

PLACE, PURPOSE, AND PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY EXAMINING RURAL
TEACHERS' SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND ITS IMPACT IN THE CLASSROOM

by

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On a hot and humid summer day in Nebraska, when I was just around 10 years old, my mother woke up one day and decided we (she and I) would learn to sail a boat. She had never sailed before so she bought a used sunfish sailboat and a book and together we learned how. The completion of this dissertation is a testament to learning that a woman with a book can do just about anything. I would like to thank my mother for that, as well as the other women in my life who have reinforced this understanding. To my dissertation committee – Dr. Jennifer Snow, Dr. Kathleen Budge, and Dr. Susan Martin: Thank you for your scholarly mentorship and your personal friendship, for sharing your time, your wisdom, and your passion. I would like to especially thank, Dr. Anne Gregory, my Obi-Wan, for walking this journey with me and knowing that I would come to this point, even when I doubted it. I'd also like to thank the other women in my life: My sister, Jill, whose struggle and perseverance inspired this work; my mentor, Julie, who was one of the first to believe I would finish; and to my best friend, Ann, who knew when to pour the wine when that finishing was in doubt.

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ABSTRACT

In an era in which education policy directs schools towards economic outcomes and away from local and/or community goals, this research is rooted in the notion that place matters (Howley & Howley, 1995). More specifically, this study examines what impact a rural teacher's sense of community has on her experiencing both the broader community, the community of her individual classroom, and on her practice.

This collective case study followed six teachers in one rural middle school in the mountain west. Participants were nominated using a Sense of Community Index (SCI-2) and fell into the following categories: teachers with a low, medium, and high sense of community. Data sources were interview, classroom observation, and reflexive journaling.

The findings of the study suggest that rural teachers with a high sense of community versus those with a low had different motivations surrounding three major areas: 1) coming to a rural place, 2) connection to community, and 3) insight into the community. Furthermore, a rural teachers' sense of community appeared to impact her practice, particularly her use of local references and willingness to engage in discussions of the status quo.

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CHAPTER 1: RATIONALE FOR STUDY

Following her students around an alfalfa field where new green shoots are just now starting to emerge, MJ directs her students to just “cross over to the first marker and wait for me.” With an hour and a half block, MJ is anxious to get her students into the outdoor classroom and onto their work of mapping noxious weeds. Not much taller than her middle-school students, MJ circles them around her to remind them that their task is to aid Adams County [pseudonym] in finding the noxious weeds they recently researched in the classroom. “Does everyone remember the color and shape of Whitetop?” Once it is determined that the students are armed with the information, marking sticks and cameras needed for the task at hand, the groups of students set off. For her part, MJ walks along Tuber Creek, a creek that runs through Adams and the larger Ogallala valley [all pseudonyms], a creek that her grandparents grew up on. As she walks, she helps students identify, chart, and photograph the land. Pushing aside sagebrush, she prompts students with questions about the local wildlife and the ways in which ranching could be affected by the weeds they are identifying. A student group comprised of Mexican American women are quick to find the weeds, although less confident, in flip flops and skirts, to cross the burm to reach them. However, even my own high heels are not reason enough not to cross. So, under MJ’s direction, we join hands, pulling the first and then the next across to the next patch of weeds.

Later that same day in the same middle school, LT stands before his class. His tie and jacket are in sharp contrast to the jeans and boots that allow MJ to work with the

students in the outdoor classroom. LT's class opens with a conversation based on the year's theme: individualism and collectivism. The conversation begins with one student talking about her own experience in which another student excluded her from a group. LT pushes them to consider larger systems of power – how religion shapes the power between people, how government influences the dynamic. The focus shifts to the novel under study. “Could what happened in the novel, *The Wave* [a story about a teacher who, in teaching his students about the Holocaust, allows an experiment of power to go terribly wrong] happen here in Adams?” LT prompts his students to get into small groups and discuss connections they see between their initial class discussion and issues of power in the novel. Connections are then drawn to a previously read novel, *Animal Farm*. The class wraps up with students preparing for an upcoming test. They work in small groups to find possible answers to test questions. The same group of Mexican American women from MJ's class have found each other here as well. LT reminds them that they need to know the details of the novel; the test will ask them for specifics.

The description of these two teachers and their classrooms seems strikingly different and yet, both teachers serve the same rural students in the same rural community. To what end? While rural education as a whole has been “misunderstood, underfunded, [and] underencouraged,” even less is known about these elusive teachers who choose to be “rural” (Sherwood, 2000, p. 159). Who are rural teachers? Why do they come to these rural places that others only know as “hard to staff” or “struggling with retention?” And what, if any impact, does their connection and perhaps commitment to

the community, their sense of community, have on the decisions they make in their classrooms?

This study explores the role that teachers' own sense of community has on their classroom interactions and instruction. The call to conduct such research, particularly in the state where this research was conducted, could not be more timely. In January 2011, nine months after this research was concluded, the Superintendent for Public Instruction in the state in which the town of Adams resides released *Students Come First*. This K-12 reform plan focuses on implementing a "customer-driven system that educates more students at a higher level with limited resources" (Luna, 2011, p. 1). One of the founding pillars of this reform is technology, and through it the state will "invest \$50 million over the next two years in both hardware and software for every Idaho classroom" (Luna, 2011, p. 2). In order to secure funding for this initiative, in a time of global economic hardship, the state plans to "eliminate about 770 teacher jobs" and increase class sizes (Popkey, 2011, p. 1). The decision to focus on technology is rooted in the belief that a "[Twenty-first] Century Classroom is not limited by walls, bell schedules, school calendars or geography" (Luna, 2011, p. 2).

Of course, this "new world order" in which education policy directs schools towards economic outcomes and away from local/community goals is not in fact new nor is it confined to the state in which this study was conducted (Howley & Howley, 1995). As early as 1995, Howley and Howley forecasted the role that technology could play in an overarching plan to implement "one-size-fits all" schooling with no regard for place.

In the same vein as school consolidations of the past, technology has the potential to render rural places powerless in determining their futures:

The fundamental problem with this view is that, when rural communities and schools accept technological “solutions,” society foists the “inevitable” upon them. They give up power, rather than gain it. This is in the very nature of progress: technological culture innovates in order to garner power for those who sponsor it. The virtual frontier is already being sold to the highest bidder.

Displacement of local economies and local cultures is not an accident of progress; it is integral to progress. (Howley & Howley, 1995, p. 126)

The question of the importance or role of “geography,” in the tradition of place-based research, is at the heart of this study. In a state where “32 out of 44 of the state’s counties are nonmetro,” it is not a stretch to see the Superintendent’s statement about the limitations of geography on twenty-first-century classrooms as a statement about the limitations of rurality on 21st century classrooms (Salant, 2003, p. 1). Therefore, this study with its emphasis on rural teachers and its questions as to how a teacher’s sense of community affects instruction is one that must be engaged and explored. The time is now.

This study is deeply rooted in the understanding that place matters. It rejects the notion that a teacher is a teacher regardless of the communities in which he or she works and/or lives. Instead, it is firmly based on Theobald’s (2002) argument that

How one teaches should depend on the students, their educational level, their disposition toward learning, their past experiences in school, the school experiences of their parents—and the list could go on to include such things as

religious background, socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, language background, etc. Getting to know these things about one student means getting to know the student's community, for most of these conditions are in some significant way related to the locale or the immediate community, from which the students come. (p. 9)

With its roots in this very understanding, this study explores to what degree teachers who have a strong sense of community and thus know and are invested in that same community affects "how one teaches," (Theobald, 2002, p. 9). Often referred to as a place-based approach to education, this philosophy of education is best defined by Sobel's (2004) definition:

[P]lace-based education is the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. Community vitality and environment quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organizations, and environmental resources in the life of the school. (Sobel, 2004, p. 7).

While this understanding of place-based education is at the core of this research, the changing demographics of rural communities also complicates any research that claims a

place-based approach. Therefore, this research broadens the definition of a place-based approach to acknowledge and include the complex relationship between those community members with generational family ties to the land and those who come, often from Mexico, to work the land. Therefore, this research's use of place-based education also explores how teacher's understandings of place "instead of stable, homogeneous autarchies, change[s] even when we 'stay put'" (Nespor, 2008, p. 480). This understanding of place also considers how place is "shaped by class, gender, and racial dynamics organized through extra-local relations of power" (Nespor, 2008, p. 480). Therefore, to understand this research it is, by extension, important to know the community in which it was conducted.

Once only accessible by ferry boat, the town of Adams is still defined by its relationship to the great Trout River (pseudonym) and beautiful Ogallala Mountains (pseudonym) to the South. The surroundings provide ample opportunity for camping, swimming, fishing, and hunting. In fact, during the opening week of hunting season, it is not uncommon for students to miss several days of school to spend time with family hunting deer or elk. Family life is also supported by a strong religious underpinning in the town's fabric. With ten churches in this small community of 2,528 inhabitants, it is difficult to find a resident, from either end of the socioeconomic status spectrum, who does not make reference to church in daily conversation (US Census Data, 2000). In fact, school sports games are deliberately scheduled on Tuesday and Thursday nights to avoid conflict with Wednesday night "church" responsibilities. Sports, and particularly football, are also an important aspect of community life. In the fall, a Friday afternoon is

full of talk of that night's game, and the Homecoming parade calls for the early closure of the elementary, middle, and high schools.

Historically, the first known settler took residence in Adams in 1889 and the town grew in response to the mining of rich mineral deposits found in the Ogallala Mountains. However, in 1913, the railroad began connecting Adams to larger cities in the neighboring states and that, coupled with irrigation, encouraged agriculture. Today, the town is still surrounded by a combination of fields, orchards, and even some vineyards. Once maintained as family farms, these fields of potatoes, fruit trees, and hops are now more likely to be tended by seasonal workers, often from Mexico. Although these workers originally came to Adams as a part of a larger seasonal triangle that included Adams, Michigan, and Mexico, many of these once seasonal workers have “gotten on” for longer engagements with local farms and now live year round in Adams.

Adams is, based on its own early settlement of primarily Basque and Austrian people, a community proud of its rich culture and heritage. In fact, each year a significant community event honors these rich traditions, and people come from all over the state—even the “big” city—to sample food and drink, and to enjoy the music and dances of the various cultures. However, despite the beauty and rich culture of Adams, it is far from the homogeneous scene one, particularly those not keenly familiar with rural places, may imagine. Instead, Adams embodies rich traditions and strong tensions, fertile lands, and deep poverty.

In the town of Adams, a tension exists – although, as one study participant noted, this tension is “rarely discussed” – between those community members with European

American roots and those who have come to Adams from Mexico. Even though many of these Mexican American families are now second and third generation to Adams, they are often separated both in location—many of them live in one particular part of town—and in interactions—with churches and social activities still remaining relatively homogenous and segregated.

Ethnicity is not the only reason for separation, there also appears to be a community record-keeping of sorts for those people who “belong to” or “settled” the area. Again, the majority of these people are either Basque or Austrian, with a few Japanese families moving to the area early in the town’s history. Clearly, there is diversity in Adams. However, comparing just the Basque and Mexican people, it is important to note that while both the Basque and Mexican people have undergone similar demands to assimilate—specifically the emphasis on speaking English and the marginalization of Euskara and Spanish respectively—the Basque diaspora, occurring primarily before the 1921 National Origins Quota Act, appears in this particular town to be less threatening. In other words, because the majority of the Basque people in this region have been here for generations, unlike the larger Latino population, and speak English as their first language and Euskara as their second, there appears to be less resentment toward embracing the Basque culture. The tension between old settlers and new immigrants is more often felt than spoken in a town that holds community at its heart and professes that “community is the essence of Adams which offers more than a place to live, work or do business; it offers a way of life—like it used to be” (city of Adams website).

Another rural reality present in Adams is poverty. While the surrounding hills are dotted with larger, single family homes similar to those one might see in the suburbs, the type of housing and space between them is quite different for those who, due to the lack of public transportation, have no choice but to live “in town.” With 20.3% of the population living below the poverty line, several mobile home parks offer fairly inexpensive housing (United States Department of Census, 2000). Often sheltering more than one family, children often seem to spill out of these homes as they look for friends within the park to play. Since an even larger percentage, 24.9%, of children in Adams under the age of 18 live below the poverty line, all three schools in the district qualify for Title I Supplementary funds (United States Department of Census, 2000).

Adams is also rural. Such a claim may seem unnecessary in a project focused on rurality and rural education; however, while this classification may seem unproblematic, pinning down a precise definition of what makes someplace or someone rural is much more complex. The distinction of rural is so complex that three separate departments under the U.S. government umbrella, the U.S. Census Bureau, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), operate on varying definitions of rurality. “Rural definitions can be based on administrative, land-use, or economic concepts, exhibiting considerable variation in socio-economic characteristics and well-being of the measured population (Cromatie & Bucholtz, 2008, para 2). However, according to Budge (2005), the most agreed upon definition used by rural researchers comes from the U.S. Census Bureau and defines rurality as existing outside urban areas (UA) and urban cluster (UC). “It delineates UA

and UC boundaries to encompass densely settled territory, which consists of: 1) core census block groups or blocks that have a population density of at least 1,000 people and 2) surrounding census blocks that have an overall density of at least 500 people per square mile” (United States Department of Census, 2000, para. 4).

As a town of 2,528 located 40 miles from the largest metropolitan area, Adams’s population places it slightly above the density marker (United States Department of Census, 2000). However, according to Adams’s own city website, the town is “small, rural” and sees itself as such (Adams City Website). This naming of one’s town as rural deepens the definition by providing “the decidedly less measurable, but some have argued, more important notions of ‘local commitments’ and ‘meaning-making’ that, more than geographic boundaries of the traditional constructs of demography, distinguish rural places” (Howley, 1997, p. 2). Adams certainly fits the rural model. In my two year commitment with Adams Middle School, there were many instances where I was keenly aware of the ways in which “everyone, knew everyone.” However, one instance that stands out was a day in which the school secretary shared with me a sepia picture of a first-grade class from the early 1930s. In it, she could identify not only her own husband, but the mother and/or fathers of three teachers in the building, as well as the parent of a current school board member. In fact, she and several of the other teachers could name, or knew, over half of the children in the picture, who are now in their early 80s. And as they sat on the couch in the teacher’s lounge, they spent the better part of a half hour making connections between those children, now elderly community members, and current students in their classrooms. If rural people experience community as essential in

linking self to others, integral in their development and attuned to a particular way of life, then Adams is most certainly rural.

Rural Realities

Many of the rural realities that rural places face are also evident in Adams. As previously noted with the change from family farms to larger consolidated agribusinesses, Adams is in the midst of a changing demographic. While the ethnicity and primary language of diverse students varies geographically, it is important to note that in the United States in general, Hispanics continue to be the largest minority group at 42.7 million (Bernstein, 2006). “With a 3.3 percent increase in population from July 1, 2004, to July 1, 2005, they are the fastest growing group” (Bernstein, 2006, para 3). This trend is particularly true nationwide in rural areas, where Hispanics have accounted for a large share of population growth in recent years (Salant, 2008). The same is true in the rural mountain west state in which Adams is situated, “where the increasing Hispanic population has accounted for almost half of all growth since 2000. [In fact,] about 12 percent of [this mountain west state’s] rural population is Hispanic” (Salant, 2008, p. 1).

A changing ethnic makeup is one of the realities of rural diversity; poverty is another. In rural America, 1-in-6 rural children live in households with incomes below the federal poverty threshold (which is \$20,444 for a family of four), placing rural child poverty rates slightly higher than those in urban areas (Salant, 2008). Even more important is the disproportionate number of rural Hispanics who are living in poverty. In fact,

Hispanics in nonmetro ‘rapid Hispanic growth’ counties – half of whom were born abroad – were often poor in 2000. This statistic can largely be attributed to relatively low wages and relatively larger families, opening a gap of \$8,600 a year between non-Hispanic Whites and Hispanics, up from \$4,000 in 1990. (Kandel & Parrado, 2005, p. 2)

Such high levels of poverty can mean schools “face daunting challenges: reduced funding due to enrollment declines, severe teacher shortages, high transportation costs, the constant threat of consolidation from states, and a student population prone to the same social ills that plague city schools, from drug use to teen pregnancy” (Hardy, 2005, p. 20).

In the face of such difficult challenges, “educational leaders and policy makers concerned with social justice and equity must attend to the hidden and forgotten inequalities in rural education” (Budge, 2005, p. 23). Where do discussions of such inequities occur? This is a particularly important question in the preparation of rural teachers who are called to truly know their students and, following Theobald (2002), their communities in order to teach.

Rural Teacher Preparation

While urban universities seemingly embrace the opportunity to prepare teachers for the challenges of urban life, “rural teacher preparation is not a popular topic” (Theobald, 2002, p. 11). Despite similarly high rates of poverty and diversity, “our cultural predisposition to denigrate rurality keeps universities located in rural areas from

declaring rural teacher preparation to be a central part of their mission” (Theobald, 2002, p. 11). This phenomenon to not declare a rural focus, which Barley (2009) documents in her study of teacher preparation programs in the mid-continent states, appears to be in contrast to highly acclaimed urban teacher preparation programs. One such example of a university that has clearly defined itself as urban is the University of Chicago’s Urban Teacher Education Program (UTEP), which in March of 2011 received “nearly \$11.6 million from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Innovation and Improvement through its Teacher Quality Partnership Grants Program” and focuses solely on preparation for and residency in Chicago’s urban places (Harms, 2010, para. 1). So why the lack of rural teacher preparation programs?

Sherwood (2000) argues that, in general, the lack of focus on “rural issues” can be attributed to several factors. These factors can be divided into those that are external, such as a lack of appreciation for rural and urban differences, and funding specifically targeted to rural issues; and those that are internal, including a lack of networking amongst rural researchers, and a corresponding lack of consensus concerning rural education’s research priorities. Budge (2005) further argues this lack of focus on rural people can also be attributed to the political status of rural people as an “oppressed group” who, as such, are often rendered invisible (p. 21).

Building on the work of Young (2000), Budge’s review of literature suggests “that rural people and their communities face four areas of oppression: cultural imperialism, exploitation, marginalization and powerlessness” (Budge, 2005, p. 2). This classification of rural people as oppressed, coupled with Sherwood’s internal and external

factors, provides a lens for rural researchers to use in exploring the disparate amount of research and focus given to urban as opposed to rural issues.

In addition to a disparate amount of research on rural education in general, research specific to rural teacher motivations, i.e. rural teacher recruitment and retention, have not kept pace with the increasing amount of research devoted to urban teacher recruitment and retention. In a review of literature on non-rural teacher recruitment and retention, McClure and Reeves (2004) found the tremendous volume of literature written since 2000 on the topic of teacher recruitment and retention “made it impractical to review all of it” (p. 4). However, only 43 rural-specific documents were identified via an ERIC search (McClure & Reeves, 2004). Furthermore, within that small body of literature concerned with rural teacher recruitment and retention only 24 of those articles were published since 1999 (McClure & Reeves, 2004). While a body of knowledge clearly exists on the motivation of urban teachers (Cochran-Smith, 2006; Quartz and TEP Research Group, 2003; Nieto, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995), the same amount of care and attention has not been afforded to rural teachers: who they are, what motivates them to teach (and remain) in rural places, and what impact, if any, a connection to community may have on the classroom.

A Rationale for Study

With nearly 31 % of public school teachers choosing to teach in rural areas, coupled with the challenges that exist in teaching in rural places, there is a call to more deeply understand rural teachers, their motivations, and their classroom practice

(Jameson, 2003, p. 7). A review of literature points to several factors that create a compelling argument for this study: 1) Rural research generally, and rural teacher recruitment and retention specifically, is lacking (Sherwood, 2000; McClure & Reeves, 2004); 2) Rural school districts face particular challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers (Monk, 2007; Barley, 2009; McClure & Reeves, 2004); and 3) Rural schools and students are unique and call for professionals who understand rural life (Howley, Theobald, & Howley, 2005; Gruenewald 2003; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995).

Lack of Rural Research

The deficiency of research devoted to rural education is a problem of both volume and character. “A variety of studies—notably, analyses supported by the U.S. Department of Education itself—identify significant deficiencies in the national body of research, including available raw data, on rural schools” (Sherwood, 2000, p. 159). While Stem (1994) points to several factors that may cause such a lack of support for rural research, including a general lack of appreciation for the urban-rural difference, what is clear is that this missing information not only “keeps us from learning more answers. It keeps us from asking the right questions” (Sherwood, 2000, p. 160).

If sheer volume is one problem, the quality or character is another. In their analysis of what rural research is of most worth, Howley, Theobald, and Howley (2005) argue for rural research that does not simply situate itself in a definitional rural place, but rather engages rural meanings. Critical of the “all too common” situation in which studies fail to engage rural meanings, Howley et al. (2005) argue that to be considered rural,

research must engage the rural “lifeworld” (p. 2). This lifeworld exists “in the flow of seemingly unremarkable everyday moments, where rural people make rural sense of, and with, their rural lives” (Howley et al., 2005, p. 2). Moreover, “rural education research simply *must* ask what sort of schooling rural kids are getting, why they are getting it, who benefits and who gets injured in the process, and by what mechanisms” (Howley et al. 2005, p. 3). In other words, for research to have rural character, it should not simply be situated in rural places, but have a stake in the actual communities and people with whom it engages.

This definition of rural research as affected by and affecting the rural places in which it is conducted has particular importance in the current climate of “educational reform, which continues to emphasize national state and local standards aligned with high stakes testing and national economic objectives.... [largely if not entirely] removed from the places where we live” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 641). In this conception of accountability, the greatest measurement is not necessarily a score on a state-wide or national test, but might privilege a place-based philosophy that “name[s] community building among their goals while stressing the significance of local control and community relevance and participation” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 643).

Such questions about the type and quality of education rural students are receiving cannot be divorced from issues surrounding rural teachers. Teachers matter and thus research surrounding how they come to and stay in districts must also engage rural meanings.

Challenges: Recruitment and Retention of Rural Teachers

Teacher shortages are not new and not necessarily a rural issue. In what is often referred to as the “graying” of the teaching force as baby boomers leave the profession, nearly half of the teachers in the past ten years have retired (Cochran-Smith, 2006). Such an exodus has required an additional two million teachers to enter (and stay) in the profession (Cochran-Smith, 2006). In addition to an increasing demand for new teachers to replace those retiring, additional requirements of the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary School Act in 2001, including the demand for “highly qualified” teachers in every classroom, have resulted in further pressure not only to find teachers, but teachers who have taken the right test or have the correct certification. While few would argue that a highly qualified teacher should be the norm for all students, hard to staff schools, which include both urban and rural schools, have particular challenges in the recruitment and retention of teachers (Barley, 2009; Monk, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2004). While rural and urban schools share some of the characteristics that make recruitment and retention difficult, i.e. high levels of poverty and lower teacher compensation rates, rural schools face four primary challenges: 1) lower pay; 2) geographic and social isolation; 3) difficult working conditions; and 4) No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements for highly qualified teachers (McClure & Reeves, 2004).

Lower Pay

Many teachers enter the profession as “lovers and dreamers” who come to teaching because they love children and believe that they can affect the future, often through democratic principals, by working alongside these creative, sometimes naïve and often idealistic, young people (Cochran-Smith, 2006). But these reasons are not enough.

In order to stay in teaching, today’s (and tomorrow’s) teachers need: school conditions where they are successful and supported, opportunities to work with other educators in professional learning communities rather than in isolation, differentiated leadership and advancement prospects over the course of the career, and good pay for what they do. (Cochran-Smith, 2006, p. 20)

Teacher compensation is even more pressing in rural districts where the pay scale numbers can affect recruitment and retention. There are even stark comparisons within some states/regions—for example, “in the state of Illinois the highest paid non-rural teacher makes \$33,761 more than the highest paid rural teacher” (Jimerson, 2003, p. 9). And the disparity in pay between rural and non-rural teachers increases throughout a teacher’s career. Nationally, beginning teachers in rural areas can earn 11.3% less, or \$2,725 dollars less per year than their non-rural colleagues. The trend continues and, unfortunately increases, with average salaries in rural areas coming in at 13.4% or \$4,010 less per year (Jimerson, 2003). The height of the discrepancy occurs for experienced teachers who can make up to 17.2% or \$6,784 less per year than their non-rural colleagues (Jimerson, 2003). These numbers are based on national averages; however, for the sake of illustration, if a teacher stays in a rural area and is within each of the three

levels of teacher categories—beginning, average, and experienced—for 10 years respectively, he or she would earn, on average, \$135,100 less than a non-rural colleague over a 30-year career. While a lower cost of living in some rural areas may have some bearing on this discussion, it is difficult to contend with such disparity in salary alone, particularly when coupled with other factors such as social and geographic isolation.

Social and Geographic Isolation

Since “rural” can be a descriptor for a range of places from those reachable only by float plane to those forty minutes from a large metropolitan area, it is difficult to quantify the feelings of social and geographical isolation that may be felt by those considering or currently teaching in rural places. However, “the primary reason teachers leave rural areas is isolation—social, cultural, and professional” (Collins, 1999, p. 2). Isolation is a factor in both recruitment and retention. Beginning teachers are particularly difficult to attract as they may not be particularly keen on moving to a rural place, unless they have grown up in that area or a similar rural area. Many of the social and cultural opportunities these beginning teachers experienced while in college, because colleges and universities are more often situated in urban areas, would no longer be available.

Additionally, rural districts are faced with the added pressure of professional isolation that can result with fewer opportunities to partner with local universities. This isolation has significant implications particularly in the context of Carlsen and Monk’s (1992) research, which found that secondary science teachers in rural schools had completed fewer subject matter courses than their urban and suburban counterparts. Since

teacher's content-specific knowledge is connected to student learning (Ferguson & Womack, 1993; Monk 1994), rural teachers often rely on professional development within the district for additional knowledge and training (Howley & Howley, 2005). However, the cost and resources needed to support effective professional development has implications for rural districts. Since rural districts have higher transportation costs and lower per pupil expenditures, professional development is often deemed a luxury and not a necessity (Johnson & Strange, 2009).

Difficult Working Conditions

There is much to celebrate about the working conditions of many rural schools, including small class size and the expectation that teachers will take the time to know their students. However, as previously discussed, the rural realities of poverty and changing demographics require rural teachers to understand multiple perspectives. Coupled with increasing poverty and a demand for more services, per pupil funding in rural districts can compound these problems. For example, in the mountain west state in which this research was conducted, rural instructional expenditures per pupil are the lowest in the entire country. At under \$4,000 per pupil per year, rural districts in this mountain west state spend less than half for rural pupil instruction than what is spent in rural places in New York (Johnson & Strange, 2009).

Additionally, rural teachers are often called on to teach more than one subject; and small class sizes often mean less specialization and the need for greater understanding of how to teach a wider array of students (Jimerson, 2003). Another

difficulty of working in a small, rural school is the mentality of “whatever it takes,” in which teachers and leaders ask the question, “if not me, then who?” (Budge, 2005).

While this can be an affirming and motivating part of rural school life, in which everyone comes together for a common mission, it can also mean that rural teachers are often called on, often without pay, to wear multiple hats within the school, i.e. curriculum director, counselor, janitor.

Highly Qualified Teachers

The current call for “highly qualified teachers for all,” most often measured through degrees, scores on tests, and years in the profession, does not acknowledge the challenges specific to rural places or the particular strengths necessary for rural teachers to succeed (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006). In general, a highly qualified teacher holds a bachelor’s degree, a teaching license, and demonstrates content knowledge for each subject taught (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). However, it is well established that teachers in smaller schools, of which the majority of rural schools can be categorized, often teach multiple subjects to a wider variety of students (Eppley, 2009; Schawartzbeck & Prince, 2003). The highly qualified provision challenges this multiple-subject approach in rural education in two ways.

