

Education and Workforce in Rural North Georgia

A Dissertation submitted
to the Graduate School
Valdosta State University

in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in Adult Career and Education

in the Department of Education
of the College of James L. and Dorothy H. Dewar College of Education and Human Services

May 2021

Donna Marinda Dalton

MSW, Valdosta State University, 2014
BS, Mercer University, 2000

© Copyright 2021 Donna Marinda Dalton

All Rights Reserved

This dissertation, "Education and Workforce Development in Rural North Georgia: A Basic Interpretive Approach to Qualitative Research," by Donna Marinda Dalton, is approved by:

**Dissertation
Committee
Chair**

DocuSigned by:
Christopher Waugh
FF07FC1CA5D3477...

C. Keith Waugh, PhD
Professor (Retired), Department of Leadership,
Technology, and Workforce Development

**Committee
Member**

DocuSigned by:
Diane Holliman
9FD64498DB14426...

Diane C. Holliman, PhD, LCSW, MPH
Professor, Master of Social Work Program
Department of Human Services, COEHS, VSU

DocuSigned by:
Diane Wright
588F2D667D434D0...

Dianne Wright, Ed.D
Associate Professor, Department of Leadership,
Technology, and Workforce Development

**Associate Provost
for Graduate
Studies and
Research**

DocuSigned by:
Becky da Cruz
84AFF646370449F...

Becky Kohler da Cruz, PhD, JD
Professor, Criminal Justice

Defense Date

September 29, 2021

FAIR USE

This thesis is protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States (Public Law 94-553, revised in 1976). Consistent with fair use as defined in the Copyright Laws, brief quotations from this material are allowed with proper acknowledgement. Use of the material for financial gain without the author's expressed written permission is not allowed.

DUPLICATION

I authorize the Head of Interlibrary Loan or the Head of Archives at the Odum Library at Valdosta State University to arrange for duplication of this thesis for educational or scholarly purposes when so requested by a library user. The duplication shall be at the user's expense.

Signature *Donna Dalton*

I refuse permission for this thesis to be duplicated in whole or in part.

Signature _____

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the current study is to explore experiences that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within a school setting; identify the needs for support and attention with possible different experiences and views from the norm, and add new knowledge to the existing limited knowledge base. The theoretical framework of the personal talent development theory, the theory of successful intelligence, and the social cognitive career theory framed the current study and provided a basis for interpreting the findings through cross-comparison. A basic interpretive approach of qualitative research was utilized as the appropriate research design in order to obtain an in-depth description of the lived phenomenon.

I interviewed nine adult students from one local High School in Cleveland, Georgia. Participants were asked to describe significant experiences that influenced their career decision-making processes. Data were collected through three in-depth interviews, which provided a platform to let the students speak to their experiences. The students articulated the following common experiences that influenced their career decisions: parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, college financial advantage, employment, perceived college rank and reputation based on selected major, and college proximity. The statements obtained during the student interviews provided valuable insight and aligned with previous researcher's statements linking the conceptual framework and theory with practice. This qualitative study of rural education and workforce development can make an important contribution. Making education relevant to the contextual realities of the student is essential, and support from research helps to identify issues.

Keywords: exceptional youth, local, contextual supports, rural, high school, underserved communities

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Chapter I: INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| Topic and Purpose of this Study..... | 1 |
| Chapter II: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK..... | 5 |
| My Experiential Knowledge..... | 5 |
| Educational Attrition in Rural Communities..... | 6 |
| Education Achievement Gaps..... | 7 |
| Curriculum Effectiveness in Rural Communities..... | 8 |
| Major Factors Affecting Student Decision-Making Processes..... | 9 |
| Adequate Preparation and Professional Development..... | 11 |
| Linking Theory with Practice..... | 12 |
| Chapter III: METHODOLOGY..... | 16 |
| Research Questions..... | 16 |
| Description of the Population and Sample..... | 17 |
| Research Procedures..... | 18 |
| Data Analysis..... | 20 |
| Validity..... | 20 |
| Chapter IV: RESULTS (Findings)..... | 22 |
| Overview..... | 22 |
| Participants Biographies..... | 23 |
| Angela..... | 23 |
| Bill..... | 24 |
| Craig..... | 25 |

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

| | |
|---|----|
| David..... | 26 |
| Ed..... | 27 |
| Fiona..... | 29 |
| Gail..... | 30 |
| Heather..... | 31 |
| Jenny..... | 32 |
| Common Themes..... | 35 |
| Summary..... | 59 |
| Chapter V: CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION..... | 63 |
| Overview..... | 63 |
| Summary of Findings..... | 65 |
| Discussion of Findings..... | 67 |
| Limitations of the Study..... | 70 |
| Implications for Future Research..... | 71 |
| Conclusion..... | 72 |
| APPENDIX A (REMOVE=IRB APPROVAL) | 83 |
| APPEN-DIX B (Research statement) | 86 |
| APPENDIX C (Informed consent) | 88 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1: <i>Plans For Postsecondary Education</i> | 35 |
| Table 2: <i>Influences On Career Decision-Making Processes</i> | 53 |
| Table 3: <i>Attracting And Retaining Local Talents</i> | 59 |

GLOSSARY

Exceptional Youth: Bright, young, motivated rural students who perform at or show the potential for performing at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment.

Local: pertaining to or affecting a particular part or particular parts of rural North Georgia. Pertaining to, characteristic of, or restricted to a particular place, city, town, or small district rather than an entire state or country.

Contextual Supports: Positive influences, factors, settings, situations, or roles that relate to students learning needs proactively, where and when they need help. The context is the setting, situation, or role that students engage with when learning and applying new understandings. Example: friends, peers, teachers, finances, employment opportunities.

Rural: Small undeveloped country areas or towns that lack big cities, infrastructures, and industries.

Underserved communities: lack of access to resources that sufficiently serve basic health and welfare needs.

High School: Grades 9-12

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I cannot express enough thanks to my committee for their continued support and encouragement. I offer my sincere appreciation for the learning opportunities provided by my committee. The completion of this project could not have been accomplished without the support of my fiancé, Raymond George; my son, Johnathan Cannon; my daughter-in-law, Shannon Cannon; and my cousin Lisa Page. You are the wind beneath my wings.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Mykerezi, Kostandini, Jordan, and Melo (2014) reported that students in rural areas have lower levels of educational achievement, and many students with talents leave to study, live and work somewhere else instead of staying and improving the quality of life and economy locally. According to Curtin, Schweitzer, Tuxbury, and D'Aoust, "a limited amount of research has explored those specific factors that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within a school setting" (2016, p.4). Exceptional youths were more resilient when they had positive personal qualities and positive social conditions. The researchers (Curtin et al., 2016) identified some of the following themes among resilient youths in their study: a positive attitude, ability to reach out to others, perseverance, a positive school climate, and healthy adult role models and mentors. According to Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2002), career development is a complex process that includes intrapersonal, interpersonal, and external factors, and contextual supports and barriers play a major role in shaping career decisions.

Topic and Purposes of this Study

The purpose of the current study is to explore experiences that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within a school setting; identify the needs for support and attention with possible different experiences and views from the norm, and add new knowledge to the existing limited knowledge base. This researcher will gather information and perspectives from rural High School students in North

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

Georgia about the following: college and career readiness; the attrition of youth and adults; post-secondary contextual supports; and experiences that impact adult career decision-making processes. The context is the setting, situation, or role that students engage with when learning and applying new understandings. Contextual supports include: friends, peers, teachers, finances, employment opportunities, positive influences, factors, settings, situations, or roles that relate to students learning needs proactively, where and when they need help.

A qualitative study of rural education and workforce development can make an important contribution. Making education relevant to the contextual realities of the student is essential, and support from research helps to identify issues. The current study will use authentic, real-world experiences to provide insight and a better understanding of how perceived contextual supports in community colleges can equip students in rural areas with the tools they need to overcome barriers, facilitate positive growth in all aspects of their lives, build competence, and expand transitional opportunities. I will describe the study participants identified learning experiences, and explore participants' suggestions for desirable contextual supports, practices, and procedures that might enhance adult learning in rural types of environments. My practical and intellectual research goals include the desire to contribute knowledge through shared experiences that provide a better understanding of rural student needs; promote awareness of achievement gaps in rural areas; improve contextual supports for adult education and workforce development; increase student success in rural areas, and help close the education achievement gap associated with adults in rural areas.

I want to focus on the students' transition, the process of going out of high school into higher education and the workforce. I am not asking about opinions; I am asking about experiences that shaped the students' perspectives. What do I want to get from that experience? The life and

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

learning experiences expressed by the student told later in the interviews. How they shaped their workforce and education goals; how they shaped their career goals. I want to discover things I didn't already know. I want the participants to tell their stories because unconscious ideas, experiences, and behaviors come out in those stories. I can gather implicit meaning through metaphors, and I will be finding implicit ideas or meaning in the interviews. The research objectives for the researcher:

- I want rich data; how the students describe their experiences and make meaning out of it; let them speak to their experiences. I will not ask leading questions; I will let the student give me the information. Or let the students tell their stories?
- According to Curtin, Schweitzer, Tuxbury, and D'Aoust, "a limited amount of research has explored those specific factors that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within a school setting" (2016, p.4). Who are the people we talk the least to? Students. We are trying to understand how a group of people we haven't talked to, at least in this context, makes meaning of their experience; the experience that is unique to them, or their rural environment.
- Intellectual Goals: I want to understand the experiences that shaped the students' perspectives. What do I want to get from that experience? How they shaped their workforce and education goals; how they shaped their career goals?
- Practical goals: How the experience can help meet student needs based on what they relate they need?
- What I want to understand should be embedded in the research questions; research questions are about what I want to understand. I have to talk to the high-school students

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

to understand their experiences and how their experiences shaped their perspectives and decisions.

Chapter II:

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

My Experiential Knowledge

I am part of a small rural North Georgia community, and the choice of a qualitative research approach is influenced by personal goals and experiences. I work with the Enotah Judicial Circuit Parental Accountability Court (PAC). PAC collaborates with other organizations, community resources, educational institutions, and judicial systems to help remove the barriers that prevent non-custodial parents from paying court-ordered child support through a provision of services and resources. The PAC program is a joint effort between the Department of Child Support Services and Superior Court Judges to offer an alternative to incarceration and to help chronic non-payers of child support make regular payments. Some services offered include assistance with GED, specific job skills training, volunteer work opportunities, mental health counseling, resume building and job placement. The main barriers among PAC participants include a lack of education and employment with a career path. I have noticed the following reoccurring patterns: all are considered chronic non-payers of child support payments; they tend to all be either unemployed or underemployed; all are over the age of 21; some lack even a basic education provided by the public education system. Education that does not extend past high school, and the majority never attended college.

For many years, I have promoted the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and other grant-funded educational opportunities to PAC program participants. I have explained and reiterated how WIOA covers tuition, childcare, books, mileage, and other related

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

expenses, but few seemed interested. Why? What is happening here? As a newly vested member of North Georgia, I began to look at my community and delve deeper into the natural environment, culture, local traditions, and experiential viewpoints, especially noting perspectives regarding adult education and career opportunities. This awakening experience invoked more questions about what is happening here. I wanted to do more research on Education and Workforce Development in rural communities; specifically, rural North Georgia.

Educational Attrition in Rural Communities

Nelson (2016) stated that rural areas have a low demand for highly educated workers, lower family incomes, and fewer adults who have been to college. Harmon and Wilborn (2016) stated that rural America has historically been associated with a strong work ethic and blue-collar jobs that require manual labor. Culturally, adult education beyond high school was not seen as a mutually beneficial goal for economic or community development for the locals. A college education was perceived as a pathway to an urban area, where a prestigious career was more economically feasible for those who wanted to relocate. Nelson (2016) reported that rural schools have fewer course options and extracurricular activities. Adolescents often must choose between staying local and having limited economic opportunities; or leaving to pursue higher education and socioeconomic advancement. According to Mykerezzi, Kostandini, Jordan, and Melo (2014), many individuals leave their rural home towns to pursue an education, acquire necessary skills, and seek better job opportunities elsewhere.

