

In search of home: An ethnographic case study exploring collaborative educational efforts
addressing rural homelessness

by

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B.A., West Virginia Wesleyan College, 2010
M.A., International University of Belgium, 2011
M.S., Kansas State University, 2014

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2018

Abstract

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

With the current economic climate of our nation, homelessness continues to remain on the rise, affecting over 2.5 million children across the United States (The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2015). Economic hardship combined with unforeseen events often force families and youth into lives of homelessness, ultimately hindering children and youth's potential for educational success (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2010). Within the public school sector, students experiencing homelessness are provided direct support and specialized services through the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act, which ensures that homeless youth have the same educational opportunities that are afforded to non-homeless youth (Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski, 2014); however, little progress has been made in promoting effective practice among school-based and community-based service providers to ensure the success of this at-risk demographic both in and outside of the classroom setting.

This introductory chapter begins by demonstrating examples of the unique challenges faced by homeless through the use of prose-poems created based upon specific occurrences of the Southside K-8 Community School in McDowell County, West Virginia, the research site of this study. Then, background, setting, and context are provided in order to demonstrate to the reader the ways in which the community school model can best serve students in rural settings. Next, this chapter explores the need for continued research on the increasing numbers of homeless students in rural areas, and will explore the ways in which the community school model can potentially serve this demographic. Due to limited scholarship within the field of rural homeless education, a rationale for this study explores how educators, administrators of the

Southside K-8 Community School respond to the unique challenges facing homeless students. An explanation of post-oppositional threshold theory will demonstrate how I engage in multiple understandings of home, and an explanation of the methodology of qualitative inquiry, ethnographic case study, and sensory ethnography will be described, along with reasonings behind their appropriateness for this study. The final sections of this chapter will include possible implications and limits of this study, along with a listing of operational definitions.



The following prose-poems were created to provide the reader with enhanced insights into the lived experiences, emotions, and imagery associated with those experiencing the effects of extreme poverty within the rural community of War, West Virginia. The first piece is shown through an omniscient adult lens, whereas the second piece is shown through the lens of a child. The use of these dual perspectives provides an opportunity to explore varying perspectives of lived experiences in order to better understand the ways in which student homelessness is perceived by both adult and child. Within both pieces, the imagery, along with the verse, creates a means through which outsiders and insiders, alike, can visually and emotionally experience and connect to the ways in which this rural community school is attempting to combat the effects of extreme poverty and homelessness among its students.



White plastic bags lay limply
on the classroom's white linoleum floor.
Students of all sizes—little ones
first—line up to receive. It will soon
be the weekend, and hungry,
distended bellies grumble and
growl—disguised only by the distant sound
of the school bell. Chiming on the hour.



End of day. Backpacks stocked with books and food.
Food that the teacher claimed was donated by that nice old lady for *those poor kids*.
“Only the *poor kids* get these,” she said.

Hour on the bus. Winding roads. Stomachs churning. Hunger. Nausea. Longing for home.
Looming mountains. Eyes open—open wide—waiting for the drop off.



These children, you see, we see them,
they see us—but what are we seeing,
really?

These children whose bellies we fill,
whose backpacks we stock, making
ourselves feel better in the process. But
what good do these nonperishable
items do when your whole life—your

whole experience—could perish at any moment?



I can smell the maple syrup as soon as I walk up the stairs, up seven, eight, nine stairs and into the big gray door. I can push that big door open all by myself. Last year, in Kindergarten, Mrs. Thompson opened it for us, but now, in first grade, we are big kids and can open that big



old door all on our own.

My tummy growls as I realize that they cooked my absolute favorite—pancakes and sausage—at school today. I love the way the maple syrup swirls over the pancakes and onto the sausage. Mama used to make them for us, but I can't remember the last

time. This morning, I had to try five times to wake Mama up, so I didn't get here early enough to get my plate. I hate it when Mama sleeps so long, her eyes glazed and her body slumped heavy over the old blue couch. I think about Mama now, and how she's probably back on the couch again. I wish I was there too. At least then, no one could hear my tummy growl.

I walk down the hall to Mr. Hughes' room and take my seat. Please don't let my tummy growl during story time, I silently pray to myself. Please, please, please don't let it growl.

Once, last year, in Kindergarten when my tummy kept growling so loudly, I was so embarrassed, and so I cried right there, right in front of Mrs. Thompson and my best friend Sara, and that mean boy Billy and everyone. Mrs. Thompson wrapped her arms around me and told me it would all be alright. That night after school, I had to take a note home to Mama. Mama yelled at me after that.



But now, all that's in the past. I'm in first grade. I'm a big kid now. I can push that big door open all by myself, and big kids never cry, you know. I smile my biggest smile at Mr. Hughes as I sit down at my desk and wait for the story to begin.



Within the first prose-poem, I recreate a scenario at the Southside K-8 Community School in War, West Virginia in which students living in extreme poverty receive bags of donated, nonperishable food items to take home over the weekend. Although the school's student body is comprised of 97% of students who qualify for free breakfasts and lunches, (WVDE, 2016) the school has to be selective in which students are chosen to receive the weekend snack packs due to limited funding and availability. When some—yet not all—students are taken into a separate classroom to receive the snack packs to put into their backpacks to take home over the weekend, students who were not selected for this particular program ask questions as to why they cannot receive snacks as well. Within this school, all students are equally poor, but the snack packs are reserved for the poorest of the poor students—a label that one teacher said aloud in front of her class, creating a negative stigma of both shame and embarrassment to the students who were leaving to receive the bags. The second prose-poem, a coming of age piece, tells a story of poverty, hunger, and resilience through the eyes of a young child. The child recognizes the struggles that she must face daily due to poverty and addiction; however, attempts to conceal these challenges throughout the school day.

Background and Setting

Homelessness adversely affects millions of school aged children across the United States (The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2015) but, to date, there has been little inquiry into how homelessness might shape school and community action (Miller, 2015). As such, research is needed to address not only the complexities regarding student homelessness, but also

the ways in which school-community partnerships can best address the needs of this demographic of students. Nabors et al. (2004) note that children who experience homelessness are at increased risk for a range of health and mental health problems, and often encounter stressors that impact their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. In spite of this increased risk, however, they are often less likely to receive appropriate services, especially within communities lacking appropriate infrastructure and support services (Nabors et al., 2004). In many instances, schools can become a home-base for students experiencing homelessness; however, without adequate appropriation of school-based services through the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act, schools are unable to address the unique challenges facing students experiencing homelessness.

Homelessness is often identified as an urban problem, as the most visible forms of homelessness occur among street dwellers in urban settings (Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski, 2014). Within rural locations, however, homelessness is predominantly an invisible problem requiring extensive collaboration among school-based and community-based service providers to combat issues of geographic isolation, negative stigmas, and lack of support and services. A recent study completed by the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2012) notes:

Unlike in urban areas, many rural homeless assistance systems lack the infrastructure to provide quick, comprehensive care to those experiencing homelessness. Reasons for this difference abound, including lack of available affordable housing, limited transportation methods, and the tendency for federal programs to focus on urban areas. (p. 1)

Similar issues that often hinder homeless youth's potential for success both inside and outside of the classroom setting in McDowell County include lack of supportive community infrastructure, inadequate housing options, and a limited number of support services. The implementation of a

community school model in War, West Virginia is attempting to alleviate the stressors of these types of hindrances within the rural community.

In the predominately rural state of West Virginia, over the past five years, alone, the number of identified homeless students has increased 315%— from 2,000 students to 8,300 students— which is assumed to be a conservative estimate by local and state education officials (WVDE, 2014). Within rural locations such as West Virginia, addressing homelessness among students and families requires extensive collaboration to combat issues of geographic isolation and lack of support, infrastructure, and public services. In this study, I will demonstrate how community school programming offers considerable potential to provide direct support and services within the school setting for rural homeless youth. Specifically, I will utilize qualitative inquiry through an ethnographic case study in order to address the ways in which a newly formed community school in rural West Virginia responds to the unique challenges faced by students affected by extreme poverty and homelessness.

Currently, there is limited scholarship that explores collaborative efforts of school-based and community-based strategies in direct support of the varying needs of homeless students within urban, suburban and rural communities. Among these three geographical settings, however, the often concealed problem of homelessness within rural settings remains both underserved and understudied, as the full extent of rural homelessness is unknown (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). Partnering school-based and community-based programming offers considerable potential to reduce the gap between needs and appropriate services for homeless youth; however, there are few examples of such programs in published literature (Nabors et al., 2004) creating the need for further scholarship within this area of educational study.

Challenges of Addressing Rural Homelessness

Within rural locations, homelessness is often hidden among the population, particularly among students. Paik and Phillips (2002) note that “little research exists about the specific issue of rural [homeless] student mobility, while much information is available about transient students, both generally and in urban settings” (p. 3). Because of the limited scholarship within this area, research is needed to better understand the ways in which homelessness is addressed in rural communities. Nord and Luloff (1995) additionally note that those in rural populations have not been exempt from the growing numbers of homeless across the United States, as young school children and adolescents, especially, are among the highest numbers affected by homelessness in rural areas. This spike in homelessness among rural school aged children has greatly affected McDowell County and surrounding communities in the state of West Virginia, as many state and local education officials struggle to maintain an accurate count of the increasing number of students experiencing homelessness. Toomey and First (1993) add that strategies used to identify homeless populations in urban areas are ineffective within rural locations. Typical means of identifying homeless populations within urban and suburban areas such as a Point-in-Time count of sheltered and unsheltered individuals completed by United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are either ineffective or incomplete in rural communities (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). Further, addressing the rising number of homeless children and adolescents within rural communities is even more challenging than in its urban counterpart due to geographic isolation and lack of available support and service agencies.

Often the downfall of key economies of rural areas can contribute to extreme poverty and homelessness among its residents. Edwards et al. (2009) note that: “rural towns have a long

history of boom and bust... Even [those] that have been high functioning, with plenty of social capital and volunteerism, local residents increasingly face unusual, if not wholly unprecedented, challenges... [including] economic pressures...and shifting political winds” (p. 331). The rise and fall of the coal industry within McDowell County, West Virginia is a prime example of this type of boom and bust effect within rural areas. The economic pressures that have emerged following the collapse of the coal industry have resulted in a spike among homeless residents within rural communities. Additionally, Cloke et al. (2001) state that homelessness as a result of economic hardship within rural areas is often not considered by community and civic leaders to be an issue due to its lack of visibility. This similar lack of visibility continues to exist in McDowell County, despite public-private partnerships and revitalization efforts among the Reconnecting McDowell initiative and American Federation of Teachers.

Homeless students in rural communities face unique barriers different from those of their urban and suburban counterparts. Edwards et al. (2009) note that due to the unique challenges faced by homeless rural youth, rural communities also struggle in addressing the challenges associated with serving this demographic. As rural communities seek to address and serve homeless youth, the location, culture, and organizational environment remains increasingly different than that of an urban or suburban environment. Edwards et al. (2009) additionally marks specific challenges in serving this demographic within a rural setting, including “geographic isolation, small town culture, critical conservatism, and ineffective fiscal and human resources” (p. 1). Similarly, in McDowell County, the Southside K-8 Community School attempts to combat issues of geographic isolation, small town culture, critical conservatism, and ineffective resources through the implementation of the community school model in serving its most vulnerable students. This research will explore the ways in which the newly formed

community school attempts to combat these unique set of challenges facing the rural community.

Additionally, within this study, I explore the ways in which extreme poverty and attachment to place contribute to the challenges faced by students experiencing homelessness in rural West Virginia. Although one might encourage the homeless within rural settings to relocate in order to acquire additional school-based and community-based services from often better equipped suburban or urban centers, the solution to the problem of homelessness among a rural population is not that simple. Attachment to place, especially among residents of rural communities, often impacts an individual's choice to remain in a particular area, despite obvious setbacks. The concept of place attachment is "complex and multifaceted" (Ponzetti, 2003, p. 1) and scholars from diverse backgrounds such as family studies, psychology, geography, social ecology, and gerontology have proposed various frameworks for understanding the phenomenon of place attachment (Low & Altman, 1992). As such, examining the emotional attachment and meaning that particular places hold for their residents is vital towards understanding the reasoning behind why individuals choose to remain in specific areas. Within this study, I will explore the concept of place attachment through a geographical perspective, noting the unique ways in which rural culture contributes to residents' need to remain within this impoverished region of Appalachia.

Another element that further complicates homelessness within rural communities includes residents' lack of knowledge and understanding of available services. Students and families within rural communities may actually be unaware of the school-based and community-based services that are available to them. Pavlakis (2014) notes that, "a parent's knowledge of [educational] policy is likely to be related to the policy knowledge held by the school personnel. A number of parents misunderst[and] or [are] confused about their children's particular rights" (p. 1). To alleviate this lack of parental awareness and understanding, the community school

model provides immediate access to student services directly within the school setting, eliminating any confusion among parents or guardians regarding the types of services that their children are receiving. This study will shed light on the potential of community school programming and demonstrate how this educational model can serve homeless students who would otherwise be lacking accessibility to much needed services outside of the school setting.

The Potential of Community Schools

Community schools are both a place and a set of partnerships involving community support and collaborations that make the school not only a center for learning, but also a full-service community support system (Cummings et al., 2011). This type of school setting calls for a “balance between educational enrichment and human support mechanisms” (Dryfoos & Macguire, 2002, p. 13). By partnering directly with community support services, schools tailor their programming based upon the particular needs of the area, making a difference in the lives of students experiencing challenges such as extreme poverty and homelessness through supportive adults, extended learning opportunities, access to healthcare, opportunities for community involvement, safe and positive environments, and a full integration of services through comprehensive, multicomponent programming (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002; Dryfoos, 1994). Despite its rural location and lack of available community partners, McDowell County’s Southside K-8 Community School has been able to implement several of these components including a wide range of supportive adults, extended learning opportunities both during and after the school day, safe and positive environments, and access to a full service healthcare clinic.

An extensive, collaborative planning process is an “essential first step in the development of community schools. Schools, potential community partners, and parents must come together to try to figure out how to meet the needs of their constituents and how to overcome the barriers to quality education” (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002, p. 18). The community school approach becomes especially significant within areas of high disadvantage, “where school leaders often feel that they cannot rely on families and communities to offer children effective support. ... The [community school] approach understand[s] children and their schools as located in wider family and community contexts” (Cummings et al., 2011, p. 31). Through this research, I will explore the ways in which the community school model, utilizing extended community-school partnerships within the local, state, and national capacities of the Reconnecting McDowell initiative through the American Federation of Teachers serves homeless students within a geographically isolated, impoverished community in rural West Virginia.

Rationale

As homelessness among school aged children continues to rise across the United States (The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2015) research is needed to explore ways in which to provide services for this at-risk demographic within the school setting. Scholarship regarding the effectiveness of school-based services provided for homeless students, particularly within rural communities is limited (Nabors et al., 2004; Nord & Luloff, 1995) and rural homelessness has been relatively understudied, as only minimal academic attention has been given to this demographic (Edwards et al., 2009). Key examples of published scholarship include Nord and Luloff’s (1995) study, where the scholars establish that rural youth found it difficult to obtain services and struggled academically. In addition, in Schafft (2006) declared that homeless families within rural locations experienced frequent mobility due to economic hardship,

inadequate housing options, and resource depleted school districts. These results (Nord & Luloff, 1995; Schafft, 2006) are similar to the challenges faced by struggling homeless families within the rural community of War, West Virginia.

Miller (2015) notes that one strategy to increase the likelihood that homeless youth will actually receive much needed health, mental health prevention, and intervention services is to bring these services directly into the school setting. Several scholars (Cummings et al., 2011; Miller, 2015; Nabors et al., 2004; Nord & Luloff, 1995) additionally note the potential of school-community based services in aiding homeless youth; however, these examples are most prevalent within urban settings. As such, there is missing piece within published scholarship on how community schools can function within rural communities as they collaboratively utilize both school and community to serve homeless students. The community school model offers considerable promise to provide specialized support and services among homeless students in rural communities. An ethnographic case study of community schools, such as the Southside K-8 Community School in McDowell County, could expand the ways in which we are able to understand home, and the school's obligations to its students when the concept of home is unsettled, alongside the ways in which the community is affected by the services provided by the community school.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this research is to explore the ways in which educators, administrators, and community service providers of the Southside K-8 Community School, located in McDowell County, West Virginia—the most impoverished region of the state (Rath, 2014)—respond to the unique challenges faced by students affected by extreme poverty and homelessness. There are four research questions that this qualitative study will address:

1. How does a rural community school respond to the unique challenges facing students who are experiencing extreme poverty and homelessness?
2. What relations and practices do rural educators and community service providers engage in in order to work with homeless children living in extreme poverty?
3. How do community stakeholders address discourses of legal mandates, financial discourses, and educational discourses responding to rural poverty and homelessness?
4. How does homelessness affect the educational and community landscapes of a rural school district?

Theoretical Framework

Post-oppositional threshold theory moves beyond a dualistic, oppositional framework of us versus them, and creates a sacred space of interconnectedness, community, allyship, and justice. This framework is ideal for social justice centered work as it enables researchers to highlight social structures of oppression without creating a binary lens of argument or generating conflict among the betterment of one solution over others. Forms of oppositional thought and framing are damaging on both an academic and social scale; a post-oppositional framework provides an invitation to heal from those damaging spaces. Keating (2015) asserts that oppositional framing “inhibits our ability to develop and implement innovative strategies for progressive social change ... [and] erodes our alliances and communities” (p. 247). Post-oppositional thought instead enables researchers to address difficult or challenging topics without conflict, or opposition, being at the center of addressing the issue of injustice. Keating (2015) further notes that “oppositional energies limit our visions for change, restrict our options, and inhibit our ability to create transformational alliances” (p. 247). As there is not merely one right solution in solving issues of inequality among homeless students, in utilizing post-oppositional framing for this

study, I will be moving past these oppositional perspectives which construct a rigid right versus wrong mentality, often creating divisiveness rather than community. This nonbinary form of consciousness will promote a common ground for addressing issues of injustice within this study.

Post-oppositional threshold theory is framed by the works of AnaLouise Keating (2015) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987/1999, 2009, 2015). Keating (2015) notes that “thresholds represent complex interconnections among a variety of sometimes contradictory worlds—points crossed by multiple intersecting possibilities, opportunities, and challenges” (pp. 291-292). This framework challenged me to move beyond traditional ways of thinking, being, and knowing as I move throughout the research site as both an insider and outsider, not conforming to either. As such, within this study, I explored participants’ lived experiences through the lenses of administrators, educators, and community stakeholders while enabling me, as the researcher, to move freely throughout multiple world views in order to better understand what is happening to each participant within the different spaces (worlds and world views) that they occupy. This theoretical space will differ from that of oppositional thinking in which “reality... knowledge, ethics, and truth [are defined] in limited, mutually exclusive terms” (Keating, 2013, p. 29) as it will engage in multiple truths, spaces of being, and understandings of home.

Further, this post-oppositional threshold theoretical lens evokes the Anzaldúan (2012) concept of *nepantla* in which:

Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, spaces I [Anzaldúa] call *nepantla*... Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. ... Living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable, even alarming

feeling. ... This state links us to other ideas, people, and worlds. (p. 243)

In understanding varied concepts of home within a rural community, it was important for me, as both researcher (outsider) and cultural insider, to embark on my own inner journey of a discovery of home in order to inquire into the inner journeys of the participants. In engaging in these types of complex questions, alongside making meaning of multiple world views, it was vital for me to be able to transform myself and my engagement, while not simply remaining in a singular view or space.

When residing in the liminal, in-between spaces as a *nepantla*, Anzaldúa & Keating (2015) note that discomfort may often occur as one “switch[es] from one perception channel to another... reflecting the same information in different ways. The cacophony... can feel... confusing, maddening, frustrating—until *nepantla* creates a wider space in your mind... allowing the various scenarios to merge and come into focus” (pp. 107-108). This widened space will enable me to further engage in heightened inquiry within the varied spaces of home that the participants describe. Within this research, utilizing post-oppositional threshold theory enabled me to gain increased insight via the *nepantlera* lens, and further, provided me with an opportunity to understand differing worldviews that were presented throughout the study demonstrating the complexities of homelessness within a rural setting. This theoretical framework allowed me to deeply engage in participants’ views of home, alongside of their own lived experiences that inform their particular views. Additionally, this framework supported me in navigating the liminal spaces and the interactions that occur within those liminal spaces as I moved between multiple worldviews as a cultural insider, researcher (outsider), participant-observer, and cultural observer throughout the course of the study.

Methodology

This study is grounded is informed by qualitative inquiry. The use of qualitative inquiry enables researchers to “gain insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing [of quantitative research]” (Merriam, 1988, p. 10). Qualitative inquiry is appropriate for this study as it will explore the ways in which educators, administrators, and community service providers serve homeless students within a rural community school setting. Qualitative inquiry and observation “consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices... turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). As such, qualitative inquiry is able to assist in understanding the ways in which individuals communicate with one another, make meaning and emotional connections to people, places, and things, and further explore how individuals’ values, beliefs, and assumptions affect their daily lives.

When completing social justice centered work, such as the study of rural homelessness, qualitative inquiry provides the opportunity to delve deep into the lived experiences and inner journeys of those experiencing issues of inequality and injustice. The act of storytelling and development of critical perspectives established when engaging in qualitative research enables an emergence of a depth of perspective and consciousness regarding issues of inequity that the use of quantitative research, or merely numbers, alone, would not allow. These forms of critical perspectives are “profoundly engaged with issues of race, gender, and socioeconomic level as major shapers as well of component of historically reified structures oppression” (Denzin & Giardina, 2009, p. 55). Similar structures of oppression are a key component to understanding the complexities of this study, in which poverty has continually shaped the cultural landscape of

a rural community. Further, the use of qualitative inquiry within this study situates me, as the researcher, as an observer of the natural world. This practice further enables me to form an enhanced sense of awareness and interconnectedness with the demographic that I am studying as I actively engage in and observe the goings on within an impoverished, geographically isolated community. Additionally, in advocating for the betterment of homeless student populations, the use of qualitative inquiry provides me with the opportunity to “fully participate in... social justice [and] ... realize [my] full potential as [an] agent of change” (Denzin & Giardina, 2009, p. 38). Further, the relational components of qualitative inquiry including entering in to the space as a cultural insider and cultivating trusting relationships with participants enable me to connect with the participants on a spiritual/emotional level and further identify the ways in which their stories bring both life and meaning to the issue of homelessness.

Utilizing qualitative inquiry to address the complexities of homelessness among school aged children enables participants’ voices to be a present force throughout the entirety of the research and allows the researcher to act as a voice of social justice and social change (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). This research is grounded in ethnographic case study in order to explore the ways in which educators, administrators, and community service providers of the Southside K-8 Community School, a newly formed community school in rural McDowell County, West Virginia, respond to the unique challenges faced by students affected by extreme poverty and homelessness. The use of ethnographic case study throughout this research is appropriate due to the ways in which this form of inquiry enables me, as the researcher, to explore a particular phenomenon through a cultural lens (Merriam, 1988).

This form of qualitative study typically involves an emic, or insider perspective. As a cultural insider who also resides in a rural, impoverished region of West Virginia, I am able to

gain an enhanced level of cultural and emotional understanding to both the people and places involved within my study. The similarities among my lived experiences and the lived experiences of the participants are shown throughout both ethnographic interviews and emic observational research, which is elaborated upon in Chapter Three. Alongside an ethnographic, cultural understanding (Merriam, 1988) of the perspectives of the educators, administrators, and community service providers within this school setting, this research was informed by the sensory ethnography work of Sarah Pink (2015) in which “sensoriality [plays a] fundamental [role in] how we learn about, understand, and represent other people’s lives” (p. 3) through sensory experience and perception. This form of sensory-based qualitative inquiry was represented through the use of evocative imagery demonstrating the varying unsettled spaces of home in which the students of this rural region reside. The prose-poetry and accompanying images from the beginning of this chapter are one example of the ways in which I utilized sensory ethnography throughout this study.

The use of prose-poetry within my study is a form of arts-based inquiry, which forms an “enhancement of perspectives” in viewing phenomenon in new ways within the field of education (Eisner & Barone, 2012, p. 96). Like other creative methods, this form of inquiry can be challenging because it does not focus on a structural epistemology seeking validity and reliability as in traditional research methodology. Instead, arts-based inquiry seeks to display research findings in creative and accessible ways through artistic forms including “literary writing, music, performance, dance, visual art and film” (Leavy, 2009, p. 3). Within the field of education, arts-based research can assist in bridging the gap among researchers, educators, and policy makers—providing a means through which data can be presented and viewed in both an

artistic and accessible manner. Arts-based researcher, Rita Irwin (2016) further describes the connection between artist/researcher/teacher in education through the process of a/r/tography:

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any artform and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create additional and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others. (p. 1)

This arts-based research utilized both photographic imagery and creative literary writing, as shown at the beginning of this Chapter, in order to “adapt the tenets of the creative arts in order to address social research questions in holistic and engaged ways in which theory and practices are intertwined” (Leavy, 2009, p. 4). The poetry and prose that were constructed from my interviews and observations are an appropriate way to display the data as it enabled me to use poetic voice to communicate an in-depth version of findings from this study. Additionally, the use of evocative imagery was used throughout this project as both “phenomenon and method” (Mitchell & Weber, 2006, p. 197). Through these forms of arts-based inquiry, I displayed data from the interviews and observations in a manner that was both engaging and accessible—enabling readers to form visual and emotional connections to the data that would not necessarily be able to occur with merely traditional academic voice alone.

Significance and Limits of the Study

Within the McDowell County School District, 78 students are currently identified as homeless, and this number continues to grow throughout both the region and state (Reconnecting

McDowell, 2015). Throughout this study, I explored the lived experiences of homeless students in a place of both geographic isolation and extreme poverty through the lenses of school-based and community-based service providers, and further illuminated how cultural ideas of attachment to place, generational poverty, and kinship affect how homelessness was addressed within rural, Appalachian culture. These findings are of use to those involved in educational leadership and policy in addressing the complex, understudied issue of homeless, not only in rural locations, but also within suburban and urban settings across the nation.

Within a rural community, however, a lack of available services from local schools and the surrounding community can hinder the day-to-day experiences of homeless students. The significance of this study involved an exploration of the ways in which a collaborative school and community partnership within the Southside K-8 Community School supported rural students experiencing homelessness both in and outside of the classroom setting, providing a means through which to understand how this dual-supported partnership assisted in meeting the day-to-day needs of rural homeless students. Additionally, because of the instability and insecurities that often occurred among students experiencing homelessness, a key element of this study included exploring the ways in which school-based and community-based service providers are partnering with one another in order to best serve the unique needs of homeless students within a geographically isolated, rural community. The population of this research consisted of educators and administrators of the Southside Community School in War, West Virginia, serving grades K-8, along with community-based service providers within historically impoverished, rural McDowell County, West Virginia. By identifying the ways in which educators and administrators, alongside key community stake holders collaborated to ensure a better quality of life and educational experience for all students, this study shed additional light

onto the ways in which a collaborative, state-supported partnership between school and community assisted in the removal of barriers of extreme poverty and homelessness that negatively impacted student learning. The impact of this study holds great significance among educators, administrators, and policy makers who are faced with issues of homelessness within rural communities and beyond. This study is also of particular significance to individual stakeholders working with homeless students, as this study explored the ways in which a collaborative partnership between school and community can assist in alleviating many of the common stressors experienced in the day-to-day lived experiences of students affected by extreme poverty and homelessness.

Despite the benefits to this study, there were also limitations. This study only explored the services provided to homeless students as shown through the lens of school based and community based service providers within the geographical location of rural West Virginia. It could be argued that utilizing only participants from inside the school setting did not provide a comprehensive enough case study because of a lack of presence from the students and their parents. It is important to note, however, that neither student nor parent perspectives were included in this study due to several key factors. The students within this school setting already face multiple traumas within their daily lived experiences. I made an ethical consideration to exclude them from the interview process due to the possibility that probing questions regarding these traumas could promote further trauma in their lives. Additionally, parents were not included in the interview process because nearly 50% of McDowell County's students do not have a biological parent present in their lives due to factors such as abuse, addiction, abandonment, neglect, incarceration, or death (Reconnecting McDowell, 2016). Because of these extenuating circumstances, including student and parent perspectives in this study could have

potentially caused additional hardships, which I did not want to occur. Although this could be considered a limitation of the study, my own ethical considerations and moral responsibilities as a researcher guided this decision-making process.

Operational Definitions

1. McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act – For the purpose of this study, this refers to legislation which ensures that homeless youth have the same educational opportunities that are afforded to non-homeless youth (Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski, 2014).
2. Homeless students – For the purpose of this study, this refers to students within the K-12 public school setting who have been identified as homeless by the constructs of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act via the school’s designated McKinney-Vento Liaison.
3. Homeless families – For the purpose of this study, this refers to the families (parent(s) or legal guardian(s)) of students within the K-12 public school setting who have been identified as homeless by the constructs of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act via the school’s designated McKinney-Vento Liaison.
4. Homelessness– For the purpose of this study, this refers to “an individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” via the constructs of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act SEC. 103. [42 USC 11302].
5. Rural – For the purpose of this study, this refers to “Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).
6. Poverty – For the purpose of this study, this refers to the federal poverty threshold in the

state of West Virginia, which is \$23,550 for a family of four. West Virginia is the second poorest state in the United States with a per capita income of \$21,232 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; 2013).

7. School-based services – For the purpose of this study, this refers to services and resources provided to homeless students and families within a K-12 public school setting, as required by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act.
8. Place attachment — For the purpose of this study, this refers to the meaning that a particular place evokes for a resident due to emotional connection.
9. Community school – For the purpose of this study, this refers to both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Community schools offer a curriculum that emphasizes real-world learning and community engagement. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone-all day, every day, evenings and weekends. (Office of Special Programs, WVDE, 2015).

– For the purpose of this study, this refers to the process by which a child receives care from extended family members or other adults with whom they have a familial relationship, aside from the child’s biological mother or father. In 2010, 19,000 West Virginia children were identified as being cared for by those other than their biological mother or father—a number that has increased by 27% in the last 10 years (West Virginia Direct Action Welfare Group, 2012).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the background and context of the community school model and its ability to serve homelessness students, particularly within a rural context. I additionally demonstrated the need for research on the growing number of homeless students in rural communities, alongside exploring the ways in which the community school model serves this demographic. Because published scholarship within the field of rural homeless education is limited, I provided a rationale for this study which explores how educators, administrators, and community service providers of the Southside K-8 Community School, located in McDowell County, West Virginia respond to the unique challenges faced by students affected by extreme poverty and homelessness. Using post-oppositional threshold theory, I demonstrated how I engaged in multiple truths, spaces of being, and understandings of home among the participants—not reflective of a typical dualistic, binary lens or way of knowing. Further, I discussed the methodology of qualitative inquiry, ethnographic case study, and sensory ethnography, along with their appropriateness for this study in order to best represent cultural connections to both place and identity. In addition, I shed light on possible limitations of this study, and the ways in which I addressed them. Finally, I demonstrated the implications of this study towards educators and policy makers in promoting a heightened understanding and awareness of the ways in which the community school model can serve homeless students within rural communities.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I continue to explore the role of post-oppositional threshold theory within my study. In addition, I address the history of economic hardship within the rise and fall of the coal industry in rural West Virginia, the potential of community school programming in addressing rural homelessness, and the effects of place attachment on individuals' choices to remain in communities of economic hardship. I also elaborate on the literature of three key concepts that inform this study: kinship, rural poverty, and rural homelessness. Finally, within this Chapter, I illuminate how cultural ideas of attachment to place, generational poverty, and kinship affect how homelessness is addressed by community schools within rural, Appalachian culture.

Post-Oppositional Thinking, Being, and Knowing

Recall that post-oppositional thinking moves beyond a dualistic, oppositional framework of us versus them, and creates a sacred space of interconnectedness, community, allyship, and justice. This framework is appropriate for this type of social justice centered study as it highlights social structures of oppression without creating a binary lens of argument or generating conflict among the betterment of one solution over others. Key scholars within this theoretical framework include AnaLouise Keating (2008, 2013, 2015) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987/1999, 2009, 2015). Within post-oppositional thought, Anzaldúa (2009) promotes a theorization of bridge building through radical interconnectedness—finding similarities outside of traditional roles that often bind us to one identity versus another. Keating (2008) notes that although Anzaldúa “does not discount the importance of gender, ethnicity/race, sexuality, ability, and other identity-related components ... she maintains that these conventional categories are too restrictive ... and are used to disempower and oppress us” (p. 61). In examining this push-pull

relationship of us versus them, and the accompanying oppression that follows, the work of AnaLouise Keating (2013) details a post-oppositional threshold theory for engagement, based upon shared commonalities in which “by posing interconnectedness as itself a shared identity trait, shift[s] from our status-quo binary systems of difference into a more expansive, relational approach to identity” (p. 210). The work of Gloria Anzaldúa (2009) further informs this post-oppositional way of knowing as she encourages “doing away with demarcations like ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ [and instead] honoring people’s otherness in ways that allow us to be changed by embracing that otherness rather than punishing others for... diversity of perspectives” (p. 246). As such, a post-oppositional onto-epistemology informs this social justice centered research and scholarship. Keating (2013) notes that traditionally, we tend to view the world through a binary lens of us versus them, or the ‘right’ way versus the ‘wrong’ way, asserting that in doing so, we “limit our vision for change, restrict our options, and inhibit our ability to create transformational alliances” (p. 250). Rather than utilizing our differences as a tool to connect with and better understand the world, we often think of our own experiences as completely unique to those of others—allowing our differences to create divisiveness instead of exploring the possibilities of connection through shared experience.

Keating (2008) additionally states that “when we view ourselves and others through this binary lens, we assume that our differences are too different—too *other*, as it were—to have *anything* of importance in common with those whom we have defined as our others” (p. 61). Viewing the world through a post-oppositional lens, however, enables us to form important networks as we connect with others as allies through our shared experiences. Keating (2013) additionally states that “oppositional energies inhibit our ability to develop and implement innovative strategies for progressive social change, [and] oppositional thinking erodes our

alliances and communities” (p. 255). Throughout this study, it was vital to form alliances and find strength within community building in order to best address the challenges of rural homelessness and promote ongoing social change within this field.

In constructing this post-oppositional vision for change, Keating (2013) states that “we need additional tools and tactics, non-binary forms of oppositional consciousness that enable us to explore, discover, and create commonalities” (p. 294). In relinquishing our need to define ourselves through our differences from others, we form a newfound sense of self-identification that celebrates shared experience and humanity. Keating (2008) also notes that “usually, self-identification functions through exclusion and binary opposition: we define who and what we are by defining who and what we are not. These exclusionary identities occur within a restrictive framework that marks, divides, and segregates” (p. 61). When working with issues of social justice and promoting social change among an at-risk demographic, such as homeless students, it is necessary to avoid these types of exclusionary identities in order to promote unity rather than division. Keating (2013) also asserts the importance of listening with sincerity to others within the world around us—as we can learn from the differences shown within these exchanges. Keating (2013) states, “listening with raw openness is multidirectional. We need numerous overlapping dialogues among all types of people” (p. 1151). Eliminating binary forms of exclusion, and listening to others with openness created space for greater levels of understanding and connectedness to occur—ultimately promoting a shared vision for social change. Within this study, these same forms of inclusion and open listening enabled me to connect with the participants much deeper than surface level, alone, and further allowed for a co-created vision for the continued support of homeless students within both the community school and rural community.