First, it has philosophical implications in that “rural teachers have done interdisciplinary work for centuries” and that much of this work comes from the desire to support students as they learn to live and contribute to their community (Eppley, 2009, p. 7). In particular, a place-based approach to education ill fits the open and shut subject-

area distinctions of “now I will teach you Science because I am qualified to be a Science teacher” place-based education encourages students and their teachers to address community issues as they strive towards greater understanding of and participation in their community.

Secondly, logistical challenges make it difficult for rural teachers to obtain required certification and content-area expertise in the multiple subject areas they are called upon to teach as they are often separated by long distances from universities and training facilities (McClure & Reeves, 2004). Additionally, rural teachers have the added burden of passing multiple tests to demonstrate their qualifications in multiple subject areas, which is both costly and requires additional time for test preparation (McClure & Reeves, 2004).

Clearly, rural teachers face unique challenges. Yet despite these challenges, thousands of professionals choose rural places to practice. Why? A review of literature suggests that 1) due to the lack of research, we may not yet be able to answer this question (Sherwood, 2000; Howley, 1997) and 2) people, and therefore teachers, should not be seen as placeless (Howley & Howley, 1995; Howley et al., 2005). Therefore, in exploring rural teachers, it is also important to investigate the multiple ways that rural schools—their administration and more importantly, for the purpose of this research, their teachers—understand their purpose.

Unique Call of Rural Schools

In the current climate of standardization and accountability, the desire to find “what works” and apply it regardless of context is understandable. It is difficult, and some may argue unethical, for rural teachers and administrators to ignore policy makers who are quick to point out that “students living in rural areas in the United States achieve at lower levels and drop out of high school at higher rates than their non-rural counterparts” (Roscigno & Cowley, 2001, p. 2008). And yet, there is also a call to explore the notion that the larger purpose of education is not a test score but a way of participating in the larger democratic society (Friere, 1970; Dewey, 1916; Snow-Gerono et al., 2009), and that rural schools are particularly well situated to engage students in a fuller understanding and investigation of the means necessary to truly live in and not merely inhabit a place (Theobald, 1995, 1997; Gruenewald, 2003). The dialogue and conflict surrounding the purposes of rural schooling is longstanding and is fundamentally a debate about two issues: whose interest schools should serve (local, national, or both) and who controls the schools (Budge, 2006, p. 4). While place-conscious educators and researchers argue that well-functioning rural schools are both rooted in and supportive of local needs,

...factors such as rural economic decline, rural outmigration, school consolidation issues, and current state and federal education policies that measure school success solely based on student test scores may work against the potential for rural educational leaders to assume collaborative roles in promoting local community development. (Harmon & Schafft, 2009, p. 5)

The significance of rural economic decline weighs heavily on the hearts and minds of rural educators as they struggle with an often either “local” or “global” future for their students (Harmon & Schafft, 2009; Budge, 2005). It is perhaps this tension or even a disregard for place altogether that has been “counter-productive” to most rural areas in that it has resulted in one of rural places most serious problems: “the outmigration of the community’s best and brightest,” (Budge, 2005, p. 4).

This “Brain Drain,” as it has become known, has serious implication for rural places and contributes to an undervaluing of rural places (Smith, 2003). However, despite the negative implications of the outmigration on rural communities, rural leaders and educators often participate and encourage such outmigration (Budge, 2004). With funding often tied to a willingness to participate in universal standards-based reforms, rural schools are engaged in a push and pull between preserving the rural way of life and the economic realities that exist for students should schools encourage them to remain within the community (Theobald, 1995, 1997; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). While place-based proponents and researchers have often implicated outside factors, such as national legislation, that has encouraged such outmigration (Gruenewald, 2003), rural research also needs to explore why:

Educational leaders may develop personal identities connected to a rural place, come to personally value the quality of rural life-ways, and build individual leadership characteristics consistent with the mentality of a small rural community. Yet, these leaders may still struggle with the tension between decisions of professional practice that prepare students for a prosperous future and

decisions that address the community's need for the school to increase the viability of the rural place (Harmon & Schafft, 2009, pgs. 4-5).

This research came out of a desire to further understand the push and pull that appears to exist for rural teachers as they make daily decisions about what to value through the knowledge, skills, and approaches they employ in their classrooms. My own rural upbringing makes me conscious and inquisitive of the ways in which rural teachers' connection to place may impact what knowledge or skills they most value for their students. It is born out of Gruenewald's call to "reinhabituate ourselves" as we have been "so assimilated, so schooled with method and discourse, that it's hard to return to our senses [to stop] rushing around together like ants [and to ask] what it is that we really believe in? What it is that we really want from our work and from our lives?" (2006, p. 3). However, perhaps more importantly, it hopes to understand these questions from the perspective of rural teachers who work tirelessly for less money and less prestige, but with the confidence of the students, families, and communities in which they serve.

The Research Questions

Guided by the belief that teachers deeply affect the lives of their students both academically and personally, this research was done with the hope that rural teachers and researchers might gain more insight into their own practice by an inquiry guided by the following questions:

- 1) What sense of community or communities exists for rural teachers? Within the various ways of being rural, what possible impacts or influences affect

teachers' way of experiencing both the broader community and the community of their individual classroom?

- 2) What, if any, impact does a teachers' sense of community have on their teaching practice? What, if any, difference exists in the classroom practices of teachers' with a high sense of community and those with a low sense of community as measured by the Sense of Community Index (SCI-2) (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

More specifically, this case study will follow six rural teachers for a period of 10 weeks in one rural community in an attempt to better understand what impact a teachers' connection to their school's community has on their teaching practice. Mindful of the realities of rural places and the current state of teacher preparation for rural places, this research seeks to add to the body of research specifically focused on what it is that rural teachers hope for their students and their community. Through interview and observations, this qualitative study will return to the alfalfa fields and the computer labs that serve as rural classrooms. It will explore, from the perspective of rural teachers with varied sense of community, what it means to answer the call of rural research to practice a critical pedagogy of place as a "response against educational reform policies and practices that disregard place" (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 308). What is it that rural teacher want for their students? And do those wants have any connection to their own feelings towards and desires for the rural community in which they work? These questions are

integral to this study and through seeking the answers, this research hopes to add to the body of rural research that engage the question “what rural research is of most worth?” (Theobald, Howley, & Howley, 2005).

CHAPTER 2: INFORMING LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Three main areas of literature have informed this dissertation: 1) sense of place, generally, and rurality, specifically, 2) current practices in rural teacher recruitment and preparation, and 3) pedagogies of place and the interplay between place-based pedagogy and democratic pedagogy.

Sense of Place

The study of place has gained attention in numerous fields including architecture, ecology, geography, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, literary theory, psychology, and cultural studies (Gruenewald, as cited in Budge, 2005). In the field of education, place as an important construct is found in life-long teacher education (Theobald & Howley, 1998; Howley & Howley, 2005); school leadership (Budge, 2005); rural student achievement (Theobald, 1995; Beck & Shoffstall, 2005), and rural school reform (Barley & Beesley, 2007). Additionally, an entire conversation about the connection between critical pedagogy and place is unfolding through the work of Gruenewald (2008), Theobald (1997), Bowers (2008), and Nesor (2008).

While such research in education is paving the way for the serious consideration of place as an undeniable factor on numerous outcomes from highly-qualified teachers to math achievement, much of this research either treats places such as rural and urban as unchallenged constants or so deep in discourse as to what “place” actually means that it is difficult to formulate a clear definition. Additionally, there is the added complication that

rural research often uses the terms “place” and “community” interchangeably. In fact, in “considering notions of place, Massey (1991) and Harvey (1996) note that ‘community and ‘place’ are two concepts that are constantly intertwined in high complicated ways” (Liepins, 2000, p. 27). This intertwining further complicates what, if any, difference exists between what is meant by “sense of place” versus “sense of community.” Nespor (2008) reminds us that “defining a connotation-rich term like ‘place’ is always going to be difficult” (p. 478). In fact, the difficulty of defining place is not unique to education. Community psychology, which has been interested in defining a sense of place for over thirty years, has had an equally difficult time settling on a shared definition (Puddifoot, 1996; Chavis & Pretty, 1999).

In examining the multiple measures used in community psychology to measure community identity, Puddifoot (1996) argues that “despite widespread agreement about the importance of community identity.... ‘community identity’ would not appear to have been defined clearly enough in order to provide a sound conceptual basis” (p. 327). While it may be disheartening to hear such a statement from a field that began developing quantitative measurement instruments of community identity in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s with the work of Sarason (1974), Glynn (1981), and McMillan and Chavis (1986), the silver lining is that researchers in both the field of community psychology and place-based education have reached some consensus as to what makes up this seemingly nebulous concept of place. While utilizing different language, both fields seem to agree that “any formalized system for the analysis of community identity should include individual members’ perceptions of, and orientation to, their community both as a

physical entity and a social arrangement” (Puddifoot, 1996, p. 332). In other words, place is both a geographical and relational construct. Even Nespor (2008) in her argument against the construction of place as a stable, bounded entity concedes that the definition for place “usually refers at some level to a bounded area setting independent of human activity—‘the land,’ ‘the natural environment’—[and that] on top of this definition, PBE [Place-Based Education] theorists plant another: place as ‘community’” (p. 478).

It seems, therefore, that any definition of place must include a geographical and relational component. However, Liepins (2000) cautions against making assumed connections between place and community since “communities may not be primarily identified according to their coincidence with particular places, although this has been the case in many rural ‘community’ studies” (p. 27). Therefore, even within these two broad elements or factors of place — the geographical and relational — rural research must explore the specific constructs of place as developed by both researchers and government bodies interested in issues of place.

Rurality as Defined by Geography

The Oxford English Dictionary clearly affirms that any definition of “rural” has its principal basis in geography. “Rural,” from French *rural, rurale* means “of or belonging to the country as opposed to a town or city” (Rural, 2011). With synonyms such as “bucolic,” “rustic,” and “pastoral,” it is not a stretch to define rurality as a seemingly idyllic, often contemplative place that stands in opposition to all that is urban. However, contrasting rural and urban as dichotomous categories does not immediately

simplify the definition. For example, using rural as the entry point, and thus assuming the opposite of rural for urban, the process of pinning down a precise definition of what makes a place rural is much more complex. In fact, the U.S. government has multiple definitions of rurality, which use population-size thresholds ranging from “2,500 to 50,000 people” and “attempt to establish physical rurality through a myriad of definitions of dependency and interdependency” (Budge, 2005, p. 1). The most agreed upon definition comes from the U.S. Census Bureau and defines rurality as a “residential category of place outside urban areas, in open country, in communities of fewer than 2,500, or where the population density is less than 1,000 inhabitants per square mile” (Budge, 2005, p.4).

Less focused on population density, the government of Great Britain has also established a rural definition that is rooted in geography but has economic implications. Stated as fourteen characteristics, these concepts serve as a rural checklist of sorts and include:

1. Few service outlets,
2. Higher service delivery costs,
3. Greater travel needs,
4. Few information points,
5. Small (economic) market,
6. Weak infrastructure,
7. Small firm economy,
8. Land-based industries,

9. Needs not concentrated,
10. Different types of needs,
11. Low institutional capacity,
12. Few sites for development,
13. Landscape quality and character,
14. Countryside amenity and access (Atkins, 2003, p. 516)

While there are differences between these two government definitions in that the U.S. is more situated in geography while the British checklist has economic measures, neither of these two definitions considers the relational aspect of rural life as it pertains to community members' dependence on each other. An understanding of rurality with its emphasis on geography and, to a lesser extent, economics is limiting at best. Therefore, it is no surprise that theorists interested in community identity would call for a broader concept of rurality beyond a physical location or level of population density. Such concepts of rurality move from bounded ideas of place to one that is relational in nature.

Rurality as Defined by Relationships

Theobald's (1997) "the commons," with its notion of "intradependencies" within a bordered area, uses a historical lens to examine the relationship between schools and communities in both Great Britain and the United States, specifically the U.S. Midwest. Theobald posits rurality as deeply situated in the personal connection with one another, and to the land. Using ancient Greek society as a community measuring stick, Theobald (1997) looks to revive intradependent places that "measure the quality of their life by the

extent of their contributions to the community” (p. 9). For teachers and theorists who have a high sense of community, teaching is a movement against the modernization that has put the individual before the collective and an attempt to move rural places, with their historical, often idealized, system of dependencies, to a privileged position where “dependency within a place, dependence on the land and dependence on the good will and wisdom of the people with whom the land is shared” is valued (Theobald, 1997, p. 15).

Less interested in presenting an ideal of rurality, Gruenewald’s (2008) definition of place “foregrounds a narrative of local and regional politics that is attuned to the particularities of where people actually live, and that is connected to global development trends that impact local places” (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 308). A break from the agrarian foundation that has often been associated with place-based education, Gruenewald’s interests lie in seeing and defining places in interaction with one another on a wider global scale. With his emphasis on seeing and defining place in connection with a larger community, as opposed to strict conservation of place as discrete places, Gruenewald seeks to stretch not only the concept of place but also how school agents, such as teachers and students, act on their sense of place through “critical place-based pedagogy.” This hybrid of critical pedagogy and place-based education “cannot be only about struggles with human oppression. [Rather] it must embrace the experience of being human in connection with others and the world of nature, and the responsibility to conserve and restore our shared environments for future generations” (p. 314).

Gruenewald calls for not only a wider definition of place but a different course of action and interaction with place that goes beyond traditional conservation to seeing land as a site for human interaction and, ideally, the resistance of human oppression. In such a call, Gruenewald (2008) speaks directly to the tension between place-based education and critical pedagogy. “If place-based education emphasizes ecology and rural context, critical pedagogy—in a near mirror image—emphasizes social and urban contexts and often neglects the ecological and rural entirely” (p. 309). However, quick to dismiss such a polarizing dichotomy, Gruenewald (2008) seeks to align these two seemingly disparate areas of scholarship by speaking of their intersections:

Perhaps the two most significant intersections between these traditions are place-based education’s call for localized social action and critical pedagogy’s recognition that experience, or Friere’s (1970/1995) “situationality,” has a geographical dimension. Acknowledging that experience has a geographical context opens the way to admitting critical social and ecological concerns into one’s understanding of place, and the role of places in education. (p. 317)

In other words, both critical pedagogy and place-based education agree that a *sense of place* is important. However, what is not clear in the theories of Theobald and Gruenewald is a more concrete understanding of how sense of place, and more specifically, a rural sense of place or rural perspective, manifests itself into both feelings and action. Such a framework is particularly important in a study such as this that seeks to learn more about how rural teachers embrace (or reject) a rural framework.

Frameworks of Rural Perspective

In conversation with the theoretical concerns articulated by Theobald and Gruenwald, other educational researchers have created more specific frameworks of rurality in which to situate and conduct their quantitative and qualitative rural research. One such researcher, Atkins (2003) found six general characteristics of rural life and social structure from data gained from interviews with rural and urban young people in Britain. His findings define rural places as those that are or have:

1. Small scale—small schools, small villages, small churches, small communities;
2. Isolated-separated from services and amenities;
3. A product of agriculture and its environmental activity;
4. Strong community feeling, friendlier than urban communities, more tightly knit;
5. Conservative and traditional values;
6. A slower, less pressurized way of life. (Atkins, 2003, p. 511)

In her investigation of how rurality and a sense of place influence rural leaders' beliefs about the purpose of school, student achievement, and school reform, Budge (2005) proposes six habits of place in which place can be experienced. The six habits or ways of living define sense of place as:

1. Connectedness;
2. Development of Identity and Culture;
3. Interdependence with the Land;

4. Spirituality;
5. Ideology and Politics; and
6. Activism and Civic Engagement. (Budge, 2005, p. 27)

These six ways of living are not particular to a rural sense of place, but rather represent six ways that place-conscious persons demonstrate a sense of place (Budge, 2005). In fact, even the third habit, “Interdependence of the Land,” could have multiple meanings and would not necessarily constitute a rural perspective. Put in the context of developing a framework particular to rural sense of place, these multiple ways of experiencing place again speak to the complexity of defining such a perspective, and the importance of resisting a singular claim of the rural perspective as one way of being connected or as one type of ideology. Cohen (1985) reminds us that,

The ‘community’ as experienced by its members—does not consist in social structure or in the ‘the doing’ of social behavior. It inheres, rather in ‘the thinking’ about it. It is in this sense that we can speak of the ‘community’ as a symbolic, rather than a structural, construct. In seeking to understand the phenomenon of ‘community’ we have to regards its constituent social relations as a repository of meaning for its members, not as a set of mechanical linkages. (p. 98)

Applying Cohen’s (1985) repository of meaning to Budge’s (2005) six habits of living calls upon any rural sense of place framework to be viewed, not as an all or nothing checklist in which we can judge who necessarily has all of the components of a rural perspective, but rather as critical areas in which members share a repository of meanings. Therefore, the question is not “Do I have the ‘right’ interdependence with the land?” but

instead “Do I have shared meanings of my individual and our collective connection to the land?”

Researchers are thus entwined in the complexity of defining what exactly is meant by “shared meaning.” At one end of the spectrum is the notion that in a global, often fractured, world even those people who share geographic space, social structures and patterns of behavior must constantly negotiate meanings through discourse” (Foucault, 1972). On the other end is the argument that sense of community, although complex, can be measured and quantified (Chipuer & Pretty, 1999). The field of community psychology, in its nearly thirty year attempt to develop a reliable “sense of community” measure, has long been having these complex conversations as to not only what constitutes an understanding of place, but also our ability to measure it (Chipuer & Pretty, 1999). While these frameworks are not specific to rurality, they do offer another conceptual definition of place.

Sense of Community in Community Psychology

In an effort to explore both individual and communal action as it pertains to a connection with sense of place, community psychologists have worked to quantify sense of community as a catalyst for action. However, within the field of community psychology there is inconsistency on a standard measurement for Sense of Community (SOC). Several reviews of SOC measurement settle on two indices as those most used and respected in the field: Glynn’s (1981) Perceived Sense of Community Index and McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) Sense of Community Index (Puddifoot, 1996, Chipuer &

Pretty, 1999). Research on the Sense of Community Index suggests that “it is *the* most used and broadly validated measure of SOC” [my emphasis] and has clearly defined subscales that can be compared with what educational researchers have labeled as characteristics or habits of place (Chavis & Pretty, 1999, p. 637).

McMillan and Chavis (1986) developed the Sense of Community (SCI) scale based on the definition of sense of community as “a feeling that members have of belonging and being important to each other, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met by the commitment of being together” (Chavis, Hogge, McMillan & Wandersman, 1986, p. 11). The measure, which originally consisted of 23 open- and closed-ended items, measures participants in four subgroups. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), these four subgroups represent one’s sense of place and include:

1. Membership;
2. Influence;
3. Fulfillment of needs; and
4. Emotional connection.

Returning to Cohen’s (1985) argument that communities have shared meanings, an analysis of the language of the three frameworks of Atkins (2003), Budge (2005), and McMillan and Chavis (1986) provides an opportunity to determine what meanings seem to be held in common in community in general and rural community specifically.

Upon review of the frameworks, three areas of overlap emerge in which people with a developed sense of place seem to experience (see Table 1). These characteristics include an understanding of community as: 1) intrinsically linking self to others in

community, 2) integral in the formation of their own development and 3) attuned to the land or a particular way of life.

Table 1.1

Common Characteristics or Threads of a Rural Perspective

Place links self to others	Place impacts personal development	Place calls for attunement to the land or a particular way of life
<i>Connectedness (B)</i>	<i>Development of Identity/Culture (B)</i>	<i>Interdependence with the Land (B)</i>
<i>Membership (MC)</i>	<i>Influence (MC)</i>	<i>A Product of Agriculture/Environment (A)</i>
<i>A Strong Community Feeling (A)</i>	<i>Fulfillment of Needs (MC)</i>	<i>Small Scale (A)</i>
<i>Emotional Connection (MC)</i>	<i>Spirituality (B)</i>	<i>A Slower Way of Life (A)</i>
	<i>Conservative and Traditional Values (A)</i>	<i>Isolated for Others (A)</i>
	<i>Ideology and Politics (B)</i>	
	<i>Activism and Civic Engagement (B)</i>	

Compiled from frameworks from Atkins (A), 2003; Budge (B), 2005; and McMillian & Chavis (MC), 1986.

Upon closer examination, the third area of overlap is most notably seen in the frameworks of Atkins (2003) and Budge (2005), which focus on a rural perspective. It is perhaps no surprise that connection or interdependence with the land could have unique meanings to those communities whose histories have been shaped by a dependence on the land. However, it is important to be clear that a singular meaning of connection or interdependence with the land would be limiting. In fact, Gruenewald (2008) would caution that to do so would be constructing too narrow an idea of a rural perspective, one that is only interested in the conservation of the land or a particular, often slower, way of

life. Instead he calls on placed-based theorists to recognize that a connection to the land can and should manifest itself in a “nam[ing] [of] the cultural, ecological, and community life that should be conserved, renewed or revitalized” (p. 319). In other words, to limit the rural perspective by saying that it can only be interested in conserving the land is to negate the complexity of this perspective. Rather, a rich definition of a rural perspective recognizes that a rural perspective is not only the right of those that live and profit from the land as farmers and ranchers, but the right of all who feel their connection to their community in their own development and in the changing space around them.

Having established multiple possible meanings embedded in the theme of interdependence of the land, it is nonetheless important to restate the importance of geography or physicality within the rural perspective. In that most “rural interviewees gave some recognition to the land itself, as the physical space which they and their community members occupy” (Atkins, 2003, p. 511). However, it is also important to note that a person with a rural perspective not only has attributed some meaning to his or her connection to the land, but also recognizes that connections to others and development of self is drawn from a pool of shared meanings. Or in other words, someone with a rural perspective is someone who can articulate how place has had a significant impact on their own development and their connection to others because it has come either through embracing or resisting shared meanings held in community.

As Atkins (2003) demonstrates through an excerpt with Sara, a young person who considered herself to hold a rural perspective, such an understanding is real:

Sara: Don't know. Well they're just typically aren't they, really like, you know farmers and things like that are just really quiet people, like everyone knows each other and everyone knows everything about each other and that kind of thing.

Atkins: Right, and you don't think that would be true of an urban context?

Sara: No. That's like living in Lincoln or something.

Atkins: Ok, that is interesting. The flip side of that then is characteristic of urban people. How, would you describe those?

Sara: I don't—my friends that live in Lincoln they're just like really kind of loud and kind of outgoing and things like that. Whereas I'm more keep myself to myself.

Atkins: Right. More reserved?

Sara: Yes, I am more reserved. (p. 511)

While other rural teenagers might not name the exact same characteristic of being reserved as a rural trait, what is clear is that this short excerpt demonstrates all three characteristics of a rural perspective. Sara strongly identifies as a member of a community and argues that her development into a more reserved person has been impacted by place.

With an understanding of the deep impact that place makes on those with a rural perspective, it is not surprising that Eppley (2009) decided to begin her policy analysis of rural school and the highly qualified teacher provision with a conversation about place.

Recently, I talked with a teacher who began her career in a rural school....she did not mention anything about standardized testing or the role of teacher

certifications as factors important to what constitutes a teacher highly qualified for rural schools. Rather in her rural school, successful teaching required that she worked as a mediator between the curriculum and the lived experiences of the children in her classroom. Her students were deeply rooted in the immediate community....Because of this, it was essential that she both understand the children's relationship with their place, and, simultaneously, use her adult point of view to help them understanding their relationship with their larger world. She was certain that if both of these conditions weren't met, learning would not occur (p. 1).

Rural researchers use the phrase, "place matters." While research can and will continue to make this statement, a defined framework of what constitutes a rural perspective allows researchers to begin to attribute actions and outcomes in our classrooms directly to teachers' and students' connection to place.

Rural Teacher Recruitment and Preparation

To call for attention to place in the preparation and recruitment of teachers is, in the current climate of accountability and uniformity, an act of resistance (Gruenewald, 2003, 2006). For in saying that place matters and that teachers must understand and live within the communities in which they teach in order to be effective (Howley, Theobald, & Howley, 2005), there is an underlying assumption that what is best for teachers and students is not necessarily the "uniform, if sometimes segregated, skills and outcomes that schools are expected to promote" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 620). Instead teachers must

be prepared for rural teaching, which means “they not only must have the credentials they need, but they should also be aware of the nature of small schools in small communities” (Barley, 2009, p. 10).

However, Theobald (2002) reminds us that “rural teacher preparation is not a popular topic” (p. 11). A basic article search in ERIC enumerates this with fourteen articles relating to the search topic “urban teacher preparation,” and only four articles under “rural teacher preparation” (ERIC search conducted on October 14, 2010). For sure, books such as *Savage Inequalities* (Kozol, 1992) did much to encourage universities to prepare teachers for urban realities; however, despite similar challenges, the same is not true for rural teacher preparation.

Despite nearly a century of consolidation, rural schools represent two-thirds of the nation’s total. And rural students represent about 25 percent of all school children. Poverty and jobless rates in rural America have slightly eclipsed the same rates in America’s urban centers. Diversity percentages in rural America mirror those in urban locales. In fact, all the circumstances that coalesce to make urban teacher preparation a noble university mission are in place with respect to rural America as well (Theobald, 2002, p. 11).

And yet, Barley’s (2009) recent inquiry into the state of rural teacher preparation among mid-continent universities found that of “120 institutions that offer teacher preparation, 17 confirmed a rural program emphasis, and nine of these have three or more of five components that might help prepare current or prospective teachers” (p. 14). While work and research is being done in rural teacher preparation (Barley, 2009, Barter, 2008,

Proffit et al., 2002), there is clearly a discrepancy between those universities who serve rural communities and those willing to focus on rural teacher preparation. This discrepancy has implications in two primary areas: initial teacher preparation and rural teacher recruitment and retention. I will begin with a discussion of initial teacher preparation.

Initial Teacher Preparation

In her study, Barley (2009), informed by the work of Barker and Beckner (1987) identified five areas that are relevant to rural schools and thus should be incorporated into initial rural teacher preparation: “1) being prepared in two or more content areas, 2) offering special courses related to rural teaching, 3) offering practicum or student teaching in a rural setting, 4) training in teaching two or more grade levels in the same room, and 5) training that helps teachers understand the role of community” (p.11). While Barley (2009) did not include questions related to the fourth condition, she found that only one of the nine universities offered a course of teaching in rural places and that even in this one instance the course was not required. Similarly, only two of the nine institutions secured rural placements for practicum—or student-teaching experiences—and only three of the nine offered opportunities for multiple certifications (Barley, 2009). Considering that these paltry statistics are part of a much larger picture that contains 103 universities that don’t offer any of the characteristics of rural teacher preparation, it is clear that the state of initial rural teacher preparation is nearly nonexistent.

If one piece of the initial rural teacher preparation puzzle is simply availability, another must be content. In addition to the five components of what a rural teacher preparation could offer as identified by Barley (2009), the changing demographics of rural places necessitates that the content of “rural” initial teacher preparation, like that of “urban” initial teacher preparation programs, must be centered on diversity. While this diversity is most certainly about ethnicity and socioeconomic status, as discussed in Chapter 1, it is also about language.

In their work on preparing teachers to work with linguistically diverse students, O’Neal, Ringler, and Rodriguez (2008) question if the focus on multiculturalism and diversity that has been added to the curriculum of initial teacher preparation programs misses the mark by “not preparing teachers to directly teach these students and instead just teach about these students?” (p. 5). But who are *these* students? The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary School Act defines English Language Learners (ELL) as a student, age 3-21, who is enrolled in a U.S. elementary or secondary school and belongs to one of the following categories:

- 1) Was not born in the United States or speaks a native language other than

English;

Is a Native American, Alaska Native, or native resident of outlying areas and comes from an environment where language other than English has had a significant impact in the individual’s level of English language proficient, or

- 2) Is migratory, speaks a native language other than English, and comes from an environment where language other than English is dominant.
- 3) May be unable, because of difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language, to:

Score at the proficient level on state assessments of academic achievement;

Learn successfully in classrooms that have language of instruction is English; or

Participate fully in society

(Public Education Network and National Coalition for Parental Involvement in Education, 2008, para. 1)

In the United States, the majority of ELL students, 58% of students, are born in the United States and 74% are from Hispanic background (O'Neal et al., 2008). And while this is not only a rural problem,

ELL students and their families tend to settle in geographical locations that are rural and thus bring unique educational challenges to these schools such as: poor attendance for seasonal migrant workers, lack of proficiency in the native language, and lack of cultural support in their communities. More recently, due to the high number of ELL students in rural areas, many classrooms are a majority of ELL students and a minority of monolingual (English only) students (O'Neal et al., 2008, p. 6).

