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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to Lauren and Mackenzie with whom I have grown up and from whom I continue to learn because of their love of learning. Their love and encouragement, along with that of their significant others, Sarah and Joshua, have supported me through tougher times and we continue to celebrate how far each of us has come and will go. I also believe this work would not have been possible without my parents and brothers who have loved me unconditionally through all phases of life. And, finally, I am grateful to friends, colleagues, students, and heroes, including those who have stood by me through all of the ups and downs in life and others who have passed through my life briefly. So many of these persons have shared chunks and pieces of themselves and left indelible impressions on my life and who I am.

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Abstract

This study addressed a gap in the literature about the importance of the school context in predicting and mediating postsecondary education participation for rural students. Using grounded theory with a modified constant comparative analysis, the study offered insight into the culture of a Midwestern, positively deviant remote rural school which graduated students with completed plans and requirements for postsecondary education. Semi-structured interviews with 10 of the 23 faculty members and other school data sources facilitated identification of the Discourse of the educators regarding students' preparation, sensemaking, and completion of steps for postsecondary education access. The resulting *Individual Anxiety-Corporate Confidence* (IA-CC) model indicated the educators' use of balanced polar messages of individual responsibility and corporate efficacy represented the school's Discourse. The IA-CC model contributed to the literature: (a) a variation of the autonomy-connectedness theory for the rural school culture; (b) a cultural view of the socially-constructed reality of postsecondary education access; (c) an understanding of the ecology of messaging important in the meaning making of the rural students; and (d) a rare real-world ecologically valid study of a case of organizational-level implicit person theory. The IA-CC model and Discourse of this remote, rural school may provide insight for other rural educators and leaders regarding school context aspects including shared expectations for postsecondary education, shared leadership, college brokering, and including steps of postsecondary education preparation and access within the school day.

Keywords: rural schools, school context, leadership, postsecondary education access, ecology of messaging, implicit person theory, growth mindset, college-going culture

Preface

Employed by a federally-funded intervention program to increase the number of students from high poverty, primarily rural schools prepared to meet the academic and cultural requirements for success in postsecondary education, I was both researcher and practitioner interested in what works to increase the culture of college readiness in schools. Intervention strategies for the program I coordinated were based on a whole-school change model, working with leaders, teachers, students, and their parents. This program followed a cohort of Oklahoma students from seventh grade through high school graduation.

As an elementary and secondary student who attended both suburban and rural schools, I lived a difference between the cultures of rural and suburban schools. Conversations with friends and acquaintances from rural Oklahoma schools in which they report experiencing high academic standards and expectations for college attendance after high school piqued my own curiosity about what was happening in these rural schools. I had also been a first generation college student.

Working with persons from significant poverty has been a constant throughout my life, from work with welfare recipients in a suburban federal program to develop basic academic skills to help them qualify for job training, as a volunteer Habitat for Humanity affiliate organizer, and as an educator and administrator in both low poverty and high poverty middle schools. I have worked with students in significant poverty ranging from 6th graders to adults in their 60s. Through my work with persons in the different phases of their lives, it has been my privilege to see firsthand the power of helping them keep doors open to all possibilities, challenging children, teens, and adults to push themselves to reach their dreams, and supporting them where they need a

helping hand up to reach their goals. It has been a priority for me to help them develop skills to pursue dreams while maintaining dignity and a value for their roots.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Nearly every state in the U.S. has adopted college and career readiness standards and incorporated the standards into requirements for a high school diploma (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, & Pittenger, 2014). In an era of high stakes educational accountability, local school leaders and teachers are charged with increasing both students' postsecondary academic preparation and enrollment rates of graduates to meet goals for a national "college completion agenda" (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The call for increased postsecondary access and success is fueled by the anticipated shift in the employment market toward jobs requiring education beyond a high school diploma. By the year 2020, research indicates that 65 percent of available jobs will require some type of postsecondary credential (Carnivale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010).

The potential growth in employment opportunities requiring education beyond high school has not been paralleled by expansion in postsecondary educational enrollment and attainment. In 2012, while 82 percent of high school graduates with family incomes above $90,000 enrolled in college the semester after graduation, their peers in families at incomes below $35,000 enrolled at 55 percent (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013; Collins, 2011; Mortensen, 2005). The schools from which only half of the students attend college after high school are predominantly urban and rural schools of poverty (Cabrera, Burkum, & La Nasa, 2005; NCES, 2006).

While U.S. higher education access and success is touted as available to all students based on academic qualification, factors such as financial situation, race and

ethnicity, social class, and high school context continue to reflect stratification based on these conditions which Liu (2011) described as “an accident of birth” characteristics. The research documenting the meritocratic inequity of postsecondary education indicates that college attendance after high school has become the “default option” for higher income students (Liu, 2011). While the average college attendance rate for high school students following graduation has risen to nearly 70 percent, the gap between the schools from which 90 percent of graduates enroll in college are contrasted with schools in which as few as 20 percent of students matriculate has not significantly changed.(Schneider, 2007).

Schools from which the high percentages of students move directly into the workforce after high school graduation tend to come from families in which parents do not have college experience. These students are typically from lower-income, urban or rural backgrounds who face financial and logistical barriers to continuing education, and do not view college as a realistic option. During the 2011 school year, more than half of all public school districts were located in rural areas, compared to 20 percent of districts located in suburban areas, 18 percent in towns, and 3 percent in cities (Aud & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2013)

First-generation college students have a greater tendency to undermatch when they do attend college (Perna 2006). Undermatch is defined as students enrolling in less selective or challenging colleges than supported by their academic qualifications. Even academically-strong students from lower income rural families whose parents had limited education have been, compared to their counterparts from higher income families, more likely to choose a postsecondary option for which they are academically

undermatched (Blackwell & McLaughlin, 1999; Provasnik, KewalRamani, Coleman, Gilbertson, Herring, & Xie, 2007; Smith, Pender, & Howell, 2013). The phenomenon of undermatch would be less disconcerting if students were selecting schools based on one or more personal or organizational criteria other than academic match. Selection of an institution of higher education after high school on the basis of fit, a combination of academic and non-academic characteristics, also supports student academic success (Schmitt, Oswald, Friede, Imus, & Merritt; 2008).

While, intuitively, any college would be preferable to no college, numerous studies posit students who undermatch significantly decrease their likelihood of graduating (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). For students who undermatch, the college graduation rate was 15 percent lower than that of their academic peers who attended more selective colleges, 66 percent to 81 percent (Sherwin, 2012). Overall, statistics of postsecondary degree attainment highlight an even larger economic divide. For students ages 18-24, the rates of college graduation range from 9 percent for students from low-income families, to 54 percent for their higher-income peers (Mortensen, 2005).

The gaps in college participation and degree attainment perpetuate a lack of opportunity for low-income students to access the benefits afforded college graduates. On average, a college degree contributes to financial, physical and social well-being over the course of an individual's lifetime. Compared to persons with only a high school diploma, research identifies significant potential benefits for college graduates including increasing the likelihood of doubling lifetime income, reducing by half the

potential for unemployment, and lives lived with more access to health benefits and fewer health problems (Collins, 2011; Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

A postsecondary access and success "opportunity gap" persists for lower-income students, many of whom are from rural schools, potential first-generation college students, and other underrepresented students. The opportunity gap supports a system in which these students face significant odds against social mobility through increasing their earnings outlook (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Darling-Hammond, Willhoit, & Pitttenger, 2014). Beyond academic ability, variables which serve to either facilitate or act as gatekeeper for higher education access have been wealth, race and ethnicity, social class, high school context, parental and family involvement, and financial aid (Liu, 2011).

Research identifies the opportunity gap and provides a pool of recommended interventions to support students innavigating college access gap and being successful (Cabrera, Burkum, & La Nasa, 2005; Darling-Hammond, Willhoit, & Pitttenger, 2014; Liu, 2011; NCES, 2006; Schneider, 2007). The recommended interventions range from increased information and support for families to increasing students' postsecondary aspirations plus direct assistance in completing requirements for admissions and financial aid to an overhaul of the postsecondary education system (Cabrera, Burkum, & La Nasa, 2005; Collins, 2011; Darling-Hammond, Willhoit, & Pitttenger, 2014; Lumina Foundation for Education, 2010; NCES, 2006; Schneider, 2007).

Understanding the college access needs of impoverished rural students and schools includes familiarity with the rural school context and experiences (Irvin, Meece,

Byun, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2011). The majority of research about increasing college preparation and access has been situated in the urban context (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005; Schneider, 2007; Semke & Sheridan, 2012). The sparse volume of quality rural school education research would seem to indicate that relatively few students attend rural schools. In actuality, one in five U.S. public school students attend a rural school and nearly one third of all U.S. public schools are considered rural (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005; Johnson & Strange, 2009). With such a substantial portion of school children attending rural schools, the educational needs of rural students and schools deserves exploration (Bauer, Dyk, Seohee, & Dolan, 2011; Crockett, Shanahan, & Jackson-Newsom, 2000; Duncan, 2001; Elder & Conger, 2000; Hardre, 2007; Hekter, 1995; Schneider, 2007; Truscott & Truscott, 2005).

For rural youth from schools of significant poverty, after controlling for student and family variables, research indicates school characteristics play a central role in promoting or constraining educational achievement ((Demi, Coleman-Jensen, & Snyder, 2010). In comparison with urban youth, rural students across gender and racial and ethnicity lines graduate high school at higher rates than urban peers. Although rural students' high school graduation rates have been higher than for urban students, rural schools still send fewer students to colleges and universities (Adelman, 2006).

Research also indicates rural students' postsecondary enrollment mediators and predictors differ from that of urban peers. For urban students, educational enrollment after high school is most impacted by family income and relationship with parents. For rural students, school context indicators are among the strongest predictors and mediators of postsecondary enrollment through student perceptions of school, grades,

and aspirations (Demi, Coleman-Jensen, & Snyder, 2010; Meece, Byun, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2011; Meece, Hutchins, Byun, Farmer, Iin, & Weiss, 2013).

Additional education beyond high school is one way to increase students' opportunities to earn higher incomes and reduce poverty for themselves and their communities and schools, which are an important anchor of society for many rural communities (American Community Survey, 2010). Poverty and low levels of education remain related; persons with only a high school diploma are four times more likely to be poor than college graduates (Policy Institute, 2011). Students who live in remote rural schools face the additional challenge of geographic isolation and report a higher degree of conflict in the postsecondary education decision, particularly when they must move away from family to attend (Johnson & Strange, 2009; Crockett, Shanahan, & Jackson-Newsom, 2000; Duncan, 2001; Elder & Conger, 2000; Hardre, 2007; Hekter, 1995; Schneider, 2007; Truscott & Truscott, 2005).

Despite the unique attributes of the rural and remote rural setting, rural school leaders and teachers face the same state and national mandates to increase college and career readiness as their urban and suburban peers. The mandates call for improvement of student academic achievement and preparation for postsecondary education success. Research indicate urban and rural schools' students, particularly potential first-generation college students, need to hear and see specific messages and affective supports offered to change college-going behaviors. The school context continues to be associated with student academic achievement. Since the majority of research about college-going behaviors has been based in urban contexts, rural school leaders and teachers have limited support of research and practitioner resources specific to the rural

context to guide them in addressing the particular needs of their students (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005). Additional research within the rural school context is needed (Semke & Sheridan, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

While there has been significant research and attention to support student academic achievement as the path to increased college access and success, the postsecondary participation puzzle calls for more than merely an academic, financial aid, or other one-size-fits all solution . Studies of the college and career readiness cultures of urban schools have provided insight into how restructuring the cultural ecological framework of schools' college-linking process supports low-income students in overcoming barriers to educational attainment (Collins, 2011; Crockett, Shanahan, & Jackson-Newsom, 2000; Duncan, 2001; Elder & Conger, 2000; Goldrick-Rab, Harris, & Trostel, 2009; Hardre, 2007; Hekter, 1995; Hill, 2008; Johnson & Strange, 2009; Schneider, 2007; Truscott & Truscott, 2005). While research has indicated the increased importance of the organizational culture of rural schools compared to urban schools, there is a gap in the literature in understanding how the rural school culture affects postsecondary preparation (Bell, Rowan-Kenyon, & Perna, 2009; McDonough & Gildersleeve, 2006; Semke and Sheridan, 2012).

This study addresses the identified gap with a qualitative study of the postsecondary socialization context for students in a positively deviant remote rural high school of poverty. The study focuses on the school teachers' and leaders' discursive practices regarding postsecondary education. The school is identified as positively deviant because the majority of students graduate with requirements

completed and a plan for postsecondary education. The aim of this study was to explore the social environment through the messages of teachers and leaders in an effort to discover more about the school's postsecondary culture. Exploration of the verbal and nonverbal messages remembered by teachers and leaders represents an appropriate way to gain insight and understanding of the school's organizational culture as it "emerges from the complex and continuous web of communications among members of the organization" (Keyton, 2011, p. 40)

Research Question

This study considers the communication practices of a positively deviant remote rural school from the perspective of the school leaders and teachers. The rural school leaders and teachers in partnership with students, parents, and community stakeholders have shaped the organizational culture and climate of the school. Climate represents individuals' perceptions about the organizational group shaped by characteristics of the group and of the individuals (Cialdini, Bator, & Guadagno, 1999).