Large areas of rural America are struggling to provide effective education, develop strong economic resources, and preserve communities. (Fishman, 2015). Nelson (2016) reported that even though rural schools gain from investing in students that remain local, they instead invest heavily in a minority of students who are high achieving, and prepare youth for education

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

attainment and out-migration. An education system that is lackluster in urban America is perhaps even more so in rural areas. It fails both to educate students for college and to prepare them for post-high school careers that allow for individual flourishing without draining out a community's highest achievers (Fishman, 2015). "The out-migration of rural communities' best and brightest for postsecondary education and job placement is an alarming reality for many rural communities" (Paul & Steward, 2016, p.312). According to Sherman and Sage (2011), local schools prepare children for out-migration to pursue higher education elsewhere. Sherman and Sage referred to out-migration as brain drain.

Education Achievement Gaps

According to Mykerezzi, Kostandini, Jordan, and Melo (2014), adults residing in rural areas show a clear gap in formal education. Students in rural areas have lower levels of educational achievement; and, even though rural and urban students graduate from high school at the same rate, rural students fall behind in college graduation rates. According to Blad (2016), "Schools where students feel safe, engaged, and connected to their teachers are also schools that have narrower achievement gaps" (p.1).

Smith, Lewis, and Heaton (2013) reported that there was a major shortage of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) educators. There was an increasing emphasis on the need for more STEM, yet there was a shortage of teachers in these fields. "In rural areas, it is harder to attract and retain teachers. Investing in teacher knowledge and professional development is important. Rural communities should "grow their own" and encourage members of the community to become teachers (p. 2-5). Barrett, Cowen, Toma, and Troske (2015) reported that professional development programs and the inner connectedness with other

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

teachers, professionals, students, and the communities might help remote school districts attract and retain school leaders.

Curriculum Effectiveness in Rural Communities

“Placed-based education (PBE) focuses on structuring learning around local history, culture, language, environment, and economy” (Avery, 2013, p. 31). Paul and Steward (2016) supported PBE and argued that rural communities are rich in the following ways: they can provide varied extensions to classroom content; resources to provide enrichment experiences that make learning engaging, relevant and memorable; and community embedded topics that expose students to real-world ways of learning outside the classroom walls. (p. 321). “Rural children acquire science and engineering skills throughout their daily lives. Although 11.4 million children in the United States grow up in rural areas, compared to 14.6 million in urban areas, relatively little attention is given to rural science education. Consequently, students who could become society’s future technicians, scientists, and engineers go untapped” (Avery, 2013, p.28-30).

The social context of learning today is characterized by globalization, the information society, technology, and changing demographics. “Globalization, the information society, technology, and changing demographics are so interrelated that it is difficult to consider one without reference to the others. The learning that adults are engaged in both reflects and responds to these forces” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p.10,11). Everyone is challenged by the speed of change; professional preparation quickly becomes outdated, and even routine tasks require new learning. “Technology has irrevocably affected how we work, carry out our daily lives, and interact with other people” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p.5). According to Merriam and Bierema (2014), technology is changing how adults learn, and the impact on informal learning is limitless. Traditional education systems can design and deliver curriculum and provide access to learning

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

through the internet. Massive open online courses (MOOC'S) can provide new learning opportunities. The knowledge society has great implications for learning, but the knowledge society has not evolved in some places, leaving them far behind and unable to compete.

“In the same way, ruralness is a socially constructed concept with psychological, social, and cultural aspects; its importance extends beyond the physical boundaries of place to emphasize the social, cultural, and economic conditions that shape the learning opportunities to which particular individuals are exposed, the interpersonal reactions they receive for performing certain activities, and the outcomes they come to anticipate” (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002, p. 269-270). Ali and Saunders (2006) reported that “person inputs such as race, sex, socioeconomic status, intelligence, proximal and distal contextual factors, cultural and gender role socialization are critical sources of influence on career development” (p.40). The context is the setting, situation, or role that students engage with when learning and applying new understandings. Example: friends, peers, teachers, finances, employment opportunities, positive influences, factors, settings, situations, or roles that relate to students learning needs proactively, where and when they need help. Lent et al. (2002) suggested that contextual supports (i.e., role models, vicarious learning opportunities, performance abilities) influence the development of self-efficacy beliefs and ultimately influence an individual's vocational and educational expectations. Perceived support is defined as aspects of an individual's environment and the individual's appraisal of the environment that facilitate career choice and development.

Major Factors Affecting Student Decision-Making Processes

“The foundation for career decisions begins long before a student enters college. It is influenced, and even at times dictated, by family, friends, and mentors” (Workman, 2015, p.287). Difficulties related to career decisions include the following: “indecisiveness, lack of readiness,

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

lack of information, dysfunctional myths, and lack of knowledge about the process” (Powell, Mobley, Kemer, & Giordano, 2014, p.163). Hinka (2017) revealed the following three major factors affecting decision-making processes about persistence: community and family values of education, the challenge of overcoming the pull of family obligations, and making the cognitive leap to master college-level coursework. “The results emphasize the importance of each college investing resources to understand the specific needs of that institution’s students, students shaped by their region’s culture and other defining traits, and customizing retention practices and programs to meet those unique needs” (p.144).

Lent et al. (2002) reported that contextual supports and barriers play a major role in shaping career decisions. Curtin, Schweitzer, Tuxbury, and D’Aoust (2016) reported that exceptional youths were more resilient when they had positive personal qualities and positive social conditions. Curtin et al. (2016) called for educational professionals to do the following: promote social skills and programs that emphasize assertiveness, coping skills, and setting and accomplishing goals; teach the importance of help-seeking and reaching out to others; help students establish connections with adult role models and mentors; provide a safe and welcoming school environment, and involve students, so they feel they have some influence in school.

“Interdisciplinary research has found that the readiness to succeed in college relates strongly to demographic, academic, motivational, and career planning factors” (Poynton, Lapan, & Marcotte, 2015, p.57). According to Shudde and Goldrick-Rab (2015), “students go to college, swayed by the college-for-all culture, but find themselves haplessly navigating complex bureaucratic structures, ultimately accumulating debt and failing to meet their educational goals” (p.41). Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) reported that counselors could provide programs for parents and students that could help them fill the gap in knowledge by assisting them with the

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

following: the search process, the decision-making process, college applications, financial aid, and preparing for college life. Paul and Steward (2016) specified the five following pathways for developing talent: enrichment, advanced learning, human connections, entrepreneurial thinking, and specialized guidance.

Adequate Preparation and Professional Development

“Rural districts often struggle to find even one qualified teacher per subject. The list of regulations that burden education improvement goes on and on. Onerous policies and inadequate access to resources, among other constraints, hamper the improvement of rural education” (Fishman, 2015, p. 2-3). “If our educational systems are to be successful in educating the youth of our state, the single most important variable is the quality of teaching in our schools” (Smith, Lewis & Heaton, 2013, p.2). Barrett et al. (2015) reported that professional development programs and the inner connectedness with other teachers, professionals, students, and the communities might help remote school districts attract and retain school leaders. “Delivery of high-quality leadership and instruction depends on adequate preparation and professional development; intensive training can have positive impacts on students” (p. 13). “Schools in remote locales may be well served by investing resources in improving the skills of their existing workforce rather than making wholesome changes to their teaching staff” (Barrett et al., 2015, p.13).

“Effective learning for adults is cognizant of the intersecting roles the educator, learner, process, and context play in the design and facilitation of learning. The design and facilitation of learning is the bridge between theory and practice in adult education” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p.253-254). An effective model for culturally responsive teaching has to have enough breadth to accommodate the range of diversity found in postsecondary education. It also has to integrate a

variety of assumptions from different disciplines. But most of all, it has to explain how to create compelling learning experiences through which learners can maintain their integrity as they attain relevant educational success. (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009, p.33). Merriam and Bierema (2014) stated that “the process of learning is culturally bound. Context is the social system that permeates the thinking and actions of all human beings within a particular situation such as a classroom, organization, community, or nation” (p.252-253). “When education intersects with students’ real world, powerful learning occurs” (Paul & Steward, 2016, p.321).

Linking Theory with Practice

The personal talent development theory (Moon, 2003, 2003a, 2003b, 2012, 2014), the theory of successful intelligence (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 2002), and the social cognitive career theory (Sternberg, 1997, 1999, 2003, 2005) will frame the current study and provide the lenses for me to examine and try to understand the experiences that influence career decision making processes of the participants in the study. The theoretical framework will provide a basis for interpreting the findings and confirming or questioning the researcher’s understanding of the truth through cross-comparison.

Paul and Steward (2016) designed the place-based investment model (PBIM) to help develop and reinvest talents within the community. The researchers proposed model provided a framework for structuring a continuum of services focused on place-based talent development, recognizing localized opportunities, and achieving self-fulfillment in rural areas. Paul and Steward (2016) designed the place-based investment model (PBIM) to help develop and reinvest talents within the community. The place-based investment model (PBIM) is a programming model for developing talents of high-potential youth in ways that could serve as an investment in the community within rural contexts and give high-potential young people the knowledge, skills,

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

and tools for understanding themselves, for developing their strengths and passions, and for recognizing localized opportunities for achieving self-fulfillment in adulthood. The model specifies five pathways for developing talent: (a) enrichment, (b) advanced learning, (c) human connections, (d) entrepreneurial thinking, and (e) specialized guidance. The researchers focused efforts on developing the knowledge, skills, and tools young people needed to adapt to or shape their environment. The core framework of PBIM was grounded in three theories that responded to imperatives for talent development in rural areas. Paul and Steward (2016) used the lens of the personal talent development theory (Moon, 2003, 2003a, 2003b, 20012, 20014), the theory of successful intelligence (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 2002), and the social cognitive career theory (Sternberg, 1997, 1999, 2003, 2005) to encourage talent development in rural communities.

Paul and Steward (2016) stated that “one way of thinking about the phenomenon of rural brain drain is through the lens of the theory of successful intelligence” (p. 312). According to Paul and Steward (2016, p.312), the successful intelligence theory proposed that talented people have three choices related to their environment: they can adapt to it, shape it, or leave it. Sternberg (2005) defined social intelligence as “the ability to achieve one’s goals in life, given one’s socio-cultural context; by capitalizing on strengths and correcting or compensating for weaknesses in order to adapt to, shape, and select environments; through a combination of analytical, creative, and practical abilities” (p.328).

According to Paul and Steward (2016, p.312), the personal talent development theory purposed that people can select and attain the goals that fit their interests, abilities, and rural community values and contexts. Personal talent can also be conceptualized as expertise in the personal domain. First, the construct focuses attention on a domain of talent development that

has largely been ignored by the field. Second, it provides a dynamic, incremental conceptualization of characteristics such as motivation and persistence that have frequently been treated as static, entity-oriented processes by our field. Third, the personal talent construct can help explain some of the conundrums in our field, such as why individuals who have lesser amounts of domain-specific abilities can surpass the accomplishments of their more able peers. (Moon, 2003, p.5-6).

Domain-specific talent development, addresses the important social-emotional tasks and skills that students need to achieve at high levels. In addition to ability, this interrelated set of personal talent skills emphasizes students' interests, values, and knowledge of context as important factors for them to consider when setting goals that will lead to attainment of overall well-being and psychological adjustment. Five components serve as the foundation for the model: self-knowledge, environmental knowledge, psychological knowledge and skills (including goal setting), personal decision-making skills, and self-regulation skills (including goal achievement. (Paul & Steward 2016, p.312).

According to Paul and Steward (2016), the social cognitive career theory purposed that people shape their careers in a complex process that includes intrapersonal, interpersonal, and external factors. The theory focuses on individuals as active agents or shapers of their career development. (p.312). Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) stated that "this theory and its focus on self-efficacy, outcome expectations, barriers, and goals could help with career and academic decision making" (p. 1). The social cognitive career theory, the successful intelligence theory, and the personal talent development theory relate to each of the research questions by focusing on the students' stories and experiences, and how they describe their experience and make meaning of it. Applicable to the aforementioned theories, previous experiences shape the way we behave in

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

our current setting, and it is the flow of experiences that move us from one place to another.

