

Book Review

Stambaugh, T., & Wood, S. (Eds.) (2015). *Serving Gifted Students in Rural Settings*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Review by Amy Price Azano
Virginia Tech

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In the conflated field of rural gifted education, the very definitions of those two key terms can be political and elusive. The ways we define rural and the context for rural education research have garnered debate and discussion at professional conferences and in formative works published in this journal (e.g., Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005; Coladarci, 2007; Howley, Theobald, & Howley, 2005). More often than not this discourse leads to questions of what is rural and what constitutes rural education. Similarly, in gifted education, parallel conversations on the nature of giftedness drive discussion and research. The edited collection *Serving Gifted Students in Rural Settings* makes a significant contribution to the field of rural gifted education by looking at these issues head on.

Serving Gifted Students in Rural Settings includes 16 chapters divided into three parts: The Rural Life; Identification, Curriculum, and Instruction for Rural Gifted Learners; and Affecting Change for Gifted Learners in Rural Communities. As noted in the foreword by Nicholas Colangelo, gifted education has been in and out of vogue over the past several decades and faces additional challenges of “political and philosophical battles regarding elitism and relevance in times of resource shortages in education” (p. vii). He observes that within the field of educational research, gifted students in rural settings have lacked attention.

In the introduction, editors Tamra Stambaugh and Susannah Wood position rural and giftedness as distinct cultures. They explain that the chapters in part one, The Rural Life, address the “what” of rural gifted education. In the opening chapter, Zachary Richards and Tamra Stambaugh define rural in complex terms, not relying on traditional measures of population density and geography, but rather calling attention to the assets of rural communities

All correspondence should be directed to Amy Price Azano, Assistant Professor, School of Education, 303 War Memorial Hall, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061 (azano@vt.edu).

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and realities of rural living (e.g., challenges associated with broadband connectivity and other infrastructural complexities). Within this discussion of defining rural, the authors describe the “essence of rural” (p. 3) with exploration of place, tradition, family, religion, and success, then examine the intersection of education and poverty in rural communities and what funding disparities mean for rural schools and rural gifted learners.

The chapters in this first section address the diversity of rural America, demographic shifts in rural communities, and the issue of place and what is at stake for gifted learners who choose to stay in or leave their rural communities. For example, in Craig Howley, Aimee Howley, and Daniel Showalter’s “Leaving or Staying Home,” the authors challenge dominant positions that encourage gifted students to leave their rural communities and posit that “rural schooling *should* encourage, support, and actively facilitate rural adulthoods for rural students” (p. 23). In asking an essential question about why “American culture is disparaging of rural locality” (p. 24), the authors delineate three standpoints: STEM, the aesthetic dimension, and practical knowledge. The final standpoint of practical knowledge (often overlooked in gifted education) challenges traditional notions of American “success” and considers “low-status employment as rurally relevant for gifted students”—that is, “being less concerned with engineering as a profession than with plumbing as a vocation open to ‘the gifted’” (p. 26). Others look at educational barriers, such as poverty and access, and their implications for educational policy (see “Education in Rural America” by Marybeth Mattingly and Andrew Schaefer). The editors explain that these first chapters look at both the varied contexts for rural gifted students and the “unique challenges and opportunities these students have” (p. 91). Moreover, they approach rural and gifted through cultural lenses, noting that rural culture is a changing one, and adding that “Rural America is also not White America” (p. 91). In “Like Finding a Needle in a Haystack,” for example, Donna Ford notes that “‘urban’ has become code word for Black and sometimes Hispanic, while ‘rural’ is equated with White” (p. 74) and explores the topic of rural gifted Black and Hispanic students.

While the first part explores the nature of rurality and its relationship to giftedness, the second part addresses issues of identification, curriculum, and instruction. Stambaugh and Wood position this section as the “how” of rural gifted education with chapters written “with the educator in mind” (p. 257). The authors of these chapters consider more traditional topics in gifted education (e.g., identification and programming, acceleration, advanced curriculum) and how these issues intersect with rural schools and students. For example, in “Celebrating Talent,” Tamra Stambaugh discusses the identification of rural gifted students with practical applications, such as using place-based methods for identification and curricula and providing context-based professional development. She suggests that educators need to understand “the context of their specific rural locale and match identification methods to their students’ needs” (p. 108).

In “Grouping and Instructional Management Strategies,” Kristen Seward and Marcia Gentry note the unique rural challenges of often-underfunded gifted programs, resulting in general education teachers teaching gifted education classes across multiple subject areas and grade levels. The authors discuss a model for schoolwide cluster grouping, noting specific considerations for rural districts, schools, and classrooms, to effectively group and teach in rural schools where resources may be limited to “help teachers work smarter, not harder, by targeting effective instruction to promote growth for all students, thereby enriching the challenging and learning experience for all” (p. 128).

This middle section serves as a resource for considering key gifted issues through a rural lens. In “Challenges and Solutions for Serving Rural Gifted Students,” Susan Assouline, Kristin Flanary, and Megan Foley-Nicpon provide an overview of academic acceleration and provide an exemplar of two forms of acceleration for rural students. Joyce VanTassel-Baska and Gail Fischer Hubbard consider the unique curricular needs of and program interventions for rural gifted students, while Joan Lewis catalogs local or state programs and curricular models (“Programming and Rural Gifted Learners”). The final two chapters in this section discuss how technology (Brian Housand and Angela Housand’s “Best of Both Worlds”) and extracurricular programming (Paula Olszewski-Kubilius, Susan Corwith, and Eric Calvert’s “Serving Rural Gifted Students through Supplemental and Out-of-School Programming”) can increase opportunities for rural learners and “reduce the rural opportunity gap and help rural students (and others) benefit from the unique cultural and knowledge resources of rural communities in an ever more diverse and interconnected nation of learners” (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., p. 251). As such, the authors of this section note the underrepresentation of rural gifted programs but with a collective focus on rural assets (as opposed to a lament of shortcomings).

The third and final section, *Affecting Change for Gifted Learners in Rural Communities*, takes on more of an advocacy tone in its chapters about counseling, policy and advocacy, rural teachers, and professional development. Susannah Wood and Erin Lane begin the section by providing an overview of school counseling and rural gifted students with strategies for working with rural gifted youth from early identification through college and career advising. This section also examines the intersectionality of race and rurality, the changing demographics in rural communities, and the implicit bias associated with identification in gifted education. For example, Dana Griffin and Susannah Wood explore issues of cultural bias and parent advocacy within the story of Griffin’s journey as a mother to a gifted African American son. Positioning themselves as advocates and using their personal stories as a backdrop to the chapter, the authors describe “three main strategies for working with parents of Black males in rural schools” (p. 306): relationship-building, open communication, and community asset mapping. The final two contributed chapters in this section, by Elissa Brown and Laurie Croft respectively, describe the need for professional development around rural gifted education and, as Brown suggests, “leveraging policies in a way that makes sense in rural America” (p. 321).

In sum, the book offers a collection of voices around the topic of rural gifted education and the inherent complexities related to place, outmigration, poverty, education, and access. In the concluding remarks, editor Tamra Stambaugh notes the many positive aspects of rural culture while also acknowledging that pervasive and persistent poverty influence educational experiences and opportunities for all rural students, including those who are gifted.

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