to share perceptions about growth, development, and teacher identity, and what constituted appropriate support for each teacher.

Summary. All of the teachers at Vista Charter, regardless of cultural background or years of teaching experience, have proven to be academically and culturally effective teachers for rural students of majority and minority cultures. Data suggest that for these teachers, identity negotiation and professional knowledge growth have been highly contextualized. Teaching identity development seems to be based, in large part, on relationships with diverse teachers within a school culture that prizes a range of cultural funds of knowledge. Specific examples of how teachers' past experiences and stances across social domains influence teachers' *saberes docentes* are present at Vista Charter. Teachers' work in the Vista Charter context influences their daily practice and their views of themselves as teachers. We have tried to trace the links between teachers' life histories, their *saberes docentes*, and the core beliefs that they share in their particular bilingual school context.

Discussion and Implications: Lessons Learned

Nelson (2008) notes that teachers' life stories across different sociocultural contexts can be "an essential tool for intellectualizing the human aspects of the teaching and learning process" (p. 3). Teacher educators should be interested in how individuals in different rural school contexts develop understandings of themselves as teachers, and how they learn to work thoughtfully with their peers for student

achievement and for their own development as teachers. Our data suggest that shared core beliefs are integral parts of Vista teachers' identities. These shared beliefs, linked to individual teachers' *saberes docentes*, are foundations on which they base daily teaching decisions. They also seem to be foundational to how they view themselves as teachers. Data suggest that these core beliefs represent a kind of collective *saberes docentes* at Vista, a critical part of what makes this school a place for diverse students and teachers to thrive. What can we learn from Vista Charter teachers' identities, beliefs, and school context?

Lessons for Rural Administrators

The Vista Charter executive director notes: "We hire the best, and we expect the best." She can do this thanks to her strong ties to teacher networks in her area, and her hard work in developing and sustaining deep connections to several geographically close teacher preparation programs. She opens her school up to university partnerships, takes on practicum students from several teacher education programs, and encourages her teachers to nurture future teachers.

The teachers in this multicultural school also work hard. They have many roles in the school and in the community. Data suggest that they view their intellectual work with great passion—they enjoy analysis of student learning, and they collect and use data to inform their instruction. Data also suggest that they view the "heart" work of teaching—identifying how to help families negotiate social services, finding a pair of football cleats for a struggling student, creating "homework clubs," providing for families in need—as equally important.

Our data suggest that Vista Charter teachers are supported in profound ways at Vista Charter, but it should be noted the level of responsibility and sheer time spent on preparing materials, teaching, and connecting with families at Vista Charter could mean a risk of undue stress and eventual burnout, particularly for newcomer teachers. With this in mind, differentiation of expectations between more experienced teachers and newcomer teachers (with respect to curriculum development and data analysis, and extra time for learning how to balance the workload of the school) might be useful in supporting all teachers.

Our data suggest that the core beliefs at Vista work to support diverse teachers and diverse students in this context. We do not wish to suggest that only these beliefs, or only these particular conditions, are necessary for exemplary instruction in rural schools that serve multicultural populations. Yet, some aspects of Vista Charter might be adapted at other rural schools where recruitment and support of diverse teachers is indicated (see Table 1).

Lessons for Teacher Educators

Research suggests that having a diverse teaching staff can have positive impacts on minority and majority culture students within a school (Flores, Clark, Claeys,

Villareal, 2007). Yet, graduation and teacher licensure rates for minority teachers remain poor (Flores et al., 2007). Many rural teacher candidates, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, wish to stay in towns where they have strong ties.

Using findings from this research at Vista Charter, we may identify programmatic elements that will help us support our rural teacher education students—from cultural backgrounds as diverse as those in our rural public schools. We need to "make teacher identity development visible" (Olsen, 2008, p. 36). Olsen stresses the need for learning and teaching autobiographies; the need for explicit, professional conversations with teacher educators at the university and with teachers in the field (about contradictions in the contemporary landscape of teaching, about choosing the right schools for oneself as a teacher); and the need for paying "formal attention to personal, emotional effects of identity transitions...an identity focus allows teacher educators and novice teachers, together, to consider how the whole person is always negotiating new identities and self-understandings around their teacher development" (p. 38).

Like rural administrators, we, in teacher education, must recruit locally and aggressively among all cultural groups in the rural communities served by our institutions. Tapping into paraprofessionals in local schools can be an excellent place to start. Three of six teachers profiled in this study worked as paraprofessionals in rural schools prior to pursuing teacher licensure; paraprofessionals often know their communities well, speak the languages used by various community members, and have strong ties to rural businesses and community institutions (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006). Once potential teacher pools are identified, we, in teacher education, need to find ways to bring licensure programs to linguistically and culturally diverse rural teacher candidates.

Once we have programs established in rural sites and students within those programs, we can support identity development and autobiographical reflection as tools for critical dialogue about minority and majority students' historical—and current—access to education in those same rural areas where they hope to teach. Mahon and Packman (2011) offer suggestions for integrating opportunities for such reflection and teacher identity examination throughout the entire teacher education curriculum. They describe group work, individual assignments, and potential program configurations to support teachers' investigations of their own career paths and the many roles of teachers over the teaching life span. They recommend that, as part of education about the career itself, teacher education students engage in their own life history research.