Post-oppositional thinking, being, and knowing inform this study as it promotes equal educational opportunities among a marginalized student population. Rather than incorporating an us versus them mentality in serving this demographic, this framework encourages a multiplicity of ideas and ways of knowing. Using this framework within this study enabled a variety of viewpoints, values, beliefs, and assumptions to emerge from each of the participants. Within this space of post-oppositional thought and action, both myself as the researcher and the participants were encouraged to embody a mindset of openness, authenticity, and understanding of one another.

Nepantleric Navigation of Multiple Spaces and Worldviews

In Anzaldúa's (1987/1999, 2009, 2015) work, an immediate connection is formed to the concept of home within the text, and the ways in which one can lack belongingness both within and beyond this space. In her writing, Anzaldúa (2009) uses the word *nepantla*, a "Nahuatl word for the space in-between" (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2015, p. 98) to "theorize liminality and to talk about those who facilitate passages between worlds... named *nepantleras*. [She] associates *nepantla* with states of mind that question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews, and shift from one world to another" (p. 249). In this study, navigating through multiple spaces and differing worldviews was initially an overwhelming and often isolating experience as I traveled between spaces of who they are, who they have been, and who they are becoming. I expand upon this navigation through multiple spaces and worldviews in the chapters to follow. Keating (2013) notes, "never entirely inside, always somewhat outside, every group of worldview, *nepantleras* do not belong entirely to any single location" (p. 366). The sense of isolation that I felt from my family and community in returning home after leaving my home state of West Virginia made me feel like an outsider who has been become the Other within what

had once been home. This missing component of home has lead me to lean on Anzaldúa's (2009) writings as a way of knowing and a source of healing as I recognize the ways in which my own worldviews, ideas, beliefs, and assumptions are continually changing. In relation to these overlapping spaces and world views, Keating (2013) additionally notes:

Living in nepantla, the overlapping space between different perceptions and belief systems, you are aware of the changeability of racial, gender, sexual, and other categories rendering the conventional labelings obsolete. ... Nepantla represents an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, transitional space/time/epistemology lacking clear boundaries, directions, or definitions. Nepantla demands intellectual humility and openness to change. (pp. 1213-1217)

Within this space of nepantla, one can encounter those who attempt to create divisiveness through binary forms of opposition. Sandoval (1991) notes that this type of "oppositional consciousness [is] influenced by struggles against... race, class, and cultural hierarchies" (pp. 10-11). In these encounters, there can often be an us versus them mentality in which one is encouraged to choose sides based upon differences rather than commonalities in shared experience. Keating (2007) notes that we are often "prevent[ed] from recognizing our interconnectedness with others and working together for social change" (p. 27). As a nepantlera, however, one can navigate through this space of conflict, looking beyond binary labels, preconceived notions, or judgements. Keating (2013) describes questioning identities, spaces, and change through the concept of nepantla:

Nepantla represents a threshold, a crossroads of sorts— a space/ time with many uncertain options: We can remain where we are, locked within the narrow safety of status-quo stories, fixed identities, and binary-oppositional politics. We can try to protect

ourselves by actively resisting change. ... Or, we can move in an extremely different direction. We can loosen our grip on these status-quo stories, let go of our old worldviews, and step out on faith, attempting to create the world we envision. We can question the barriers that seem to divide us. (p. 1263)

Because of this opportunity to expand worldviews and enact change, the concepts of nepantla and nepantlera have been used through both educational and social science research to provide a heightened understanding of varying perspectives in the promotion of cultural competence and community building. For example, in a study by Réza-Lopez et al. (2014) nepantlera pedagogy promoted the notion of culturally responsive pedagogy through finding commonality in both language and culture. Additionally, Fránquiz et al., 2013 applied nepantlera pedagogy in the understanding of Mexican-American instructors and bilingual students searching for a secure space in which to engage in conversation regarding differences in culture, language, and communities. Further, to (de)marginalize Latino/a youth, educators have applied border pedagogy, based upon the Anzaldúan connection to spaces outside of cultural origin (Ramirez et al., 2016). Similar to each of these studies, in stepping outside of our cultural origins, letting go of our old worldviews, and attempting to create the world we envision, Anzaldúa & Keating (2015) state that we “struggle each day to know the world [we] live in, to come to grips with the problems of life. Motivated by the need to understand, [we] crave to be what and who [we] are” (p. 118). As we act on this motivation towards the need for understanding, we are able to enact a greater sense of self-awareness and ways of knowing. In response to the questioning of divisive barriers, within the in-between space of nepantla, we can navigate multiple worldviews, seeking to create alliances and build bridges towards finding shared commonality—even amongst our differences—to create a more just environment.



A History of Coal in Appalachia

As this study examines the ways in which extreme poverty and homelessness affect rural students, it is important to first understand the history and origins of the generational poverty within West Virginia and surrounding Appalachia. In order to best conceptualize the ways in which extreme poverty has affected the residents of this region, I first explore the rise and fall of the coal industry.

Historically, the coal industry has played a leading role in West Virginia's economy, as the state has exported more coal than any other state in the nation (McGehee, 2016). Coal was first discovered in 1742 in what is now Boone County, in southern West Virginia, and following the initial discovery of coal, this particular region of the state was a principal source of coal mining and production where "by 1950, some 125,000 West Virginia coal miners lived and worked in more than 500 company towns" (McGehee, 2016, p. 108). Despite a boom in production and the creation of a multi-billion dollar industry, Appalachian coal miners were often exploited for profit, as the industry was perceived as merely "provid[ing] cheap resources to fuel the rest of the country ... [with] outside interests' exploitation of the resources of Central Appalachia through the subjugation and domination of its people. ... A cheap workforce was the foundation of early mining" (Bell & York, 2010, p. 119). Although coal was a key industry to this area, low wages, unsafe work environments, and the continued exploitations of the mining companies negatively affected the lives of miners and their families. Miernyk (1979) further describes the concept of "cheap resources" noting:

The blessings of cheap coal were less obvious to the men who mined it. Constant downward pressure on wages—and the ever present threat of unemployment in a highly unstable industry—meant lives of grinding poverty for many coal miners and their

families. It also resulted in minimal expenditures on health and safety measures by the operators in the most hazardous occupation of the industrial age. (p. 8)

This life of grinding poverty for coal miners and their families is still present in modern day Appalachia, as evidenced by the continued closures of mines and increased rates of unemployment within the region. Also, within the history of the mining communities of the Appalachian region, coal companies “owned the houses, the streets, the schools, and the company store, which was the only store in the town. ... In addition, most coal companies paid their employees in scrip, their own monetary system redeemable only within particular coal company” (Bell & York, 2010, p. 120). This form of unjust compensation forced many miners and their families to become indebted to the coal companies, forcing them into a life of extreme poverty.

In the Coal Boom era of the first four decades of the 1900s, as the coal industry continued to rapidly expand within West Virginia and the surrounding Appalachian region, opportunities for employment also expanded; however, the coal mining industry “made [its] own rules... build[ing] their own... coal camps...[with] total control by a few at the top. Throughout the coal mining industry and its communities of workers... a system of serfdom and wage slavery was well-established” (Kline, 2011, p. 79). Poverty has been a “historical fact of life in many rural areas of America, and the Appalachian region where West Virginia is located, is a classic example of deeply rooted poverty” (DeSousa et al., 2004, p. 1). Not only were the coal miners economically burdened, but also were physically burdened while working inside of the mines. In 1907, 3,242 miners lost their lives in the mines, as (Lewis et al., 2009) note:

The increasing death rate at the turn of the twentieth century primary served to solidify the public and, arguably, the miners’ perceptions that mining was a naturally risky occupation.

High casualties during the early expansion era heightened the subculture of danger among miners and equally influenced public acceptance of such unnecessary deaths. (p. 58)

This type of treatment within the coal camps, however, did eventually “help [to] fuel a strong labor movement that persisted in its efforts to organize and protect the rights of miners” (Scott, 2010, p. 155). Unions were eventually formed within the coal camps which helped to ensure fair treatment and compensation among the miners.

Due to its lucrative profitability, the coal industry held a significant impact on the political landscape of West Virginia through what has now known as “mountain politicking ... [which] manipulated the lower-class industrial... workers who lived within the city limits but did so as an agent of corporate capitalism; the upper echelons [included those] who brokered land and mineral deals” (Bailey, 2008, pp. 91-92). Because of the financial stronghold that the coal industry had on the area, mining companies were able to control the political landscape through an “abuse of power and flagrant manipulation of the political process. ... Shrewdly co-opted language of reform strengthen[ed] their [coal industry’s] control over state and county politics” (Bailey, 2008, pp. 88-89). This abuse of power has continued to affect the Appalachian coal region for the past several decades, continuing into present day with loss of jobs, homes, and economic stability.

The rise and subsequent fall of the coal industry within the state of West Virginia and the surrounding Appalachian region occurred as quickly as it had begun. Perdue & Pavela (2012) state that “domestic coal demand decreased as homeowners across the nation switched from coal to cleaner burning oil for their heat, while the railroads shifted to diesel power” (p. 371). This shift in industry resulted in an extreme loss of jobs, forcing residents to either leave the area, or be left unemployed. Thomas (2010) further notes, “the disruption or disappearance of traditional

coal markets led to falling coal production, narrower profit margins, and discharge notices for growing numbers of miners as coal operators mechanized to reduce labor costs” (p. 12). This practice forced miners who remained employed by the mines to receive lower wages for longer working hours, causing even deeper stresses on themselves and their families. In response to the changing practices of the coal industry, opportunities for employment rapidly declined.

McGinley (2004) notes, “In 1948, 117,104 miners were at work in West Virginia. In 1957, only 58,732 miners had jobs, and by 1961 employment of miners had shrunk to only 42,557 in West Virginia” (p. 34). As a result, the poverty and unemployment associated with geographic isolation and lack of economic possibilities in Appalachia was a primary reason for the implementation of the War on Poverty programming, and the first recipients of food stamps resided in McDowell County (Thomas, 2010). The continued decline of the once prevalent coal industry and lack of incoming industry made finding employment nearly impossible. Latimer (2010) describes the effects of a lack of economic opportunity within rural regions, stating:

The labor markets in which people live shape the economic opportunities that are available to workers and their families. Employment opportunities in rural areas are significantly different from those in urban areas and these differences make labor force population and higher earnings more difficult for the rural poor. (p. 98)

As alternative employment opportunities within the rural region remained scarce, continued closures of mines adversely affected both the mining communities and their residents. Perdue & Pavela (2012) note that “in the 1980s, more than 1,600 of West Virginia’s mines closed, decreasing the number of employed miners by half and causing the state to lead the nation in unemployment by 1984” (pp. 372-373). Unfortunately, similar losses in employment and lack of incoming industry continues to plague the area—to date, 19,100 of West Virginia’s miners lost

their jobs throughout 2015, and during the first month of 2016, alone, 1,892 miners were unemployed (Sussman, 2015). The lack of supportive industry, alongside increased unemployment among miners in this region have greatly impacted the rising number of homeless students within my research site in McDowell County.

Poverty and Homelessness in McDowell County

McDowell County, located in the southern-most region of West Virginia, was once the highest producer of coal in the state, and boasted the largest coal preparation plant in the world (Schust, 2010). Residents marvel at the opulence of the area's past—as the booming coal industry and resulting economy within the area had insiders and outsiders, alike, referring to McDowell as to as Little New York. At the height of its coal production, in 1950, McDowell County's population neared 100,000 residents; however, the now declining industry and resulting lack of employment opportunities has caused the area's population to decrease to 20,000 residents (Schust, 2010). Residents who remain are faced with a lack of employment opportunities and options for social mobility. In response to the unemployment within the area, DeSousa et al. (2004) note:

The unemployment scenario at the beginning of the last three decades indicates that West Virginia not only leads the nation and the Appalachian region, but also the unemployment rate increased considerably in the decades of 1980s and 1990s, presumable due to a decline in the demand for unskilled rural labor. Recent statistics reveal that, while West Virginia's unemployment rate has declined it is still high compared to the rest of the nation. (pp. 4-5)

Unemployment continues to plague the residents of McDowell County, as 54% of its students live in a household without any form of gainful employment (Reconnecting McDowell, 2015). In McDowell County, the decline of coal production and movement towards clean energy,

alongside workers being replaced by machinery has not only promoted a rapid population loss, but also has influenced extreme poverty among its residents—showcasing a prime example of what can happen to an area when abandoned by a leading industry. Bell and York (2010) state that “in the aftermath of these transformations in production practices, many rural communities were left with... high unemployment due to a decline in industry jobs” (p. 139). The state of West Virginia has been greatly affected by this unstable and oppressive community context. Unlike in the neighboring Appalachian region of Kentucky, where there have been state-sponsored economic relief efforts following the decline of the coal industry (Reuters, 2015) West Virginians have not garnered the same type of support to alleviate the economic disrepair that the coal industry has left behind. In response to the Appalachian region’s overwhelming job loss within the mining communities, Duncan (1992) notes:

Over time the structure of work in the region [Appalachia]—its scarcity, volatility, and control by a domineering industry—has created a community context that is both unstable and oppressive. Limited opportunity for steady work and income means that control over jobs is a source of wealth and power. (p. 111)

This unstable and oppressive community context is extremely present within McDowell County, affecting both young and old, alike. McDowell County ranks as the poorest county in West Virginia, with the greatest level of unemployment and the highest percentage of identified homeless students in the state (Rath, 2014). Issues of overwhelming poverty and resulting homelessness within the area are not surprising due to the lack of jobs and supportive community infrastructure within this area.

Extreme poverty, such as shown in McDowell County, is a systemic problem that has affected its residents for generations. Latimer (2010) notes that “poverty is linked to systemic

problems in the rural economy. It is primarily structural barriers that impede economic self-sufficiency and upward mobility for low income [residents] in West Virginia” (pp. 114-115). Lack of upward mobility for the residents of rural West Virginia hinder their ability to break the cycle of generational poverty. Further complicating students’ potential for upward mobility is the fact that nearly 50% of McDowell County’s students do not live with a biological parent due to factors such as abuse, addiction, abandonment, neglect, incarceration, or death (Reconnecting McDowell, 2016). This form of instability within the home affects children’s ability to succeed both in and outside of the classroom setting. Unfortunately, these forms of instability are extremely common within the Appalachian region. Duncan (1992) states:

Poor Appalachians live precarious lives in unstable, unpredictable communities, vulnerable to individual setbacks. ... They become trapped in poverty because there are few opportunities for steady work and income in their own communities and few opportunities to develop the skills and educational background necessary to find work elsewhere. ... They have little control over their lives. (p. 112)

This form of unstable and unpredictable environment often traps impoverished residents of rural communities—a continued issue that hinders children and youth’s potential for success. In McDowell County, specifically, generational poverty has plagued its residents, causing for even greater levels of trapping among this particular demographic of students and their families.

Due to overwhelming challenges associated with the extreme poverty of the area, McDowell County has ranked lowest in K-12 educational performance for most of the past decade, with only 13% of students proficient in Math, and 31% proficient in reading, alongside many parents and guardians who also struggle with basic literacy and mathematics skills (Quinn, 2015). Because of this, McDowell County Schools have been under state control for most of the

past decade, regaining county control merely two year ago. Additionally, within the school setting, truancy is at an all-time high, and the dropout rate among high school students in McDowell County is three times the national average (Layton, 2011). The unstable home environments that many students of this area reside in prevent them from attending school and successfully performing in the classroom. Within the McDowell County school district, the student body is comprised of 97% of students who qualify for free breakfasts and lunches (WVDE, 2016). As an escapism of the harsh realities of life in poverty, many residents succumb to drug abuse and drug addiction—similar to many of their parents and extended family members. McDowell County leads the nation in overdose deaths by narcotic pain medication with a death rate from overdose that is eight times the national average (Rath, 2014). The community school model has potential to alleviate some of these stressors from the lives of students within the area by providing a safe space with supportive adults, specialized programming, and infrastructure to meet the needs of the area’s most vulnerable students.

Effects of Rural Homelessness

Due to issues of geographic isolation, rural homelessness, as compared to urban or suburban homelessness, is not often able to be addressed by traditional forms of assistance such as shelters or non-profit agencies. Within the state of West Virginia, extreme loss of population alongside the loss of rural households are both cause and effect of “persistently high rates of poverty with repercussions for the economic and social well-being of the rural population, the health of local businesses, and the ability of the local governments to provide basic services” (DeSousa et al., 2004, p. 1). As such, within the rural school setting, it is especially difficult to garner appropriate infrastructure and support services for students and families experiencing homelessness. DeYoung (1995) notes that “the situation of perhaps thousands of rural

Appalachian schools and communities remain ...isolated and depressed...[and] persistently impoverished ... where the local economy is underdeveloped and outmigration is high, and [are] typically far removed from transportation and commerce centers” (p. 172). The community school model, as shown in Southside K-8 Community School has great implications for addressing the needs of this impoverished demographic, not only in McDowell County, but in additional rural areas in West Virginia and beyond.

Recall that there is limited scholarship regarding the effectiveness of school-based services provided for homeless students. One strategy to increase the likelihood that homeless youth will actually receive needed health and mental health prevention and intervention services is to bring these services to the schools (Nabors et al., 2004). Within the rural setting, however, it can be challenging to engage partners within this process, particularly when there are limited opportunities for employment and income. In response to this challenge, Latimer (2010) notes:

The limited employment and income bases of rural areas have a cumulative effect on the community context because low wages, likewise, lower the local tax base. This limited tax base affects the development, quality, cost, and availability of public services. The lower average media household incomes found in rural areas also limits money spent on educational, transportation, and other infrastructure. (pp. 98-99)

West Virginia lacks public services addressing issues of poverty and homelessness, particularly within rural communities (Latimer, 2010). Rural areas often lag behind their urban and suburban counterparts in addressing issues of economic inequality. Additionally, there are “substantial differences in the geography, economic conditions, and demographic characteristics” (Latimer, 2010, p. 101) among residents experiencing extreme poverty and homelessness within the context of rural, suburban, and urban communities. Poverty within rural communities has been

“linked to the labor market, income inequalities by race and gender, welfare dependency, single-parent families, presence of pre-school children, low human capital, lack of earning ability low annual earnings, and economic insecurity” (DeSousa et al., 2004, p. 2). These are merely a few of the key issues that influence the high poverty rates in McDowell County. Additional aspects would include lack of adequate housing, availability of support services, and drug dependency. Latimer (2012) offers a response to the lack of available support services within the area, noting that the “loss of federal funds and increased use of state funds have [had] significant negative implications for the support services offered to the poor and near poor in West Virginia” (p. 120). This is certainly true in McDowell County, as state supported initiatives including a narcotics taskforce are not provided within the area, due to its geographic isolation and distance from key areas where these programs are typically offered. As a direct result of extreme poverty and lack of supportive infrastructure within the area, West Virginia has been shown to have fallen behind both the Appalachian region and the nation, as a whole, in terms of educational attainment, unemployment, and median household income, which has adverse implications on both children and their families within this area.



Why Stay? An Overview of Place Attachment Research

Why would an individual choose to remain in an area of both geographic isolation and extreme poverty, such as McDowell County, West Virginia? The meanings that are evoked from particular places can help in understanding the life choices that individuals make based upon emotional connections, familiarity, and personal connections to place. Place attachment is a complex and multifaceted concept that is layered with multiple dimensions of individual experience including emotions, values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions regarding a particular place (Tuan, 1974; Ponzetti, 2003). For example, although an outsider may encourage a resident

to leave a particular area due to lack of employment opportunities or social mobility, that resident may choose to stay, despite negative implications. Often, a “place or environment has been the carrier of emotionally charged events or perceived as a symbol” (Tuan, 1974, p. 93). In attempt to better understand individuals’ connections and relationships to place, a wide range of scholars from varying backgrounds including geography, psychology, social ecology, family studies, and gerontology have provided assorted frameworks for illuminating this phenomenon (Altman & Low, 1992). It is recognized that attachment to place “involves an elaborate interplay of emotion, cognition, and behavior in reference to place” (Ponzetti, 2003, p. 1). This elaborate interplay can be shown through the ways in which individuals interact with a particular place through emotional connection to the lived experiences of their past or within the perceived lived experiences of their futures. Attachment to place can be based upon past experiences or emotions as “awareness of the past is an important element in the love of place” (Tuan, 1974, p. 99). Indeed, past experiences or previous perceptions of a particular place or region can encourage a resident to remain, even if the current experience is much different. Emotions can often play a major role in an individual’s choice to reside in a particular place. Milligan (1998) refers to these emotional ties to places of both the past and future within an interactionist theory of place attachment, addressing the interactional past, which includes significant meaning from a place based upon previous memories and lived experiences, and the interactional potential, which focuses on possibilities of experiences or opportunities that a particular place could hold in the future. Residents of McDowell County, for example, may recall the days of economic prosperity when the area was referred to as Little New York, rather than the shell of the once vibrant main street that now remains.

Despite an understanding of the ways in which places hold emotional experiences that

bond individuals to particular locations, over the past several decades, the ways in which we have grown to research and understand the phenomenon of person-place relationship and accompanying place attachment has continued to evolve. Initially, research regarding place attachment held limited interest, mainly among scholars within the phenomenological field of environmental behavior, which focused on emotional bonds and individuals' attitudes and perceptions towards particular places (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1974). This phenomenological form of inquiry, however, was not readily accepted as productive research within positivist research paradigms, and was often thought of as a lesser form of inquiry due to its focus on subjective behaviors within particular cultural contexts (Altman & Low, 1992). Additionally, until the late 1970s, much of research within the social sciences was "ahistorical, with an emphasis on synchronic rather than diachronic processes, and on comparisons across cultures rather than on changes and development within cultures" (Altman & Low, 1992, p. 2). Within this research, "place, for many social scientists other than geographers was not even a relevant category, and many studies of communities, towns, or villages presented on the barest analyses of people-place bonding, or even descriptions of physical environments" (Altman & Low, 1992, p. 2). In addressing these early criticisms, Tuan's *Topophilia* (1974) defended this person-place theoretical approach, noting:

The scientist and theorist, on his part, tends to overlook human diversity and subjectivity because the task of establishing linkages in the nonhuman world is already enormously complex. However, in the larger view we know that attitudes and beliefs cannot be excluded even from the practical approach, for it is practical to recognize human passions in any environmental calculus; they cannot be excluded from the theoretical approach because man is, in fact, the ecological dominant and

his behavior needs to be understood in depth, not merely mapped. (Tuan, 1974, pp. 2-3)

Scholarship involving individuals' relationships to place continued to evolve as further studies by researchers in fields such as sociology, anthropology, and social psychology added their own knowledge and reasoning behind emotional and cultural attachment to place (Altman & Low, 1992; Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2014; Lewicka, 2011). This work helped to increase interest in studies of places such as home, sacred spaces, childhood surroundings, and residents for the elderly (Altman & Low, 1992). In addition, researchers began to address "social issues of homelessness, relocation, mobility, changing family structures, crime, and community development, [and because of this] ...human emotions about places became salient, including personal and family upheaval, stress, alienation, loss of rootedness to places, and a variety of affective disruptions" (Altman & Low, 1992, p. 3). Thus, in time, interest in the phenomenon of place attachment became more accessible across a wide variety of disciplines as the bond between individuals and place became more widely popularized and began to include a variety of diverse scholarly perspectives.

Currently, as the views of social science have turned from positivist to postmodern, poststructuralist, "scholarship seems more comfortable embracing multidimensionality, and taking a pluralistic perspective on people-place relationships" (Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2014, pp. 2-3). This turn represents a change in mindset among scholars fueling enhanced inquiry and representation into varying modes of inquiry. In addition, the applicability of place attachment to multiple areas of inquiry and scholarship has continued to evolve, and "as research on place attachment has grown, its application in various fields and to diverse topics has also proliferated. ... This work has responded to the critical challenges of contemporary society" (Manzo &

Devine-Wright, 2014, pp. 4-5). Additionally, modern research on place attachment is vast. Lewicka (2011) notes that nearly 400 papers regarding place attachment have been published in over 120 different journals in the last 40 years, posing rich and diverse perspectives from multiple scholarly fields and areas of inquiry.

This diversity of viewpoints provides a wealth of information on the topic of place attachment, however, due to these varying perspectives, there is a lack of consensus on how attachment to place should be measured and/or researched (Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2014). Research of place attachment is “split between two different theoretical and methodological traditions: qualitative, which has its roots in geographical analyses of sense of place, and psychometric, rooted in early community studies” (Lewicka, 2011, p. 219). Despite these differences in scholarly approaches, Manzo & Devine-Wright (2014) state that “the best collective strategy for studying relationships to place remains a critical pluralist one that recognizes that no one research program by itself can successfully engage the various facets of place” (p. 5). Some scholars, however, argue that the research of place and place attachment must be a fully operationalized construct in order to come to a consensus on definition, methodological approaches, and the understanding of the concept, itself. Relph (1976), one of the earliest leading scholars on place and placelessness stated that place is “not just a formal concept awaiting a precise definition... clarification cannot be achieved by imposing precise but arbitrary definitions” (p. 4). The definition of this concept continues to be debated in modern times as well, as the focus of place continues to incorporate a variety of academic disciplines and scholarly perspectives. In achieving clarity on this matter, Patterson & Williams (2005) note that:

Recognizing that place is a broad domain of research in which concepts have developed across multiple disciplines and research programs has another implication relative to

recent criticisms about the perceived lack of clarity that results from diversity in definition of specific place-related concepts. There will always be some degree of segregation across disciplines due both to differences in orientation and to the rapid proliferation of knowledge and information in any given discipline. (p. 367)

As such, humanistic and cultural geographers note that an individual's bond to a particular, meaningful place is a universal affective tie that fulfills fundamental human needs (Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Tuan, 1974; Relph, 1976). In seeking to understand individuals' emotional connections to place, "the meaning of places may be rooted in the physical setting and objects, but they are not a property of them—rather they are a property of human intentions and experiences" (Relph, 1976, p. 47). From a geographical perspective, the concept of place, itself, can be seen as a subjective experience that is challenging to define (Morgan, 2010, p. 11). Relph (1976) states that within the fields of humanistic and cultural geography, we find the concept of place to be "not just a formal concept awaiting definition but also a naive and variable expression of geographical experience" (p. 4). The concept of place, and the ways in which people-place relationship is researched can often be shown through individuals' lived experiences, along with the perceptions, attitudes, and world views that accompany the particular place which hold meaning for them.

This lens enhances both depth and richness of inquiry from the individual experience. In response to this form of inquiry, Tuan (1974) notes:

An active front of research, especially by geographers, is the human response to natural hazards. Eventually, this type of work should give us basic understanding of how people react to uncertainty in natural events. ... Perception, attitude, value, and world view are among the key terms of the present work; their meanings overlap. (pp. 5-7)

Because of this in-depth understanding of person-place relationships, alongside attachment to place, approaching this area of research from a geographic perspective provides a means through which scholars can relate these concepts to the person, place, and processes that place attachment represents (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Without looking at place attachment through a geographic lens, several key components to the puzzle are missing. Forming an understanding of societal and cultural place and place identity is key to the geographic perspective which forms a strong link to an individual's attachment to place and belongingness.

Emotional Attachments to Place

Without question, individuals' emotional attachments to place are multidimensional and differ among varying lived experiences. What may be a place of security for one, may also be a place of fear for another. Likewise, the ways in which individuals form bonds and emotional connections to places are based upon personal experiences and place identities. Relph (1976) notes that "to be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and know your place" (p. 1). Emotional connections towards particular places have a significant influence on the research of place attachment and can best be understood by exploring the attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions of individuals. This emotional connection to place is shown through *topophilia*, the "affective bond between people and place or setting" (Tuan, 1974, p. 4) in which "affect, emotion, and feeling are central to the concept" (Altman & Low, 1992, p. 4). This study addressed this type of bond between people and place, and further explored individuals' need to remain within a rural, impoverished region. Key examples of this form of emotional attachment to place include attachment to homeland, emotional attachment to material environment, emotional attachment to physical and cultural landscapes, and emotional attachment through prolonged residency and insideness.

One example of an emotional attachment to place includes individuals' emotional attachment to homeland. Nostrand and Estaville (1993) note that homelands are "intrinsically geographical" and "are the places that people identify with and have strong feelings about" (p. 1). These strong feels toward a particular place encourage long term residency and prolonged emotional ties and attachment. Smith and White (2004) further define the term *homeland* as "captur[ing] the essence of peoples' deep-seated feelings of attachment to place" in which "intense feelings of loyalty and connection" are formed to a particular region or place (p. 59). Smith (2002) notes that "the homeland concept is significantly improving our appreciation of the deep-seated feelings people have for a place" (p. 435). Smith and Cartlidge (2011) additionally note that "places become significant in our lives because they remind us of our interpersonal relations with others. In these places our emotional connections with family, friends, and even ancestors come out" (p. 540). Within this space of homeland is an "emotional and cognitive experience, and includes cultural beliefs and practice that link people to place" (Low in Altman & Low, 1992, p. 165). An example of this type of emotional attachment to homeland is shown in Smith and McAlister's (2015) study of rural residents of the American Great Plains region. The emotional ties shown to this particular place show a strong connection to the concept of homeland, "reinforc[ing] ... individual or collective identity" (Smith & McAlister, 2015, p. 183). Within this case study, Smith and McAlister (2015) found that although not everyone shows the same level of attachment towards the county, there is still a shared sense of cultural character, connections with others, pride, and identity among the homeland.

A second example of emotional attachment to place includes individuals' emotional attachments to material environments. Within consumerist culture, we often find individuals

who become attached to the material environment through personal objects, prestige, or possessions. Possessions can “give us a sense of who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going” (Belk in Altman & Low, 1992, p. 37). Particular communities can also be seen as providing a means through which to acquire material possessions or enhanced status. Community satisfaction research studies how individuals assess their place of residency, which can often be contributed to (Hummon in Altman & Low, 1992). A Gallup poll found that “instead of economic, employment, and safety-related factors, people are more likely to develop strong connections to communities that are attractive and aesthetically pleasing, offer ample opportunities for socializing, and are ‘open’ and receptive to people with diverse backgrounds and interests” (Smith & Cartilidge, 2011, p. 541). It is not surprising to find that individuals are naturally drawn towards pleasant aesthetics and attractiveness within their chosen communities; however, how can this same concept be shown in areas not traditionally considered as home? An example of this type of an emotional attachment to the material environment may be found in Smith’s (2002) study of rural place attachment in Hispano Urban Centers. Within this study, rural Hispano culture is preserved after migrating to urban centers through “cultural roots, reinforcing cultural identity and giving them feelings of comfort, security, and belonging” (Smith, 2002, p. 447). Sources of data within this study include material environmental components including murals, mortuaries, and acequias, which enable these individuals to form an emotional connection to a place not traditionally considered as home.

Another example of emotional attachment to place includes individuals’ emotional attachments to physical and cultural landscapes. The perceived beauty of physical landscape and emotional connections to a cultural landscape are additional component that often cause emotional attachments to a particular places. In communities there is often a “shared, positive

vision of the landscape and direct emotional support to its members” (Marsh, 1987, p. 347). This view of a landscape’s perceived beauty can sometimes be overly exaggerated by residents, and uses a “highly selective viewing of the land, based more on its historical significance than on its present form” (Marsh, 1987, p. 347). This highly selective viewing is often present among individuals reliving past beauty or experiences within a particular place. Individuals interact with landscape in three ways: “as a member of a species... as a member of a particular culture or subculture; and as a unique individual” (Riley in Altman & Low, 1992, p. 13). As such, “cultural landscape can contribute to an emotional connection to place. The place most people develop their strongest affinity for is called ‘home’ because it holds the deepest personal, emotional, ties” (Smith, 2011, p. 539-540). This concept of home creates a deep seeded awareness of memory, alongside both personal and emotional attachment. In addition to the cultural landscape of a particular place, individuals often develop emotional attachments to a place as the setting helps them to connect with a particular cultural identity.

Additionally, cultural identity can be shown thorough traditions and norms (Smith & Cartlidge, 2011; Smith & White, 2004). An example of emotional attachment to physical and cultural landscapes includes Smith and Cartlidge’s (2011) study of place attachment among retirees in Greensburg, Kansas. After a tornado ravaged their longstanding community, it was important to the elderly residents of this rural area to recreate a landscape filled with familiar landmarks—“this elevated level of familiarity and intimate knowledge of a place that comes with years of living there enables older people to traverse their community with confidence and security” (p. 544). This form of emotional security in creating new spaces that were similar to the old, enabled the residents to form ties to the past and present of the place, creating an enriched connection to the familiarity within the key landmarks of the community.

A final example of emotional attachment to place includes individuals' emotional attachments through prolonged residency and insideness. Rowles (1990) study of place attachment demonstrates that individuals who have resided within a place for the longest period of time have the highest indicators of emotional attachment and place identity. A final concept which contributes to one's emotional attachment to place is prolonged residency and insideness. Rowles (1990) characterizes three types of insideness, including physical, social, and autobiographical. The physical is comprised of one's familiarity of a particular physical setting, the social is comprised of familiarity of people often found through close friendships and/or kinship, and the autobiographical is comprised of individual experiences and memories (Rowles, 1990). Marsh (1987) further notes that past experiences and connections often limit individuals from moving to new places.

In Marsh's (1987) example of the Anthracite Towns of Pennsylvania, despite the coal mining industry leaving the region, alongside the accompanying poverty that resulted from the withdrawal of the industry, many individuals did not leave the area, noting that:

the stresses of the early mine towns created a community strong enough to resist any threat to itself, change for the worse or change for the better. That past has constrained people's repertoire of responses to the world, limiting them to those that conserve community. ... [This example shows an] adamant loyalty of the residents to their towns, the places are much richer than many towns more vigorous than they. (p. 347)

Marsh's (1987) study is strikingly similar to the views of residents of McDowell County, West Virginia, wherein the once successful past of the mining community shapes an unwavering loyalty and attachment to place of the McDowell County of the present. Undoubtedly, the sense of attachment to place is based not on the economic foundation, but rather on the emotional,

cultural, and historical meaning that this place holds for its residents. This emotional, cultural, and historic meaning found within a particular place will help to guide and inform this study as I continue to explore residents' views on residing within a geographically isolated, impoverished region.