Understanding these dynamics, as well as understanding specific teaching strategies that benefit ELL students, would certainly be an integral part in the preparation of incoming rural teachers.

Rural Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Insuring that incoming teachers are indeed prepared for the realities of rural education is one piece; however, an even more pressing obstacle is recruiting and retaining teachers to rural places. With challenges to teacher recruitment and retention, such as lower pay, geographic isolation and the need for multiple certifications, rural districts need systemic efforts to ensure committed teachers come and remain in rural classrooms. In their review of literature, McClure and Reeves (2004) found five promising practices for rural teacher recruitment and retention, including:

- (1) “grow-your-own” initiatives, including career-switchers programs, that nurture local talent through collaborations among public school systems and postsecondary institutions;
- (2) targeted incentives, both strictly financial but also things such as housing or subsidized educational opportunities;
- (3) improved recruitment and hiring practices, especially those that use state and local data;
- (4) improved school-level support for teachers; and
- (5) use of interactive technologies to help alleviate the problems faced by rural schools in recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers. (p. 8)

First, it is important to note that with all of these promising practices, there is not yet much research to support the effectiveness of these programs and much more research is

needed to determine the efficacy of such programs (McClure & Reeves, 2004). However, one distinguishing component of rural teacher recruitment and retention that does appear to be effective is the ability to tap into the “rootedness” of the community (McClure & Reeves, 2004). While all five practices could include elements of “rootedness,” grow-your-own initiatives are uniquely situated to capitalize on this effective practice. For this reason, this particular recruitment and retention practice is considered here for more explanation and exploration.

Grow-Your-Own Initiatives

One practice within this rootedness component is grow-your-own initiatives, which incorporate a wide-range of practices such as supporting existing paraprofessionals in rural schools to move through certification to encouraging rural high school students to return to their communities through traditional university-based teacher preparation.

Since geographic isolation was identified as a major challenge to rural teacher recruitment and retention (McClure & Reeves, 2004; Collins, 1999), grow-your-own programs identify and support potential teacher candidates who already understand the rural lifestyle and are already connected to the community through friends, family, and other social supports. While this may seem trivial, Davis (2002) found that 95 out of 147 elementary teachers in one rural Montana school district were “most strongly influenced to accept their present teaching positions because they ‘enjoyed the rural life style’” (p. 99). In fact, the personal/family sphere was the greatest factor for teachers in both deciding to teach in rural places and in staying there.

A similar result was found in the work of Bornfield (1997) who found that the decision to continue teaching special education in a rural district was a “matter of roots.” Her study indicated that “leavers” and “stayers” rated their job satisfaction about equally (none were greatly satisfied), but the determining factor in whether a teacher changed jobs was rootedness to the community (Bornfield,1997). “The leavers . . . considered ‘home’ to be someplace other than where they worked” (p. 36), while 47% of “stayers” cited personal connections to the community as their main reason for continuing to teach in a rural district.

One such grow-your-own program is the Appalachian Model Teacher Consortium that, through a partnership between a rural school district in Virginia, a community college, and a local university, offers a structured curriculum path for high school students. Through the program, high school students from Grayson High School can earn enough credits in high school to begin college as sophomores, and successful completion of coursework at the community college level means pro forma admission to the university (Proffitt et al., 2002). Then, in their last year of university, students return to Grayson School District for a professional year of practicum and student teaching experiences. The benefits of this program exist for the students, who are given the opportunity but also financial support for post-secondary study; the community, who has an avenue to encourage well-educated community members to remain and contribute; and the school, who now has a pool of educators who understand and are committed to the larger community.

While the mere presence of teachers fully prepared to teach in rural schools either through initial teacher preparation programs geared towards rural school needs and/or other promising recruitment practices such as grow-your-own initiatives is important, there is still a debate as to what rural teachers should be preparing students for. Should curriculum and teaching practices be rooted in the places they inhabit?

Pedagogies of Place

Over the past twenty years, “reform efforts have been driven by the need to build a strong workforce for a national and global economy and satisfy a consumption-obsessed culture” (Budge, 2005, p. 44). However, rural theorists such as Theobald (1997) argue that modern liberalism, by privileging individual economic gain over the collective good, has led to a significant diminution in the power and importance of the collective. Tracing the devastating implications of this line of thinking on community, Theobald (1997) argues that there are benefits in moving away from self and towards community with the promise that,

if students have been enculturated into an ethic of shouldering responsibility for a shared place, into reasoned study and deliberation, and into a propensity to look beyond conventional wisdom for solutions to problems, that will certainly increase the odds that community will become a primary factor in our economic and political reckoning in the future. (p. 159)

While few teachers, administrators, and community members would argue against high standards for all students, a narrow focus on “What Works” to prepare students for a

global, consumer-based society neglects the importance of place (Gruenewald, 2006; Howley, Theobald & Howley, 2005).

Place-Based Education

Like all reforms, place-based education as a term is “overused and misunderstood” (Resor, 2010, p. 85). Thus, a definition is necessary that illustrates how place-based education is used in this study:

[P]lace-based education is the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to the teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students’ appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. Community vitality and environment quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organizations, and environmental resources in the life of the school (Sobel, 2004, p.7).

It is this engagement of the community and students as community members that directly speaks the connection between placed-based education and democratic education. For Theobald (1997), rural communities—with their intradependencies or “virtue of necessary relations”—are uniquely situated to instill the democratic practices

of working towards what is good for the community and away from that which strictly benefits the individual (p. 7).

The goal of a more democratic citizenry that is rooted in place is shared amongst other rural researchers. In his framework of place-based education, Gruenewald (2008) details the role that democratic action research can play in helping students to understand their responsibility as place-makers. It is this responsibility to create and reform place, Gruenewald argues, that prepares students for democratic citizenry and can be called democratic education. In this way, place-based education with its focus on inquiry towards the betterment of the collective or community is at its core democratic education. But what is democratic education and in what ways does it speak directly to rural educators?

Democratic Education

Dewey and Democracy. Any discussion of democratic education must, by necessity, begin with the work of John Dewey. Known for espousing a philosophy of education in which the concern of schools is “not only the development of children and youth but also of the future society in which they will be constituents” (Dewey, 1916, p. 85), Dewey wrote extensively about the promise of education to better a democratic society through inquiry (1897; 1916; 1927). It is this focus on inquiry or communication that sets Dewey apart from other educational philosophers of his time. “Dewey’s philosophy is therefore not a child-centered approach but a thoroughly communication-centered philosophy” (Biesta, 2006). And it is this focus on the push and pull inherent in

communication through which Dewey conceives of a democracy that is not stable or fixed but in process. For Dewey, democracy is in the participation. However, again, what separates Dewey is the understanding that true participation is through communication.

It is important to note that communication and even shared meaning through communication does not imply mutual agreement.

Dewey challenges readers to contemplate the alternatives to an interest in learning from all the contacts of life. Certainly, such an interest does not mean endorsing [a particular alternative.]...For Dewey, however, the right response—the moral response—to these facts of life is not blind aversion, dogmatic condemnation, or cowardly withdrawal. The moral response is to learn from them. Since learning involves communication, the moral response means somehow engaging the contacts, somehow interacting or communicating with them... (Minnich, 2006, p. 186).

It is within the interaction and sometimes interrogation of contrasting ideas and beliefs that true democracy exists. In fact, Apple (2004) reminds us “conflict must be looked at as a basic and often beneficial dimension of the dialectic of activity we label society” (p. 91). Therefore, first and foremost, democratic education must prepare students to engage in this dialectic by providing an environment in which students can evoke the “moral response” of learning from one another (Minnich, 2006, p. 186).

To say that the purpose of democratic education is simply to foster crucial communication falls short, however.

If primary schooling leaves students with a capacity for political criticism but no capacity for political participation or sense of social commitment, either because it fails to cultivate their sense of political efficacy or because it succeeds in teaching them deference to authority, then it will have neglected to cultivate a virtue essential to democracy (Gutmann, 1987, p.92).

In other words, democratic education should prepare students to think, communicate, and act.

It is in democratic education's call to action that a strong connection exists between it and place-based education in that the real "point of becoming more conscious of places in education is to extend our notions of pedagogy and accountability outward toward places" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 620). In this way, place-based education with its aim to "enlist teachers and students in the firsthand experience of local life and in the political process of understanding and shaping what happens there" is, in fact, democratic education situated in place (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 620). But to what end? For what purpose?

While Gutmann (1987) is clear that instilling democratic or deliberative character and teaching moral reasoning is not democratic education's only purpose, she argues that the "development of deliberative character is essential to realizing the ideal of a democratically sovereign society" (p. 52). Predicated on the belief that deliberative character can be taught, Gutmann (1987) seeks educated individuals to be committed both to "living up to the routine demands of democratic life, at the same time they are committed to questioning those demands whenever they appear to threaten the

foundational ideals of the democratic sovereignty, such as respects for persons” (p. 52). Resisting the value of neutrality that claims all morals lead to the “good life,” this vision of democratic education rejects the teaching of such values as discrimination or dishonesty based on the fact that such behavior violates a foundational ideal of democracy. Instead, Guarasci and Cornwell (1997) argue that any conception of democracy founded on democratic foundational ideals, such as respect for persons, will be “a wholly different ideal of democratic communication in which both difference and connection can be held together yet understood to be at times necessarily separate, paradoxical, and in contradiction to one another” (p. 3).

Dewey’s brief but pregnant definition of democracy as a “mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” further defines the purpose of democratic education (1916, p. 87). Conceiving of democracy in this way requires that students be prepared to engage with the dynamic interaction of a community of difference and connection, and to work towards a greater understanding and participation in that community in order to seek liberty and happiness for all citizens.

This definition of democratic education also speaks to the goal of critical education. Currently held as two distinct theories, recent scholarship (Knight & Pearl, 2000, Edwards, 2009) has begun to see the connection between democratic and critical education. In fact, Edwards (2009) argues that “while it may seem theoretically untenable to bring together these two theories, the reality is that the origins and influential theorists, while they do come from different times and places, have always had much in common” (p. 2). Edwards (2009) goes on to argue that when these two theories are compared for

their similarities rather than contrasted for their differences, a clearer purpose of the outcome of critical education is made apparent. He furthers his case by asserting that while critical reflection and action may be the mode of critical education, a more democratic state is its desired outcome. In other words,

Critical educators engage students, providing them with an opportunity to transcend textbooks and ditto-sheets, enabling them to think differently and more democratically, not simply for the sake of doing it, but so that it becomes a state of being in action (Goldstein and Beutel, 2007, p. 5 as cited in Edwards, 2009).

Gruenewald (2008) adds the concerns of place-based education to this dynamic interplay between the modes of critical pedagogy and the outcomes of democratic education. As previously discussed, Gruenewald makes the case for a critical pedagogy of place by citing well-established critical theorist McLaren and Giroux,

At the most general level...a critical pedagogy must be a pedagogy of place, that is, it must address the specificities of the experiences, problems, languages, and histories that communities rely upon to construct a narrative of collective identity and possible transformation (McLaren & Giroux, 1990, p. 263 as cited in Gruenewald, 2008).

Therefore, while critical education's seemingly singular focus on action related to human interaction may seem antithetical to place-based education, with its traditional focus on ecology and the importance of environmental restoration (Bowers, 2008), in truth, "place-based education's call for localized social action and critical pedagogy's recognition that

experience, or Friere's (1970/1995) 'situationality,' has a geographical dimension" (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 317).

Critical Pedagogy of Place

Drawing from the work of Friere (1970, 1998), Apple (2004), Giroux (2001) and McLaren (1994), Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) define critical education as:

An approach to education that is rooted in the experiences of marginalized peoples; that is centered in a critique of structural, economic, and racial oppression; that is focused on dialogue instead of a one-way transmission of knowledge; and that is structured to empower individuals and collectives as agents of social change. (p. 183)

Such a definition recognizes education, like all things, as a largely political act that has societal implications. This definition is of particular importance for rural educators for two reasons: 1) the role of oppression in rural communities, and 2) the empowerment of collectives as agents of social change.

Oppression

Using Young's (2000) "Five Faces of Oppression," "rural schools and communities face at least four types of oppression: cultural imperialism, exploitation, marginalization and powerlessness" (Budge, 2005, p. 21). In fact, well before Young's "faces," rural scholars linked rurality and oppression.

‘Why should the social inequity be raised in relation to rural youth—a topic customarily reserved for minorities such as Blacks, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, women and others who are recognized as not sharing equally in the opportunities and attainments available to most Americans?’ The answer seems to lie in a cluster of rural problems that include: a characteristic lack of structural opportunities (for education and occupations); a tendency for mass society not to take rural problems and rural people seriously, and a tradition of rural neglect (Cosby, 1979, p. 2)

Budge (2005) argues that in the era of cultural sensitivity and political correctness, it is still socially acceptable to poke fun at rural people as “rednecks,” and “hillbillies.” These terms and the deeper pejorative meanings behind them certainly affect rural peoples’ views of themselves as rural people have internalized negative messages from the urban-dominated culture and no longer wish to be identified as rural (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998). Such marginalized sentiments about rural people, alongside larger economic issues of exploitation of rural places, speak to the purpose of critical education as inquiry into and alongside oppressed voices.

Empowerment of Individuals for Collective Change

It is here in the second element of the definition of critical education, in the power of the collective for change, that critical education and democratic education converge. And it is in this understanding of critical education as action that we again see the connection between critical education and place-based education in that such action can

and should occur within specific places. While originally conceived as a dichotomy between place-based educators focus on collective change toward ecological conservation and critical educators focus on collective change towards oppressive social structures, Gruenewald (2008) again argues that there is more interplay than initially realized.

Because of critical pedagogy's strong emphasis on transformation, the question of what needs to be conserved takes on special significance in a critical pedagogy of place. This question does not imply political and ideological alignment with those typically labeled "conservatives." Instead it makes this political category problematic by challenging everyone, from radicals to reactionaries, to specifically name those aspects of cultural ecological, and community life that should be conserved, renewed or revitalized. (p. 319)

But what skills, knowledge, or dispositions are needed for students to participate in this complex interaction of ideas and understanding for the critical purpose of conserving, renewing, and revitalizing rural places?

What is Knowledge?

Gee (1991) argues that "discourse [is] an 'identity kit' which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act and talk so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize" (p. 3). If we follow Gee's argument, then the identity kit or knowledge that schooling must expect of all students in a democratic society is that which prepares them to create, critique, and act on the dialogue of "good

life” in community. However, in order to act and talk in a way that “others will recognize,” there must be a shared conception of not only what constitutes the “good life,” but, more importantly, who gets to create and transform it.

In her landmark study, Anyon (1981) explored the role of knowledge in four types of schools, which she identified as executive elite, affluent professional, middle class, and working class. Based on students’ response to the question, “What is knowledge?” Anyon concluded that schools were preparing students for very different “identity kits.” In executive elite schools, Anyon concluded that knowledge was academic, intellectual, and rigorous. While only half of the students felt they could create knowledge, that understanding was not because they didn’t have the right to do so, as it was in the middle-class and working-class schools, but rather out of deference to the tradition of knowledge and power to be inherited. In contrast, when students at the working-class school were asked what is meant by knowledge, “not a single child used the word *think*. Only one mentioned the word *mind*. When asked if they could make knowledge, only one said yes” (Finn, 1999, p. 12). Clearly, students are being given distinctly different ways of seeing their place in a society that is no longer predicated on the doing of the body but on the understandings of the mind. Therefore, it follows that if we see knowledge as one basis of identity, Anyon’s (1981) study speaks to a discrepancy in both the instruction of and expectations for all students, and thus, all citizens. And with high levels of poverty in rural places, Anyon’s study has clear implications for rural schools and students.

Delpit (1995) also speaks to the varied identity kits given to some students and not others and moves the argument further by examining the power structure inherent in language.

While linguists have long proclaimed that no language variety is intrinsically “better” than another, in a stratified society such as ours, language choices are not neutral. The language associated with the power structure—“Standard English”—is the language of economic success, and all students have the right to schooling that gives them access to that language. (p. 68)

Delpit’s critique is a cornerstone of the theory of literacy known as critical literacy. Born out of the work of Paulo Friere, critical literacy “has grown largely out of critical theory and its intersections with feminist theory, poststructuralist theories around language and power and education as a liberatory practice” (Jones, 2006, p. 61).

To begin her examination of the role of critical literacy in the lives of working-class girls, Jones (2006) details the history of critical literacy. Her historical analysis of the theory begins with an examination of Friere’s liberatory theory of literacy.

Paulo Freire is considered a pioneer of critical theory and critical literacy. A major goal of his work with adult literacy learners was *praxis*, or reflective practice that engages critical rethinkings and reimaginings; critical reflection and action. (p. 61)

From there, Jones (2006) introduces the work of critical researchers such as Alvermann and Hong Xu (2003), Clarke (2005), and hooks (1994), who have pushed Friere’s notion of reflective practice even further with the determination that “critical literacy practices

are best grown from what students do and say, and from what we know about our students, their families and their communities” (p. 63). For critical literacy theorists, a rooting in individuals’ lives does not negate a larger vision of the systems in place that affect individuals. In fact, it is the critical examination of the power structure or system that sets critical literacy apart from other progressive theories of education that place the student at the center. It is this same focus on students’ lives and their community that situates it well within the purpose of place-based education and its call to use the local community and environment as a starting point to the teach concepts (Resor, 2010)

Jones (2006) details the importance of local interrogation by providing three layers of a critical inquiry stance: perspective, positioning, and power:

- Perspective: All texts are constructed by people who are informed by particular ideologies—they are entrenched in *perspective*.
- Positioning: All texts make the experiences of some people seem more valuable than others, enabling some to exercise power more freely than others—they contribute to social and political *positioning*.
- Power: All texts grow from language practices, which are embedded in relations of social and political differentials that are distributed across a hierarchy in society—they are always indicative and productive of *power*.

(p. 67)

These layers of text, with text being all that is spoken, written, performed, and enacted, in turn lead Jones (2006) to define critical literacy as,

...an understanding that language practices and texts are always informed by ideological beliefs and perspectives whether conscious or not. It is a habit of practice to think beyond and beneath text, investigating issues of power and whose interests are being served by texts, whose interests are not being served and why. (p. 67)

This definition of critical literacy demands that teachers enable students to have both the experience of and from a disposition towards considering their own position within a larger system. This definition of critical literacy reveals that critical literacy can serve as a lens to examine the larger systems of social, economic, and political power. Taken one step further, critical literacy in service of a critical pedagogy of place calls for an examination not of only larger but local systems of social, economic, (including environmental) and political power.

Therefore, critical literacy in service of the purpose of a critical pedagogy of place calls on systems of education to prepare students to ask such challenging questions as “What is my responsibility to others not in some abstract fair and just society, but rather in this society?” Or even, “What makes this community a fair and just society?” and “How is our treatment of the environment mirrored in our human interaction within the democracy?” By preparing students to ask such questions, the mode of critical literacy, in service towards the outcome of a critical pedagogy of place, calls for teachers and students to live and collaborate as “cultural workers” (Friere, 1998).

Cognizant of this call to prepare both teachers and students to do the important work of both sustaining and renewing democracy within particular places, Finn (1999)

builds on Gee's (1991) precedented work on powerful literacy, to present the concept of levels of literacy. These literacy levels are particularly important in a critical pedagogy of place because of Finn's attention to the preparation (or lack thereof) of working-class students to fully participate in a democratic society.

The Role of Literacy Levels. While Finn (1999) is most interested in raising the literacy of working-class students so that these students and teachers can see that "powerful literacy and school discourse are necessary and desirable to further their self interest," the framework of critical literacy in service of a critical pedagogy of place provides us with a larger purpose for providing all students with an identity kit of powerful literacy (p. 205). But first, the levels.

As Finn (1999) tells us, "there's literacy, and then there's literacy" (p. 124). All of the students in Anyon's (1981) study were literate by Stahl's (1997) definition of literacy as the "flexible use of [an] intertwining process" to decode a text and comprehend it. However, some were given the identity kit of literacy as a powerful tool to create, deliberate, and assign knowledge. Others were given a literacy of alienation and distance, presenting students with knowledge as something held and transformed by others. Finn (1999) ties these understandings of literacy to the levels of literacy taught in schools.

The lowest level [performative level] is simply the ability to 'sound out' words and turn sentences that are typical of informal face-to-face conversation into writing... The next level is the 'functional level'...[which] is the ability to meet the reading and writing demands of an average day of an average person...The

third level is the ‘informational level’ [which] is the ability to read and absorb the kind of knowledge that is associated with the school and to write examinations and reports based on such knowledge... The fourth level is ‘powerful literacy.’ Powerful literacy involves creativity and reason—the ability to evaluate, analyze, and synthesize what is read. (p. 124)

Finn (1999) predicated the need to teach all students, but particularly working-class students, powerful literacy. While powerful literacy can therefore support these students in serving their own self-interests, clearly there are implications for the larger purpose of a democracy that seeks actively to define and redefine the “good life” for all its citizens. So, what does powerful literacy look like in the classroom and by extension, for what type of role in a democracy does powerful literacy, which I am equating with critical literacy, prepare students?

If we believe the central tenet of place-based education that the classroom is not separate from the world outside it, but rather preparation and interaction with the everyday business of living in a particular place, then the practice of critical literacy is as important as the theory. Jones (2006) outlines three actions consistently implemented by students engaged in critical literacy:

- deconstruction, which reminds us that “all texts are constructed” and once taken apart can “unveil power, perspective and positioning;”
- reconstruction, which may be about recreating new pieces of literature, but is more interested in “new identities”; and

- social action, which is the act of engaging in long-term inquiry and social action projects around a particular social issue.

In a similar vein, Smith offers five approaches to place-based learning: (a) local cultural studies, (b) local nature studies, (c) local internships and entrepreneurial opportunities, and (d) community issue-investigation and problem-solving. A clear overlap exists between the two in that Smith's first two practices are in line with critical literacy's notion of deconstruction, while the third is in line with reconstruction and the fourth, social action.

In this way, critical literacy acts in service of place-based learning and more specifically a critical pedagogy of place. Able to deconstruct, reconstruct, and take social action with perspective, positioning and power, rural students will not be preparing for some abstract notion of democracy but will already be engaged in the process with the skills, knowledge, and disposition of democratic life.

Conclusion

A case can be made for the importance of establishing a critical pedagogy of place particularly in an "educational climate that is increasingly focused on quantitative, paper-and-pencil outcomes at the expense of what it means to live well in a place" (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 321). Moreover, particular attention to rural places is warranted given the current undervaluing of rural places, as evident from the outmigration of rural persons, and the rapid decline of committed rural teachers due in part to lack of preparation for and support of teachers in rural places.

It is in this current climate that this research draws from these three seemingly distinct bodies of literature: sense of place, rural teacher preparation and retention, and pedagogy of place. While the pairing of these three bodies may seem unlikely, taken together they suggest that a strong framework for examining rural teacher motivations should not stop at simply what is done to and for teachers in preparing them to teach in rural places. Instead, if rural research is truly interested in speaking with and not simply for rural teachers, it must also push further and deeper to examine how teachers' own sense of community both brings them to rural places and informs their teaching practices. Therefore, exploring both teachers' decision to come and remain in rural places and their commitment to the rural communities as evident in their teaching practices is both critical and timely. And while the three areas of this review: rural sense of place, teacher preparation and retention, and critical pedagogy have not been brought together in previous rural research, this study will begin to explore what, if any, overlap exists among these three areas in the teaching practice of six rural teachers.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

While much has been written separately about the three areas of research upon which I am building my study—democratic education, rural perspective, and critical literacy—my exploration of how these three areas work together in rural classrooms seeks to open new connections between all three. Because an investigation of how teachers’ rural perspective encourages their use of critical literacy to prepare students for democratic citizenry is complex and not easily mapped onto a quantitative measure, I chose a qualitative research methodology in order to obtain “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) and utilized collective case study as my research design.

Yin (1989) defines case study research design as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used”(p. 23). I chose collective case study to better understand how two contexts—teachers’ sense of community and their beliefs as to the purpose of education—inform what “level of literacy” they use with and seek to support in their students (Finn, 1999). More specifically this research looks at what sense of community exists for rural teachers and what, if any, impact that sense of community has on a rural teachers’ practice.

Collective case study was the ideal design to begin to understand these questions because it allowed me to examine in detail six participants’ experiences as rural teachers

in one rural middle school. I chose case study over other qualitative designs, such as ethnography, because the ultimate interest of my study was to understand this particular population's motivations on their practice. I felt this understanding of case study called for a more focused scope than ethnography's goal to "place specific encounter, events and understandings in a fuller, more meaningful context" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 380). Through case design, I could ask questions of teachers regarding how they came to that rural school and what impact their current connection to the community had on the daily decisions of classroom practice. I could also observe their classes and look for outward signs of a teachers' sense of community on their curriculum choice or the culture of their classroom.

Overview of Research Process

The research was conducted at one rural middle school in a mountain west state. The two sources of qualitative data collected were interview and classroom observation. This chapter will explain each of these sources of data in more detail. Additionally, I used the Sense of Community Index (SCI-2), a quantitative measure to determine the community orientation of each of my six participants. Reflexive journaling was also used throughout the study as a strong analytic tool. Data was collected during a 10-week period.

The study began by soliciting volunteers to participants. This was done by putting information in all of the teacher mailboxes at the school. Seven participants volunteered for the study. After participants were selected, an initial assessment of the teachers' sense

of community was administered. I used the Sense of Community Index (SCI-2), a quantitative measure to assess prospective participants' sense of community. During weeks two and three, interviews were conducted with these six participants. Classroom observation data, the second data source, was then collected from week three until the final week of the study. As a part of the observation process, participants debriefed two of the four observations. Throughout the research process, I utilized reflexive journaling.

These two sources of data were selected for two reasons: my research questions and the need to establish trustworthiness. Later in the chapter, I will discuss each of the sources of data collection as they related to Guba's (1981) four criteria for establishing trustworthiness. I will also explain how selecting these two data sources lead to triangulation. However, I want to first discuss how these two data sources were directly tied to my research question.

Research Questions

My decision to use multiple data sources was rooted in a desire to understand not only what teachers believe but also how what they believe may influence how they act. This research focus is delineated in my research questions that asks not only the what but also the why. The first set of research questions ask, "What sense of community or communities exists for rural teachers? Within the various ways of being rural, what possible impacts or influences affect teachers' way of experiencing both the broader community and the community of their individual classroom?"

Interview allows the researcher to “collect background information about the respondents’ personal characteristics and their environment that can aid the researcher in interpreting the results” (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachimas, 2008, p. 218). Because the question calls for participant reflection, interview was an appropriate data source to measure this question. Observation allows researchers “to validate verbal reports by comparing them with actual behavior” (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachimas, 2008, p. 191). Therefore, observation was a second valid data source for this question. In this way, the information and perceptions that were gained through interview were then “validated” through observation.

The second set of research questions ask, “What, if any, impact does a teachers’ sense of community have on their teaching practice? What, if any, difference exists in the classroom practices of teachers’ with a high sense of community and those with a low sense of community as measured by the Sense of Community Index (SCI-2)?” (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). Interview data can be used to explore these two questions; however, these questions can also be explored through observation. So once again a combination of interview and observation was used as the data source to measure this question.

