

The Spatial Dilemma of Rural Teacher Team Building and Its Resolution

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Abstract: The construction of rural teachers is an important tool for realizing the quality and balanced development of urban and rural education, which has long been facing the governance predicament of “unable to get down, unable to stay, and unable to teach well”, but under the leadership of the spatial turn, we have begun to incorporate the rural field itself into the research field as a key explanatory variable. Based on the theoretical framework of material space, spiritual space and social space of the spatial triadic dialectic, it is found that there is a problem of low utilization of modern equipment in the material space; teachers' mobility and turnover are strong in the spiritual space, and their professional stability is worrying; and the separation of work and life in the social space has seriously weakened teachers' sense of belonging. The reasons for this are the lack of rural teachers' ability to use modern equipment, short-sighted policies, and the urban-rural dichotomy, which have led to the difficulties in each spatial dimension. The solution to the problem of rural teachers should be sought in the construction of meaningful physical space, the construction of highly identifiable spiritual space and the shaping of a close-knit social space.

1. Introduction

In the new era, establishing a high-quality rural teaching workforce and revitalizing rural education are powerful foundations for achieving national educational modernization and becoming an educational powerhouse. These goals are shared by the nation and the people.[1] The 20th National Congress report pointed out that “to strengthen education, we must first strengthen the teaching staff. We must regard strengthening the teaching staff as the most important foundation for building a strong country in education.” In this strategic deployment, the strength of the rural teacher workforce determines the overall level of teacher workforce development in China. Previous studies have suggested that to promote the healthy development of the rural teacher workforce, it is necessary to establish external support mechanisms and policy frameworks[2]. Specifically, this includes setting clear goals in terms of quantity, quality, and capabilities[3]; based on changes in the external environment, scientifically assessing the potential for resource allocation, innovating teacher staffing rotation systems, and increasing the intensity of non-monetary

benefits[4]. On the other hand, it is indispensable for rural teachers to make their own efforts,[2] and an increasing number of studies have called for attention to the intrinsic pathways of individual teacher growth, emphasizing that efforts can be based on routine and foundational school work, starting with small tasks, to systematically enhance teachers' basic educational and teaching capabilities and comprehensively improve their professional competence and cultural literacy[5]. Although existing research has provided numerous valuable insights from macro-level institutional frameworks to micro-level individual dynamics, overall, current studies on rural teacher workforce development still face challenges. These studies tend to overly focus on functional issues such as institutional provision and capacity building, while neglecting the “spatial foundations” upon which rural teachers' professional growth relies. With the shift in educational research paradigms, the academic community has begun to reflect on the issue of “spatial absence” in rural education research, which offers new perspectives for exploring rural teacher workforce development[6]. Therefore, drawing on Lefebvre's “spatial triadic dialectic,” we construct a triadic analytical framework comprising material space, social space, and spiritual space. From this holistic perspective of “space,” we analyze the issues surrounding the development of the rural teacher workforce and conduct a causal analysis, thereby providing new theoretical explanations and practical guidance to address the challenges facing rural teacher development.

2. Spatial Constraints on the Development of the Rural Teacher Workforce

With the spatial turn in sociological research, the nature of space has been re-examined. Henri Lefebvre proposed the triadic dialectic of space, analyzing the complexity, multidimensionality, and interactivity of space through the interplay of spatial practices, spatial representations, and representational spaces. This approach transcends traditional dualistic thinking about matter and spirit, viewing space as a unity of materiality, spirituality, and sociality, thereby providing a new theoretical framework for explaining social phenomena[7].