Attachment to Place in West Virginia

As previously noted, economic hardship has plagued the region of Appalachia for generations. Lack of opportunities for education and employment, high poverty rates, social, economic, and geographical isolation, and lack of social mobility have contributed to the plight of poverty for those within this region for decades (Mather, 2004). Currently, geographic isolation and economic instability are key reasons why many residents of Appalachia decide to leave to their homes within the confines of the mountains in order to make home elsewhere (Mather, 2004). According to a study by the Appalachian Regional Commission, the entirety of the country's population growth has increased nearly twice that of Appalachia's due primarily to a mass exodus of adults between the ages 18-35 looking for additional access to both advancement and opportunity in larger, urban centers (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2014). According to the push-pull theory, "some people move because they are pushed out of their former location, whereas others move because they have been pulled, or attracted, to another location" (Weeks, 2008, p. 252). Additionally, Carmichael (1968) noted that:

Most of the difficulties facing... Appalachia are prevalent throughout the nation, but some are peculiar to the region. Many of the latter have been engendered by the socioeconomic pattern imposed on the region by its historical development and geography. A vicious cycle of poverty and poor education has been generated and perpetuated. (p. 17)

These difficulties faced by both West Virginians and surrounding residents of the rural

Appalachian region, have promoted a mass exodus of residents in recent years. West Virginia is the only state that is located entirely in Appalachia, and its population is decreasing faster than any other in the nation, with approximately 3,300 total residents lost in the year 2013-2014 (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2014). Despite this increase in population loss, however, a 2015 study by West Virginia Public Broadcasting (2015) revealed that: “the move to the cities sometimes leaves people dissatisfied and homesick. Appalachians often say that the longing for the mountains puts things in a totally new perspective. Home sometimes looks better to them once they’ve moved away” (p. 1). The results of this study directly connect to the tenets of place attachment as their memories of the Appalachia of their past create a newfound sense of longingness for the same type of environment once they’ve relocated elsewhere. Attachment to place can best describe residents’ willingness to stay within this area, alongside their willingness to return upon leaving. This pattern of longing, including feelings of nostalgia and attachment are particularly prominent among Appalachian residents (West Virginia Public Broadcasting, 2015) who, upon leaving, often yearn for the mountains that they once called home.



An Overview of Kinship, Poverty, and the Promise of Community Schools

Recall that school officials in McDowell County estimate that up to 45% of all students live apart from their biological parents due to factors such as abuse, addiction, abandonment, neglect, incarceration, or death (Reconnecting McDowell, 2015). Because of this, it is important to understand the ways in which kinship plays an integral role in the lived experiences and stability, or lack thereof, among students within this community. For the purpose of this study, kinship refers to the process by which a child “receives care from extended family members or other adults with whom they have a familial relationship, aside from the child’s biological

mother or father” (West Virginia Direct Action Welfare Group, 2012, p. 1). In McDowell County, specifically, this form of kinship is often shown through custodial guardianship by grandparents, aunts, or uncles.

In 2010, 19,000 West Virginia children were identified as being cared for by those other than their biological mother or father—a number that has increased by 27% in the last 10 years alone (West Virginia Direct Action Welfare Group, 2012). McDowell County leads the state in the number of students who are not receiving care from a biological parent. A recent study by Public Broadcasting System (2015) noted that, “in the rural West Virginia county of McDowell County, almost half of all children live apart from their parents. Families have splintered in the face of economic and social troubles, leaving many grandparents to take on the role of parenting” (p. 1). Historically, extended family (kin) has played a role in the care of children when parents were unable or unwilling to do so. It is estimated that over two million children within the United States are cared for by relatives (kin) (West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, 2015). This form of instability among guardianship can adversely affect children and youth’s health and mental health. Further, children who are cared for by kin as opposed to biological parents within the state of West Virginia are more likely to be faced with stressors of living in poverty. A study by the West Virginia Direct Action Welfare Group (2012) notes that within the state of West Virginia, 63% of Kinship Care families are below 200% of the federal poverty line.

Within the state of West Virginia, more than 332,000 residents were living poverty in 2013, including nearly 100,000 children across the state. 1 in 3 children under the age of five lived in poverty in West Virginia in 2013 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). McDowell County, specifically, is the most impoverished of West Virginia’s 55 counties, with “more than half of

McDowell County households living with incomes below \$25,000, compared to one-quarter of households nationally” (U.S. Census American Community Survey, 2015, p. 1). Although exact causes of rural poverty are unknown, Duncan (1992) notes rural poverty persists for similar reasons as urban poverty, such as limited opportunities for residents. Further, Tickamyer and Duncan (1990) note that “rural areas have a disproportionate share of the US poverty population. ... Many rural communities lack stable employment, opportunities for mobility, investment in the community, and diversity in the economy and other social institutions” (p. 1). This is especially true in McDowell County, as its residents struggle to find local employment options and opportunities for social mobility and improvement. Another component to rural poverty demonstrates that even though the overall poverty rate is higher in rural than in urban areas, it is often assumed by the American public that poverty is an urban issue rather than a rural one (Duncan, 1992; Ricketts & Sawhill, 1988; Wilson, 1987). The actual causes and lived experiences of those living in poverty are multifaceted and complex, as not one story is the same, and experiences of poverty vary with each individual’s experience. Duncan (1992) argues that, “the failure of the poverty literature to adequately treat rural poverty limits its usefulness in understanding the fundamentally different character and changing nature of rural poverty and thus its value for those designing public problems to serve the rural poor” (pp. 8-9). In addition, misconceptions and negative stigmas regarding the poor also can contribute to a misunderstanding of the culture of rural poverty. For example, the small size and geographic isolation of rural communities often contribute to negative stigmas of the poor. Coles and Duncan (1999) state that within rural communities, “the social isolation that keeps the haves out of contact with the have-nots means that all long-term poor are stigmatized and lumped together as an undeserving group. Those with good jobs often use the pronoun ‘they,’ and speak with

disdain about the dependent poor” (pp. 8-9). Additionally, Sherman (2006) notes that, “the experience of rural poverty is in many ways unique from that of urban poverty. In the rural setting, social cohesion creates pressure on the poor to behave in ways that are consistent with local values” (p. 1). Similarly, O’Hare (1988) further describes misconceptions regarding the poor within rural communities, stating: “Most rural poor do not receive cash assistance, do not live in public housing, do not receive food stamps, and are not covered by Medicaid. ... The rural poor are also more likely than the urban poor to be working” (p. 1). This is often the case in rural communities such as McDowell County, where students and families do not have the access to necessary support and services as their urban or suburban counterparts.

Despite the negative setbacks that many of McDowell County’s students face, there is considerable promise in the community school model to help alleviate stressors associated with both homelessness and extreme poverty. Recall that homelessness, at its core, is often identified as an urban problem, as the most visible forms of homelessness occur among street dwellers in urban settings (Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski, 2014). Within rural locations, however, homelessness is often hidden among the population, particularly among students (Cummings et al., 2011). Within rural communities, educators and administrators, alike, are faced with the daunting task of promoting student achievement despite the fact that “large numbers of students cannot learn effectively because of the family and social disadvantages they face” (Cummings et al., 2011, p. 110). In creating opportunities for educational enrichment and achievement, the “goal of community schools is enhanced learning ... [where] the school transform[s] classroom approaches and at the same time develop[s] collaborative programs with outside agencies” (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002, p. 56). Similarly, key partnerships within the Southside K-8 Community School include the TEAM Center, McDowell CHOICES, American Federation of

Teachers, McDowell County FACES, Project AWARE, Save the Children, and several community ministry organizations. Similarly, a wide range of support and services can be found within the community school model, however, these services vary depending on the particular needs of the community (Cummings et al., 2011). Dryfoos and Maguire (2002) note:

Many children come to school hungry; they may also lack clothing and housing.

Traditional school systems are not set up to meet those needs. ... Community partners take on the responsibility of make sure that children have warm and suitable clothing and help parents find adequate housing. Such supports can be provided in the context of a family resource center that ensures confidentiality without stigmatization. (pp. 12-13)

Community school support services are often found in all-inclusive, multifaceted programming including school-based health services, mental health services, social skills and social competency training, mentoring, family resource centers, parenting programs, recreation and cultural enrichment, and school retention and dropout prevention (Dryfoos, 1994). Ultimately, this type of school-community centered curriculum can “change the relationship between social disadvantage and education. ... When factors are aligned against the prospects of children’s doing well, there is little that traditionally organized schools can do to counter the powerful forces that work beyond the school gates” (Cummings et al., 2011, pp. 111-112). Addressing these forms of economic, social, and intellectual disadvantage, Noddings (2013) notes: “Giving all of our children the same education, especially when that ‘sameness’ is defined in a model of intellectual excellence, cannot equalize the quality of education” (p. 190). This is certainly a relevant component to developing curriculum for students experiencing extreme poverty and homelessness. The unique and challenging circumstances that students face can create a disinterest in academic performance or success within the classroom. The community school

curriculum encourages engaged and interactional experiences through both the school and surrounding community that students may not receive otherwise (Dryfoos, 1994). This type of learning creates an environment "...to which each [student] belongs" (Dewey, 1902/2001, p. 104). This is similar to the mission of the Southside K-8 Community School, which is preparing students today for their successful tomorrows.

The community school model ultimately creates a model of learning and engagement that focuses on the unique needs of all students. In recognizing the unique needs of homeless students, specifically, Nabors et al., (2004) notes that it is vital for schools and communities to provide quality learning environments that address the unique challenges of homelessness. Further, Rogers & Freiberg (1994) encourage facilitators to create a climate of learning that truly gives students the freedom to learn—an atmosphere that "...creates a psychological climate in which the child will feel free to be curious, will feel free to make mistakes, will feel free to learn from the environment, from fellow students, from [the facilitator and] from experience" (p. 170). Creating a center of school and community learning that enriches the experiences of homeless students is a key to keeping them engaged and active within the classroom, despite the struggles that they may be facing outside of the school setting through the use of "activities [that] have motivation and meaning... recognizing the importance of every individual, regardless of race, national, social or economic status" (Tyler, 1949, pp. 7, 34). Community school curriculum additionally provide educational objectives that are not simply focused on bridging gaps in performance or achievement. Based upon Tyler's (1949) curriculum theory, focal points of educational objectives include meeting students' social and psychological needs "...that are not well satisfied outside of the school" (p. 7). The disadvantages that come from unequal opportunities within social class structure, however, can contribute to an overwhelming

achievement gap. Apple (1986) notes, “we simply cannot understand what is happening to teaching and curriculum without placing it in a framework which integrates class” (p. 177). It then becomes the role of educators, administrators, and community service providers to provide quality learning experiences that reach beyond the classroom, promoting a philosophy of compassion and care. Counts (2013) notes that “in their own lives teachers must bridge the gap between school and society and play some part in the fashioning of those great common purposes which should bind the two together” (p. 46). Because of this, the community school concept can enable educators to “tackle the structural causes of disadvantage ... and the inequalities and adversities inherent in those structures” (Cummings et al., 2011, p. 113) among students within the community school. The community school educational model ultimately creates an opportunity for both school and community so tackle these disadvantages head on.

The community school approach to learning promotes care over typical classroom concerns. Students come to the community school knowing that they are cared for and supported—a stark contrast to what many experience at home. Conversely, within a traditional school setting, Noddings (2005) states that students are often faced with a one size fits all approach to education, in which care towards their personal interests, strengths, and unique talents are not recognized. Because of this, students feel “alienated from their schoolwork, separated from the adults who try to teach them, and adrift in a world perceived as baffling and hostile. ... The capacity to care should form the foundation of our educational system” (pp. 2, 14). Despite extreme acts of care, however, it is impossible to develop effective curriculum for homeless students unless curriculum developers connect with the struggles that homeless students face. Ornstein (2011) notes “curriculum specialists can turn to many sources of knowledge, but no matter how many sources they draw on or how many authorities they listen

to, their decisions are shaped by all the experiences that have affected them and the social groups with which they identify” (p. 6). Since many curriculum developers have not experienced homelessness, themselves, it is crucial that they familiarize themselves with the individual students who struggle with homelessness on a day to day basis in order to best develop curriculum suited to meet their unique needs. In examining the direct lived experiences of individual students, Dewey (1902) asserts, “literally, we must take our stand with the child and our departure from him. It is he and not the subject-matter which determines both quality and quantity of learning” (pp. 107-108). Tyler (1949) also demonstrates an innovative approach to curriculum development by studying the learner in order to best promote the individualized interests of students ... [because] “learning [takes] place through the active behavior of the student; it is what [the student] does that [allows them to] learn, not what the teacher does” (p. 63). In engaging in ways of knowing regarding the lived experiences of homeless students it is especially important to know their beginnings, alongside the challenges that these students face outside of the school setting.

Compassion is another key component to the community school model. These types of learning environments are best defined by educators, administrators, and community service providers’ care and compassion towards students. Noddings (2005) asserts that the role of the educator is to care by example through modeling, stating “... modeling in caring is vital. We have to show how to care in our relations with the cared for. We show them how to care by creating caring relations with them” (p. 22). Conversely, Noddings (2005) criticizes the traditional school setting, stating that “...[schools] rarely provide the community setting that was once available to large numbers of children. Too often, [schools] do not even think of providing it. [They] think of providing specialists, computers, advanced math, and remedial

reading” (p. 23). This concept of care extends beyond the classroom of the Southside K-8 Community School as students are shown compassion and care both in and outside of traditional school day.

One way that community schools differ from traditional educational environments include their ability to find direct support and solutions to challenges that their students face. In criticism of the traditional school setting, Eisner (1982) notes that schools typically “fail to identify the underlying conditions that make schools what they are. In a very real sense, they address symptoms, and because they neglect the deeper structural conditions that animate schools, the ‘solutions’ that are prescribed provide no actual solution” (p. 4). The community school concept, however, provides a direct contrast to this traditional academic setting by providing direct support and services from school and community. Ultimately, the community school model can provide much needed support and services through school-based and community-based partnerships in serving disadvantaged students (Dryfoos, 1994). The “integration of the extended and core roles of the school ... enhance the capacity to tackle issues that prevent children and young people from learning” (Cummings et al., 2011, p. 53). Additionally, the community school serves as a center of care and compassion (Noddings, 2005) for students who may not be receiving adequate care outside of the school setting.

By bringing support, programming, and services directly into the school settings the achievement gap can be lessened among housed and students experiencing housing insecurity (Nabors et al., 2004). Thus, through implementing the community school structure and curriculum of care, it appears possible for a school to transform classroom approaches and at the same time develop collaborative programs with outside agencies. An environment of change may further both educational enhancement and strong support mechanisms” (Dryfoos &

Maguire, 2002, p. 56). This form of community-driven educational approach enables educators and administrators to both teach and serve students from all racial, ethnic, geographical, and socioeconomic backgrounds, helping to ensure that quality, care-driven education is delivered to all students.

Connecting Components of the Literature

Within this study, it is important to recognize the connections that are formed between all components of this literature review. It is challenging to understand the complexities of homelessness among rural student populations so reviewing this literature can aid in that process. The literature presented has explored past decades of poverty in West Virginia and surrounding Appalachia, along with the struggles of modern day poverty. In understanding the adverse effects of this type of poverty, it is imperative to explore poverty of both the past and present within the region. An understanding of the history of the rise and fall of the coal industry within this area helps to form and enhanced understanding and awareness of the lack of viable economic and employment opportunities available to this region. The exploration of place attachment research provides a geographical perspective from which to understand residents' feelings of emotional attachment towards this particular place—despite obvious challenges that are associated with living there. Post-oppositional threshold theory looks beyond traditional boundaries of opposition to provide a means through which we can address this type of emotional connection, and form a co-constructed understanding of others' varied lived experiences in connection with that of our own. Additionally, observing the challenges of impoverished McDowell County helps us to form an increased awareness of the ways in which the implementation of community school programming can best address the struggles of homeless students.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have detailed the use of post-oppositional threshold theory and its appropriateness for this study. In addition, I have described the economic implications of the history of the rise and fall of coal production in West Virginia, along with the resulting poverty and hardship that the loss of this industry has left behind. Since this study is situated in rural West Virginia, I explored the literature of key concepts that have impacted this particular area including a history of economic hardships in rural West Virginia, the potential of community school programming, and the effects of place attachment on both individuals and communities. I then outlined additional key components of kinship, rural poverty, and the promise of community schools that will continue to inform this area of research and study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Recall that the purpose of this ethnographic case study was to explore the ways in which educators, administrators, and community service providers of the Southside K-8 Community School, located in McDowell County, West Virginia responded to the unique challenges faced by students affected by extreme poverty and homelessness. The research questions that guided this study included:

1. How does a rural community school respond to the unique challenges facing students who are experiencing extreme poverty and homelessness?
2. What relations and practices do rural educators and community service providers engage in in order to work with homeless children living in extreme poverty?
3. How do community stakeholders address discourses of legal mandates, financial discourses, and educational discourses responding to rural poverty and homelessness?
4. How does homelessness affect the educational and community landscapes of a rural school district?

Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry

The previous chapter explored how social justice centered work, such as the study of rural homelessness, utilized qualitative inquiry in order to explore the lived experiences of marginalized populations. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) note that the essence of qualitative inquiry places emphasis on the “intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied... and the value-laden nature of inquiry. [Researchers] seek to answer questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (p. 14). This exploration of the lived experiences of others helped to answer these types of questions related to social inequities and make meaning from others’ social experience.

This form of rich inquiry created a method through which complex and sensitive issues, such as homelessness, can be observed within a natural environment. Through this form of “naturalistic inquiry, [researchers] study real-world settings inductively to generate rich narratives” (Patton, 2005, p. 41). Making meaning of the lived experiences of others created an opportunity for transparency between researcher and participants, in which both were encouraged to be their authentic selves.

In addressing complex social issues within qualitative inquiry, Bloor (2016) notes that qualitative inquiry has the potential to influence the policy-making community—and although the policy-making community is not the only audience for this form of research, it creates a heightened means through which to create social change. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) similarly note that “qualitative researchers are more likely to confront and come up against the constraints of the everyday social world. They see the world in action and embed their findings in it” (p. 16). Qualitative inquiry was an appropriate format for this study as it provided enhanced understanding of the ways in which the community school model can serve rural homeless students.

Subjectivity Statement

In situating my research in the field of qualitative inquiry, it was especially important that I first examined my own subjectivities prior to beginning this study. Peshkin (1988) states that “one’s subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed. It is insistently present in both the research and nonresearch aspects of our life” (p. 17). As I interrogated my subjectivities, I found that Peshkin’s statement rang true, and that no matter how hard I tried to remove or resist my own garment of subjectivity, it remained a vital component to who I am and why I had chosen to complete this study. The process of examining my subjectivities was vital as I interrogated my

“motives, passions, and prejudices in pursuit of answering the questions of this study” (Finlay & Gough, 2008, p. 55). In addressing my subjectivities prior to beginning this research, I became increasingly aware of my reasoning behind completing this study, along with my connections to the participants.

As a child growing up in rural West Virginia, I coped with challenges of geographic isolation, poverty, addiction, and violence through reading, writing, and performing stories in the school setting. Because of this, I found myself naturally drawn to research that engages in contemplative, arts-based inquiry, through the creation of poetry and prose in sharing the lived experiences of others. The stories that I was able to create as a child often helped me to escape from the harsh realities of home. In fact, for both myself, and many of my peers, school often became a place of home, providing much needed comfort and stability that many of us did not experience outside of the school setting. Although I recognize that school does not always become home for all students, because of my own lived experiences, I was drawn to research children in crisis—particularly homeless students—to find the ways in which school, too, becomes a place of home for them.

Within this study, I explored the ways in which school and community partnerships helped to alleviate many of these challenges that children in crisis face within a rural context, parallel to those of my own lived experience. I created the following found poem based upon a conversation with the principal of the Southside K-8 Community School as both a visual and poetic representation of interrogating my subjectivities and the emotional connections that are evoked through coming home to West Virginia to conduct the research for this study.

Coming Home (*A Found Poem*)

You'll love our community;

it will be very much like coming home for you.

Extreme poverty...

drug abuse...

lack of employment...

inconsistency.

Lack of

food...

clothing...

shelter.

Within the school, they're all equally poor;

they don't have a lot, but they share what they have.

Yes, you'll love our community.

It will be very much like coming home.



Methodology

The methodology of this study is ethnographic case study, which provided an ideal means through which to comprehend cultural, educational phenomena through a rich, holistic account (Merriam, 1988). The use of case study in qualitative educational research promotes enhanced understanding and awareness of a particular issue, or case that is unique in its content. Yin (1984) notes that case study is a best suited design when addressing a specific issue or phenomena through an exploratory lens. In this study of a community school's response to rural homelessness, I utilized case study in order to expand future scholarship and best practices within this area.

Ethnographic Case Study

Within this study, the case study drew from the anthropological perspective of ethnography, as it examined a particular culture and place. Merriam (1988) notes that “ethnographic techniques are the strategies researchers use to collect data about the social order, setting, or situation being investigated. ... An ethnographic case study is a sociocultural analysis of the unit of study” (p. 23). Ethnographic case studies are informed by cultural anthropology that account for common beliefs and practices among a specific group of people. I selected the methodology of an ethnographic case study rather than ethnography due to the fact that:

Case studies are unlike ethnographies in that they seek to answer focused questions by producing in-depth descriptions and interpretations over a relatively short period of time, perhaps a few weeks to a year. Ethnographies tend to ask much broader questions, observe and explain practices and beliefs, and make cultural interpretations in studies that may last for as long as a year or more. (Hays, 2004, p. 218)

For the purpose of this study, I spent a total of four months in McDowell County, West Virginia

utilizing focused questions in order to formulate these types of in-depth descriptions and interpretations about a particular case during this time. As such, ethnographic case study was the most appropriate methodology for this study. In relation to the data gathered during this form of research, Goetz and LeCompte (1984) note that “ethnographies recreate for the reader the shared beliefs, practices, artifacts, folk knowledge, and behaviors of some group of people” (p. 2). The key objective of utilizing ethnographic case study in educational research is to gain an enhanced understanding and awareness of a particular place and cultural among its people that ultimately create a symbolic form of meaning when exploring a particular phenomenon.

Characteristics of Case Studies

Case study design often involves components of data collection including interviewing, life histories, and participant observation (Merriam, 1988). The use of case study in educational research aids the researcher in gaining an in-depth understanding and awareness of a particular occurrence or concept within a community, particularly when there is a problematic issue or phenomena that has occurred. Case studies focus on a single unit or bounded system (Smith, 1978) in both description and analysis, and are often used to promote effective practice and policy within educational research. Within this bounded system, case studies additionally provide a detailed description of boundaries of space, place, and time (Merriam, 1988). A bounded system then provides context for causal relationships to emerge within the bounded system. In my study, the Southside K-8 school was the bounded system, as it was spatially-bound within an institutional setting bound to routine schedule (time), setting (space), and location (place), alongside established regulations, expectations, and curriculum. The boundaries within the intrinsically bounded system of this case provided a means through which I could develop a more focused understanding of what was both inside and outside of the case itself.

Case studies also incorporate a unit of analysis in order to define the specific case within the case study, as determined by the research questions (Merriam, 1988). The unit of analysis defines the what or who that is being studied. (Yin, 2003). Units of analysis could include but are not limited to a specific program, an individual, a specific group, or a social organization (Stake, 1995). For example, in my study, the unit of analysis was the community school model, which offered a specific program designed to aid in removing barriers to learning for homeless students. Although the unit of analysis can change after initially being defined based upon newfound discoveries within the data, in my particular study, this was not the case, as the unit of analysis of the community school model remained consistent throughout.

Additionally, there are three key characteristics that comprise qualitative case studies, which help to further illuminate the research design: particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (Merriam, 1988). The case study's particularistic nature can:

- Suggest to the reader what to do or what not to do in a similar situation.
- Examine a specific instance but illuminate a general problem.
- May or may not be influenced by the author's bias. (p. 13)

The case study's descriptive nature can:

- Illustrate the complexities of a situation—the fact that not one but many factors contributed to it.
- Show the influence of personalities on the issue.
- Present information in a wide variety of ways ... and from the viewpoints of different groups. (p. 14)

The case study's heuristic nature can:

- Explain the reasons for a problem, the background of a situation, what happened, and

why.

- Explain why an innovation worked or failed to work.
- Evaluate, summarize, and conclude, thus increasing its potential applicability. (p. 14)

Merriam (1988) further notes that educational case studies tend to draw from alternative disciplines outside of the field of education including anthropology, sociology, psychology, and history. This was important to my study, as it drew upon ethnography within the overarching discipline of anthropology.

Arts-Based Inquiry

Arts-based inquiry is a form of research that utilizes creative, artistic characteristics. Barone and Eisner (2012) state that arts-based inquiry is comprised of two main criteria, which include that the research be “engaged in for a purpose often associated with artistic activity to enhance perspectives pertaining to certain human activities, and that [there is a] presence of certain aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry process” (p. 95). Arts-based inquiry enables an advancement of scholarship through bridge building among researchers, practitioners, and the public through creative approaches to scholarly inquiry and representation (Sullivan, 2010). In this study, I utilized creative, prose-poetry writing, alongside the use of evocative imagery to enable others to connect with the data in a visceral and emotional manner.

Additionally, Barone and Eisner (2012) emphasize that this form of creative inquiry involves personal discovery and transformation. Leavy (2009) adds that arts-based inquiry is “often useful in studies involving identity work. Research in this area often involves communicating information about the experiences associated with difference, diversity, and prejudice” (p. 24). This is a particularly important element to arts-based research as it enables the researcher to deeply engage with issues of social justice, social inequity, and act as an agent of

change. My study explored elements of difference, diversity, and prejudice through its examination of the daily lived experiences of homeless students situated within a geographically isolated, rural community. Because this study addressed unsettled spaces of home among a marginalized population, this form of inquiry was appropriate as it enabled me, as the researcher, to creatively connect with and represent this topic in a more accessible way than traditional scholarship would allow.

Methodological Framework

Recall that the framework of this study is grounded in post-oppositional threshold theory, which moves beyond a dualistic, oppositional framework of us versus them, and creates a sacred space of interconnectedness, community, allyship, and justice. The use of post-oppositional threshold theory, framed by the work of AnaLouise Keating and Gloria Anzaldúa, explored participants' experiences through the lenses of administrators, educators, and community stakeholders. This theoretical space differed greatly from that of oppositional thinking in which "reality... knowledge, ethics, and truth [are defined] in limited, mutually exclusive terms" (Keating, 2013, p. 29). It is important to note that this theoretical framework creates an opportunity to expand ways of thinking, being, and knowing as it stretches beyond what is traditionally understood and accepted within a dualistic mindset. Within this theoretical framework, I became a *nepantla*, or a traveler within the in-between (Anzaldúa, 2015). Residing within this middle space, or the in-between, creates a sense of in-between-ness, which aids in describing how evolving into this transformative new way of thinking, being, and knowing feels. When residing in the liminal, in-between spaces as a *nepantla*, Anzaldúa (2015) notes that discomfort may often occur as one "switch[es] from one perception channel to another... reflecting the same information in different ways. The cacophony... can feel... confusing,

maddening, frustrating—until nepantla creates a wider space in your mind, allowing you to make the connections, allowing the various scenarios to merge and come into focus” (pp. 107-108). This type of cacophony occurs as the nepantla is experiencing the in-between-ness, stuck in a middle space not mutually exclusive to merely one identity or cultural norm. This cacophony did cause discomfort throughout this study as I continually reflected upon the often heartbreaking and traumatic information, such as the trauma of both abuse and addiction, that was being shared with me. This, too, created a space in which I was forced to face my own trauma from within my childhood which paralleled many of the accounts that were shared with me. This nepantleric way of thinking, being, and knowing; however, ultimately created a sacred space of healing, which enabled me to reflect upon my own trauma, alongside the trauma shared by the participants in a way that produced both deep, critical reflection and restorative practices.

As I navigated these deep wounds of crisis for both myself and the participants, particularly those of abuse and beginning the process of healing decades worth of deep-seeded wounds, the continued use of post-oppositional threshold theory also enabled me to gain an increased insight via the nepantlera lens, which provided a means through which to empathetically see and understanding trauma and crisis from multiple lenses without casting judgement or acting as a savior of sorts within this particular setting. This nepantlera lens additionally supported my understanding of differing world views that were presented throughout the study which demonstrated the complexities of homelessness within a rural setting. This nepantleric form of thinking, being, and knowing additionally enabled me to move freely into varying realms of consciousness and understanding as I navigated the ongoing pain of personal trauma, alongside the trauma shared by the participants.

This framework enabled further navigation throughout the in-between-ness, as I

negotiated the liminal spaces along with the interactions that occurred within those liminal spaces, moving between multiple worldviews as a cultural insider, researcher, participant-observer, and observer throughout the course of the study. I began the study with an initial understanding that there was potential for an overlap of lived experience due to my cultural insider status; however, nothing could have prepared me for the ways in which my story strikingly paralleled those that were being shared with me. There was a near immediate emotional connection as I negotiated my own trauma alongside my own truths, alongside those of the participants. Within these liminal spaces, lines were blurred between I, we, you, and me, due to the shared lived experiences among myself and the participants. There were times when I found myself finishing the sentences spoken by the participants in my mind, as the participants spoke their truths aloud, as my story—their story—our stories entangled into one. These liminal spaces included unsettled spaces of home, shifting representations of self or identity groups, emotional reactions from poverty, place, and space, adapting to various life stages, or transitions in relationships with self and other. Utilizing post-oppositional framing to engage with the participants and to collect, analyze, and represent data cultivated a co-created understanding of these types of liminal spaces, and further enabled the authenticity of participants' transformations and healing, along with my own transformation and healing, during these types of transitions to emerge.

Research Design

This study focused on participants' experiences in serving homeless students through the community school model in rural West Virginia. This design was informed by ethnographic case study. An ethnographic case study is a "sociocultural analysis of the unit of study" (Merriam, 1988, p. 23). The use of ethnographic case study offered a means to "investigate complex social

units consisting of multiple variables...in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon [offering] insights and illuminat[ing] meanings that expands its readers' experiences" (Merriam, 1988, p. 32). Based on the research purpose and questions that guided this study, the use of ethnographic case study was the most appropriate methodology as it explored socio-economic and sociocultural perspectives.

Site Selection, Participant Selection, and Gaining Access

In this section, I discuss the details of this study pertaining to site selection, participant selection, and gaining access. First, I discuss the site selection of the Southside K-8 Community School in War, West Virginia, followed by the ways in which participants were selected. Finally, I discuss the means through which I gained access and entry to the research site.

Site Selection

As this study focused on the ways in which a community school in rural West Virginia served the unique needs of homeless students, site selection was limited to the only community school in rural West Virginia, which was the Southside K-8 Community School, located in War. As such, I conducted overall sampling using purposeful, criteria-based sampling. Purposeful, criteria-based sampling "identifies and selects individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest" (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 2). The use of purposeful, criteria-based sampling enabled me to acquire rich data from the case that was appropriate in answering the four research questions that guided this particular case study (Patton, 1990). Because of this, I selected the Southside K-8 Community School as it was best suited to address the research questions of this study and the research site, itself, was the first and only community school in rural West Virginia. As such, this site selection had great

implications for surrounding rural areas in West Virginia which could also potentially implement a similar community school model. This particular place was selected for the implementation of a community school as it was the lowest performing school in the state, based upon state-wide standardized testing data (WVDE, 2016). Due to consistent low performance among its students, along with 97% of students qualifying for free breakfasts and lunches (WVDE, 2016) this particular school was a key selection to test the success of the community school model in serving an at-risk demographic of rural students.

Gaining Access

During a pilot study conducted in the spring of 2016, I gained entry into the research site based on professional connections made with both the Community School Coordinator and School Principal. Following the successful completion of the pilot study, it was agreed among these two individuals and myself that continued study into the community school process would be appropriate for my future dissertation study. An incentive for the community school's participation in this study included an opportunity for the school to have someone readily available to provide much needed analysis of the ways in which the community school was able to serve its most vulnerable students. Presently, the community school model has been implemented at Southside K-8 for two years, however, no data has been collected regarding the ways in which this model actually serves the school's students. The opportunity to provide this type of data collection and analysis for the school provided a key entry point in gaining access to completing my study at Southside K-8.

Participant Selection

I completed the participant selection process for this study through purposeful, criteria-based sampling. Recall that purposeful, criteria-based sampling "identifies and selects

individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest” (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 2). As such, participants included the educators, administrators, and community service providers that directly served homeless students within the community school setting. Since this rural school had a limited student population, with less than 400 students totaling grades Kindergarten through eighth grade, participant selection for this study was also limited, as there were less than 20 total educators, administrators, and community service providers that were directly involved within the community school implementation process at Southside K-8. Because of this, I selected three direct participants, Florisha (Flo) McGuire (Southside K-8 Community School Principal), Dr. Ingrida (Inga) Barker (Assistant Superintendent of McDowell County Schools), and Sarah Muncy (Southside K-8 Community School Coordinator) as the primary sources that I had the opportunity to interact with regularly. The community service providers acted as indirect participants and secondary sources of data, as my interaction with them was limited to the monthly Steering Committee Meetings that occurred within the school setting.

I first selected the direct participants for this study. I initially contacted directly the Southside K-8 Community School in War, West Virginia via telephone to speak with Sarah Muncy, Community School Coordinator. After having an initial conversation with Sarah Muncy, Community School Coordinator, I conducted a Skype video conference call with Flo McGuire, School Principal, along with Sarah Muncy in order to discuss the specifics of the study. Based on this initial conversation, we then discussed the roles of direct participants involved in the study within the school setting itself (administrators and educators) along with the role of the indirect participants, which were comprised of the community service providers of the Community School Steering Committee. I then sent an email to the school and to the McDowell County

Board of Education seeking their participation in the study (see Appendix A). Once an individual agreed to participate in the study, I outlined the purpose and objectives of the study to the participant via reading, reviewing, and signing an Informed Consent Form and viewing an Observation Protocol form (see Appendix B and D).

Membership Role

In this section, I describe my membership role within the research site of the Southside K-8 Community School, along with the research activities that took place there. Upon gaining an entry point in to this research site, I began the process of emic observational research as a participant-observer. Emic observational research strives to understand a particular culture from a native point of view (Morris et al., 1999). Spradley (1980) notes that participant-observation involves six key differences from that of an ordinary participant including a dual purpose of engagement and observation, explicit awareness, wide-angle lens, insider/outsider experience, introspection, and detailed record keeping. Within the Southside K-8 Community School setting, it was important that I participate in each of these areas in order to engage in my role as both participant and observer. In describing the emic approach to inquiry, Headland et al. (1990) note: “in taking an emic approach, a researcher tries to put aside prior theories and assumptions in order to let the participants and data ‘speak’ to them and to allow themes, patterns, and concepts to emerge” (p. 130). In some areas of observation and inquiry, such as one-on-one meetings and elicitations or community exploration, I was actively engaged in participation; however, this form of emic observation was especially appropriate for situations when it was best to keep my theories, beliefs, and assumptions to myself. For example, when attending the Community School Steering Committee meetings, which involved both direct and indirect participants, I did not engage in interactions with the meeting attendees, nor expressed any of my thoughts or

opinions throughout the course of the meeting, in order to organically observe and allow for the thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions of the participants to emerge.

Within this study, part of my membership role was ensuring that I identified these major dimensions through both my observation and inquiry. As a cultural insider, I entered both the school and community setting with an initial understanding of rural culture and attachment to place; however, it was ultimately the sense of authenticity and truth telling displayed by both myself and the participants during the time spent in McDowell County that enabled me to bridge a gap between my original, surface level understanding to form a deep seeded awareness and meaning of the participants and the place(s) and often unsettled space(s) that they call home.

Methods of Data Collection

In this section I include information regarding the types of data that were collected throughout this study. Additional details including a data inventory table, timeline, and interview details regarding specific data collection methods and analysis are also discussed.

The design of this study included interviews, observations, elicitations, and document analysis. The data for this study was collected over a period of four months from September 2016 – December 2016. The time required to complete this study was fifteen weeks. The timeline shown in Table 1 (see Appendix H) reflected the amount of time that was used to complete project items from both myself and the participants. Over the course of this ethnographic case study, I collected 235 pages of raw data. Table 1 shows a raw data inventory that accounts for the amount of the data that was collected throughout this study.