While interview and observation were selected specifically because they measure a perception and the possible manifestation of that perception respectively, these multiple methods, along with reflexive journaling were used as a means for triangulating, the data. Triangulation is “a powerful strategy for enhancing the quality of research” (Krefting, 1991, p. 219). Knafl and Breitmayer (1993) established four methods of triangulation: triangulation of data methods, triangulation of data sources, theoretical triangulation and

triangulation of investigators. While each of these methods has different advantages in strengthening the quality of research, this study chose to utilize triangulation of data methods, which compares data collected by multiple means in an effort to increase the credibility that a study is “representing the multiple realities revealed by informants as adequately as possible” (Krefting, 1991, p. 215).

The remainder of this chapter will look, with more detail, at how each of the two data collection sources reinforce Guba’s (1981) criteria for trustworthiness. However, since rural research should be rooted in rural meanings (Howley et al., 2005) this research must now turn to a description of the rural participants and the rural site at which this research took place.

Research Design

Description of Participants

Initially, I had seven participants agree to participate in the study; however, one participant was a paraprofessional and not a certified teacher. Therefore, out of the seven participants, six were chosen for this study. After reading about the details of the research project and giving informed consent, all six participants volunteered to participate in the study. Participants were not given any compensation for their participation outside of my gratitude and the opportunity to engage in collegial discussion through the interview and classroom observation debriefing process. All of the participants were rural teachers. To clarify this definition, I chose the language of the State Board of Education in which this research was conducted. The State Board defines an active teacher as a “K-12 teacher

with a valid Idaho certificate who is currently teaching in an Idaho K-12 classroom” (Idaho State Board of Education, 2004, para. 1). All six of the participants chosen to participate in the study fit this definition of active teacher. Added to this definition is the adjective “rural.” While the next section will provide more details as to what constitutes a rural place, I define rural teacher as an active teacher who practices in a rural district. Therefore, it is important to note that not all of the teachers involved in the study lived in the rural place in which the research was conducted. Residing in the town of Adams was not part of my criteria.

Within the larger definition of rural teachers, the participants broke into three groups: those with a high sense of community, those with a medium sense of community, and those with a low sense of community. This further grouping was determined based solely on the teachers’ score on the Sense of Community Index (SCI-2) and teachers were not asked to self identify as rural.

The two teachers with the highest sense of community were Abby and Kate (pseudonyms). Kate had been teaching in the district for six years and taught Agriculture Education classes for both the middle school and high school. She also served as the Future Farmers of America (FFA) advisor. She was raised on a ranch and returned frequently to work with her family. Unlike many of the other participants, she resided in the town of Adams. Like Kate, Abby also had a rural upbringing. However, while Kate’s rural roots were outside of “the valley,” Abby could trace her family roots to the area from the “early 1800s” (Interview 1, 4/17/10). Additionally, her husband was a farmer, and Abby often commented on how her family’s livelihood was connected to the

farm. At the time of this research, Abby was in her second year of teaching and had come to profession after working for a government agency that supports place-based education in K-16 schools. She taught 7th and 8th grade Science.

The two teachers with a medium sense of community were Steven and Phillip (pseudonyms). Similar to those teachers with a high sense of community, Steven also had a rural upbringing; however, unlike Abby and Kate, his family's livelihood was not directly connected to the land. Steven also appeared to identify strongly with sports, a connection that began in high school as a student-athlete and then continued as a coach at Adams Middle School. In fact, in the halls and his own classroom, many of the students referred to him as "Coach." When he came to Adams Middle School, he had five years of previous teaching experience and was in his second year of teaching at Adams. He taught 5th grade. He did not live in the town of Adams.

Raised in Mexico City and with no "roots" in the community, Phillip came to Adams after his wife was offered a position in the district. At the time of this research, he was in his eighth year of teaching at Adams Middle School. While Phillip and his family did not reside in Adams, he and his wife chose to put their two children in schools in the district. He taught Spanish and P.E.

The two teachers with a low sense of community were Olivia and Roger (pseudonyms). A bit of a "wandering soul," Roger was raised around the world as the son of a service man (Interview 1, 4/10/10). At the time of the research, he was in his third year of teaching at Adams and had five years of teaching experience prior to coming to

Adams at two different schools. He taught 7th and 8th grade English. Like Steven and Phillip, Roger did not live in the town of Adams.

Olivia came to Adams Middle School 21 years ago. It was her first teaching position, and in her 21 year tenure at Adams, Olivia never strayed from teaching the 6th grade. She came to teaching slightly later in life, after raising her own family, and despite her long tenure as an Adams teacher, never lived in the community.

Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) define participant-observer as “observers [who] become participants in the activities of the group revealing their identities and the goals of their research” (p. 260). Therefore, this definition and my understanding of my role as a participant-observer requires some personal background. Raised in a rural community in Nebraska, in a family made possible through adoption, I had the opportunity to see rural life through a unique lens. With two bi-racial siblings, I grew up acutely aware of the ways in which one’s ethnicity can define one’s sense of belonging in a rural community. In many ways, this awareness, coupled with the fact that my family moved to this rural community when I was an infant, and even after 34-years of residence in the town couldn’t claim “native” status, made me a bit of an outsider to rural life. However, on the flip side, I personally was well served in a rural community, and have extremely fond memories of my own rural childhood. Memories of days spent riding my bike through town or entire days at the community pool, without a parent in sight, are constant reminders of the safety and security that remain with me from my own rural upbringing. I returned to these rural roots, when I began working in Adams as a

literacy coach, two years prior to beginning this research project. At the time of the research, my position had grown to include student support and curriculum development.

However, as I took this position with Adams and as that work there grew into this research, I became more aware of potential biases that my own rural upbringing had on the lens through which I view rural education. When I was in a rural place like Adams, I was both insider and outsider. Many of my own positive rural experience filled my senses when I joined our students at the homecoming parade or saw them walking in large groups to the local hamburger joint on their lunch break or, more importantly, getting the one-on-one support by a teacher who truly knows them. However, I was also keenly aware of those students who are not represented on the homecoming floats, are not in the group that walks together, and those that sit silent in the corner of the classroom. Therefore, it is important to note that I saw Adams through a lens that appreciates the connection of community, but also questions the social structure that, in part, creates that community. Because of her ethnicity, my sister was always the outsider in our rural community, held there by teachers, administrators, students and, in the end as a coping mechanism, by herself. I saw my sister everywhere when I was at Adams Middle School. Due to this potential bias, I used reflexive journaling throughout this research process to uncover those moments when my analytical eye held too tightly to my own bias.

Description of Site

While my already established role in the community of Adams both complicates and adds credibility to this study, I chose this site for research because it is rural. While

this classification may seem unproblematic, pinning down a precise definition of what makes someplace or someone rural is much more complex—so complex that even the U.S. government has three varying definitions of rurality that are used by different departments. Definitions used by Federal agencies rely on the use of population-size thresholds ranging from 2,500 to 50,000 people and attempt to establish physical rurality through a myriad of definitions of dependency and interdependency (Rural Assistance Center, 2009). However, according to Budge (2005), “the most agreed upon definition” of rurality by rural researchers comes from the U.S. Census Bureau and defines rurality as a “residential category of place outside urban areas, in open country, in communities of fewer than 2,500, or where the population density is less than 1,000 inhabitants per square mile” (p. 4).

Adams is a town of 2,528 located 40 miles from the largest metropolitan area in the state. Adams’s population places it ever so slightly above the U.S. Census Bureau’s density marker of 2,500 to deem a community “rural” (United States Department of Census, 2000). However, “add to this definitional menu the decidedly less measurable, but some have argued, more important notions of ‘local commitments’ and ‘meaning-making’ that, more than geographic boundaries of the traditional constructs of demography, distinguish rural places” (Howley, 1997, p. 2). In other words, it is not simply the census or location of Adams that makes it rural, but rather the community’s rural sensibility. According to Adam’s own city website, the town is small, rural and sees itself as such.

Similar to other rural places, Adams also experiences many of the rural realities of poverty, high unemployment, and low levels of education (Theobald, 2002; Hardy, 2005; Monk, 2007). While these realities are not necessarily shared with the neighboring metropolitan area, due to the place-based economy of rural places like Adams (Monk, 2007), they do help to define it. Below is a table that compares several economic indicators for Adams and the neighboring metropolitan area. While “there are discrepancies in the literature regarding whether the rurality of a school hurt the academic performance of its students, there are a variety of reasons to think that rurality would negatively affect educational outcomes—e.g. socioeconomic disadvantage” being one of those indicators (Beck and Shoffstaff, 2005, p. 2). The following table indicates that in comparison Adams does appear to be at a socioeconomic disadvantage when compared to its neighbor to the east.

Table 3.1

The Rural Reality of Adams

Area	Unemployment Rate	Mean Household Income	Poverty Rate	Levels of Education
Adams	5.5%- Unemployed- 42.2%-Not in the labor force	\$24,196	17.8%-families 20.3%-individuals	42.5%-no high school diploma 32.7%-high school graduate 16.5%-Some college, no degree 3.0%-Associate’s Degree 3.4%-Bachelor’s Degree 2.0%-Graduate Degree

table continues

Table 3.1 (continued)

Area	Unemployment Rate	Mean Household Income	Poverty Rate	Levels of Education
Neighboring Metropolitan Area	3.1%-Unemployed- 27.5%-Not in the labor force	\$42,432	5.9%-families 8.4%-individuals	8.9%-no high school diploma 21.2%-high school graduate 29.2%-Some college, no degree 7.2%-Associate's Degree 23.2%-Bachelor's Degree 10.6%-Graduate Degree

Note. Adapted from the United States Department of Census, 2000

Many of the rural realities of the Adams community were present at Adams Middle School. As such, the school received Title I funds. Title I funds:

Provide additional academic support and learning opportunities to help low-achieving children master challenging curricula and meet state standards in core academic subjects. For example, funds support extra instruction in reading and mathematics, as well as special preschool, after-school, and summer programs to extend and reinforce the regular school curriculum. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, para 4)

Schools are eligible for Title I funds if 40% of the student population is classified as low income (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). With over 60% of the population qualifying for free and/or reduced lunch, Adams Middle School received Title I funds. At Adams, these funds were used to secure a designated Title I teacher to run an after-school

program two days a week, and to hold yearly parents' nights on how the school and the home could partner to recognize and build students' literacy skills.

However, while poverty is evident and prevalent at Adams, so is a rich sense of pride. The building itself, with its murals and painted ceiling tiles, created by Advanced Art students, is just one indication of the pride felt at the school. The school building and the grounds are well maintained. Unlike the dire descriptions in Kozol's (1992) *Savage Inequalities*, with ceiling tiles falling down and bathrooms left unclean seemingly for months, Adams is meticulously maintained. Classroom carpets are swept each night and trash removed. Students wipe down the tables after lunch and trash is rarely seen outside in the yard. In fact, prior to the first day of school each year, all of the hallways are buffed and shined, giving the entire building a welcoming glow when students first enter. Additionally, there is a sense of pride in both the academic and athletic accomplishments of the school. Students are willing to display "school pride" in their dress, especially on Fridays, where students and staff are encouraged to wear their Adams gear. The school also offers many opportunities for students, including after-school robotics and knowledge bowl clubs. These groups are offered in addition to traditional school sports: volleyball, basketball, football, wrestling, and track. While a description of the site provides a rural context for the study, the next section of this chapter will provide more details on the qualitative framework utilized in this study.

Data Sources

I chose two data sources in my research: interview and observation. The decision to use these specific data sources originated directly from my research questions. I also privileged the trustworthy strategy of triangulation of data sources and therefore needed multiple data sources to determine the workability of emerging themes and relationships.

Interview

I chose semi-structured interviews because the open-ended questioning allowed for a greater breadth of data than other types (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 652). I also preferred this type of interview protocol because it provided an opening set of questions but allowed the conversation to move in a natural way even while employing the use of probes (Glesne, 2006). I began the interview using a two-part script (Appendix A).

This script was developed by the researcher and then reviewed by a panel of four experts in the reflexives of rural education, teacher education, and literacy. Initially, the script contained reflective questions that asked participants to consider their own sense of community and what effects that sense of community might have on their practice. However, through the review process, the script changed into the two-part script. The first part included a revised version of those initial reflective questions, and a second part was added that provided the participants with a scenario in which a change at the school board level called on teachers to privilege local knowledge. Participants were then asked to provide feedback to this initiative. Additionally, the review process called for a tighter connection between interview questions and the overarching research questions. The

Initial Interview Protocol demonstrates the relevance between each interview question and the corresponding research question. However, as a specific example, the third question, which asks participants to describe their connection to the larger community of Adams, is directly relevant to the first research question that is interested in rural teachers' sense of community. The finalized interview protocol was once again reviewed by the panel of experts before its use in the study.

Once approved, the initial interview protocol was utilized one time with each of the six participants. The interview was conducted within the first two-weeks of the study and all participant responses were audio taped and transcribed.

Classroom Observation

Classroom observation was selected as a second data source because such observations allowed me to compare any initial understandings found from participant interviews with an actual enactment of literacy practices. Again, the need for such comparison directly stemmed from my research questions that asked me to explore teacher's perceptions of self and their actual actions.

I collected classroom observations using a classroom observation protocol that I designed specifically for this project (Appendix B). Since I was interested in looking at teaching practices associated with powerful literacy, I based the content of the protocol on Finn's (1999) characteristics of domesticating versus liberating education.

In creating the protocol, I utilized the topography section of Young, Brett, Squires and Lemire's (1995) Classroom Observation Tool for Inquiry Learning. I chose Young et

al.'s (1995) tool because the "heart of [their] tool became a typography, a continuum rating scale with more inquiry-based practices on one end and more traditional practices on the other" (p. 5). While Finn's characteristics, which were concerned with domesticating versus liberating education, were different than Young et al. (1995), I felt the general model of using a continuum to demonstrate practice among and between two ends of a spectrum was well suited for my research purposes. In Finn's work, each of these fifteen characteristics is presented as a binary of domesticating ("knowledge taught is not related to the lives and experiences of the students") versus liberating ("knowledge taught is always related to the lives and experiences of students") (Finn, 1999. p. 198). Therefore, in adapting Finn's (1999) characteristics to Young et al.'s (1995) typology section, I placed each of Finn's fifteen characteristics on the continuum with domesticating on the left side and liberating on the right. Additionally, I chose to utilize a continuum because my own classroom experience and work as a school administrator suggested that teacher action is rarely either domesticating or liberating, but rather reflects qualities of both sides of the binary.

Each of the fifteen characteristics on the tool has two parts: the continuum and a space for descriptive notes. Since I feared that simply marking a practice on the continuum would ultimately result in too great of a reduction of data, the descriptive section to the protocol allowed for a thick description of those practices (Geertz, 1973). A double-entry format was used. In the descriptive section, I recorded direct quotes and descriptions of classroom activities that directly related to each characteristic under each continuum. Directly below the actual description of classroom events, I allowed space for

my own thoughts, feelings, and questions. To show how this double-entry format allowed for thick description, I will provide an example (Geertz, 1973).

Under the seventh continuum characteristic, “discussion of challenges to the status quo rarely occur” to “discussion of the challenges to the status quo frequently occurred, I recorded the following actual description of classroom notes: “Twelve minute discussion of power: collectivism versus individualism.” Teacher Statement: “Wave was an abuse of power.” Teacher Question: “Could this happen here in Adams?” (Classroom Observation 1 for Roger, 4/16/11). Following these actual notes, I recorded my own reflections, “Interesting to hear such a long discussion focused exclusively on collectivism and power as it relates to the novel. I wonder if this is a typical discussion in this classroom.” (Classroom Observation 1 for Roger, 4/16/11). This example shows how under each continuum there was space to include details and quotes from the class, along with my own reflections. Creating such a space on the observation tool utilized the strategy of reflexivity and gives credence to Krefting’s (1991) argument that this type of journaling allows researchers to become familiar with the “biases and preconceived assumptions” emerging in the data collection process (p. 218).

In implementing this protocol, I used the continuum and double-entry format together. For example, one of the characteristics is the connection between knowledge presented and the lives of students. During observation, I recorded details of when I directly observed the teacher drawing a connection between a concept and the lives of the students. In such instances where the teacher would draw a parallel (e.g., the irrigation system in Egypt and its similarities to farming in Adams), I would note this conversation,

along with my thoughts and additional observations, in the double-entry format. I would note these moments as they related to the fifteen characteristics throughout the observation. In other words, based on the dialogue or activity in the classroom, I might make a notation on the first characteristic, followed by the thirteen and then return to the first. At the conclusion of the observation, I would return to these notes under each of the fifteen characteristics, reflect on the amount/quality of the interactions, and mark the continuum appropriately. In many cases, there were not notes under a particular characteristic and so I would mark the continuum to reflect that this particular characteristic was not evident during this observation.

Tools for Reflection

Reflexive Journaling

While my reflexive journal was not a data source, it played a critical role in analyzing the two data sources and so I include a description of my use of this tool here. I chose to utilize reflexive journal as a way to “own and [be] reflective about [my] own voice and perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 41). In general, I utilized reflexive journaling by writing in a reflexive journal after completing an aspect of the research process. For example, I wrote in the journal after each interview and at the end of a day of classroom observations. I did not utilize any set questions in my reflexive journaling, but instead allowed myself to write on observations, questions, or concerns that were lingering after a particular interview or observation. For example, after completing my fourth participant interview, I began my reflexive journal in this way,

Just finished my fourth interview and I am left this question, “who can claim rural teacher as their identity?” In other words, what does the face, experience, expectations of rural teachers look like? If I want to prepare my students to leave the rural community because I know, from my own rural experience, that the opportunities in rural towns are economically limited, am I any less rural?

(Reflexive Journal, 4/19/10)

Knowing that “all researchers take sides, or are partisan for one point of view or another,” reflexive journaling after each interview and observation allowed me to more clearly understand my own partisanship and to interrogate how my perspective may be influencing the collection of data (Denzin, 1989, p. 23). For example, after reviewing the above example from my reflexive journal on April 19th, I went back to this question of what constitutes a rural identity and created a diagram comparing characteristics of two participants: one with a high sense of community and one with a low sense of community. The purpose of this diagram was to more systematically interrogate this question by creating a visual that, for instance, noted time lived in rural community and general feelings expressed about that rural community, in order to explore places where my overarching question regarding who can claim a rural identity may be affecting my data collection.

Similar to Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) description of a reflexive journal, my reflexive journal contained two parts. The first part contained logistical information (i.e., schedule of interviews and observations), and the second part was a personal journal where I revealed my thoughts, feelings, concerns, and perceptions. These writing were

then allowed to collect for a week. At the end of that time period, I reviewed all of the entries for that week to evaluate emerging or potential biases. I would then write a summary noting any themes and potential concerns.

Now that I have provided a more detailed description of my two data sources and the analytic tool I used in analyzing these sources, I will turn my attention to foundations of my research design, followed by an examination of the strategies I utilized to ensure trustworthiness.

Research Foundations of Study

Under the larger umbrella of social science research, qualitative research is, at its core, the study of the empirical world (Schmid, 1981). However, within this core definition Schmid (1981) outlined two central principles or understandings of qualitative research. The first is that behavior is influenced by the physical, socioculture, and psychological environment. The second is that behavior goes beyond what is observable, and therefore, “subjective meanings and perceptions of the subject are critical in qualitative research, and it is the researcher’s responsibility to access these” (Krefting, 1991, 214).

The Case for Case

The decision to utilize case study was born out of a nesting of my research question within a larger framework. I designed my research utilizing the qualitative method of case study with the understanding that case study “is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (Glesne, 2006, p. 13). Since I studied

teachers in the naturalistic settings of their classrooms, case study was an appropriate choice. To more clearly define what I mean by case study, this research is situated within Stake's (1995) three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective.

Stake (1995) differentiates between intrinsic and instrumental by defining the goal of an intrinsic case study as gaining a better understanding of that particular case and the goal of instrumental as using a particular case to "provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization" (p. 437). Because I am interested in drawing generalizations about how rural teachers with a high sense of community both think and act in the classroom, I conducted an instrumental case study that focuses on six cases of rural teachers from one rural middle school. My research was an instrumental case study because, through my detailed examination of six teachers first as separate cases and then as a collective body, I hoped to provide "insight into the issue" of rural teachers and what, if any, impact sense of community has on teachers' conception of their community and their practice (Stake, 1995, p. 437).

The choice to pursue qualitative research was first and foremost a question of purpose. Since the purpose of this research project was to develop theory about the motivations of rural teachers, this research is firmly rooted in a qualitative process in which researchers "collect data, formulate hypotheses based on the data, test their hypotheses using the data, and attempt to develop theory" (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008, p. 268). As qualitative researcher, I created space for the theory "to arise out of [and be] directly relevant to the particular setting under study," thus grounding the theory (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008, p. 268). Therefore, I have

adopted Charmaz's (2000) definition of constructivist grounded theory as a guide for my research stance and sensibility. Recognizing

...the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and the multiple realities that are experienced by any larger group of persons, constructivist grounded theory allows researchers to reclaim the tools [of Grounded Theory] from their positivist underpinnings to form a revised, more open-ended practice of grounded theory that stresses its emergent, constructivist elements. (Charmaz, 2000, p. 510)

Therefore, I used constructivist grounded theory as a “flexible, heuristic [of] strategies rather than formulaic procedures” (p. 510). Strategies of constructivist grounded theory were selected out of a desire to:

...define conditional statements that interpret how subjects construct their reality. [Understanding that] these conditional statements do not approach some level of generalizable truth. Rather, they constitute a set of hypotheses and concepts that other researchers [and I would argue more importantly, participants] can transport to similar research problems and reflexives. (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524)

Mindful of the criticism of grounded theory as a “fracturing” of the data towards an objective truth (Conrad, 1990; Riessman 1990), I included multiple voices—both the teachers' and my own in conversation with the teachers'—and multiple visions of rural teachers' perspectives and practice. Teacher voices were recorded, documented, and analyzed through interviews and my own voice was examined through my reflexive journal.

While embracing many of the procedures of grounded theory such as coding and journaling, a constructivist stance also encourages the use of selective or focused coding. This type of coding allows for more conceptual analysis of data. The stance also asks researchers to use reflexive journaling, to unmask herself and her perceptions through the process of data collection, analysis, and reporting (Charmaz, 2000, p. 516).

In addition to utilizing specific practices within the theory of constructive grounded theory such as focused coding and reflexive journaling, Guba (1981) delineated four criteria of trustworthiness that any rigorous qualitative research design must heed. These four criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981). From these criteria, Krefting (1991) summarized and presented Guba's (1981) model as a series of strategies under each criteria that establish rigor in qualitative research. While I will talk about each of these areas in more detail in the data source section, below is a table of the strategies drawn from Krefting's (1991) work, which I utilized in my research. Because "not all qualitative research can be assessed by the same strategies," I have created a table outlining the strategies I have utilized in my research to be clear about what strategies I did choose to implement (Krefting, 1991, p. 214). I outline them here and discuss them in more detail with an exploration of each of the four criteria.

Table 3.2

Strategies for Trustworthiness

Criteria for Rigor (Lincoln and Guba, 1985)	Strategies (Krefting, 1991)
Credibility	Prolonged Reflexive Experience
	Reflexivity (Reflexive Journal)
	Triangulation
	Final Member Check
Transferability	Nominated strategy—SCI-2
	Dense Description of the Participants
Dependability	Triangulation of methods: interview, observation, and journaling
Confirmability	Triangulation of methods: interview, observation, and journaling

Note: Adapted from Krefting, 1991, p. 217.

Credibility

A qualitative study is credible when it presents such accurate descriptions or interpretations of human experience that those who share that experience are certain to recognize it (Sandelowsky, 1986). The notion of truth value in qualitative research, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) later termed credibility, is the most critical criteria for qualitative researchers to establish in that a credible study is one which can be trusted to reflect the multiple realities of those who serve as research informants (Krefting, 1991). In order to establish credibility, I utilized the strategies of prolonged reflexive experience, triangulation, reflexivity, and final member check.

Prolonged Reflexive Experience

According to Krefting (1991),

Credibility requires adequate submersion in the research setting to enable recurrent patterns to be identified and verified. Thus an important strategy is to spend an extended amount of time with informants, which allows the researcher to check perspectives and become accustomed to the researcher. (p. 217)

My own decision to work at Adams Middle School was a direct response to the need to establish prolonged reflexive experience. At the time of the study, I was engaged in the role of Curriculum, Instruction, and Student Support Director. In this role, I worked with teachers to develop and sustain curriculum, and implement best practices in their classroom. In practice, that portion of my job was an extension of my previous work at Adams, where in the year prior I served in a contractual position as the school's Literacy Coach. This role, which I began the prior year, allowed me to meet with teachers regarding their students' literacy goals and outcomes. Through this coaching model, my duties often changed based on the experience of the teacher. With more veteran teachers, I would often provide a support role in the classroom, i.e. working with individual students to revise a paper or comprehend a difficult text. However, with less experienced teachers, I would often model lessons or small units that encompassed a previous discussion between me and this teacher and highlighted skills he or she was interested in learning or improving.

In addition to my work with curriculum and instruction, an even larger portion of my position was student support. In this role, I worked alongside teachers to assess

students who were struggling and, through another staff member who worked with me, offer intervention and individualized classroom support for those student. While my work with curriculum and instruction never felt adversarial and was often extremely collegial, it was this work with students that teachers seemed to appreciate most and perhaps went the furthest to build a collegiality between me and the teachers of Adams. While my work at this school the previous year as the Literacy Coach provided much less sustained contact with teachers and students, this new role, which I had assumed for over eight months at the time of the research, ensured that I had well-established relationships with the teachers and students at the school in that I served as a colleague and sounding board to the teachers as they developed new curriculum, tried a new teaching approach, or had a student who needed academic intervention. While this role had administrative functions—such as facilitating curriculum work and running an after-school program for Adams’ students—I did not supervise teachers. Therefore, serving in a position where I was there as a support to teachers and students allowed for more collegial relationships with teachers.

This prolonged investment of two years’ time, energy, and resources provided me as a researcher with a more conceptual view of this school and also engaged Krefting’s notion of prolonged reflexive experience. “A study’s credibility is threatened by errors in which research subjects respond with what they think is the preferred social response...use of prolonged engagement can assist in detecting [these] responses” (Krefting, 1991, 218). By working at Adams for just under two academic years at the

time of this research, the participants and I had engaged in numerous collegial conversations, where divergent ideas were expressed and encouraged.

However, while prolonged reflexive experience has many benefits in establishing a rapport with participants from which multiple realities can be shared and examined, researchers risk becoming so enmeshed that they lose the ability to interpret their findings (Krefting, 1991). Therefore, reflexivity is another credibility strategy used within this study to help ensure that over involvement did not occur (Krefting, 1991).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an assessment of the researchers own perceptions, interests, and background on the research process (Ruby, 1980). Qualitative research is reflexive in that the researcher is a part of the research and not separate from it (Krefting, 1991). Therefore, in order to guard against over involvement, I kept a reflexive journal. This journal had two parts: logistics and thoughts/reflections. As I was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, was critical that I be reflective about my role as both an insider and outsider to this community.

Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) define participant-observers as observers [who] become participants in the activities of the group revealing their identities and the goals of their research. [Furthermore] when researcher adopt this type of role, they....make long-term commitments to being active members of the group and attempt to establish close relationships with its members who subsequently serve as both informants and respondents. (p. 260)

As a participant-observer, particularly one in a rural community in which cultural insiders can be suspect of outsiders, my own experience as a rural person was critical as it affected both the rapport that I had and continue to have with the teachers. My own rural upbringing also affected my ability to think reflexively about the phenomenon that I witnessed in conducting this research. In engaging in this research as a participant-observer, I needed to be aware of the dual role of insider/outsider that I inhabited. Therefore, I used a reflexive journal to uncover and reflect upon the, often unconscious, duality of my position. In order to uncover any bias, I wrote in a reflexive journal after completing any one significant aspect of the research process. For example, I wrote in the journal after each interview and at the end of a day of classroom observations. I did not utilize any set questions in my reflexive journaling, but instead allowed myself to write on observations, questions, or concerns that were lingering after a particular interview or observation. At the end of a set period of time, which was usually a week, I reviewed all of the entries for that week to evaluate emerging or potential biases. I would then write a summary noting any themes and potential concerns.