The primary data for the study was from interviews with teachers and leaders as they shared their perceptions of their experience of occupational culture in their school and their participation in role anticipatory socialization of students for developing postsecondary education plans (Kramer, 2010). Educators' occupational culture represents their understandings of their roles within the school shaped by their experiences both before and since affiliation within the school organization (Kramer, 2010). The research question investigated was: *How does the discourse of a remote rural high school reflect Discourse of a culture supportive of postsecondary education (PSE) for all students?*

Summary

National-level research indicates that rural students graduate high school but tend to move into the job market rather than enroll in postsecondary education. Research in urban schools has shown that a culture of college-going within schools increases postsecondary education participation in general. The research about rural students' postsecondary participation indicates significance of the social environment of the rural school differs from the role of school culture for urban students. This study sought to discover, from a teacher-leader perspective, what happens at aremote rural high school from which graduates plans for education after high school represent a positive deviation from the national trends for rural students.

Chapter 2

Introduction

In an age of educational standards and accountability, the call for all students to graduate high school ready for college and career challenges secondary school leaders to examine their organizational practices in this area. Research offers insight to support leaders in exploring their organizational communication and culture reflective of the college and career readiness aspects of their schools. Establishment of a school college-going culture in rural schools of poverty includes expectations for students to pursue at least some type of postsecondary education for all students, providing academic expectations congruent with college-level work, offering information and support through the process of admissions, financial aid, and continued support for potential first-generation college students and their families. The discouraging patterns of postsecondary education participation for rural school students, particularly in schools of poverty, call for re-examination of organizational goals and priorities to provide students with information and opportunities to increase access and success in college and other forms of post-high school training.

Review of the Literature

Schools: Organizational Communication, and Culture

> Schools have a culture that is definitely their own. There are, in the school, complex rituals of personal relationships, a set of folkways, mores, and irrational sanctions, a moral code based upon them. There are games, which are sublimated wars, teams, and an elaborate set of ceremonies concerning them. There are traditions, and traditionalists waging their world-old battle against innovators (p. 96)

The words of Willard Waller written in 1932 provide insight into the complexity of school culture, shaped by its "unwritten rules and traditions, norms and expectations"

(as cited in Deal & Peterson, 2009, p. 5-6). Waller's description characterizes the culture of organizations and schools realized through the shared interactions in combination with the shared artifacts, values, and assumptions which shape the culture of schools and other organizations. Three criteria for distinguishing cultural components is that they are core perceptions of members, recognized by organization members and those outside the organization, and understood by and between members of the culture. Shared interactions of stakeholders within and outside of the school communicate culture. Communication, including conversations, written documents, e-mail, texts, oral traditions, nonverbal communication, and symbolic acts represent, create, and provide evidence of the culture (Keyton, 2011).

The organizational reality of a school is socially constructed and constantly changing through communication between different stakeholders with diverse perspectives, investments, and expectations for the school. Ford and Ford (1995) indicate that an organization's culture is created by both verbal and written conversations and by the practices, values, assumptions, and artifacts associated with the conversations. Intentional change in culture must alter not only what is said but also must alter the myths, symbols, rituals and signs associated with the conversations to "deliberately bringing into existence, through communication, a new reality or set of social structures" (Ford & Ford, 1995). Organizational membership of a school includes administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents, as well as stakeholders external to the school who interact with and impact the organization in a variety of ways: providing support, imposing expectations and requirements upon the operations of the school, or assessing the work of the school.

Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) and Bisel, Keyton, and Messersmith (2010) identify three "orientations" from which discourse scholars study the relationship between organizational culture and Discourse. Rather than selecting one of the orientations from which to study organizations, they assert all three perspectives are necessary in order to understand the Discourse to organization relationship. The three orientations are: (a) object orientation which describes organizational culture as a container for discourse, an established entity identifiable from top down with a discursive history of features and outcomes, (b) becoming orientation that identifies the organizational culture in a constantly emerging process of organizing based on discourse of the members and others' discourse about the organization, and (c) grounded in action orientation that reflects an understanding of the mutually constitutive forces of an organizational culture anchored in the continuous flow of social practices and discourse (Barbera, 2014; Bisel, Keyton, and Messersmith, 2010; Fairhurst and Putnam, 2004;).

Organizational culture exploration includes identification of shared values, expectations, norms, meanings, and assumptions (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004). Lucas and Buzzanell (2004) used career theory to establish a framework for the reader to understand their study from the perspective of identity development differences which lead to white- and blue-collar career choices. In organizational contexts, narratives develop which shape both organizational and individual identities, establish power structures, and solve problems. The narratives can be uncovered in the stories people tell at work about work, sometimes they are handed down within the organization and families. Through family intergenerational conversations and community

conversations, along with both current and historical documents, socialization of an organization were documented as repositories for values and belief systems (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004).

The researchers sought to understand how the occupational narratives of iron ore miners in the forms of the stories they heard from their elders and co-workers and the stories they chose to share with others socialize them to aspire to and reinforce their definitions of success in the blue-collar jobs despite the negative impacts of the work in the mines. Lucas and Buzzanell (2004) juxtaposed the blue-collar iron ore miner's job identity with the white collar career identity along with the premises of choice and options, reputation, work task, potential for injuries, and job instability. The two researchers sought to identify ways the miners made sense of career and success through analysis of their occupational narratives.

The dynamics of superior-subordinate interactions represented by the teacher-student relationship and the power difference in the relationship are identified by Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien). The messages teachers share with their students about higher education and academic realities shape the college-going culture. Subordinates tend to limit upward—subordinate to superior—feedback which could be essential for the superior to clearly understand the situation (O'Reilly, 1978). In a culture in which teachers with high LMX practice do not attempt to neutralize the power differential between themselves and students and their parents, important information such as a teacher's attempt to help a student become college ready, may not be communicated or may result in students not seeing themselves as

college ready and, therefore, not attempting to go to college (Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003).

School Leadership

This description of the tasks of school leadership captured the complexity leaders face (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).

> We define school leadership as the identification, acquisition, allocation, coordination, and use of the social, material, and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning. Leadership involves mobilizing school personnel and clients to notice, face, and take on the tasks of changing instruction as well as harnessing and mobilizing the resources needed to support the transformation of teaching and learning (p. 11-12).

That complexity continues to be taxed by educational accountability reform measures that hold administrators and teachers increasingly accountable for academic performance based on the results of high stakes testing and the expectation for college and career readiness (Karhuse, 2012). Schein (2010) has identified leadership and culture as "two sides of the same coin." While responsible for the culture of their schools, administrators must rely on shared leadership with their teachers to make an impact on the college preparation of their students, particularly in larger schools.

Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi (2010) recommend ways school leaders develop collective teacher efficacy by establishing a school culture which supports high standards and achievement for students. First, transformational leaders understand their role of clarifying goals, working with others to develop, articulate, and inspire stakeholders with a vision for the future, and promoting cooperation and collaboration among staff. Additionally, leaders support development of general collective teacher efficacy through positive professional relationships characterized by mutual respect with staff members, an open door policy, and valuing staff opinions. By modeling

desired practices and appropriate school values by providing meaningful professional development, encouraging faculty to develop a network with others to learn from their experiences to overcome challenges, and providing school structures to support teacher collaboration.

As the single place where adolescents spend the majority of their time other than their homes, adolescents' school experiences impact their academic and social-emotional development. Eccles and Roeser (2011) review research of the cultural context of the school organization and its role in adolescent development from the first decade of the 21st century as represented by teachers, tasks, and classroom environments, school-wide characteristics, and district-wide policies. The effect of teacher optimism, the teacher's belief in personal ability to teach all students and in the ability of all students to learn, operates on both individual teacher and school-wide levels and is a potential key to teacher efficacy and the adult-adolescent trust relationships in secondary schools (Hattie, 2008; Jussim & Harber, 2005; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). Groups of teachers with high collective teacher efficacy, or collective confidence, display enthusiasm for teaching, encourage student persistence and resilience, and support student achievement through the use of effective teaching strategies; they also tend to have a high degree of ownership in school decisions (Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi, 2010).

In addition to teachers' implicit theories of students' ability to learn, students' implicit perspectives of intelligence about their own abilities to learn also impact academic achievement, particularly during times of educational transition (Yeager et al., 2014). Research indicates that students who believe intelligence is malleable, known as

an incremental theory, can continue to see an upward trajectory in their grades, while the trajectory of grades for students who believe an entity theory, or that intelligence is fixed, stay flat (Black, Trzesniewski, and Dweck, 2007). The researchers found the beliefs could be modified by teaching students the incremental theory including learning goals, positive beliefs about effort, and attributions and strategies for failure. In much the same way, the entity theory of personality has been shown to correlate with a negative reaction to social adversity including higher stress, poorer health, and reduced academic achievement (Yeager, Johnson, Spitzer, Trzesniewski, Powers and Dweck, 2014).

Conscientiousness and self-control have been shown through research to have a high degree of predictive power over academic and life achievement after controlling for cognitive ability and demographics (Almlund, Duckworth, Heckman, and Katz, 2011). Research has also added grit and growth mindset to the first two executive function indicators linked to student success which may be influential in supporting academic achievement, postsecondary persistence and completion, and life outcomes (West et al., 2014). Grit refers to the ability to maintain interest and effort toward long-term goals. Growth mindset, an incremental theory of intelligence, refers to the belief that academic ability can improve with effort rather than being beyond the individual's control (West et al., 2014).

In addition to the executive function skills students either bring to the classroom or can be cultivated in the students, the classroom social and emotional climate also impacts academic achievement. Students perform better when they feel a sense of belonging in a classroom where they are respected and have supportive relationships

with their teachers (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). Teachers' relationships with students and students' sense of support and belonging may be especially critical for success of students who face significant challenges in areas such as socioeconomic, racial and ethnic, sociolinguistic, bullying and harassment, violence, and sexual orientation (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Lichter, 2012).

Beyond student skills, educators have interpersonal power as defined by Yukl (Tjosvold & Weiss, 2009) as the potential for influence on others' attitudes and behaviors. Effective leaders rely more on personal power than on positional power. Personal power is based in respect in the relationship between leaders and followers and the knowledge they exhibit. For those who rely on legitimate personal power as opposed to legitimate positional power, they tend to do so by minimizing power differentials and protecting subordinates' self-esteem (Tjosvold & Weiss, 2009). As persons ascribed legitimate positional power by students and their parents, some teachers may benefit from a greater understanding of the significance of their potential influence with students and their families about students' college readiness and decisions when they operate from their personal power. In addition to influence, teachers could benefit from a greater understanding of the ways coercive, reward, and legitimate powers are positively mediated by expert and referent power, power developed through respect and relationship as subordinates connect with their superiors (Tjosvold & Weiss, 2009). While the decisions of whether and where to pursue postsecondary education are made by the student in cooperation with parents, assuming parents will provide affective and/or financial support, potential first-generation college students and their families report that they depend upon teachers to provide support and

information to help them make decisions for life after high school (Metropolitan Life, 2011).

In addition to greater understanding of the strength of the different types of power, educators also may benefit from a greater understanding of the use of influence tactics with their students. In a comparison of responses to requests delivered across nine influence tactics, Falbe and Yukl (1992) identified three levels of compliance: (a) resistance or failure to comply, (b) compliance or willingness to comply in absence of personal agreement with the request, and (c) commitment which is compliance with internal agreement with the request. The results of the study indicated that inspiration has the most effect for any single one of the nine influence tactics and produced commitment in participants 90 percent of the time and compliance in the remaining ten percent. An understanding of influence tactics in addition to inspiration, including consultation, personal appeals, exchange, ingratiation, rational persuasion, legitimating, coalition and pressure, and their effects when used in combination with one another may be an asset for educators.

College-Going Culture

Potential first-generation college students and their parents, particularly those in high poverty schools, need both information and support in navigating the college application process, the financial aid system, and other choices available within the postsecondary education system. Research suggests that high schools impact transition to college through both formal structures related to the college-linking process and the established practices that communicate values and expectations for education after high school, practices difficult to identify and measure through questionnaires or surveys

(Hill, 2008; Alexander & Eckland, 1977; McDill et al., 1969; McDonough 1997; Meyer 1970).

One definition of a college culture was shared by Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) as a part of their research with urban schools:

> College culture reflects environments that are accessible to all students and saturated with ever-present information and resources and ongoing formal and informal conversations that help students to understand the various facets of preparing for, enrolling in, and graduating from postsecondary academic institutions as those experiences specifically pertain to the students' current and future lives (p. 26).