Culture is built on core values, and culture is our way of viewing the world.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

The research questions were designed to capture and detail how the students experience the way of life changes and transitions, how students understand the career decision-making process, and how students make meaning of adult education and workforce development in a rural community. The research questions will theoretically help us to understand how students make radical shifts and adapt to different forms of living. The research questions are about what I wanted to understand, and I talked to the source, the high-school students, to understand their experiences. I wanted to focus on the process, not on variables. I interviewed nine high-school students and focused only on them. I asked students about their experience with high school and their plans for college or future workforce.

Research Interview Questions

For High School Students:

- (1) What do high-school students say their plans are for postsecondary education?
- (2) What do high-school students say are some of the experiences affecting their education and career decisions making processes?
- (3) What could rural communities and colleges do to attract and retain local talents?

These questions focus on how students' experiences influence their career decision-making processes, and how contextual supports can foster the development of resiliency for students in rural underserved communities.

The qualitative methodology from a general approach perspective was utilized in this study to explore, gain understanding, contribute to the existing knowledge base, and contribute to the development of future studies. The qualitative, general approach was used as follows: historical, applicable to information taken from previous literature and researchers' findings;

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

basic interpretative qualitative research with descriptive authentic and real-world experiences; inductive, discovery learn as you go interviews with rich recorded dialogue. The research was population specific, consisting of one sample from a local high school population of 12th graders. The participant samples were randomly selected from one high school institution in the small rural geographical area of North Georgia. The rural area students were typical, and my identification as a part of this community helped facilitate the study. The setting and students selected were appropriate and represented the demographics of rural North Georgia. Participant interviews provided the data to answer the research questions.

I loosely followed Seidman's (2019) suggestion to conduct a series of three 90-minute interviews. The first interview allowed me to build rapport and gather background information. The second interview focused on the student's stories and experiences; the flow of experiences that moved them from one place to another; how they described their experience and made meaning of it; and how their experiences influenced their career decision-making processes. The third interview focused on reflection and feedback. Two Audio taping devices were used to reduce mechanical errors and eliminate interruptions while recording the participants' experiences. Interviews were open-ended and incorporated questions accordingly as the interviews progressed.

Description of the Population and Sample

I interviewed nine adult students in rural North Georgia. The study posed no serious ethical problems for these reasons: Participants were all adults and will remain anonymous. Names were changed to protect the identity of the participants. The specific population was from one local High School in Cleveland, Georgia. The participants were obtained from the following targeted population: 269 students locally enrolled in the 12th grade (NCES, 2017-2018 school

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

year). The sample was randomly selected from students who were all adults 18 years of age or older on a volunteer basis. Twelve students initially volunteered to participate as follows: six Caucasian females, five Caucasian males, and one Hispanic male. Only nine of the initial students appeared for the interviews. One Caucasian female and two Caucasian males decided to opt-out of the participation group for unknown reasons. The educational leader contacts or gatekeepers from the High School included the following: Assistant Superintendent, Principal, 12th-grade Teachers, high school counselors, and senior sponsors.

Research Procedures

I first consulted with my dissertation advisor for program-specific requirements. We discussed how to develop a tentative proposal and ideas on the selection of committee members for my dissertation. I selectively chose the additional committee members from the appropriate graduate faculty list. I personally asked the faculty members I had chosen to serve as my committee members, and they graciously accepted. Christopher K. Waugh Ph.D., the former Department Head of Adult Career and Education, agreed to be my dissertation committee chair and my committee researcher. Diane C. Holliman, Ph.D., LCSW, Professor of Social Work and Dianne Wright, Ph.D., Professor of Adult Career and Education, graciously agreed to be my committee members. I submitted the Committee Appointment form and obtained approval. I prepared a draft of my proposal, met with my committee, and obtained their approval to proceed with my dissertation. I obtained the Institutional Review Board form (IRB, APPENDIX A) required for approval on human research participants. I submitted the IRB form and obtained approval to proceed with my research.

I wanted to conduct my research with adult senior-high school students at the High School in North Georgia. I went to the high school in person and got permission to conduct the

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

study from the Assistant Superintendent. I contacted specified leaders by phone or email to request an interview with the principal, as advised by the Assistant Superintendent. I spoke with the principal, and we discussed the details of the study. She graciously granted permission to conduct the study and agreed to help with the study arrangements. The principal facilitated contacts with appropriate high school participants who were 18 years of age at the time of the interviews, and she made the arrangements and set up the appointment times and locations. The students were asked to volunteer to participate, and those that wished to participate were given consent forms (Informed Consent, APPENDIX C) to review with their parents according to educational protocol. Students were advised that their participation was without compensation, strictly on a voluntary basis, and they could discontinue participation at any time without consequence. Twelve students initially volunteered to participate in the study, but only nine appeared for interviews and participated. To ensure participant understanding, the researcher read aloud the Research Statement (Research Statement APPENDIX B) before conducting the interviews, and a copy of the statement was offered to the participants. Students were advised as follows: that upon completion of the research study all data would be securely maintained in a locked file cabinet and password-protected computer; data would be accessible only by the researchers for a minimum of three years, and interview recordings would be deleted immediately upon creation of the transcripts.

The timeline of research activity and the estimated completion date was 16-20 weeks to conduct a series of three 90-minute interviews. The interviews were developed by the researcher and adapted to the specifics of the target population. The steps in administering instruments and collecting data included on-site, formal, semi-structured, tape-recorded interviews with open-ended questions. The interviews were transcribed immediately after the session ended. The

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

recordings were used only for the purpose of creating an accurate transcript and deleted immediately. The research consent statement was read aloud to each participant at the start of recording, and the reading was documented in the transcript. Each participant was given a copy of the statement.

Data Analysis

The analysis was ongoing and inductive. Interviews were used to provide rich descriptive details of life experiences. MAXQDA software was used to make it easier to transcribe, code, analyze, cross-compare, and store data, memos, and notes. Interviews were transcribed immediately, then coded. Content analysis identified emergent themes, patterns, and questions. Intent listening during the interview process and intent listening to recordings captured the choice of words and tones of voice used. Verbal and non-verbal cues, facial expressions, body language, and display of emotions were observed with comparison across interviews for re-occurring themes. Transcripts were read several times and analyzed into emergent conceptual categories.

Validation

To minimize possible threats and to test the validity of my findings, I used the following: triangulation of methods-interviews, observation and documentation; transcripts, notes and memos to create rich data; feedback from my committee; member checks-discussing and comparing findings with a co-reader; cross-comparison of data and comparing findings with existing theory; checking for alternative explanations and negative evidence; reflection, bias check, and subjective I monitored through memoing. Memoing or reflecting, and keeping a research diary is a way of self-monitoring to address and correct the possibility of subjective I and biases.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

Overview

I interviewed nine high-school seniors about the experiences that influenced their career decisions. The thematic material is presented as it relates to the following research questions: (1)

What do high-school students say their plans are for post-secondary education?

(2) What do high-school students say are some of the experiences affecting their education and career decisions making processes?

(3) What do high-school students say rural communities and colleges could do to attract and retain local talents?

These questions focus on how students' experiences influence their career decision-making processes, and how contextual supports can foster the development of resiliency for students in rural underserved communities. A summary of the predominantly common experiences that influenced the career decision-making process among the participants is described.

This chapter includes biographical descriptions of each participant, a summary of the themes that emerged from each interview, and an overview of the consistent themes across interviews. A summary of prominent themes that emerged from each participant's interviews is reported in narrative form and illustrated in three separate tables. Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of the participants included above. Table 1 presents thematic material as it relates to the first research question as follows: What do high-school students say their plans are for post-secondary education? Table 2 summarizes the actual experiences of the participants included above. Table 2 presents thematic material as it relates to the second research question as follows: What do high-school students say are some of the experiences affecting their education

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

and career decisions making processes? Table 3 summarizes the perspectives of the participants included above in reference to rural communities and local talents. Table 3 presents thematic material as it relates to the third research question as follows: What could rural communities and colleges do to attract and retain local talents? All names used in the reporting data are fictitious, and non-crucial identifying information was omitted to protect the participant's anonymity and confidentiality.

Participant Biographies

The biological description of each participant includes general demographic information and career aspirations. A summary of prominent themes that emerged from each participant's interviews is reported in narrative form and illustrated in Table 1. All names used in the reporting data are fictitious, and non-crucial identifying information was omitted to protect the participant's anonymity and confidentiality.

Angela

Angela is 18 years old and self-identifies as a Caucasian female. She is currently in her senior year in high school. Angela has two siblings. She has lived in the same area in the rural mountains of Cleveland, Georgia all her life. Angela reports that both of her parents graduated from local colleges and are very supportive of higher education. She states that she has two aunts who went to college; one attended a local college, and the other attended college in another state. Angela plans to attend a four-year university. She has been accepted at Augusta University, where she is going to run cross-country and track. Angela says she is interested in education and employment in the medical field. Angela states that her college of choice is based on reputation and reports that Augusta University is a well-known medical college. Angela explains that Augusta is far away from home, and she doesn't want to stay local.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

Bill

Bill is 18 years old and self-identifies as a Mexican-American male. He is currently in his senior year in high school. Bill has seven siblings; three foster brothers, one foster sister, and three biological brothers. He lived in Mexico before taking up residence in North Georgia. Bill states that his biological parents dropped out of school in the third grade. His biological mother is a housewife, and his biological father is a farmer. Bill states that he is the first member of his biological family to attend college. Bill's foster mom is a teacher, and his foster dad is an electrical engineer. Bill says that he was inspired by both sets of parents, and the diversity between them influenced his career-making decision processes. Bill reports that in Mexico, his family situation wasn't good. Bill explains he was going to drop out of school, but he decided to move to North Georgia instead.

Bill states,

I saw how my biological parents struggled with the every-day functions of life without an education. I also saw how my foster parents used their education to secure a better future. Both of my foster parents are college graduates, and they are very successful and well-rounded. My biological parents didn't make it past third grade, and things were bad. We struggled as a family. My family situation wasn't good, so I was going to drop out of school. Things changed when I moved here and got with my foster family. My parents definitely influenced my decision to pursue post-secondary education.

Bill is in a move on when ready dual enrollment program, and he has acquired 12 college credits. He says that the high-school program gives him a feel of college life. Bill has enlisted in the Army National Guard and will be attending the University of North Georgia (UNG), where

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

he plans to be a Flight Warrant Officer. Bill states that he chose UNG because of the proximity to his family.

Bill explains how everybody plays a part in making a community better and suggests that rural communities could benefit from things such as expanding industry and tourism. Bill suggests that schools could improve relevancy by teaching more topics that apply to real life, like ROTC and welding classes.

Craig

Craig is 18 years old and self-identifies as a Caucasian male. He is currently in his senior year in high school. Craig has one sibling who is currently attending college at the University of Georgia (UGA). He lived in Atlanta before moving to Cleveland, Georgia. Craig reports that both of his parents graduated from local colleges. Craig's mom attended UGA, and she is a nurse. His dad attended UNG, and he is a teacher. Craig reports that his grandparents and several relatives attended college, but he wasn't sure where they attended. Craig states, "You are affected by your surroundings. If you grew up with parents who did not attend college, then I believe you are more likely not to finish college because you grew up knowing you did not need it to live."

Craig plans to go to Kennesaw State University (KSU) for a couple of years, then transfer to UGA or Emory University. Craig explains that he will attend UGA if he decides to study law, or Emory University if he decides to study medicine. Craig states, "My uncle is an engineer. I plan on getting a bachelor's in biomedical engineering and then go to law or medical school. My dream job would be anesthesiologist or law." Craig states that teachers, counselors, family, and friends influenced his career decision-making process. Craig shared his thoughts about what rural communities and colleges could do to attract and retain local talent. He states that rural

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

areas need more choices, more technical colleges, more big businesses, more employment opportunities, and better-paying jobs. He explained that big businesses are in the cities, not in rural areas.

David

David is 18 years old and self-identifies as a Caucasian male. He is currently in his senior year in high school. David has one sibling. He has lived in the same area in the rural mountains of Cleveland, Georgia all his life. David reports that both of his parents graduated from local colleges. His mom teaches fifth grade, and his dad is the director of a local charter high school. David states that his parents played a significant role in his career decision-making processes. David plans to attend North Georgia Technical College (NGTC) and enroll in the nursing program. He explains that he wants to be a registered nurse (RN) and later down the road, a nurse practitioner (NP). David states that he has a friend who graduated from the nursing program. David states, "I chose NGTC because they have a bridge program. Once you get an associate, you can bridge over and work on your bachelor's degree."