As an example of my role as participant-observer and the type of reflexivity that the reflexive journal encouraged, I provide this excerpt from my reflexive journal. What follows is a summary excerpt that was written after reviewing entries from the first week of research. In several cases, while writing I alluded to research that I was reading and familiar with at the time of the study. However, I then returned to this entry at a later date and added the formal citations and page numbers that are found here.

While my own rural perspective is complex in that I was raised in a rural community but saw that experience through the lens of a biracial family—all of my siblings are adopted and as a family of color we were often kept at a distance from other rural families—the mere fact that I can talk “rural” helped me in developing a rapport with participants. As someone who has already had prolonged experience in rural communities in general and this rural community in particular, I can “act continually [or know when I am breaking cultural norms] in culturally appropriate ways” which is essential to establishing rapport. (Glesne, 2006, p. 111)

Conversely, the fact that I live in “the big city” and no longer choose the rural life as a place to raise my family makes me an outsider to many of the teachers in the school. The fact that I wear high heels on a daily basis, while an ongoing joke, is a real indicator that I am somehow “different” and not of this community. Additionally, my own complex feelings about both the benefits and the challenges of rural life, especially for those who, like my bi-racial brother and sister were considered “other,” had to be explored throughout the research project.

My own experience growing up in rural Nebraska, which at the time was racially, ethnically, and economically homogenous, has had a great impact on my own ways of thinking and knowing. My childhood had many of the romanticized notions of rurality: the sharing with neighbors of zucchini and tomatoes from our family garden, the small town potluck Fourth of July picnic, and the nights catching fireflies. However, because of my two biracial siblings, I saw all too often the detrimental effects of “local

intergeneration knowledge” in which racism and sexism is shared and encouraged to continue (Bowers, 2008, p. 328). While I have now lived almost as long away from this rural place as in it, I am constantly aware of the ways in which these “hidden dimensions” and complexity of the place of my childhood affect my thinking.

Triangulation

Triangulation is “based on the idea of convergence of multiple perspectives for mutual confirmation of data to ensure that all elements of the data have been of the phenomenon have been investigated” (Knafl & Breitmeyer, 1993). As previously mentioned in this chapter, this study chose to utilize triangulation of data methods, which compares data collected by multiple means in an effort to increase the credibility that a study is “representing the multiple realities revealed by informants as adequately as possible” (Krefting, 1991, p. 215). To that end, the study compared data from both data sources. This comparison of data sources was done in the data collection and data analysis portions of the research process. Throughout the data collection process, as interviews were conducted and classrooms observed, I recorded initial perceptions or thoughts in my journal of patterns or themes that appeared to be emerging. Then, in the data analysis process, I went back to these initial thoughts and perceptions and compared them against the data tables for interview and observation. I also concluded the research with a final member check.

“Central to the credibility of qualitative research is the ability of informants to recognize their experiences in the research finding. This strategy [member checking]

ensures that the researchers has accurately translated the informants' viewpoint” (Krefting, 1991, 219). To conduct final member checks, each participant was emailed a two-page handout that contained three sections: 1) the participants sense of community index rating as measured by the SCI-2 the themes that emerged through their interview, presented through the interview data table, and 3) the themes that emerged through the classroom observations, presented through the classroom observation table. In the body of the email, I informed the participants that as a part of finalizing my research, it was important that I conduct a member check to ensure that my understandings as a researcher were consistent with their own understandings as participants. I then asked them to please let me know either via email or by phone if they disagreed or were uncomfortable with any of the interview and/or classroom observation data collected, or my interpretation of that data.

Transferability

Transferability is the ability of the research findings to “fit the context outside the study situation” (Krefting, 1991, 216). While Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that transferability is more the responsibility of the person who wants to transfer the findings, Krefting (1991) reminds qualitative researchers who want to make generalizations that strategies for transferability must be implemented. Since this research utilized instrumental case study to begin to make generalizations, two strategies of transferability were utilized: defined group and dense description.

Defined Group

A key strategy for transferability is to ensure that the group being study represents a particular group (Krefting, 1991). Since the group under study was rural teachers with a sense of community, the Sense of Community Index (SCI-2) was used to compare the “characteristic of the informants to the demographic information available on the group being studied” (Krefting, 1991, p. 220). Therefore, the SCI-2 established each of the participants as belonging to the groups of “low,” “medium,” or high” sense of community (Appendix C). There were six participants in the study and results from the SCI-2 indicated that two participants scored in the low sense of community category, two in the medium and two in the high category.

Dense Description

Dense background information about the participants, the research context, and site is critical for establishing transferability (Krefting, 1991). To this end, this research, through data analysis, provides both condensed data through interview and observation tables, as well as providing direct comments from interviews and direct observations whenever appropriate. Additionally, a detailed description of the site is also provided at the beginning of this chapter.

Dependability

Dependability is the consistency of the findings (Guba, 1981). One of the strongest strategies of dependability is the “exact method of data gathering, analysis and

interpretation” (Krefting, 1991, p. 221). To that end, I have been transparent both in the role of data sources and the time frame in which they were collected. Additionally, dependability can be enhanced through triangulation. This research utilized triangulation of data sources to strengthen both credibility and dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the criteria of neutrality (Krefting, 1991). However, in qualitative research, this criterion investigates the neutrality of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation of data sources is one strategy to strengthen confirmability (Krefting, 1991). “Guba (1981) noted that an investigator should provide documentation for every claim or interpretation from at least two sources to ensure that the data support the researcher’s analysis and interpretations of the findings” (Krefting, 1991, p. 221). Therefore, this research confirmed all findings by data from each of the two data sources: interview and observation.

Now that I have reviewed the data sources and their collection as they relate to Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) four criteria for quality qualitative research, I will turn my attention to the data collection and discuss my general approach to data analysis.

Data Collection

Participant Selection

Initially, I had seven participants agree to participate in the study; however, one participant was a paraprofessional and not a certified teacher. While this paraprofessional

taught a full-complement of classes and in many ways was virtually indistinguishable for a certified teacher in her general roles and responsibilities, I decided to remove her from the study since my research design was a case study that focused on rural teachers.

While I had not clearly defined “teacher” prior to beginning my research, her removal from the study called for a clarification of my definition of teacher. To clarify this definition, I chose the language of the State Board of Education in which this research was conducted. The State Board defines an active teacher as a “K-12 teacher with a valid Idaho certificate who is currently teaching in an Idaho K-12 classroom” (Idaho State Board of Education, 2004, para. 1). Additionally, I included in my definition those active teachers who had obtained or were in the process of obtaining their credentials through alternative routes. Again, using language from the State Board, a route to alternative certification is “designed for candidates who want to enter the teaching profession for non-education professions or the para-education profession or for teachers...” (Idaho State Board of Education, 2004, para. 2). All six of the participants chosen to participate in the study fit this definition of active teacher.

The first step in data collection was to determine the community orientation of each participant. The six participants were given McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) Sense of Community Index (SCI-2) (Appendix C) to determine their sense of community. While my fundamental research approach is qualitative, I utilized this quantitative measure because it allowed for the identification of those teachers with a strong sense of community. Additionally, as previously stated, utilizing the SCI-2 was used to create a defined group. While determining membership within this group could have been

possible through initial interviews with the majority of the teachers at the school, this measure allowed for consistency in determining what it means to have a high, medium, or low sense of community. Because the SCI-2 assigns a quantitative number to a sense or feeling, utilizing such a measure ensured that participants were assigned to a group not based on their or my interpretation of their actions or perceptions of self but based upon their SCI-2 score, again allowing for a consistent assignment to group.

Sense of Community Index

The SCI-2 was developed in the reflexive of community psychology. Within that reflexive, there is some inconsistency on a standard measurement for Sense of Community. However, several reviews settle on two measures as most used and respected in the reflexive: Glynn's (1981) Perceived Sense of Community Index and McMillan and Chavis' (1986) Sense of Community Index (Puddingfoot, 1996, Chipuer and Pretty, 1999). The Sense of Community Index was selected "because it is *the* most used and broadly validated measure of SOC [my emphasis]" (Chavis & Pretty, 1999, p. 637).

McMillan and Chavis (1986) developed the Sense of Community (SCI) scale based on the definition of sense of community as "a feeling that members have of belonging and being important to each other, and a shared faith that members' need will be met by the commitment of being together" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 11). The measure, which originally consisted of 23 open- and closed-ended items and is now known as the long version of (SCI-L), measures four subgroups: membership, influence,

fulfillment of needs, and emotional connection. However, due to the time it took to administer the SCI-L, Chavis and his colleagues created a short form of the SCI, which consisted of 12 True/False and three open-ended questions. The total scale of this new, shorter version of the SCI was shown to have an internal reliability coefficient of .80 and several studies support the construct validity of the measure (Chipuer & Pretty, 1999).

Despite the overall internal reliability of the SCI, there was and continues to be much criticism as to the internal reliability of the subscales of the shortened form of the measure. Due to this inconsistency, many researchers eliminated items of the SCI-L and adapted the measure. However, this also led to consistency issues within the reflexive as many of these measures were not piloted and validity and reliability not established. Therefore, in 2008, Chavis, Lee and Acosta created a 24-item Sense of Community Index version 2 (SCI-2). Using a Likert like scale instead of the True-False format, this measure was piloted with 36 different persons and then used within a large survey of 1800 people. The analysis of the SCI-2 from the survey showed it had a reliable measure of .94. The subscales also proved to be reliable with coefficient alpha scores of .79 to .86 (Chavis, Lee & Acosta, 2008).

Based on teachers' scores on the SCI-2, I categorized the teacher into three groups: those with a low, medium, and high sense of community. Scores of the SCI-2 can range from 0-72. Using that range, I determined the following categories: low sense of community, medium sense of community, and high sense of community (Patton, 2002). While I did not have pre-set expectations for how these six participants would score in relations to the SCI-2, two of the participants scored in the lowest third of the range, two

of the participants scored in the middle third of the range, and two of the participants scored in the upper third of the range.

Interview

The second step in the process was conducting interviews. Each of the participants was interviewed once during the first two weeks of data collection. The interviews were held in the teachers' classroom, except in one case where the teacher's primary classroom was the gym and confidentiality could not be ensured. The interviews took between 30-60 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed. In all six cases, the interview protocol was used.

Observation

The third step in the data collection process was conducting classroom observations. Each participant was observed four times throughout the study. Observations spanned an entire class period and promptly began at the opening class bell and continued until the ending bell. As the primary researcher, I was the only one who conducted observations. However, as an additional credibility strategy, I debriefed two of the four observations with each teacher within one to two days after the observation was made. The debriefing was organized using an adapted version of the classroom observation protocol (Appendix B). In the debriefing protocol, the teacher was asked a series of questions including, "what was the purpose of this lesson?" Then, the participant was asked to mark how he or she felt that particular lesson fell on eleven of the Finn's

(1999) fifteen characteristics. Four of Finn's (1999) characteristics were deleted from this process since they may have been perceived as offensive to the teachers or reveal too much information about the research. For example, one of the characteristics is "domesticating: teachers make derogatory comments to and about students; liberating: teachers never make such comments."

In checking for agreement between my observations and the participants' understanding, I compared the two continuums. If both the participant and I marked the same area of the continuum for the observed lesson (e.g., practices falling closer to the first characteristic, between the two characteristics or closer to the end characteristic), I marked that particular characteristic as "in agreement." However, if, for example, I had marked an observed practice(s) as closer to the first characteristic and the participant marked it in the middle, then those characteristics were not considered in agreement. In the data analysis section of this chapter, I provide details as to the percentage of characteristics in agreement between the observation protocols teachers' debriefing protocol for each participant.

Reflexive Journal

Additionally, I kept a journal throughout the research process. I recorded my thoughts, feelings, and concerns after every interview and attempted to journal after every observation. However, sometimes I had to schedule back-to-back observations. In those instances, I would journal during the first available opportunity. At the end of a week, I

reread my entries and wrote a summary entry for the week that explored lingering themes or questions for the weeks journals

Member Checks

While I used an audio recording device for the interview, I did not use a computer-based analysis program for coding and coded all interview transcripts and observation protocols manually. To ensure that I accurately represented the interviews, I utilized member checks by simply asking the participants to review interview transcription and corroborate the information present there. This type of member check builds “descriptive validity” in that asking members to review the interview transcripts helps ensure that “descriptive accounts [are] factual—where the physical, concrete, or behavioral details are agreed to by both the researcher(s) and participant (Eisenhart, n.d.). If the participants disagreed with the information or wanted to add more information, the transcription was modified until agreement was obtained. To further increase the credibility of this analysis, final member checks were also used.

Final Member Check

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that to test the overall interpretations of the study, a final member check is necessary. Therefore, after all data had been collected and analysis completed, I conducted a final member check. This process took place by emailing each participant themes that emerged from their own individual data. This information was shared with participants by emailing them the data reduction matrixes

for the interview and observation data. To ensure confidentiality, I was careful to only send the portion of the matrix that was applicable to each participant. I also offered to share my final dissertation with any of the participants upon their request

Data Analysis

While my own understanding of the importance of democratic practices within the classroom informed my review of the literature, it was my intention to approach the gathering and analyzing of data from an inductive stance (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Therefore, I used an open-coding technique, which required me to identify potential themes by pulling together real examples from the text (Agar, 1996; Bernard, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The codes I used reflect standard grounded theory practice in that they were “active, immediate and short” and focused on “definition action, explicating implicit assumptions and seeing process” (Charmaz, 2005, 517). A constructivist grounded theory stance was adopted, which means I used the process of transcribing and coding both the interviews transcripts and my own reflexive journals to triangulate data methods. However, instead of line-by-line coding, I utilized selective coding, which seeks to identify more conceptual chunks in the data (Charmaz, 2000). Since my research looked at the interplay between three relatively distinct areas of research, I did not establish a priori categories, but allowed themes to emerge from the interview data.

The actual process of coding began by looking for themes in the interview data. So, for example, in responding to one of the initial interview questions that ask

participants why they chose a rural district, the following codes emerged in my interview data: Own Rural Upbringing, Personal History, Land/Location, Mission, and Recommendations. As grounded theory is a “comparative method in which the researcher compares data with data, data with categories, and category with category,” I then compared these codes against all six participants to check for convergence and divergence (Charmaz, 2005, p. 517). When I was satisfied that these five codes represented the various participant responses to this initial question, I grouped them under the theme, “coming to a rural place” and explored their appearance in other parts of the interview data, and later in the observation and reflexive journal.

Once I began identifying and confirming codes, I built a code book based on Milstein’s (1998) definition of a good code book (Appendix D). MacQueen, McLellan, Kay & Milstein (1998) suggests that a good code book includes a detailed description of each code, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and examples of real text for each theme .

Throughout the data analysis process, there were four major points of analysis. Figure 3.2 graphically represents these points:

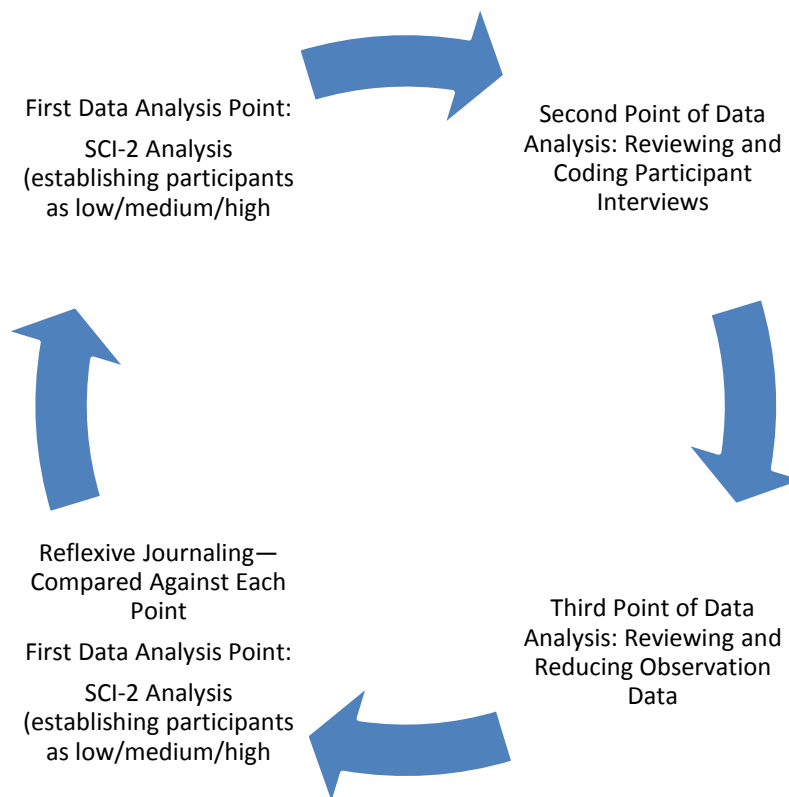


Figure 1. Graphic representation of the four points of data analysis.

As the figure suggest, each point of data analysis lead to the next point of analysis. The remainder of the chapter details each of these four analysis points. However, prior to that discussion, I want to discuss the role that the data reduction matrix played in comparing data for multiple sources.

First Point of Data Analysis: SCI-2

The first data analysis point concerned the use of the Sense of Community Index-2. Since my research questions are interested in rural teachers' sense of community, the first step in my protocol—after establishing consent to participate in the project—was to

administer the SCI-2 index with each participant, this tool was then scored (Table 4.1).

The participant's score on the SCI-2 was then used to create a nominated sample for this study.

Table 3.3

Participant SCI-2 Scores

Participants	Reinforcement of Needs	Membership	Influence	Shared Emotional Connection	Total Score (out of 72 possible)	Overall Feeling
ROGER	5	5	4	5	19	4
OLIVIA	5	3	6	7	21	4
STEVEN	5	5	7	10	29	6
PHILLIP	8	9	10	10	37	6
ABBY	11	13	10	9	43	6
KATE	14	15	13	17	59	6

In addition to the Likert-scale utilized in the SCI-2 to establish each of the subscales and to determine the total score, the SCI-2 index begins with a general question: "How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other community members?" To answer, participants could circle (1) I prefer not to be a part of this community, (2) not important at all, (3) not very important, (4) somewhat important, (5) important, and (6) very important. I have noted the participants' responses in the last column titled "Overall Feeling."

Second Point of Data Analysis: Interview Data

Following the administration and scoring of the SCI-2, the next step in data analysis was coding participant interviews. The interview data consisted of one interview per participant. The interviews were audio recorded and following each interview, the data was transcribed. I transcribed three of the interviews and the other three were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. To ensure confidentiality, all identifying information was removed from the interview before I submitted it to the professional transcriptionist. When all of the interviews were completed and transcribed, the six interviews were read in their entirety. Key points within each interview were then marked for codes. Charmaz (2005) provides a description of constant comparison in which

Coding gives a researcher analytical scaffolding on which to build. Because researchers study their empirical materials closely, they can define both new leads from them and gaps in them....Thus, should a researcher discover a lead through developing a code in one interview, he or she can go back through earlier interviews and take a fresh look as to whether this code sheds light on earlier data. (p. 517)

In this way, I utilized constant comparison, identifying a code and then comparing it against other interviews and reflexive journal entries for convergence and divergence. Convergent codes for each of the individual interviews were then grouped as similar concepts using a branching tree diagram. Below is an example of a branching tree diagram for Roger.

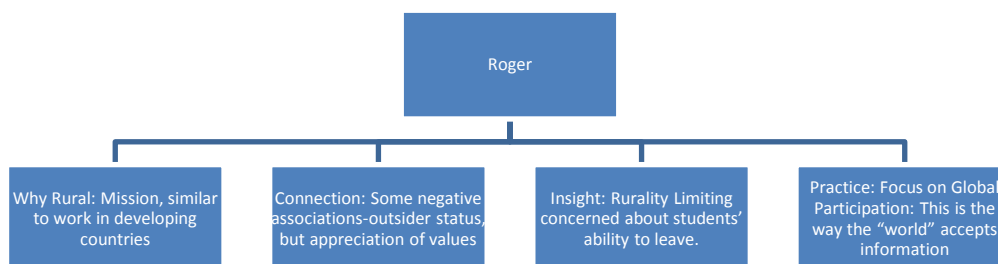


Figure 2. Graphic Representation of the Roger’s Branching Tree Diagram from Interview Data

These individual participant diagrams were then compared to look for themes across the participants. In other words, was Roger’s “mission” in coming to a rural place true for other participants? The three main themes that emerged through the interview process were the participants’ 1) reasons for teaching in a rural district, 2) feelings about and/or connection to community, and 3) community insights. Within these broader themes, more discreet ideas emerged that were shared among participants and a matrix was created to reduce the data and allow for comparison among and between participants (Appendix D).

Once these broader themes were determined, they were compared with the research questions to check for congruence between the central research questions and the data. The first question, “What, if any, difference exists in teachers’ sense of community?” was address under the broad theme of “reasons for teaching in a rural district” and, to some degree, “connection to community.” The second question “to what extent do teachers with divergent (high/low) senses of community belong to divergent

communities of practice?” was addressed under the second theme “connection to community,” in which teachers spoke explicitly about both positive and negative interactions—and in one case, a lack of interaction—with the community. Responses under the third theme, “community insight” also dealt with this question in that teachers discussed their own feelings about the community’s values, as well as the futures of students within that community and knowledge needed to attain those futures. While such ideas might not seem explicitly connected to a strict sense of “community of practice,” I have attributed these feelings to a community of practice based on Wenger’s (1998) argument that meaning does not simply happen to us but rather a person “contributes to the negotiation of meaning by being a member of a community” (p. 55). Following that logic, participants’ feelings or insights, both positive and negative, about a community can speak to their own membership in that community.

Finally, the third question, “what, if any, impact does a teachers’ sense of community have on their teaching practice?” was addressed under the theme of “connection to the community.” In an attempt to understand this somewhat abstract notion of practice, participants were given a scenario in which the local school board called for teachers to incorporate more local knowledge/history into the curriculum. In responding to this scenario, the participants often talked about how they had in the past or were currently implementing local knowledge (or conversely, their rejection of more local knowledge for “global” understandings) and what, if any, curricular changes they would implement (or not implement) based on the board request. In this way, the participants’ responses offered an initial glimpse of possible theoretical underpinnings of

their practice. However, while this third question was initially addressed through the interview process, data from the classroom observation also served to “reificate” or give form to these meanings and further explore the third question.

Third Point of Data Analysis: Observation Data

For each participant, I observed and recorded four lessons using the observation protocol specifically for this research project. Additionally, while observing the lessons, margin notes on the protocol were made when the teacher made specific reference to the local community or environment. After the lesson observation, member checks were conducted by having the participants complete an observation debriefing protocol. This tool was similarly based on Finn’s (1999) characteristics.

Whenever possible, the observation debriefing immediately followed the lesson; however, when time did not allow for such immediacy, debriefings were conducted within two school days of the observation. While I originally intended to have the participants complete a debriefing protocol after each of the four observations, the teachers’ schedules and the limited time frame of the study did not permit all four observations to undergo the debriefing process. However, I was able to debrief with each participant for 50% or two out of the four observations.

Both the observation protocol and the observation debriefing protocol consisted of a series of fifteen characteristics along a continuum. In checking for agreement between my observations and the participants’ understanding, I compared the two continuums. If both the participant and I marked the same area of the continuum for the observed lesson

(i.e., practices falling closer to the first characteristic, between the two characteristics or closer to the end characteristic), I marked that particular characteristic as “in agreement.” However, if, for example, I had marked an observed practice(s) as closer to the first characteristic and the participant marked it in the middle, then those characteristics were not considered in agreement. In some cases, either myself or the participant did not feel that a set of characteristics were observable in that particular lesson. This phenomenon resulted in member checks with varying number of characteristics that could be compared. So for example, in some member checks, I was comparing eleven characteristics while for others only six. Below is a table of the observation member checks.

Table 3.4

Observation Member Check

Participant	Check One Characteristics in Agreement/Total Comparable	Check Two Characteristics in Agreement/Total Comparable	Total % Agreement
OLIVIA	6/8	*	75%
ROGER	10/11	9/9	96%
STEVEN	5/6	4/4	92%
PHILLIP	7/9	8/9	84%
ABBY	9/10	6/7	88%
KATE	3/6	8/8	75%

In all six cases, member agreement was 75% or higher, and in the case of Roger, there was a 96% agreement between the participant’s understandings and my observations of the lessons. However, with the case of Olivia, this percentage is based on one member check. While I did do two debriefing protocols with this participant, the second lesson we debriefed was an activity known as “business day,” which is an

opportunity for students to use classroom reward money to purchase their classmates' products (e.g., homemade brownies, ice cream floats, bookmarks) in an all-class market of sorts. While this was an excellent opportunity to observe a classroom ritual that occurs one Friday a month and represents an important element of the classroom dynamic, it did not lend itself to the characteristic continuum found on the protocol. However, I chose to use the debriefing protocol with this lesson in particular because through the open-ended questions of the debriefing protocol, I could learn more about Olivia's motivation for utilizing this classroom ritual. However, since this lesson did not map onto the continuum this is a limitation of the study and given more time, I would return to the classroom for one more observation and debriefing.

After agreement between the participants and observer was established, the observation data was further analyzed. I approached this process by creating a data reduction matrix for observation data. The first step in analyzing the data was to look across the four observations using each of the fifteen characteristics. On a master protocol sheet, I transferred, from the four individual observation protocols, where the mark fell for each set of characteristics. I went through this process transferring the individual characteristic for each of the four observations onto one master sheet. This process was then replicated with the observation data for all of the participants.

After the master protocol sheet was created, I compared the master protocols for each of the six participants against one another. In general, there were differences amongst the participants in that some participants' practice was more heavily marked on the domesticating end of the continuum and others' on the liberating. One participant was

much more equally split with marks on both sides of the continuum. However, despite these differences across the participants, each participant had two to four characteristics out of the fifteen that stood out across the four observations as consistently marked at one or the other extremes of the continuum. Therefore, my next step in data analysis was to create a matrix that allowed me to compare the extreme characteristics across participants (Appendix F).

From the data reduction matrix for observation data (Appendix F), I wrote a short synopsis for each participant's practice that attempted to encapsulate the general demeanor of the classroom and the participants' approach toward knowledge. I used these synopses as member checks and shared them, via email, with each of the six participants.

Analytic Tool: Reflexive Journal

My analysis of the reflexive journal did not take place until after the data matrixes for the interview and classroom observation data were created and shared with the participants. My decision to wait to return to my reflexive journal was mainly one of omission. I clearly saw my reflexive journal as a critical part of the research process and used it understanding that "research situations are dynamic, and the researcher is a participant not merely an observer," which calls on "investigators [to] analyze him or herself in the context of the research" (Krefting, 1991, p. 218). However, it was only when I returned to my reflexive journal and saw that many of the themes that I identify in the interview and observation data were also evident in my own writing that I saw how

my reflexive journal could be coded and used more systematically to confirm or refute emerging themes from my data sources.

Therefore, to analyze the reflexive journal, I reviewed each entry to check for congruence and dissonance between what my own reflexive writing and the established code book for interview data. After reviewing it to look for overlap between the journal and the interview data, I analyzed the journal again, this time highlighting any places where I noted issues of practice. From this analysis, I returned to the data matrix for classroom observation to see if there was any overlap. Below is an example of how I coded a reflexive journal to highlight this process.