Descriptions of a college culture environment include references about being prepared for college in their futures, such as “accessible to all students,” “saturated with ever-present information and resources,” and “ongoing formal and informal conversations.” The communication characterized as “ongoing formal and informal conversations” seems to indicate the kinds of conversations representing a high level of relational trust between students, teachers, and parents (Keyton, 2011; Schneider, 2007). The types of conversations and trust required to support a strong college culture builds social capital through interconnected networks of students, families, and teachers with shared expectations for student achievement and post-high school education (Coleman, 1988; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Schneider, 2007.

Using data from the National Centers for Education Statistics High Schools Effectiveness Study, Hill’s (2008) research identified three types of schools in terms of “college-linking” practices, practices of providing college information, as traditional, clearinghouse, and brokering. For most of the 20th century, the traditional high school approach was to support the majority of students in preparation for entering the job market and a smaller percentage of graduates to enter college, which can be described

and enacted either as a form of formal or informal tracking of students based on their college potential. The next level college-linking practices are clearinghouse schools, open to expanding the offering of resources for college planning to all but relying on the initiative of students and their parents to request information and support, which, as Hill notes, may vary significantly based on student characteristics.

Hill (2008) identified college-brokering schools as the schools most successful at sending students to college. In these schools, leaders and teachers make commitments to become agents in promoting equitable access to postsecondary information and preparation for all students and their families. Brokering high schools personnel commitments go beyond thatof traditional and clearinghouse schools' approaches. At college brokering schools, all educators become leaders in the college-going cultures of their schools and advocates for postsecondary education for all students (Hill, 2008). A brokering high school's leaders intentionally develop the kind of culture in their schools in which students understand that the faculty and staff care about them and their futures and work with students and their parents in a "family-like informal" atmosphere to provide both information and support (Carter, 2011; Collins, 2011). After accounting for students' ACT scores, GPAs, and demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, increasing the strength of a school's college-going culture is a strong predictor for increased student enrollment in college (Roderick et al., 2009).

Schools with strong college-going cultures have interconnected networks of students, families, teachers, and community members with social contexts of shared goals and expectations for student achievement and college enrollment. A significant

focus of the college-going culture is to help students build the social capital key to both college enrollment and success (Coleman, 1988; Coleman, 1990; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Schneider, 2007). As with other areas of educational research, the impact of individual student and school level factors on college enrollment has been researched in urban and suburban schools (Adelman, 2006; Hardre, Sullivan, & Crowson, 2008; Holland and Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Matthews, 1999; Roderick et al., 2011; Schneider, 2007; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002).

The conversations in organizations change their cultures (Keyton, 2011). While the way school personnel talk does not necessarily change the school's culture of college-going, it is certain that the culture will not change unless the way school teachers and leaders talk about going to college changes. Conversely, change in the school's practices toward providing information and support for students will not change the college-going culture unless the conversations about college change. For example, for schools with low academic performance and college attendance rates, increasing academic rigor and performance within a school culture alone will not impact the college-going practices unless teachers, students and parents are also talking differently about future options.

Teachers are presented with multiple opportunities to engage students in conversation and contemplation about their futures. While students are generally searching for and would seem to appreciate definitive answers about the decisions they should make, the task teachers face is to help students open doors to potential and opportunity in order to help them answer their own questions. Barge and Oliver (2003) explain the discursive practices of leadership as the interplay of sensemaking,

positioning, and "play." Weick & Sutcliffe (2007) defines sensemaking as a process by which a person relies on experiences to help them "see" what is going on and how to react, how what we know is the context for our choices. Understanding organizational and individual behavior is to understand sensemaking, the process through which persons turn circumstances into meaning that drives action (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Sensemaking is a continual process of interpretation of messages and actions modifying organizational culture. Positioning refers to the language of social relationships which positions people to be amenable to certain ideas (Barge, 2009).

The concept of "play" in terms of leadership and change, Barge (2009) says, is the idea of being open to "flirting" with meaning, opening wide the doors of possibilities. The concepts of large-scale organizational change apply to the large-scale change rural schools—and all schools—are attempting to make to prepare students to make decisions to fit 21st century realities students face in their world and futures. Barge proposed the appreciative inquiry model combining affirmation with supplementation in constant constructive tension as a conversation model for significant change. Either affirmation or supplementation alone is not conversation. Appreciative inquiry allows leaders to relate to people with regards to what they do well, to build on the positive, to use reflexive questioning to encourage co-creation of new ways of thinking. In essence, the appreciative inquiry model illustrates the intent of schools and teachers to help students discover their futures, to help students be open to new possibilities grounded in what they know and affirm for themselves.

Helping students build upon what they do well involves students understanding both cognition and knowledge as well as their executive function skills which include

skills or traits not identifiable through standard intelligence tests (West et al., 2014). Executive function skills tend to be referred to by educators as social and emotional learning or 21st century skills and by some psychologists and economists who use terms of virtue and character (West et al., 2014). Research has indicated that executive function skills of conscientiousness and self-control have shown evidence of a high degree of predictive power over academic and life achievement after controlling for cognitive ability and demographics (Almlund et al., 2011; Poropat, 2011; Duckworth & Carlson, 2013).

For college information, 76 percent of high school students say they depend upon teachers, 66 percent rely upon parents, and 65 percent talk with school counselors. Students depend upon teachers for information and, for students in remote rural high poverty schools, teachers may be the only college-educated persons with whom they have daily contact (Metropolitan Life, 2011). Strong college-going cultures in schools depend upon teachers who adopt a positive attitude about postsecondary education for all students and reinforce the attitude within their classrooms (Metropolitan Life, 2011).

The messages teachers share with students and parents, particularly in high poverty schools and districts in which adult family members have limited or no experience with college enrollment and the requirements for success, are essential. The communication between teachers and their students and parents regarding college is important to increasing the college-going cultures of schools. The messages shared in these conversations may be integral in helping students and their parents see the possibilities of college and life after college, even when it may mean that students will leave their hometowns to pursue college and career (Perna, 2006; Schneider, 2007).

Perna's (2006) review and synthesis of college-going research indicates that academic preparation and achievement, knowledge about college, family support and financial resources are most important predictors of college enrollment. Understanding college enrollment decisions includes accounting for four layers of context: students and their families, the K-12 school system, college and universities, and the broader societal, economic, and policy context. Access to advanced high school courses and postsecondary preparation activities are two key predictors of higher postsecondary educational aspirations for rural youth (Irvin et al., 2011; Monk 2007; Planty, Provasnik, & Daniel, 2007; Provasnik, Coleman, Gilbertson, Herring, & Xie, 2007).

Research also suggests a causal relationship of academic self-concept on achievement and reciprocal effects of self-efficacy and postsecondary education enrollment (Guay, Marsh, & Boivin, 2003; Valentine, DuBois, & Cooper, 2004). Positive school valuing of education, a predictor of educational aspirations, and school belonging, a predictor of educational achievement increased through instructional practices such as cooperative learning and proactive classroom management, are integral to positive impact on school achievement and postsecondary enrollment (Hawkins, Doueck, & Lishner, 1988).

Social Cognitive Career Theory, grounded in Bandura's social cognitive theory, is a model of how academic and career interests mature through selection and implementation with the focus on the individual's self-efficacy, outcome expectations and goals and the perceived barriers and supports (Gibbons-Shoffner, 2005; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). Self-efficacy for postsecondary education refers to the beliefs students have about their own ability to complete the steps required to earn a

college degree. The beliefs change constantly based on interaction with others, environmental factors and personal actions (Gibbons-Shoffner, 2005; Lent et al., 1994).

Potential first-generation college students benefit from information and support to dispel erroneous beliefs about college, as well as the knowledge about expectations and resources available to help them navigate the college culture. Both students and parents benefit from information in all aspects of the process of going to and being successful in college. Counseling and support for this process with small groups of persons who become continued support for one another through preparation for and long-term experiences of postsecondary education can also be seen as effective and efficient (Gibbons-Shoffner, 2005). Changing the college-going culture within populations and individuals involves addressing a complex network of both perceived and fact-based financial considerations, student attitudes and perceptions, parent knowledge and ability to access information, information and support networks, and access to information and support throughout the student's secondary career.

College-Going Culture in Rural Schools of Poverty

The majority of U.S. education history has had an urban focus. Urban-based concerns have been the focus of education policy, research and scholarship. For example, school reform movements of the mid-19th century through early 20th century developed with needs of the Industrial Revolution and increase in the needs of a growing urban population, while education reform beginning in the 1950s addressed the plight of inner city minority students, national defense needs, and developing work force skills for the global economy. By the mid-1980s, rural education researchers

began to look at issues such as equity, school size, school and community life connection, and rural school professional development. (DeYoung, 1987).

While urban and rural schools share characteristics, they also have significant differences. Rural schools, like their urban counterparts, are more likely than those in the suburbs to be situated in high poverty communities, score lower in student achievement assessments, and struggle to find and keep highly qualified teachers (Barley & Beesley, 2007). Long-term, intergenerational poverty is more prevalent among students who live in rural areas, particularly remote areas (Lichter & Johnson, 2007; Provasnik et al., 2007) Poverty increases the chances for education problems including dropout and underachievement. Despite significant indications of the deleterious effects of rural impoverishment such as students dropping out of high school at more than twice the national average rate, research has relatively ignored the issues of high poverty rural schools (Hardre, 2007; Provasnik et al., 2007).

Khattri, Riley, and Kane (1997), in their review of extant literature found that students in poor rural areas did better academically than those in poor urban areas, but the research was limited in understanding how the needs and effects of being rural and poor relate to achievement. Research indicates that successful rural schools report higher teacher retention, higher expectations of students, supportive long-term teacher-student relationships, and the school positioned at the center of community life which facilitates principal leadership (Barley & Beesley 2007; Burney & Cross 2006; Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2011; Lyson 2002; Schafft & Jackson, 2010).

Demi, Coleman-Jensen, and Snyder (2010) used an ecological systems framework and structural equation modeling for quantitative study to identify indicators

of individual, family, school, and rural contextual processes as having direct, mediating, or indirect relationships as predictors of postsecondary educational enrollment for a rural youth sample. The study sought to document the inherent complexity of the postsecondary enrollment of students across the contexts specifically for rural youth. Data for the study came from two cohorts of the ongoing Rural Youth Education study examining factors contributing to educational, occupational, and residential aspirations and outcomes for a representative sample of rural Pennsylvania youth.

Several key findings from the 2010 study indicated uniqueness of the predictive relationship between factors and postsecondary enrollment for students from the rural schools in the study. First, unlike indications from urban youth studies, for rural students, family income and relationship with parents had a smaller association with educational enrollment after high school. Second, several indicators of the school context emerged as the strongest predictors of enrollment after high school, both directly and indirectly, including student perceptions of school, grades, and aspirations, highlighting rural schools as being central to future educational engagement not found in other populations. While the school climate had no direct effect on postsecondary enrollment, the climate's mediating effects were some of the strongest relationships in the model through self-efficacy, grades, and educational aspirations. The findings support an ecological systems framework recognizing multiple contextual influences on individual outcomes. In some cases, family contextual indicators were associated with postsecondary enrollment through the school context which indicated the intersections of contexts. Finally, the school climate had strong mediational effect through several

paths pointing to the importance of a supportive and positive atmosphere on potentially increasing college enrollment rates among rural youth.

The research design for the Demi, Coleman-Jensen, and Snyder (2010) study addressed a problem in many studies of schools by including a weighting of the rural school districts and rural students' sample to ensure an analysis reflective of the actual distribution of rural students. The weighting was used to give the students from smaller districts, which rural districts tend to be, equal representation in consideration of the significance of characteristics. While smaller, rural districts' characteristics are included in general studies, the significance of their characteristics tend to be overwhelmed by the larger numbers associated with the characteristics of larger districts. While this study does not pretend to reflect the diversity of all rural school students across a larger geographic population, it did indicate the attempt to represent Pennsylvania rural school students and indicate the need for further exploration of the small rural schools' assets and needs (Demi, Coleman-Jensen, & Snyder, 2010).

In high poverty rural schools, students who reach high school may not "see" themselves as college material, a stark contrast from that of students from schools with a smaller percentage of students from lower socioeconomic status and a higher percentage of community members with a college degree, even though they may have been encouraged that education after high school will be important to their success (Cote, 2009). Many of their parents have limited or no experience with college enrollment and attendance although a majority of parents of students who attend rural schools indicate intentions for their students, who would be first-generation students, to extend education beyond high school.

Beyond developing an identity for themselves which includes college, first-generation students and their parents generally do not have personal knowledge, or experienced persons in the family and social networks, about applying for college and financial aid, the types of opportunities and programs for exploration and support, and what is realistic to expect in college. This information is a part of the social and cultural capital students need to develop in order to enroll and be successful in college. In rural schools, students and parents depend upon school counselors, teachers, and other adult mentors who have been successful in college for knowledge, resources, and skills to help with postsecondary education decisions and plans. The sharing of "college knowledge" has not been included as an essential aspect of national school reform mandates, (Roderick et al., 2009).