Table 1

Raw Data Inventory

Source of data	Number of pages	Number of total pages
2 one-hour interviews with participants <i>(Involves researcher and participants)</i>	20 pages per one hour of transcription; 2 one-hour interviews	20 (2) 40 pages
1 hour observation of Steering Committee Meeting (School/Community Partnerships) <i>(Involves researcher and participants)</i>	20 pages per one hour of transcription; 5 pages of field notes per one hour of observation	20 + 5 25 pages
Arts based/traditional journal reflections from the researcher <i>(Involves only researcher)</i>	5 pages of free write per canvas; 10 canvases total	5 (10) 50 pages
Communication including email correspondence and informal conversations with participants <i>(Involves researcher and participants)</i>	2 pages per communication; 10 occurrences	2 (10) 20 pages
Steering Committee Meeting Notes (School/Community	20 pages per one hour of transcription; 5 pages of notes	20 + 5 25 pages

Partnerships) <i>(Involves researcher and participants)</i>	per one hour meeting	
Three 30 minute peer debriefing sessions	20 pages per one hour of transcription	10 (3) 30 pages
Three 30 minute member checks	20 pages per one hour of transcription	10 (3) 30 pages
Reconnecting McDowell Archival Data <i>(Involves only researcher)</i>	5 resources per day; 3 days of research on Reconnecting McDowell	5 (3) 15 pages
Total pages		235

Interviews

Throughout this study, I conducted multiple semi-structured, ethnographic interviews with school staff and community members involved within the community school implementation process. In qualitative inquiry, interviews seek to “describe the meaning of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understanding the meaning of what the interviewees say” (Valenzuela et al., 2002, p. 1). Ethnographic interviews are “a particular kind of speech event” (Spradley, 1979, p. 18) that provide both cultural and geographical information to guide one’s inquiry. Specific guided questions for the interviews within my study were created based upon my research purpose and questions. Although these guided questions were created to elicit conversation with the participants, much of the conversation was tailored based upon their particular responses, and the rapport that was built with the participants (deMarrais, 2004). For the purpose of this study, sample guided questions included:

1. Introduction (personal connection to McDowell County and West Virginia)
2. School (explain community school initiative)
 - How have the students responded to the community school?
3. Location (tell me a little bit about War and surrounding McDowell County)
4. Demographics of Students
 - How does the school serve the students?
 - How does the surrounding community serve the students?
5. Reconnecting McDowell program (What has the program accomplished so far? What are the program's goals for the future?)
6. What is the role of Southside's Steering Committee?
7. Is there a current partnership between the school and community?
8. What are your hopes/goals for the future of your students?

See Appendix C for a detailed interview guide which was used throughout the data collection process. Below is an excerpt from my initial interview with Southside K-8 Principal, Flo McGuire.

Meaghan: What are some of the challenges faced by the educators and administrators at Southside?

Flo: When we talk about that whole child, we have, we're one of the lowest performing schools in the state of West Virginia. I'm sure you've already pulled the data. When we started the school improvement process, we teach harder, let's PD your teachers, let's make the best teachers that we can, teach harder, work harder... That has its issues in that, you know, for the pedagogy and that sort of thing, the child has to come, the child has to, gotta have the basic needs met. You know, they have to feel loved and comforted, they

have to have their medical needs, they have to have food and clothing and shelter. I mean we know all of those things. And that is a contributing factor to our low performance. Another contributing factor is because of our rural location, and we can't keep teachers. I mean, the rate of teacher turn over at this school is amazing. When we invest a lot of money into the pedagogy and the teaching, then in a teacher you might invest within a year, you know, \$6000 - \$7000 in staff development. Then that teacher moves to a school closer to where they live. Most of our teachers drive in forty-five minutes to an hour and a half a day to and from. You know, forty-five minutes to and forty-five minutes from. And you know, you can't blame them for wanting to be close to home. But then we send excellent trained teachers to other schools and then we start over the next year even with someone who is a noncertified teacher, maybe someone working outside of the field, like a social worker. ...It's the perfect storm. I mean, Sarah and I both live in this community and we've had a lot of conversations about moving just for the sake of our children. This is not an area that draws young families who want, you know, what's best for their children. Living here comes with a sacrifice to the family and many educators are not willing to make that decision. And understandably so.

The excerpt of interview transcript shows how our initial interview was especially helpful to me in understanding some of the key challenges facing both the educators and administrative staff at the Southside K-8 Community School. Flo's extensive response to this basic, initial question provided a foundation for me to formulate future probing questions regarding these unique and complex challenges.

Upon collecting and analyzing data from individual and/or group meetings, I planned both peer debriefings and member checks with the participants in order to have them "elaborate

or clarify what they have said in interviews or done in observed scenes” (Given, 2008, p. 501). This continued practice ensured that a relationship of sustained trust occurred, providing me also with the opportunity to gain clear insights from these particular sections of the study. Ultimately, this enabled me to portray participants’ thoughts, actions, and beliefs more accurately than if I would not have engaged in this practice. In December, I conducted 30-minute member checks with the participants, which provided the opportunity for me to create a brief “self-correcting interview... [providing participants with] an opportunity to comment on the interviewer’s interpretations as well as to elaborate on their own original statements” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 222). During this time, I went over specific details that the participants had shared with me about their roles within the school and community, along with my personal observations of the ways in which the individuals responded to the obligations of these roles. I wanted to ensure that I was portraying their roles accurately, alongside an accurate portrayal of the ways in which the Southside K-8 Community School served a large selection of vulnerable students throughout the course of the school year.

Observations

In addition to interviews, multiple observations were conducted throughout the course of the study. In qualitative research, observation is a “systematic data collection approach. Researchers use all of their senses to examine people in natural settings or naturally occurring situations. Observation of a field setting involves prolonged engagement in a setting or social situation” (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, p. 248). Observation served as a primary tool for data collection throughout this ethnographic case study. Additionally, as I studied this culture and group of people, I utilized Spradley’s (1980) question-observation technique. Spradley (1980) notes that what is seen and recorded is influenced by the questions that the researcher has in

mind. As I spent increased amounts time within this particular area studying its culture, people, and place, I gained enhanced insight into the types of observations and questions that needed to be asked as a result. Further, in this form of ethnographic inquiry, specific, descriptive questions subsequently produced descriptive observations in eliciting responses on a particular cultural or social situation. Spradley (1980) notes nine major dimensions to identify within every social situation:

1. Space: the physical place or places
2. Actor: the people involved
3. Activity: a set of related acts people do
4. Object: the physical things that are present
5. Act: single actions that people do
6. Event: a set of related activities that people carry out
7. Time: the sequencing that takes place over time
8. Goal: the things people are trying to accomplish
9. Feeling: the emotions felt and expressed (p. 78)

As a cultural insider, since I am already familiar with the educational, societal, and cultural elements of the area, I felt that I was able to interpret cultural nuances that often occurred throughout my time in McDowell County, including vernacular and phrasing, that would have potentially be confusing to a cultural outsider. For example, I brought to each observation a general knowledge of the ways in which a rural students in West Virginia spent their school days and time after school, having been a student in rural West Virginia myself. Day to day goings on such as state supported programming and after school activities for West Virginia rural youth were similar or even identical to programming and activities that I had participated in as a

student in rural West Virginia. Despite this cultural insider status, however, throughout the observation process I took into account that “interpretation is a major part of all research. ... On the basis of observations and other data, researchers draw their own conclusions” (Stake, 1995, p. 5). Through the ethnographic lens of this case study, I became a participant-observer who engaged directly in the happenings and culture of the research site. The objective of participant-observation is to “help researchers learn the perspectives held by populations... by both observing and participating...in the study community’s daily activities” (Mack et al., 2005, p. 13). Kluckhohn (1940) additionally notes that the participant-observer technique is particularly effective within small communities, such as War, West Virginia. I used a template for observation protocol and observation field notes (see Appendix D and E) throughout this process.

Figure 3.1 Example of Observation Notes

Notes	Observations
Sarah is confidently leading the meeting, with committee members listening intently and engaging in direct conversations (both in large group and small group). Brain storming is taking place for future programming within the community school. Ideas for additional partnerships (state and local) are discussed in hopes of revitalizing the community center and	Sarah: [Provides a listing of potential partnerships, both state and local. The list is provided via handout and written on the white board.] Flo: “I think we need to all understand what we are getting into before we start.” Sarah: [Explains in depth to whole group pros and cons of additional partnerships, including a newly formed partnership with Virginia Medical Center, bringing medical

extracurricular activities for students and families, and further steps are being taken to provide a full service medical center within the community school.	services directly into the school.] Flo: “Each subcommittee will need to have someone responsible for the communication between parties and they would work in conjunction with Sarah.”
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This participant-observer technique was especially effective in the small community of War, West Virginia. As a participant-observer in the small school and community, soon after beginning my research, I almost immediately became well acquainted and well accepted by individuals both inside and outside of the school setting. I noted the ease with which I seemed to immediately connect with the participants, and the ways in which they openly invited me into various spaces in the school and community. This connection is particularly relevant as it directly represents our connected lived experiences, and the ways in which the participant-observer technique was, indeed, effective within the small, rural community.

Elicitations

Since the use of interviews, alone, do not always provide a full explanation of particular ideas or experiences, the use of elicitations were used in conjunction with the interviews in order to allow participants to elaborate on significant experiences. Elicitations aid in enhancing the interview process by using visual or verbal prompts to elicit expanded comments from the

participants. This enables both the researcher and the participant to further elaborate upon particular areas of interest that emerged within the interview conversations, that the traditional interview process, alone, possibly would not allow. The use of elicitation in qualitative inquiry is completed by either a visual or verbal technique that “supports participants in remembering nearly forgotten parts of their experiences and in expressing emotions associated with those significant experiences” (Thygesen et al., 2011, p. 596). In addition to the ethnographic interviewing techniques described in the previous section, I additionally utilized photo elicitations within the interviews by asking participants to visualize and describe student homes in McDowell County through the use of photographic imagery. Photo elicitation can aid in enriching understanding and expression outside of the limits of traditional text or speech, alone. Harper (2002) states:

Photo elicitation may overcome the difficulties posed by in-depth interviewing because it is anchored in an image that is understood, at least in part, by both parties. If the interview has been successful, then understanding has increased through the interview process. (p. 20)

Photo elicitation is a prime example of how researcher and participant can form a deep emotional connection and mutual understanding through the use of photographic imagery. Within my study, through the use of these photographs, I was able to garner key information from the participants regarding students’ unsettled spaces of home. Additionally, these elicitations involved a connection between a particular object or physical place that the participants formed an emotional connection with. As such, the participants had the opportunity to express specific emotional ties to objects, places, and spatial connections. Brown et al. (2015) note that these type of emotional attachments found through elicitations can provide connections to the ways in

which individuals connect with an object or place. For this study, I utilized photo elicitations (shown in Chapters Four and Five) of varied representations of student homes in McDowell County to explore participants' beliefs, values, and assumptions regarding both the concept of home, and emotions involved when the concept of home among their students is unsettled. This practice assisted in eliciting both expanded storytelling and emotional connections, and will be elaborated upon in the chapters that follow.

Figure 3.2 Example of Photo Elicitation



Meaghan: Take a look at this photo. What do you see? How does it make you feel?

Sarah: This is the kind of home many of our kids is livin' in these days. Worn down, worn out—like many of the people raisin' 'em. It wasn't all like this when I was growin' up here. Wasn't all this bad. With all the lay offs in the mines 'n all that, you just see, you see that people is hopeless. They just don't know where to turn or what to do next. Makes me sad 'cuz I see there's a lotta good here, but not everyone sees it same as me. Someone else might look at this, n say, what good could ever come out of a place like that? But I

see a strong foundation, strong folks, like you and me, wantin' what's best for the kids, for the families, for the workers, for the mines, for everyone, you know? We just all tryin' to do what's best. But it's hard when all anyone else sees is worn down, and worn out.

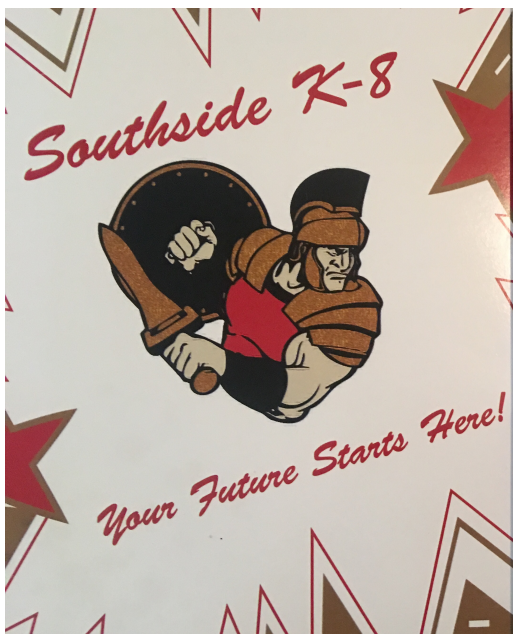
This photo elicitation is a prime example of one way that a participant could connect beyond merely a surface level of interview questioning. The photo elicitation provided a means through which she could freely express both her thoughts and emotions in a way that enabled me, as the researcher, to better understand her point of view and perspective of place.

Document Analysis

Document analysis involves analyzing and interpreting data following the heightened examination of documents and records from a particular research site or study (Bryman, 2011). To gain added insight into the Southside K-8 Community School and the overarching goals of the Reconnecting McDowell Project, I utilized document analysis of multiple items provided by the school including field notes, email and informal conversational correspondence, Steering Committee Meeting notes, Reconnecting McDowell archival data, audio recordings, and miscellaneous accompanying resources provided by the participants. Altheide et al. (2008) note that within document analysis, “the research process and the interaction between the researcher and the subject matter is key... pursu[ing] concepts, data, and other information sources that emerge in the context of the thinking and discovering process of research” (p. 127). School staff and administration provided me with access to documents including school success data, community school implementation plan, West Virginia Department of Education Innovation Zone data, and Reconnecting McDowell program archival data, which enabled me to form an

enhanced level of understanding of the school, state, and community before, during, and after the interviews and observations.

Figure 3.3 Example of Document Used for Document Analysis



Current Services	In Progress	Focus Areas
Southside K-8 Community School Activities Area 1: Health		
Current Services	Goal	Funded:
WVU Ext. Support in a Box Health Literacy Class WVU School of Pharmacy	Attendance	Free to Southside by WVU Ext.
Choices Karate Zumba Family Options Mental Health Smiles Middle Dentistry Clothing and Food Bags Yearly Shoe & Coat Distribution	Attendance	Free
	Attendance & Discipline	Choices grant
	Attendance & Discipline	Insurance, Project Aware
	Attendance & Discipline	Insurance, Free to Donations, grant funded
	Attendance & Discipline	Donations
	Attendance & Discipline	Donations

Attendance	8 Pillars of Community School
8+	Family Engagement/Health and Social Support
Community/School	Health and Social Support
50+	Family Engagement/Health and Social Support
125+	Health and Social Support
50+	Health and Social Support
240+	Health and Social Support

The document shown in Figure 3.3 was a packed provided to me by the Southside K-8 Community School administration that showed specific community school activities that were either currently ongoing or in progress. This document additionally noted specific focus areas within each of the in-school or after-school programming that incorporated specific activities that contributed to student and familial health, wellness, and academic success. I utilized this document, along with others to assist in creating the interview probes and guiding questions, and to better inform my knowledge of the funding, creation, and purpose of the community school.

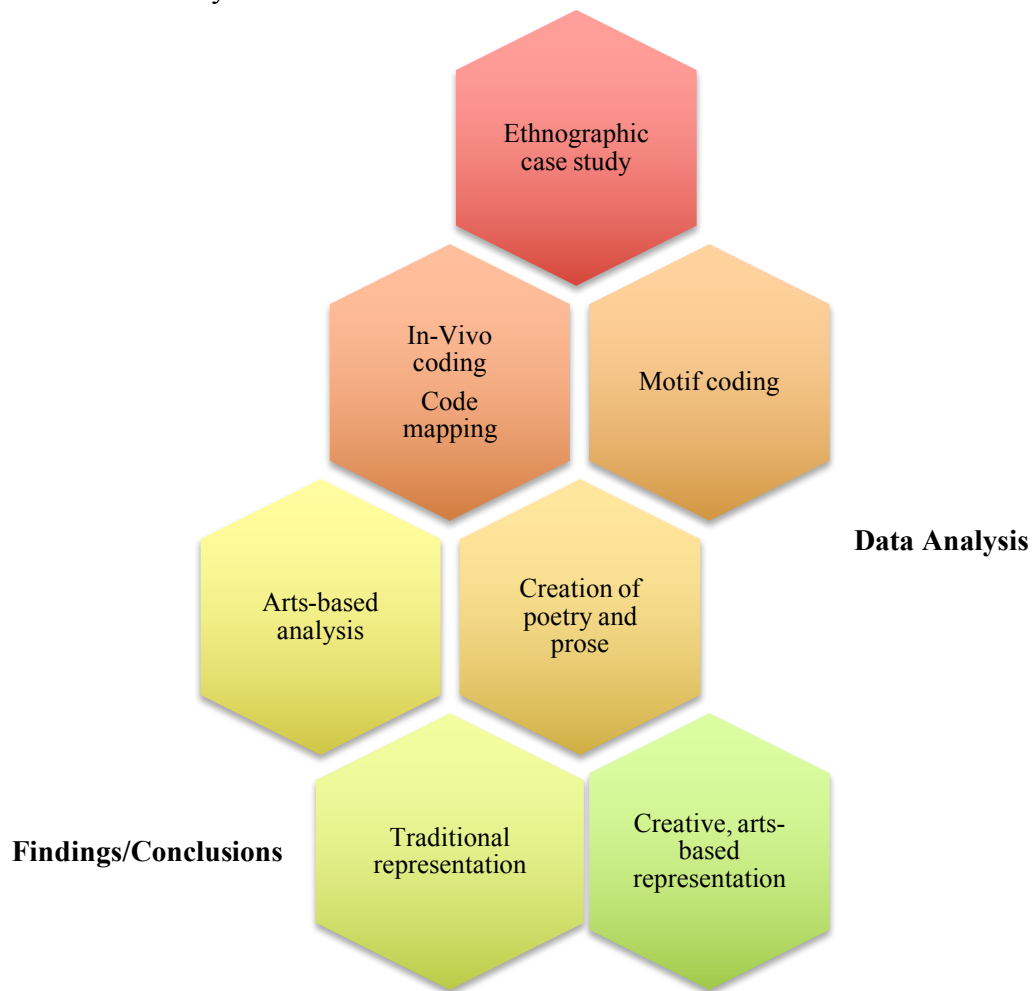
Data Management and Data Analysis

Data management addresses the methods that I used in order to effectively manage the large amounts of data that were collected throughout this qualitative study. All data, aside from any handwritten notes field notes or images, was be electronic. Any hand-written documents, once electronically transferred, were shredded to maintain security of the information. Additionally, all transcriptions of interviews, observations, and field notes, were completed securely and electronically using the program oTranscribe. All correspondence between participants remained on a secure server on a password protected laptop computer that only I had access to. In addition, any reported data collected directly from the school was scanned electronically and then shredded as well in order to maintain anonymity of student information.

Traditional Data Analysis

Within qualitative inquiry, traditional data analysis emphasizes the importance of “detailed readings, reviewing and refining categories, and using provisional analysis to inform how data is collected, transcribed, and analyzed when returning to the field” (Silverman, 2016, p. 10) however, this process is often emergent depending upon the data that is being analyzed. Figure 3.4, below, acts as a visual representation of the nonlinear, iterative process of data analysis that guided this study.

Figure 3.4 Data Analysis Process



As shown in Figure 3.4, within traditional data analysis, the primary processes of traditional analysis for this study involved in-vivo coding and code mapping.

To begin the traditional analysis process, I first began a sequence of reading and re-reading through my transcripts, observations, and field notes to identify codes. In qualitative inquiry a code is “most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3). Following the transcription of each interview, I utilized traditional in-vivo coding as an initial coding method. Saldaña (2013) states that in-vivo coding uses “actual words

[to] enhance and deepen... understanding of cultures and worldviews” (p. 91). An example of my in-vivo coding process is shown in Figure 3.5., which assigned a label to a particular selection of data using a word or group of words taken directly from the data as a descriptor (Saldaña, 2013). This enabled me to locate key patterns and themes within the transcript text.

Figure 3.5 Example of in-vivo Coding

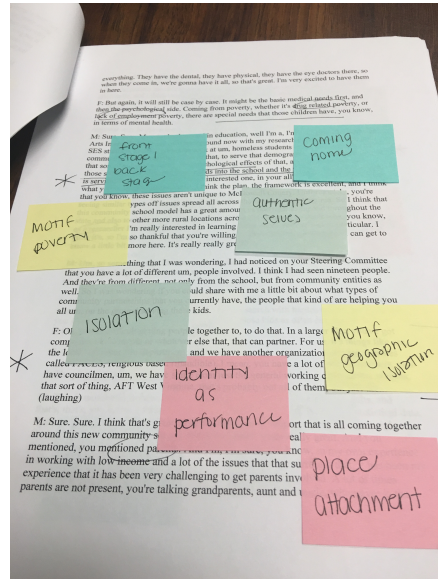
Sarah: A lot of kids, they're ¹ sufferin' from like,	¹ kids...sufferin'
like, physical illness For example, a lot of them	² parents too high
doesn't even get to go to the doctor. So 'cuz the	³ poor lack of transportation
² parents are either too high or somethin' to you	⁴ rural community lay out
know, be concerned about their kid bein' sick.	⁵ goals...full service health clinic on campus

Flo: Or because the poor lack of transportation. The same is true for our older people. You know, we have to ³travel on you know, you've been to West Virginia, so you know how ⁴rural community's laid out in terms of roads. You have to travel a minimal of twenty minutes to get into a local clinic, and that doesn't guarantee you're gonna get what you need there, which is why we have one of our ⁵goals to have a full service health clinic here on our campus for our students and also for our community.

After using the in-vivo coding process to code the interview, I utilized code mapping, which is a follow-up strategy that “frames the research project, reduces qualitative data, analyzes themes and interconnections in a study, and produces findings” (Dailey, 2004, p. 1). Code mapping helped in the organizational process of the varying codes, “to bring meaning, structure, and order to data” (Anfara, 2008, p. 932). During the code mapping analysis, I developed multiple categories, which were later organized into themes. An example of my code mapping process may be found in Figure 3.6.

As a secondary method, I coded both the transcript and observation notes using literary and language coding method of Motif Coding. Saldaña (2013) notes that motif coding is similar to the motif literary device as it is used to classify particular elements or themes that appear several times within a story. In qualitative research, motif coding, too, recognizes key elements or motifs that appear several times within the data. This form of coding enabled me to delve further into the language components of my conversations with the participants, exploring deeper meaning behind sociocultural, sociological, and psychological areas of our communication. Motif coding “borrows from established approaches to the analysis of literature, and a contemporary approach to the analysis of oral communication applying folk literature’s symbolic elements as codes for an evocative approach to analysis” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 123). Due to my own background in creative writing, I naturally tend to look at data as a form of storytelling, so this method of coding provided a good fit to the ways in which my mind naturally created a representation of the data. An example of motif coding may be found in Figure 3.6.

Figure 3.6 Example of Code Mapping Analysis and Motif Coding

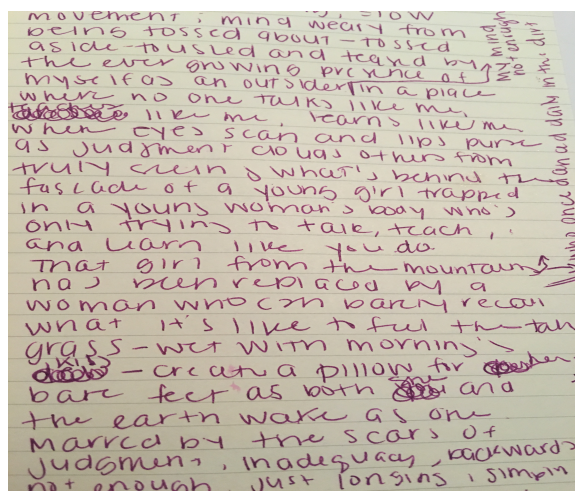


I identified key themes and motifs that emerged from initial processes of code mapping and motif coding including poverty, geographic isolation, and place attachment. Both code mapping and motif coding enabled me to form an initial outline of key patterns and narrative elements for the selections of prose and prose-poetry that I later wrote based upon the emotions, identities, and notable occurrences that had emerged from the data. As I wrote both the prose and prose-poems, I often looked back to these forms of traditional data analysis in order to ensure that I was portraying the most accurate description of what the participants had shared. Completing this form of analysis prior to the arts-based analysis enabled me to create a foundation upon which to create the accompanying prose and prose-poetry that followed.

In addition to the coding performed within the traditional data analysis process, I also utilized journaling to connect deeply with the participants, the data that was being presented, and my own personal connections to the trauma and crisis that often emerged. In qualitative inquiry, journaling presents the researcher with a powerful investigative tool as it provides the

opportunity to document not only the roles of the participants, but also the researcher's role within the data collection process (Janesick, 1998). Journaling provided me with a space to connect with the data on a deeply personal level. I found that during this time of data analysis, journaling, and reflection, the post-oppositional framing of this study provided me with a means through which to navigate the liminal spaces of in-between-ness through the varied emotions that I was experiencing, alongside helping me to better understand my role as a researcher navigating between wounded participants, wounded researcher, and wounded participant-observer.

Figure 3.7 Example of Journaling



movement: mind weary from
 being tossed about - tossed
 aside - tossed and teard by
 the ever growing presence of
 myself as an outsider in a place
 where no one talks like me
~~where~~ like me. learns like me.
 when eyes scan and lips purse
 as judgment clouds others from
 truly seeing what's behind the
 facade of a young girl trapped
 in a young woman's body who's
 only trying to talk, teach,
 and learn like you do.
 That girl from the mountains
 has been replaced by a
 woman who can barely recall
 what it's like to feel the tan
 grass - wet with morning's
 dew - create a pillow for ~~her~~
 bare feet as both ~~her~~ and
 the earth wake as one
 marked by the scars of
 judgment, inadequacy, ~~backward~~
 not enough. just longing, simply

Through journaling, specifically, I was able to uncover personal wounds of trauma and crisis from longstanding abuse, which paralleled those of the participants. Through this nepantleric form of questioning these wounds of both myself and others, I found that both myself and the participants had concealed these difficult truths for many years. I would not have had the opportunity to take such an introspective approach to understanding and connecting with the data without the nepantleric framework, analysis, and reflexive journaling process.

Arts-Based Data Analysis

Traditional data analysis often offers thematic narratives in qualitative research. In my study, I was able to identify initial themes, patterns, and narrative elements from the traditional data analysis process, and then use those as a foundation to build and create both poetry and prose through arts-based data analysis. The creation of poetry and prose utilizing arts-based data analysis combined with this traditional process in order to create an intersection between traditional and arts-based representations. Arts-based data analysis can be defined as the “systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions...as a primary way of understanding and examining experience” (McNiff, 1998, p. 29). In addition to traditional data analysis, I also utilized an arts-based representation of both photographic imagery and creative literary writing to “adapt the tenets of the creative arts in order to address social research questions in holistic and engaged ways in which theory and practices are intertwined” (Leavy, 2009, p. 4). For this type of data analysis and representation, I used the direct words and actions of the participants, and within the analysis process, created a written representation through the use of poetry and prose to account for particular occurrences, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions that emerged throughout the study.

This practice helped me to connect deeply with the participants, and enabled me to portray the data in a way that utilizing only traditional analysis methods would not allow. This artistic analysis and representation of the data additionally allowed me to be “in tune with emotional, carnal, psychological, and intellectual indicators... or internal dialogue” (Leavy, 2015, p. 269) throughout the analysis process. This creative approach to inquiry and analysis permitted me to lean on my own natural inclinations to understand and recall particular

occurrences through the art of creative writing and storytelling. The process through was based on Grbich's (2012) procedure for qualitative poetic analysis:

1. Read the transcripts during data collection and undertake preliminary data analysis so that you gain information on all aspects of the research question.
2. When all the data is in, re-read the transcripts together with any other data gathered (observations, visual and written documents) and make notes identifying themes.
3. Develop files of the themes noted, keeping the words of the participants if data is in interviews, transcripts, or videotapes.
4. Order and reorder these themes.
5. Transform them into the poetic or combined styles that best portray the response to the research question.
6. Read aloud or display to others to gauge the effect. (p. 131)

This process enabled me to form both a visual and emotional connection to the data. Both the process and representation of arts-based inquiry has enabled for shared stories, experiences, and emotions to emerge and ultimately, has allowed them to be shared with others. This resulting form of artistic representation through the prose and prose-poetry that I have created allows for readers to do the same. In this way, readers are exposed to the often tragic nuances of day-to-day life among homeless students in rural West Virginia. In the following chapter, I created a month-by-month representation which documents various goings on within both the school and community of War, West Virginia, as told via adult and child perspectives. I additionally integrate my own personal narratives in order to share both similarities and differences of my lived experiences to the lived experiences of the participants. For example, during the monthly account of November, I highlighted the difference between children facing the challenge of

parental addiction and a lack of food, shelter, and familial support, versus my experience of having caregivers who were sober, and the fact that we had abundant food at the Thanksgiving table, so much so that we could invite others to share. Through arts-based analysis, I was able to transform general themes using poetic stylings to offer responses to the research questions that were outside of the traditional representation. Although I, too, offer a traditional representation of these responses, the arts-based analysis provided a means through which to creatively express key portions and themes from the data in a way that is accessible, engaging, and relevant to readers.

Data Representation

I utilized arts-based representations in order to create an engaging way for readers to connect with the data that was being presented. For this type of data representation, I created poetry and prose from my interviews and observations in order to “develop a poetic voice [to] prepare scholars to discover and communicate findings in multidimensional, penetrating, and more accessible ways” (Cahnmann, 2003, p. 29). Through these forms of arts-based representation, I intended to display data from the interviews and observations in a way that was both engaging and accessible to all readers both in and outside of the scholarly community.

To ensure that the data were represented in both an engaging and accessible manner, I wrote a descriptive vignette and accompanying narrative to describe each of the study’s direct participants. Following these narratives, I created a wide selection of prose and prose-poems accompanied by evocative photographic imagery to represent a series of month-by-month occurrences of my time spent in McDowell County. I chose to represent the data in this manner to shed light on the unique circumstances faced by homeless students, alongside those individuals serving homeless students both within and outside of the rural community school.

Just as homelessness within rural context varies widely from that of urban and suburban contexts, I wanted to ensure that I was accurately depicting what was both seen and heard within this particular place. To honor the voices and stories shared with me, I often used direct quotes from the participants rather than paraphrasing in the resulting prose and prose-poetry. The vernacular with which I wrote each of the pieces is true to the voices that shared their stories with me. Staying true to this rural vernacular was especially important to me in sharing these stories in an organic and authentic way. Ethically, however, I initially struggled with this form of arts-based representation because I felt that outsiders may feel that I was over-exaggerating the tone, voice, or verbal portrayals of the participants within these depictions. After a brief struggle with how to conserve the authenticity of these voices without seeming overly exaggerated or trite, I ultimately concluded that I would be doing a disservice to the participants unless I depicted their voices as accurately as I could keeping in mind the emotional truths they shared with me. As a result, I focused on their voices, mannerisms, and genuine senses of self within each of the monthly pieces of prose and prose-poetry, as shown in Chapter Four.

Ethics and Reciprocity

Protection of Human Subjects

Within this study, I made a conscious decision not to involve homeless children or youth. Due to the sensitive nature of homelessness, along with the trauma that it can often cause, I felt that it was best to not include the perspectives of children within this study. Because of this, my study was shown through the lenses of adult educators, administrators, and community service providers who directly interacted with and served homeless students within the Southside K-8 Community School. In protection of these participants, a detailed description of the purpose of this study, research questions, anticipated risks, and methods of study throughout this research

were provided to all participants and administrators of the school at both the local and district levels. This information was further detailed within the Institutional Review Board (IRB) pack, which was provided to the school and school district upon approval from the Institutional Review Board of Kansas State University.

Participation in this study was voluntary, and those willing to participate were asked to sign informed consent forms, as shown in Appendix B. Participants had the choice to have identifying information removed from the study; however, pseudonyms were not used in this study, as they were not requested by the participants. All information gathered from participants was stored privately, and only I had access to that information.

Reciprocity and Ethical Considerations

Because of the day-to-day instability and insecurities that occur among students experiencing homelessness, a key element of this study included addressing the ways in which school-based and community-based service providers were partnering with one another in order to best serve the unique needs of homeless students within a geographically isolated, rural community. A key reciprocal way in which this study directly supported the Southside K-8 Community School and surrounding community was to create a platform to show both influence and evaluation of the community school implementation process. Following this study, I am now in the very fortunate position to be able to continue this research with McDowell County Schools as part of my current employment. The findings from this study, alongside the future studies that I will conduct within the community school setting are indeed reciprocal as they enable the school to gain future funding opportunities, and expand their platform and programming to include expanded services that will continue to benefit students of both the present and future.

Ethically, researching a sensitive issue such as homelessness brought about many challenges due to negative stigmas that are often associated with the topic, such as shame, fear, depression, or guilt. Initially, I had some apprehension about how I would ethically breech these types of sensitive subject areas—especially if discussion of these particular subjects could cause any type of trigger or increased trauma to the participant. Because of this, I made sure to be straightforward with the participants about these sensitive topic areas, and ensured that I would hold these conversations only if they were comfortable in doing so. Ultimately, although these were difficult subjects to discuss, it was important to have honest and open conversations, to which each of the participants agreed. In discussing these sensitive issues, confidentiality remained a top priority, and all data presented was anonymized to avoid specifics of individual situations being identifiable. In mitigating any particular challenges that could have emerged within this area, I ensured that all participants fully understood that any information that they shared would be completely confidential and that they could withdraw any statements made, if they felt the need to do so.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Both trustworthiness and rigor are critical components that must be addressed in qualitative research. Looking outside of the traditional means of reliability and validity as found in quantitative inquiry, qualitative inquiry looks to trustworthiness and rigor to ensure that research is academically sound. To corroborate both trustworthiness and rigor within my research, I informed this study with strategies used by traditional qualitative researchers and arts-based qualitative researchers. Discourses in both traditional and arts-based research (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Tracy, 2010) identify a set of key strategies that promote both quality and rigor in qualitative study. In this section, I explain a selected set of strategies that were helpful to

maintaining trustworthiness and rigor of this study: member checks, triangulation, peer debriefing, reflexivity, prolonged duration in the field, incisiveness, concision, and social significance.

1. Member Checks: Member checks are defined as a “quality control process by which a researcher seeks to improve the accuracy, credibility, and validity of what has been recorded during a research interview from participants” (Harper & Cole, 2012, p. 510). The value of member checks in a qualitative study is a co-created narrative where the participant is a co-creator in the creation of the narrative. In this study, I verified with the participants at various points within the study to involve them in the accurate representation and creation of the narrative. I then completed a final member check with each of the participants in December 2016.
2. Triangulation: Triangulation is a method used to establish trustworthiness and rigor by analyzing research questions from various perspectives. It involves the use of “different methods, especially observation, focus groups, and individual interviews in order to triangulate data sources” (Shenton, 2004, p. 66). The value of triangulation in a qualitative study is a means through which to implement multiple sources of data as a source of continued trustworthiness and rigor. Triangulation within this study was completed by the use of interviews, observations, elicitations, and document analysis. By using these variety of methods, triangulation occurs by analyzing the study’s research questions via multiple data sources and perspectives. Thus, I was able to cross-verify my interpretations of the data from this use of multiple data sources including interviews, observations, and elicitations with the participants.