Table 3.5

Coding Example for Reflexive Journal

Excerpt from 4/21	Code
<p>If place-based education has a name at Adams Middle School, that name is Abby. Clearly her own experience as a place-based educator through her previous position with the state continues in her new position as a science teacher. But for all her amazing connection to not only her content but also the land, is it possible that she is missing a connection to the students? Or is it just those that are resistant to learning about these things? I have also heard her on several occasions—and in her interview as well—talk about Adams diversity as more negative than positive, almost a spoiling of the community, its history, its agrarian roots. Is her sense of community too purist, too elitist? Am I judging instead of observing? (Reflexive Journal, 4/26/10)</p>	<p>Practice-Local</p> <p>Practice: Lange</p> <p>Connection: Land</p> <p>Changing Identity</p> <p>Connection:</p> <p>Insider/Outsider</p>

Ethical Concerns

The ethical concerns in this study consist of transparency of purpose, confidentiality, and informed consent. As this study was interested in teachers' personal and professional connections to the community and the implications that such connections may (or may not) have on their classroom, establishing a clear purpose was essential. To that end, prior to the beginning of the study, all participants were informed of the purpose of the study in writing (Appendix G). Participants were also given interview questions and the observation protocol in advance. In my final member check email to each participant, I shared each of the themes that emerged from each participants' interview and classroom observation data. Finally, throughout the study, I was clear with the participants that they could be removed from the study at any time. This was conveyed to the participants in the initial consent form. I also reiterated this at the beginning of the interview.

While research done in and about small communities has the potential to concern participants over confidentiality issues, I took every measure to ensure participants' right to privacy. I was the only person to view the data, with the exception of a professional transcriptionist who lived and worked elsewhere. All identifying factors were removed from the audio files prior to transcription, and the transcriptionist was not familiar with the voices of any of the participants. All data was kept in a locked file drawer and password protected on the computer database. Finally, all participants signed a consent form prior to entering the study (Appendix G).

Limitations of the Study

As with other case study research, the main limitations with this study was researcher bias and applicability.

Researcher Bias

Reflexive journaling throughout the research process was used as a means of addressing and being conscious of such biases. However, it is important to note that qualitative research in which the research is a participant-observer is most definitely “dynamic” and dependent on constant reflection and analysis on the part of the researcher (Krefting, 1991, p. 218). While other strategies were utilized to strengthen the credibility of the study, including member checks, it is impossible to negate the role, and thus the potential biases, of the qualitative researcher.

Applicability

Applicability refers to the “degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts and settings” (Krefting, 1991, p. 216). While several strategies such as using the SCI-2 to establish groups and dense description were utilized to strengthen the transferability of the study, there were several limitations.

The first was my use of a convenience sample. Researchers “obtain a convenience sample by selecting whatever sampling units are conveniently available” (Frankfort-Nachimas & Nachimas, 2008, p.168). One of the limitations of a convenience sample is that “researchers have no way of estimating how representative of the population the

convenience sample is” (Frankfort-Nachimas & Nachimas, 2008, p.168). Therefore, it is difficult to say whether or not this group of participants is a fair representation of rural teachers or if their willingness to participant in a doctoral study indicates other differences between themselves and other rural teachers. Did participants choose to participate because of their relationship with me, the researcher? And if so, as a participant-observer, was I, as the researcher, always able to separate my relationship with the teacher as a colleague. from my relationship with the teacher as a participant in the study? While I used reflexive journaling to uncover biases such as these, my own participation in this study can certainly be viewed as a limitation.

Another limitation of the study was the 10-week time frame. While my own decision to work at Adams Middle School was a direct response to the need to establish prolonged reflexive experience in that I had been at the school in other capacities for nearly two years, the actual research process was only 10-weeks. Therefore, the time between classroom observations was often within days from one another. An ideal study would have spread out these observations throughout a school year to determine if these elements of practice were consistent.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

In developing a framework for what constitutes a rural perspective and examining how that perspective might inform one's role as a teacher in a rural community, my study runs the risk of reinforcing the binary of rural/urban that Nespor (2008) cautions against. Based on the SCI-2, it would be easy to characterize those with a high score as having a rural sense of community that perhaps shapes their practice based on those rural community understandings, and those with a low score as not being "of" a rural community of practice. This question is of particular importance if we follow Collins, Flaxman and Scharman's (2001) argument that both the relationship between the school and the community is crucial in the effectiveness of the school and that it is the school's role to prepare students not only for the global community, but for living well in the local community as well. These dictates on a school's community and purpose call into question a teacher's own sense of community, for if we follow the logic that we can only teach what we know, we must consider a teacher's sense of community.

Themes emerging from the interview and observation data suggest that while there were many similarities between the teachers in the study despite varying levels of sense of community, a universal assumption about an individual teacher's purposes and practices cannot be assumed. In other words, as there is no one way to be an urban or suburban teacher, there is also no one way to be a rural teacher. However, in a rural place where the community and classroom are intertwined, a closer investigation of the various

possibilities of being a rural teacher is important. It is with the goal of learning more about these multiple ways to “be rural” that I turn to the three major themes that emerged in my analysis of the interview data: Coming to a Rural Place, Connection to Community, and Insight into Community. A fourth theme that emerged through the classroom observation data was Practice. Due to the interplay between practice and the three previous themes, I have separated Practice from the others and titled the section *Practice and Sense of Community*. I have supported all four findings with data from participant interviews and classroom observations. I have also inserted portions of my reflexive journal that show my analysis in coming to these understandings.

Coming to a Rural Place: Insider/Outsider

Across all six cases, there was some discussion and meaning given to the role that membership in the rural community played in each of the individual teacher’s lives. Furthermore, an “insider” status appeared to correspond positively to the participants’ overall score on the SCI-2. In other words, if a teacher had a rural upbringing themselves, then they tended to score higher on the SCI-2, indicating a stronger perceived sense of community. This is most evident with Abby and Kate who were not only raised in rural settings but whose individual or family income currently depended on the land. Kate, who previously taught in a one-room school house near her own family’s ranch, spoke to the connection between land and family.

My granddad turns 85 in July and is still very active [with the ranch], and one of my uncles is still there. Growing up, I had three aunts and uncles involved, us,

and my grandparents. We all lived within like two miles of each other. Nothing like everybody knowing when you did something stupid. (Interview 1, 4/20/10)

Abby, who chose teaching after a previous career conducting water-shed education, could connect her own sense of community to the town of Adams and her family history.

My family roots in Ogallala County (psydennomyn) go back to---well, either Madison or Ogallala County but this area, this region---go back to like the mid 1800s.....So that's where it starts for me. I have a big family history there.

(Interview 1, 4/17/11)

While these two participants had a particular connection to the land, Steven also had a rural upbringing in a nearby state, and it was this connection that encouraged him to look for teaching in a rural school.

Looking everywhere and I didn't know a lot about the outlying areas so I just started looking at districts, that were a little bit outside, rural districts....And so I started researching what it was like and I saw it was comparable size-wise [to my hometown] and I had a feeling it was probably something I was used to being in a rural area and having taught in the same kind of area. (Interview 1, 4/19/10)

In fact, all three teachers who had a rural upbringing could connect that upbringing or knowing what small towns were like to their own decision to teach in a rural area. And for Kate and Abby that rural upbringing was ongoing in that they both chose to live either directly in the town of Adams or in the nearby valley.

Conversely, the two teachers with the lowest sense of community did not have obvious rural upbringings. While Olivia was raised in a town whose primary industry was

and still is agriculture—the current population for the town is 10,985—she offered no details about rural life except a brief conversation about how her grandfather had settled the city in which she was raised. Instead, Olivia came to teach in the small town of Adams for reasons external to the community.

[I came based] on the recommendations of my teaching institution. There were other schools in the area that were not anywhere near as desirable academically...and I was attracted to the school because of its high standards.

(Interview 1, 4/21/10)

For Olivia, the initial call to a rural school was not its location or even its rural sense of place, as it was for Kate, Abby, and Steven, but due to a reputation established by a teaching institution in the nearby city.

Similarly, Roger, who in his own terms grew up a “military brat” and was very aware of his own “wandering soul,” came to rural teaching not necessarily for the community but because of a calling

Back-stepping here, it wasn't a back step at all. It was part of--[in comparing the decision to come to Adams against the decision to leave a charter school with more affluence] --I guess you would call it—a calling or a ministry or any number of different things where you also got a sense of, “Oh I'm helping those that have already been helped.” (Interview 1, 4/20/10)

Connected to a larger calling to serve economically disadvantaged students, Roger's decision to teach in a rural place was the same calling that encouraged him previously to teach in a developing nation and was not based out of a desire to be in a rural community.

The sixth teacher in the study, Phillip, who scored in the upper ranges of the SCI-2, also did not have a rural upbringing. However, his reasons for teaching in Adams had a rural sensibility in that they were deeply connected to family. Raised in Mexico City and with no “roots” in the community, Phillip took the position in Adams after his wife was offered a position in the district. While Phillip was clear that he took the position because he needed a job, he also spoke extensively about the connection to community that has emerged.

Our children go to school here. We volunteer a lot over here in Adams...So we have a big connection to the community. We eat at the restaurants here in town. We know the people who own the restaurants because I mean, I guess you do that often enough that they kind of know us...Our kids have developed friendships over here. (Interview 1, 4/7/10)

Additionally, as one of the only Mexican Americans on staff in the school, Phillip’s connection was also one of language and ethnicity.

The kids know that we are here, and somehow they feel that connection with me because I’m, you know, I’m Mexican. And they will invite me to their parties and stuff like that. And it continues. (Interview 1, 4/7/10)

While Phillip’s situation differs slightly, the connection between a teacher’s own rural sensibility and their decision to teach in a rural setting appears to be significant.

My reflexive journal also supports the finding that participants’ own rural sensibility affects participants’ decision to teach in rural settings. Reflecting after my

interview with Abby in which another teacher who was not involved in the study accidentally interrupted our interview, I wrote:

It was interesting when [name of teacher] interrupted the interview. Even though it [stopping the recording device] was the ethical thing to do, I wish I could have taped the interaction between these two women. Perhaps it was because we [Abby and I in the interview process] were talking about being a “rural teacher” in the abstract, but then comes this conversation between she and [teacher’s name] that so easily transitioned into local talk—about seeing the others’ husband hauling cattle after the sale. The two women seemed to share a confidence, and I wonder if such a relationship would have grown if not for their shared sense of self as connected to the land since one husband farms and the other runs a dairy.

(Reflexive Journal, 4/17/11)

Here is an example of how Abby’s personal history and rural upbringing, which brought her to teaching in Adams, also shapes the relationships she develops with her colleague, who also has a rural upbringing and identity.

As my reflection continues, I unpack my role in this conversation as someone who was both allowed to participate, but also kept at a slight distance.

While I feel confident that a relationship exists between me and both of these teachers, there is a familiarity that they let me witness, perhaps because I too have enough “ruralness” to relate. But there is also a sense that I do not have enough connection specifically to Adams to participate. While I definitely didn’t feel isolated or left out of the conversation, I also know it was, for a moment, a real

and shared dialogue, not meant for me or my research. (Reflexive Journal, 4/17/11)

My reflexive journal, along with the interview data, suggest that teachers' own rural upbringing not only affects their decision to come to rural places, but it also impacts teachers' ability to engage in collegial conversations such as the one described above. In other words, this ability to engage in such conversation and to truly see a rural place matters.

Bornfield (1997) found that the decision to continue teaching special education in a rural district was a "matter of roots." Her study indicated that "leavers" and "stayers" rated their job satisfaction about equally, none were greatly satisfied, but the determining factor in whether a teacher changed jobs was rootedness to the community (Bornfield et al., 1997). "The leavers . . . considered 'home' to be someplace other than where they worked" (p. 36), while 47% of "stayers" cited personal connections to the community as their main reason for continuing to teach in a rural district. These findings suggest that a rural background may be an important aspect of that rootedness. Additionally, considering that rural teachers' salaries are as much as 17% lower than urban and suburban teachers and that rural districts are becoming increasingly "hard to staff," factoring in a teacher's own rural upbringing is in line with current rural-specific strategies for teacher recruitment and retention (Jimmerson, 2003, p. 9).

Another aspect of this rural identity is the ability to draw on local knowledge as references in the classroom. While I have nothing to suggest that the use of local references only comes out of a rural upbringing there does seem to be a connection

between those participants with a high sense of community, who also have a rural upbringing and continue to live in a rural place, and the use of local references.

Local References

My original observation protocol did not set out to capture the type and regularity of participant references, either local or global. While my research questions are interested in differences in practice based on sense of community, I initially saw these differences as occurring in more substantial ways. Thus, I looked to Finn (1999) and his notion of domesticating and liberating pedagogy to create my protocol. However, as I began observing the participants, I quickly became aware of the simple difference between the references that were used amongst those teachers with high, middle and low senses of community. Therefore, as I conducted my observations, I began noting in the margins of the first page of the protocol those references that the participants made to or about either the town or community of Adams and/or the lives that the students live connected to place.

Placelessness

For those participants, with the exception of Olivia, who had a low or medium sense of community, references appeared to be either global or placeless. Often about sports, questions such as Steven's "have you even tried out for a sports team?" connected to the lives of the students but didn't necessarily have any direct relationship to place. Another form of this "placelessness" occurred in Phillip's classroom; when teaching

Spanish, Philip would talk about native Spanish speakers or non-native speakers as seemingly existing elsewhere. This is certainly not a criticism of Phillip, as a clear tension existed, as previously discussed, in the community of Adams around the inclusion/exclusion of Spanish-speaking families. However, it is important to note that during my observations this discussion was not engaged, and students did not discuss their own bilingualism.

Globalism

In terms of global references, Roger appeared to most commonly reference “the world” out there, often noting that the students’ entrance into this world would occur after high school. In introducing the notion of the Modern Language Association (MLA) format as a way to cite “intellectual property,” Roger told the students “this is the way the world accepts information. This is the format you need to empower you to share your ideas. You need to know this format” (Classroom Observation 2, 5/6/10). In this example, the focus is clearly on what students will need to be successful in seemingly bigger, more complex places.

Local

In contrast, the two participants with the highest sense of community often used local references, even in situations when a more global reference would have been common and expected. For example, Kate, in teaching parliamentary procedure, which has clear historical roots to the British parliament and is certainly utilized in “the world”

of government, tied the lesson to pressing local needs. Opening by saying that this was the procedure used by the Ogallala Water Board, the Adams District School Board, and her own FFA group, Kate then talked about how knowing parliamentary procedure would empower students to go in front of the school board to propose a change to the school calendar so that you don't have to "sell your piggies on Sunday [at the fair] and then start school on Wednesday" (Classroom Observation, 5/10/10). In fact, in the entire forty-minute discussion of parliamentary procedure, there was only a brief note about the history of it and only two references to its current use in the government of the United States.

This reliance on local references was also apparent in Abby's classroom. During observations, Abby often went one step further to incorporate local objects or areas of study into her classroom. In a lab on electromagnetism, Abby used "moo-magnets," which are magnets that are put into the stomachs of livestock to attract metal a cow may eat in the pasture, to teach laws of attraction. Beginning with a discussion of "why it would be a problem to have metal in the stomach of livestock for those who make a living raising cattle," Abby then moved the conversation to a discussion of "mag lev trains" (Classroom Observation 4, 5/19/10). As was typical for Abby, which was not always the case for Kate, discussions often began with local references and then moved to a more global discussion.

A similar pattern was noted for Olivia but with some differences. Earlier I said that for those with a low or medium sense of community, references were often global or of the world or placeless. There appeared to be a slight difference with Olivia. As

someone who taught in Adams School district for her entire career, over 20 years, Olivia obviously had some knowledge of the community. And yet, in her interview, she was clear that she did not feel a particular connection to Adams. Despite her own comment that she “feels no connection to the community” (Interview 1, 4/21/10), there were numerous times in the observations of her in which Olivia would make a comment to the students such as “This doesn’t look like Ogallala County” (Classroom Observation 1, 4/30/10). However, these comments, as they occurred in the teaching of social studies, often had the same feel as those made about other civilizations. In this way, comments made about Adams were said in the same way as those made about ancient Egypt or Rome. In other words – and perhaps this was just a part of Olivia’s teaching style – connections to Adams were not engaged and/or discussed with the students, as they were in Kate or Abby’s classrooms, but rather were used as comparisons to other places. For example, in talking about city planning and the role of industry in the growth of civilizations, Olivia made the comment “maybe if we look in the future, Adams will be one-half million. If we discover something fabulous or a great industry” (Classroom Observation 3, 5/12/10). This comment was made and then a further discussion of the Incas continued. Clearly, Olivia was calling on students to understand how industry can make a small place, like Adams, grow. But unlike Kate and Abby where students then built on this through their own discussion of place, there was no similar conversation. Comments such as these also appeared to be slightly negative in their depiction of Adams, particularly for those students who might feel that Adams already has

“something fabulous” or find the agrarian way of life to be sufficiently fulfilling commerce.

It is also worth noting that while Olivia’s current inclusion of Adams was limited to these one-line comments, she was the only participant with a low to middle sense of community who mentioned the integration of local knowledge into the curriculum. While “mandated curriculum”—the reading program that was adopted in line with Reading First— “forced this unit out,” Olivia talked about how when she first started teaching in Adams, she had a desire to bring the community into the classroom.

I developed a unit which taught the pre-history, the economics of the area, the government of the area....I would bring in community members to talk. We had an archeologist that would talk about the pre-history. And we had a senior citizen come in every year and talked to kids about what it was like to live in Adams, 60 or 70 years ago. We brought in business leaders. I brought in people from the city council, you know, the Chamber of Commerce. And had them talk with the kids.
(Interview 1, 4/21/10)

Since this unit was taught in Olivia’s early years of teaching, which was 15 years before the introduction of No Child Left Behind, the movement away from this unit could be seen as one example where the reliance of state standards appears to have shifted some of the focus away from local to state and global.

Conversely, however, the two teachers with the highest sense of community, while not completely adapting the curriculum to rely only on local knowledge, appeared to find ways to consistently implement local knowledge into their lessons. As the “ag

teacher,” Kate’s use of references to local governing bodies and traditional farming knowledge is perhaps not surprising. While Abby, as a science teacher, had to and often did find ways to “weave it [place-based knowledge] into lessons,” a goal she discussed in her interview (Interview 1, 4/17/10). Again this appears to be rooted in a deep concern for students to value where they come from. In “speaking for the agricultural community,” Abby discussed how

A lot of times they [the agricultural community] feel like their kids are actually being alienated from them in the school system in terms of science and natural resource speaking, like they’re learning about these far off things. And yet you ask some of these kids about something right out their back door and they can tell you. (Interview 1, 4/17/10)

Again, this discussion and the difference in references used by those teachers with a low to medium sense of community and those with a high sense of community suggests that the use of local reference (i.e., local governing bodies and traditional economic pathways) is different for those teachers who strongly identify with their community.

Of course, the bigger question, which I will discuss in more detail in the summary of findings and conclusions section, is “does it matter?” Does it matter that some teachers seem to use more global references, while others tend to have a more “rooted” curriculum in place? Does it matter that some teachers live in and feel connected to their community, while others do not?

However, before engaging these questions in a bit more depth, I want to turn to the second theme: Connection to Community.

Connection to Community

In addition to recruitment and retention of teachers, a teacher's own sense of community emerged as a possible explanation for his or her general feelings toward the community and its values. While there appears to be connection between a teacher's rural identity that may be shaping decisions to come, and remain in a rural place, as well as informing references used in practice, teachers with varying sense of community also appeared to feel differently about his or her connection to the community. Throughout the interview process, this connection to the community appeared to coincide with other interactions and feelings about the community, most notably the general feeling toward the values of the community and the future role of the community in the lives of the students.

Interactions With the Community

All six of the participants talked about how the small town values of "hard work" and "respect" were apparent in the day-to-day interactions with students in the classroom. However, Kate in particular, who had the highest sense of community according to the SCI-2, tended to detail more positively and much more personally about specific interactions she had experienced within the community. Specifically, she talked at length about the ways in which small towns "come together" in times of need, a facet of community life she connected to her own rural upbringing (Interview 1, 4/20/10). In discussing a tragedy when an Adams' high school freshman was killed in an auto

accident, Kate discussed how her own students came together to do some yard and garden work for the family.

We ended up with over 20 kids out there. We planted the garden. I had more Rototillers, lawn mowers and edgers than—[we] planted all the flowerbeds, the garden, mowed the lawn, everything, and the kids were so happy when they were finished. They just felt so good about it. There's the nice thing. (Interview 1, 4/20/10)

Of course, for Kate, the coming together that a rural community experiences in times of tragedy can become “too close” at times. Jokingly, she talked how the community is full of “matchmaker aunts” and that the “kids know pretty much everything I do” making “buy[ing] a bottle of wine” at the local grocery store an impossibility (Interview 1, 4/20/10).

Conversely, however, that high sense of community that Kate speaks of and seems to embody in her own interactions with the community also appears to produce negative feelings when one's sense of community doesn't appear to be shared. This certainly appeared to be the case with Abby who felt that her connection to the community was not shared by her students, even those that come “from families [she] knows and likes” (Interview 1, 4/17/10). Within a larger conversation about Abby's concerns that kids “don't see their community in the same light as I think most of the adults in the area see the community,” another conversation about the “new” ethnic diversity of Adams was discussed (Interview 1, 4/17/10):

I feel a connection with a lot of the businesses and people you know, but I think there is a cultural gap here with—I'm not sure that's quite the right word, but I don't know. I mean to be quite honest there's a lot of Hispanic families in the area that I think don't—they could but for some reason their kids are not feeling connected to the heritage for Ogallala county, what Ogallala county or Adams identifies itself as or has traditionally identified itself. (Interview 1, 4/17/10)

Concerned that Abby has not expressed herself and prompted by her own question of “what makes you uncomfortable with what you are saying,” she continued.

Well, I'm trying not to make it sound like I think it's bad because I don't necessarily feel like it has a negative connotation. I don't want it to sound like I think it's bad that there's this new cultural diversity that [is] being added into the community because I don't think it's bad. However, I think there's a problem with, like, the community identity either incorporating them or making them feel incorporated. (Interview 1, 4/17/10)

In my own reflexive journal, I wrote on three separate occasions about this tension that appeared to exist for Abby between insiders and outsiders, as she perceived them, in the community.

Today's interview with Abby yielded, in many ways, what one (and maybe by “one” I mean a rural researcher that values place-based education) might expect to hear from an interview with a “rural” teacher. It was clear to me, as I reflect back, there is definitely a connection between Abby and the physical land, the place. Perhaps that connection supersedes connection to students.....I also keep thinking

her comments about the changing demographics shaping/changing/decreasing the sense of community. She was so careful not to sound like the migrant workers and their children were a negative addition to the town, but at the same time she seemed to be struggling with her own historical connection to the physical place and changes in community that have occurred. (Reflexive Journal, 4/17/10)

Despite the variety of topics Abby and I discussed in interview and I observed in her classroom, I continued to circle around this tension. Nine days after writing the previous entry, I once again returned to this tension after spending several hours with Abby and her students in the outdoor classroom mapping noxious weeds (Classroom Observation 1, 4/26/10).

If place-based education has a name at Adams Middle School, that name is Abby. Clearly her own experience as a place-based educator through her previous position with state continues in her new position as a science teacher. But for all her amazing connection to not only her content but also the land, is it possible that she is missing a connection to the students? Or is it just those that are resistant to learning about these things? I have also heard her on several occasions—and in her interview as well—talk about Adams’ diversity as more negative than positive, almost a spoiling of the community, its history, its agrarian roots. Is her sense of community too purist, too elitist? Am I judging instead of observing? (Reflexive Journal, 4/26/10)

This excerpt, again, highlights the tension within Abby that I felt as a researcher. It also calls into question my own bias as I clearly choose to circle around this question of “who

can belong to a rural place?” in my journal. However, while my own bias may have kept an exploration of this tension in the forefront, it also remained important because it was evident in the interview and observation data for several of the other participants and in my analysis of that data through my reflexive journal.

This concern about how the town deals with this “new” identity was also evident in the interviews with Phillip. However, his rationale for concern appears to be different than Abby’s. For Abby, it appears to be about a loss of community identity while for Phillip it appears to be about the loss of opportunity for some students based on their ethnicity and/or first language. When asked what the typical life trajectory for an Adams’ student might be, Phillip responded.

Well, I think, that pretty much depends on who you are. You know, they are the families that they come from, their ethnicity, perhaps all those things, you know, will determine what will happen to them when they go to high school. It’s kind of unfortunate that not everybody will have the same chance or opportunity to, I don’t know to—I don’t want to say succeed, but you know, something related to that. (Interview 1, 4/7/10)

For Phillip the “everyone knows everyone” facet of small town life has real implications for Mexican-American students who were kept from particular opportunities because their ethnicity and language kept them from full participation in the community. While Phillip was never explicit about which members of the community were instrumental in this exclusion and inclusion process, I noted in my reflective journal that “Phillip appeared almost distrustful of community teachers to ‘create’ an Adams i.e. framing its

history, that is inclusive of the families to which he has made such strong connections” (Reflective Journal, 4/7/10). It is also important to note that Phillip was the first interview in the data collection process and no classroom observation had been conducted at the time. The timing suggests that while my own bias may have played a factor in picking up on this tension, this awareness was not informed by later conversations with Abby and Roger, who also talked in depth about this tension.

In this way, this notion of “everyone knows everyone” takes on new meaning. For Kate, being an insider meant community members came together in times of need. However, for Abby and Phillip “everyone knows everyone” appeared to create a tension between insiders and outsiders, which resulted in either excluding some from full participation or changing the dynamics of a community. For Roger, the participant with the lowest sense of community, the tension between insider and outsider was personal.

Relating it to his “analytical outsider’s perspective,” Roger relayed three incidents, two societal and one personal in which he felt that being an outsider directly impacted his feelings for the community. The first was the heavy role that sports plays in the life of the community. In fact, Phillip and Steven also talked about how sports were a significant part of the town’s identity. For Roger, the role of sports appears to be in direct opposition to academics.

A kid getting the grades is only a venue or a vehicle to being able to play the sports. If my tests are too hard, if my curriculum is too demanding, then it’s interfering with football or anything else and that’s a huge issue. Somehow, I should adjust. (Interview 1, 4/10/10)

Roger also talked about the “requirement” for teacher’s to participate in a huge community fundraiser that he feels has limited financial gain and feeling the pressure to participate in something simply out of “tradition and community aspect that creates fervor and an interaction” (Interview 1, 4/10/10).

However, Roger’s greatest concern about the fact that “everyone knows everyone” was directly related to an experience he had in which his own ethics were questioned through what he saw as “gossip.” Speaking about the ramifications of that event and the extensive steps he went through to prove himself, Roger stated:

For me, it was a personal offense, too. So it was the sense of gossip and the culture within the community that bled over into my world and lead to a whole different deal. Because I didn’t live in the community and I wasn’t part of the community and being single and not around, there’s a whole different view or—stereotypes are put out. (Interview 1, 4/10/10)

Clearly, this experience of being the outsider subjected to gossip and speculation had negative implications for Roger as it was an incident he referenced both in the formal interview and at several other occasions throughout our two-year professional relationship.

Taken in the context of Chambers and Fowlers (1995) findings that when monetary rewards are lower—as they most likely are in a rural district—then there is more pressure on sustaining positive non-financial elements such as work environment, Roger’s negative associations with the community are important considerations. In fact, it is perhaps not surprising that when asked if he plans to remain in the district, he was the

only participant who didn't see a future there beyond perhaps the next year. This is even more pressing considering Roger had more years of post-secondary education than the other participants and tended to utilize more liberating forms of pedagogy (Finn, 1999) than many of the other participants.

Community Insights: Students' Future

One theme that emerged through all six interviews, regardless of the participant's connection to the community, was a concern about their students' future based on their own insights into the challenges that Adams, as a rural town, faces. To some degree all of the participants echoed Steven's concern that the agrarian way of life in Adams could not sustain the majority of their students.