2.1. A Three-Dimensional Spatial Analysis Framework for the Challenges Facing Rural Teacher Workforce Development

Lefebvre re-evaluated the dualism of space, transcending rigid polarism and dualism through a “spatial triadic dialectic.”[8] This “trinity” of spatial triadic dialectics encompasses three spaces: material space, i.e., nature and the universe, also known as the practice of space; spiritual space, including logical abstraction and formal abstraction, also known as the representation of space; and social space, which is the logical-epistemological space, also known as the representational space[8]. Material space, spiritual space, and social space are interdependent and together form a complete spatial production system[8]. Material space provides the material foundation for the social space's communicative activities, spiritual space endows the social space with meaning through beliefs and emotions, and social space is the dynamic interaction between the two, representing the individual's direct experience of space and their sensory world of feedback and reshaping.

In Lefebvre's view, space is not a physical container but a product of social relations, constantly undergoing construction and reproduction. Rural space, as the primary domain for the development of the rural teacher workforce, inherently embodies the core elements of the spatial triadic dialectic. Its material aspect is manifested in the geographical environment and physical facilities of rural areas; its spiritual aspect is reflected in the cultural traditions and educational philosophies of rural communities; and its social nature is manifested in the power relations and interpersonal interactions within the rural education system. These characteristics endow rural space with structural tensions in teacher workforce development, whether it be imbalances in teacher allocation or challenges in professional development, all of which are closely intertwined with the

multidimensional attributes of rural space. As a professional group deeply embedded in specific social structures and cultural contexts, the development challenges faced by the rural teacher workforce are not the result of single institutional or policy factors but are profoundly constrained by the systemic limitations of the spatial environment in which they operate. Therefore, applying spatial theory to analyze rural teacher workforce development not only maximizes the explanatory power of the theory but also precisely captures the underlying contradictions in the development process, providing a theoretical framework for understanding the challenges in teacher workforce development.

2.2. The Dilemma of Material Space: High Configuration and Low Efficiency

Material space is an artificial, tangible space. As the foundational carrier for rural educational practices, it was originally expected to improve the living conditions and development opportunities of the teaching staff through infrastructure upgrades. However, the current material space challenges faced by rural teacher development are no longer traditional material shortages but rather functional misalignment and usage disconnect in the context of material abundance. Under the rural revitalization strategy, rural schools have seen significant improvements in hardware. A survey conducted across five provinces and six counties nationwide revealed that 45.8% of rural teachers primarily use multimedia teaching supplemented by blackboard writing to conduct education and teaching; 30.9% of rural teachers primarily use blackboard writing supplemented by multimedia teaching; and approximately 5.1% of rural teachers completely rely on blackboard writing [9]. This indicates that while the configuration rate of multimedia equipment may be high, its effective utilization as a primary teaching tool remains relatively limited, highlighting the contradiction between facility configuration and actual application outcomes. It reflects that the completeness of facilities has not translated into teachers' actual teaching capabilities, and the functional design of spaces is misaligned with teachers' usage experiences. During the 2025 National People's Congress, representative Chen Weizhi pointed out, "The rapid updates in digital technology have led to a significant mismatch between institutional supply and the actual needs of rural teachers." In what appears to be a modern teaching environment, rural teachers often find themselves in a situation where they have the equipment but do not know how to use it. In other words, the current dilemma in the material space of rural education is not "lack of resources," but rather "inability to use or use effectively," manifesting as a deep disparity between the outward abundance of material resources and the internal inefficiency in practical application, thereby reflecting the inability of rural teachers to teach effectively.

2.3. Spiritual Space Dilemma: High Mobility and Low Stability

Spiritual space is a space of subjectivity, characterized by vitality and an emotional core, and is qualitative, fluid, and dynamic[10]. As the ideological foundation of rural teacher education practice, spiritual space plays a role in supporting the meaningfulness and innovation of teacher education behavior through ideological construction. However, in current rural education practice, the stability and continuity of rural teachers' spiritual space are facing multiple challenges. A survey of rural teachers in Yunnan Province revealed that young rural teachers (especially female teachers) have a strong desire to move, with as many as 90% of young teachers expressing a willingness to move or leave [11]. This high proportion of psychological mobility has created a state of ongoing spiritual fluctuation, making it difficult for rural teachers to establish deep connections with schools, professions, and communities. Additionally, a survey of 414 primary and secondary schools across 23 counties in two provinces in northwestern rural areas revealed that the teacher mobility rate for mathematics teachers was 12.06%, with an intra-school mobility rate of 5.56% and an inter-school