Engaging in this study has shown us the potential for life story work to shore up shared perceptions of teaching within a particular rural school. Too, this study highlights

Table 1
Lessons for Rural Administrators

Vary Recruitment Strategies	If diversity is needed in teaching staff, differential recruitment strategies are crucial. Remember that most minority teachers at Vista Charter were pushed into teaching. Long-term plans for identifying and "growing your own" minority teachers should be developed. Recruit aggressively and locally for good second career teacher candidates from majority and minority cultures in your area.
Seek Partnerships	University-school partnerships can be an important pipeline for identification of outstanding teachers and for site-based professional development of staff. It is worth the time to seek out and maintain strong connections with geographically--or philosophically--close teacher preparation programs.
Evaluate School Mission	The school mission statement should include a focus on students' multicultural competence as well as academic achievement. The mission should be shared visibly and daily in different ways among all staff and students.
Support All Roles for Teachers	Most rural teachers have many roles to fill within a school and in their communities--e.g., teachers of multiple content areas, coaches, arts, and performance advisors, community outreach specialists, crisis counselors, creators of place-based curriculum. Find ways to support teachers in all their roles so that they can meet high expectations (e.g., give release time for planning, find community contacts who can help them during and after school with mentoring students, find access to special teaching materials and teacher resources).
Promote Culture of Collaboration	Find ways to promote a culture of collaboration around teaching as intellectual and community-oriented work. Recognize that collaboration in itself is important work that takes time, tact, and people skills.
Provide Teacher-Selected Professional Development	Group and individual professional development is key to teacher growth and renewal. Professional development topics should come from what teachers identify as their needs in a particular school (not top-down mandates from a district at large). Rural teachers can make use of online interaction and education webinars; site-based professional development can be arranged and funded by the district.
Know the Community and Involve Families	Schedule home visits throughout the year to talk with, and listen to, parents and caregivers; promote "open door" policy for family members who want to visit classrooms as resources or observers; view parents as important sources of information and inspiration about how to teach children; find ways to make students and their work visible in the community (e.g., student-decorated paper grocery bags used at local grocery store; have students design and landscape school grounds).

the potential of the concept of *saberes docentes* in unpacking beliefs about what constitutes good practice within a particular community. Professional developers who wish to deepen collaboration within a school might engage in this kind of work as well. We conclude this section by providing a list of suggestions for teacher educators preparing and supporting culturally competent, diverse teachers. (See Table 2).

Concluding Thoughts

This study has explored ways that teachers' histories and experiences influence their practice in a multicultural rural school, and identified key beliefs shared by effective teachers of multilingual students in one rural school in the Pacific Northwest. We have suggested some implications for the preparation and support of culturally diverse teachers in rural settings. Nevertheless, we realize we have only scratched the surface of how teachers' interactions and daily decisions about practice influence their development and identity as rural practitioners in multicultural settings. We do not suggest the need for a "rural only" multicultural teacher preparation program in order to produce or support exemplary rural teachers. However, data in this study do suggest that an explicit focus on work in rural schools that target the needs of particular linguistic and cultural communities can be beneficial; a concomitant focus on rural teacher identity and development in multicultural settings as rural school demographics change can be beneficial as well.

Our university has a rural outreach mission with respect to community development and teacher education. Our overarching goal is to support teacher development in all rural schools as communities change throughout our region. Eppley (2009) notes:

Rural teachers have a special obligation to awaken students to the concept of sustainability and to help them develop and nurture a sense of place. This is an urgent requirement of the rural highly qualified teacher and has little to do with test scores and certifications, and everything to do with nurturing students and sustaining communities (p. 9).

If we want to prepare and keep the best teachers for our increasingly diverse rural students, this is our obligation as well. We have learned many lessons as we work with Vista Charter school teachers and students, and we are still learning.

Table 2
Lessons for Teacher Educators

Vary Recruitment Strategies	Recruit locally and aggressively, using all community networks available to you to "push" those adults into teaching who might be well suited for work in rural schools; focus especially on effective paraprofessionals as potential certified teachers.
Integrate Autobiography	Within aspects of teacher preparation coursework, design autobiographical assignments that help preservice teachers identify and examine their very different schools experiences. (See, for example, Olsen, 2010; Mahon & Packman, 2011.) Discuss the implications of these experiences within rural communities for educational equity and rural student achievement.
Support Content Area Knowledge for Nontraditional Teachers	Design and offer any needed remedial courses for developing content area knowledge needed by second career teachers who have spent many years away from their own school experiences. In this era of highly qualified teacher licensing, we must support (and not assume) content area learning for nontraditional and minority cultural teacher candidates, so they can pass state licensure exams.
Go Where Rural Preservice Teacher Candidates Are	Design teacher preparation programs near rural schools--and design cohort-model programs that support nontraditional, second career teacher candidates.
Prepare Teachers to Meet the Needs of Rural Communities	Tailor site-based preparation programs to local needs in schools. For our university, this has meant a heavy emphasis in all rural sites on preparing teachers who are ESOL-endorsed in addition to their initial teacher license preparation.
Seek Partnerships	Be open to partnerships with rural schools. Be willing to drive to site-based meetings and to design web-based support structures for rural teacher collaboration and development.
Tap into Paraprofessional Community Knowledge and Cultural Proficiency	Paraprofessionals often have intimate knowledge of community language(s), history, and culture(s); many are expert in making appropriate cultural connections and adaptations as they work with students and families (Wenger et al., 2004; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006), so invite them to share what they know with pre-service teachers in panel presentations or visits to methods classes.

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