I think that is the deal with the small towns too is the way that farming and stuff is changing and it is harder to make money for the small guy—more of those kids need to be equipped if they choose to go and be in bigger places and succeed in urban areas. (Interview 1, 4/19/10)

Abby connected this need to prepare students not only to an economic reality, but also to the feelings of the families in Adams.

And so for parents—I know a lot of parents that have kids that are getting ready to go off to school, they're like, "I don't want my kinds to come back and do this, I don't want them to come back and ranch, I don't want them to come back and farm. I want them to go off and make a decent living. I want them to not have to struggle. (Interview 1, 4/17/10)

And yet, despite this shared concern across participants regarding economic realities of Adams and the limits those realities place upon students, there also appeared a distinct difference in approach towards preparing students for the future. For those teachers with low or medium sense of community—Roger, Olivia, Steven, and Philip—the response seemed to be one of global preparation. When asked if local knowledge should be implemented in the curriculum, Olivia replied

I see it as a valuable adjunct to their education, if we can dovetail it in. With the emphasis on state standards, I don't think that it is probably fair to sidestep essential components to the curriculum such as state standards. It is probably more fair to the kids to do a well rounded education based on what the state has determined is important. (Interview 1, 4/21/10)

Steven also shared Olivia's belief that students should be learning skills for "out there."

They need the technology skills, communication skills. They need to be exposed to different opportunity. I think they can be kind of limited in their thinking when they are from a small place just because they don't see a lot of what is out there. (Interview 1, 4/19/10)

For Roger, the economic limitation of the community has socio-cultural elements.

I imagine that you'd see about probably 60 percent will remain truly within the culture and step into their family's footsteps: Their trades or their general cycle of life, the value sets, be that ranching or farming or if they're in the low socioeconomic status, they might repeat the same cycles as their family members and may end up being limited in job opportunities. But I think in general, you

might see a 40 percent change that might change their culture, change their location, change their expectancy or view of life and step out in a new direction that we might have a direct influence on. (Interview 1, 4/10/10)

In all three of these excerpts, it appears that for the participants with a low to medium sense of community, rurality can equate to a sense of limitation. While Roger is perhaps the most outspoken in his choice of language, his statements align with other participants' concerns that their students' choices, should they choose to stay in Adams, were limited.

Even for the two participants with the highest sense of community, Kate and Abby, there was a deep understanding that the agrarian way of life was not feasible for the majority of students. However, with these two participants that limitation appeared to have less to do with the negative connotation associated with those students and the community and more to do with outside political/economic forces that were shaping their community. In both cases, their response to such outside forces seemed to be an emphasis on preparing students with local knowledge so that they could combat outside notions of rural life.

Kate talked about the "outside influence" on farming including the high price of land and the challenges of conservationists. From her own knowledge of cattle prices, she talked in-depth about the balance of conservation and farming and the importance of her students having direct knowledge of why the food supply is so affordable and at what cost.

I always tell my kids you can't whine unless you have a solution...So we do an Ag Expo—we'll have 400 and 600 elementary kids at the fairgrounds, and they

learn about bees, they make applesauce, they make butter and they milk a cow. We [the students in her classes] grow sugar beets, cotton, peanuts, wheat, and potatoes in the greenhouse all year for it. So where your clothes come from, where milk comes from. We have horses, pigs, chicken, beef cows, dairy cows, sheep...(Interview 1, 4/20/10)

For Kate local knowledge does not necessarily equate to preparation for an agrarian way of life for all, but rather knowledge of such a life and from where food, clothing, etc. comes.

Abby seems to share a similar desire to have students “value where they are from” (Interview 1, 4/17/10). Again, this is not based on an assumption that these students will work this land for a living (in fact, she talks about students having to go away for college), but rather out of a desire to understand or appreciate this country.

I think that it’s important that the kids like see the issue in their area, so that when they go off and get another outside perspective on it that they have like a full view of it and they’re not like, “Oh my goodness, I never thought about that.” I guess that just what bothers me, you live in an area and then you go 300 miles away to learn about the area you were living in. (Interview 1, 4/17/10)

This desire to equip students with an understanding of local issues was certainly evident in the observation conducted with these two participants.

Evidence of this shared concern over students’ futures in a rural area also emerged in my reflexive journal. In this excerpt, I begin to wonder about how these

concerns over rural students' futures and desires for restoration of rural life define someone as a rural teacher.

Just finished my fourth interview and I am left with this question, "who can claim 'rural teacher' as their identity?" or "what does the face, experience, expectations of rural teachers look like?" If I want to prepare my students to leave the rural community because I know from my own rural experience that the opportunities in rural towns are economically limited and I am less 'rural?' It seems to me that rural researchers have created an idealized rural teacher, who, like two of my participants has a very high sense of community or rural perspective, as well as a generational connection to the land. Clearly Abby and Kate could be calling for a rebirth of the land. But is that the only way of being rural? (Reflexive Journal, 4/19/10)

Later in this journal entry, I continue to struggle over the rural identity of those participants who have a vision of successful rural students as those who have the ability to leave the rural community.

In my own rural framework, I have this category "connection to the land" as something critical to a rural perspective and yet, I am wondering what that means exactly. For Abby it is clear. But for Steven, and maybe even Phillip and Roger, it is an understanding of the limitations of the land as a future support for all students. Is that understanding enough to garner the identity of rural teacher or is it only those teachers that posit regeneration or rebirth of the town by their own students that should claim this identity. (Reflexive Journal, 4/19/10)

Although the label of “rural” teacher, which these entries focus on, might not be important, it seems what is more at issue is the philosophy toward rural life that rural schools want to support and engage. While all participants expressed concern over their students’ futures, it does appear that there is a difference between those teachers with a high sense of community and those with a medium or low sense of community in the emphasis they put on remaining or supporting the development of the rural community in which they teach.

Practice and Sense of Community

It is important to begin this section by again noting the limitations of this study. With only six participants and a limited timeframe for interviews and observations, it would not be trustworthy of me to suggest that differences of practice observed are true for all rural teachers with various connections to the local community in which they teach. However, comparing the extremes found amongst the participants (see data reduction matrix for observation, Appendix E) within these six participants there were three sets of characteristics that seemed to be noteworthy. These sets of characteristics included discussions of challenges to the status quo, the importance placed on following steps, and the access to materials given to students.

Discussion of Status Quo

For five out of the six participants, the discussion—or lack thereof—of challenges to the status quo was noted at one extreme of Finn’s (1999) continuum of domesticating

versus liberating education. Interestingly, this was the only set of characteristics that seemed to have some correspondence to a teacher's sense of community. In other words, while there were other characteristics that perhaps the two participants with a low sense of community or the two with the highest seemed to share within a similar range on the continuum, upon analysis this set of characteristics jumped out as consistently shared within the levels of sense of community. Again, as represented on the extreme characteristics chart (Table 4.3), teachers with the lowest sense of community seemed to frequently engage in conversations with their students in discussions about the status quo, while those with middle or high sense of community rarely, if ever, engaged such conversations.

First, it is important to describe how this was defined in my own research. Taking from Alinsky's (1946) work to develop characteristics of domesticating versus liberating education, Finn (1999) encourages "working-class parents and older working-class students [to] master school discourse and powerful literacy in order to struggle for justice and equity" (p. 206). A key piece of engaging in powerful literacy is understanding the power structures put in place that encourage executive elite students to be "masters of the universe," while teaching working-class children to follow directions and fall in-line (Finn, 1999, p. 20).

In my own research, I looked for opportunities for teachers to encourage students to consider how their own local, state, or global society was "set up." In other words, in order to mark participants as engaging in discussions of the status quo, there did not need to be what one might call a liberal agenda associated with such references. I consciously

chose to note these conversations even when they were about understanding how systems exist as opposed to why, to avoid privileging one political leaning over the other. Since rural schools and communities tend to be more traditional and conservative in their politics (Atkins, 2003), I wanted to be able to note those teachers who might see themselves as more conservative and yet who still encouraged students to think critically about how (and in some cases, why) societies exist.

Before a larger discussion of this characteristic ensues, it is also important to note that some subjects may lend themselves to these discussions more readily. For example, the two teachers with the lowest sense of community, Roger and Olivia, had the highest frequency of such conversations. However, these teachers taught English and Social Studies respectively, subjects ripe for such discussions. However, congruent with the belief that teaching is a political act (Freire, 1970), choices within all subjects, including what and how to teach, are made and acted upon daily. Therefore, it is my belief that possibilities for such discussions exist in all subject areas.

In many ways, the two participants with the lowest sense of community who most often engaged students in conversations around the status quo have little in common. Olivia has taught in the district her entire career; Roger only for the past three years. Olivia has led a seemingly “conservative” life, marrying, staying home to raise children, and only then beginning a career in teaching. While Roger, who considers himself a “bit of a wandering soul” is not married and spent several years teaching and learning in developing countries. The two do share an identity as “Christian,” although that identity is constructed in very different ways. Olivia would often reference her faith in the first

few weeks of our relationship, while Roger did not discuss his own personal beliefs until after several months and numerous experiences had solidified our relationship. I bring up these differences because I want to emphasize that for all intents and purposes, these are two very different individuals. And yet, particular to this research, the two both share a similar sense of community, which seems to have some bearing on their overall goal to prepare students to go out into a more global society.

While Olivia was perhaps less interested in having students engage in a critique of the ways in which societal systems are set up, throughout her lessons there were comments and questions encouraging students to notice this as an important facet of society. In one lesson on the Incas, Olivia shared the following exchange with her students:

They [the kings/ruling people] did the most natural thing (small laugh), they took over their neighbors lands. [To students] Isn't that what you do? History, it is just ugly. (Classroom Observation 3, 5/12/10)

Again, while there is no engagement in conversation about this societal status quo in which those with money take from those, perhaps less affluent, farming peoples, Olivia makes this comment.

For his part, Roger was much more purposeful in his engagement with students on societal issues around wealth and power. In fact, he based his curriculum for the honors English class around the themes of individualism versus collectivism and chose books such as *The Wave* and *Animal Farm* to highlight this theme. These themes also worked their way into his regular English classroom in the reading of books such as *The*

Outsiders. During one observation, Roger and his students spent the opening 15 minutes of class engaging the themes of collectivism and individualism as they pertained to the novel being studied. Students were encouraged to consider if what happened in *The Wave*, where students embrace a classroom experience that is based on the racism that fueled the Holocaust in Germany, “could happen here in Adams?” (Classroom Observation 1, 4/16/10).

These themes also worked their way into his regular English classroom in the reading of books such as *The Outsiders*. During the interview, in a discussion about the ways in which he saw the community coming into the classroom, he talked about the connection between literature and societal reality.

So I see community values, or community ideas of what’s okay, coming in constantly within our literature and the novel units that we do and the things that we talk about. Be that with the regular eighth graders and dealing with the outsiders—the greasers and the socs. It comes through heavily. The Hispanic kids do identify and make comments and put forth writing that show the real identification with the greasers and some of that tension that they relate to even within school of not having the Hollister shirts, not having the cell phone to take out and text somebody. (Interview 1, 4/10/10)

In contrast to the frequency of such discussions of the status quo in the classrooms of Olivia and Roger, there was little to no such discussion within the other participants’ classrooms. Adams’ own societal structure did surface in the interviews with Phillip and Abby—as with Roger; however, it didn’t seem to cross over to the classroom in the same

way. Again, this could have to do with subject matter. However, Steven taught both English and Social Studies, and the teaching of these two subject matters by Roger and Olivia respectively garnered the fullest discussions of the status quo. For example, Roger, through his discussion of the novels *Animal Farm* and *The Wave*, encouraged the students to engage in deeper discussions of issues of power (Classroom Observation 1, 04/16/10). While Olivia didn't foster a discussion of the status quo to the same degree as Roger, her teaching of Social Studies content did touch on issues of power in Incan society (Classroom Observation 3, 5/12/10).

The one exception, within those four teachers with a medium or low sense of community who did not engage the status quo, was Kate, who in her discussion of parliamentary procedure talked about knowing the format so that students could have their voices heard at the local level (Classroom Observation 2, 5/10/10). However, this reference was clearly encouraging students to work within the system. Other than that singular reference in Kate's classroom, discussion of challenges to the status quo rarely or never occurred.

The other two sets of characteristics in which participants consistently were marked at one extreme or the other was 1) students' access to materials and freedom to move around the classroom, which was noted as an extreme for four out of the five participants, and 2) the importance of following steps, which was noted as an extreme for three out of the five participants.

Access to Materials

While this set of characteristics does not appear to have the same connection to sense of community as the characteristics surrounding discussions of the status quo, it is important to note that for three participants— Roger, Phillip, and Steven—the ability for students to freely move around the room and access materials was an extreme characteristic.

The fact that this characteristic was extreme for these three teachers was more likely a result of a general disposition towards students than a result of their sense of community. In general, the teachers—Steven and Phillip, with a medium sense of community and Roger, with a low sense of community—appeared to have almost a placelessness in their relationship with their students. I characterize it as placeless not as a criticism or because they were not interested in the lives of their students. On the contrary, these teachers appeared to know and respect their students quite well. However, in general, the comments that were made to engage students about their lives were often sports or school-based and did not have any particular connection to rural life. For example, in talking through a set of spelling words, Steven made connections between a given word and the New York Yankees baseball team (Classroom Observation 4, 5/21/10). In my observations, there was no similar mention of identity markers that could be connected to a traditional agrarian way of life.

However, in addition to general or all class comments connected to sports or school culture (e.g., something that happened at lunch or the specific curriculum), these three participants often engaged many of their students in side conversations about how

they were doing or what was new in their lives. The effects of such personal interactions seemed to be a classroom environment where students seemed to be well known and thus trusted to move about the classroom to get resources and materials needed. Again, it would be difficult to suggest that this environment of respect was particular to any one sense of community. Instead, this characteristic did appear to be connected to these teachers who in interviews and through observations seemed to privilege relationships with students as a high priority.

Importance on Following Steps

The importance of following steps was the third most common extreme set of characteristics. While it is interesting to note that this characteristic occurred in the classrooms of those participants with the highest and lowest sense of communities, it is perhaps a stretch to directly connect this with a sense of community. However, it is possible that those participants who have particularly strong notions of students' success—the skills/knowledge to compete globally, as in the case of Roger and Olivia, and the skills/knowledge to become a local leader, as in the case of Kate—may be impacting the extreme occurrence of this characteristic.

Finn (1999) determined that the importance of following steps is part of domesticating education. However, it is possible that the participants in my study placed such importance on “do it my way or it’s wrong” not for domestication, but around knowledge that they believed necessary for later success. For example, in having the students write a long and involved research paper as a culminating activity at the end of

the school year, Roger stressed the importance of following the citations rules of MLA. He was adamant to his students that this was the way they could “share their ideas” with the world and therefore insisted that it be done correctly (Classroom Observation 2, 5/6/10).

The same was true with Kate in her teaching and requirements around parliamentary procedure. For Kate, parliamentary procedure was the way for students to be leaders and voice their concerns in a local context (Classroom Observation 2, 5/10/10). In that way, she, like Roger, insisted the procedure be followed to the letter because it was how the world, and in her case how the local world, accepted information. In this way, the insistence of following steps or “it’s my way or it’s wrong” was not like the portrayal in Anyon’s (1981) landmark study of isolated steps that teachers in working-class schools used to fracture knowledge and domesticate students. Rather, the practice seemed to more closely resemble that of executive elite schools where children learned that knowledge “comes from tradition. It’s “out there” and you are expected to learn it” (Finn, 1999, p. 19).

Conclusion

This research explored two central sets of questions. The first set of questions asked “what sense of community or communities exists for rural teachers?” and “within the various ways of being rural, what possible impacts or influences affect teachers’ way of experiencing both the broader community and the community of their individual classroom?” The findings of this research suggest that rural teachers have varying

degrees in which they experience and connect to the rural community in which they teach. Furthermore, the data suggest that a high sense of community is often the result of a personal connection to a rural way of life, which in the case of these participants often stemmed from their own rural upbringing.

The second set of questions that this research engaged focused on teachers' rurality and practice. More specifically, it asked, "what, if any, impact does a teachers' sense of community have on their teaching practice?" and "what, if any, difference exists in the classroom practices of teachers' with a high sense of community and those with a low sense of community as measured by the Sense of Community Index (SCI-2)?" (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). A rural teacher's sense of community likely impacts decisions he or she makes in the classroom in the following two areas: 1) the use of local references or knowledge, and 2) the discussion (or lack thereof) of the status quo. While these are only two aspects of the many, complex facets that occur in the daily interactions between teachers and students, their appearance and possible connection to a teacher's sense of community may warrant further exploration. Understanding that there is, in truth, a difference in what it means to be a "rural" teacher and that such a difference may have some implications for the classroom, the research findings suggest that rural teachers' sense of community is an important area of exploration not only for rural researchers, that is, those who are interested in both the challenges and possibility of rural education, but also for rural school districts, whose philosophy of education and decision to either foster rural sensibility or encourage globalization may be tied to the livelihood of its rural community.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

In the virtual frontier that is today's classrooms where the "displacement of local economies and local cultures is not an accident of progress; it is integral to progress," this research began by asking the question does place matter? (Howley & Howley, 1995, p. 126). This research is certainly not the first to engage this question. In fact, in the field of education, place as an important lens through which to see and conduct research is found in life-long teacher education (Theobald & Howley, 1998; Howley & Howley, 2005), school leadership (Budge, 2005), rural student achievement (Theobald, 1995; Beck & Shoffstall, 2005) and rural school reform (Barley & Beesley, 2007). Additionally, an entire conversation about the connection between critical pedagogy and place is unfolding through the work of Gruenewald (2008), Theobald (1997), Bowers (2008), and Nesper (2008). However, this research hopes to distinguish itself within and amongst this body of research by focusing specifically on the role that rural teachers' sense of community has on their practice. More specifically, this research explored the following questions:

- 1) What sense of community or communities exists for rural teachers? Within the various ways of being rural, what possible impacts or influences affect teachers' way of experiencing both the broader community and the community of their individual classroom?

- 2) What, if any, impact does a teachers' sense of community have on their teaching practice? What, if any, difference exists in the classroom practices of teachers' with a high sense of community and those with a low sense of community as measured by the Sense of Community Index (SCI-2) (McMillan and Chavis, 1986)?

In order to more fully understand these questions, this case study followed six rural teachers for a period of 10 weeks in one rural community. Data collection consisted of two sources: interviews and classroom observations. I chose these two sources of information to strengthen the credibility of the research through methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1978). Through interviews and observations, this qualitative study explored, from the perspective of rural teachers identified as having varied senses of community, what it means to answer the call of rural research to practice a critical pedagogy of place as a "response against educational reform policies and practices that disregard place" (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 308). What is it that rural teachers want for their students? And do those wants have any connection to their own feelings towards and desires for the rural community in which they work? These questions are integral to this study and through seeking the answers, this research hopes to add to the body of rural research that engages the question "what rural research is of most worth?" (Howley, Theobald, & Howley, 2005).

Collective case study was the ideal design to begin to understand these questions because it allowed me to examine in detail six participants' experiences as rural teachers in one rural middle school in the mountain west. Through case design, I could ask these

very questions of teachers regarding how they came to a rural school and what impact their current connection to the community had on their daily decisions. I could also observe their classes and look for outward signs of a teachers' own sense of community on their choice of curriculum or the culture of their classroom.

This research makes the claim that place matters, particularly in rural places, in full awareness of the risk of reinforcing binaries such as insider versus outsider (Nespor, 2008). Data collected from both interviews and observations suggest that there is a difference between teachers with a high sense of community and those with a low sense of community, particularly in their sense of connection to the rural community in which they teach and how, to some degree, they approach their teaching practice. However, first, I want explore how these different ways of being rural were established particular to this research.

Ways to Be Rural

In reviewing various frameworks of sense of community as a construct (Atkins, 2003; Budge, 2005; McMillian & Chavis, 1986), three areas of overlap emerged in which people with a developed sense of place seem to experience. These characteristics include an understanding of community as: 1) intrinsically linking self to others in community, 2) integral in the formation of their own development, and 3) attuned to the land or a particular way of life. Additionally, quantitative measures have been developed to measure these understandings of community. McMillian and Chavis (1986) developed the Sense of Community (SCI-2) scale based on the definition of sense of community as

“a feeling that members have of belonging and being important to each other, and a shared faith that members’ need will be met by the commitment of being together,” (Chavis et al., 1986, p. 11). This measure was used in this study to create a nominated sampling. Scores on the SCI-2 can range from 0-72 and the scores of the six teachers who participated in this study fell within the patterns of low, middle, or high senses of community (Patton, 2002). While I did not have pre-set expectations for how these six participants would score in relation to the SCI-2, two of the participants scored in the lowest third of the range, two of the participants scored in the middle third of the range, and two of the participants scored in the upper third of the range.

The six participants were selected for this study, in part, because they were willing to participate. The use of volunteer participants can be seen as a limitation of this study in that they represent a group of teachers that, just by sheer willingness to participate in a doctoral study, may be slightly different than their colleagues. Their willingness to participate also suggests that these participants may have been motivated to participate out of a relationship with the researcher. However, I used reflexive journaling through the research process in an effort to uncover any bias associated with the relationship between me as the primary researcher and the participants.

All of the participants were rural teachers. To clarify this definition, I chose the language of the State Board of Education in which this research was conducted. The State Board defines an active teacher as a “K-12 teacher with a valid Idaho certificate who is currently teaching in an Idaho K-12 classroom” (Idaho State Board of Education, 2004, para. 1). All six of the participants chosen to participate in the study fit this definition of

active teacher. Added to this definition is the adjective rural. I define rural teacher as an active teacher who practices in a rural district. While the rural perspective, which consists of understanding community as 1) intrinsically linking self to others in community, 2) integral in the formation of their own development, and 3) attuned to the land or a particular way of life was an important of framing my own research, I did not use it as a criteria for participant selection. It is important to note that not all of the teachers involved in the study lived in the rural place in which the research was conducted. Residing in the town of Adams was not part of my criteria.

This study found that sense of community impacts rural teachers' 1) conceptions of the rural community in which they teach and 2) their teaching practice. What follows is a summary of the findings related to each area of impact: conception of community and teaching practice. I will then discuss implications of these findings on the preparation and retention of rural teachers.

Impact on Conceptions of Community

Themes emerging from the interview and observation data suggest that while there were many similarities between all participants in the study, there does appear to be some significant difference between teachers with varying levels of sense of community in terms of their conception of the rural town in which they teach. More specifically, rural teachers with a high sense of community versus those with a low had different motivations surrounding three major areas: 1) coming to a rural place 2) connection to community, and 3) insight into the community.

Coming to a Rural Place

Across all six cases, there was some discussion and meaning given to the role that membership in the rural community played in each of the individual teacher's lives. Furthermore, an "insider" status appeared to correspond positively to the participants' overall score on the SCI-2. In other words, if teachers had a rural upbringing themselves, then they tended to score higher on the SCI-2, indicating a stronger perceived sense of community. Additionally, all three teachers who had a rural upbringing could connect that upbringing or knowing what small towns were like to their own decision to teach in a rural area. This finding corroborates McClure and Reeves (2004) conclusion that one distinguishing component of rural teacher recruitment and retention that does appear to be effective is the ability to tap into the "rootedness" of the community. Since geographic isolation was identified as a major challenge to rural teacher recruitment and retention (McClure & Reeves, 2004; Collins, 1999), grow-your-own programs identify and support potential teacher candidates who already understand the rural lifestyle and are already connected to the community through friends, family, and other social supports. While this may seem trivial, Davis (2002) found that 95 out of 147 elementary teachers in one rural Montana school district, were "most strongly influenced to accept their present teaching positions because they 'enjoyed the rural life style'" (p. 99).

While none of the participants in this study were from identified "grow-your-own" initiatives, the decision to teach in a rural place on the part of three participants—Kate, Abby and Stephen—affirms the importance of that rural connection in that all three

could directly connect that decision to return to a rural place to teach to their own rural rootedness.

Connection to Community

While the findings related to coming to a rural place support prior research on teacher recruitment, this study also has implications surrounding rural teachers' connection to the community and the impact of that connection on both rural teacher retention and rural teachers' overall feelings about the community in which he or she works. I would like to take both of these areas in turn, beginning with the ways in which teachers' sense of community may impact retention.

Teacher Retention

Bornfield (1997) found that “leavers” and “stayers” rated their job satisfaction about equally—none were greatly satisfied—but the determining factor in whether a teacher changed jobs was rootedness to the community (Bornfield et al., 1997). “The leavers . . . considered ‘home’ to be someplace other than where they worked” (p. 36), while 47% of “stayers” cited personal connections to the community as their main reason for continuing to teach in a rural district.

While this study was not longitudinal and not specifically concerned with the long-term commitment of those participants in the study, there are some interesting findings that both support and question these results. In this study, participants with a high sense of community also considered the town of Adams to be their home. Similar to

Bornfield's (1997) findings, these teachers intended to stay in Adams because Adams, was just that, home. Similarly, Roger, one of the teachers with the lowest sense of community, not only considered home to be someplace other than Adams, he was often critical of the community and questioned his ability to remain successful in its framework (Interview 1, 4/10/10). Taken in the context of Chambers and Fowlers (1995) findings that when monetary rewards are lower—as they most likely are in a rural district—then there is more pressure on sustaining positive non-financial elements such as work environment, Roger's negative associations with the community are important considerations. In fact, it is perhaps not surprising that when asked if he plans to remain in the district, he was the only participant who didn't see a future there beyond perhaps the next year. This is even more pressing considering Roger had more years of post-secondary education than the other participants and tended to utilize more liberating forms of pedagogy (Finn, 1999) than many of the other participants.

While the experiences of Kate, Abby, and Roger support the finding that teacher retention is a matter of roots. Olivia and Phillip question if there are other factors that are more influential than rootedness in teacher retention. Neither Olivia nor Phillip had generational roots to Adams and neither lived in the town. Yet, these two teachers had remained in Adams longer than any of the other participants, with 21 and 8 years, respectively. While the interview data suggest that Phillip has, in many ways, created a connection to the community (his wife works in the same district and his children attend school there), Olivia was clear in her interview that she felt no sense of connection to the community (Interview 1, 4/21/10).

Feelings About Community

The findings of this study also suggest that rural teachers' connection to the community may impact their overall feelings about the rural community in which they teach. All six of the participants talked about how the small town values of "hard work" and "respect" were apparent in the day-to-day interactions with students in the classroom. However, participants with a high sense of community tended to detail more positively and much more personally about specific interactions they had experienced within the community. Conversely, teachers with a low sense of community tended to relay more negative associations with the community or, in the case of Olivia, no real connection at all.

In many ways, this frank discussion of teacher's perceptions of the rural community in which they teach is a somewhat uncharted area in rural research. There is a body of rural research that discusses how "outsiders" often undervalue rural education and research (Sherwood, 2000; Theobald, 1995; Howley, Theobald & Howley, 2005). There is also a body of rural research that posits place-based education as an opportunity for rural communities to once again value themselves through connecting their children with their history, their people and their environment (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995; Theobald, 1997; Howley, 1997). However, what seems to be missing is an honest and frank exploration of how rural teachers fit into this equation. In other words, do rural teachers value rural community life? Should that be a requirement of the job? And perhaps even more looming are larger questions about what it is that should be valued in rural life. Should rural teachers be encouraged to value the positive aspects of "everyone

knows everyone” such as the willingness to come together in times of trouble that participants with a high sense of community often value or should they be asked to look critically at the ways “everyone knows everyone” can lead to exclusion and oppression.