Summary

The lack of college and career readiness research situated in rural schools has painted the picture of barriers for students but does not offer education leadership information for marshalling the unique assets of their schools. Expectations, opportunities, information, support for students and families are all essential components of a college-going culture in rural schools of poverty, particularly for potential first-generation college students and their families. Additional research to provide best practices to support rural schools in expanding their students' postsecondary options is needed.

Chapter 3

Introduction

For this study of Winding Road High School, a grounded theory approach was selected to support discovery about what happens in this context and move beyond a narrative of specific messages of the group to an abstract theoretical understanding of the phenomenon being studied. This chapter began with the philosophy of grounded theory in relation to the phenomenon studied. Next, the chapter described the rationale for selecting the setting as an exemplar for study. Third, the role of the researcher was explained in terms of the relationship with the selected setting. Fourth, the process of collection was explained for data which included field notes, documents, and interviews. Fifth, the analysis of data was described. Data analysis began with reduction of the data, use of a modified constant comparative analysis simultaneous to continued data collection, triangulation, and presentation of the data. Finally, this chapter addressed the issue of the trustworthiness of the data and the analysis.

Qualitative Research and Grounded Theory

Qualitative researchers have used grounded theory as a way to explore diverse situations, actions, and analytic and substantive problems, to keep grounded theories anchored in their contexts as opposed to aiming for abstract theory of empirical reality, and "learning about the specific and the general—and seeing what is new in them—then exploring their links to larger issues or creating larger unrecognized issues in entirety" (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz (2006) claimed the use of strategies including coding, memo-writing, and theoretical sampling in combination with "twenty first century

methodological assumptions and approaches" to shape the examination of processes within the data for "creating abstract interpretative understandings of the data."

Qualitative research provided an avenue for discovery of what happened within a particular social context and was selected for this study. Merriam and Associates (2002) highlighted as key to understanding qualitative research the idea of individuals' interactions with their world to socially construct meaning. Qualitative research asserted multiple versions of reality and continual change in reality over time within a social context as individuals and groups continually interpret and construct meaning. Qualitative researchers were interested in understanding the interpretations at a particular time and in a particular context.

The use of a grounded theory method addressed questions of how process and structures of social interactions shape how things are accomplished. The philosophy of grounded theory through an ethnographic lens supported development of greater understanding of the Discourse culture of the high school. Understanding of the Discourse and culture was developed through exploration of the behavioral and cognitive realities shared by the teachers and leaders represented by their discourses with students and parents (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Grounded theory offered a system of guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to develop rich conceptual analyses of the processes (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). The abstract theoretical concepts emerged in the iterative process of moving between increasingly focused data and the abstracted categorizations of the data. The emergent categorization and theoretical concepts were informed by both explicit and implicit ideas expressed in the data and interpretive analyses of the

data and the social context (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Grounded theory was selected for this because of its focus on "seeing" what is going on in the sensemaking process of the persons involved within a particular context (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007).

The original study for teachers and leaders was approved by the Institutional Review Board in 2008 and approved for continuation in 2013 (Appendix B). In 2008, the original study was reviewed and approved by Winding Road's superintendent of schools; the superintendent approved this study in March of 2014. The superintendent was informed and kept abreast of this study throughout its duration. The use of grounded theory methodology was the appropriate means to gain a rich understanding of the school's cultural processes of supporting students' preparation for pursuit of postsecondary education and develop a conceptual framework for the process.

Grounded theory is a qualitative research method for inductive discovery of explanatory theory grounded in real-life social processes, actions, and interactions of a people or peoples being studied (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Creswell, 2009; Merriam & Associates, 2002). Interpretive theorists worked from their observations of patterns and connections within a studied phenomenon or context, developed through study of practices, actions, perspectives, artifacts, values, and assumptions of persons involved. Grounded theorists sought to integrate identified concepts into frameworks to explain the realities and processes of contexts from the perspective of the persons who have lived the phenomenon (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Developing theory was about moving into the perspective of a conceptual "overview of the landscape," beyond what can be seen to identifying the "inferential glue" connecting the seen to the unseen

(Merriam, 1998). The identified grounded theories may or may not have resonance to other contexts (Charmaz, 2006).

The theoretical understanding which emerged through grounded theory research studies was referred to as *substantive theory.* Substantive theories represented conceptual frameworks or interpretations of identified problems of professional practice, situations in life, or, as Charmaz (2000) referred to them, "slices of social life." The substantive theories remained grounded in the experience of the participants through inductive analysis of the data (Charmaz, 2006; Cresswell, 2009)

The grounded theorist began from a concern or area of interest and selected a particular phenomenon to study and people with whom to explore it. Grounded theory relied upon the two key strategies of *theoretical sampling* and *constant comparative analysis*. In theoretical sampling, I interviewed people and collected artifacts about the phenomenon being studied (Charmaz, 2006).

Early in the data collection process, I began constant comparative analysis by reading the data and then re-reading the data line-by-line, phrase-by-phrase, or word-by-word review to identify. Portions of the data appropriate to study concerns were coded based on their potential to contribute to theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2000). Both data analysis process and data collection continued concurrently. Throughout the process of constructing codes, categories, and properties of categories from collected data, categories were also being compared, memo writing supported category definition, categories, and decisions were made to collect additional data until gaps in the data were mitigated (Charmaz, 2006). Data analysis continued through drafts of research

reports and my continued involvement in analysis increased the abstraction of the ideas (Charmaz, 2006).

Setting

The name of the remote rural high school which was the focus of this study has been changed for the report to guard respondents' confidentiality. Winding Road was identified as a remote rural school according to the 2006 National Center for Education Statisticsand Census Bureau system of Urban-Centric Locale Codes (Schneider, 2006). Remote rural, the most rural code in the system, was defined as territory more than 25 miles from an urbanized area (population of 50,000) and more than 10 miles from an urban cluster (population of between 25,000 and 50,000).

The town of Winding Road in which the school is located is 200 miles from the state capital. With a strong history of business in the areas of agriculture and the oil and gas industry, the community's population in 2013 was approximately 2,000 persons; this represented a decrease from almost 2,700 in 2000. While the community's population decreased nearly 25 percent in that time period, the number of students in the district increased 13 percent. During interviews, several school personnel commented that young couples with families have returned to Winding Road because they want their children to have the quality school experience they had experienced.

Demographics have changed in Winding Road Public Schools since 2000 with an additional 50 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced priced lunch as part of the National School Lunch Program, 53 percent total, and the percentage of the district's Hispanic students has increased from 4 percent in 2000 to 22 percent in 2007 and 31 percent in 2013. While the prevalence of family farming has decreased

significantly in the Winding Road community, corporate hog farming has moved into the area and Hispanic workers who were employed there brought their families. Early on, the influx of Hispanic children, many who spoke limited English, was a challenge for the district. The superintendent noted the changes in the district, "In the early days, we had to scramble to meet the needs of the students. Language was a barrier but also culture. Hispanic students came to school because their families valued school but they did not participate in extracurricular activities." During the time when the hog farming business moved to Winding Road, the school's retired counselor worked in the personnel department for the hog-farming company. She said the company partnered with the district to help the school bridge both the language and the cultural understanding gaps. "Now, the students participate and excel in all areas just as the Caucasian students do," said the superintendent. There are still cultural differences but there is mutual appreciation and respect for the differences, said the retired counselor.

Winding Road was selected as the site for this study for three primary reasons which included familiarity with the school, the strong tradition of postsecondary education access plans by students in the school, and the class of 2012 in which all of the students had plans to continue their education after high school. The first reason was that I became familiar with Winding Road through working with the high school in 2010 when a six-year partnership project with a state university research center designed to increase college preparation and access for students moved from the middle school to the high school. The project, funded in 2008 by a federal Department of Education grant, worked in 32 primarily rural schools throughout the state with the cohort of students from the class of 2014. Using the research center's model of

systemic, whole school improvement, the project worked with leaders, teachers, students and their parents. The project supported the schools in increasing academic skills and preparation for postsecondary access and success. Professional development provided by grant staff also supported school leaders and teachers as grade level teams, school wide and individually in the use of data to plan for improving instruction, research-based strategies to increase student achievement, and integration of technology in the classroom to provide students with resources to support learning with 21st century tools.

The second reason the school was selected for this study was found in the field notes of project researchers who worked with the teachers, students, and parents at Winding Road. Both anecdotal stories and field notes of the researchers indicated something different in a positive way about the vision for the students' futures as expressed by Winding Road educators and community compared to many of the other schools they visited. A researcher who provided professional development for teachers seven times per year throughout the life of the grant project said the faculty always made her feel as if she were one of them. They were supportive and willing to help share their successful classroom practices and strategies with their peers. One researcher who visited frequently to work with students and parents noted the strong participation of parents and families in meetings about college for their students. In the majority of the 32 schools in the project, participation in parent meetings about college preparation was low because the meetings represented a new concept. At Winding Road High School, the meetings were attended by nearly all students and parents. The school had already developed a culture that actively supported postsecondary education

as the preferred option for their students. The researcher also noted all the teachers were "on the same page" in describing how the teachers all began talking with students about their futures from the first grade (Field notes, 2012). Another researcher who attended a College Fair night for juniors and seniors and their parents noted how well attended the evening was and how well students were prepared to visit with representatives from colleges who participated.

Finally, Winding Road High was chosen as the site for this study because of the high rate of students completing the steps to be prepared for education after high school. In addition to academic preparation, schools have been charged with increasing college and career readiness and ensuring that students have access to information, complete requirements, and leave school with postsecondary plans for continued education. College and career ready students could enter postsecondary education or the workforce based on the work they completed in high school. Winding Road students graduated with this capability. While not all classes have college participation rates as strong as the graduating class of 2013 in which 26 students graduated and by one year after graduation all 26 had completed at least one semester of college, all students did complete the process of college access preparation. College access preparation included career and college majors exploration, completion of at least one college admissions application, college financial aid planning including one submitted scholarship application, and participation in taking at least one college admissions examination. Additionally, Winding Road students had a history of making plans for some type of postsecondary education option such as college, technology center training,

apprenticeship, or military service. Five years of data for Winding Road students also indicate student:

- average college entrance examination scores ranging from one point below state averages to one and a half points above;
- End of Instruction exam results range from the same at or below state averages to 25 percentage points above.
- college participation rates range from equal to the state average to ten percent higher than state percentages.

A ten-year look at the college attendance rate for Winding Road indicated a range of college participation rates from 47 percent to 71 percent, significantly higher than the rates of college participation for students from rural schools of poverty indicated earlier in this study (Office of Educational Quality & Accountability, 2014).

Exploration of the messages shared by teachers and leaders with students and their parents using constant comparative analysis to identify patterns of the messages which supported students to move beyond self-efficacy to identify goals for education after high school may be identified. These patterns of messages could support development of a theoretical framework aligned with the unique attributes of a rural high poverty school college access culture. The research question for this study was: *How does the discourse of a remote rural high school reflect Discourse of a culture supportive of postsecondary education (PSE) for all students?*

Data Collection

To study the school culture of college and career readiness, multiple data sources were collected including documents, field notes and interviews. A variety of

general documents were collected from the school website, newspaper accounts, and publicly available data which provided contextual and background information for the study. The primary school document collected and analyzed was the Winding Road Student Handbook, a 17-page document which included items such as school philosophy, faculty commitments, student outcomes, student expectations, disciplinary policies, and extracurricular descriptions, officers, and contacts. The handbook, reviewed with all students at the beginning of the school year, also included a yearlong calendar full of activities and opportunities for students, parents, and faculty. University-school project documents included six years of agendas and resources professional development opportunities provided to the school, action plans developed by the school learning teams focused on increasing academic preparation and college access information, and reports of meetings with parents and students and student college visits.

The second set of data was field notes from two years of interactions with, and observation of, the Winding Road High School, plus photos of the school public spaces and classrooms along with memos I wrote about observations made during visits and conversations with persons during the visits. Reflection journal entries from other project staff who worked with school leaders, teachers, students, and parents from 2010 to 2014 were also reviewed.

The third set of data was from interviews conducted with Winding Road educators from May to October 2014. The nine hours of open-ended interviews ranging from one-half to nearly one and one-half hours were conducted with six teachers, two counselors, immediate past counselor and new counselor of one year, and two

administrators regarding the perceptions of the messages shared with students and their parents regarding postsecondary education and college and career readiness. With only 23 faculty members on staff at the high school, the 10 interviews represented the perspectives of half of the school's educators. Educators interviewed had been a part of the faculty for periods ranging from 1 to 39 years. The newest faculty members, one with three children who graduated from Winding Road before she became an employee and a second who was from a nearby community, provided keen insight as to what they had observed and experienced during their relatively short terms of employment. One teacher whose father was a former Winding Road school administrator and mother a teacher had graduated from WRHS and taught one year at another school before joining the faculty of her alma mater nearly 40 years earlier. Two others were also WRHS alumni. Several were from communities in the northwest part of the state who had known about Winding Road while they were public school students or had worked in neighboring districts.