mobility rate of 6.51% [12]. The uncertainty and restructuring caused by teacher mobility further disrupts the continuous construction of rural teachers' mental space. This ongoing psychological migration not only disrupts the original mental order but also erodes emotional investment in the educational context, causing rural teachers' daily practices to gradually shift toward functional completion, lacking confirmation of meaning and maintenance of value. Over time, teachers may be physically present in the classroom but struggle to establish deep mental connections with their environment and culture, with their professional lives gradually evolving into a passive mode of existence. The predicament of rural teachers' spiritual space is revealed in this daily drift and detachment, intertwined with the educational setting, affecting the internal stability of the entire rural teacher workforce and the vitality of educational practice, becoming a vivid portrayal of the reality that rural teachers are “hard to retain.”

2.4. Social Space Dilemma: High Separation and Low Integration

Social space encompasses various relationships of reproduction and production[13](49). It tends to exist as a “symbolic space,” composed of and distinguished by different forms of “lifestyles” and the social groups that possess these lifestyles[14]. That is, it carries social relationships between people and is influenced by both material and spiritual space. In the rural educational context, social space should ideally serve as a crucial foundation for teachers to integrate into rural society, achieve professional integration, and engage in social participation. However, the current social space structure of the rural teacher workforce exhibits significant fragmentation, posing a major constraint on the development of the rural teacher workforce. On one hand, teachers' residential spaces and work spaces are highly separated. A survey of Y County's W Primary School revealed that among the 50 teachers at the central primary school, 29 reside in the county seat[15]. These data indicate that more than half of the teachers do not reside in the village where the school is located but have settled in the county seat, commuting between urban and rural areas on weekdays. The separation of residence and workplace causes teachers to constantly travel between urban and rural areas, with their lives centered far from the school community, leading to a state of disconnection where they are “physically in the countryside but mentally in the city.” On the other hand, teachers also exhibit a strong sense of alienation in their interpersonal interactions within the rural community. A survey on rural small-scale schools revealed that teachers' satisfaction scores in relationships with “family members, leaders and colleagues, and student parents” were 2.92, 2.84, and 2.86, respectively, indicating overall low satisfaction levels[16]. This reflects the weakness of teachers' interpersonal networks in rural society, making it difficult for them to establish stable social structures and emotional connections. Although teachers serve as the core role in rural education, they occupy a marginal position in the real social network, gradually forming an “otherness” that is difficult to break, preventing the rural teacher group from experiencing a sense of “self” and smoothly integrating into rural society[17]. This state of spatial presence yet social disconnection prevents teachers from truly integrating into rural society, driving rural teachers to increasingly seek teaching opportunities in urban areas. This has led to a dual weakening of cohesion and practical effectiveness in rural teacher team development, reflecting the reality that rural teacher teams are reluctant to work in rural areas.

3. Spatial Constraints: Causes of Spatial Dilemmas in Rural Teacher Team Building

Between 2010 and 2020, the number of rural teachers in China's compulsory education sector plummeted from 5.464 million to 2.448 million. This data not only reflects the current challenges faced by the rural teacher workforce—namely, the difficulties of attracting, retaining, and effectively educating teachers—but also foreshadows the potential for this issue to become a

significant obstacle on the path to rural revitalization and the construction of an education powerhouse. Within Lefebvre's triadic spatial framework, the spatial challenges facing rural teacher workforce development are becoming increasingly evident, necessitating further exploration of how this triadic spatial structure traps rural teacher workforce development within a “triple vacuum” of development.