Theorists such as Gruenewald (2008) argue the answer lies in a critical pedagogy of place,

Because of critical pedagogy’s strong emphasis on transformation, the question of what needs to be conserved takes on special significance in a critical pedagogy of place. This question does not imply political and ideological alignment with those typically labeled “conservatives.” Instead it makes this political category problematic by challenging everyone, from radicals to reactionaries, to specifically name those aspects of cultural, ecological, and community life that should be conserved, renewed or revitalized. (p. 319)

The findings of this research suggest that those teachers with the highest sense of community, those who may be more likely to invest in the future of the rural community, are also the least likely to question the status quo. I will discuss the implications of this pairing in the implications section.

Insight Into the Community

One theme that emerged through all six interviews, regardless of the participant’s connection to the community, was a concern about their students’ future based on their own insights into the challenges that Adams, as a rural town, faces. And yet, despite this shared concern across the participants regarding economic realities of Adams and the

limits those realities place upon students, there also appeared a distinct difference in approach towards preparing students for the future. For those teachers with low or medium senses of community, the response seemed to be one of global preparation. Even for those two participants with a high sense of community there was a deep understanding that the agrarian way of life was not feasible for the majority of students. However, with these two participants that limitation had more to do with outside political/economic forces that were shaping their community and therefore there was little to no mention of global preparation.

This finding supports previous research that demonstrates how the economic uncertainties of rural life are understood by rural teachers and administrators (Budge, 2005). However, the difference in how teachers with varied senses of community choose to frame that understanding again leads to the discussion of what should be valued about rural life in rural classrooms.

Impact of Practice

Additionally, themes emerging from interview and observation data also suggest that a rural teacher's sense of community appears to impact decisions he or she makes in the classroom. Specifically, rural teachers with a high sense of community versus those with a low sense of community appear to differ in their 1) use of local references or knowledge, and 2) discussion (or lack thereof) of the status quo.

Use of Local References

For those participants, with the exception of one, who had a low or medium sense of community, references appeared to be either global or placeless. In contrast, the two participants with the highest sense of community often used local referents, even in situations when a more global reference would have been common and expected.

Place-based education by definition calls for the use of “the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and other subjects across the curriculum” (Sobel, 2004, p. 7). In that way, this research suggests that teachers with a high sense of community may be more likely to successfully utilize place-based education, as defined in this way. However, these findings also suggest that a critical pedagogy of place, which is born out of place-based education, may be more elusive to rural teachers. A critical pedagogy of place calls for,

An approach to education that is rooted in the experiences of marginalized peoples; that is centered in a critique of structural, economic, and racial oppression; that is focused on dialogue instead of a one-way transmission of knowledge; and that is structured to empower individuals and collectives as agents of social change. (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, 2008, p. 183)

In other words, there are those teachers with a high sense of community that draw on local knowledge; however, the findings of this research suggest that these are not necessarily the teachers that will engage students in how that local knowledge and culture

sustain and perpetuate systems of oppression. This willingness to engage the status quo is the final finding.

Discussion of the Status Quo

For five out of the six participants, the discussion—or lack thereof—of challenges to the status quo was noted as an extreme characteristic on the observation protocol. Teachers with the lowest sense of community seemed frequently to engage in conversations with their students about the status quo, while those with middle or high senses of community rarely, if ever, engaged in such conversations. This finding is unique to this research and within it the crux of the discussion around the impact of teachers' sense of community on practice.

Implications

While many teachers may choose a rural place to teach, this study suggests that a difference may exist between those who strongly identify with their community and those who do not. Such a difference may have implications for teacher preparation and retention.

Rural Teacher Preparation and Retention

Following the logic that there is a difference between the ways in which rural teachers engage their classroom and community, understanding and recognizing teachers' sense of community becomes a critical piece of teacher preparation and retention. This is

in direct contrast to the underlying assumption that what is best for teachers and students is the “uniform, if sometimes segregated, skills and outcomes that schools are expected to promote” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 620). Instead, rural teachers must be prepared for rural teaching, which means “they not only must have the credentials they need, but they should also be aware of the nature of small schools in small communities” (Barley, 2009, p. 10).

While this study supports an understanding that teachers’ sense of community does appear to make a difference, it does not presume to understand how that difference should be put into policy and practice. In other words, it leaves more questions than answers, particularly in the areas of rural teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention.

Recruitment

Grow-your-own initiatives can incorporate a wide-range of practices such as supporting existing para-professionals in rural schools, encouraging rural high school students to return to their communities after traditional university-based teacher preparation, or specifically working to identify potential teacher candidates who already understand the rural lifestyle and are connected to the community. However, while these initiatives have the benefit of combating geographic isolation, a major challenge to rural teacher recruitment and retention (McClure & Reeves, 2004; Collins, 1999), this study suggests that they may also have a disadvantage.

While rural teachers with a high sense of community tend to associate positively with the community, they also appear to be less interested in challenging the status quo

(Finn, 1999). In his chapter, “Taking Sides,” Finn (1999) argues that “transforming intellectuals take sides. They are on the side of democracy and social justice” (p. 188).

Finn (1999) reminds us that these concepts are not politically free.

Isn't it political, I ask, to teach the history of European missionaries bringing 'civilization' to Africa and never mention Bishop Tutu's assertion that in the end the Europeans had the land and the Africans had the bibles? Isn't it political to teach the history of women's suffrage or the abolition of slavery or the civil rights struggle as the work of larger-than-life heroes rather than as the accomplishments of common people who organized and took action....I point out that what shocks them about Peterson [a teacher he is referencing] is not that he's political; it's that he is controversial. (p.178)

While special interest groups exist at all local school system levels, “these can be especially intense in a rural setting” (Farmer, 2009, p. 30). In addition to such special interest groups such as sports booster clubs, “religious and political affiliations can also play a role in the politics of rural education” (Farmer, 2009, p. 31.) Again, while the participation of religious groups in rural schooling does not immediately suggest that rural teachers would be discouraged from engaging controversial questions, the legacy of the 1925 Scopes trial still symbolizes a conflict between modern, secular, urban America and conservative, religious, rural America (Keith, 1995). Again, cautious of reaffirming a dichotomy in which urban equals progressive while rural equals conservative, the findings of this research leads to other questions. Are rural teachers free to engage Finn's (1999) concept of liberating pedagogy if engaging such a pedagogy requires that

“curriculum and methods are critical... [because] they are designed to enable students to ask critical questions?” (p. 184). In other words, how can rural teachers remain part of a community and still ask critical questions such as “Who makes decisions and who’s left out?” “Who benefits and who suffers?” How could things be different?” (Finn, 1999, p. 184).

This research is not suggesting that rural education is incompatible with these questions. However, critical questions may challenge rural understandings of land rights, economic distribution, and ethnic belonging. These challenges could then call into question the greater rural perspective that includes a sense of rurality as 1) intrinsically linking self to others in community 2) integral in the formation of their own development and 3) attuned to the land or a particular way of life (Atkins, 2003; Budge, 2005; McMillian & Chavis, 1986). In this way, Gruenewald (2008) is correct to point out that a reframing of place-based education to a critical pedagogy of place not only “does not imply political and ideological alignment with those typically labeled ‘conservatives,’” but perhaps more problematic for rural teachers who may engage a critical pedagogy of place is the actual problematizing of “this political category [of conservative].....by challenging everyone, from radicals to reactionaries, to specifically name those aspects of cultural, ecological, and community life that should be conserved, renewed or revitalized” (p. 319). In other words, is it possible for rural teachers to both look and act critical and also remain “of” a rural community?

Preparation

Following the logic that teaching is a political act (Friere, 1970), the preparation of pre-service teachers is also a political act. Again, in calling for not only an understanding that there are differing ways to be rural, but a need to prepare pre-service teachers for this reality, this research begs the question, “What type of rural teacher should pre-service institutions prepare?” Should institutions that prepare pre-service teachers for rural teaching encourage a high sense of community in which local knowledge is drawn from but not questioned? Or, by preparing pre-service teachers to engage a critical pedagogy of place, are pre-service teaching institutions also privileging the experience of rural teachers with a low sense of community who may believe that out-migration is not only unavoidable but also to be welcomed? Such an either/or framing of these questions creates a neat, if also false, dichotomy. Yet, if teaching is a political act, it is important to acknowledge that choices on either side of the dichotomy have real implications.

Retention

Teachers who have positive interactions or feel positively about where they work, including the community as an extension of their work place, seem to be more likely to come to and remain in rural places (McClure & Reeves, 2004). This seemingly positive correlation also raises questions as to what practices are most valuable. Again, cautious of presenting a picture of rural teachers as somehow homogenous, this research does ask rural schools and districts to consider what type of rural teacher is best to retain.

Teachers with a high sense of community appear more likely to include local knowledge through their daily references. They also appear more willing to enact a place-based approach as defined by Sobel (2004). However, teachers with a high sense of community also seem less likely to encourage students to challenge the status quo. This type of critical thinking and discussion is an important part of critical education (Finn, 1999). Therefore, this study suggests that rural schools and school districts, should they seek to retain teachers with a high sense of community, may also experience an approach to practice in which critical questions regarding the status quo are not necessarily engaged in the classroom.

Conversely, teachers with a low or medium sense of community appear to preference global knowledge and to see the rural community as limiting. Furthermore, those with a low sense of community also appear more likely to encourage students to challenge the status quo. Again, I hesitate to suggest that there is a strict dichotomy; however, there is some suggestion that by privileging teachers with a low sense of community, rural students may be more likely to experience some elements of critical education. However, that critical education may be difficult to successfully root in place.

Given these findings, this study not only engages the question “what do rural teachers believe is the ideal outcome for rural education,” but more critical perhaps, is the question “who can enact these outcomes?” It is my belief that while teachers with a low sense of community may be most invested in enacting a critical pedagogy that encourages the “ability to evaluate, analyze and synthesize what is read,” these same

teachers do not always have the local knowledge, understanding, and commitment to community to be heard (Finn, 1999, p. 124).

I will explore this implication as it relates to two of the participants: Roger and Abby. Roger, with his low sense of community, was deeply committed to encouraging students to engage critical questions of collectivism versus individualism, questions of belonging and the role of the societal structure in creating that system of belonging. And yet, nearly a year and a half after this study, my continued contact with Roger indicates that while he might remain in Adams for one more year, it is certainly not a place where he will lay down his own roots. In part because his own philosophy of teaching was often at odds with the community, and he often found it disheartening to field parents' and administrative concerns as to the purpose of his book choices and classroom discussions.

On the other hand, Abby, with her deep roots and intimate knowledge and understanding of the community, was uniquely situated to ask her students to critically examine societal practices in the town of Adams, but in a way that was respectful of the town's history and prospective future. In many ways, her uniquely rural position afforded her the credibility to engage a critical pedagogy of place that "address[es] the specificities of the experiences, problems, languages, and histories that communities rely upon to construct a narrative of collective identity and possible transformation" because she understood those problems and histories in her personal and professional life (McLauren & Giroux, 1990, p. 263 as cited in Gruenewald, 2008). And yet, the tension that surfaced in her interview and classroom teaching between those who belonged to the land and those that had come to work it appeared to prevent her from really engaging the students,

and perhaps herself, in critical questions that get to the heart of the promise of a rural Adams for all of its citizens. Perhaps with more opportunity to reflect and wrestle with this tension either in pre-service education or in-service education, Abby would value the purpose of a critical pedagogy of place for all of her students, not just those, who like her, have a generational tie to the land.

Conclusion

This study engaged two sets of questions that explored 1) the various ways that rural teachers experience community, and 2) what, if any impact, that sense of community had on rural teachers' practice. Through a collective case study of six participants, this study found that sense of community was experienced at differing levels and that this connection to the community appeared to have implications for teachers' own perceptions about the community and their practice.

It is also important to know that while these findings appear significant, there are limitations to this study. As with other case study research, the two main limitations with this study are researcher bias and generalizability. Reflexive journaling throughout the research process was used as a means for addressing and being conscious of such biases. To address generalizability, a research protocol was established that utilized triangulation of data through interview and classroom observation. Additionally, when generalizations were called for, I utilized rich description of the phenomenon. Another limitation of this study overall was its size. While utilizing a case study designed allowed for a deeper understanding through multiple data sources, because the research was a

small case study, additional research is needed to explore the findings of this collective case study to other rural teachers.

For myself, engaging in this research reaffirmed my own rural insider/outsider status. Throughout this study, there was a tension both to reaffirm all that I love about my own rural upbringing and, conversely, to continue to question the detrimental aspects of small communities that can exclude based on race, ethnicity, sexuality, or language and resist a critical exploration of why such exclusion exists. Perhaps it is a good sign that I leave this research with more questions than answers about the road forward for rural education.

I began writing this dissertation at the same time that the Superintendent for Public Instruction in the state in which the town of Adams resides released *Students Come First*. This K-12 reform plan focuses on implementing a “customer-driven system that educates more students at a higher level with limited resources” (Luna, 2011, p. 1). One of the founding pillars of this reform is technology, and through it the state will “invest \$50 million over the next two years in both hardware and software for every Idaho classroom” (Luna, 2011, p. 2). The decision to focus on technology is rooted in the belief that a “21st Century Classroom is not limited by walls, bell schedules, school calendars or geography” (Luna, 2011, p. 2). Through the writing of this dissertation, I have come to understand that when “society foists the ‘inevitable’ upon them [which in this case is a universal technology], they [rural schools] give up power, rather than gain it” (Howley & Howley, 1995, p. 126).

This understanding encourages me to call for research that asks rural teachers, administrators, and researchers to go back to the question, “what really matters?” Is it globalization? Is it localization? Or is it democratic preparation, as Dewey (1897; 1916) suggests, through critical engagement? Furthermore, if critical pedagogy of place does warrant a place at the rural table as Gruenewald (2008) suggests, then further research is certainly needed to more fully unpack how a teacher’s sense of place affects his or her desire, interest, and ability to engage a critical lens. It is also important to note that such research will need to extend to current rural practices of teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention.

However, what hasn’t changed through this research process is my commitment to the singular philosophy that place, does in fact, matter. Despite their differences and their label of high, medium, or low senses of community, the teachers of Adams Middle School have consistently said that where they come from and where they now choose to practice is, for many of them, a question of place.

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APPENDIX A
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

I would like you to talk about your understanding of what it means to be “from Adams” either for yourself or for your students and how that connection to this community has or has not shaped what you do in the classroom. If you have any questions during the interview, please feel free to ask them. Also, if at any time during the interview, you would like a break or feel uncomfortable, please let me know.

1. Please describe your teaching experiences. (Context Question)
 - a. Number of years taught
 - b. Number of schools taught
 - c. Subject/grade levels taught
2. Please describe how you came to teach at Adams Middle School. What factors most influenced your decision to teach in this school? (Relevance: RC #1—probing if teaching cite rurality as a factor that influenced decision)
3. Adams Middle School serves a rural town. Can you describe your connection to the larger community of Adams. (Relevance: RQ #1-What are teachers connections to the community)
4. Building on the last question, can you give me an example of a time when you felt that the larger community of Adams had a direct impact on your classroom? How did you feel about that impact? (Relevance: RQ #1—does the community impact the teachers’ individual classroom.)
5. Can you describe the typically life trajectory of a Adams Middle School student? Or in other words, in your opinion what happens to the majority of HMS students after they leave the middle school? the high school? (Relevance: RQ #2: What do teachers believe they are preparing the majority of students for)

Now, I want to switch gears a bit to talk about your teaching practice. More specifically, I want to give you an opportunity to describe the things that most impact the choices that you make in the classroom. Since it is sometimes difficult to talk about teaching in the abstract, I am going to give you a scenario and ask you to base your responses on this scenario. Remember this is only a scenario.

The school board has recently argued that with all the emphasis on standardized testing—and the universal skills and knowledge sets connected to such tests—the students in the district do not seem to understand what it means to be “from Adams”

anymore. More specifically, they argued that students no longer know the history of the town or seem to understand what it means to live in rural place. They are worried that students today will not be able to take over the major roles and responsibility of the community. They are asking teachers to consider gearing aspects of classroom instruction towards providing opportunity for students to learn more about the community from which they are from and the skills/knowledge necessary to support the community in the future?

1. What would be your reaction to the school board argument? Would you agree with their claim that students do not know what it means to be “from Adams?”
2. How important do you think it is for students to know the history of the community? What skills/sets of knowledge do you think students need to have? Are those skills/sets of knowledge directly connected to living in a rural community?
3. If you were to act on the board’s request to incorporate more local knowledge into your curriculum, what would you include? Would you need to find sources in the community or do you feel you have enough experience/knowledge of your own to add this to your curriculum?

This covers all the things that I wanted to ask. Is there anything you care to add?

APPENDIX B

Classroom Observation Protocol

Classroom Observation Protocol

Teacher's Name:

Date of the Observation:

Knowledge is presented as facts isolated from wider bodies of knowledge. _____

Knowledge is rarely presented as facts isolated for wider bodies of knowledge

Description of Practice

Reflection on Practice

Knowledge taught is not related to the lives and experiences of the students. _____

Knowledge taught is always related.

Description of Practice

Reflection on Practice

Teachers do not explain how assignments are related _____

Teachers do explain how assignments are related

Description of Practice

Reflection on Practice

Work is easy _____

Work is hard

Description of Practice

Reflection on Practice

Knowing the answers is valued _____

Value creativity and expression

Description of Practice

Reflection on Practice

<p>Knowledge from textbooks is more highly valued. _____</p> <p><u>Description of Practice</u></p>	<p>Textbook knowledge is validated by experience</p> <p><u>Reflection on Practice</u></p>
<p>Discussion of challenges to the Status quo rarely occur _____</p> <p><u>Description of Practice</u></p>	<p>Discussion of the challenges to the status quo frequently occur</p> <p><u>Reflection on Practice</u></p>
<p>Instruction is typically copying notes and writing answers to factual questions _____</p> <p><u>Description of Practice</u></p>	<p>Rarely copying notes and writing answers to factual questions</p> <p><u>Reflection on Practice</u></p>
<p>Work is evaluated in terms of following steps. My way or its wrong _____</p> <p><u>Description of Practice</u></p>	<p>Work is sometimes following steps, but students have choice and are rewarded for originality</p> <p><u>Reflection on Practice</u></p>
<p>Writing is filling in blanks on worksheets _____</p> <p><u>Description of Practice</u></p>	<p>Writing is taught in workshop</p> <p><u>Reflection on Practice</u></p>

Both students and teachers focus on grades as the objective _____	Grades are not the objective
<u>Description of Practice</u>	<u>Reflection on Practice</u>
Student access to materials and movement is restricted _____	Students access is not restricted
<u>Description of Practice</u>	<u>Reflection on Practice</u>
Students are rewarded for passivity and obedience _____	Students are rewarded for initiative and inquisitiveness
<u>Description of Practice</u>	<u>Reflection on Practice</u>
Students are rarely given a chance to express their own ideas _____	Students are frequently given an opportunity to express their ideas
<u>Description of Practice</u>	<u>Reflection on Practice</u>
Teachers make derogatory comments to and about students _____	Teachers never make such comments
<u>Description of Practice</u>	<u>Reflection on Practice</u>

APPENDIX C

Sense of Community Index (SCI-2)

Sense of Community Index (SCI-2)

The following questions about community refer to: [insert community name].

How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other community members?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6

Prefer Not to be Part of This Community	Not Important at All	Not Very Important	Somewhat Important	Important Very	Important
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How well do each of the following statements represent how you feel about this community?

Not at All Somewhat Mostly Completely

1. I get important needs of mine met because I am part of this community.

2. Community members and I value the same things.

3. This community has been successful in getting the needs of its members met.

4. Being a member of this community makes me feel good.

5. When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of this community.

6. People in this community have similar needs, priorities, and goals.

7. I can trust people in this community.

8. I can recognize most of the members of this community.

9. Most community members know me.

10. This community has symbols and expressions of membership such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize.

11. I put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community.

12. Being a member of this community is a part of my identity.

13. Fitting into this community is important to me.

14. This community can influence other communities.

15. I care about what other community members think of me.

16. I have influence over what this community is like.

17. If there is a problem in this community, members can get it solved.

18. This community has good leaders.

19. It is very important to me to be a part of this community.

20. I am with other community members a lot and enjoy being with them.

21. I expect to be a part of this community for a long time.

22. Members of this community have shared important events together, such as holidays, celebrations, or disasters.

23. I feel hopeful about the future of this community.

24. Members of this community care about each other.

Instructions for Scoring the Revised Sense of Community Index

1. Identifying the Community Referent

The attached scale was developed to be used in many different types of communities. Be sure to specify the type of community the scale is referring to before administering the scale. Do not use “your community” as the referent.

2. Interpreting the Initial Question

The initial question “How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other community members?” is a validating question that can be used to help you interpret the results. We have found that total sense of community is correlated with this question – but keep in mind this may not be true in every community.

3. Scoring the Scale

For the 24 questions that comprise the revised Sense of Community Index participants:
Not at All = 0, Somewhat = 1, Mostly = 2, Completely = 3

Total Sense of Community Index = Sum of Q1 to Q24

Subscales Reinforcement of Needs = Q1 + Q2 + Q3 + Q4 + Q5 + Q6

Membership = Q7 + Q8 + Q9 + Q10 + Q11 + Q12

Influence = Q13 + Q14 + Q15 + Q16 + Q17 + Q18

Shared Emotional Connection = Q19 + Q20 + Q21 + Q22 + Q23 + Q24

APPENDIX D

Codes for Interview and Reflection Journal Data

Codes for Interview and Reflection Journal Data

Theme 1: Reason For Coming to Rural	<p>This Theme Applied to Discussions of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Own Rural Upbringing -Personal History -Land/Location -Mission -Recommendations
Theme 2: Connection to Community	<p>This Theme Applied to Discussions of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Credibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subcode: Insider/Outsider Participants Connections to the Towns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Values <ul style="list-style-type: none"> subcode: Religion Sports -Changing Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subcode: Families Students
Theme 3: Connection with Community (later a the broader theme of Insight into Community was utilized to avoid confusion with Connection to Community)	<p>This Theme Applied to Discussions of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Changing Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subcode: students' future Local economy
Theme 4: Practice	<p>This Theme Applied to Discussions of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Skills/Knowledge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subcode: Global/Local

APPENDIX E

Data Reduction Matrix for Interview Data

Data Reduction Matrix for Interview Data

Reason for Rural Teaching						
	ROGER	OLIVIA	STEVEN	PHILLIP	ABBY	KATE
Level of Sense of Community (as measured by SCI-Index)	19/72	21/72	27/72	37/72	43/72	59/72
<i>Personal Reasons</i>						
personal mission-not necessarily rural	X		X	X		
Personal reason—necessarily rural			X		X	X
Specific tied to rural community					X	X
<i>External Reasons</i>						
Recommendation of particular school		X				
Connection to Community						
	ROGER	OLIVIA	STEVEN	PHILLIP	ABBY	KATE
<i>Feelings about Personal Interactions Within</i>						
More + than -			X	X	X	X
More – than +	X					
<i>Own Personal History</i>						
Rural generally			X		X	X
Land specifically					X	X
<i>Expressed Feelings about Participation in Community</i>						
Positive	X		X	X	X	X
Negative	X				X	
<i>Curricular Connections to Community</i>						
Focus on local in the past		X			X	
Focus on local presently					X	X
Focus on local theoretically					X	
Global focus	X	X	X	X		
Community Insight						
	ROGER	OLIVIA	STEVEN	PHILLIP	ABBY	KATE
<i>Students' Future</i>						
Local can be limiting	X	X	X	X	X	X
Local represents possibility					X	X
<i>Community/Shared Values</i>						
Values are shared	X	X	X	X	X	X
Values are not shared	X			X	X	
Practice						
<i>Knowledge Needed</i>						
Global	X	X	X	X		
Local				X	X	X

APPENDIX F

Data Reduction Matrix for Observation

Data Reduction Matrix for Observation

OLIVIA			
Synopsis: Knowledge is both in the textbook and connected to other modes of information, i.e., technology, additional books/projects. Students eager to learn are most successful when they follow pre-determined steps. In the study of social studies, the world's history is complex and connected.			
Domesticating Characteristic		-----Liberating Characteristics	
		Discussion of Status Quo	
			Assignments are connected
Textbook is more valued than experience			
Following Steps is important			
ROGER			
Synopsis: Discovery is valued and students are encouraged to analyze the social systems within and outside of literature. However, there is also a place for knowledge outside of the individual students, i.e., grammar/MLA and therefore, knowing the answers is important and steps may need to be heeded.			
Domesticating Characteristic		-----Liberating Characteristics	
			Discussion of Status Quo
			Students have access to Materials
	Knowing Answers is Valued		
	Following Steps is important		

STEVEN			
<p>Synopsis: Learning occurs through a variety of activities for particular skills/understandings. These various activities are connected to lives of students, especially sports knowledge, and the classroom environment is marked by respect and a feeling a family.</p>			
Domesticating Characteristic		-----Liberating Characteristics	
			Knowledge is related to lives of students (sports)
			Students have access to Materials
Discussion of Status Quo			
	Assignments connected		
PHILLIP			
<p>Synopsis: Knowledge is a set of skills/understandings that students must master to learn a new language. Whenever possible these skills/understandings are connected to the lives of students through activities. The environment is open for students to move to access materials and there is a feeling of respect.</p>			
Domesticating Characteristic		-----Liberating Characteristics	
Discussion Status Quo			
		Assignments are connected	
			Students have access to Materials
	Knowing the Answers is valued		

ABBY			
<p>Synopsis: Knowledge is important scientific knowledge and understanding. There is an emphasis on teaching difficult concepts through hands-on experience which are most often connected to the concept at hand. Students who are most successful are self motivated and have a sense of inquiry.</p>			
Domesticating Characteristic		-----Liberating Characteristics	
			Textbook knowledge is validated by experience
			Work is Hard
			Students are rewarded for inquiry
Discussion of Status Quo			
	Students encouraged to express ideas		
KATE			
<p>Synopsis: While there are some important skills/understandings that make up valued knowledge, students are equally encouraged to develop skills for local leadership. As such knowledge is rooted in the local lives of students. However, when outside knowledge is valued it is important that students to follow particular steps so they are successful in the local environment.</p>			
Domesticating Characteristic		-----Liberating Characteristics	
			Related to lives of students (local issues)
Following Steps is important			
			Students encouraged to express ideas
	Students access is restricted		

APPENDIX G

Informed Consent Letter

Teachers of Adams Middle School,

As a part of my doctoral studies, I will be conducting a research project at Adams Middle School to look at the impact of teachers' sense of community on their teaching philosophy and practice. The purpose of this research is to gain a greater sense of what rural teachers with a high sense of community believe to be the purpose of education and the classroom practices they put forth to achieve that end.

There are two levels of consent to participant in this study. The first level of consent means that you are willing to complete a Sense of Community Index (SCI). This index takes 15 minutes to complete and asks you to choose from the options of "not at all," "somewhat," "mostly" and "completely" to answer questions such as "Being a part of this community is part of my identity."

The second level of consent means that if you are chosen based on your score on the Sense of Community Index, you will be willing to participate in two interviews, which will not last more than 45 minutes, and two classroom observations. Participants will also be asked to participate in member checks, which will occur three times throughout the study and take approximately 15-30 minutes per time.

All data collected as a part of this study will remain confidential and pseudonyms will be given in the writing and presentation of my research. You also have the right to be removed from the study at any time during the project.

While there are no financial benefits to participating in this research, your willingness to participate makes research in rural education possible. While there is much written about education in general and urban education specifically, the body of research on what really matters to rural teachers is small. Participating in this research will add to that body of research and add your voice to the discussion of what is important in the education of rural students.

Through the interview process, there is also the potential benefit that reflection on one's own philosophy and practice can bring. While time is limited and precious, this opportunity to reflect on what matters most in rural education has the potential to benefit you as an individual teacher.

If you give consent to participate in this study, please sign below and put this form in my box in the work room. Thank you for your time and your willingness to support me in my doctoral research.

Sincerely,

Faith Hansen

I, _____ . give consent to both levels of participation in
Faith Beyer Hansen's Dissertation Research

Signature _____ Date _____