Before the interviews, all participants signed informed consent forms as required by the university's Institutional Review Board as a condition of research proposal approval. Initial interviewees volunteered to participate in the study following my presentation to the faculty about the study. Initial interviewees were asked to suggest additional study participants who would provide additional insight and these participants were recruited as a practice of theoretical sampling..

Both face to face and telephone interviews varying in length from 30 to 75 minutes were conducted. Initial interviews used a semi-structured interview protocol of nine questions (see Appendix A). The interview questions were designed to illicit

participants' general impressions about the school's culture in the form of the messages they shared. Study participants were encouraged to respond to the questions by remembering their activities, the activities of their faculty peers and leaders, stories, and conversations about life after high school they had with school stakeholders. Follow-up questions were asked of participants to offer clarification and elaboration of the attitudes and behaviors about postsecondary education represented by school stakeholders. At the end of each interview, there was time for the educators to make additional comments they believed to be important. The interviews were all recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

Before the interviews, I began the process of data reduction, which referred to the process of selecting data relevant to the process being studied, and the first stage of modified constant comparative analysis. After the first few interviews were conducted, data reduction and first stage of modified constant comparison began with interview transcripts. The analysis began with initial coding with open, line by line coding, of the first interview transcripts and other data (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2008). During initial coding, reading of the documents focused on multiple close readings of the data to identify segments of data related to the focus of the study. In initial coding, I highlighted words of action, staying true to the language of the transcripts, recognizing *in vivo codes* drawn from the language of participants as opposed to working with *a priori* theoretical concepts. Initial coding helped me recognize gaps and additional types of data to collect (Charmaz, 2006). Additional interviews continued to be conducted to address identified gaps, known as theoretical sampling, and line by line

coding continued. During this time, a second researcher who had worked with the Winding Road Schools helped me code the data

As the significant codes were identified, it became possible to make decisions to use the codes to shape the next coding phase, called focused coding. This level of coding moved to comparison of different data pieces and codes to be sorted, synthesized, and integrated to account for and explain increasingly larger segments of the data to identify categories. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2008; Creswell, 2007). Throughout the process of data analysis, I documented my reflections, questions, and ideas about the study based on the data in memos to support constant comparison between people, incidents, and categories. This process guided me in directions indicated by the data (Charmaz, 2000).

The purpose of the third stage and final stage of coding was axial coding. Axial coding included reorganizing the fractured open codes into linked categories and subcategories and specifying properties and dimensions of the categories to facilitate development of a theoretical foundation or analytic framework for the data. Charmaz (2006) suggested a perspective of "theoretical playfulness" to help qualitative researchers identify patterns in codes and categories and make meaning from the data. Axial coding included the identification of themes which revolved around an overarching, sensitizing concept around which the themes coalesced. The interrelationships of the themes and the sensitizing concept represented the deeper understanding of the data.

During axial coding, I worked with another researcher experienced in the use of modified constant comparative analysis and in the development of sensitizing concepts in the study of organizational culture. Owen (1984) described the process of thematic analysis for identification of key themes based on the criteria of recurrence, repetition, and force. Recurrence referred to the repeated threads of meaning found across at least two different parts of the data representing a core conceptual concept in the Discourse of the phenomenon. Some recurrent concepts also met the criterion of repetition, which showed repeated use of the same or similar words in discourse about the phenomenon. The third criterion of force referred to the significance of the ideas as represented by the participants in the study. The forcefulness was represented in the discourse by the degree of value participants expressed about certain aspects of the phenomenon in their description.

Trustworthiness

Perhaps the best way to address the issue of plausibility, credibility, and trustworthiness of this study is to consider of three important and common criticisms of qualitative research. Common criticisms included that the investigations are impressionistic, anecdotal, and a-theoretical. First, impressionistic research has been characterized, critics have argued, as subjective and biased, poorly defined and analytically incomplete. Second, the same critics have described qualitative communication research as anecdotal because of its focus on the verbal and nonverbal messages of a particular culture and context, and not meant to be systematic or generalizable. Third, criticism that qualitative communication research was a-theoretical represents a lack of understanding about the role of theory in qualitative

research. The following paragraphs explained ways in which qualitative researchers seek to address the criticisms of their work being impressionistic, anecdotal, and a-theoretical increase and ensure the quality of their research.

The critic who identified qualitative communication research as impressionistic does not accept or understand the researcher's purpose was to explore and understand interconnectedness of messages and perceptions of the persons who lived in the context and culture and their sensemaking process. Research quality improved with increased time in the field in activities such as observing, analyzing documents, and in interviews and conversations with members (Elliot et al, 1999). Qualitative communication research included observation in a natural setting with the context key to understanding. The quality of the study was maximized through the use of modified constant comparative analysis that kept me working with all of the data collected throughout the analysis process, including data that seemed to be outside the awareness and development of sensitizing concepts. Data were compared within and across multiple sources over time and natural patterns emerged from the data to support development of sensitized (Christians & Carey, 1989). As is true of qualitative research, I, as the researcher, was the data collection "instrument" and was transparent and honest in terms of personal relationship to the context and location of the research, the decisions made, and the procedures followed in design and implementation (Charmaz, 2006).

The critic who claims qualitative communication research is anecdotal does not understand that the purpose of the research is not generalizability. The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the socially-created reality and realities of a particular group of people. Lincoln and Guba (1994) countered the concern that the

researcher's interaction with the researched phenomenon introduced bias because the only way to research socially constructed reality was to do so with the people who have constructed it. Increased association between the inquirer and inquired dyad increased the likelihood that the findings reflected phenomenon "as things really are, and as they really work" (Lincoln and Guba, 1994). Triangulation through the use of multiple sources of data as sources of analysis and interpretation increased the level of rigor and credibility of this study (Tracy, 2010).

The description of qualitative communication research as a-theoretical indicated a misunderstanding of the difference between quantitative and qualitative research. While quantitative research was deductive, theory testing, qualitative research was inductive with the goal of discovering concepts on which to build a theoretical representation of the reality of the process studied within a particular context. In this grounded theory study, as with most qualitative studies, theory was *a posteriori*, entering the picture in the midst or near the end of the research process of discovering what is going on with the process or people being studied. An important way to increase the understanding of the role of theory was for me to coherently share the process of emerging theory. I also conducted member checks by sharing the emerging categories and conceptual framework with participants in the study to support the credibility of the study findings (Tracy, 2010).

While these criticisms may be valid of poorly designed, implemented, or analyzed qualitative research, the criticisms indicate a lack of understanding or an unwillingness to consider the significance of the qualitative approach to research. Ensuring trustworthiness for this study was a process of researcher transparency and

triangulation, study of the phenomenon through direct interaction with the context and the people who lived the phenomenon studied, and the proper use of theory and member checks to verify resonance for the developing conceptual framework with their experiences.

Summary

This chapter provided the rationale and research methods of the study. Beginning from a view of the history and processes of grounded theory, a description of the setting as an exemplar for study followed. The next sections outlined data collection and analysis processes. Finally, this chapter addressed issues of the trustworthiness of the data and the analysis.

Chapter 4

Introduction

Through the words of the persons who lived the experience as educators at Winding Road High School and a modified constant comparative analysis, the Discourse of the teachers and leaders for students regarding postsecondary education was identified as be anxious and be confident. This chapter provided a glimpse through the words of the educators of their discourse about the Discourse of Winding Road in managing the juxtaposition of individual anxiety-corporate confidence.

Findings

> Public schools are established and maintained to help provide for the mental, physical, social, and emotional development of the student. Winding Road Schools exist to assist in this development and to help each of you to gain the fundamental skills necessary for successful living in our complex society. The school is here to serve you.

The opening words of the Winding Road School's student handbook welcomed students in grades K-12 to the new year of school with this statement which epitomized the professional commitments expressed by the faculty and staff during this study. During interviews, teachers and leaders described a school community which included in daily practice the assumption that students would be prepared to access a college education and the provision of information and supports needed to, as one teacher stated, "make their dreams come true."

Through a spiraling process of modified constant comparison of interviewees' descriptions of messages shared with their students, the identification of *in vivo* codes and categories emerged from the data representative of shared beliefs, values, assumptions, and practices within the remote rural school. Interviewee responses were

also compared to extant texts, including field notes from throughout my work and the work of other researchers with the school and its stakeholders, and from documents specifically pertaining to the high school's preparation of students for life after high school.

The perspectives of the educators' experiences and expressions of the postsecondary education culture in their school emerged from their descriptions about what happened in the school and were supported by field notes of observations of interactions, documents, and visual messages of the school environment. A set of five distinct, *in vivo* messages were identified to represent the central phenomenon of the school's culture regarding postsecondary education access are included in Table 4.1. The five messages included *you need a plan, you can do it, you know what's right and how to work hard, we know what we are doing,* and *we are here to help, now and later.* See an overview of these themes, representative of events, actions and codes, and sample responses, in Table 4.1. These themes are further explained in the following narrative.

Be Anxious: You Need a Plan

Students of Winding Road Schools began exploring career options early. Two of the 16 exit outcomes for the elementary school included awareness of career opportunities and of responsibilities for participation as a productive citizen in a democratic society. At the secondary level, these concepts were extended to include career exploration matching personal skills and choosing a career path to support economic independence.

Table 4.1
Postsecondary Education Discourse at a Rural High School

	Representative Codes	Characteristic Responses
Anxiety		
You need a plan.	• Elementary and secondary exit outcomes include career exploration and plans • All complete college requirements • Students' plans change	• *We just put it out there that we just assume they're all going to college.* • *I just bluntly ask them if they have a plan.* • *It's not acceptable to not do at least some kind of training.* • *It's just important to keep that option for them all the time.*
Confidence		
You can do it.	• Important students believe they can be successful • Many first-generation • High expectations • Community support	• *We expect it and we believe they can and pretty soon they start thinking they can.* • *The traditions are set here. Students are groomed and raised in 'that's how things go.'* • *In my classroom, they complete scholarships and there are a few, especially local ones, that everyone has to fill out.*
You know what is right and how to work hard.	• Leadership • Hard work • Morals, character, manners expected in the school • Accountability • Extracurricular activities important	• *The main priority is to help make them well-rounded, make them better, not just academically* • *Old-fashioned manners, high standards of behavior, and students aren't "spoon fed."* • *They know how to show up and stay late to get the job done.* • *I think that is what we do very well here is build tradition and instill character, morals, and high expectations not only of yourself but everybody around you.*
We know what we are doing.	• Senior postsecondary education checklist • In-school college preparation activities • Administrators postsecondary vision	• *The superintendent was clear about the priorities that kids go on to college on some kind of education scholarship and the testing.* • *I tell them when they become overwhelmed – and they have a lot to be overwhelmed about – they can come back here and just spend some time playing, or reading or writing a note to a classmate.*
We are here to help, now and later.	• Teacher commitment • Teachers "real people" • Community members financially support students	• *The school is here to serve you.* • *They know we will work just as hard as they do.* • *The students have our phone numbers and we tell them they can come back or call us if they have a problem or needs something. We have for years.* • *The community has a lot of pride in the students and their futures. They want them to be successful.*

When teachers were asked what they told their students about life after high school, their replies included sharing expectations with students that they need to make a plan to pursue education after high school. As one teacher said,

> We just put it out there that we just assume that they're all going to college. Our seniors fill out their information every year from the time they are

> freshman. It’s like a plan and with it there is an expectation of what they are going to do after high school.

Another teacher said, “It’s not acceptable to not do at least some kind of training.” A teacher in his first year at the school said, “The teachers talk about student success a lot with the students. I hear them talking about future plans and career just as I walk by. They try to paint the big picture.”   Starting earlier than she used to with her students, a teacher said,

> I used to not worry about it until they were juniors. But, I've started with my freshman, and even, that's the lowest I go, but starting already we're talking about the ACT, and college and careers and what might you like to do? I mean it's not just when they're juniors and seniors.

While the high school teachers noted that not every student would pursue a college education, they indicated teachers neither decided which particular students were not “college material” nor accepted students’ pronouncements that they were not going college as excuses for not completing steps that would make them eligible to attend college upon graduation. The principal articulated how they kept the door open for all students, even students who from the beginning announced they were not going to college.

> We have so many kids who say as freshmen, "I'm not going to college." And then, as they get older, they decide that's probably what they want to do. Just not, to always make that a huge option for them. And really, we don't give our kids much of an option. You’ve got to pick something, you know, which we're small enough, we can do that. And most of our kids go on to do something else after high school as far as education. But, there are so many who do change their minds that you don't want to limit a kid when he's a freshman who says, “You know, I'm not going to do that,” because, you know a lot of them change their mind. They do. It's just important to keep that option for them all the time. I mean, when they do say that, [we don’t’] just stick them over here and say well that is what you're going to do then. We don't give up on them.