3.1. Causes of Material Space Constraints: Imbalance between Teacher Capabilities and Facility Equipment under the Dominance of Quantitative Indicators

The current rural education landscape is undergoing a physical space restructuring centered on the standardization of infrastructure. Under the requirements of the “Standardized Construction of Compulsory Education Schools,” the physical space construction of rural schools is primarily guided by quantitative indicators such as “per-student floor area” and “equipment compliance rate,” neglecting the actual needs of rural teachers' teaching methods, technological literacy, and daily teaching ecology. As a result, the modernization of spatial forms has failed to translate into the internalization of teachers' capabilities. Instead, equipment and platforms have become technical burdens that teachers “cannot use or use effectively,” leading to the current situation where material spaces are “adequately equipped but underutilized.” Additionally, there is a mismatch in time and capability between the technological imagination in institutional design and teachers' realities. Digital education and information technology are often presented in policy documents as part of the “educational modernization” vision, but rural teachers' preparation in terms of training support, usage habits, and cognitive structures has not kept pace. This has led to a disconnect between technological updates and teacher capability development, resulting in the coexistence of technological performance and teaching hollowness. Teachers have formally entered the modern educational space but remain marginal figures within it, exacerbating their sense of isolation and burnout in their professional development pathways. This compensatory material space constructed under policy initiatives, while formally possessing the symbolic system of modern education, lacks deep alignment with the capability structure and teaching ecology of rural teachers in practice. This has resulted in rural teacher team development failing to advance toward modernization, maintaining a disparity with urban teacher teams.

3.2. Causes of Spiritual Space Dilemmas: Identity Erosion and Emotional Deprivation under Institutional Fluidity

The trend toward “resignation and mobility” in the professional space of rural teachers is not solely driven by personal preference but rather the result of the interplay between structural institutional arrangements and cultural psychological mechanisms. First, within the current teacher personnel system and staffing management framework, rural teaching positions are often viewed as the “starting point” or “stepping stone” for urban teachers' career development. This institutionally “temporary” arrangement not only weakens teachers' professional identification with rural positions but also fosters a migratory cultural psychology where “transfer is seen as success and leaving is the goal,” making it difficult for teachers to view their current work as a long-term career and thus hard for them to dedicate themselves to educational practice and emotional investment. Second, rural teachers receive teacher education training centered on urban knowledge systems, resulting in a lack of organic integration between their professional knowledge structure, curriculum philosophy, and teaching methods and rural realities. An empirical survey revealed that newly hired rural teachers stated, “During classes, we mostly follow the textbook content and generally do not incorporate local knowledge into teaching, primarily because we are unfamiliar with it and lack such knowledge. [18]” Due to the systematic neglect of local knowledge and cultural resources in the training system,

teachers often struggle to draw on local experiences in their teaching, leading to a practice of “teaching strictly from the textbook and avoiding local topics.” Bridging the gap between the urban education system and rural educational realities should rely on teachers developing emotional connections and cognitive resonance with the local community through long-term practice. However, the mobility mechanism for rural teachers deprives them of the motivation and necessary time to deeply engage with the local community and its people. Additionally, due to the lack of a comprehensive support system in rural education, rural teachers face multiple mental pressures, including shortages of teaching resources and professional exchanges, as well as weakened social recognition. Yet, due to the long-term absence of a “educational community” culture and peer support, individual teachers are prone to occupational isolation, gradually losing their emotional connection to educational ideals, and their spiritual space becomes increasingly hollowed out. When teachers cannot obtain emotional responses and value recognition in their work, educational practices are prone to devolve into purely instrumental rational operations, and teachers cannot develop a sense of belonging to the rural teacher workforce, ultimately leading to difficulties in workforce development.