3. Peer Debriefing: Peer debriefing allows for neutral “colleagues to comment on the findings [of the study] as they emerge” (Merriam, 1988, p. 169) in order to detect potential problems or issues. The value of peer debriefing in a qualitative study allows for neutral entities to contribute to potential issues that the researcher may miss. Within my study, I identified three neutral colleagues that served in this peer debriefing capacity. As they held impartial views to my study, their examination of my work and resulting feedback assisted in identifying areas that were too vague, overemphasized, or underemphasized, as well as identifying both strengths and weaknesses.
4. Reflexivity: Reflexivity is a critical reflection that the researcher engages in while assessing events, interactions, roles within the course of the study. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) define a researcher’s reflexivity as a “continuous process of critical scrutiny and interpretation” (p. 275). The value of reflexivity in qualitative research enables the researcher to create an ongoing sense of interpretation of self. Within this study, I engaged in reflexive journaling, as shown in Figure 3.7.
5. Prolonged Duration in the Field: Prolonged duration in the field is identified by the “assumption that the more time is spent in the field, rapport with participants will increase. Researchers know they have spent enough time in the field when information, themes, patterns, trends, and examples are repeated” (Chilisa & Preece, 2005, p. 166). Prolonged duration in the field in qualitative inquiry is valuable as it enables researchers to form deeper connections and find enhanced meanings in the lived experiences of their participants. For the purpose of this study, I spent a four months from September 2016 – December 2016 in McDowell County collecting data

- and then another eight months interacting with participants and peer debriefers to analyze the data. The conversations with peer-debriefers, member-checks, and my reflexive journaling were also considered data in this study.
6. Incisiveness: In examining the trustworthiness and rigor of arts-based inquiry, Barone and Eisner (2012) define incisiveness as research that “gets to the heart of a social issue” (p. 148). The value of incisiveness in arts-based qualitative study enables individuals of varying background, beliefs, and assumptions to connect to the work of the research through observations that were shown within the study. In this study, I utilized both evocative photographic imagery and the creation of original prose and prose-poetry to progress to the heart of the particular issue of rural homelessness and associated daily living conditions. The resulting imagery and arts-based representation create a space for both head and heart to connect with the data.
 7. Concision: Barone and Eisner (2012) also promote the role of concision in examining trustworthiness and rigor of arts-based inquiry. Concision is “the presence of a controlling insight that serves as a guide for the artist or researcher in making judgments about which material to include and which to exclude” (p. 149). The value of concision in arts-based qualitative study is the ability to address a particular social issue both concisely yet effectively. In this study, I was keenly aware of the ways in which I thought each photo and accompanying piece of prose or prose-poetry would be received by readers. I maintained a key focus on the emotions that could be potentially evoked through each piece, along with the ways in which these emotions could yield an enhanced understanding of the topic, and allowed that to guide me in my selection.

8. Social Significance: Within arts-based inquiry, Barone and Eisner (2012) further examine trustworthiness and rigor through social significance. Barone and Eisner (2012) define social significance as a work's "thematic importance, its focus on issues that make a sizable difference in the lives of people within a society (p. 151). The value of social significance in arts-based, qualitative inquiry is a means through which issues of social justice and social inequities can be addressed. Arts-based inquiry provides an opportunity to explore injustices in ways outside the typical norm of traditional inquiry. This particular study met the criteria of social significance as it explored the ways in which educators, administrators, and community stakeholders serve homeless students within an impoverished, geographically isolated, rural community. The social significance of this study lies in its potential to inform those who work with homeless and vulnerable students within rural locations both in and beyond the state of West Virginia.

This study was an arts-based ethnographic case study. Critical to this study was a need for in-depth exploration of rural homelessness and how a community school can support the needs of those who experience rural homelessness. The methodology of this study was designed to be provocative and accessible through creative modes of inquiry and representation. Designed through post-oppositional framework, this study allowed for an expansion into a space of possibilities that served as an intervention, beyond being trapped in oppositional relationship of traditional ways of thinking, knowing, and being. The data collection, analysis, and representation strategies presented were informed by previous work conducted but given the emergent nature of qualitative research, new paths were discovered during this study, as presented in Chapters Four and Five.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I reviewed the research purpose, research questions, and rationale for this study. I provided an overview of my subjectivities involved in conducting this study, along with describing the qualitative methodology of ethnographic case study and theoretical framework of post-oppositional threshold theory that were used throughout. I discussed the study's research design, alongside its site selection, participant selection, and gaining access to these entities. In addition, I also discussed my membership role as the researcher at the Southside K-8 Community School. I then elaborated upon my methods of data collection, data analysis, and data representation. Finally, I provided enhanced insight into the ethics and reciprocity of this study, along with the ways in which I ensured trustworthiness and rigor.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The three participants of this study were selected because they each shared enhanced understanding of the community school implementation process and performed key roles in directing community school programming at Southside K-8. Recall that this rural school has a limited student population, with less than 400 students totaling grades Kindergarten through eighth grade. As such, participant selection for this study was also limited, as there were less than 20 combined total educators, administrators, and community service providers that were directly involved within the community school implementation process. To best demonstrate and explain the ways in which educators, administrators, and community service providers respond to the unique challenges faced by students affected by extreme poverty and homelessness at Southside K-8, I selected three participants, Sarah Muncy (Southside K-8 Community School Coordinator), Florisha (Flo) McGuire (Southside K-8 Community School Principal), and Dr. Ingrida (Inga) Barker (Assistant Superintendent of McDowell County Schools).

These three women provided key perspectives through which to view both the challenges and triumphs of the day-to-day goings on within the community school, as well as cultural insider status which offered much deeper insight into the lived experiences of students affected by extreme poverty and homelessness. It is important to note that each of these women are McDowell County residents—two of whom have resided within the county for the entirety of their lives. Additionally, all three participants have children who are students within McDowell County Schools, including two who attend Southside K-8. This is an important distinction to make because over 60% of McDowell County School staff do not reside within the county (Reconnecting McDowell, 2016) due to lack of adequate and/or available housing options, with most traveling between 1.5 to 3 hours one way to school each day. The fact that each of the

participants resides within the county and have their own children enrolled within the county's school district provides an even greater opportunity for them to present detailed narratives which expand upon the four key themes that have emerged from this study: poverty breeding addiction, the struggles of geographic isolation, lack of familial and community engagement, and limited human capital which will be discussed in greater length via a cross-case comparison at the end of this chapter. Each participant having not merely talked the talk, so to speak, but also having walked the walk as permanent residents and cultural insiders of McDowell County, provide expert insight and unique perspectives for this study. The participants and I became co-researchers throughout this process, as their stories helped to shape my own understanding of the community, school district, and cultural landscape of the area.

As a native West Virginian, my own lived experiences often paralleled those of the participants, alongside the lived experiences of students which were shared with me through the cultural insider lenses of the participants. Exploring the struggles faced by homeless children, as well as the community school's obligation to these children through the lenses of adults who had faced similar life circumstances presented a unique opportunity to connect over shared experiences. Our conversations were open, honest, and vulnerable, and did not shy away from sensitive topics such as place attachment and displacement, trauma, poverty, stressors, abuse, and pain. As such, a line became blurred between I, we, you, and me. There was an entanglement of stories among the participants, students, and myself—of poverty, of violence, of addiction, of abuse, of pain—which ultimately yielded an enhancement of perspectives from both myself and the participants through our shared perceptions and experiences of home, or lack thereof.

I recognized that through personal story telling, both the participants and I could relate to one another in ways that traditional and more rigid forms of inquiry would not allow. To honor

these stories, and our co-creation of shared narratives, the post-oppositional theoretical framework of this study particularly contributed to creating a means through which I, as the researcher, could move freely throughout multiple world views in order to better understand what was happening to each participant within the different spaces (worlds and world views) that they occupied. The resulting vignettes and accompanying narratives are based upon information shared with me during formal and informal interviews, observations, and elicitations with the participants. These individual's stories, depicted alongside corresponding photographic imagery have been co-created from the words of the participants, and provide expansive ways of understanding the experiences of suffering of both self and other. Sharing these stories also provided an opportunity for critical conversations to occur which aided in identifying how to disrupt suffering outside of traditional educational infrastructure, as well as ways that Southside K-8 could better provide relief from such suffering among its students.

To begin, I provide a descriptive vignette and accompanying narrative for each participant in order to share background information about their lives in McDowell County, as well as their roles within the community school and school district. Then, through the creation of prose and prose-poetry, I share poignant personal experiences that I, as the researcher, have shared with each participant to provide an in-depth look as they occupy varying identities and world views moving throughout roles of parent, teacher, administrator, community member, and advocate.

The participants' lives and identities, although important; however, are not the most vital piece of this study. The meat and potatoes—as we say in West Virginia— of this study, rather, lie within the previously untold and all too often unheard stories of the children and youth affected by extreme poverty and homelessness within this community. These stories, as

presented to me based upon the participants' day-to-day interactions with these children and their families, will be shown at the end of this chapter, presented via a month-by-month account of findings, depicting instances within the fall semester of the school year, beginning in August and ending in December. Each monthly account will include three prose-poems, depicting three separate perspectives, adult (direct) participant, child (indirect) participant, and researcher.

Through this month-by-month exploration, I invite readers to explore how rural homeless students participate in day-to-day meaning making of place through sensory categories and experiences. Sensory ethnography provides an opportunity to deeply explore cultural landscape(s) and gain enhanced insight into sensory aesthetics of place, displacement, and placemaking. I utilize this form of qualitative inquiry to create a sensory-fuelled representation of homeless students' lived experiences through the visual use of evocative imagery, movement through unsettled spaces, and the sound of shared voices within co-constructed poetic narratives establishing auditory and visual representations of home.



Descriptive Vignettes of Participants

Sarah Muncy: Community School Coordinator

Sarah Muncy, a Caucasian female in her twenties, and lifelong resident of McDowell County, was the first direct participant selected for this study. As the recently hired Southside K-8 Community School Coordinator, exploring her role, although newly created, was vital to better understanding the community school implementation process. Sarah and her spouse, a local police officer also in his twenties, have one child, a son, who is enrolled in Kindergarten at Southside K-8; he and Flo's daughter share the same classroom and teacher. Sarah's perspective is not only that of a community service provider and community-school liaison, but also that of a parent of a child within the community school setting. Sarah additionally offers a unique perspective as her insights not only arise from an educational perspective, but also, due to her spouse's employment as a law enforcement official, offer an enhanced perspective of the poverty-fuelled addiction and crime within the area. Below, a descriptive vignette describes my initial meeting with Sarah.



Sarah enters the school office, hurriedly tying her shoulder length, brown hair into a ponytail at the nape of her neck. She frantically apologizes for being late as her son had just been sent home from school with a stomach bug. It's only 9:30 AM, and she already looks like she could use a nap, or a vacation, or both. I stand quietly at the side of the secretary's desk.

"That makes 15 so far today," the school secretary sighs from the back corner of the office. "They're droppin' like flies—that bug's really going around!"

"See, that's the problem around here," Sarah begins. "Too many of these dang families sending kids to school when they're sick. Take 'em to the doctor already! Don't you think?!"

“You know that’s never going to happen...” the secretary says, her voice trailing off.

“I know, I know,” Sarah replies. “But when they’re making my kid sick, it becomes my problem!”

The two women laugh, sharing an understanding of the way things always seem to work in this town, in this community, in this school—never seeming to change—no matter how hard they or anyone else tries.

Colorful posters line the school’s walls and doorways with cheerful messages about healthy eating, hand washing, and signing up to see the dentist and doctor during scheduled visits at the school—but the information has fallen on deaf ears. Even colorful, new posters don’t always make a difference.

Figure 4.1 School Posters



Figure 4.1. These are examples of several different types of posters displayed within the school setting promoting healthy habits and lifestyles.

Sarah hurries down the main corridor of the school, taking a left down a side hallway, and entering a small classroom, filled nearly to capacity with books, school supplies, clothing,

shoes, hygiene products, bags of nonperishable food items, and bins of classroom items that have been donated to the school. She motions for me to follow her, as she moves items from a chair.

“My desk is in here somewhere,” she laughs, as she pushes the items to the side.

“Welcome to my office!”

Figure 4.2 Donated Items



Figure 4.2. Donated backpacks and children’s tennis shoes fill two corners of Sarah’s office.

Sarah then notices a sheet of white notebook paper on the white board of the classroom. A few moments of silence pass as she scans the childish scrawls of names and clothing sizes written on a small sheet of notebook paper hanging on the board. She walks slowly to her desk and rewrites each of the names into a large, spiral bound notebook.

“Five new names since this morning,” she begins, her voice getting softer as she finishes. “Just since this morning,” she whispers to no one in particular.

Figure 4.3 The List

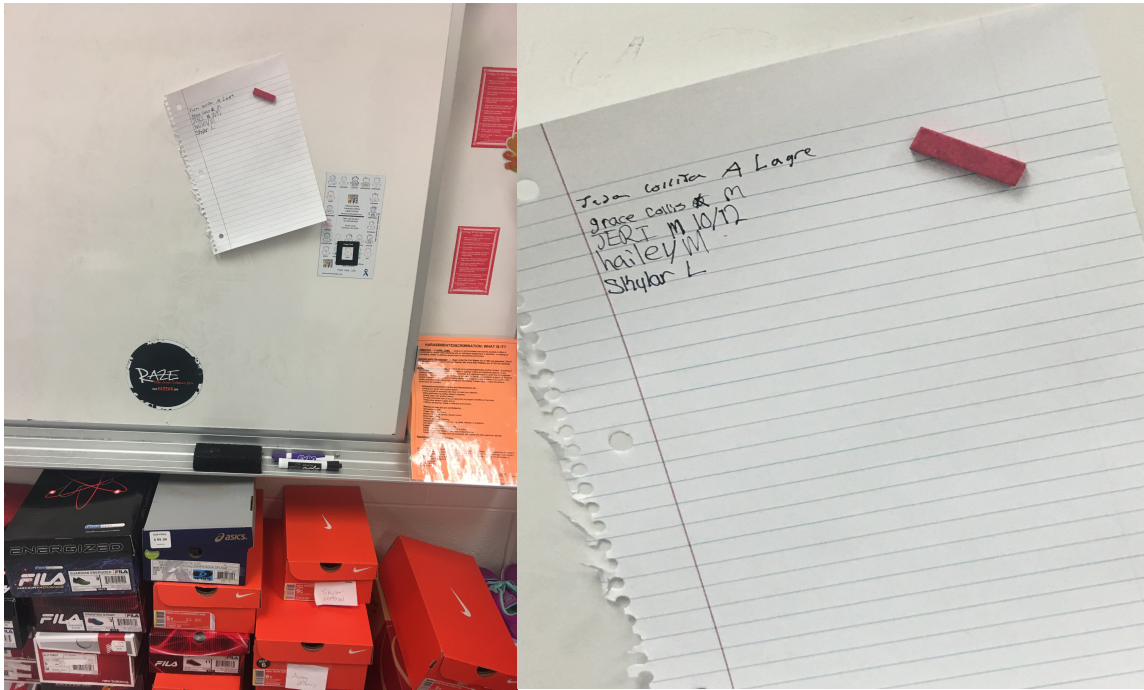


Figure 4.3. A handwritten list hanging on the white board inside of Sarah’s office includes student names and clothing sizes, requesting winter coats.

Sarah continues to stare at the paper. Another few moments of silence pass.

“Looks like I’m gonna’ need to start making some more phone calls. It’s gettin’ colder each day, and these kids need coats. I’ve asked the five churches down the road for too many donations already. Maybe if I call some of them churches over at Tazewell...” her voice trails off once again.

Sarah’s is interrupted by the sound of the loud speaker and an announcement overhead, “Mr. Bills, please come to Ms. Smith’s classroom—Mr. Bills, to Ms. Smith’s classroom. Thank you!”

“Oh no! Not again!” Sarah groans.

Mr. Bills walks by the classroom, janitorial cart in tow, on his way to clean up after another student who has fallen ill with the stomach virus.

“If we could just get this health center at the school, we wouldn’t have this problem,” Sarah says. “I’ve been tryin’ all last year to get this thing off the ground, but I can only get the doctors and dentists here once every few months!”

“Besides that, the closest hospital is two hours away! They ain’t gonna’ take their kids there—can’t even begin to afford the gas, and most of ‘ems too high anyway!”

She scans the piece of white notebook paper again.

“A lot of the kids they’re sufferin’ from like, physical illnesses. A lot of them doesn’t even get to go to the doctor. The parents are either too high or somethin’ to, you know, be concerned about their kid bein’ sick. We need doctors, dentists, nurses, all of ‘em—we need ‘em here all the time. These kids need ‘em. That’s what no one understands.”

Sarah walks to a large blue bin next to her desk, and points to the contents inside.

“See?! See here?! Gives us this toothpaste, and books about brushin’ but no toothbrushes! Most of these kids don’t have no toothbrush at home. Even if they do, no one’s helpin’ ‘em brush their teeth or teachin’ ‘em how to do it!”

Sarah sighs again, clearly frustrated.

“Last month, they brought two dentists to check every kid in the county! *Two* dentists for the *whole* county—can you *reckon*?!” Sarah’s cheeks begin to redden, as she is now becoming visibly angered.

“In two days, them dentists pulled over 700 teeth. 700! Had to come back the next week just to finish ‘em up!”

She pauses a moment to catch her breath. I watch her, intently, sensing her frustration.

“Yeah... most of these kids... you know how it is. They never seen no doctor or dentist. No one to take care of ‘em. That’s why we keep gettin’ so many sick kids here every day. We just gotta’ get that health center at the school, you know? We just got to!”

Figure 4.4 The Dentist



Figure 4.4. A bin containing donated tooth paste and dental books inside of Sarah’s office. A student is given a dental check up at the school.

Florisha (Flo) McGuire: School Principal

After having an initial conversation with Sarah Muncy, Flo McGuire, Southside K-8 School Principal joined for a follow-up conversation, becoming the second direct participant selected for this study. Flo, a Caucasian female in her thirties, and lifelong resident of McDowell County, had initially been hired within the county as an English/Language Arts instructor, but had later advanced to the role of School Principal of Southside K-8. Flo sees the community school model as a means through which to boost student attendance, family engagement, and community pride—mirroring the McDowell County she remembers from her youth. Flo and her spouse, a school principal at a neighboring high school within the county, have one child, a daughter, who is enrolled in Kindergarten at Southside K-8; she and Sarah’s son share the same classroom and teacher. Flo’s perspective is not only that of a former educator and current administrator, but also that of a parent of a child within the community school setting. Although the community school model is only in its beginning stages at Southside K-8, Flo shares many ideas of how the community school can help to revitalize the struggling community. The descriptive vignette, below, describes my first meeting with Flo.



Flo’s voice booms down the hallway, “I’m coming, Meaghan!” More often than not, you hear Flo before you see her. Flo is a constantly moving presence within the school—visiting classrooms, heading up conferences with parents and family members, tying shoe laces, picking up lost papers and delivering them to their rightful owners. As she walks down the busy corridor of the school, students rush from all directions to give her hugs. Soon, she is enveloped in a group hug from 20 first graders. Flo is as busy as she is loud, and doesn’t simply lead from behind a desk or a closed principal’s office door. Flo’s leadership style is both unique and

admirable, as it enables her to take on the role of a much needed stable adult in the lives of each of her students.

“You get car sick, Meaghan?” Flo asks me. “These roads, well, they can get pretty windy. Where we’re goin’ today, most people don’t even go. Didn’t even take the guys from *The New York Times* or *Al Jazeera* there! But since you’re one of us, you get the backstage tour!”

In recent years, journalists from major news outlets and publications have visited McDowell County to chronicle the area’s extreme levels of poverty and opioid crisis—the worst in the nation. As a school principal and lifelong resident of the area, Flo is often interviewed for these pieces.

“Well, even if ‘ya don’t get sick, we’ll be ready,” Flo laughs, throwing a bottle of Tums into her purse. I nod politely, making a mental note to pack my own Tums next time.

“Gotta’ stop by my house first though, that okay? Gotta’ put supper on.”

Flo’s home, a single-wide trailer, is located across the street from the school. Rows of similar mobile homes line the gravel filled path. There is barely any yard space or place for children to play outside. A chain link fence lines the make shift yard in front of their family home, and Flo reaches over to the other side to unlock and pull the door of the fence open.

“Gotta’ watch out for breaking and entering,” she laughs. “Lotta’ bad people up in these parts!”

I smile at Flo’s seemingly nonchalant way of discussing the crime in the area. Still laughing, Flo steps up onto a handmade set of wooden stairs with a rail falling off the side. The trailer home stands on cement blocks, so the stairs provide a more manageable entrance into the front door.

“Watch out for the rail—it’s on the honey-do list!”

Stepping inside the trailer, Flo picks up two cans of creamed soup from the counter and begins to open them with a hand crank can opener. A crock pot sits on the counter top, and she plugs it into a small outlet on the wall. The contents of the cans splash in the crock pot as Flo grabs a large rump roast from the refrigerator.

“Eating high on the hog tonight!” She exclaims. “Got this on sale from the Wal-Mart when we were in Bluefield last week! We don’t got nothing like this around here!”

Flo turns the crock pot on high and sets the timer.

“Okay, now that supper’s on—let’s go!”

Flo walks to her car, an older four door sedan, and turns on the ignition. After a short sputter, the car starts, and she begins to drive down a winding gravel road.

“You know, right now there’s a lot of drug issues here. I can show you which of these houses are drug houses. Two of ‘em live right by me—see there?”

Flo points to two neighboring homes located above the same gravel road as her home. These homes are former coal camp homes that are both dilapidated and unkempt.

Figure 4.5 Drug House



Figure 4.5. Homes in McDowell County that are similar in style to the described drug houses near Flo’s home. To protect the privacy of the individuals living in these homes, different house photos have been used.

“I look for things to get even worse because there have been a lot of coal mines, things like that that's layin' off. When people got no money, no hope, they get into the drugs. You look at things even a month ago, you know, our Wal-Mart was functioning, we had more of our mines and things open, but our drug problem and the level of still, I guess, apathy, was still pretty bad,” she pauses, sighing loudly. I nod in agreement, silently noting a deep sadness in her voice.

“But now, with more cuts, you know, I look for many of our coal miners to need to move out of the area, which is just gonna’ increase again the poverty rate and for those that stay here, the drug rate, too. You've got less access coming into the community, so you're gonna’ have cuts

probably within your other systems, and that just creates more poverty and more addiction. It's a vicious cycle, you know?"

The gravel road suddenly turns to dirt as Flo makes a right turn down a narrow path.

"Welcome to holler number three," she says. "Believe it or not, a lot of our kids live down here—and honestly, it's one of the worst."

Figure 4.6 Holler Number Three



Figure 4.6. Homes in McDowell County that are similar in style to the described homes located in Holler Number Three. To protect the privacy of the students living in these homes, different house photos and a different holler number have been used.

Holler Number Three is named for the group of miners who once lived in these homes. Miner Group One lived down Holler Number One, Miner Group Two lived down Holler Number Two, Miner Group Three lived down Holler Number Three. The pattern continued down several hollows (pronounced hollers)—a word used to describe the smaller valleys located between the mountains.

"A few years ago, one of our students living down her got real sick. Mom called the ambulance which was coming from 40 minutes away—told her she lived down Holler Number Three." Flo pauses, recalling the event.

“Only problem was, they couldn’t seem to find Holler Number Three. Apparently it’s not a recognized address. So, the ambulance didn’t get there in time, and we lost her. Gone. Just gone. She was only in second grade.” Flo wipes a tear from her eye.

“Had her funeral down here at the tabernacle in Holler Three. We all know where it is—it’s a dirty shame that ambulance didn’t.”

Figure 4.7 Holler Number Three Tabernacle



Figure 4.7. A tabernacle church located in McDowell County that is similar in style to the described tabernacle located in Holler Number Three. To protect the privacy of the deceased student and her family, a different church photo and holler number have been used.

Dr. Ingrida (Inga) Barker: Assistant Superintendent

Dr. Inga Barker, the Assistant Superintendent of McDowell County Schools, was the final direct participant selected for this study following initial conversations with both Sarah and Flo. Inga, an Eastern European immigrant in her forties, and long-term resident of McDowell County, adds a unique perspective to this study as someone who, due to her immigrant status, was once a cultural outsider, but who has become a cultural insider after several decades spent living in McDowell County. At the time of this study, Inga was completing her own doctoral defense, which provided an enhanced perspective in terms of connecting with the research topic and modes of inquiry. As a fellow researcher, she understood the process of data collection and analysis, and was eager to provide any information that would be helpful to the study. Inga was a former secondary educator in McDowell County School, but has served at the county level as the Assistant Superintendent and Director of Secondary Schools for the past decade. Additionally, she has a secondary school aged child who, although not enrolled at Southside K-8, is a student within the district. This offers another unique perspective, not only that of a former educator and current administrator, but also that of a parent of a child within McDowell County Schools. In her current role as a district administrator, Inga hopes to see continued successes at Southside K-8, in hopes of implementing the community school model to meet the needs of students of remaining struggling schools across the county. The descriptive vignette, below describes my first meeting with Inga.



The phone at the front of the Board of Education Office rings once, twice, three times. The office secretary picks up on the third greeting, offering a hearty hello to the voice on the other side. The secretary's introductory conversation offers an opportunity for Inga to take in a deep breath, her voice already hoarse from the number of phone calls she has taken on today.

“Bet it’s for me,” she laughs, waiting for the secretary to transfer the call to the secondary office phone. I smile at Inga, and glance at my watch, wondering how long this phone conversation will be and what it will entail.

Sure enough, the phone in Inga’s office, which had been placed on silent, begins to hum, a red light buzzing on its side signaling that the call is for her.

“Told ya’,” she grins. I nod and grin back at her.

The county’s Board of Education Office is situated at the top of a large hill in the county seat of Welch. A narrow gravel road leads to the building, which is surrounded by mountains on either side. From the outside, the building looks like something out of a film from the 1960s or 1970s, the words, ‘Board of Education’ painted in block lettering on the brick siding. The black and white paint is now peeling and faded, with no other signage to replace it. Often, visitors will get lost coming to the building, or think that there must be a renovated version at another location.

There’s not.

Figure 4.8 Board of Education



Figure 4.8. A photo of the outside of The McDowell County Board of Education building, located in the county seat of Welch, West Virginia.

Inga's voice, sharp and firm toned with a hint of an Eastern European accent is a stark contrast to the slow, deliberate Southern-accented voice on the other end of the phone line.

"I understand, sir, that you are unable to get your contractors' trucks here, but we are in great need of your services. The students are without a playground, and we're already four months into the school year."

Inga pauses and wipes her bob length dark hair away from her face, tilting her head backwards. She is becoming visibly agitated by the conversation. I give her a sympathetic look.

"Sir, I understand..."

Inga pauses to listen to the voice on the other end of the phone.

"Yes, sir, but the foundation was set this summer, and the kids have been talking about this playground for months now..."

Inga can't help but roll her eyes as the voice on the other end of the phone continues to drawl on. She looks at me and I shrug my shoulders, feeling her frustration.

"Yes, sir... Yes..."

The voice on the other end of the phone suddenly becomes louder, as does Inga's response.

"Sir, the school district provided you with full funding for this project, along with a signed contract several months ago. This kind of work is simply not acceptable, and further, not what we're typically used to..." her voice trails off as she shrugs her slim shoulders.

Figure 4.9 The Playground



Figure 4.9. Photos taken outside of the Southside K-8 Community School during recess. Unused construction equipment and a portable toilet remain at the site of what was once the construction area of the school's playground.

It is well known, however, that this type of lackluster work is typical in McDowell County. Often, contractors, laborers, and paid workers will begin large construction projects or other labor intensive jobs within the county, and never finish. For example, the site of a Teacher's Village, proposed by Reconnecting McDowell, a nonprofit of public-private partnerships tasked to help revitalize the community through education and Warrior Creek Development, a social enterprise/ community development organization, has been dormant since 2012. The Reconnecting McDowell Teacher's Village was supposed to be a residential community for highly qualified teachers to reside. Apartments were set to be built which would include modern amenities such as high speed Internet and a coffee shop—amenities not found anywhere else in the county—in hopes of attracting educators to live and remain in the area.

The construction site remains untouched.

Figure 4.10 Coming Soon: Teachers Village



Figure 4.10. Photos taken outside of the proposed site of the McDowell County Teacher’s Village, which was initiated in 2012 and said to be coming soon. At the end date of this study, the construction site remained untouched.

The phone conversation seems to end rather abruptly, and Inga hangs up the phone. Once again wiping her bob length dark hair away from her face, and tilting her head backwards, she leans back in her chair, clearly both exhausted and exasperated by the conversation.

“Limited human capital,” she sighs. “Make sure you mention limited human capital.”



I, We, You, and Me: An Entanglement of Lived Experience

I created the following prose-poems as a means through which to depict poignant personal experiences that each participant has shared, many of which parallel similar lived experiences of my own. Recall that throughout this study, a line became blurred between I, we, you, and me, as the participants and I shared similarities in our lived experiences, personal backgrounds, and emotions regarding life in Appalachia. The following prose-poems and accompanying photographic images act as a sensory and visual representation of these lived experiences. These poems are told in the first person in order to best represent a shared 'I' within these occurrences.



‘Cuz I’m Gonna’ Shoot You Dead... That’s Why

My baby came home from school
today,

blue eyes opened wide
and tears streamin’ down

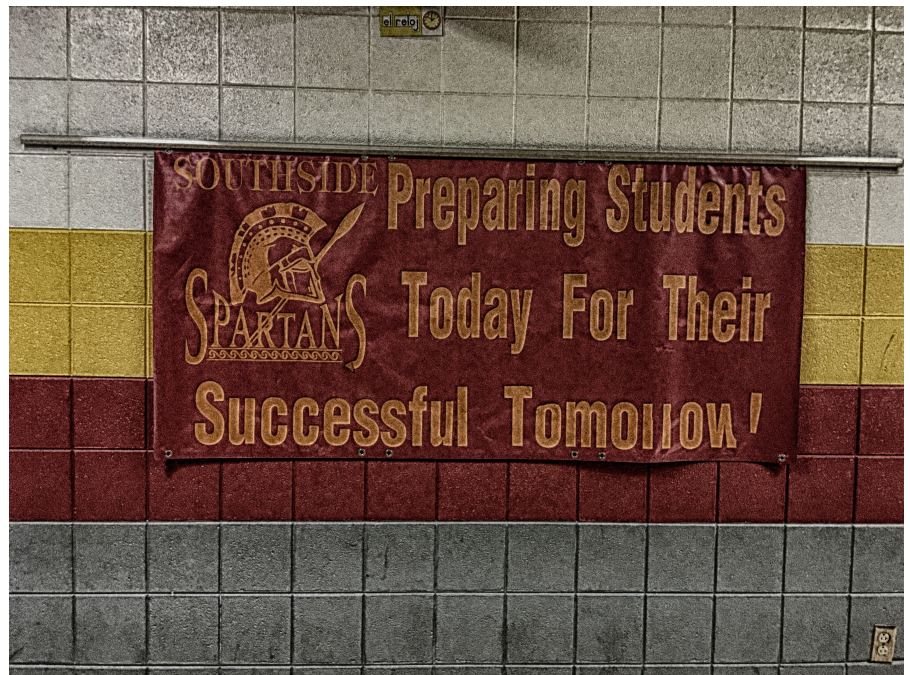
his tiny, dirt streaked face.

“I got pushed down, Momma,” he
said.

“That’s why there’s dirt on my
face.”

I didn’t think anythin’ of the dirt at
first,

‘cuz five year old boys tend to spend more



time in the dirt than on top of it,

and it wouldn't be the first

time

that my boy had come

home with

his face lookin' like that.

I'm not the kind of

momma that

gets worked up about that

kind of thing.

Those tears, though—

he'd never come home

from

school showin' tears before.

"Momma, he said he was gonna' shoot me!"

"Said he was gonna' shoot me dead... that's why!"

"'Cuz my daddy put his daddy in jail, locked him right up.

Said he knew right where that gun was and I'd be gone, too,

just like his daddy."

"I know I need to be brave and go after all them bad guys,



but I can't. I just can't. I'm too scared, Momma."

"Oh, Momma,
please! I can't go
back to school."

"I don't want to
die."

Daddy had
locked the other
boy's daddy up
alright.

That boy's daddy
had tried to shoot



his momma with that same gun.

My baby's daddy was the one who responded to his momma's call.

Kept that momma and boy safe from harm's way

but all that boy knows is that my baby's daddy

took his daddy away.



You Don't Know What You Don't Know

Packed the one bag I had into Dad's old beat up truck and he took a long swig of Bud as the engine sputtered—almost as if it, too, was tellin' me to just stay at home.

Mom's eyes welled with tears, and one managed to slip down her cheek.

She wasn't much for words, but that tear said it all.

Dad and I left the dirt

roads of home, and the old truck headed up



paved roads with colored billboards, and truck stops, and the yellow arch of a McDonalds brightening the starless night sky. A sight I'd only seen once before.

Stopped and split a box of golden, crispy French fries—

super sized, since it was a special day.

White specks of salt covered our fingers and tongues, and Dad scolded me to be careful not to spill any ketchup in the truck—a most prized possession.

I was seventeen and off to college and knew better not to spill

what was inside that little red packet, but

Dad never seemed to think of me as

much other than the same little girl he

always scolded so many years ago.

Shoved a handful of the little red packets

in my pocket for later—never know

when the next meal will come.

The morning hours of sunlight soon

called us forward,

and five hours later, the paved roads lead

us to a large, brick building.

Biggest building Dad had ever seen, he
said.

WELCOME FRESHMEN painted in big,
block letters

on a poster hanging at the front of the
dorm.



Dad took another swig of Bud and asked, “You livin’ here? In this fancy place?”

I thought so, but I checked the map, neatly folded in my jean pocket, one more time just to make sure.

I took my bag from the bed of Dad’s truck, and walked up ten stairs to the entrance of the dorm. Dad followed close behind.

“Well, this is it,” I began. “I...”

“See ya’ at Christmas,” Dad said.

He climbed back into his old truck, tipped back the Bud one last time, and was gone.



I walked down a long hallway to room 135.

A tall, lanky, freckled face girl met me at the door.

“I’m your roommate,” she said, her lean arms wrapping me in a hug. “All us on scholarships in this building!”

“Want to go grab some breakfast at the caf before orientation?”

“No thanks,” I stammered. “Need to unpack first.”

I placed my bag onto the floor.

“I, uh, I got more things outside.”

“Need any help?” she asked.

“No, no—no thanks.”



My stomach growled as I refolded the clothes from my bag into the chest of drawers by the bed. Ran my fingers over the ketchup packets in my pocket. Dad hadn’t given me any money for food.

Two weeks went by before I found out that I could eat whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted from the college cafeteria.

It might be hard to believe, but you simply don’t know what you don’t know.

I made sure I never went hungry again.



They Can't Go, Neither Can I

A lot of people ask why I stay.