A teacher continued the explanation of how educators at Winding Road dealt with those students who said they were not going to college after high school.

> We don’t say to them, “So, you're not going to take the college prep road, so we're just going to teach you basic, we're not going to teach you like we do our college prep students.’ Basically, everybody in my classroom, I'm teaching them like they're going to go to college.

Be Confident: You Can Do It

The principal and teacher who talked about keeping students on track to be prepared to attend college even though they said they were not planning to attend college also said that throughout the four years of high school students’ general aspirations about post-high school plans continued to change and that students who were the most vocal about not going to college after high school often changed their minds before graduation. A teacher explained,

> In my classroom, they complete scholarships and there are a few, especially local ones, which everyone has to fill it out. I make everybody complete them as an assignment and there are always those who say, "Well I'm not going to college." "Doesn't matter,” I say, “this is an assignment. This is what you're going to do."

She continued,

> What's so funny is that, half the time, the ones who said, "I'm not going to college.” Then, they're the ones going to college and need the scholarships. "Oh well, I'm glad I decided to go," they say I mean, even at the beginning of the senior year, they say "I'm not going" and by the time May gets here, they’re saying "Oh and I got that scholarship and I'm glad because I am going to go too."

The teacher talked about the importance of students believing they could be academically successful saying, “Sometimes, if they just need to know they are not failures, 90 percent of academic success is if they believe they can succeed. Pretty

soon, they are making Bs." "We expect it and we believe they can do it and pretty soon they start thinking they can," said another teacher. She continued,

> I have had students who not done great academically in high school. I tell them to just try it. I promise them they will be able to do it if you work hard. They make As and Bs. It is like a light turns on. I may have had to write a letter to get them into college but they are on the President's honor roll.

Academic expectations for Winding Road students were grounded in a history and a reputation for providing students with a strong academic experience. The student handbook stated, "It is believed that this is one of the finest schools anywhere. . ." A teacher who grew up about 30 miles from Winding Road noted the reputation, saying the school had for a long time had a "good name for education in the area." He elaborated that the teachers knew their curriculum, describing the Winding Road faculty as full of "really good teachers . . . experienced teachers," who knew how to relate to and build relationships with students

The tradition for providing a quality education for students was echoed in the description of another teacher who grew up and went to school in a nearby town but moved in high school and graduated from Winding Road. She recalled teachers who had held them to high standards and expected them to further their education. Although she started her teaching career in another community, she said that she knew she wanted to return to the community to give back by sharing the wonderful experience with other students and that she wanted it for her own children. When her children were in elementary school, she had the opportunity to return to Winding Road to teach and both of her children had flourished as students in the school and continued their educations after high school in college.

Another asset in helping students understand the expectations and the process of making plans for education after high school was described by one teacher in the way students participate in mixed grade level classes and activities. This teacher shared,

> Younger kids hear people in the community talking [to older students about their plans] and I think it gets them thinking about what they want to do and where they want to go because the process of making those decisions is discussed. I think it gets the younger kids thinking it will be them making those decisions soon, it teaches them to be aware of what goes into making those plans.

The messages of postsecondary education expressed within the school extend into the community.

Be Confident: You Know What's Right and How to Work Hard

Research has indicated four non-cognitive skills of conscientiousness, self-control and growth mindset, contributing factors to "knowing what is right and working hard," that have been correlated with increased academic performance (Duckworth et al., 2007; West et al., 2014). Teachers talked about people in the business community beyond Winding Road who had been attracted to the community's former students for employment or internships because they understood the strong work ethic of the people of the region of a Midwestern state.

The faculty said they encouraged students to be involved in some sort of extracurricular activity, as described by one teacher who said, "The main priority is to help make them well-rounded, make them better, not just academically." The teachers said they encouraged students to participate in extracurricular activities to learn skills that will support success during high school and beyond. One teacher was able to capture the kinds of things students learn through the school culture and activities at Winding Road because of the conversations she had been having with her son who was

in his first year of teaching at another school a couple of hours away. She said that as she listened to him talk about the things that needed to be happening at the school where he taught, it was as if she were hearing herself and other teachers, leaders, and coaches from the school talk because she could recognize the people whose philosophies and messages he was emulating. She shared,

> He tells me about making them responsible and holding them accountable, and making them into good people and leaders, not just for their academics, but teaching them how to be productive citizens. He just keeps telling me "Oh man, I need to get this started at my school. " And he says they have great programs but he just there are just things they need to do differently, to talk about getting everybody involved, making them be accountable, and be leaders.

Another teacher said that students need to be challenged to learn how to work independently.

Several teachers indicated that Winding Road had high expectations of its students and was what some referred to as a "strict school." Different interviewees said Winding Road expected "old-fashioned manners," high standards of behavior, they do not "spoon feed" their students and "[The students] know how to show up and stay late to get the job done." As an example of the types of expectations the faculty expected of students, a teacher said they had been addressing students' "focus on their phones and texting by pushing the importance of one-to-one communication, encouraging students to be present in the moment with that person to whom they are talking."

One teacher shared what she thought made Winding Road special stating, "I think that is what we do very well here is build tradition and instill character, morals and high expectations of not only yourself but everybody around you." Another teacher said that even though the Winding Road school building was very old, it was well-kept

and she attributed this to the pride students had for their school and the respect they showed for it.

Be Confident: We Know What We are Doing

During the summer before their senior year, Winding Road students and parents met to strategize about how they would complete the decisions and requirements. The senior class sponsor hosted the summer student and parent meeting. Distributed during the meeting was a checklist of steps to be completed each month during the school year. In August and September, students were to meet with the counselor to be certain their schedules and their transcripts meet graduation requirements, update their resumes, register to take or retake to try for a better score for the national ACT testing day given for students from the region at the Winding Road School, attend the regional college fair which is hosted by the school and required for all juniors and seniors, and narrow their college or after graduation options to three choices. They were also expected to schedule college visits to the institutions of higher education to which they will apply and to calendar deadline dates for their colleges various forms and reservations. Though their checklist included completing college applications by Thanksgiving, the counselor reported that before the end of September, "many had already completed three, four, or five admissions applications." Each month of the year through May graduation, the checklist outlined items for the students and their parents to complete and opportunities offered by the school to support seniors and their parents in the process, particularly important for prospective college students who are the first in their families to attend college.

While the counselor and the senior class sponsor were responsible for the checklist and the summer student-parent meeting, multiple teachers and leaders throughout the study interviews described a culture of shared leadership and responsibility for students being prepared for education after high school. They either talked about their own messages to students or others' messages and providing students with skills, information, and help completing forms and meeting deadlines. A teacher new to the district described his colleagues as long-tenured, quality educators who talked with their students about their futures, ". . .if not daily, then very regularly." He continued, "The groundwork's been laid a long time ago; there are big expectations for their futures. . .The traditions are set here. Students are groomed and raised in 'that's how things go.'"

Several teachers noted that the senior class sponsor worked with students before the senior year to help them explore and consider their interests and options for the future. During the senior year, she continued to support them through the final steps and decisions. At the back corner of her classroom, was an area devoted to the senior class. Each of the seniors' names was written on a paper airplane and posted on a map of the world representing the senior class theme of "Take Flight." Informal candid photos of the seniors were on another bulletin board with "An Adventure" running across the top edge. Above that board, a statement, "If your dreams don't scare you, they aren't big enough." On a nearby counter in the same corner of the room, small toys littered the counter, including airplanes, trucks, an airport and runway, and other small manipulative toys. A row of children's books stood with their titles visible: *You Are My I Love You, You Are My Wish, You Are My Wonders, Planes, Love You Forever*

and *I Promise I'll Find You.* Also posted on the wall was a hanging with pockets for each senior identified; in some of the pockets, small notes and other objects could be seen behind the names. The class sponsor explained,

> This area is for the seniors. I tell them when they become overwhelmed – and they have a lot to be overwhelmed about – they can come back here and just spend some time playing, or reading, or writing a note to a classmate. You would be surprised how many times they take advantage of this area.

Teachers described administrators as leading with a vision for students' postsecondary success and supporting the vision by providing resources and opportunities for teachers' use in preparing students, as well as being "very hands on" with the students. The district's PK-12 new counselor, at Winding Road for less than a year, noted that the superintendent had been clear about her most important responsibilities when she was hired saying he expected "kids going on to college on some kind of education scholarship and the testing."

Be Confident: We are Here to Help, Now and Later

The school is here to serve you," these words from the welcome in the Winding Road Student Handbook seemed to characterize the commitment expressed by the teachers and, as they indicated, the larger community. "It's all about the students," one teacher said about the Winding Road School. Another explained,

> The kids see teachers as "real people." In a small school, they not only see us in the classroom working for them. They also see us at their games, working concession stands, at their plays, taking them to academic meets, leading their youth group at church – in all aspects of their lives.

The counselor, new to the staff, said,

> Most of the teachers talk to the students about life after high school. I think they really, they kind of look out for them and their futures. They tell them they don't just have to limit themselves but that there is help available to make it possible for them to extend their education after high school.

Another teacher noted, “They know we will work just as hard as they do to help them succeed.”

Teachers’ efforts to help students succeed extend beyond the classroom. For example, one of them talked about a senior student, “One of those students, the kind that it seems that everything works against them.” She went on to describe the student who had some legal issues that had become roadblocks and his single parent wasn’t able to help him. “He wants to go to college so bad; he needs to go – he is so intelligent.” She said that some of the teachers had “taken him in” to get him into college, and some others in the community are taking care of his financial needs. “I think we have just about made that a reality. It takes a village.”

Another teacher described a shared community value of the importance of supporting others with resources available. ‘We try to meet individual’s needs in the community. We try to meet their needs because it could be [us in need] someday soon,” said one teacher. “We do our best to bring ‘do unto others’ in the classroom.” The sense of working together and helping others in the community can be seen in student actions as well. She went on to describe that a boy had moved into town a couple of years ago as a seventh grader and he had some “issues.” The teacher explained that some of the students took him under their wing. They noticed that he wore the same shirt many days and gathered clothes for him. They noticed he did not have things that other students had and one student gave him an extra iPod from home. The teacher said, “We have really watched him blossom, he is not the same as when he moved in.”

In Winding Road, the commitment of the faculty was represented by the student handbook statement, “Every effort to help you make your school career a success will

be made by the administration and faculty." Several faculty members described the commitment by saying it applied not only while students were in high school but extended beyond graduation. "The students have our phone numbers and we tell the students they can come back or call us if they have a problem or need something. We have for years." Another said she told students, "I am here to help you make your dreams come true."

"[The community members] hold education in high esteem. They want their children to be educated, to have a chance for careers and to be successful in life," explained one teacher who had been at the school for more than a decade. "The community has a lot of pride in the students and their futures and what they are going to do. They want them to be successful." She continued, "Lots of community members really help. I am just finding out there is more than what I thought. More than I ever realized, especially financially." The teacher went on to say that even though she was a Winding Road alumnus, had taught in the school for more than a decade, and had two sons who were alumni of the school, she was continually surprised by the number of people who supported students. She said she had only recently begun to realize the larger number of people who provided financial support for students' pursuit of postsecondary education.

The Winding Road teachers talked in interviews about the way the school faculty, students, parents, and community work together and the sense of teamwork across the community groups. At the school level, "You are concerned about [the students] first; then work on everything else. We don't just have strong academics, science, agriculture; we have great coaches and music teachers."

Positive statements, noted one teacher, play a significant role in building teamwork among the students in Winding Road. Positive statements are visible throughout the hallways and teachers' classrooms, some pre-printed statements and others handmade by the students themselves. The school's beginning of the week bulletin included a positive statement. Different teachers shared their work was to provide a good education, helping students "build pride within self, others, team mates, classmates," and "build tradition and instill character, morals and high expectations of not only yourself but everybody around you." "Positive feedback is important," said another teacher, "Students need someone to encourage them." "I encourage them to stay positive and have something to look to when things aren't going well," said another. One teacher whose son was teaching in a nearby community and she said she encouraged him to use positive statements to build interest in the track team that had experience limited success in previous years. She helped him spruce up the locker room and post positive statements on the walls and "And it's worked – they had to order more track uniforms because so many more students are going out."

Teams at Winding Road have been recognized for successful extracurricular activities such as sports, the arts, Future Farmers of America and academics. Several sports teams have recently won district and state championships, as well as being recognized for the teams having the highest grade point averages in their conferences. Multiple years of academic team plaques – both at the high school and middle level – were posted in the hallway. Interviewees said that Winding Road parents support the teachers, "We have good partnerships with homes, good parental support." Another said,

> In the past, I would occasionally work with a parent that would say staying and working here "was good enough for me and its good enough for them." Not here, really. I've not heard that. Usually, it's "I want better for my students."

The math teacher said, "The parents trust us to do what we need to do and the parents make sure students do what they need to do and get the help they need."