3.3. Causes of Social Space Dilemmas: Broken Relationships and Identity Displacement under Urban-Rural Structural Imbalance

The challenges rural teachers face in integrating into the social sphere are not due to a lack of individual ability or willingness, but rather the result of multiple intertwined factors, including long-standing inequalities in urban-rural structures and the breakdown of social and cultural ties. First, the structural inequalities in urban-rural educational relationships have consistently placed rural education within the framework of “being assisted.” Various talent recruitment and targeted teaching support policies, such as the “Special Position Program” and “Three Supports and One Assistance,” have temporarily bolstered rural educational resources. However, these policies fundamentally reinforce the one-way “support-receiving” structure between urban and rural areas. This institutional framework labels rural teachers as “temporary residents” within the system's logic, leaving them without the expectation of establishing roots in rural areas. More profoundly, this institutional language pushes rural teachers into a low-confidence zone in their careers, further exacerbating mobility tendencies and leading to instability in role identity within the social space. Secondly, there is a disconnect between teachers' social networks and the rural social structure, leading to the isolation of social relationships. A large number of rural teachers are not locals, forming a workforce characterized by “migratory” teachers. Their lives are centered on their hometowns, while their social activities are concentrated at their workplaces. This “life-work” dichotomy in spatial structure prevents teachers from deeply engaging in rural daily life networks and lacking deep connections with the village community. In the “familiar society” of rural areas, where interpersonal relationships are based on personal connections, teachers are often excluded from local social networks, preventing them from effectively engaging with students' families, community affairs, and local cultural contexts. This deprives them of the practical foundation needed to rebuild local identity through social participation. Finally, the lack of a mutually supportive atmosphere within the teacher community weakens the internal cohesion of the social support system. In reality, rural schools often face staff shortages and limited resources for professional title promotions, leading to competitive relationships among teachers. The isolation among teachers not only exacerbates teaching pressures and psychological burdens but also limits the possibility of forming group identity and team belonging, leaving teachers without a reliable “professional community” in the social space. As such, the difficulties rural teachers face in integrating into the social space fundamentally stem from the interplay of three tensions: the

temporary nature of institutional positioning, the dislocated nature of living structures, and the divisive nature of group culture. This structural disembedding within the space prevents rural teachers from transitioning from “transients” to “rooted individuals,” and also hinders the stable formation of the teaching workforce within rural society, making it a key bottleneck in its developmental challenges.

4. Spatial Deconstruction: A Three-Pronged Approach to Alleviating the Rural Teacher Workforce Crisis

The core objective of rural teacher team building is to create a team of teachers that is sufficient in number, excellent in quality, and has a sense of belonging to the countryside. The interactivity of space has made it difficult to truly resolve the difficulties in rural teacher team building. Therefore, we will attempt to explore effective strategies to alleviate these difficulties by starting from the collaborative construction of a three-dimensional space, thereby promoting the stability and high-quality development of rural teacher teams.

4.1. Building a Meaningful Rural Physical Space: From the Aggregation of “Things” to the Growth of “People”

As the foundation of social and spiritual space, the significance of physical space lies not only in providing the physical medium for survival and practice, but also in creating conditions for higher-level social interaction and spiritual development through functional perfection and meaningful perception. The development of the rural teacher workforce takes place within the rural physical space. To build a meaningful physical space, it is necessary to focus not only on school space but also on the experiential sense of the rural teacher community. Enhancing rural teachers' understanding, adaptability, and creative use of modern facilities ensures that new spaces truly serve the modernization of the teacher workforce. In material spaces, the focus shifts from the accumulation of infrastructure to the growth of the human subjects engaged in spatial practices.

First, rural material space development must be teacher-centered, reinforcing the principle of “building for people,” to achieve a deep alignment between functional configurations and teacher needs. In school spaces, educational spaces first manifest as tangible, concrete physical entities that directly embody and accommodate specific educational objects, practices, and phenomena[19]. School spaces should break free from traditional subject-based zoning and single-purpose thinking, expanding beyond teaching functions to become venues for teacher professional development. For example, teaching venues and training spaces should be organically integrated to promote “multi-functional room” design, enabling libraries to double as teacher training rooms and laboratories to be converted into teacher educational technology research and development venues after class. In terms of living spaces, teacher accommodation areas and social activity areas should be reasonably planned to create an integrated “living-working-socializing” composite scenario, alleviating the issue of teacher occupational isolation and enhancing their professional identity and sense of belonging.