How could I stay in a place

where

there's more churches than

stop lights,

surrounded by winding dirt

roads and mountains,

with no grocery store, no

restaurants, no shops,

barely anything to make this

place feel like home.

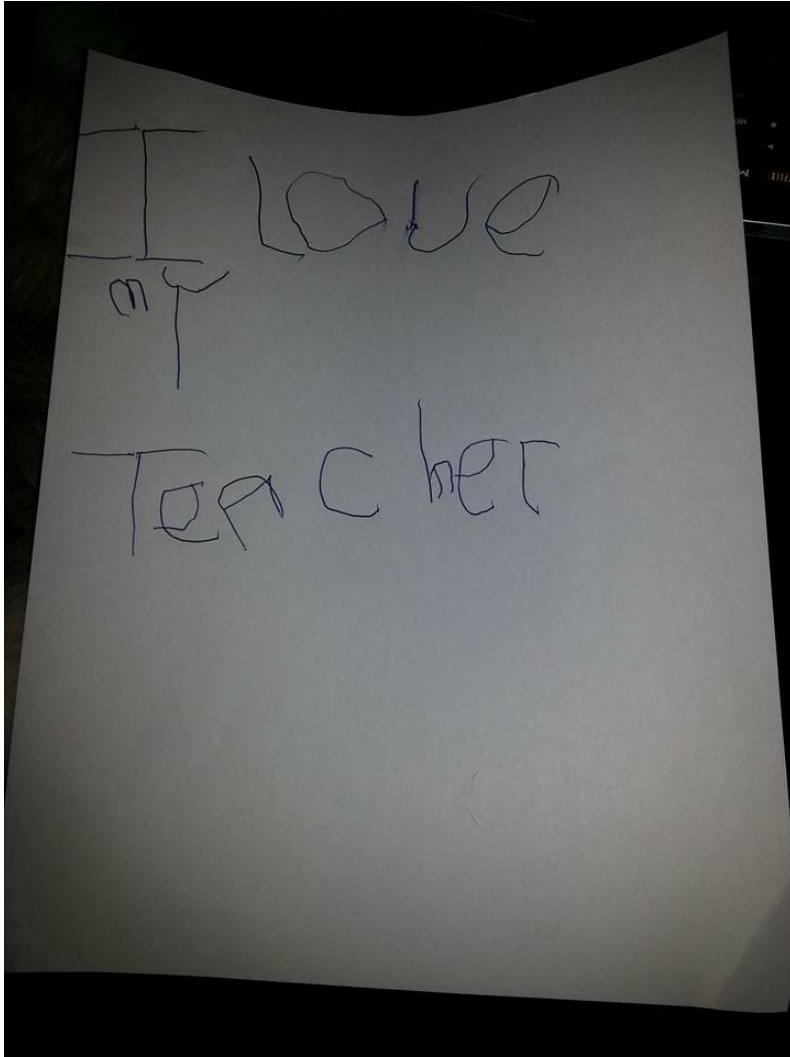


Don't you miss Target? What about Starbucks?

How do you *survive*?

It's funny, when you only have a little,
you never expect a lot.

And you can't miss something
you've never had.



These kids, you see, these things, these places

that we think are so essential, so convenient,

those conveniences have never been there for them.

They don't miss them, you see, because these things are simply things they've never had.

I think of them, the kids, anytime I begin

to miss some modern convenience that really isn't much to miss at all.

Can I *survive* without Target? Can I *survive* without Starbucks?

Yes, I can.

Can these kids *survive* without someone like me?

Sure, I've thought about leaving.

Moving far away to a city somewhere.

Far away from these winding dirt roads and mountains, because there is no grocery store, no restaurants, no shops, barely anything to make this place feel like home.

But the one thing that makes this place home

is the very thing that makes me stay.

They can't go.

Neither can I.



(Re)Imagining Home in the Community School: A Month-by-Month Exploration

I created the following prose-poems and accompanying photographs to represent a month-by-month exploration of the lived experiences of children and youth affected by extreme poverty and homelessness within McDowell County, West Virginia. Recall that each occurrence has been presented to me as witnessed and experienced accounts based on the participants' day-to-day interactions with these children and their families occurring within the fall semester of the school year, beginning in August and ending in December. Each monthly account includes three prose-poems, depicting three separate perspectives, adult (direct) participant, child (indirect) participant, and researcher.

Within these pieces, I extend an invitation to explore how rural homeless students participate in day-to-day meaning making of place through sensory categories and experiences, and how the community school acts as a catalyst to an otherwise bleak situation of homelessness. Each of these ethnographic narratives are weaved in with my personal narratives in order to demonstrate the ways in which subjectivities informed and entangled the perspectives and analysis made in this study. The order of the adult and child perspectives will alternate in each monthly section. The third and final prose-poems within each monthly section are from my perspective as both a cultural insider and researcher, and are also written in first person.



August

Back to School

Mom, we're supposed to get everything on this list, see?!

Mrs. Elmore gave it

to us so we can all

pitch in and share!

Our classroom is a

sharing room—isn't

that cool?!

Mom?

Mom!

Were you even

listening to me?

Here, Mom, look at

this list—there's

twenty things on

here, see?

Spiral notebooks,

Kleenex, Lysol

wipes, hand

sanitizer, crayons, pencils, colored pencils...



Mom, seriously?

Can you pay attention
for one second?

This is *really* important.

Everyone is going to
make fun of me if I
don't bring this stuff to
Mrs. Elmore tomorrow.
Please, Mom—please?



This is fifth grade, Mom.

Things are different in fifth grade.

We have to do this.

Come on, Mom.

It's only an hour to the store.

We can go to the Wal-Mart in Bluefield.

They always have the best stuff, Mom.

Please, Mom?



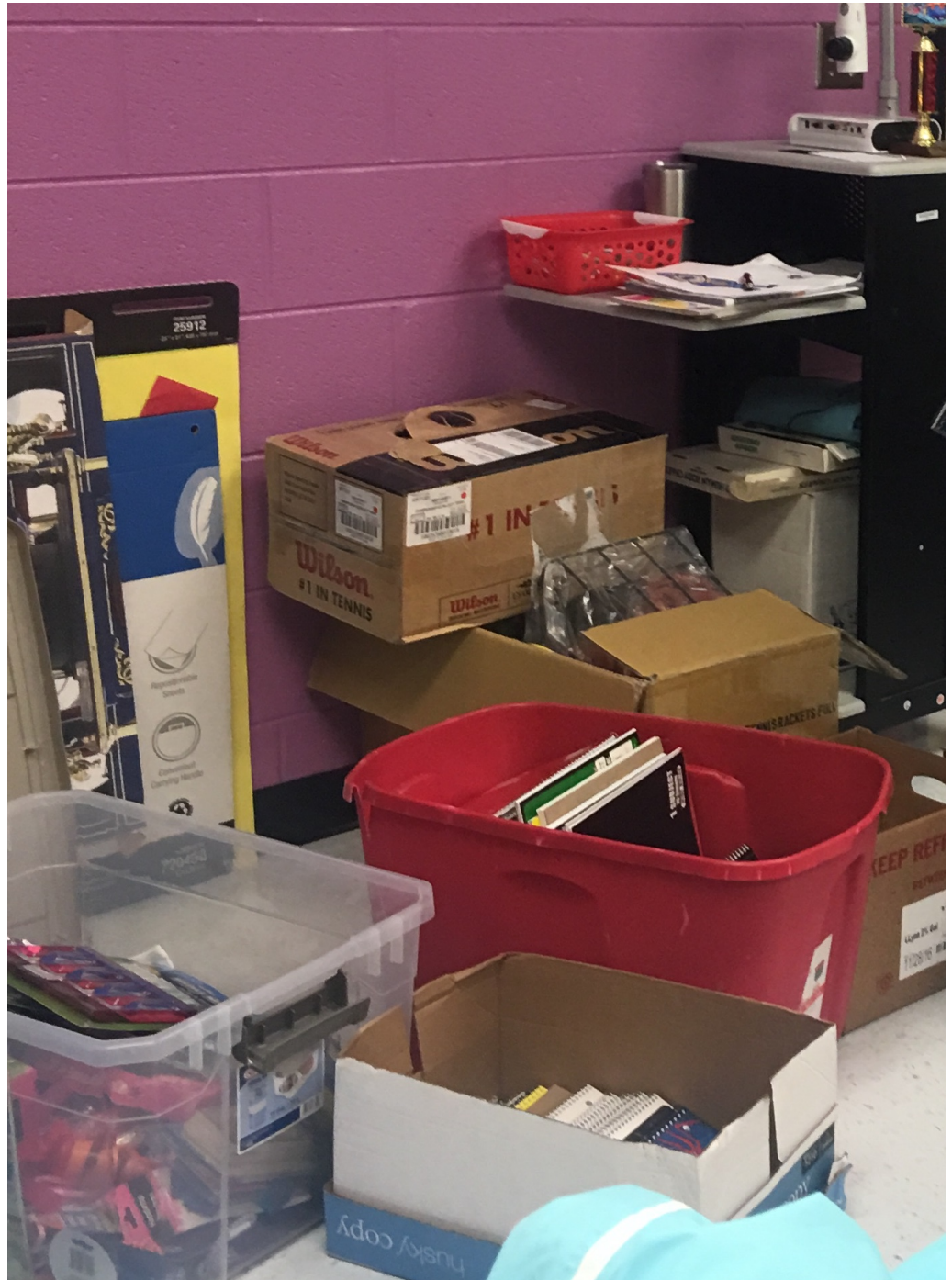
I can get those sparkly
pencils this year,
and the erasers that make
your notebook paper
smell like oranges and
strawberries.

All the cool kids have
those, Mom.

If there's anything left
over, can I please get
those two pocket folders
with the neon
animal prints, and the
glitter, and the...

Mom!

Seriously, Mom?





Mom, what's *he* doing here?!

You're leaving with *him* right now?

But I *need* to go to town to go to the store!

I already told you, Mom, this is important!

Don't you understand?

We're all supposed to pitch in and share.

I have to do this, Mom.

It's fifth grade and I told you,

things are different now.

Please, Mom?

Please, Mom!

Please.

Big Creek Gym

The latch on the door was tightly bolted—to keep any of the locals from breaking in. Flo unlocked the bolt and quickly ran to the right wing of the building to turn off the security system—a precaution due to ‘the bad ones’ who live nearby. At least seven drug houses across from the school—two next door to her own. “They’re the families of some of our kids,” she tells me.



The building smelled of must, and frozen pipes had recently caused nearly irreparable water damage—cracking the once lacquered gymnasium floor. A past dynasty of state championships hung—now only limp and dusty banners on the wall—reminders of a time that once was, a time of prosperity and success.

Inscribed on one banner were the years 1976, 1977, 1978, along with the name Wesley Payne. Payne was named the outstanding wrestler, winning the state wrestling championships for Big Creek High School

at only 155 pounds, and becoming a hero to the school and community, leading the team to victory during his years of high school. A true hometown hero.

The hometown hero is now in prison. Murder. Second degree. The banners hang limp and dusty on the gymnasium wall, only the memories remain.



Meaghan's First Day of School

Granny taught me how to tie
up my shoes just last week.

“Big girls like
you can’t be goin’
to school
not knowin’ how
to tie your shoes,”
Granny told me.
“See, you take
one string and
you loop it like a
bunny ear.”



“Take the other
string and make bunny’s other ear, you see?”

“Pull bunny’s ears together to make a bow! There! You got it! Just like the bunny on your shirt!”

“That was easy, Gravel Gertie, wasn’t it? See, that wasn’t so bad after all.”

I was so excited to show Mom and Dad what I’d learned
that day when they got home from work.

Show them what a big girl I was and how I was ready
to go to school just like all the other big girls.

I had met my Kindergarten teacher at orientation last week up the hill at the big red brick school.

Her name was Mrs. Keyser, and I'd been practicing just how I would say her name. I'd say it over and over until I got it just right. I wanted Mrs. Keyser to see what a good, big girl I was. I lined up my teddy bears one by one in a circle, cross legged on the floor, just like we had done last week at orientation.

"You be my students, and I'll be Mrs. Keyser."

Say, "Good morning, Mrs. Kii-zer."

"It's easy to say, you can do it."

"Kii-zer!"

Teddy bears weren't always the fastest learners.



Lucky for them, they had a teacher like me.

I couldn't wait to be in Mrs. Keyser's class. She was so nice, and smelled like Ivory soap, and she had long brown hair, just like me. Maybe we could wear the same colored bows in our hair on the same day. Maybe I would ask her. I had a feeling that we were going to be best friends.

I wanted so badly to please Mrs. Keyser. I wanted to show her that I was the best student in her entire class, so I practiced my reading on Dad's work computer every night before bed.

The computer was just supposed to be for Dad's work, but he'd let me sit in our living room in my pajamas and read from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* CD Rom.

"Not every kid has this, Meaghan," Dad would say.

"Never forget how lucky you are, okay?"

Soon it was the night before the first day of school, but Mom and Dad were being more quiet



than usual. I wasn't sure why, but they'd been speaking in whispers all night, and I knew that whispers meant something was probably wrong.

"Meaghan, we picked a different school for you to go to tomorrow. It's a better school, sweetie, and there will be better books, and better computers, and better..."

"But what about Mrs. Keyser? Will she be there too?" My heart already knew the answer.

I didn't want to go to a new school. I didn't care if it was better. I just wanted to stay with Mrs. Keyser. But sometimes, little girls don't have a choice—no matter what a big girl they may be.

September

Supper in a Sack

Waiting bags of food line the table
as parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles

will soon
arrive.
“Don’t
know why
they
expect
these hand
outs,” Deb
scoffs.
“Ain’t no



one ever done nothin’ like this for me or none of my kin.”

Supper in a Sack, they call it. Some big time pastor and his big ol’ church from
some big’ ol town in Virginia started it last year
and folks needed the food so much
that they just kept comin’ back for more.
Now Supper in a Sack happens once a month,
and folks from all over these hollers come to



fill their bag and bellies

even though they're supposed to be

takin' that food home to the kids.

"I bet they just eat it all—don't share it with them poor kids or nothin.'"

Deb rolls her eyes as she takes the food from the bags.

"Selfish, selfish,

that's what *them kinds* of people are."

"Ain't you ever been hungry before, Deb?"

"What about when you was little and your Daddy got laid off from the mine?"

"Wasn't you hungry then, Deb?"

Deb shrugs, beginning to organize the food into

piles on the table.

"Don't none of that matter now—it was a long time ago, anyway. I'm a grown woman and I work for me and mine, ya hear? Don't expect none of these hand outs, and they shouldn't either."

"Shouldn't these folks know how to cook by now, too?"

"Who's cookin' at home for them poor kids?"

"Supper in a Sack teaches 'em how to cook, Deb. So that they can go home and cook for the kids. That's what we're all doin' this for. Come on, Deb. Give it a break."

"Ain't none of my kin ever needed no cookin' lessons."

“Ain’t none of my kin ever needed no supper in a sack.”

“Don’t expect none of these hand outs. Not us. Me and my kin—now, we’s a workin’ kind. Not like *them folks*.”

“We ain’t nothin’ like *them*.”



Priceless

The window to the left side of the computer table's busted in again. Feel the draft from the fall air whippin' in. Gets a lil' chilly, but none of us mind. It's our favorite place to go after school.

The pages of the books are yellow and torn, and dust fills the book shelves and the air smells just like Pap's tobacco smoke, sweat from gym class, and today's leftovers from school lunch.

As you grow, your gut tells you never to eat the whole thing

because
everyone
knows that
empty bellies
grumble the
most after
the last
school bell
has rung.

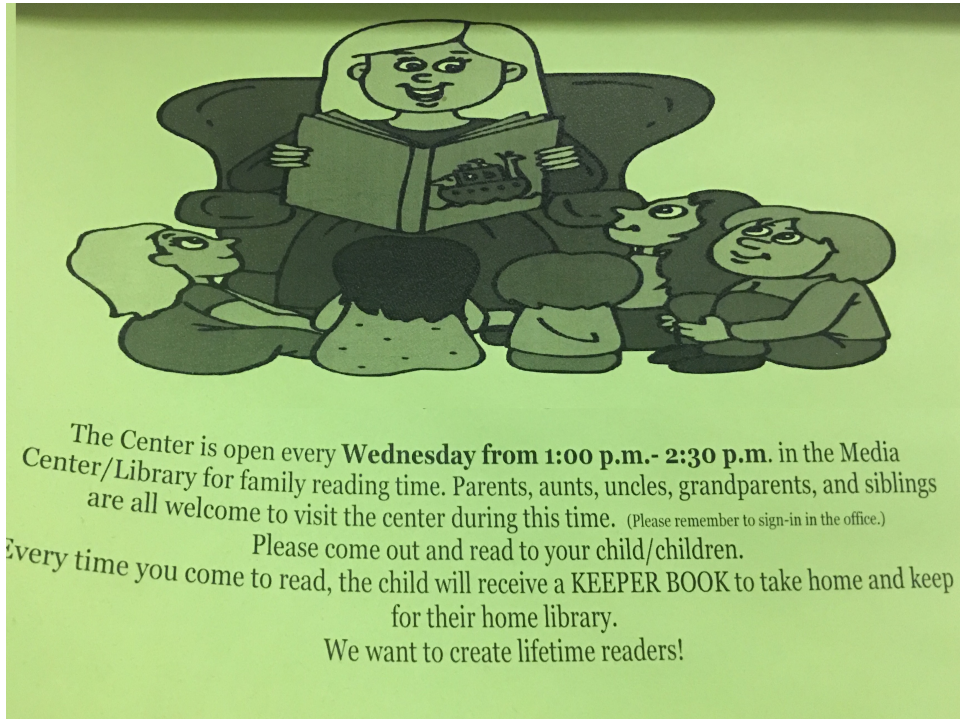
Us kids line
up silently—
little ones
first—to use

the computers that have
been tossed away and forgotten by others who don't know
what it's like to find treasure from what's been thrown aside.



Tossed away, thrown aside—we feel that way too.

In the library, though, we find our own treasures. The books and computers provide escape from these hills, moving us out of the hollers, escaping the stigma, away from the shouting, away from the winding roads that never lead anywhere but here.



“This is the last week our library will be open, kids,” Ms. Tammy the librarian says to no one in particular. I know that voice of Ms. Tammy is the same one that shakes like the ripples of the pond when you’re trying not to let your own water run down your cheeks.

“I want you each to pick a book from the shelves and take it home with you, okay?”

I hug Ms. Tammy and whisper, “why?”

“Money,” she says, her voice far away.

“How much?” I ask. “My mama’s been saving for a new car, but she knows how much I love this place, so maybe...”

“Three thousand,” she murmurs, her voice shaking like the ripples of the pond again.

Three thousand... three thousand. That’s more money than I’d ever heard tell of.

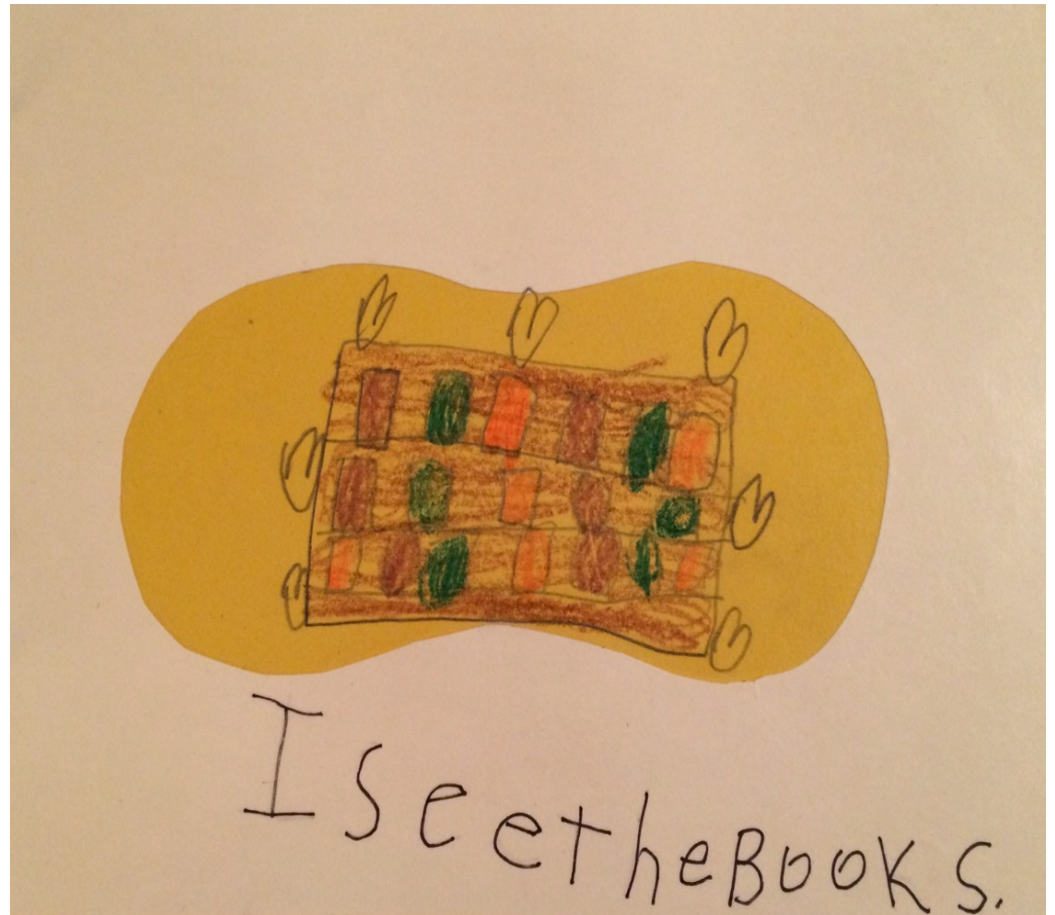
I thought treasures were priceless, but this one comes with a cost.

I See the Books

Books have always been magic.

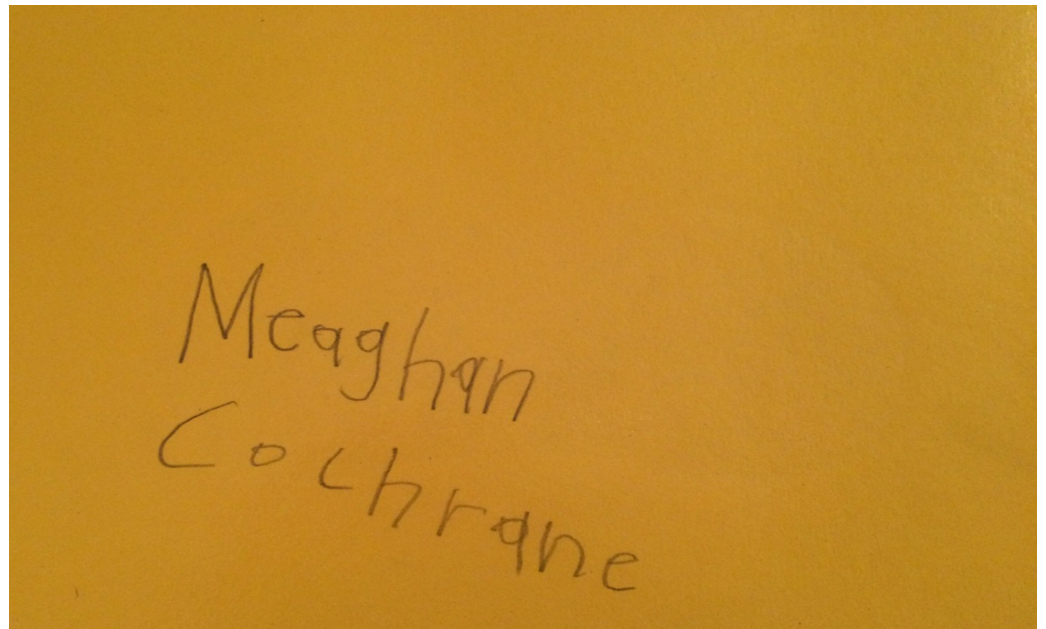
Magic that could take me to places far away from the mountains, far away from dirt roads, far away from the mud filled creek.

Books showed me places that I vowed to visit one day. That I vowed to write about so that my Grandma and Granny



who lived in a small white house by the mud filled creek, could know what it was like to go somewhere only magic could take us. I promised to write them a story someday about the places I'd gone and the things that I'd seen. Promised to write a story, just for them, filled with magic only we would know. Promised though, that I'd never forget our mountains, or our dirt roads, or our mud filled creek. Promised I'd always come home, no matter how far away books—or magic—allowed me to go. The magic did take me away, after reading all those books. But by then, Grandma and Granny had been taken away, too.

I was one of the lucky
ones, I know, because
books, they saved me.
Saved me from
addiction, saved me from
abuse, saved me from
trauma, saved me from
pain.



Books have this magic
way of transporting you to somewhere new, somewhere different, somewhere far away from the
places where you don't want to be.
Books can take you anywhere,
anywhere but *here*,
and that's just where I went.
As far away from *here* as I could be.
Yes, I was one of the lucky ones.
Books,
magic books,
took me away.

October

Trunk-or-Treat

Halloween this year's gonna' be different.

We don't want none of our kids out there

trick-or-treatin' down them bad hollers.

Gotta' protect these

young'ins, ya' hear?

Saw on the news that First

Baptist in Tazewell's

doin'

this thing, this thing they

called Trunk or Treat.

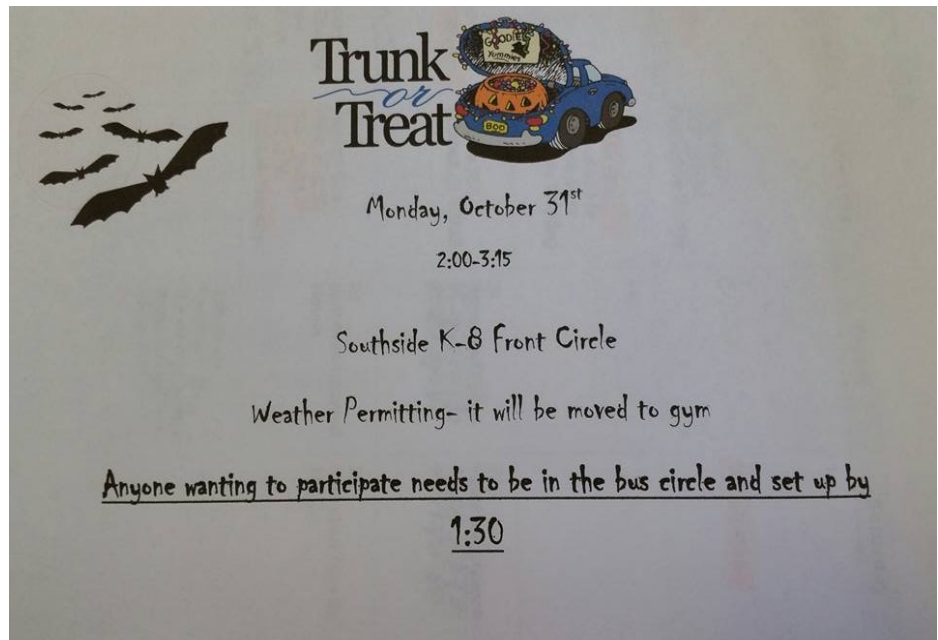
Line up a bunch of cars in

the lot, fill them trunks

with candy and let

all of them kids

get their fill.



That away they ain't havin' to walk down no bad hollers anymore,
you see?

We just give 'em the candy right here in the lot at the school.

We can keep an eye on 'em.

You see?

Keepin' 'em away from them dark hollers, away from
them drug houses—who knows the difference?

And besides, they'll get more candy here
than they'd ever get from knockin' on doors.

They can dress up in their costumes, and grab
a plastic bag, and go around and around the lot
until they've had their fill.



This'll be the best Halloween—one for the books!

They'll be talkin' bout it for weeks!

The kids line up one by one to
parade around to each trunk.
Plastic bags in tow, waiting to get their fill.
“What are we supposed to say?”
“Do we still say, ‘Trick or Treat’?”
“This is weird, y’all.”
“Can we go back to doin’ it the old way next year?”
“Like it better the old way. The old way’s always best.”



The Scariest Costume

Guess what, Mamaw?!

James got the scariest costume!

He's dressin' like a skeleton man
from the black lagoon!

Mamaw, James said his cousin Tracy
got his costume from a store called
Target down in Princeton.

Said it's got a big red bullseye, and a
coffee shop inside!

Tracey got him a cake pop, too!

Mamaw, can we go down to Princeton
and see if they got one of them
costumes left for me?

Mamaw, it's only two hours away.

If we have any extra, can we get us a
cake pop, too? I'll share it with you,

Mamaw, we just need one and we can
try it together! I've never had a cake
pop before, Mamaw—have you?

Punkin', you know your Papaw's gon'
away drivin' the rig



and we can't go nowhere like Princeton without him.

Why don't we just dress you up

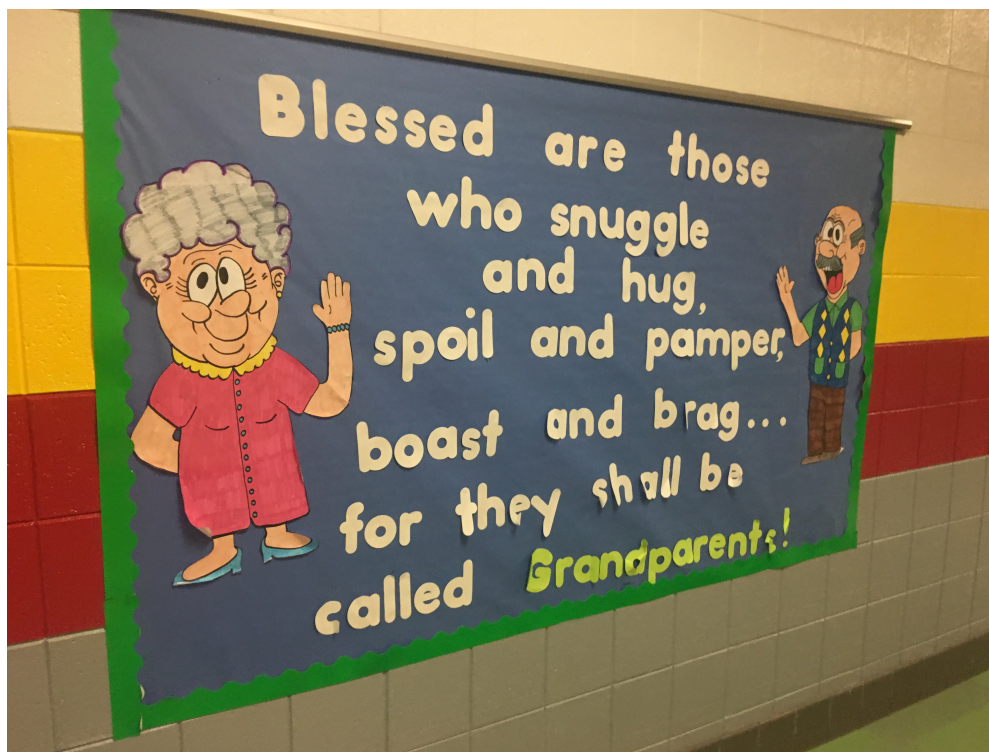
in your

Super Man shirt?

You can be a super hero!

And Super Man's better than
a scary skeleton from the black
lagoon anyway.

But Mamaw, it's just a t-shirt,



not a costume. I want to
have the scariest
costume! Besides, I
wore that last year—
and it's too small now
anyway! I want a
costume like everyone
else, Mamaw. Please,
Mamaw? Please?

We're havin' a parade at school next week,
and they're givin' us candy from people's trunks!
The trunks of their cars, Mamaw! Isn't that silly?
They're gonna' take pictures of us, too, Mamaw.
Pictures for the yearbook!
So I wanna' have the scariest costume! I gotta' have the scariest costume!
The scariest costume of all!
Please, Mamaw? Please?



Meaghan's Homemade Halloween

My Grandma's gonna' have a Halloween party

at her house down by the creek.

You gonna' come?

Grandma lives up Middle Island, you know the one?

It's the old white house, at the bottom of the hill, that backs right up to the creek.

Grandma's gonna' invite all us kids from

George Street Church,

and we can even dress up, too!

They'll be lots of yummy food—

My Grandma's the best cook—

and they'll be games, and decorations,

and it will be the best Halloween party

us kids have ever seen!

I guess some folks have been tellin'

Grandma that Halloween is a pagan

holiday, whatever that means, but

Grandma says they're all just a bunch of

fuddy duddys, and it's her house, and her party, and if they don't like it, well then, they don't

have to come, do they? No one—not even those fuddy duddy folks—could argue with that.



“It’s gonna’ be a homemade Halloween,” Grandma says.

Grandma and I decorate the basement, puttin’ white sheets on top of blown up balloons, and making smiley faces on them with the black felt pen.

“Little ghosties, Grandma!” I squeal.

I’m so excited to
bob for apples, and
eat cookies, and
play musical chairs,
and see who is brave
enough to drink the
special witch’s
brew. I’m not sure if
I am or not.



Grandma and Granny have always made my Halloween costume, but this year’s different. This year, we’re having a special party, so Grandma takes me to the Family Dollar and lets me pick out a costume, all my own. I pick the princess one, because it’s pink and it even comes with its very own magic wand. Grandma’s going to dress up like an old lady—she already has plenty of old lady clothes—but she gets a scary mask from the Family Dollar to add to her costume, too.

“You’re the prettiest little princess that I ever did see,” Grandma says.

“I never got to have a Halloween party for my kids, you know,” Grandma tells me. “There were seven of them and only one of me. Never had one for the grandkids either. Since you’re my first great-grandchild, this is a very special party, just for you. A first for you and a first for me.”

November

My Heart is Thankful for My Bus Driver

Mr. Evans says Thanksgiving is a time to have a thankful heart and we should write about something that we're the most thankful for.

He says we can pick anything, and my heart is extra thankful this year, so it was

a pretty easy thing for me to pick.

My heart is extra thankful for my school, and for Mr. Evans, and for Ms. Sarah, and Mrs. McGuire.

But my heart has the most thanks inside of it for Mr. Tim.

Mr. Tim is my bus driver, and this paper is for him.



My heart is thankful for Mr. Tim

because he helped me help
my mom.

Mr. Tim never lets me go
home alone,

doesn't drop me off at the
bus stop, but takes me
right down the gravel path
to the door of our trailer.

Mom is sometimes waitin'
for me, but Mr. Tim
knows that sometimes
she's not, too.

Mr. Tim came to the
trailer with me last month
when I knocked and
knocked on the trailer
door, and mom never
came.

I tried to tell Mr. Tim she was probably sleepin'—she does that a lot—
but he came with me anyway. Came right into the trailer shoutin' for mom.



Mr. Tim came right into our trailer,

tried to shake my mom awake.

Took too many of them pills again, I said.

Mr. Tim called the ambulance,

took me in his school bus straight to Welch Hospital.

Mr. Tim wanted me to be there when my mom woke up.

My heart is thankful for Mr. Tim. He helped me help my mom.

Hard to tell where we'd be without Mr. Tim.

He's always helpin' us all.



Be Thankful for Your Family

In a hushed tone, Sarah whispers, “See that truck parked there? That’s one of our biggest druggies in the office. Comes to the school high all the time to pick up the kids. Ain’t even his kids—his nieces and nephews—but he’s the only one at least half way sober enough to drive ‘em home. We all pray every time, pray so hard, that they don’t have a wreck on the way back. Wait and see when we walk in there. Take a good look. He’ll be high as a kite.”