The larger community had an enduring interest in students and their futures. Community members who do not have students in the schools attend their events. One teacher shared, "Everybody in the community encourages these kids as they come through." Residents followed students' plans for the future, a teacher said, "In this community, their futures are talked about." "It is discussed in the community quite a bit, part of general conversation and I hear kids talking about what other kids are going to do," said another teacher. He went on to explain his perception which was that because of the smaller size of the school and the way students intermingled, less separated in school by grade levels in classes and activities, younger students often had 'front row seats to older students' conversations and descriptions of the decision-making process' for their post-high school plans. He said he believed that helped make them begin to think about their own futures and more aware of the decisions they would be making within the next few years.

Summary

In this chapter, results of the processes of data collection and modified constant comparative analysis were presented; I was able to identify messages shared by educators which characterize the socialization of students throughout their high school experiences as they prepared to graduate. The teachers' and leaders' five primary messages detailed supported development of the overarching sensitizing concept of

individual anxiety-corporate confidence. The juxtaposition of anxiety and confidence characterize the two distinct forces at work to support students in developing plans and completing the requirements for postsecondary education.

Chapter 5

Introduction

The focus of this study was generation of an operational theory representing the role anticipatory socialization perspective of educators from Winding Road High, a remote rural high school which graduates the majority of its students with plans for postsecondary education. The aims of this study were to explore and conceptualize the school context role anticipatory socialization of students at one remote rural high school for pursuit of postsecondary education. Exploration of the socialization resulted in identification by educators of two primary categories of messages and five distinct messages which combine to support the Individual Anxiety-Corporate Confidence (IA-CC) model. In addition to explanation and rationale of the IA-CC model, discussion of the research contributions of this study and implications for future research were also presented.

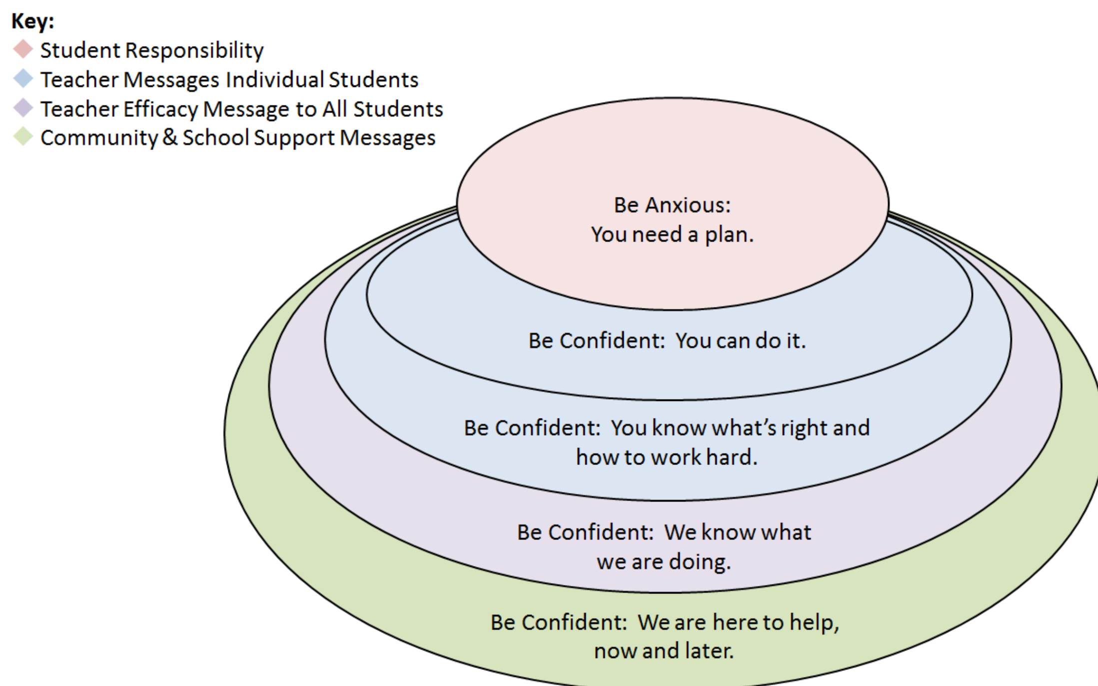
Individual Anxiety-Corporate Confidence

Further analysis of the five categories resulted in identification of two primary messages for students in the remote rural school: *be anxious* and *be confident*. The "be anxious" perspective characterized the "You need a plan" category which helped establish student responsibility for making the decisions and creating specific plans for life after high school. The lone message seems simple enough except that expectation students face is making decisions that represent a major life transition. The other four messages represented the "be confident" category, the supports in place for students in making the transition successfully. The messages combined that were identified as characteristic within the remote rural high school context represented the theoretical

concept of *individual anxiety-corporate confidence*. Individual anxiety-corporate confidence represented the twin faces of postsecondary preparation messages shared with students. The messages are shared verbally in large groups, verbally in private conversations, visually in the posters and the school history lining the halls and the bulletin boards of the school, through the opportunities and requirements enacted by educators, and echoed in the support of the larger community to prepare students to graduate high school ready to enter postsecondary education.

A visual representation of the relationship categories of messages Winding Road High educators identified representing the postsecondary education Discourse within both the school and larger community and the individual anxiety-corporate confidence phenomenon is presented in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1. Individual Anxiety-Corporate Confidence Model
Role Anticipatory Socialization for Winding Road High Postsecondary Discourse



In Figure 5.1, the five nested statements represent the five categories of the cultural messages identified by this study as the overarching messages students receive from their teachers and the larger community. The nested arrangement of the messages indicates that the messages form a sort of developmental cocoon to guide the development of students toward future success. The first five messages of confidence represent messages that begin early in the students' educational careers and have followed them throughout the years. At the top of the cocoon is the message that becomes superordinate in the last year of high school as students are poised to make postsecondary plans.

The messages of *anxiety* shared in the school's cultural Discourse set the stage to invoke students' realization and actions of planning for education after high school. As described by the Winding Road educators, students are told about the difficulty of the senior year of high school including the steps they need to take, the requirements they need to complete, and the overwhelming feelings they will have at times throughout the year. The anxiety was characterized by the senior class sponsor in what she described to students, "I tell them this will be the most difficult year of their lives, at times 'overwhelming," time of considering options, identifying interests and skills, completing requirements, and making decisions." Building Winding Road students' confidence to prepare them to make decisions for the next steps in their lives had been the focus of educators and the larger community in various ways since they began high school.

The numerous *confidence* messages, juxtaposed with messages of *anxiety*, in the cultural Discourse alleviate students' anxiety and, in a sense, open a clear pathway for

students in the complicated decision-making and task completion required for postsecondary access and success. While the confidence messages are encouraging, they also represent years of challenges the students already have met in school experiences of leadership, teamwork, and responsibilities and the difficult work they face over the first years after high school. Beyond the individual development of confidence, the students have a foundation in the history of school and community stakeholders' success in sending students on to postsecondary education and continued tangible support in the form of messages and funds to make postsecondary education possible.

Discourse Represented in the IA-CC Model

Role anticipatory socialization, also known as vocational anticipatory socialization, asserts persons develop work-related values and interests through exposure to information and communication offered by influential persons. The shared cognition represented in the messages of teachers and leaders indicated role anticipatory socialization was a priority for students both for the faculty and for the larger community (Kramer, 2010; Jablin, 2001). The self-identification of teachers' regarding their roles as influential persons in the development of students' career and educational knowledge base was reflective of what research has indicated about the significance of the rural students and school context (Demi, Coleman-Jensen, & Snyder, 2010; Meece, Byun, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2011; Meece, Hutchins, Byun, Farmer, Irvin, & Weiss, 2013). While the faculty members interviewed in this study tended to describe the postsecondary education priority as something that developed in the school over time, further research with additional community members to understand how the school

culture developed could support increased understanding for the potential for other schools.

In addition to the school emphasis on postsecondary education for all students, educators spoke of the importance of the commitment to postsecondary education by the larger community (Coleman, 1988; Coleman, 1990; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Schneider, 2007). Analysis of the data indicated a historical cultural value at Winding Road for students making plans for postsecondary education. Faculty who had either graduated or had children who graduated from the Winding Road in the last 30-plus years reported remembering an emphasis placed on an education beyond high school. Teachers talked about their involvements in the larger community through church and community leadership and the way students knew them as “real people” through the community roles.

In addition to teachers’ roles as members of and leaders in the community, teachers identified community members as supporting students through attendance of school activities, keeping track of and asking students about their plans for after high school, and the contributing financial support for students’ needs while they attend Winding Road schools but also in helping to make college a reality for students. Teachers’ and leaders’ descriptions of their practices and activities for providing information, support, and opportunities for postsecondary exploration indicated Winding Road educators have developed their practices as a college brokering school (Hill, 2008). In rural school research, the school context emerged as the strongest predictor, indirectly and directly, of student perceptions about school, grades and aspirations (Demi, Coleman-Jensen, & Snyder, 2010). Also, the mediating effects of

the rural school climate were some of the strongest relationships through self-efficacy, grades, and educational aspirations. For rural students, the school context is central to the likelihood of students' propensity to attend college in a way not found in other populations.

Two of the newest teachers to the faculty noted that the teachers knew their curriculum and how to build relationships with students. While research has indicated teacher retention is difficult for rural schools; the educators at Winding Road tend to stay in their positions for longer periods of time. The description of teachers' classrooms would indicate they more than likely do not rely on the coercive, reward, or legitimate powers afforded to them by their role as a teacher. In fact, teachers who do rely on any one or combination of these three legitimate positional power bases generally struggle in the classroom. Most of the Winding Road teachers are able to hold students to high standards of behavior and academic engagement by showing students their expert and referent powers (Rahim, Antonioni, & Psenicka, 2001).

Additionally, the environment of the school featured bright and encouraging posters in hallways and classes, the attendance of teachers at student events outside of school, and the multiple school roles educators filled in sponsoring sports, music, academic teams, clubs and organizations, and other extracurricular activities for students. One teacher was late for her interview appointment and apologized because she had been delayed at the grocery store purchasing items for snacks for the cross country team to take to their meet. These qualities indicate the teachers understand the importance of creating what research refers to as a positive classroom emotional climate by teachers who are responsive to students' social, emotional, and academic needs and

its role in supporting student engagement and academic success (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). The Winding Road educators seem to understand the value of inspiration, the most effective influence tactic, and they use it liberally (Falbe and Yukl, 1992). Student attendance was high, disciplinary data significantly lower than state averages, and academic performance generally above state averages, all indicators that the school and classroom environment supports students' social and emotional needs so that they are able to engage in school tasks for academic success (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012).

Implications for Leadership Practice

Shared leadership has been identified by Winding Road educators as a key component to success in the culture of Winding Road School. While teachers expressed value for the shared leadership, they also repeatedly mentioned the high quality of their school administrators' leadership. Some of the characteristics teachers expressed appreciation for in their administrators were treating all stakeholders with personal and professional respect, providing resources and professional development teachers needed to teach their students, and establishing and supporting high expectations for student behavior, academic performance, and extracurricular involvement. Administrators set expectations based in the need for strong stakeholder relationships. For example, administrators expected teachers to be present at student activities, communicate with parents, and support students in their choices between different activities as events conflicted. These and the other teacher statements about the administration indicated they had achieved a high degree of *phronesis*, the skill of quality leadership referred to as practical wisdom, in setting priorities and making decisions that support the good of

the stakeholders of the school (Halverson, 2004). While the administrators certainly held positional power, from the teachers' descriptions, it seemed they exercised personal and/or referent power based in respect, rather than forms of positional power. As described by teachers, administrators were skilled at the practice of Leader-Member Exchange which seeks to alleviate power differentials to facilitate communication (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, Rahim, Antonioni, & Psenicka, 2001).

The leaders and teachers at Winding Road High spoke about having high expectations of students in terms of high expectations for respect, responsibility to self and to others, behavior, goal-setting, extracurricular activities and the need for time management, and knowing how to work hard. These types of expectations for students seem to overlap with the executive function skills identified as contributors to academic and lifelong success including conscientiousness, self-control, grit, and a growth mindset (West et al., 2014). The statements of teachers and leaders indicated they modeled commitment and enthusiasm for their careers and designed school and classroom practices and expectations to support development of the executive function skills which have been implicated for their contributions to student success (West et al., 2014).

This study focused on the identified gap in understanding of the aspects of a remote rural school context through the exemplar culture supported by teachers and leaders for college access and success information (Demi et al., 2010; Roderick et al., 2009; Semke & Sheridan, 2012). The study supported development of a theoretical understanding of one remote rural school's role anticipatory socialization. Through exploration of the culture of the school, key practices supporting postsecondary

education for all students were identified: administrators established a vision of postsecondary education for all students and shared responsibility of developing the vision with teachers, teachers recognized and enacted their roles as influential persons for supporting students' development of plans for the future, and administrators and teachers indicated a belief in a growth mindset for their students. While this study focused on the discursive practices of educators of one remote rural school, the findings may resonate with other rural school administrators and teachers.