David states that he would work in Gainesville, Cumming, or Lawrenceville, Georgia, but not in Dahlonega or Cleveland, Georgia. "There's a higher demand down there and pay would be a little more. I still would be close to my family and the White County area, and I would make more money and have better opportunities." David reports that rural areas pay less than urban areas, and rural areas have lower levels of educational achievement. He states, "I think rural-based areas do have lower education experience since the majority of them are agriculturally based. Most people, right out of high school, might only go to a two-year tech then start working for a small business." David explains that he would like to live close to his family, but he would need to have

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

a decent paying job with benefits to stay in White County. David states, “to make a rural area more attractive, you would have to make it un-rural.”

Ed

Ed is 18 years old and self-identifies as a Caucasian male. He is currently in his senior year in high school. Ed has three siblings, and none of his siblings are currently attending college. He has lived in the same house in Cleveland, Georgia all his life. Ed reports that his dad has a master’s degree, and his mom is currently enrolled in college. Both parents are teachers. Ed states that three of his grandparents graduated from college. Ed will be attending Georgia Tech and plans to study engineering. Ed says he wants to work in research and development, or some other exploratory science-related field. Ed reports that financial factors influenced his decision to attend Georgia Tech. Ed states, “GA Tech is the best science school in the state, and it’s cheaper. My great aunt passed away and left a huge grant, so I will be getting the family’s scholarship. It’s kind of like a loan with no interest just for the family.”

Ed states that his dad teaches music, and for a long time, he wanted to be a musician or a music teacher. Ed explains, “after a while, that plan fizzled out. I joined Science Olympiad and discovered I loved engineering. Since I was in the Science Tech Club, we got to go to the competition.” Ed excitedly describes some of the projects his team has engineered and entered in the competitions. He expresses his appreciation for the art shop and metal shop. Ed states, “I love the metal shop, agriculture room, and the art room.” Ed expresses his interest in material science. He describes polymers and defines them in depth. Ed states that he would like to invent new materials. Ed has a notebook full of ideas on what he might invent. Ed states that his high school has the best agriculture department. “They have a big team, and they win lots of

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

competitions.” Ed states that there is a “big push” to get kids into CTE classes, get degrees, and start work. Ed explains that CTE classes integrate academics with technical skills.

Ed reports that some of his peers are making early decisions, and some are making last-minute decisions. Ed explains, “I think you should apply to several places, so you have options and know what all your options are.” Ed reports that some of his friends are going to college, some are going into the military, and some are going right into the workforce. He explains that some of his peers will be graduating from high school with a welding degree and will stay local to do welding jobs. Ed states, “they will probably make more money, and that’s a pull not to go to college. It’s easy to make money, but they will only last about nine or ten years because their lungs fill with chemicals, and their eyes are affected.” Ed reports that there is a stigma attached to the students attending agriculture, art, and welding classes. He states, “other students refer to us as the back-hallway kids, and it’s considered rednecky.” Ed states, “there was a rumor that the welding teacher gave out free dip.”

We discussed what rural communities and colleges could do to attract and retain local talents at length. Ed states, “change the stigma around not leaving. There appears to be fewer high degree requiring professions here. If you want to pursue a more intellectual field, you feel like you need to leave.” He explains that staying local or choosing to attend college close to home is perceived as less successful than going to school far away. He says that an education “here” is “less credited” than a big university. Ed refers to the local colleges as 2.0. I asked him to explain this. Ed states, “An education here is considered 2.0, more high school. Dual enrollment is offered from Truett McConnell and UNG here, so it’s considered less because you can get it here in high school, so it’s just an extension.” Ed explains that he and his friends feel that they need to do well in high school, and if they aren’t high achievers, they aren’t going to be

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

able to leave. Ed states, because of the stigma, he and his friends have a joke called can't do it, Truett. Ed says, "If you can't do it, Truett, and if you can't Truett, screw it. That's how my friends and I feel. I don't know how to change the stigma."

Fiona

Fiona is 18 years old and self-identifies as a Caucasian female. She is currently in her senior year in high school. She has lived in the same area in the rural mountains of Sautee, Georgia all her life. Fiona has two siblings; one brother and one sister. Fiona states that both her parents and her grandfather graduated from college. Her sister graduated from college, and her brother is attending a military college in South Carolina. Fiona's mother and sister are teachers. Fiona plans to attend Brenau University in Gainesville, Georgia. Fiona explains that she is going to obtain a Bachelor of Science in education and then pursue a Master of Education with a minor in sign language. Fiona states that Brenau is close to home and has more diversity and a good solid reputation. Fiona states, "I want to teach severe and profound special education, and a special education degree is hard to find. I have a scholarship to play volleyball, and UNG doesn't have a volleyball team."

Fiona reports that her parents and teachers were great influences on her career decision-making processes. "I let them influence my decision between special education and occupational therapy because they were willing to give me the pros and cons of what they knew." Fiona explains that she had to start early to get into the school she wanted. Fiona says she thinks college is a "great thing" and believes a college education is needed to be "successful for a long time." Fiona explains that she wants to work in Alpharetta or Roswell, Georgia for about two years to get some experience. Fiona says she likes the small community feel and wants to return to Cleveland, Georgia to raise a family. Fiona states, "I like the small community. The schools

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

are small, but you are exposed to a lot of experiences. I like the way we come together as a community.” Fiona says that you get what you put into a community. Fiona states,

I believe the opportunity is there; it’s up to the student to take it or not. Where a student is from does not define work ethic and intelligence. Those traits come from within and through self-motivation. I believe children are inspired by their parents. A kid who graduated from here last year has straight A’s at UGA; meanwhile, he has people in his class from all over the country, not doing that well compared to him. His parents aren’t educated, and it made him want to do better. I think that’s what’s really pushing him.

Gail

Gail is 18 years old and self-identifies as a Caucasian female. She is currently in her senior year in high school. She has lived in the same area in the rural mountains of Cleveland, Georgia all her life. Gail has three brothers. Gail stated that her father attended college locally at UNG, and both parents work for local educational institutions. Gail aspires to teach “childhood” education and will be attending Truett McConnell University after graduation. Truett McConnell University is a private Baptist university in Cleveland, Georgia. Gail states that her mother works at Truett McConnell, which will give her a financial advantage. Gail states,

I like the atmosphere. The community is real sweet. I like the intent. When I visited the campus, they were so friendly, and I loved the feel of that community. I think schools where students feel safe, engaged, and connected, like our own, is the greatest school experience one can have.

Gail says she has friends who don’t know what they want to do after they graduate. Gail states that she has many friends with diverse career aspirations and goals, but she resonates with like-minded peers. Gail explains, “I have several friends that have stated they want to go into

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

botany at UGA and stuff like that. Because I want to be a teacher, I surround myself with others that want to be teachers as well.” Gail says that, as a teacher, she hopes to inspire others. She says she fell in love with teaching after working with her younger family members. Gail states that her parents, family, and friends have influenced her career decision-making process the most. Gail states, “I have been more motivated to achieve in school because I have been inspired and pushed to do well. I want to make my community, teachers, and parents proud.” Gail states that White County naturally attracts and retains local talents. “From the community to the natural attractions, and the local stores, everything is sweet and welcoming. There is no other place I would have chosen.” In the last phase of the interviewing process, Gail provided the following feedback: “I love how the students are being interviewed and asked their opinions and thoughts. I think by doing so, it makes many of us feel listened to and heard. I love talking about education and workforce development.”

Heather

Heather is 18 years old and self-identifies as a Caucasian female. She is currently in her senior year in high school. She has lived in Cleveland, Georgia since she was three years old. Heather has one biological sister and one half-sister. Her parents, grandparents, and several relatives attended college. Heather stated that neither of her parents graduated from local colleges, but both parents have degrees. Heather reports that her mom works at the Board of Education and has a “double master’s degree in business and finance.” Heather says her parents are supportive, and her family members are creative and ambitious. Heather will be attending Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia. She explains that her major will be in theater with a minor in music theory. Heather says that music has had a major impact on who she is as an individual. Heather plays several musical instruments, and she composes songs. Heather

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

says her dream job would be in the theater education field, and she aspires to be a singer, director, or an actress. Heather states that she chose Georgia Southern University based on “right fit,” reputation, diversity, fraternization, and opportunity. Heather states that her mom attended Valdosta State University (VSU). Heather states, “my mom suggested VSU and other colleges too, but she understood what works for her may not be right for me.” Heather reports that her tenth-grade theater teacher influenced her career decision-making processes the most. According to Heather, her teacher showed her that she was capable of many things, and she helped her develop self-confidence. Heather states, “The impact she had on me inspired my decision to major in theater education. I hope to inspire students the same way my teacher inspired me.”

Heather says that many of the local colleges were “inviting,” but if they were “bigger,” she would be more inclined to stay. Heather states, “I love interacting with others, and larger schools offer more opportunities for diversified social interaction. Having a more diverse culture would also encourage me to stay here, as well.” Heather explains that Georgia Southern University would present more overall opportunities conducive to what she wants to do with her life. Heather provided the following feedback: “Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this study. The questions allow for an in-depth response as well as personality to show through. I personally enjoyed what was be inquired of the young adults today.”

Jenny

Jenny is 18 years old and self-identifies as a Caucasian female. She is currently in her senior year in high school. She has lived in the same area in the rural mountains of Sautee Georgia all her life. Jenny is the oldest of two siblings. She has one brother and one sister. Jenny states that both of her parents work at local educational institutions. Jenny reports that three of her four grandparents attended college in Michigan. Jenny plans to attend Piedmont College, where she

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

will study environmental science and run cross country and track. Jenny states that both of her parents have a Master of Arts in Teaching from Piedmont College. Piedmont College is a private college located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains in Demorest, Georgia. Jenny says she looked at UGA, but it was too far away.

Jenny says she enjoys outdoor activities and hiking. Jenny explains that she wouldn't have the same opportunities to enjoy those activities in an urban area. Jenny states, "I don't think I would be comfortable in a big city. I've spent my whole life here, and I don't think I would be comfortable with that big of a change." Jenny states that her teacher played a major role in her career-decisions making processes. Jenny states, "As far as influences of my major, I would have to say that my agriculture teachers fostered my love of the environment by allowing me to participate in forestry competitions." Jenny says that her family and friends are incredibly ambitious. Jenny states, "I have been taking AP and honor classes since freshman year, and I have been around some very ambitious and dedicated students the last four years."

Jenny says that she loves the area she lives in, and the mountains are her favorite place to spend time. Jenny reports that Helen, Georgia is a tourist attraction. She describes how people come to Helen to hike and go tubing down the rivers. Jenny explains how Cleveland, Georgia is innovating by improving infrastructure, updating restaurants, and expanding businesses to attract more people to the area. Jenny states, "there are occupations here that require just as much schooling as those in urban areas, such as law workers and doctors." At the end of the interviewing process, Jenny offered the following feedback: "I'm biased, but I don't believe that students in rural areas have lower levels of education or we have a lower demand for highly educated workers. We need to get the people's perspective heard. I think this is an interesting study, and I hope it yields a lot of insight."

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of the participants included above.

Table 1 presents thematic material as it relates to the first research question as follows: What do high-school students say their plans are for postsecondary education?

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

Table 1
Plans for Postsecondary Education

| <u>Name (Gender) Ethnicity</u> | <u>College/Technical College</u> | <u>Career Aspirations</u> |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Angela (F) Caucasian | College August University | Medical Field Doctor |
| Bill (M) Mexican-American | College University of North Georgia | Army/National Guards Flight Warrant Officer |
| Craig (M) Caucasian | College Kennesaw State University | Biomedical Engineering Anesthesiologist |
| David (M) Caucasian | Technical College North Georgia Technical College | Nursing program Nurse (RN/PN) |
| Ed (M) Caucasian | Technical College Georgia Tech | Engineering Research/Development Exploratory Science Field |
| Fiona (F) Caucasian | College Brenau University | Education Teacher/Special Education |
| Gail (F) Caucasian | College Truett McConnell University | Education Teacher |
| Heather (F) Caucasian | College Georgia Southern University | Theater Education Actress/Singer/Director |
| Jenny (F) Caucasian | College Piedmont College | Environmental Science Botanist/ Park Ranger |

Common Themes

The depiction of the students' actual experiences is presented to provide a better understanding of what the student experiences; how the students' perceived experiences influence their career decision-making processes; and how the contextual supports mentioned can foster the development of resiliency for students in rural underserved communities. The

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

students articulated the following predominantly common experiences that influenced their career decisions: parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, the financial advantage of a college or scholarship, employment, perceived college rank and reputation based on selected major, and college proximity.