“Believe it or not, he used to have a good job. Worked on the railroad with my daddy. He even was higher up than my dad on the job—a foreman. Daddy said he had a lot of talent—that he was strong, and sharp, and young, and



that’s what the company was looking for now a days. Youth and wit. Natural talent. That’s what he had, Daddy said. Then he started coming to work high. At first just a little weed here and there, nothing major, just got off with some warnings and stern talking to. He got in with the wrong crowd—started pushin’ and then takin’ pills. Now God knows what all

he’s got in ‘em. Comes here high as a kite.”

“Just think about those kids. We can’t even call CPS though. They ain’t got nowhere to go. None of these houses here meet fosterin’ code. No foster families. And this—this is home to these kids. We can’t force ‘em to leave. Just gotta’ pray. Pray so hard. Can’t even begin to tell you how much we all pray,” she says.

“Guess they should be thankful they got any family around here at all. If not, we’d have to move ‘em all the way to Beckley to foster care. Take ‘em away from the school, their friends, their teachers. This place is home. When we gotta’ do that, them kids just cry and cry.”

A young man who couldn’t have more than thirty years old stood in the office waiting to pick up. Sarah quickly glanced at the sign in sheet, but couldn’t read the handwriting. Not even a little bit. She knew it was him though. The boy from the railroad. He had been attractive once, she thought to herself. Had big, glassy blue eyes. Those kind of eyes that you can’t seem to look away from. But there was something missing in his eyes now. Something was gone. He didn’t even notice anyone walkin’ into the office. He was just a-starin’ at something far away that no one else could see. Yes, these kids should be thankful for family. Just maybe not this one. Not today.



Meaghan's Thanksgiving Table

Mom, I'm going to be the best cook, just like Grandma and Granny.

They showed me how to turn on the oven, and put the pot on the stove, and told me to always remember to use that special mitt so I don't burn my fingers. Mom, they even showed me how to set the timer, and how things have to stay on the rack with the oven door closed, just right, until that timer dings.



And then when that timer rings, that means it's ready, Mom.

Did you know that? It's so easy, Mom.

Granny showed me how to crack the egg, so I don't get any of the shells in the bowl.

And then Grandma told me how to tilt the bowl to the side when I'm beating the eggs with a fork so that they come out just so-so.

Mom, Granny and Grandma said I can go to Grandma's house in the morning when they're fixing Thanksgiving. I can watch the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade on the TV in the den, and I can even help them in the kitchen. Granny said she'd give me a piece of turkey before anyone else!

They said I could help, Mom, because I am becoming such a good cook, just like them!

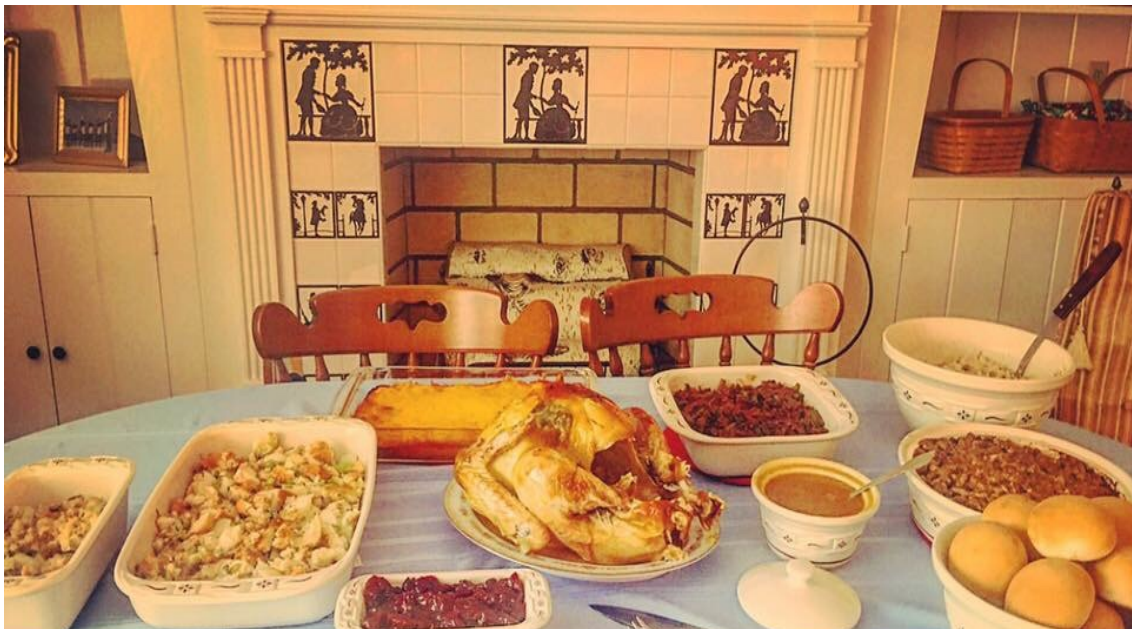
I helped Granny and Grandma fix our family's Thanksgiving meal year after year until they were gone. And now, I make that same meal every year for my Mom and Dad.

"Dressing just like Granny's..."

"Gravy just like Grandma's..."

Mom and Dad say.

Some memories stay forever,
and on the Thanksgiving table,
mine remain.



December

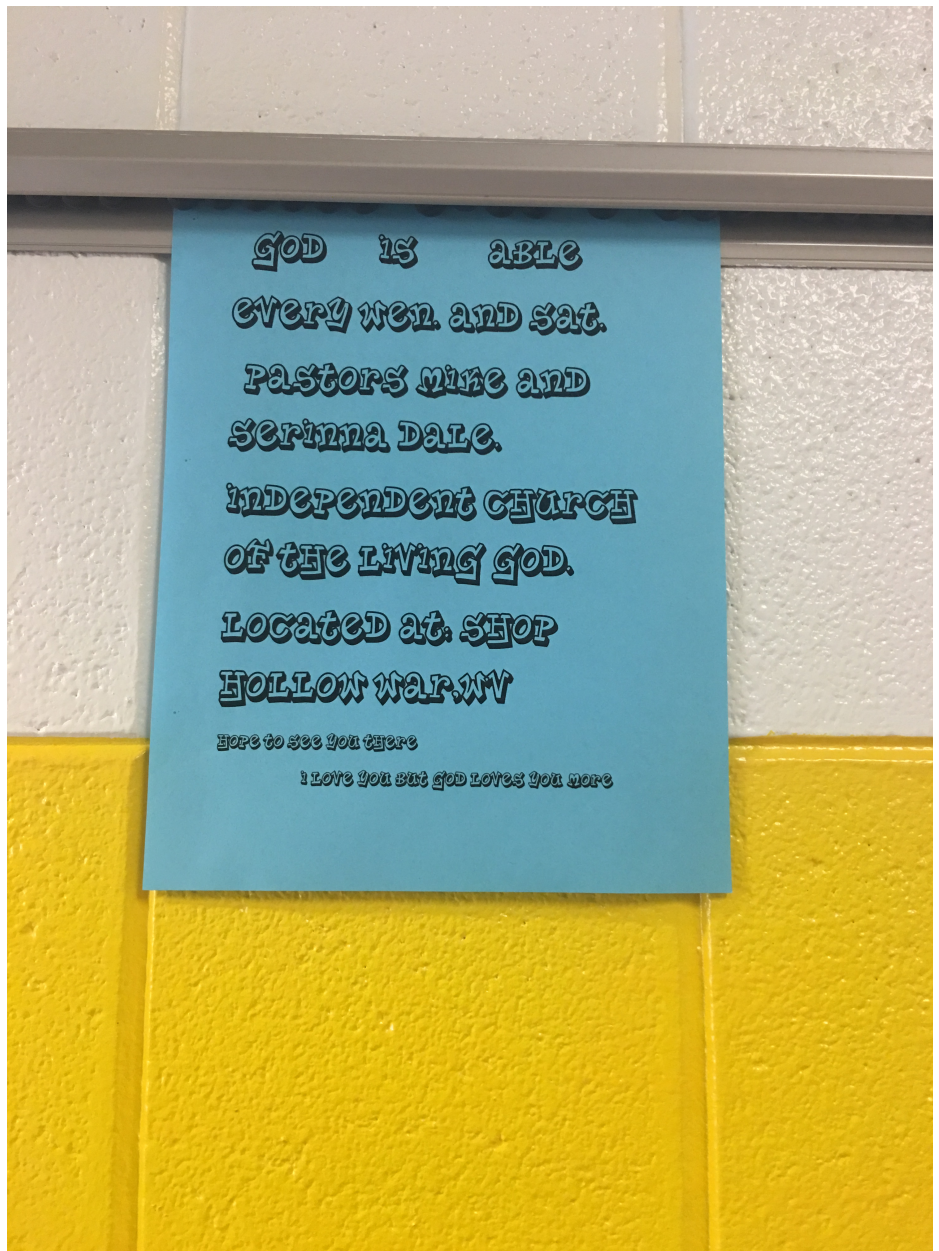
God is Able

Pastor Mike says God is able
and I want to believe him
and I try to believe him
but it's hard to believe when your
prayers aren't answered
no matter how hard you pray
as you hide in the hamper, far
away from Daddy's fists and
Mama's screams
and you don't dare make a sound
as tears stream silently down your
cheeks.

It's hard to believe when you
come home from school
and find Mama sleeping on the
couch again—except she's not
really sleeping

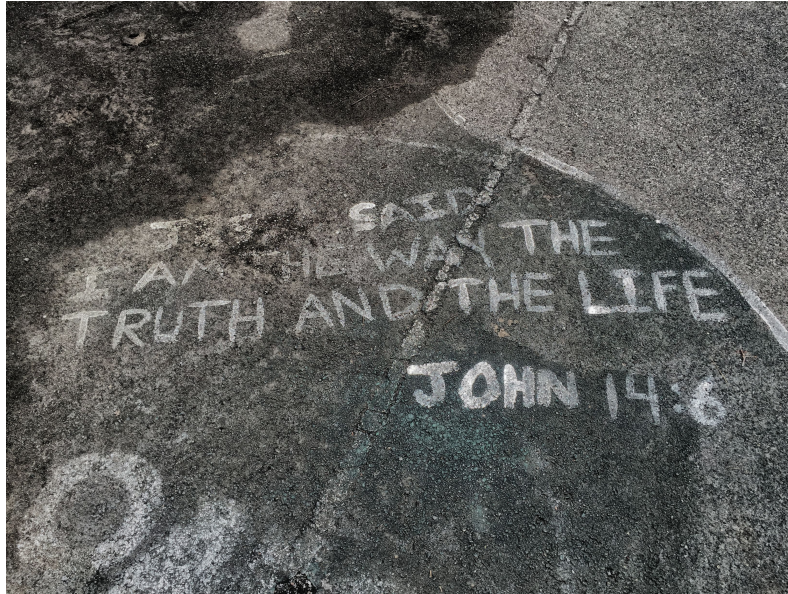
and you know because she always wakes up for you when you call her by name and sing her
favorite song about Jesus, and the little children, and love felt 'round the world.

It's hard to believe when you're home alone again and you're hungry, and you're cold, and then
the lights go out and you cry and you pray to the God who is able because you're scared of the



dark, and all you want is for the light to shine again—like that song Pastor Mike taught you about that little light of mine that shines and shines all the time.

It's hard to believe when school's out for Christmas and you can't wait for Santa, and the reindeer, and the cookies, and the big red sleigh and you sing songs about Frosty, and Rudolph, and Jingle All the Way.



Christmas morning's long come and gone, and you no longer believe because there were no presents under the tree, and no Santa, no reindeer, no cookies or sleigh.

It's okay, though, 'cuz believing's just for little kids,

and you're not little no more, not today.

It's hard to believe when Daddy's fists leave marks of green, yellow, and blue on your body after his whiskey breath and heavy, clenched dukes somehow find your hiding spot in the hamper when only silent tears streamed down your cheeks.

Just like that time before with Daddy's same fists and Mama's screams.

Give anything to hear Mama one more time—just singin' not screamin'—she's in God's angel choir now, and only tears remain.

Pastor Mike says God is able

And I want to
believe him
And I try to believe
him
but it's hard to
believe when your
prayers aren't
answered
no matter how hard
you pray.



It's hard to believe, and believing's just for little kids,
But maybe, just maybe, I'll stay little like them
and believe for one more day.

Winter Giveaway

It's gettin' colder and these kids ain't wearin' no coats to school.

Somebody's gotta' do somethin.'

Gotta' keep 'em warm or they'll just keep

gettin' sicker

and sicker.

Still waitin'

on the health

center to open

at the school.

That may

never happen,

the rate things

seem to go

'round here.

Nothin' ever seems to get done 'round here.

Every winter, we do a giveaway,

right up there in the Big Creek Gym.

Givin' families new coats

new blankets,

makin' sure they stay warm.

Gets cold 'round these parts, you know.

We're in the mountains, so it snows

FREE NEW COAT! FREE NEW BLANKET!

Big Creek Gym

Items will be available

Saturday, November 5, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

Must be present to receive items!

PASS IT ON!

(Provided by Friends of Southside Elementary & First Baptist Church of Weber City, VA
in partnership with Blanket Appalachia)

more here than anywhere else in the state!

Bet ya didn't know that, did ya?

Big Baptist Church down in Virginia

gives us

all these

things,

you see.

Comes

over with

trucks and

trucks

filled

with

boxes.

More stuff



than most of us

ever seen. You should see the kids' faces when they

see all them boxes lined up in the gym.

Something in there for us? They try to sneak

peeks as they walk by the door. They get so

excited, these kids.

Any little 'ol thing means so much to them.





The kids get Christmas presents, too, you know.
Church fills up shoe boxes,
wraps 'em up all nice in Christmas paper.
The kids each get one, and you should just see 'em,
all lined up in rows, sitting cross legged on the floor,
just waitin' to open 'em up.
They can't hardly wait.
Only present some of them kids will get.
Christmas Giveaway sure is special, allright.
Only boxes a lot of 'em ever see.

Letters to Santa

I stood in the empty school
hallway

and cried.

I cried

for the Santa that doesn't come.

For the students who know
better than

to ask for any gifts

under the tree.

I cried

remembering my own
childhood,

how when I was five,

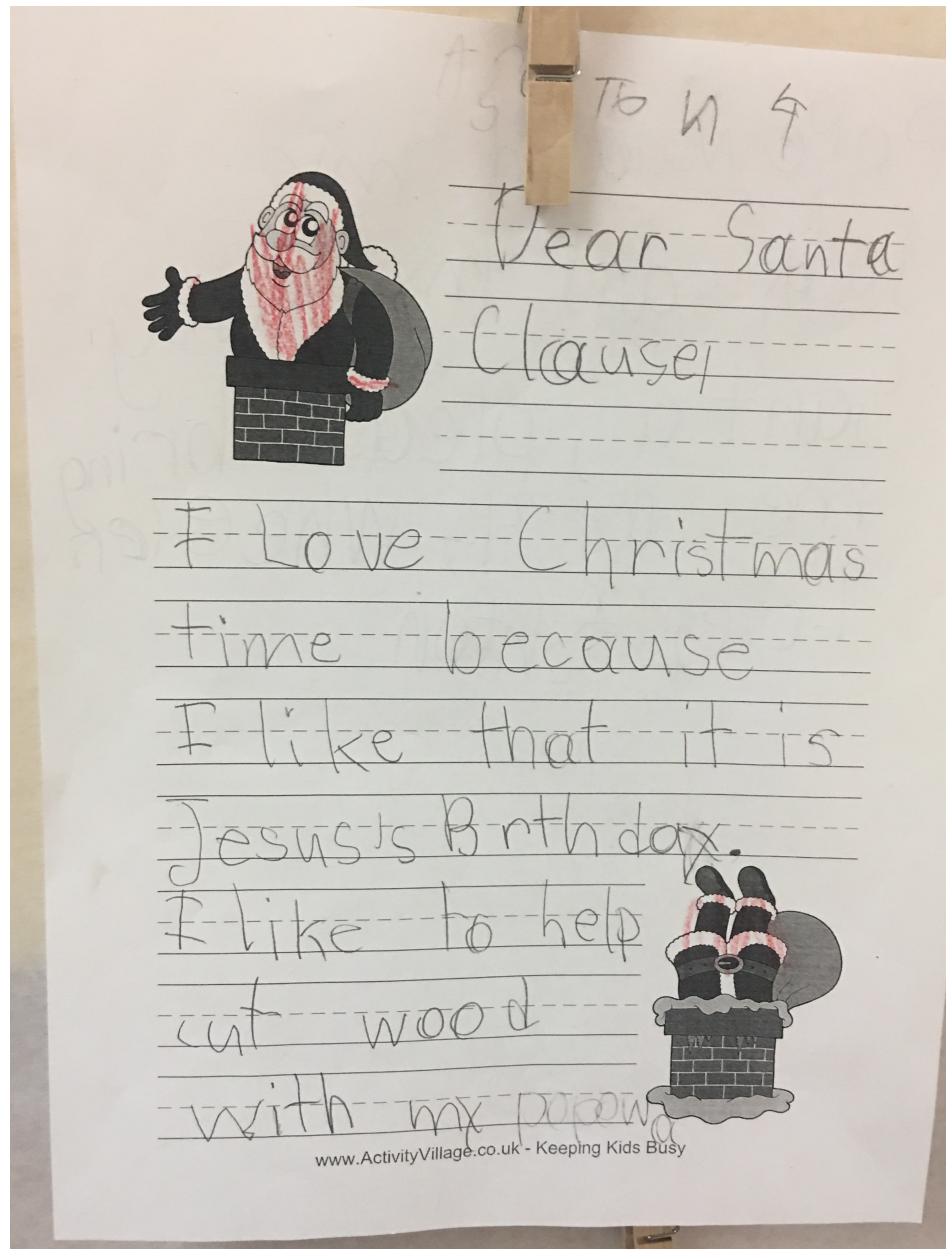
my Granny, who was sick,

sick from where and how she worked,

took on extra shifts at that same place

that was making her so sick inside

just so there would be



presents for me under her tree.

I cried

because I knew

what that felt

like,

to know that

those presents

weren't coming

from



a white haired,

jolly old man in a red winter suit.

But I pretended anyway,

knowing full well though,

that it was Granny's love for me,

not Santa,

putting those presents under the tree.

I stood in the empty school hallway

and cried.

Wishing there was some way

that I could
magically fix this,
that I could
make the presents
appear.

That I could
make it so that each
of these
kids could wake up
on Christmas
morning



and know what it's like to see
boxes wrapped in shiny paper
under the tree,
and their families
could see the smiles on their faces
magnified by the twinkling lights
of the Christmas season.

I wish that these kids would ask
for something in these Letters to Santa.
Something—anything—
so that I could get the memory
of my sick Granny out of my mind.
So that I could get the memory
of showing up where she worked
dressed up as a present,
wrapped cardboard box over my head,
red bow in my hair,
of how she smiled with tears in her eyes,
when I told her that I couldn't wait
for Christmas morning
to see what was under her tree.



Discussion: A Cross-Case Comparison

Introduction

In this section of the chapter, I present information offering a cross-case comparison which highlights both similarities and differences amongst the lived experiences of the participants. These narratives allow better understanding of the complexities surrounding the community school's role in combatting extreme poverty and homelessness among rural students, alongside students' responses to the community school's efforts. The comparative analysis is divided into four thematic patterns, which include: i) poverty breeding addiction, ii) the struggles of geographic isolation, iii) lack of familial and community engagement, and iv) limited human capital. Each of these themes are elaborated upon in the following sections, and are examined through comparative elements from the previous narratives.

Poverty Breeding Addiction

This study depicts several specific instances where poverty breeds addiction. It is not merely poverty that is the problem, or addiction that is the problem among the residents of this community—but rather a two-fold problem that goes hand in hand. In these instances, addiction, itself, was a means to an end that often began innocently. Individuals were hurt during a work-related accident and were prescribed opioid medication to alleviate chronic pain. While out of work and without income, many individuals fell prey to addiction, which is an all too common occurrence in McDowell County, West Virginia.

Over the past two years, alone, drug companies shipped over 9 million opioid pain pills to a single pharmacy located in McDowell County, West Virginia (Foley, 2016). Opioid addiction has become an epidemic in McDowell County, and across the surrounding state of West Virginia. McDowell County leads both the state and country in overdose deaths (Johnson, 2014). This was a prominent theme throughout the course of this study, with both poverty and

addiction having affected each participant in some way. There are only two remaining pharmacies located within the county due to increasing health and safety concerns.

The prose-poem *'Cuz I'm Gonna' Shoot You Dead... That's Why* describes poverty bred addiction, which in turn, has created a pattern of domestic violence from both child and father. Within this occurrence, a student's father has been arrested and jailed by the father of another student, a local policeman. When the student whose father has been arrested threatens to shoot and kill the other student, he is repeating not only the words, but also the actions of his father. Although not overtly stated within the prose poem, the father who has been jailed was once employed as a coal miner within the area; however, due to a work injury, was no longer able to work in the mines. Out of work and without money to support his family, the father turned to opioid pain pills to create a different and better reality other than the one that he was living in. This is an all too familiar scenario with many addicted individuals within the area. This account demonstrates a prime example of the generational cycle of poverty, addiction, and violence.

My Heart Is Thankful for My Bus Driver demonstrates the ways in which poverty bred addiction affects its youngest victims—the children of those struggling with addiction. This prose-poem shares the lived experience of a child whose mother, a single mother living in poverty and struggling with addiction, copes with not knowing what state her mother will be in as she arrives home from school each day. In this particular instance, in which a bus driver for McDowell County Schools accompanied a young student into her home to find the child's mother had overdosed, spurred a county wide initiative where each bus driver is now required to drop each student at the site of their homes, rather than a bus stop, and ensure that a parent, family member, or guardian is present inside of the home upon dropping the child off.

The prose-poem, *Be Thankful for Your Family* depicts the lived experience of a young man, once a highly paid foreman working on the local railroad, who had succumbed to addiction after falling in with the wrong crowd, losing his job, and going from gateway drugs into a series of other illegal substances. This man, however, comes from a larger family who are all suffering from poverty bred addiction. Even though this man is clearly using illegal substances, he is the cleanest member, so to speak, of the family, and as such, is given the task of picking up his nieces and nephews from the school. Similarly to *'Cuz I'm Gonna Shoot You... That's Why*, this piece additionally showcases a generational cycle of poverty, addiction, and violence.

Figure 4.11 The Pharmacy



Figure 4.11. A photo taken outside of the former McDowell Pharmacy building. The business has been shut down and the building boarded up due to increasing health and safety concerns.

The Struggles of Geographic Isolation

Flo's descriptive vignette provides an introduction to the struggles of geographic isolation within McDowell County. As described in the section of the vignette, *Holler Number Three*, the struggles of geographic isolation are especially present as a young student dies because she is unable to receive timely medical care from first responders due to the geographically isolated location of her home. This is merely one instance of where a young child

within the school setting has suffered medical complications due to inability to receive prompt medical care and/or treatment. The closest regional hospital is the Bluefield Regional Medical Center, located in Bluefield, West Virginia, which is over one hour away from War, West Virginia.

You Don't Know What You Don't Know additionally uses a lived experience shared by Flo to depict the struggles of geographic isolation in great detail. Flo described community members' treatment towards her after going away to college on a tennis scholarship as as if she had died. Her adjustment to the collegiate experience as a first-generation student was also daunting, as she simply did not understand how to navigate the day-to-day goings on of a college student as she had neither been on a college campus before, nor known anyone who had gone to college. As depicted in the prose-poem, she did not realize that her scholarship covered the cost of tuition, alongside room and board, and she went hungry when she initially arrived on campus because she did not have any money for food. Having been born and raised in a geographically isolated area, such as McDowell County, Flo simply had not been taught or shown the cultural norms within a larger, collegiate community.

Priceless, a prose-poem shared through the lens of a student whose priceless library is being shut down due to a lack of available funds further depicts the struggles of geographic isolation. The War Public Library is the only public library within a 30-mile radius, and once it has closed down, the student will no longer have access to its books, or her favorite librarian, Ms. Tammy. Had this student lived in a non-rural area, she would have had access to many public libraries, and a variety of places from which she could access books and computers; however, due to the geographic isolation of this particular area, the girl no longer has access to these items after the school day.

The Scariest Halloween Costume, a prose-poem also told through the lens of a child, depicts a lack of goods and services within a geographically isolated area. The student, who is wanting to purchase the scariest Halloween costume for the upcoming Trunk or Treat event at the school, is unable to do so because the closest chain retail store is over two hours away. Also complicating this situation is that the student is being raised by her grandparents, and ‘papaw’ is currently out of town driving a truck rig to financially support the family, and ‘mamaw’ is unable to provide transportation for the child. This occurrence is all too familiar, as the child does not get to wear the costume that she would like, simply due to the geographic isolation and unavailability of such items within the area.

Figure 4.12 Abandoned Businesses



Figure 4.12. Photos taken outside of abandoned businesses in McDowell County. The decline of business and industry within the community further contributes to the struggles of geographic isolation among children and adults alike.

Lack of Familial and Community Engagement

Sarah's descriptive vignette provides an introduction to lack of familial and community engagement within the school setting. Her frustration is shown as families send their children to school sick—and do not provide them with any type of medical intervention. As Sarah's own son catches the virus that has affected several children within the school, her frustration becomes too much to bear, declaring that their problem is now her problem. This lack of family engagement was a key theme throughout this study. Recall that nearly 50% of McDowell County's students do not live with a biological parent due to factors such as abuse, addiction, abandonment, neglect, incarceration, or death (Reconnecting McDowell, 2016). Despite continued efforts from the Southside K-8 School to increase familial engagement including promotions such as game nights, movie nights, and giveaways, most of the efforts do not yield increased engagement. Within Sarah's vignette, she also depicts a lack of community engagement within the area with her frustration over the long-awaited health care clinic. Although she has attempted to start a health care clinic within the school for over one year, it has yet to materialize, and she is only able to bring doctors and dentists—who provide much needed medical and dental services for the students—once every few months.

The prose-poem *Back to School*, as shared through the lens of a student, additionally describes a lack of familial and community engagement in the community. In this occurrence, the student is very excited to begin a new school year, and her fifth grade teacher has requested that students bring various classroom necessities—notebook paper, pencils, pens—to school as part of a sharing classroom initiative. The student pleads with her mother to take her to the Wal-Mart, located an hour away; however, the mother is inattentive and aloof, neither listening to the child, nor responding to her requests. As the piece progresses, the child's pleas are interrupted by

the arrival of the mother's boyfriend, and the piece closes as mother chooses to put the needs of her partner over that of her child.

Supper in a Sack further explores a lack of family and community engagement as it depicts a charitable, community-wide event that invites parents and guardians of the students to attend an evening where they are taught to cook a healthy meal, and afterwards, are provided with the same ingredients to cook the same meal to share with the children at home. In this piece, Deb, a community service provider who works alongside the educators and administrators of the Southside K-8 School is shown as an antagonist towards the good that the Supper in a Sack program can and does accomplish. Deb, whose family once struggled financially and depended upon similar types of supportive programming following the loss of her father's job in the mines, holds a particularly negative attitude to *them kinds* that participate in programs like these, *lookin' for handouts*. Unfortunately, Deb's perspective is not shared by her, alone, but rather is a common misconception that community members have towards struggling children and their families, ultimately limiting their involvement in community efforts to support these vulnerable demographics.

God is Able also sheds light on lack of family and community engagement as it shares a heartbreaking account of a student whose family is torn apart by domestic abuse, addiction, alcoholism, and violence. The student attends a local church meeting, where Pastor Mike reiterates that 'God is able;' however, no matter how hard she prays, the violence at home continues to occur. This piece depicts a lack of familial engagement within her life as her father struggles with both substance abuse and physical abuse towards all members of the family. He is neither available to the child as a stable parent or caring adult. This piece additionally represents a lack of community engagement, because even though Pastor Mike's efforts of supporting

students through after-school church based programming are admirable, more effort must be made from both his and other community organizations in recognizing and intervening in issues where violence and abuse occur.

The prose-poem *Big Creek Gym* describes an event, murder in the second degree, which was fueled by a neighborly argument. Wesley Payne, once a stand out wrestler for McDowell County Schools who had won several State Championships, is shown no longer as a stand out athlete, but rather, as a jailed inmate having been tried and convicted of the second degree murder of his neighbor. The promise that Wesley once showed as a ‘hometown hero’ in McDowell County has now been overshadowed by murder. Wesley claimed that he wasn’t shooting at the neighbor, but rather trying to get away from him, after the neighbor had threatened him with a gun. He now faces 10 to 40 years in prison with the possibility of parole after 10 years. Violence and tension amongst neighbors and community members further contributes to a lack of community engagement within the area, as long standing feuds, or tension lead, heated arguments can often lead to violence within the community.

Finally, in the prose-poem *Trunk or Treat*, the school administration and community service providers have decided to create an alternative option to the traditional Trick or Treat, which has become less safe in recent years due to the overwhelming addiction within the area. The Trunk or Treat event is designed to bring all the students to the parking lot of the school to receive candy from the trunks of cars, rather than going door to door for treats as in traditional Trick or Treat. On the day of the event, less than 20 vehicles participated, filling only a quarter of the school’s parking lot. Since this event was unlike the traditional Trick or Treat and Halloween parties that students and their families were used to, familial participation was also

limited. This lack of familial and community engagement ultimately created a less than successful event, and from the lens of the students, this event was also not well received.

Figure 4.13 Graffiti



Figure 4.13. Graffiti lines the outside of an abandoned building in McDowell County—some of which notes messages of violence from one community and/or familial group to another.

Limited Human Capital

Inga's descriptive vignette introduces the theme of limited human capital. During this experience, she becomes increasingly frustrated as she completes a fairly one-sided phone conversation with a contracting company who had been tasked with building a playground at the Southside K-8 School. Despite signing a contract and paying the company in full, the business refuses to complete the task of building the playground, leaving Inga with little to no possibilities of completing the task. As there are limited opportunities in nearby areas to contract with workers who are willing to travel the mountainous roads to their isolated community, it creates an even greater problem with completing a task that could be completed in a matter of days if it were not for their rural location and lack of human capital. Further, in *They Can't Go, Neither Can I*, Inga depicts a further lack of human capital within the area as she describes the limited

accessibility to important economic sectors including grocery stores and retail shops. Without these types of businesses in the area, the possibility of economic growth and investment in human capital is nonexistent.

Additionally, the prose-poem *Winter Giveaway* depicts a lack of human capital within the area, as the school has to partner with a church in Weber City, Virginia, over two hours away, in order to receive an adequate number of winter coats, blankets, and shoe box Christmas presents for the students and their families. The immediate area in McDowell County simply doesn't have these types of financial, economic, or business-relates resources to support this type of large giveaway program. Without the added support of organizations such as the church in Weber City, the school would be unable to provide the types of goods and services needed to invest in the betterment of their students and families.

Figure 4.14 Donations

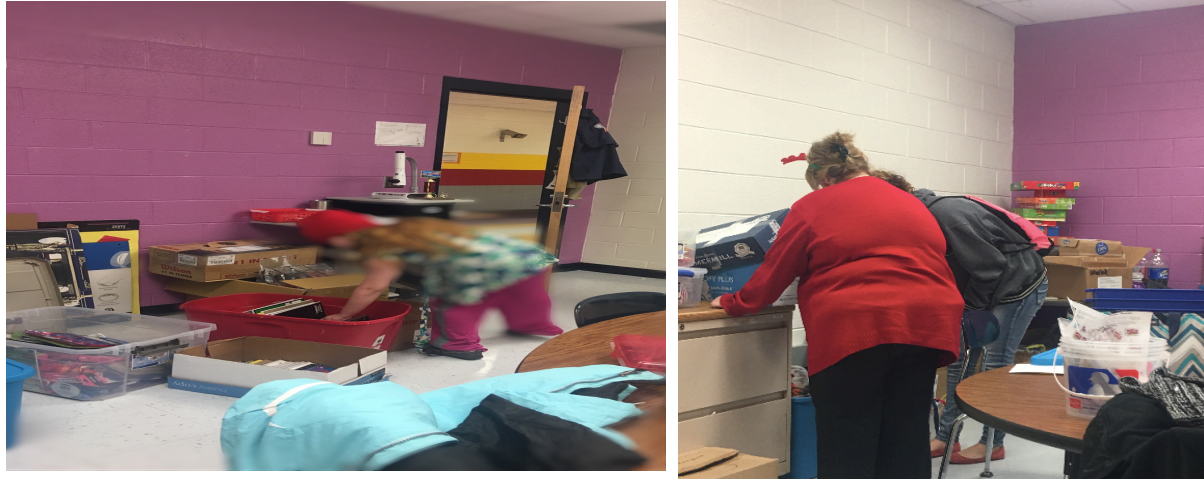


Figure 4.14. Students select clothing and hygiene related items that have been donated from organizations from neighboring states including Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I began by first providing a descriptive vignette and accompanying narrative of the study's direct participants, Sarah Muncy, Community School Coordinator, Flo McGuire, School Principal, and Inga Barker, Assistant Superintendent in order to share background information about their lives in McDowell County, as well as their roles within the community school and school district. Then, through the creation of prose and prose-poetry, I described poignant personal experiences that I, as the researcher, have shared with each participant. These stories were represented through first-person narrative within each of the prose-poems and accompanying photographs in order to represent the shared 'I' within our similar lived experiences.

I then presented a month-by-month account of findings, depicting instances within the fall semester of the school year, beginning in August and ending in December in order to describe the challenges of the day-to-day lived experiences of students affected by extreme poverty and homelessness. Each monthly account included three prose-poems, depicting three separate perspectives, adult (direct) participant, child (indirect) participant, and researcher.

Finally, I provided a cross-case comparison of each narrative across four emerging thematic patterns, which included poverty breeding addiction, the struggles of geographic isolation, lack of familial and community engagement, and limited human capital. My discussions with the participants, along with the study's resulting themes were informed by the study's research purpose, questions, and theoretical framework. In the final chapter, I will offer the conclusion and implications of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Published scholarship (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002; Dryfoos, 1994) explores various ways in which the community school model can positively influence students affected by extreme poverty and homelessness; however, few studies, if any, have examined the ways in which this educational model contributes to the betterment of day-to-day lived experiences of homeless students within rural settings. For this study, I used my positionality as an educator, cultural insider to rural West Virginia, and arts-based researcher to inform this study. I have written this final chapter in both a scholarly and personal voice. As such, in the concluding sections of this chapter, I offer a selection of closing prose-poetry that honors this study's participants, the surrounding community members of McDowell County, West Virginia, and my elders, all of whom have played an integral role in my growth as a researcher throughout this process.

Recall the purpose of this study and accompanying research questions, as shown below. The purpose of this research was to explore the ways in which educators, administrators, and community service providers of the Southside K-8 Community School, located in McDowell County, West Virginia—the most impoverished region of the state (Rath, 2014)—respond to the unique challenges faced by students affected by extreme poverty and homelessness. There were four research questions that this qualitative study addressed:

1. How does a rural community school respond to the unique challenges facing students who are experiencing extreme poverty and homelessness?
2. What relations and practices do rural educators and community service providers engage in in order to work with homeless children living in extreme poverty?
3. How do community stakeholders address discourses of legal mandates, financial discourses, and educational discourses responding to rural poverty and homelessness?