Administrators seeking to build the postsecondary education culture of their schools must be willing to articulate the vision of education after high school as the default option, a non-negotiable for all students. Administrators who have established the vision of postsecondary education for all students must be able to share the vision and, through shared leadership, facilitate teachers in developing practices to support the vision. College and career exploration and readiness have been most successful when students begin long before they enter high school.

As the school personnel with the most consistent direct contact with students on a daily basis, teachers must accept their roles as influential persons for helping students develop perceptions and plans for postsecondary education. Rather than teachers teaching students differently based on their expectations of students future potential, teachers need to teach all students as if they will enroll in college. College and career readiness and exploration cannot be limited to special events. Teachers need to include general references to, and exploration of, career options within the classroom and talk with students both as a group and individually about their interests and plans for education after high school.

The Discourse of educators at Winding Road indicated a shared belief in the malleability of student talent, intelligence, and post-high school plans continued to be shaped by information and experiences shared throughout the high school years. All students were required to attend college fairs, complete scholarship applications, and apply to colleges. When Winding Road students said they did not plan to attend college, teachers replied that these activities were school assignments that all students completed. The teachers also talked about students who entered high school saying they were not going to college later thanked teachers for requiring them to complete requirements to enter college because they had changed their minds. All aspects of the Winding Road school culture and the discourse of the individual teachers and leaders created the picture of a positive emotional climate in the classroom representing high expectations across academic, social, and emotional domains.

This study captured the phronesis of one group of exemplar educators supporting students in planning for education after high school. The educators at Winding Road enacted a shared vision articulated by the administrators, teachers collaborated to support students in making plans and completing steps, and teachers expressed the belief that all students needed to be taught as if they were attending college. Additional organizational culture research is indicated to shape a more significant understanding of the unique assets for and barriers to rural students' postsecondary education participation.

Implications for Future Research

This goal of this study was to discover more about the messages of educators in the postsecondary access socialization process in a remote rural school with the

majority of students who graduate high school with plans in place and requirements completed for postsecondary education. The IA-CC model contributed to the literature in a number of ways. First, the IA-CC model contributed the notion of a school culture in which the two balanced polar messages of individual responsibility and corporate efficacy have been successfully leveraged. Second, this study provided the cultural view of the dynamic of the educators who created the socially-constructed reality of expectations of postsecondary education. Third, this understanding of the ecology of messaging important in the meaning making of students about life after high school extended understanding of the power of building upon assets of students' environment, as opposed to the barriers, supporting success. Finally, this study represented a rare real-world ecologically valid case study focused on organizational-level implicit person theory. By studying the social environment of a positively deviant school system and the ecology of messages that constituted its culture, I discovered that the intersection of two kinds of meaning making represented by the IA-CC model seemed to explain the regular decision by Winding Road students to plan for postsecondary education.

First, these findings contributed to the relational dialectics literature by providing the IA-CC model as a variation of the autonomy and connectedness model, the idea that relationships develop by trying to combine the two poles that cannot be combined (Baxter, 2004.). This organizational cultural study of a case resulted in development of a model representing the importance of the balanced nature of the contradictory messages of individual responsibility and corporate efficacy. Whereas the autonomy-connection theory had been used extensively in the study of dyad and family dynamics (Baxter, Braithwaite, & Nicholson, 1999; Baxter & Montgomery, 199;

Sabourin, 2003), few studies have focused on systems or macro level relational dialectics (Sahlstein, Maguire, & Timmerman, 2009). The independent-interdependent relationship of the school context on rural students' meaning making about postsecondary education was exemplified by the network of messages communicated in the school and community cultures. For example, the senior class sponsor's messages of "take flight" were balanced by actions to pull the students together and reinforce their connection to their identities as Winding Road Broncos. The future application of relational dialectic research in the area of the ecology of messaging across group-level dynamics and contexts is indicated by the results of this study.

Second, the IA-CC model contributes a cultural explanation for the postsecondary access success of a positively deviant rural school. Whereas research had previously identified the significance of the rural school context for students in accessing postsecondary education, the IA-CC model represents the significance of one rural school context in terms of the messages communicated. In rural school research, the school context emerged as the strongest predictor and mediator of student perceptions about school, grades and aspirations (Demi, Coleman-Jensen, & Snyder, 2010). Specifically, the mediating effects of the rural school climate were some of the strongest relationships through self-efficacy, grades, and educational aspirations. The messages represented in the IA-CC model reflect the socially-constructed realities shared by the teachers and leaders from the school with an exemplar record of preparing students for postsecondary education. Future research in educational areas in which the school context has been identified as key could support a more in depth understanding of the phenomenon.

Third, the IA-CC contributes to the education literature an example of the expectations communicated in the ecology of messaging important in the college-going meaning making of high school students. Previous college-linking process research has established the significance of school leaders and teachers becoming advocates and agents in promoting equity of access to postsecondary education and preparation for all students (Carter, 2011; Collins, 2011; Hill, 2008; Roderick et al., 2009). While the research underscores the importance of a culture of care and support as a strong predictor of increased student enrollment in education after high school, the research also indicates the need for high expectations for all students as equally important for success.

This study represents a view of the balance of the contradictory nature of the discourse of students' individual responsibilities inextricably coupled with the school-level partnership with students and families. The IA-CC model represents an important understanding of the balance between the two specific messages individual responsibility and corporate efficacy that students at Winding Road High take for granted: these students don't know there is another way. If the Discourse weighed too heavily on the side of emphasizing student responsibility, the stress may overwhelm students and prevent them from pursuing postsecondary education. In the same way, too much emphasis on Discourse of corporate efficacy may have created complacency to the point that students fail to take responsibility. Without a balance between the messages, students could fail to complete the tasks of making plans and completing requirements for postsecondary access and success. A need for additional research

about the potential role of schools and nature of the role in supporting students' meaning making for postsecondary access across different school contexts is indicated.

Finally, this ethnographic study of an exemplar case contributes to the research regarding Implicit Person Theory (IPT). The reported Winding Road faculty messages indicated a shared, taken for granted incremental intelligence theory (Dweck, 2006). The shared cognition of a growth mindset among the faculty and shared with the students represented the belief that intellect and talent are malleable. Included in the messaging of organizational communication climate of Winding Road High School were references to high expectations, care, and nurture associated with teaching all students to meet high standards (Dweck, 2006). In Winding Road, all students were taught as if they were going to college and challenged with expectations to make plans and complete steps required for postsecondary access.

Winding Road faculty participants verbalized the growth mindset perspective when they stated students' ideas about themselves and their abilities continue to change and grow, representing a perspective of incremental intelligence which they shared through interactions and experiences with their students (Dweck 2012). While strong experimental studies of implicit person theories exist, there are almost no group level, real-world, and ecologically valid case studies. One experimental study of incremental theory of personality with adolescents in times of transition indicated the power of intervention to support students' development of a belief that people can change and the link to increased academic performance and less negative reactions to social adversities (Yeager, Johnson, Spitzer, Trzesniewski, Powers and Dweck, 2014). A near group-level experimental study of growth mindset by Murphy & Dweck (2010) demonstrated

individuals presented themselves to a group differently based on their perceptions of the group's implicit theory. My study highlighted the need for future research focused on understanding real-world, system-level shared implicit theories across different schools and types of schools and their implications for student success. Additional study of IPT and student success has the potential to impact the practices of both current and future leaders and teachers.

Summary

This study resulted in generation of a sensitizing concept representing the role anticipatory socialization perspective of educators from a remote rural high school positively deviant in its success in graduating the majority of its students with plans in place and requirements completed for postsecondary education. The discussion highlighted the educators' shared value for offering postsecondary education for all students evidenced in an understanding of research-based practices to support students; larger community value and commitment for continued education; high teacher retention, collective efficacy, and appropriate uses of expert and referent powers; demonstrated use by teachers of inspiration and positive classroom emotional climate; shared leadership between administrators and faculty; and high expectations for students across academic, social and emotional domains. Implications for further research to extend this study were also indicated.

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Appendix A

Semi-structured Interview Protocol for Leaders and Teachers

1. What has been your affiliation with the school and community?
2. What influenced you to become an educator? Continue as an educator?
3. What do you see happening in your school to support increased student academic success?
4. Tell me about some of your conversations with students about education and life after high school? Conversations in the last few weeks? Conversations with parents of students?
5. How do you respond to concerns about students' readiness for education after high school?
6. What do you hear from students and/or parents about high school graduates leaving the community to pursue college and career?
7. If you were going to design a curriculum for encouraging students to consider college after high school, what would you be certain to include?
8. What messages do you remember hearing from teachers that were important for your success in life?
9. What do you say to students not planning to continue education past high school?
10. Additional comments/concerns?

Appendix B

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Continuing Review – Expedited Review – AP0

Date: December 10, 2013 **IRB#:** 0695

Principal Investigator: Scott N Wilson, PHD **Approval Date:** 12/10/2013 **Expiration Date: 11/30/2014**

Expedited Category: 6 & 7

Study Title: K20 College and Career Readiness for Schools (Teachers & Leaders).

Based on the information submitted, your study is currently: Active, open to enrollment. On behalf the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and approved your continuing review application. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorization using the currently approved, stamped forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Promptly submit continuing review documents to the IRB upon notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date indicated above.
- Submit a final closure report at the completion of the project.

You will receive notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date noted above. You are responsible for submitting continuing review documents in a timely fashion in order to maintain continued IRB approval.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

E. Laurette Taylor, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix C

701-A-1

University of Oklahoma
Institutional Review Board
Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Project Title: The K20 College and Career Readiness for Schools (Teachers & Leaders)
Principal Investigator: Dr. Scott Wilson
Department: K20 Center

You are being asked to volunteer for this research study. This study is being conducted at the University of Oklahoma's K20 Center. You were selected as a possible participant because your school is participating in a United States Department of Education GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) grant.

Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

Purpose of the Research Study
The purpose of this study is to investigate the processes of building interactive learning communities and schools that nurture the development of students who excel academically and gain admission into local and out-of-state institutions of higher learning.

Number of Participants
About 12,500 people (around 6,250 students and 6,250 of their parents and guardians) will take part in this study.

Procedures
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following: Complete surveys, interviews, and allow classroom observations. We will be observing for implementation of professional development learning.

Length of Participation

General questionnaires will be given as pre- post assessments, each will take about 20 minutes. Event surveys will take about 5 minutes each. If asked for an interview, it may take about half an hour. These surveys may be online or paper-and-pencil. Classroom observations will either occur annually or will be scheduled in association with a summer experience and may last up to an entire class period. The study will last for six years, but you may withdraw at any time in the study.

Risks of being in the study are
There are no perceived risks beyond the normal risk teachers and leaders encounter when involved in professional development, classroom innovations, and supervision of student activities. We will make every effort to protect the data we collect from you and only report aggregated data back to the school. Your supervisor will not have direct access to these data.

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Benefits of being in the study are

There are no perceived benefits beyond those realized from normal involvement in professional development, classroom observations, and supervision of student activities.

Compensation

You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this study.

Injury

In case of injury or illness resulting from this study, emergency medical treatment is available. However, you or your insurance company will be expected to pay the usual charge from this treatment. The University of Oklahoma Norman Campus has set aside no funds to compensate you in the event of injury.

Confidentiality

In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you without your permission. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers will have access to the records.

There are organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis. These organizations include the OU K20 Center and College of Education, United States Department of Education, and the OU Institutional Review Board.

"State law requires reporting information about suspected or known sexual, physical or other abuse of a child (if applicable, or older person), or a subject's threats of violence to self or others. If any member of the research team is given such information, he or she will make a report to the appropriate authorities."

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you withdraw or decline participation, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the study. If you decide to participate, you may decline to answer any question and may choose to withdraw at any time.

You have the right to access the research data that has been collected about you as a part of this research study. However, you may not have access to this information until the entire research study has completely finished and you consent to this temporary restriction.

Audio Recording of Study Activities

To assist with accurate recording of your responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to audio recording. ___ Yes ___ No

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Contacts and Questions

If you have concerns or complaints about the research, the researcher(s) conducting this study can be contacted at OU's K20 Center by calling or emailing Dr. Scott Wilson, 405-325-1267, scott.wilson@ou.edu; Dr. Jean Cate, 405-325-2228, jcate@ou.edu; or, Dr. Leslie Williams, 405-325-1267 or lesliew@ou.edu. Contact the researcher(s) if you have questions, or if you have experienced a research-related injury.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than individuals on the research team or if you cannot reach the research team, you may contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records. If you are not given a copy of this consent form, please request one.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received satisfactory answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Participant Signature　　　Print Name　　　Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent　　　Date

Print Name of Person Obtaining Consent

IRB NUMBER: 0695
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 12/10/2013
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