Second, to achieve a virtuous cycle from spatial modernization to teacher modernization, efforts should not be limited to updating physical infrastructure. More importantly, we should systematically enhance rural teachers' information literacy and educational technology capabilities, enabling them to become active participants in modern educational spaces rather than passive adapters. Technology is not merely a tool but a constructive force in shaping cultural and practical structures. Therefore, teachers' technological capabilities should not only be demonstrated in their ability to use technology but also in their ability to apply it effectively and creatively, meaning they can flexibly utilize technological tools according to educational contexts to enhance teaching

efficiency and even drive the reinvention of teaching methods. We should rely on the intelligent platforms and digital systems embedded in newly built physical spaces, such as smart blackboards, education cloud terminals, and remote collaborative teaching and research platforms, to construct a tiered, continuous information technology training system that strengthens teachers' comprehensive literacy in data processing, platform operation, and human-computer interaction. At the same time, we should combine the actual needs of rural teaching to promote the deep integration of information technology with teaching content and teaching organization methods, and carry out contextualized training projects centered on “technology-teaching-rural areas.” For example, by guiding teachers to incorporate digital local resources into classroom teaching, develop local micro-courses, and organize remote cross-school teaching and research, their educational autonomy and creativity enabled by technology can be enhanced. This enables rural teachers to achieve a professional advancement path of “tool mastery—method update—concept transformation” in modern physical spaces, driving individual teachers from being adapters of space to creators, thereby making the modern functions of physical spaces a deep-seated resource for teacher growth and educational innovation.

Third, the construction of rural physical spaces should fully respect the cultural ecology and natural texture of rural societies, avoiding the rigid application of urban templates that create a sense of disconnection and strangeness. Ruralness is the essential attribute that distinguishes rural areas from cities, and “modernization” does not equate to urbanization but rather refers to the organic integration of modern technology, humanistic ideals, and local culture to create educational spaces with regional characteristics, adaptability, and emotional warmth[20]. For example, by incorporating local architectural elements and cultural resources into school building designs, using local materials, rural colors, and cultural symbols, the physical space can achieve both the efficiency of technological updates and the warmth of cultural memory. By leveraging local advantages, vacant spaces can be transformed into bases for teacher cultural experiences and curriculum development, enabling teachers to engage in authentic and deep interactions with the local community through spatial practices.

4.2. Building a Leading Rural Spiritual Space: From “External Discipline” to “Internal Recognition”

As the mainstay of the spiritual space of rural education, rural teachers should actively integrate their rich practical experience and deep emotional experiences as spiritual nourishment. This integration not only deeply connects them to the countryside but also endows and highlights the unique emotional value and social significance of rural education, thereby allowing teachers to take root in rural education on a psychological and emotional level. The key to transforming rural teachers from a “temporary” to a ‘rooted’ state lies in constructing a three-dimensional spiritual space system that can support teachers' spiritual growth, professional identity, and cultural emotions, enabling individual teachers to gradually transition from “external discipline” to “internal identity,” thereby stabilizing the spiritual structure of the teaching workforce.

First, to rebuild teachers' spiritual identification with their positions, it is necessary to reshape the meaningful connection between teachers and their work. On one hand, the concept of “rooting” should be strengthened in teacher training and development systems, guiding young teachers from the early stages of teacher education to form a professional ideal of “serving rural areas and integrating into the local community.” Rural curriculum development, local cultural research, and on-site educational practices can be incorporated into mandatory components of teacher education programs, guiding teachers to internalize these concepts through practical experience. On the other hand, when reforming the systems for professional title evaluation, outstanding teacher selection,

and promotion, governments and schools should increase the weighting of rural teaching experience and rural research achievements in career development. This will break the psychological reliance on the mindset of “working for a few years before leaving,” enabling teachers to see the growth pathways and spiritual values of long-term retention.