4. How does homelessness affect the educational and community landscapes of a rural school district?

In this chapter, I address the study's research questions, and further discuss contributions of this study to existing literature, alongside the potential for future scholarly contributions towards both rural homeless education and community school initiatives. Additionally, I have written a final collection of prose-poetry, serving as an epilogue to pay homage to the study's participants, the residents of McDowell County, and my elders to conclude this work.

Research Questions Unpacked

In this section, I respond to the research questions as a series of collective and comprehensive responses, presented in individual sections, as each response contributes to the answer to more than one research question. Therefore, to avoid redundancy in this section, the answers to the research questions are presented as a collective whole. Throughout this study, traditional methodological understandings were interwoven with the use of evocative imagery as a visual tool, alongside the creation of prose-poetry to represent both the triumphs and challenges of a rural school that has become a home base for vulnerable students whose own sense of home is unsettled. In unpacking these research questions, the following topics are discussed in relation to the participants' role(s) within the Southside K-8 Community School: response to unique challenges faced by students experiencing extreme poverty and homelessness, relations and practices that they engage in during their work with homeless students, addressing legal mandates alongside financial and educational discourses in working with homeless youth, and their understanding of the ways in which homelessness affects the community landscape of their rural school district.

We Each Have Our Own Role: A Response to Extreme Poverty and Homelessness

This study demonstrates how the participants (educators, administrators, and community service providers) partnered with one another in order to best serve the unique needs of homeless students within a geographically isolated, rural community. Their individual roles within this process built upon one another to create a safety net and supportive environment which acted as a catalyst towards providing vast improvements within the lives of their most vulnerable students. The descriptive vignettes, accompanying narratives, and month-by-month exploration of varied perspectives of lived experiences via the creation of prose-poetry as shown in Chapter Four depicted specific examples of the ways in which each participant responded to the unique challenges faced by students experiencing extreme poverty and homelessness.

Both Sarah and Flo navigated their roles in response to the challenges of homeless students through a hands-on approach directly within the Southside K-8 School setting. Though complimentary to one another, they each served specific and differing purposes within the lives of the Southside K-8 students. Ms. Sarah, as she is known to the students, was an easily accessible individual within the students' lives. Her office, a small classroom stocked with bins filled with various school supplies, clothing, shoes, and personal hygiene items was seen as a safe haven and private space for students who were in need to be able to receive these necessary items without fear of judgement or ridicule. Throughout this study, students were constantly coming in and out of Ms. Sarah's office, and she shared close relationships with the students as a result of these constant interactions.

On the other hand, Flo—Mrs. McGuire, as she is known to the students, although not as approachable as Sarah due to her role as an administrator within the school setting, still remained

a constant and accessible presence in the lives of the students. Her presence was shown each day through small yet meaningful gestures, as she made daily classroom visits and observations, built continued rapport through small talk with students in the halls, and gave high-fives to each student as they waited to drink from the water fountain. Living across the street from the school additionally provided her with a means through which to connect with students, even after the school day had ended. She often walked around the school as part of her fitness routine, and sheepishly referred to herself as the Pied Piper, as she more often than not has a line of students in tow, following her step by step.

From an administrative perspective, Inga's role as Assistant Superintendent provided a less hands-on approach, but more of a behind-the-scenes approach in the lives of the students. It is important to distinguish that although Inga was not physically present at the school during most of the occurrences depicted within this study, this did not in any way lessen her role or contributions towards the well-being of the Southside K-8 students. In her role as a district administrator, she was constantly supporting all students within the McDowell County School District through grant writing, research, professional development, and educational opportunities, and acting as both a school and community liaison advocating for the betterment of all students within the community.

The participants' roles within Southside K-8 are essential to providing a successful community school model in rural West Virginia. Just as community schools originate from unique sets of circumstances, they also develop their own distinctive cultures in serving students. As such, there are no specific guidelines for the specific roles of those involved in the organizational culture of the community school, but rather these roles often tend to emerge organically, and are based upon specific needs of the students, which was the case at the

Southside K-8 Community School. Community schools share a “common belief in the basic principles of collective impact: a commitment to partnerships, accountability for results, respect for diversity, belief in community strengths, and high expectations for all” (Blank et al., 2012). Because of this common belief system and range of goals and expectations, the emergent roles of the educators, administrators, and service providers as shown in this study were both unique to the Southside K-8 Community School, yet common to the mission and belief system of the community school educational model.

An Uphill Battle: Advancing Relations and Practices

Since the Southside K-8 Community School has only recently begun implementing the community school educational model in the past two years, many individuals—both locally and throughout the state of West Virginia—are still fairly unfamiliar with this educational model and the ways in which it serves the students. As such, it can be somewhat of an uphill battle when attempting to promote buy-in amongst potential donors, volunteers, and overall supporters. Southside K-8 is not only the first community school model that has been implemented in McDowell County, but also the first community school to be implemented within the state of West Virginia. This creates an even greater uphill battle when attempting to build and advance relations and practices among outsiders to the community school implementation process.

In advancing relations and practices among potential supporters to best work with and serve the unique needs of the school’s homeless students, each of the participants noted that they have attempted various forms of outreach and communication including phone calls, emails, letters, and social media postings. Dryfoos and Maguire (2002) assert that “community school partnerships yield an integrated model: Whatever is brought into the school by outside agencies fits into the educational system” (p. 152). For example, the Southside K-8 Community School

works to ensure that each of their outside partners understands the specific needs of the students, including basic necessities such as food, shelter, and health and wellness related services. Although many partnering organizations work with the school to ensure that students' core needs are being met, the school additionally partners with other outside agencies to provide fun and enriching activities for both students and their families. One successful correspondence which resulted in buy-in for this type of student and family enrichment activity from supporting organizations was a Family Game Night initiative. Once the organizations were approached about participating in this event, several local churches and charitable organizations donated board games so that the school could host a game night for students and their families, allowing for each of the families to take home a game of their choice at the end of the night. This particular occurrence created the possibility for future opportunities of donations, volunteers, and overall support of the community school to occur.

Figure 5.1 Family Game Night



Figure 5.1. Students and their families participate in a Family Game Night at Southside K-8. Board games were donated by local churches and charitable organizations.

Setting a Precedent: Legal, Financial, and Educational Mandates and Discourses

Addressing the legal, financial, and educational mandates and discourses within the community school implementation process is completed primarily at the local level rather than the district level. As such, Sarah and Flo were able to provide initial insight into this particular topic area as they had both been involved with Southside K-8's community school implementation process since its inception. Both were quick to point out that there is not a one size fits all approach to the community school, as each community school is tailored to the specific needs of students and the surrounding community. Because of this, there is not a guide book or a specific step-by-step process of how to navigate legal, financial, and educational mandates. Since the community school is newly implemented, their knowledge is still evolving.

Recall that from a federal educational perspective, in serving the needs of homeless students, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act ensures that homeless youth have the same educational opportunities that are afforded to non-homeless youth (Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski, 2014). By law, the school is required to provide equal educational opportunities for its homeless students. As this is the first community school within the state of West Virginia; however, a precedent has not yet been set regarding financial and educational mandates and discourses. Southside K-8 provides a foundation upon which to place the future of community schools in the state of West Virginia, alongside other rural communities across the nation. As the community school continues to evolve with the changing landscape and accompanying needs of students within McDowell County Schools, both financial and educational mandates and discourses can be put into place to best support the students and

community. This is one element of this study that is yet to be determined, but that would benefit from future research and study.

A Ripple Effect: Homelessness and the Community Landscape

Each of the three participants noted that the growing number of homeless students within the area has had a great impact on both the educational and community landscapes of their rural school district. As more attention is brought onto McDowell County as a whole due to the overwhelming poverty and nation-led opioid epidemic, more and more outsiders come into the community wanting to help. Although this does not always affect the students from directly within the school setting, many of them still benefit from the support and services that these outside organizations provide. As more and more of these outside organizations become aware of the challenges faced by the residents of McDowell County, a ripple effect often occurs, inviting an even greater number of volunteers providing support to the area.

Figure 5.2 Giveaway



Figure 5.2. A flyer announces a Giveaway taking place at the Big Creek Gym and Hillbilly Market in English. Food boxes, toys, coats, blankets, and clothing have been donated from outside organizations and placed in the Big Creek Gym to assist residents in need.

Recall that one of the key thematic elements of this study was a lack of human capital. There are a limited number of viable businesses, nonprofit organizations, and individuals who are able to financially support struggling students and their families within the immediate area. Without these organizations and the ripple effect of support that surrounds this community, many of the students and their families would go without basic necessities including food and clothing, simply because local organizations are not able to provide the same volume of supplies, along with financial contributions, that organizations from larger, more prominent areas can provide. Community schools enable community partners, parents, teachers, and administrators to collaboratively assess key areas of student need, as well as identifying partnerships and stake holders to assist in meeting these needs (Jacobson et al., 2011); however, this is not an easy task due to the lack of human capital within rural communities such as War, West Virginia.

In McDowell County, specifically, most of their community school partnerships come from outside organizations in surrounding areas such as Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, or Pennsylvania. As a greater awareness of the challenges faced by McDowell County residents continues to arise, increased numbers of outside organizations reach out to help—particularly when it comes to providing basic necessities such as food and clothing for the students and their families. Each participant noted that this type of support and care from outsiders coming into the community provides a great deal of hope to its residents. They are no longer seen as drug addicted, poverty-stricken folks, but rather as individuals, with faces, and names, and families, trying to live their lives just like anyone else.

Figure 5.3 Community Class

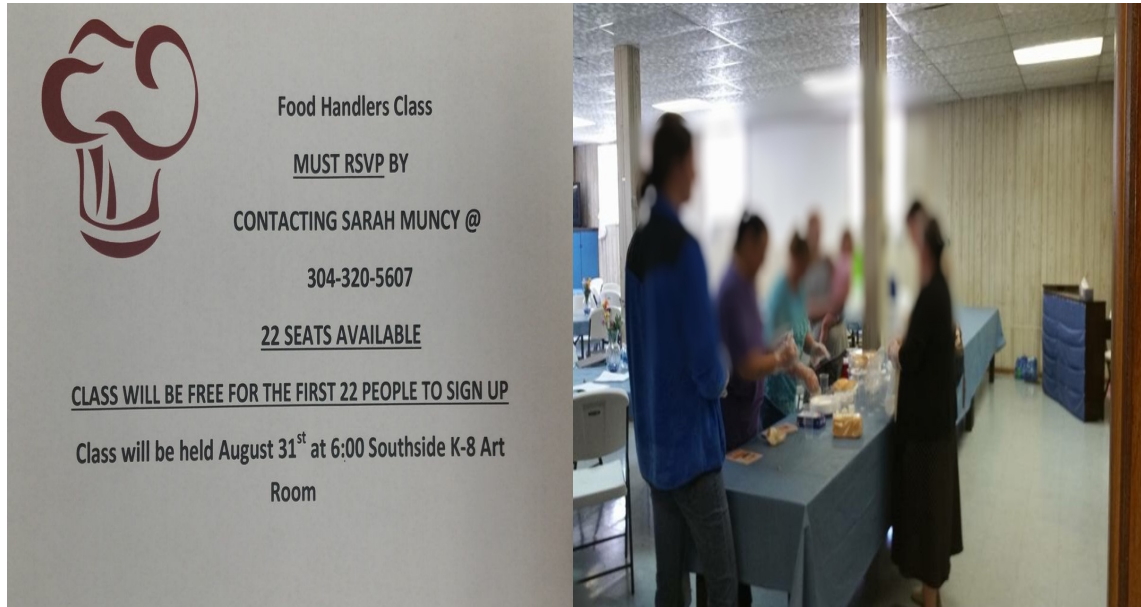


Figure 5.3. A Food Handlers Class was offered at no charge by an outside organization to members of the community. This class acted as a food safety course that could potentially be used for residents to gain future employment within the restaurant and fast food industry.

Contributions to the Literature

In chapter two, I established that there is limited scholarship that explores collaborative efforts of school-based and community-based strategies in direct support of the varying needs of homeless students within rural communities. At the heart of this complex issue is the fact that homelessness among students in rural settings is often concealed, and the full extent of rural homelessness is unknown (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). Although the topic of homelessness presents a wide range of scholarship (Duncan, 1992; Latimer, 2010; Rath, 2014) the topic of homelessness among students within rural settings remains both underserved and understudied.

Partnering school-based and community-based programming offers considerable potential to reduce the gap between needs and appropriate services for homeless youth; however,

there are few examples of such programs within rural locations in published literature (Nabors et al., 2004) creating the need for further scholarship within this area of educational study.

Scholarly works (Cloke et al., 2001; Edwards et al., 2009; Toomey and First, 1993) in the area of rural homelessness additionally dictate that a majority of rural communities simply do not have the proper infrastructure to support the needs of homeless students (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). Information on the needs of rural homeless students, alongside the ways in which rural schools can best serve these unique needs, however, has not been explored. An in-depth understanding of this is vital to ensure success for these students both in and out of the classroom setting.

This study created an enhanced understanding of lived experiences of rural homeless students and those serving rural homeless students. As the extensive formal and informal interviews, observations, and elicitations provided a vast amount of information, an increased understanding of questions regarding infrastructure, support, and the promise of school and community partnerships within rural communities also occurred. This study identified ways in which educators and administrators, alongside key community stake holders collaborated to ensure a better quality of life and educational experience for rural students. As such, the study shed additional light onto the ways in which a collaborative, state-supported partnership between a rural school and community assisted in the removal of barriers of extreme poverty and homelessness that negatively impacted student learning.

Jacobson et al. (2011) state that community schools “work with their partners to develop a climate that is welcoming to families and students. Such schools acknowledge that students have varying academic and nonacademic needs and connect students to supports that meet those needs” (p. 20). This study, too, demonstrated the need for strongly supported local, state, and

national partnerships in order to provide a solid infrastructure for providing multi-tiered support structures for rural homeless students including health, wellness, nutrition, and basic necessities. Dryfoos and Maguire (2002) note that the community school model aids in facilitating strong relationships between students and supportive adults. My study also addressed the need for rural homeless students to interact and gain mentorship from reliable, supportive adults, such as the participants of this study, Sarah, Flo, and Inga. In this study, mentorship and behavior modeling from supportive adults provided a means through which students could model their own healthy behaviors, form wholesome relationships, and set and accomplish goals. Ultimately, the community school model acted as a catalyst for school improvement and student and familial support (Dryfoos and Maguire, 2002) through building community and school partnerships that promote success in areas such as student performance, attendance, graduation and dropout prevention, family engagement, and closing the achievement gap.

Implications

This study specifically focused on a broad vision of education and human development of the needs of the whole child supported by the community school educational model. Within this study, there are important implications for educators, school administrators, community service providers, and policy makers of how the community school model, serving the needs of the whole child, expands the ways in which we are able to understand students' perceptions of home, alongside schools' obligations to students when the concept of home is unsettled.

Findings from this study showed how the community school became a space of home to students whose traditional sense of home was otherwise unsettled. Findings showed that the community school acted as a home for students because there were supportive and healthy relationships with adults, alongside a stable and safe environment which provided students with

necessities including shelter, food, warmth, and clothing. As such, this study has important implications for educators and school administrators as they work alongside one another to ensure that the school remains a safe and supportive home base for all students. Both educators and school administrators play a key role within this process as they form the foundation of the student's support system. As shown in this study, within the community school, the educators and school administrators provided much needed stable, supportive, and caring adult roles in the lives of the students. Many of these students did not have stable, supportive, or caring adults involved in their lives otherwise.

This study additionally has further implications for school administrators as they are able to view both the potential and pitfalls of the community school implementation process, as shown throughout this study. By looking at pitfalls, such as barriers to the traditional implementation process due to lack of viable partnerships in a rural setting, along with the potential of the community school, such as improved health, wellness, and academic outcomes of the student population, this study could aid in making strategic decisions regarding the future implementation of community schools in other rural counties both within and beyond the state of West Virginia.

Further, this study has implications for community service providers such as non-profit organizations and corporate businesses that partner with community schools in support of students. This study can provide enhanced insight into what works what doesn't work within these types of community partnerships. For example, this study demonstrated the ways in which several local churches combined to provide a 'winter giveaway' for the students and families, where warm winter clothing was provided prior to the start of the winter months. This collaborative effort among various community service providers is one example of the ways in

which the community school can greatly depend on and thrive from these types of support structures and benevolent practices.

Finally, this study has implications for policy makers in supporting the ongoing efforts of maintaining community schools for both present and future students. In West Virginia, the decision-making process of policy makers to implement the community school model at Southside K-8 was guided by both the socio-economic status and low performance among the school's students. This study demonstrated the ways in which the community school provided a supportive infrastructure for these vulnerable students, putting into place multi-tiered support systems to promote success both inside and outside of the classroom setting. For policy makers, however, policy making, alone, is not enough. Continued funding, promotion, and support from policy makers can continue to help this community school, and other community schools, to thrive.

In this study, I included examples of both educational and whole child outcomes through the use of the community school educational model. Within this study, the community school was designed to serve the needs of the whole child, affecting not only educational outcomes, but also outcomes not related to education, such as improved social behavior and healthy youth development, better family functioning and parental involvement, enhanced school and community climate, and access to support services. These whole child outcomes yielded immediate, individual results while also creating potential to affect long-term, educational outcomes contributing to overall student success. Through the community school model, the potential for long-term educational outcomes and student success presented additional prompts for future research to address further questions related to this study. This opportunity for future research will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Future Research

The community school foundation is built upon recognizing students' needs outside of the classroom in order to best meet their needs inside of the classroom. As shown in this study, the community school model provided a framework for both school improvement and student success as it promoted the betterment of the educational environment, and supported student successes that extended beyond the classroom. The Southside K-8 Community School and its partnering organizations helped students attend the school ready to learn, improved academic outcomes, promoted engaged familial and community connections, and prepared students for successful futures.

Many areas of future research could be suggested following this study; however, I have focused on the community school's whole child approach which creates potential to affect long-term, educational outcomes contributing to overall student success. Further exploration of a variety of areas could expand future scholarship and deepen the overall findings from this study. A selection of potential topics for further inquiry could include:

- In what ways are other community schools serving homeless students in rural settings?
- How does a policy of creating and supporting community schools come to be, and who are the key stakeholders that are creating these policies?
- In what ways can advocacy be made for community schools to ensure there is a seat at the table for individuals who are advocates for community schools?
- In what ways could equity-based organizations work alongside key stake holders in the community school process to offer support for trauma that children and families experience? What does it look like to heal a community?

The study of additional rural community schools outside of McDowell County that are serving homeless students could potentially have a great impact on the future implementation of the community school model within various rural communities both in West Virginia and beyond. This research would aid in forming an enhanced understanding of the barriers and successes of the implementation process within rural context. Additionally, the study of policy-making in creating and supporting community schools could be especially beneficial as it could help to inform future leaders or those interested in implementing the community school model within their communities to better understand specific mandates and processes that are involved. Researching advocacy practices and advocates for community schools could provide a means through which justice-oriented researchers could better understand key ways to support the varying needs of homeless students by using the community school model. This type of study could provide a much needed platform and future of voices advocating for the unique needs of these students. Finally, researching equity-based organizational partnerships with stakeholders who offer support to traumatized students and families within the community school setting could offer an opportunity for an increased awareness of both trauma and healing. This research could provide a means through which to create trauma-informed practices, alongside healing and restorative measures for both students and their families.

Although parts of my own study could be utilized to inform these potential studies, each would require additional data to be collected. These possibilities of future research could benefit the understanding of the long-term impact that community schools can have on homeless students and their families, as well as promoting enhanced understanding of the policy making and advocacy work that occurs within the implementation of a community school. In this study, the community school provided a support structure which enabled students to be prepared to

learn, and developed improved work habits, efforts, and attitudes toward learning. These possibilities for future research could add value to the future achievements and additional implementations of community schools contributing to overall success of a greater number homeless students for years to come.

Conclusion

Because of the day-to-day instability and insecurities that occur among students experiencing homelessness, a key element of this study included addressing the ways in which school-based and community-based service providers partnered with one another in order to best serve the unique needs of homeless students within a geographically isolated, rural community. The Southside K-8 Community school ultimately acted a hub of educational and community resources that assisted in removing complex barriers to student learning. Within this community school culture, educators, administrators, and community service providers recognize a shared vision for the success of the Southside's students. This study identified key ways in which educators, administrators, and community stake holders collaborated to ensure a better quality of life and educational experience for rural students. These findings are of use to those involved in educational leadership and policy in addressing the complex, understudied issue of homelessness in rural locations both in West Virginia and beyond.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I began by reviewing and discussing the research purpose and questions of this study. I unpacked each of the research questions individually, but through a collective lens, and then discussed this study's contributions to the literature as it relates to the potential of community schools in serving rural homeless students. I concluded this chapter by highlighting

possibilities for future scholarship exploring the long-term, educational outcomes of the community school's whole child approach.

Where I Come From: An Epilogue

This epilogue serves as a closing statement and final reflection on coming home to West Virginia to conduct the research for this study. I have written this final piece to pay homage to the study's participants and the residents of McDowell County, as well as to my elders. Without them, this study would not have been possible.



It is an honor to know each of you.

It's an even greater honor to share our stories.

Thank you.

Montani semper liberi.

— Meaghan



Where I Come From

They say folks in West Virginia's

lips speak a little slower.

And our heads?

Well, they think a little slower, too.

But, see, I know better.

West Virginia's where I come from.

Yes, I surely know better.

And maybe they'd know, too,

if their ears could just listen

as slow as our lips.



They say folks in West Virginia

ain't got much to say,

except they do,

and they will,

and I did.



Don't you go frettin' though,
I'll say it for you again.
'Cuz us folks in West Virginia,
well, we know all too well
what it's like
for our soft, slow
voices to fall on hard ears.
So I'll say it real slow for ya',
and then say it again.

Where I come from
we don't have much,
but always share what we have.
And no matter who you are,
or how far you've gone,
our country roads always
welcome you to stay.



They say our schools
are strugglin' and
don't give no care
'bout our kids.

But what you don't know,
is I'm proof that they do.

And they did.



You just have to look.
There's lots of us, see?
Proof that we're not
just another number,
not just another failure,
not just another statistic
that you want us to be.

Told Granny and Grandma

I'd write them a story.

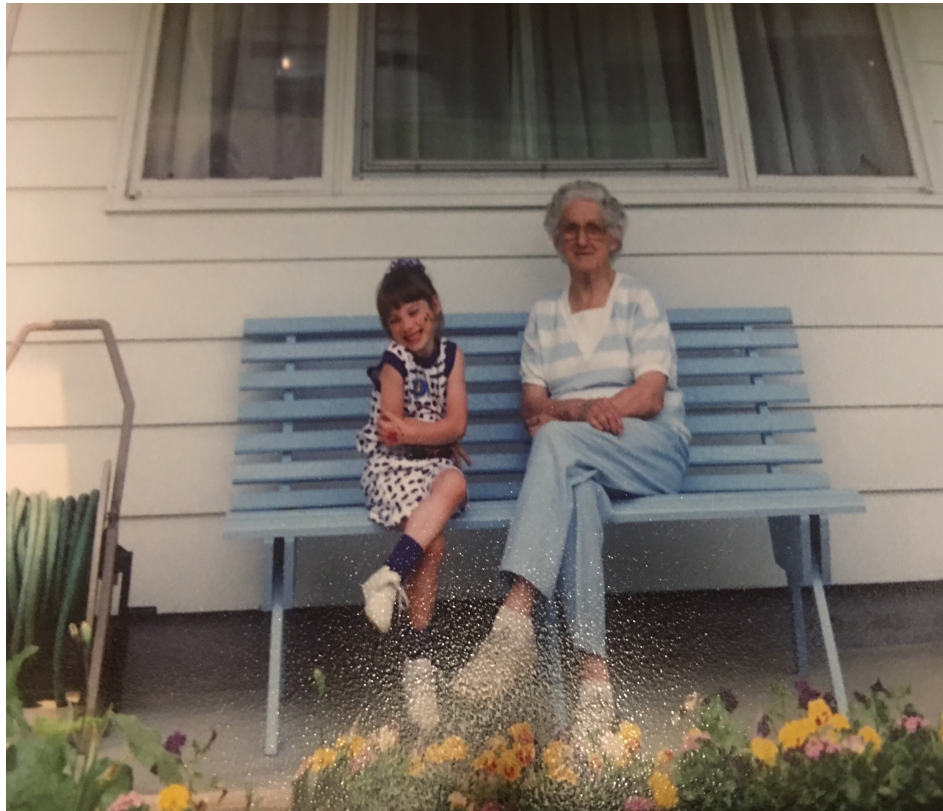
A story just for them.

I'll write a story for you, I said.

About us.

A story about here.

And to think—I just did.



I never knew that *they* were
writing *my* story.

And *that* story, *our* story is
where I come from.

Now I'm sure it's
that story;

I have no doubt.

Our story is what
brought me home.

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APPENDIX A
PHONE/ SKYPE VIDEOCONFERENCING SOLICITATION

Phone Skype Videoconferencing Conversation(s) with: Mrs. Flo McGuire, Southside School Principal and Mrs. Sarah Muncy, Southside Community School Facilitator

My name is Meaghan Cochrane. I am a doctoral student at Kansas State University in the department of Curriculum and Instruction. I am interested in doing a pilot study concerning the ways in which your newly formed community school serves students experiencing extreme poverty and homelessness. If possible, I would like to interview either one or both of you, as key leaders within the community school setting. In addition, if possible, I would like to interview and observe members of the Southside K-8 Steering Committee to gain a better understanding of the key school and community stakeholders who assist in the success of this project. Your participation is completely voluntary and will include videoconference and face-to-face meetings, scheduled at your convenience, where you are asked about your experiences.

If you would be interested in further discussing the community school and possible participation in my study, please contact Meaghan Cochrane at mcochrane@ksu.edu or (330) 280-4125.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Meaghan Cochrane

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM
KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: In Search of Home: Exploring Collaborative Educational Efforts Addressing Rural Homelessness through Qualitative Inquiry

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT:

EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT:

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Meaghan Cochrane

CONTACT NAME AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya, 785-532-1164, kakalibh@ksu.edu or Meaghan Cochrane, 330-280-4125, mcochrane@ksu.edu

IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION:

- Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.
- Jerry Jaax, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance and University Veterinarian, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

SPONSOR OF PROJECT: Kansas State University, Advanced Data Analysis Qualitative Methods

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: The purpose of this research is to explore the ways in which educators, administrators, and community service providers of the Southside K-8 Community School, a newly formed community school in rural McDowell County, West Virginia, respond to the unique challenges faced by students affected by extreme poverty and homelessness.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

As a member of the Southside K-8 Community School/Southside K-8 Steering Committee, if I volunteer to take part in this study, I will engage in the following activities:

- Participate in 2-3 one-hour interviews by sharing your experiences of the Southside K-8 School and surrounding McDowell County community.
- Participate in 2 Steering Committee Meetings in which the participant will be present.
- Participate in 2-3 thirty-minute member check meetings to review the information collected in the previous interviews and observations.

I understand that:

- The researcher will audio record and transcribe interviews and meetings that occur.

LENGTH OF STUDY: This study is expected to last 15 weeks.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED: The researcher does not anticipate any risks or discomforts to the participant.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: Throughout the data collection process, participants will be sharing the ways in which the Southside K-8 Community School positively affects its students. The data gathered during the duration of this study may be used for needs assessment and funding purposes.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: At the request of participant(s), names will be removed from transcribed correspondence, observation, and interviews if necessary.

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

Participant Name/Title: _____

Participant Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

There will be two *open-ended, semi-structured interviews* conducted in a *conversational* nature during the course of the study. Each interview will be 30 to 60 minutes in length. Broadly speaking, the questions will be used for *guiding questions* during the interviews. Not all questions will be answered in one interview. Depending on how the participant elaborates each question, the interviewer will have to remain flexible. Therefore, the questions that remain unanswered after the first interview will guide the second and subsequent interviews or member check sessions. Due to the semi-structured, open-ended, conversational nature of the interviews, probes will be used based on participants' response to further explore their answers *in-depth* after asking a broad open-ended guiding question. Some probes can be pre-determined and they are listed below. Other probes will emerge as a result of what the participant shares. However, all probes and questions will be broadly informed by the following questions.

Broad open-ended guiding questions for the interviews will be:

1. Tell me about War, West Virginia and the surrounding McDowell County community.

Probes to explore

Geographic location
Isolation
Rural community
Community demographics

2. What are the demographics of your student population?

Probes to explore

Socio-economic status of students
Parental involvement
Parent/Guardian demographics
Academics
Student strengths/weaknesses

3. Tell me about the role of the Southside K-8 Community School.

Probes to explore

School structure
Community involvement
In school programming
After school programming
Extracurricular activities
Mentoring
Services provided

1. Tell me about the Reconnecting McDowell Program and how the Community School fits into its overall goals?

Probes to explore

Goals of Reconnecting McDowell

Goals of Southside K-8 Community School

Short-term goals

Long-term goals

What has been accomplished so far?

What can be accomplished in the immediate future?

What can be accomplished in the long-term future?

2. Tell me about students' reactions to the newly formed community school.

Probes to explore

Academics

Behavior

Physical health

Mental health

Attitudes

3. Tell me about parent/guardians' reactions to the newly formed community school.

Probes to explore

Response to student achievement

Mentoring

Participation

Engagement

Physical/Mental health

Attitudes

4. What are some of the biggest challenges facing your students?

Probes to explore

Financial hardship

Lack of basic needs (i.e. food, shelter)

Drug abuse within the family

Physical abuse within the family

Lack of parental involvement

Incarceration

Physical health

Mental health

APPENDIX D

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Space – Description of physical and geographical surroundings

Object – Description of school and/or community materials

Act – Participants’ behaviors during interviews and Steering Committee Meetings

Activity - Observe interactions with school and community

Event – Instances as identified by participants, which occur in the lives of students, families, faculty, staff, and/or community as a result of the role of the community school

Time – Frequency of events, acts, activities that occur during the entire observation period

Feelings – Description of emotions expressed in the by participant(s) or that are visibly evident to the researcher

APPENDIX E
OBSERVATION FIELD NOTES TEMPLATE

Date:

Time:

Location:

Notes	Observations

APPENDIX F

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS PROTOCOL

In qualitative research, it is important to collect documents that will offer additional context to the study in order to gain a deep understanding of the participants' experiences. In this case, participants will be encouraged to share relevant documents they feel that might further explain the ways in which the Southside K-8 Community School serves students. These documents will not be published in the report if they have identifying information that cannot be concealed. However, if there is no danger to revealing identities of the participant(s) or any other associated people, if appropriate, some documents will be shared with the participants' written permission.

Example of documents could include but not limited to:

- Student Demographic Data (names will not be included)
- Community Reports
- School Reports
- Needs Assessment Reports

In this study, participants' documents will be analyzed and explored for common themes and patterns. Themes and patterns will be investigated with the following analytical focus:

- Evidence of ways in which the community school serves students
- Student involvement in the community school
- Parental or guardian involvement in the community school
- Degree and levels of benefit of community school
- Support from parents, guardians, teachers, administrators, peers
- Students behavioral changes impacted by the community school
- Students academic changes impacted by the community school

APPENDIX G

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Thank you for your participation in this study on the ways in which the Southside K-8 Community School serves its students. Two interviews and observations were used in addition to asking that documents and/or artifacts directly related to the relevance of the interviews be provided. The goal of the interviews was to gather information about the unique ways that the school serves students affected by extreme poverty and homelessness within a rural community. Through the information gathered in the interviews, themes about service of students were developed. Some themes identified as a result of this research includes: (insert themes from study).

Final results will be available from the researcher, Meaghan Cochrane, by (DATE). You may contact me at mcochrane@ksu.edu to receive an email copy of the final report.

If you would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact my professor: Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya, kakalibh@ksu.edu. Also, you may contact the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board: Dr. Rick Scheidt, Chair Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects or Dr. Jerry Jaax, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance and University Veterinarian. They are both located in 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506 and the telephone number is 785-532-3224.

APPENDIX H

Timeline for Dissertation Study

Date	Description/Duration of Activity	Participant's Role
Week 1	Identify Participants (1 hour)	None
	Contact participants by phone (20 minutes)	Communicate with researcher
	Confirm participation (20 minutes)	Confirm participation
	De/constructing Personal Biases (1 day)	None
Week 2	Research on Reconnecting McDowell Initiative (3 days)	None
	Conduct first interview (1 hour)	Participate in first interview with researcher
	Transcribe first interview (5 hours)	None
	Arts Based Data Analysis (2 days)	None
	Journaling (2 days)	None
Week 3	Conduct second interview (1 hour)	Participate in second interview with researcher
	Transcribe second interview (5 hours)	None
	Arts Based Data Analysis (2 days)	None
	Journaling (2 days)	None
Week 4	Observation of Steering Committee Meeting (1 hour)	Participate in Steering Committee Meeting
	Field notes from Steering Committee Meeting (1 hour)	None
	Transcribe audio recording of Steering Committee Meeting (5 hours)	None
	Arts Based Data Analysis (2 days)	None

	Journaling (2 days)	None
Week 5	Compare/Contrast Data to Community Schools Literature (2 days)	None
	Gather Accompanying Resources on Reconnecting McDowell Initiative (3 days)	None
	Utilize Traditional in vivo Coding for Data Analysis (1 day)	None
	Complete First Write Up (3 days)	None
Week 6	Send Thank You Notes to Indirect Participants (1 hour)	None
	Arrange face-to-face visit with direct participants (1 day)	Correspondence with researcher
	Member check with school principal/school facilitator from first interview (1 day)	Provide feedback to researcher regarding accuracy of data collection
	Complete in vivo Coding (1 day)	None
	Continued Member Checks (4 days)	Correspond with Researcher
Week 7	Face-to-face Meetings with Participants in McDowell County (1 day)	Meeting with researcher
	Emic Observational Research in McDowell County (1 day)	None
	Participate in Informal Conversations in McDowell County (1 day)	Conversations with researcher
	Gather accompanying resources from participants (1 day)	Provide researcher with accompanying resources
	Increase Familiarity of Rural Community and Geographical Landscape of McDowell County	None

	(1 day) Visit the Southside K-8 Community School	Allow researcher to visit and tour the school
	(1 day) Reflective Journaling	None
Week 8	Member check with school principal/school facilitator from second interview	Provide feedback to researcher regarding accuracy of data collection
	(1 day) Member check with members of the Steering Committee	Provide feedback to researcher regarding accuracy of data collection
Week 9	Compare in vivo Coding and Arts Based Data Analysis	None
	(2 days) Writing Up Data Analysis	None
	(3 days) Peer debriefing	None
	(1 day)	
Week 10	Follow Up Correspondence with Participants	Correspond with researcher
	(2 days) Reflective Journaling	None
	(1 day)	
Week 11	Continued Writing Up Data	None

	(4 days)	
	Reflective Journaling	
	(1 day)	None
Week 12	Complete Draft of Data	None
	Analysis	
	(3 days)	
Week 13	Ensure all data has been collected and coded	None
	(1 day)	
	Peer debriefing	None
	(1 day)	
Week 14	Continue revisions of data analysis	None
	(3 days)	
Week 15	Final Proofing	None
	(1 day)	
	Final Journal Reflections	None