



Doctor of Education: Leadership, Learning and Community

An Investigation of the Influences on the Residency Aspirations of Youth in the Present-Day Rural Context

Lori A. Langlois, Plymouth State University

Dissertation Defense: March 28, 2020

Executive Summary: July 28, 2020

Introduction: This study examined the influences on residency aspirations of rural youth in the context of the globalized economy. The practical aim of this study was to inform efforts to reduce the permanent outmigration of high-potential rural youth and/or increase the likelihood of return migration to rural communities. This is important for two reasons: (a) the sustainability of rural communities that benefit from a demographic composition that includes talented young adults, and (b) maximizing the scope of opportunities for rural youth.

Problem of Practice: The problem of practice is gaining an understanding of how residency aspirations of rural youth are shaped in the context of the present-day globalized economy.

Research Method: This qualitative multi-case research study was comprised of five cases constructed around five high school seniors in the Class of 2018 who were graduating from a rural high school in the Northern Forest Region. This is a region with a long history tied to forest-based industry where many communities have been forced to adapt to dramatic economic changes that resulted from national and global forces.

Summary of Findings: The findings of my study showed generally favorable attitudes towards the community of study—except for the perceived lack of good jobs. The findings revealed a lack of teaching the skills of entrepreneurship or of promoting knowledge-worker career fields that allow for remote work. What these findings revealed was an absence of the community, including its educational system, playing a role in internally solving this problem.

Limitation(s) of Study: The study focused on students in the northeastern region of the United States. Therefore, implications of the study may not be generally applied to other regions in the country or outside of the United States.

Implications/Significance of Study: Despite other research showing the important role of entrepreneurship and self-employment in rural economic development, my findings suggest that the school was providing little, if any, exposure or learning associated with self-employment, small business development, entrepreneurial skill development, innovating, and/or careers that allow for remote work. Seeing opportunity for gainful employment appeared to be the greatest obstacle to having young adults consider remaining in the community and K-12 educational opportunities can play an active role in how the community's economic development unfolds in order to build a more self-sustaining model.