Parents

Nine out of nine participants, Angela, Bill, Craig, David, Ed, Fiona, Gail, Heather, and Jenny, articulated that parental influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes.

As Angela states:

My parents inspired me to pursue a career with such difficulty. Although neither work in the medical, both my mom and dad attended college and are currently working hard in their careers. This is what has inspired me to work hard for my future.

As Bill states:

My biological parents dropped out of school in the third grade. My biological mother is a housewife, and my biological father is a farmer. None of my family or relatives have ever attended college. I am the first generation in college. I saw how my biological parents struggled with the every-day functions of life without an education. I also saw how my foster parents used their education to secure a better future. Both my foster parents are college graduates, and they are very successful and well-rounded. My biological parents didn't make it past third grade, and things were bad. We struggled as a family. My family situation wasn't good, so I was going to drop out of school. Things changed when I moved here and got with my foster family. My biological parents and my foster parents definitely influenced my decision to pursue a post-secondary education.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

As Craig states:

My mom attended UGA, and she's a nurse. My dad attended UNG, and he is a teacher.

My dad has a doctorate, so he is very vested in education. You are affected by your surroundings. If you grew up with parents who did not attend college, then I believe you are more likely not to finish college because you grew up knowing you did not need it to live.

As David states:

My parents, both being big in the education field, have really played a significant role in my career decisions. They have always stressed the importance of education and the importance of being educated. Their success has pushed me to continue my education.

As Ed states:

Both my parents are teachers. My parents always inspired me to learn. They made learning fun and exciting. My dad teaches music, and for the longest time, I wanted to be a musician or a music teacher like him. As I grew as an individual, I discovered how much I loved science. I am interested in material science, especially polymers. I keep a book of all my ideas and plans for new inventions. I want to invent new materials.

As Fiona states:

My family, especially my parents, were great influences on my career decisions. My mom and sister are both teachers. I let them influence my decision between special education and occupational therapy because they were willing to give me the pros and cons of what they knew.

As Gail states:

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

Both my parents work in the field of education here in White County, and they have played a very inspirational role in my career decision-making process. As a teacher, I hope to inspire others too. I want to teach childhood education. I fell in love with teaching after working with my younger siblings and other family members. I have been more motivated to achieve in school because I have been inspired and pushed to do well. I want to make my community, teachers, and parents proud.

As Heather states:

My parents didn't graduate from local colleges, but both have degrees. My mom has a double master's degree in business and finance, and she works at the Board of Education. Both my parents are supportive of continuing education, but of course, my mom is really vested in education. I would say that all my family members are hard-working, educated, creative, and ambitious.

As Jenny states:

Both of my parents work at local educational institutions, and both have a Master of Arts in Teaching from Piedmont College. My mom and dad, my family, have always encouraged me to do well academically. They encouraged me to go to college. They wanted me to pursue a post-secondary education. My entire family, and most of the friends I am surrounded by, have an incredibly ambitious attitude. My father provided place-based learning. He would take me hiking when I was younger. It was a bonding experience. I learned about simplicity, and I became very aware of my surroundings. He taught me about real life and the evolutionary process of nature. It was a learning process. That's when I really developed a love for the outdoors.

Siblings

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

Four out of nine participants, Angela, Craig, Fiona, and Gail, articulated that sibling influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes.

As Angela states:

My brother attended UNG just like my dad. My parents made a big deal out of him going to college. My dad was especially proud that my brother was following in his footsteps. My parents told him how proud they were. They asked him about everything and how it was going. College was the topic of family conversation. My brother just kept that same tradition. He influenced me to follow suit, but I didn't want to attend UNG.

As Craig states:

My brother is currently attending college at the University of Georgia. He is studying law. I might do the same later on down the road. If I do decide to study law, I'll go to UGA. I'll have to see what my mindset is after KSU, and I get a degree in biomedical engineering. I'll have to see how my brother does and how that all turns out. I might also go to Emory and study medicine. Right now, I'm a little indecisive when it comes to grad school.

As Fiona states:

My sister graduated from UNG, and she's a teacher. My sister has really influenced me, and I am proud of my brother as well. My brother is attending Citadel, which is a military college in South Carolina. He chose Citadel over UNG because of Citadel's reputation for being only a military school and a very prestigious one at that. UNG used to be considered a military college, but it has really evolved and expanded beyond just the military.

As Gail states:

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

I fell in love with teaching after working with my younger family members. I have three little brothers and some younger cousins that I try to mentor and educate. They look up to me. They watch me, learn from me, and imitate me. It's like looking in a mirror. I am their mirror. I don't want that mirror to be distorted. I want them to be all they can be and I want to be a good role model for them.

Relatives

Five out of nine participants, Angela, Craig, Ed, Gail, and Heather, articulated that relative influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes.

As Angela states:

I have two aunts that attended college. One attended Berry College, which is a Christian college in Mount Berry, Georgia. My other aunt attended Shorter University which is also a Christian college in Rome Georgia. These colleges are not right down the street, but I would still consider them kind of local; well maybe not exactly local, but not far off or out of state. I'm not exactly sure of my grandparent's education, but I don't think they went to college. I remember this from family discussions about the importance of education.

As Craig states:

I have several relatives that attended college. My uncle is an engineer. I plan on getting a bachelor's in biomedical engineering and then go to law or medical school. My grandparents attended college too, but I'm not sure where. I remember them talking about it. I just don't remember right off hand, which one went where. I think they set the expectations for my parents to go to college, and then my parents set those same expectations for me. You are affected by your surroundings. If you grew up with parents

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

who did not attend college, then, I believe, you are more likely not to finish college because you grew up knowing you did not need it to live.

As Ed states:

Three of my grandparents went to college. They inspired my parents to get a post-secondary education, and both my parents are teachers. My dad has a master's degree, and my mom is working on one. Education is important in my family. My aunt passed away and left a huge grant, so I will be getting the family's scholarship. It's kind of like a loan with no interest just for the family. We can only use the money set aside for our education. Education was a priority to her, and that impacts us all.

As Gail states:

I fell in love with teaching after working with my younger brothers and my cousins. I was their big sister, older cousin role model, and mentor. It was just expected for me to be the leader of the pack, and as the oldest I tried to educate them. I tried to imitate my parents and their parents and lead by example. I would help them with their homework, science projects, spelling, and whatever. I was always correcting their English. I just naturally fell into the teacher role, so in that respect, my family really influenced my decision to become a teacher.

As Heather states:

My parents, grandparents, and several relatives attended college. My family really embodies education as a career pathway. I would have to say that my parents, as well as my relatives, are all very creative and very ambitious. They definitely pushed me. They kept me motivated. My family, as a whole, have been very supportive. They inspired me to follow my dreams.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

Peers

Five out of nine participants, Angela, Craig, David, Gail, and Jenny, articulated that peer influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes.

As Angela states:

A lot of students are going to UNG, and my father and brother attended UNG. It has the reputation of going to a second White County High School. The students around me do not have high aspirations for their future, and if they do, their parents have high-level jobs. I guess other students have inspired me to make better choices. I have high aspirations for my future, and I want to do better myself.

As Craig states:

Friends have influenced my decisions. Friends also persuaded me in a pathway. Family and friends have helped me choose a profession. I listen to my classmates talk about their plans after graduation. I listen to my friends. We talk about our future plans and the colleges we are going to. We know each other, and we give each other advise.

As David states:

I have a good buddy who graduated from a nursing program. My buddy is a registered nurse, and he really enjoys being a nurse. We talked about it a lot. I want to be a registered nurse and later down the road, a nurse practitioner. The job opportunities are more widespread. A nurse practitioner can make a lot more money. They write prescriptions. They are more like a doctor.

As Gail states:

I have friends who don't know what they want to do after they graduate. I have several friends that have stated they want to go into botany at UGA and stuff like that. Because I

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

want to be a teacher, I surround myself with others that want to be teachers as well. My parents, family, and friends have influenced my education and career choices the most.

As Jenny states:

I have been taking AP and honor classes since freshman year, and I have been around some very ambitious and dedicated students in the last four years. Being around other like-minded ambitious people fuels the fire. The students I have been around definitely impacted my career decision-making processes.

Teachers

Seven out of nine participants, Bill, Craig, Ed, Fiona, Gail, Heather, and Jenny, articulated that teacher influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes.

As Bill states:

I initially went to a big high school where the counselors deal with you but don't follow up. Here they really stayed with me and got me with my foster parents. That smaller connection to my teachers helped me stay on track. My teachers further enforced the importance and relevancy of education and place-based learning.

As Craig states:

Teachers, counselors, family, and friends have all influenced my career decisions, but my teachers really played a major role. Teachers and counselors have made choosing a college much easier. They have inspired me through their zest for education. They have helped prepare me for college and my future.

As Ed states:

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

I joined Science Olympiad and discovered I loved engineering. Since I was in the Science Tech Club we got to go to the competition. My teachers have really influenced me and steered me in the right direction. We have some awesome teachers and some awesome classes. I love the metal shop, agriculture room, and the art room. We have the best agriculture department. Our high school is well known. They have a big team, and they win lots of competitions. There's a big push to get kids into the CTE classes where they integrate academics with technical skills.

As Fiona states:

My teachers were great influences on my college and career choices. I let them influence my decision between special education and occupational therapy because they were willing to give me the pros and cons of what they knew. College is a great thing. Ignorant people just stay ignorant without an education, and they have a hard time communicating intelligently. You need an education. I believe a college education is needed to be successful for a long time.

As Gail states:

I want to teach childhood education. I think schools where students feel safe, engaged, and connected, like our own, is the greatest school experience one can have. I have been more motivated to achieve in school because I have been inspired and pushed to do well. I want to make my community, teachers, and parents proud.

As Heather states:

My tenth-grade theater teacher was so amazing. She influenced my career decisions the most. My teacher showed me that I am capable of many things. She helped me develop

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

self-confidence. The impact she had on me inspired my decision to major in theater education. I hope to inspire students the same way my teacher inspired me

As Jenny states:

My teachers really inspired me, and they played a major role in my career decisions-making processes. As far as the influences of my major, I would have to say that my agriculture teachers fostered my love of the environment by allowing me to participate in forestry competitions. My teachers pushed me, they pushed all of us, and they inspired us to be ambitious. I have been taking AP and honor classes since freshman year, and I have been around some very ambitious and dedicated students in the last four years.

Financial

Four out of nine participants, Bill, Ed, Fiona, and Gail articulated that financial advantage influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes.

As Bill states:

In Mexico, my family situation wasn't good. In Mexico, I see the value of money more than in investing in education even though it is free. My biological parents dropped out of school in the third grade. They started in the workforce while they were still just children, and in essence, they traded their education to make a living. That really affected me in a lot of ways, and I was going to drop out of school and follow suit. When I came here, everything changed. I enlisted in the Army National Guard, and I plan to be a Flight Warrant Officer. I will be attending the University of North Georgia.

As Ed states:

Financial factors influenced my decision to attend Georgia Tech. GA Tech is the best science school in the state and it's cheaper. My great aunt passed away and left a huge

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

grant, so I will be getting the family's scholarship. It's kind of like a loan with no interest just for the family.

As Fiona states:

Brenau is close to home; it's only 30 minutes away. I want to teach severe and profound special education, and a special education degree is hard to find. I received a scholarship to play volleyball, and UNG doesn't have a volleyball team. This scholarship is perfect for me. I can play volleyball, the thing I love, as I'm getting my degree. It's a win-win situation, and I'm so excited.

As Gail states:

Truett McConnell is a private Baptist based university. My mom works there, so it gives me a financial advantage. I like the religious aspect, I like the financial aspect, and I like the atmosphere. The community is real sweet. I like the intent.