Second, schools need to cultivate the educational passion of rural teachers through the spirit of educators. The spirit of educators is the core spiritual guidance for addressing the challenges in rural teacher team development [21]. As the essence of China's educational tradition, the spirit of educators can be transmitted through a mechanism of “spiritual space—value guidance—team building,” shaping the dedication and educational practices of rural educators such as Tao Xingzhi and Yan Yangchu into value coordinates for rural teachers, inspiring the intrinsic development of rural educational passion, and crystallizing it into the core of rural teacher team building. At the value level, the spirit of “willingness to sacrifice” is transformed into professional identity for rural teachers, relying on physical spaces such as rural education memorial halls and teacher ethics workstations to strengthen the emotional bonds within the rural teacher workforce. At the practical level, the “unity of knowledge and action” practical wisdom is transformed into teaching innovation capabilities, encouraging rural teachers to develop local curriculum and enhance their ability to integrate theoretical knowledge with local knowledge. This transforms the spirit of educators from abstract concepts into tangible, participatory, and inheritable development pathways, injecting sustained momentum into the construction of the rural teacher workforce.

Third, a spiritual community for the rural teacher workforce is constructed to enhance the collective identity and synergy of the teacher group. The construction of a spiritual space cannot be separated from deep connections and peer support among teachers. Through the construction of a spiritual community, the loneliness and pressure felt by rural teachers can be effectively alleviated, and a positive work atmosphere and group support mechanism can be formed. On the one hand, cooperation and communication among rural teachers are strengthened to create a work atmosphere of mutual assistance and support. On the other hand, identifying exemplary models among rural teachers can provide a core foundation for rural teacher team development, serving as a “stabilizing force” to anchor the “teaching spirit” of rural teachers. By fostering internal cohesion within the rural teacher team from a spiritual perspective, this approach not only strengthens the intrinsic spiritual resilience of the rural teacher workforce but also lays a solid foundation for its continued development within material and social spaces.

4.3. Building a Rural Social Space of Interconnected Relationships: From “Weak Connections” to “Strong Interactions”

Social space is a product of human social activities and cultural cognition[22]. Long influenced by the urban-rural dichotomy, rural areas have been placed behind the urbanization process, leading to the “marginalized team” dilemma faced by teachers in rural areas. We should firmly grasp the constructive, interactive, and generative characteristics of social space. Strengthening the close ties between urban and rural areas, between rural teachers and community members, and between rural education and rural society is essential to achieving a transition from “weak connections” to “strong interactions.”

First, we must establish an equitable relationship between urban and rural education and between urban and rural teacher teams. At present, China is building a new urban-rural relationship, which in the field of education means establishing a new urban-rural educational relationship. Additionally, under the backdrop of building an education powerhouse, enhancing the status of rural teachers and attracting more outstanding talent to teach in rural schools has become an inevitable choice for promoting high-quality development in compulsory education[23]. To address the challenges in

rural teacher workforce development, it is necessary to redefine the urban-rural education relationship, and more specifically, to redefine the relationship between urban and rural teacher workforces, shifting it from a “support-supported” model to an “equal-collaborative” model. On the one hand, measures such as optimizing the rotation system, joint research, and collaborative lesson planning should be implemented to break down the structural barriers between urban and rural teachers and establish an equal and interactive social network. On the other hand, an honorary system for rural teachers should be established to highlight their professional value and social contributions, thereby enhancing their social status and addressing the imbalance in urban-rural teacher relations. By reshaping the relationship between urban and rural teacher teams within the social space, sustainable momentum can be injected into rural education development, achieving mutual prosperity between urban and rural education.

