

Finding the Future in Rural America

Rural Places, Rural Stories, Rural Ties

Rural Outcomes & Issues

Education

- 14.5 million students in rural / town locales
- Over 85% complete high school
- Growing rural/ urban college gap (19 vs. 33%)
- Aspirations don't match coursework

Health

- More sickness and disability in rural areas
- Less access to healthcare
- Link between education & health
- Opioid crisis & accidents particularly in teens/young adults

Community

- Historically higher poverty
- Higher rates of working poor
- Rural areas are more entrepreneurial

Developmental Science

(Cairns, Bronfenbrenner, Magnusson, & Elder)

- Who we become reflects sorting, sifting, and adaptation between persons and environments
- Diverse subtypes of youth with distinct outcomes
- Stories of continuity and adaptation across generations

Key Developmental Concepts and Implications for Rural Education

- Persons-in-context – How do the characteristics of the person and the ecology align and how do they transform each other (the fit between the child and her or his ecology)
- Correlated constraints - multiple factors within and external to the individual operate as a system to shape her or his functioning and adaptation; adjustment in school tends to reflect bidirectional influences and the fused contributions of the student's functioning across academic, behavioral, and social domains
- Developmental reorganization – Because development reflects a dynamic system, changes in one domain can prompt changes in another domain; therefore, it is possible for major realignments, for good or ill, in the functioning of an individual across the lifecourse. Students who struggle can adapt and experience positive outcomes/futures. Conversely, students who have long trajectories of success can nonetheless experience difficulties, maladaptive patterns, and poor outcomes



Obie's Filling Station & Grocery Store

Obie's Ridge



The New River



Belspring School



Rural Roots and Foundations



Rural Towns

Community hub

Strong community
values

Sense of safety &
collective responsibility
for youth



Loss of factories,
mining, and other
industries

Population loss /
increasingly elderly
and poor

Local businesses close

Vulnerable to
substance use and
other risks for youth

Developmental Pathways: A Winding Road

Going nowhere & getting there as fast as we can

Learning to leave or leaving to live



Opportunities often mixed with challenges

Perceived constraints & lack of models may result in not trying or set-backs in pursuit of education/goals

The lack of linearity does not mean that success is not over the horizon

Obie's Ridge Outcomes



Very diverse outcomes
of youth growing up in
the same community

Some stay

Some go

Some come back

Some live in multiple
worlds

Nearly all find their
sense of success and
place in the world

Rural Ties

Relationships

Perspectives, Values & Centering
Links to the Land



Rural Constraints



Social Stratification

“An honest day’s work”

Don’t grow above your raising or forget where you came from

Early entry into adult roles/responsibilities

Staying may feel like giving up yourself

Leaving may feel like giving up yourself

Rural Opportunities



Community
supports/traditions

The strength of weak ties
(connections)

Advantages of under
resourced environments

“Person I am is the person
I want to be”

Educating out and giving
back

Living in both worlds

Implications for Rural Education

- Not only diverse rural places but diverse needs/abilities in rural places
- If we want to enhance the outcomes of rural youth we need to focus on social forces as well as instruction, test scores, and career and technical education
- This means:
 - Linking education to the social, generational, and economic opportunities/constraints experienced by youth
 - Providing youth with the experiences and network linkages to find their pathways to a future that is meaningful to them
 - Viewing schools as a critical anchor for keeping and attracting new families/businesses
 - Fostering the dynamic capacity to reinvent both persons and places

Today's Challenge

Are we asking the right questions?

Can we find better answers?

Who do we need to be working with?