Jobs

Five out of nine participants, Angela, Bill, Craig, David, and Heather, articulated that job influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes.

As Angela states:

The students around me do not have high aspirations for their future, and if they do, their parents have high-level jobs. I enjoy the small-town atmosphere; however, the job field I desire would not be supported here due to the lack of opportunity. I have grown up here all my life, and I know what my future family would experience. For me to stay here, the town would have to grow and develop more so I would have more opportunities. Augusta University is a well-known medical college, and Augusta and the surrounding metro areas have better job opportunities.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

As Bill states:

In Mexico, I see the value of money more than in investing in education even though it is free. Rural communities should show people how they could use education. My experiences have taught me that I need to seek employment that would support a modest, lavish lifestyle. It is my goal to start as a Flight Warrant Officer and prosper to achieve the highest rank possible. I am going to use my experience and education from the army to better myself.

As Craig states:

The main thing with choosing a college is how that diploma will look in the real world. With schools like Georgia Tech, you get connections to businesses, and the degree is valued highly. Georgia Technical College is highly regarded in the technical field. It gives you connections and helps you find a job. A degree without a job prospect is only a piece of paper.

As David states:

I would like to live here with my family, but I need a decent paying job with benefits. I will probably work in Gainesville, Cumming, or Gwinnett because I will make more money and have better opportunities. There's a higher demand down there, and pay would be a little more. I still would be close to my family and the White County area.

As Heather states:

Georgia Southern would present more overall opportunities as far as what I want to do in the theater, or as a singer, director, or actress. I love interacting with other people, people from all over the world. I can't get that here. I need more cultural diversity. Bigger areas, bigger cities, bigger opportunities.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

Reputation

Seven out of nine participants, Angela, Bill, David, Ed, Fiona, Gail, and Heather articulated that reputation influence played a significant role in their career-decision making processes.

As Angela states:

Augusta University is a well-known medical college. A lot of students are going to UNG and my father and brother attended UNG. It has the reputation of going to a second White-County High School, but I didn't look there. I went with the reputations and chose Augusta.

As Bill states:

I chose UNG based on reputation. I enlisted in the Army National Guard. UNG is a well-known military college. It's smaller than some of the others, like Citadel, and it's close to my family. I want to be a Flight Warrant Officer and I think this is the best strategy to reach my goals in the shortest time frame.

As David states:

I chose North Georgia Technical College because it has an excellent reputation for nursing. NGTC has a bridge program. Once you get an associate you can bridge over and work on your bachelor's degree. They have a campus in Clarksville, one in Blairsville, and one in Toccoa. The main campus is in Clarksville, which is close to home.

As Ed states:

I applied to several schools. I think you should apply to several places, so you have options and know what all your options are. Ultimately my decision was Georgia Tech. I love material science. I'm especially interested in polymers. I would like to invent new

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

materials, and I have a lot of ideas about what I might invent. I chose GA Tech because it is the best science school in the state, and it's cheaper.

As Fiona states:

Brenau is close to home; it's only 30 minutes away. Brenau has more diversity and a good solid reputation. I want to teach severe and profound special education, and a special education degree is hard to find. I have a scholarship to play volleyball, and UNG doesn't have a volleyball team. My sister went to UNG, so I kind of want to be different.

As Gail states:

I like the atmosphere. The community is real sweet. I like the intent. My mom works there, so it gives me a financial advantage. The religious aspect was a determining factor. When I visited the campus, they were so friendly, and I loved the feel of that community. It has a good reputation. I think of it as a safe haven. I think schools where students feel safe, engaged and connected, like our own, is the greatest school experience one can have

As Heather states:

My dream job would be in the theater education field. I want to be a singer, director, or an actress. I love interacting with others, and bigger schools offer more opportunities for diversified social interaction. My decision to attend Georgia Southern is based on several things like size, right fit, reputation, diversity, fraternization, and opportunity. Georgia Southern will present more overall opportunities for me

Location

Nine out of nine participants, Angela, Bill, Craig, David, Ed, Fiona, Gail, Heather, and Jenny articulated location influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes.

Five participants, Angela, Bill, Craig, Ed, and Heather, plan to attend distant colleges.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

As Angela states:

Augusta is pretty far away from here, and obviously, I don't want to stay here. The students around me do not have high aspirations for their future, and if they do, their parents have high-level jobs. I enjoy the small-town atmosphere; however, the job field I desire would not be supported here due to the lack of opportunity. I have grown up here all my life, and I know what my future family would experience. For me to stay here the town would have to grow and develop more so I would have more opportunity

As Craig states:

I am going to KSU (Kennesaw State University) then transferring to UGA (University of Georgia) or Emory University. UGA, if I pursue law, or Emory if I pursue medicine. I plan on getting a bachelor's in Biomed engineering and then moving on to law or medical school. My dream job would be anesthesiology or law. Big businesses are in the cities, not in rural areas. The main thing with choosing a college is how that diploma will look in the real world. It gives you connections and helps you find a job.

As Ed states:

I am going to Georgia Tech to study engineering. I want to work in research and development or some other exploratory science-related field. GA Tech is the best science school in the state. There appears to be fewer high degree requiring professions here. If you want to pursue a more intellectual field, you feel like you need to leave. Here is less credited than a big university. An education here is considered White County 2.0, more high school level.

As Heather states:

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

I chose Georgia Southern University based on the right fit and what works for me personally. It's a big university. I love interacting with others, and bigger schools offer more opportunities. It has more people to socialize with, more diversity, and more overall opportunities as far as what I want to do with my life.

Four participants, Bill, Fiona, Gail, and Jenny, plan to attend local colleges.

As Bill states:

UNG is close to my family, but I would really like to be in a better-developed community. I believe the development of communities can have a chain reaction, as the local government looks to improve, surrounding communities follow. I think it is an amazing initiative to develop a community where we can all live in a state of progress and growth.

We should place more emphasis on the use and value of education here. We should expand the industry and tourism. Schools should teach more topics like ROTC and welding classes that apply to real life. By making communities aware, we can be better. People just say somebody else will get it or do it. Make them aware that everybody plays a part. Expansion is a chain reaction that bleeds to the surrounding communities, and I think that is awesome.

As Fiona states:

Brenau offers the degree I want. I want to teach severe and profound special education, and a special education degree is hard to find. Brenau is close to home; it's only 30 minutes away. I eventually want to raise a family here. I like the small community feel. I like the small community. The schools are small, but you are exposed to a lot of experiences. I like the way we come together as a community.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

As Gail states:

I want to teach childhood education, and I am going to Truett McConnell. I like the atmosphere. The community is real sweet. I like the intent. When I visited the campus, they were so friendly, and I loved the feel of that community. I think schools where students feel safe, engaged, and connected, like our own, is the greatest school experience one can have.

As Jenny states:

Piedmont is local. I looked at UGA, but it was too far away. I like the outdoors, and if I did go somewhere more urban, I wouldn't have the opportunities like hiking. I don't think I would be comfortable in a big city. I've spent my whole life here, and I don't think I would be comfortable with that big of a change.

A display of the thematic material discussed above is presented in table 2. Table 2 presents thematic material as it relates to the second research question as follows: What do high-school students say are some of the experiences affecting their education and career decisions making processes?

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

Table 2
Influences on Career Decision-Making Processes

| Students | Financial | Parents | Siblings | Relatives | Peers | Teachers | Reputation | Job | Distant | Local |
|----------|-----------|---------|----------|-----------|-------|----------|------------|-----|---------|-------|
| Angela | | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | |
| Bill | X | X | | | | X | X | X | | X |
| Craig | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | |
| David | | X | | | X | | X | X | X | |
| Ed | X | X | | X | | X | X | | X | |
| Fiona | X | X | X | | | X | X | | | X |
| Gail | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | X |
| Heather | | X | | X | | X | X | X | X | |
| Jenny | | X | | | X | X | | | | X |

Rural Communities and Local Talents

The depiction of the students' relative viewpoint on contextual supports and barriers is presented. The thematic material relates to the third research question as follows: What could rural communities and colleges do to attract and retain local talents? Students describe how contextual supports can foster the development of resiliency in rural underserved communities. The students suggest what rural communities and colleges could do to remove contextual barriers and attract and retain local talents. The students articulated the following predominantly common perspective suggestions: more job opportunities, better-paying jobs, urban

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

development, expand industry and tourism, place more value on education, teach relevant topics, increase community awareness, build more colleges, and larger compasses, more cultural diversity, stay rural.

As Angela states:

The students around me do not have high aspirations for their future, and if they do, their parents have high-level jobs. I enjoy the small-town atmosphere; however, the job field I desire would not be supported here due to the lack of opportunity. I have grown up here all my life, and I know what my future family would experience. For me to stay here, the town would have to grow and develop more so I would have more opportunities.

As Bill states:

I believe the development of communities can have a chain reaction, as the local government looks to improve, surrounding communities follow. I think it is an amazing initiative to develop a community where we can all live in a state of progress and growth. Rural communities could benefit from things such as expanding industry and tourism. Schools could improve relevancy by teaching more topics that apply to real life, like ROTC and welding classes. Place more emphasis on the use and value of education. Make communities aware we can be better. Make communities aware that everybody plays a part. Expansion is a chain reaction that bleeds to the surrounding communities. I think that is awesome.

As Craig states:

Rural areas need more choices; more technical colleges, more big businesses, more employment opportunities, and better-paying jobs. Georgia Technical College is highly regarded in the technical field. It gives you connections and helps you find a job. Big

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

businesses are in the cities, not in rural areas. I don't know if you could change that or whatever. The main thing with choosing a college is how that diploma will look in the real world. With schools like Georgia Tech, you get connections to businesses, and the degree is valued highly. If a college were to offer that here, I would consider staying.

As David states:

Rural areas pay less than urban areas, and rural areas have lower levels of educational achievement. I think rural-based areas do have lower education experience since the majority of them are agriculturally based. Most people, right out of high school, might only go to a two-year tech then start working for a small business. I would like to live close to my family, but I would need to have a decent paying job with benefits to stay in White County. To make a rural area more attractive, you would have to make it un-rural. It would need to have a main feature that draws people to it, so just the landscape or something different. Like all towns in the Mid-West are all the same, but the Grand Canyon brings people in. I think if you can connect it somewhere and like bring something in.

As Ed states:

There appears to be fewer high degree requiring professions here. If you want to pursue a more intellectual field, you feel like you need to leave. Change the stigma around not leaving. Staying local or choosing to attend college close to home is perceived as less successful than going to school far away. An education here is "less credited than a big university. The local colleges here are 2.0. An education here is considered White County 2.0; more high school. Dual enrollment is offered from Truett McConnell and UNG here, so it's considered less because you can get it here in high school, so it's just an extension.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

My friends and I feel like we need to do well in high school to get out of here, and if we aren't high achievers, we aren't going to be able to leave. Because of the stigma, we had a joke about can't do it, Truett. We say: if you can't do it, Truett, and if you can't Truett, screw it. That's how my friends and I feel. I don't know how to change the stigma.

As Fiona states:

I like the small community feel, and I wanted to return to Cleveland, Georgia to raise a family. I like the small community. The schools are small, but you are exposed to a lot of experiences. I like the way we come together as a community. The opportunity is there; it's up to the student to take it or not. Where a student is from does not define work ethic and intelligence. Those traits come from within and through self-motivation". Fiona explained how she believed children are inspired by their parents. I was inspired by my parents. Here's an example: A kid who graduated from here last year has straight A's at UGA; meanwhile, he has people in his class from all over the country not doing that well compared to him. His parents aren't educated, and it made him want to do better. I think that's what's really pushing him.

As Gail states:

White County naturally attracts and retains local talents. From the community to the natural attractions, and the local stores, everything is sweet and welcoming. There is no other place I would have chosen. I like the atmosphere. The community is real sweet. I like the intent. I think schools where students feel safe, engaged, and connected, like our own, is the greatest school experience one can have.

As Heather states:

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

Many of the local colleges were inviting, but if they were bigger, I would be more inclined to stay. I love interacting with others, and larger schools offer more opportunities for diversified social interaction. Having a more diverse culture would also encourage me to stay here, as well. I feel like a larger urban area would present more overall opportunities and be more relative to me and my career goals.