Second, we need to strengthen the connection between rural teachers and rural community members to restore the “rural sage” role of rural teachers. Currently, most rural teachers are not native to the rural areas, resulting in distant relationships with rural community members. They need to transition from outsiders to locals, and the new “rural sage” identity serves as a bridge for communication between rural teachers and rural community members. The concept of “rural sage” is unique to Chinese culture. New local sages, as a contemporary development relative to traditional local sages, are characterized by a deep understanding of rural areas, deep integration into rural social relationships, and a strong willingness to serve rural areas. They are important members of the rural community. Rural teachers, given their identity and practical field, should consciously assume the key role of new local sages. They are not only an important part of the traditional rural elite group, bearing the important responsibilities of being the main body of rural grassroots governance, the moral pillar of the community, and the hub of cultural inheritance; they should also actively align with the contemporary connotations of the new rural elite, leveraging their understanding of the countryside, deep connections with the community, and sense of mission to serve the countryside, to become the new backbone force driving good governance in the countryside, nurturing civilized rural customs, and revitalizing rural culture in the new era[24]. Therefore, rural teachers should become guides for students, form cooperative relationships with parents, establish professional communities with colleagues, and act as cultural connectors with other residents within the rural social space. By strengthening connections with rural community members, they can gradually build a social relationship network, enhance emotional ties with the rural community, and better root themselves in and contribute to rural development, thereby breaking the impasse in rural teacher team building.

Third, we should reconfigure the relationship between rural education and rural society, seeking answers from rural social governance. Rural education and rural society are inherently interdependent and should develop in tandem. The rural teacher workforce not only exists within rural education but also within rural society, so the resolution of issues related to the development of the rural teacher workforce should naturally be part of rural social governance. To address the issue of the disconnect between the rural teacher workforce and rural society, efforts can be made in terms of the institutional framework, effectiveness, and content of rural social governance[25]. In terms of the institutional framework, the government should establish long-term mechanisms to support rural teachers in integrating into rural society, incorporating them into the main governance system of rural areas. In terms of governance effectiveness, emphasis should be placed on achieving two-way interaction between the rural teacher workforce and rural society through policy implementation and social collaboration, thereby promoting teachers' active participation in rural development. In terms of governance content, the development of the rural teacher workforce should be regarded as an integral part of the rural revitalization strategy, ultimately forming a community of shared destiny between the development of the rural teacher workforce and rural

social governance, thereby promoting the sustainable development of the rural teacher workforce.

5. Conclusions

This paper analyzes the challenges in rural teacher team development based on Lefebvre's spatial triadic dialectic, examining three dimensions: material space, spiritual space, and social space. The study found that while material space has seen significant improvements in hardware conditions, teachers' insufficient technical literacy leads to low equipment utilization rates, resulting in the contradiction of “high configuration, low efficiency”; in spiritual space, teachers exhibit high mobility and weakened sense of belonging, making it difficult to foster stable educational commitment; in the social space, the separation of residence and work, coupled with strained interpersonal relationships, has marginalized teachers within rural society. The root causes of these challenges include both short-sighted policy support and insufficient teacher capabilities, but more fundamentally stem from the long-standing constraints of the urban-rural dichotomy.

To address these challenges, the article proposes three solutions: first, we should promote the meaningful development of rural physical spaces, emphasizing teacher growth, enhancing information literacy and facility usage capabilities, and achieving the integration of modern technology and local culture; second, we need to construct a sense of belonging in the spiritual realm through the cultivation of an educational spirit and institutional guidance, strengthening professional identity and educational passion, and forming a stable teacher community; Third, we must shaping relational social spaces by reconfiguring urban-rural educational relationships to facilitate the transformation of teachers from “transients” to “new rural elites,” thereby achieving deep symbiosis between education and rural society.

In summary, resolving the “triple dilemma” of the rural teacher workforce hinges on achieving the stability and long-term development of the teacher workforce through the collaborative construction of spaces. This not only provides a new theoretical perspective for rural teacher development but also offers practical insights for advancing the strategies of building an education powerhouse and rural revitalization.

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