As Jenny states:

I like the outdoors, and if I did go somewhere more urban, I wouldn't have the opportunities like hiking. I don't think I would be comfortable in a big city. I've spent my whole life here, and I don't think I would be comfortable with that big of a change. I love the area I live in, and the mountains are my favorite place to spend time. Helen, Georgia is a tourist attraction. People come to Helen to hike and go tubing down the rivers.

Cleveland, Georgia is innovating by improving infrastructure, updating restaurants, and expanding businesses to attract more people to the area. There are occupations here that require just as much schooling as those in urban areas, such as law workers and doctors.

I'm biased, but I don't believe that students in rural areas have lower levels of education, or we have a lower demand for highly educated workers.

Three out of nine participants, Bill, Ed, and Fiona, articulated that more job opportunities play a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Nine out of nine participants, Angela, Bill, Craig, David, Ed, Fiona, Gail, Heather, and Jenny, articulated that better-paying jobs influence play a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Four out of nine participants, Angela, Craig, Fiona, and Gail, articulated that urban development plays a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Five of nine participants, Angela, Craig, Ed, Gail, and Heather, articulated that expansion of tourism and industry plays a significant role

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

in attracting and retaining local talents. Five out of nine participants, Angela, Craig, David, Gail, and Jenny, articulated that placing more value on education plays a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Seven out of nine participants, Bill, Craig, Ed, Fiona, Gail, Heather, and Jenny, articulated that teaching relevant topics plays a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Eight out of nine participants, Angela, Bill, Craig, David, Ed, Fiona, Gail, and Heather, articulated that increasing community awareness plays a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Five out of nine participants, Angela, Bill, Craig, David, and Heather, articulated that more colleges and larger college campuses play a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Five out of nine participants, Angela, Craig, David, Ed, and Heather, articulated that more cultural diversity plays a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Four out of nine participants, Bill, Fiona, Gail, and Jenny, articulated that staying rural plays a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents.

A display of the thematic material discussed above is presented in table 3. Table 3 presents thematic material as it relates to the third research question as follows: What could rural communities and colleges do to attract and retain local talents?

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

Table 3
Attracting and Retaining Local Talents

| Students | More Job Opportunities | Better Paying Jobs | Urban Development | Expand Industry Tourism | Place More Value on Education | Teach Relevant Topics | Increase Community Awareness | More Colleges Larger Campuses | More Cultural Diversity | Stay Rural |
|----------|------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------------|
| Angela | | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | |
| Bill | X | X | | | | X | X | X | | X |
| Craig | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| David | | X | | | X | | X | X | X | |
| Ed | X | X | | X | | X | X | | X | |
| Fiona | X | X | X | | | X | X | | | X |
| Gail | | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | X |
| Heather | | X | | X | | X | X | X | X | |
| Jenny | | X | | | X | X | | | | X |

Chapter Summary

Chapter four describes the results of this qualitative study. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, which provided a platform to let the students speak to their experiences. Participants were asked to describe significant experiences that influenced their career decision-making processes. The interviews focused on the students' stories and experiences and how they describe their experience and making meaning of it. The depiction of the students' actual experiences is presented to provide a better understanding of what the student experiences; how the students' perceived experiences influence their career decision-

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

making processes; and how the contextual supports mentioned can foster the development of resiliency for students in rural underserved communities. The students articulated the following common experiences that influenced their career decisions: parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, college financial advantage or scholarship, employment, perceived college rank and reputation based on selected major, and college proximity.

The third interview focused on reflection and feedback. To ensure participant understanding, the researcher once again read aloud the Research Statement initially provided. Students were advised as follows: that upon completion of the research study all data would be securely maintained in a locked file cabinet and password-protected computer; data would be accessible only by the researchers for a minimum of three years, and interview recordings would be deleted immediately upon creation of the transcripts. The recordings were then reviewed to make sure the students expressed experiences were correctly captured verbatim. This opened the door for discussion of the aforementioned findings. Students were encouraged to provide feedback, and they were told they could correct, add, change, or omit any statements previously made and recorded. The students eagerly listened to their individual recorded depictions. The students agreed that the findings accurately represented the predominantly common experiences they shared. The students were all satisfied with their recorded statements and articulated their approval of use for this research. Four out of seven students provided feedback. Angela, Bill, Heather, and Jenny provided the following feedback:

As Angela states:

I think we, as students in this rural area, can add valuable insight to your research. I think the statements made by Harmon and Wilborn (2016) and Nelson (2016) are validated by this town. Angela read aloud the following researcher's statements that she had

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

highlighted: Harmon and Wilborn (2016) stated that rural America has historically been associated with a strong work ethic and blue-collar jobs. Culturally, adult education was not seen as a mutually beneficial goal for economic or community development for the locals. A college education was perceived as a pathway to an urban area, where a prestigious career was more economically feasible for those who wanted to relocate. Nelson (2016) reported that rural schools have fewer course options and extracurricular activities. Adolescents often must choose between staying local and having limited economic opportunities; or leaving to pursue higher education and socioeconomic advancement.

As Bill states:

Everybody plays a part in making a community better, and every individual is different. It is our diverse and individual expressions, stories, and experiences that are being told here. It's that combination of diversity and individuality that you are tapping into, and you are relating that to others through this research. I think that is an important retro and relevant contribution.

As Heather states

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this study. The questions allow for an in-depth response as well as personality to show through. I personally enjoyed what was being inquired of the young adults today. I think what is missing from research thus far is us, the perspective of the person in the environment.

As Jenny states:

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

I'm biased, but I don't believe that students in rural areas have lower levels of education, or we have a lower demand for highly educated workers. We need to get the people's perspective heard. I think this is an interesting study, and I hope it yields a lot of insight.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

Overview

Chapter Five contains the following: a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings, the limitations of the study, the implications for future research, and the conclusion. This chapter begins with a review of the three research questions and the predominantly common themes that were reported by the participants and presented in Chapter Four. The research questions focus on how students' experiences influence their career decision-making processes, and how contextual supports can foster the development of resiliency for students in rural underserved communities. A summary of the predominantly common experiences that influenced the career decision-making process among the participants is described. The thematic material is presented as it relates to the three following research questions:

- (1) What do high-school students say their plans are for post-secondary education?
- (2) What do high-school students say are some of the experiences affecting their education and career decisions making processes?
- (3) What could rural communities and colleges do to attract and retain local talents?

I interviewed nine high-school seniors about the experiences that influenced their career decisions. In reference to what high-school students say their plans are for post-secondary education, all nine of the students say that they plan to pursue post-secondary education. The students articulated the following plans for post-secondary education: seven students articulated that they will be attending a four-year college or university; two students articulated that they

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

will be attending a technical college; five students plan to attend distant colleges, and four students plan to attend local colleges.

In reference to what high-school students say are some of the experiences affecting their education and career decisions-making processes, the students articulated the following predominantly common experiences that influenced their career decision-making processes: parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, the financial advantage of a college or scholarship, employment, perceived college rank and reputation based on selected major, and college proximity. Nine students articulated that parent influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes. Four students articulated that sibling influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes. Five students articulated that relative influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes. Five students articulated that peer influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes. Seven students articulated that teacher influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes. Four students articulated that financial advantage influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes. Five students articulated that job influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes. Seven students articulated that reputation influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes. Nine students articulated location influence played a significant role in their career decision-making processes.

In reference to what rural communities and colleges do to attract and retain local talents, the students articulated the following predominantly common perspective suggestions: more job opportunities, better-paying jobs, urban development, expand industry and tourism, place more value on education, teach relevant topics, increase community awareness, build more colleges,

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

and larger campuses, increase cultural diversity, and some students said just stay rural. Three students articulated that more job opportunities play a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Nine students articulated that better-paying jobs play a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Four students articulated that urban development plays a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Five students articulated that the expansion of tourism and industry plays a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Five students articulated that placing more value on education plays a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Seven students articulated that teaching relevant topics plays a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Eight students articulated that increasing community awareness plays a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Five students articulated that more colleges and larger college campuses play a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Five students articulated that more cultural diversity plays a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. Four students articulated that staying rural plays a significant role in attracting and retaining local talents. This is their opinion, and it is important in that respect. They believe that staying rural is an attraction in itself.

Summary of Findings

In summary: all nine of the students say that they plan to pursue post-secondary education. The students say the following common experiences influenced their career decisions: parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, college financial advantage or scholarship, employment, perceived college rank and reputation based on selected major, and college proximity. The students suggest rural communities and colleges could provide more job opportunities and better-paying jobs, expand the industry, urban development, and tourism, place more value on

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

education, teach relevant topics, increase community awareness, build more colleges and larger compasses, increase cultural diversity, and just stay rural to attract and retain local talents.

The third interview focused on reflection and feedback. The recordings were reviewed to make sure the students' expressed experiences were correctly captured verbatim. This opened the door for discussion of the aforementioned findings. Four students provided feedback. Angela, Bill, Heather, and Jenny provided the following feedback:

As Angela states:

I think we, as students in this rural area, can add valuable insight to your research. I think the statements made by Harmon and Wilborn (2016) and Nelson (2016) are validated by this town. Angela read aloud the following researcher's statements that she had highlighted: Harmon and Wilborn (2016) stated that rural America has histrionically been associated with a strong work ethic and blue-collar jobs. Culturally, adult education was not seen as a mutually beneficial goal for economic or community development for the locals. A college education was perceived as a pathway to an urban area, where a prestigious career was more economically feasible for those who wanted to relocate. Nelson (2016) reported that rural schools have fewer course options and extracurricular activities. Adolescents often must choose between staying local and having limited economic opportunities; or leaving to pursue higher education and socioeconomic advancement.

As Bill states:

Everybody plays a part in making a community better, and every individual is different. It is our diverse and individual expressions, stories, and experiences that are being told here. It's that combination of diversity and individuality that you are tapping into, and

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

you are relating that to others through this research. I think that is an important retro and relevant contribution.

As Heather states

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this study. The questions allow for an in-depth response as well as personality to show through. I personally enjoyed what was be inquired of the young adults today. I think what is missing from research thus far is us, the perspective of the person in the environment.

As Jenny states:

I'm biased, but I don't believe that students in rural areas have lower levels of education, or we have a lower demand for highly educated workers. We need to get the people's perspective heard. I think this is an interesting study, and I hope it yields a lot of insight.

Discussion of Findings

According to Curtin, Schweitzer, Tuxbury, and D'Aoust, "a limited amount of research has explored those specific factors that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within a school setting" (2016, p.4). The purpose of the current study is to explore experiences that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within a school setting; identify the needs for support and attention with possible different experiences and views from the norm, and add new knowledge to the existing limited knowledge base. Ali and Saunders (2006) reported that "person inputs such as race, sex, socioeconomic status, intelligence, proximal and distal contextual factors, cultural and gender role socialization are critical sources of influence on career development" (p.40). "The foundation for career decisions begins long before a student enters college. It is influenced, and even at times dictated, by family,

friends, and mentors” (Workman, 2015, p.287). According to Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2002), career development is a complex process that includes intrapersonal, interpersonal, and external factors, and contextual supports and barriers play a major role in shaping career decisions.

The design and facilitation of learning is the bridge between theory and practice in adult education” (Merriam & Bierema (2014, p.253-254). An effective model for culturally responsive teaching has to have enough breadth to accommodate the range of diversity found in postsecondary education. It also has to integrate a variety of assumptions from different disciplines. But most of all, it has to explain how to create compelling learning experiences through which learners can maintain their integrity as they attain relevant educational success. (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009, p.33). Merriam and Bierema (2014) stated that “the process of learning is culturally bound. Context is the social system that permeates the thinking and actions of all human beings within a particular situation such as a classroom, organization, community, or nation” (p.252-253). “When education intersects with students’ real world, powerful learning occurs” (Paul & Steward, 2016, p.321). The researchers (Curtin et al., 2016) identified some of the following themes among resilient youths in their study: a positive attitude, ability to reach out to others, perseverance, a positive school climate, and healthy adult role models and mentors.

All nine of the students interviewed plan to pursue post-secondary education. The students say some of the following themes and common experiences influenced their career decisions: parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, college financial advantage or scholarship, employment, perceived college rank and reputation based on selected major, and college proximity. The students suggest rural communities and colleges could provide more job opportunities and better-paying jobs, expand the industry, urban development, and tourism, place more value on education, teach relevant topics, increase community awareness, build more

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

colleges and larger compasses, increase cultural diversity, and just stay rural to attract and retain local talents. According to Curtin, Schweitzer, Tuxbury, and D'Aoust, "a limited amount of research has explored those specific factors that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within a school setting" (2016, p.4). Who are the people we talk the least to? Students. We are trying to understand how a group of people we haven't talked to, at least in this context, make meaning of their experience, the experience that is unique to them, or their rural environment. The statements obtained during the student interviews provided valuable insight and aligned with the aforementioned previous researcher's statements linking the conceptual framework and theory with practice.

A qualitative study of rural education and workforce development can make an important contribution. Making education relevant to the contextual realities of the student is essential, and support from research helps to identify issues. The current study uses authentic, real-world experiences to provide insight and a better understanding of how perceived contextual supports in community colleges can equip students in rural areas with the tools they need to overcome barriers, facilitate positive growth in all aspects of their lives, build competence, and expand transitional opportunities. The study participants identified learning experiences and explored suggestions for desirable contextual supports, practices, and procedures that might enhance adult learning in rural types of environments. My practical and intellectual research goals include the desire to contribute knowledge through shared experiences that provide better understanding of rural student needs; promote awareness of achievement gaps in rural areas; improve contextual supports for adult education and workforce development; increase student success in rural areas and help close the education achievement gap associated with adults in rural areas. I focused on the process of going into high school and out of high school into higher education and the

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

workforce. I did not merely ask about opinions; I asked about experiences that shaped the students' perspective. I wanted to get from them how they shaped their workforce and education goals; how they shaped their career goals. I wanted to discover things I didn't already know. I wanted the participants to tell their stories because unconscious ideas, experiences, and behaviors come out in those stories. I gathered implicit meaning through metaphors, and I found implicit ideas or meaning in the interviews. The purpose of the current study was to explore experiences that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within a school setting; identify the needs for support and attention with possible different experiences and views from the norm, and add new knowledge to the existing limited knowledge base.

Limitations of the Study

The research was population specific, consisting of one sample from a local high school population of 12th graders. The participant samples were randomly selected from one high school institution in the small rural geographical area of North Georgia. The rural area students were typical, and my identification as a part of this community helped facilitate the study. The setting and students selected were appropriate and represented the demographics of rural North Georgia. Participant interviews provided the data to answer the research questions. I loosely followed Seidman's suggestion to conduct a series of three 90-minute interviews. The first interview allowed me to build rapport and gather background information. The second interview focused on the student's stories and experiences; the flow of experiences that moved them from one place to another; how they described their experience and made meaning of it; and how their experiences influenced their career decision-making processes. The third interview focused on reflection and feedback. Two Audio taping devices were used to reduce mechanical errors and

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

eliminate interruptions while recording the participants' experiences. Interviews were open-ended and incorporated questions accordingly as the interviews progressed.

The study was a very small sample of the population. The specific population was from one local High School in North Georgia. The participants were obtained from the following targeted populations: 269 students locally enrolled in the 12th grade at a North Georgia High School. (NCES, 2017-2018 school year). The sample was randomly selected from students who were all adults 18 years of age or older on a volunteer basis. Twelve students initially volunteered to participate. Only nine of the following initial students appeared for the interviews: five Caucasian females, three Caucasian males, and one Hispanic male.

Implications for Future Research

According to Curtin, Schweitzer, Tuxbury, and D'Aoust, "a limited amount of research has explored those specific factors that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within a school setting" (2016, p.4). "When education intersects with students' real world, powerful learning occurs" (Paul & Steward, 2016, p.321). A qualitative study of rural education and workforce development can make an important contribution. Making education relevant to the contextual realities of the student is essential, and support from research helps to identify issues. The current study was limited and very small. More populous, diverse, and in-depth studies are needed to fully understand and explored those specific factors that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within school settings. Ali and Saunders (2006) reported that "person inputs such as race, sex, socioeconomic status, intelligence, proximal and distal contextual factors, cultural and gender role socialization are critical sources of influence on career development" (p.40).

Conclusion

According to Curtin, Schweitzer, Tuxbury, and D'Aoust, "a limited amount of research has explored those specific factors that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within a school setting" (2016, p.4). Who are the people we talk the least to? Students. We are trying to understand how a group of people we haven't talked to, at least in this context, make meaning of their experience, the experience that is unique to them, or their rural environment. The purpose of the current study was to explore experiences that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within a school setting; identify the needs for support and attention with possible different experiences and views from the norm, and add new knowledge to the existing limited knowledge base.

"In the same way, ruralness is a socially constructed concept with psychological, social, and cultural aspects; its importance extends beyond the physical boundaries of place to emphasize the social, cultural, and economic conditions that shape the learning opportunities to which particular individuals are exposed, the interpersonal reactions they receive for performing certain activities, and the outcomes they come to anticipate" (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002, p. 269-270). Ali and Saunders (2006) reported that "person inputs such as race, sex, socioeconomic status, intelligence, proximal and distal contextual factors, cultural and gender role socialization are critical sources of influence on career development" (p.40). A qualitative study of rural education and workforce development can make an important contribution. Making education relevant to the contextual realities of the student is essential, and support from research helps to identify issues. The current study uses authentic, real-world experiences to provide insight and a better understanding of how perceived contextual supports in community

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

colleges can equip students in rural areas with the tools they need to overcome barriers, facilitate positive growth in all aspects of their lives, build competence, and expand transitional opportunities. We are trying to understand how a group of people we haven't talked to, at least in this context, make meaning of their experience, the experience that is unique to them, or their rural environment. The study participants identified learning experiences and explored suggestions for desirable contextual supports, practices, and procedures that might enhance adult learning in rural types of environments. More populous, diverse, and in-depth studies are needed to fully understand and explored those specific factors that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within school settings.

The theoretical framework of the personal talent development theory (Moon, 2003, 2003a, 2003b, 2012, 2014), the theory of successful intelligence (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 2002), and the social cognitive career theory (Sternberg, 1997, 1999, 2003, 2005) framed the current study. The three theories provided a basis for interpreting the findings and confirming or questioning the researcher's understanding of the truth through cross-comparison. Paul and Steward (2016) used the lens of the personal talent development theory (Moon, 2003, 2003a, 2003b, 20012, 20014), the theory of successful intelligence (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 2002), and the social cognitive career theory (Sternberg, 1997, 1999, 2003, 2005) to encourage talent development in rural communities. According to Paul and Steward (2016, p.312), the successful intelligence theory proposed that talented people have three choices related to their environment: they can adapt to it, shape it, or leave it. Sternberg (2005) defined social intelligence as "the ability to achieve one's goals in life, given one's socio-cultural context; by capitalizing on strengths and correcting or compensating for weaknesses in order to adapt to,

shape, and select environments; through a combination of analytical, creative, and practical abilities” (p.328).

According to Paul and Steward (2016, p.312), the personal talent development theory purposed that people can select and attain the goals that fit their interests, abilities, and rural community values and contexts. Personal talent can also be conceptualized as expertise in the personal domain. First, the construct focuses attention on a domain of talent development that has largely been ignored by the field. Second, it provides a dynamic, incremental conceptualization of characteristics such as motivation and persistence that have frequently been treated as static, entity-oriented processes by our field. Third, the personal talent construct can help explain some of the conundrums in our field, such as why individuals who have lesser amounts of domain-specific abilities can surpass the accomplishments of their more able peers. (Moon, 2003, p.5-6).

According to Paul and Steward (2016), the social cognitive career theory purposed that people shape their careers in a complex process that includes intrapersonal, interpersonal, and external factors. The theory focuses on individuals as active agents or shapers of their career development. (p.312). Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) stated that “this theory and its focus on self-efficacy, outcome expectations, barriers, and goals could help with career and academic decision making” (p. 1). The social cognitive career theory, the successful intelligence theory, and the personal talent development theory relate to each of the research questions by focusing on the students’ stories and experiences, and how they describe their experience and make meaning of it. Applicable to the aforementioned theories, previous experiences shape the way we behave in our current setting, and it is the flow of experiences that move us from one place to another. Culture is built on core values, and culture is our way of viewing the world.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

The research questions were designed to capture and detail how the students experience the way of life changes and transitions, how students understand the career decision-making process, and how students make meaning of adult education and workforce development in a rural community. The research questions theoretically help us to understand how students make radical shifts and adapt to different forms of living. The research questions are about what I wanted to understand, and I talked to the source, the high-school students, to understand their experiences. I chose a qualitative study because I wanted to focus on the process, not on variables. I interviewed nine high-school students and focused only on them. I asked students about their experience with high school and their plans for college or future workforce.

Research Questions

High School Students:

- (1) What do high-school students say their plans are for postsecondary education?
- (2) What do high-school students say are some of the experiences affecting their education and career decisions-making processes?
- (3) What could rural communities and colleges do to attract and retain local talents?

These questions focus on how students' experiences influence their career decision-making processes, and how contextual supports can foster the development of resiliency for students in rural underserved communities.

The qualitative methodology from a general approach perspective was utilized in this study to explore, gain understanding, contribute to the existing knowledge base, and contribute to the development of future studies. The qualitative, general approach was used as follows: historical, applicable to information taken from previous literature and researchers' findings; basic interpretative qualitative research with descriptive authentic, and real-world experiences;

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

inductive, discovery learn as you go interviews with rich recorded dialogue. The research was population specific, consisting of one sample from a local high school population of 12th graders. The participant samples were randomly selected from one high school institution in the small rural geographical area of White County, Cleveland, Georgia. The rural area students were typical, and my identification as a part of this community helped facilitate the study. The setting and students selected were appropriate and represented the demographics of rural North Georgia. Participant interviews provided the data to answer the research questions.

I loosely followed Seidman's suggestion to conduct a series of three 90-minute interviews. The first interview allowed me to build rapport and gather background information. The second interview focused on the student's stories and experiences; the flow of experiences that moved them from one place to another; how they described their experience and made meaning of it; and how their experiences influenced their career decision-making processes. The third interview focused on reflection and feedback. Two Audio taping devices were used to reduce mechanical errors and eliminate interruptions while recording the participants' experiences. Interviews were open-ended and incorporated questions accordingly as the interviews progressed.

I interviewed nine adult students in rural North Georgia. The study posed no serious ethical problems. Participants were all adults and will remain anonymous. The specific population was from one local High School in North Georgia. The participants were obtained from the following targeted populations: 269 students locally enrolled in the 12th grade at a local High School. (NCES, 2017-2018 school year). The sample was randomly selected from students who were all adults 18 years of age or older on a volunteer basis. Twelve students initially volunteered to participate as follows: six Caucasian females, five Caucasian males, and one

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

Hispanic male. Only nine of the initial students appeared for the interviews. One Caucasian female and two Caucasian males decided to opt-out of the participation group for unknown reasons. The educational leader contacts or gatekeepers from a North Georgia High School included the following: Assistant Superintendent, Principal, 12th-grade Teachers, high school counselors, and senior sponsors.

. A summary of the predominantly common experiences that influenced the career decision-making process among the participants is described. A summary of prominent themes that emerged from each participant's interviews is reported in narrative form and illustrated in three separate tables. Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of the participants. Table 1 presents thematic material as it relates to the first research question as follows: What do high-school students say their plans are for postsecondary education? Table 2 summarizes the actual experiences of the participants. Table 2 presents thematic material as it relates to the second research question as follows: What do high-school students say are some of the experiences affecting their education and career decisions making processes? Table 3 summarizes the perspectives of the participants in reference to rural communities and local talents. Table 3 presents thematic material as it relates to the third research question as follows: What could rural communities and colleges do to attract and retain local talents? All names used in the reporting data are fictitious, and non-crucial identifying information was omitted to protect the participant's anonymity and confidentiality.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, which provided a platform to let the students speak to their experiences. Participants were asked to describe significant experiences that influenced their career decision-making processes. The interviews focused on the students' stories and experiences and how they describe their experience and making meaning of it. The

depiction of the students' actual experiences is presented to provide a better understanding of what the student experiences, how the students' perceived experiences influence their career decision-making processes, and how the contextual supports mentioned can foster the development of resiliency for students in rural underserved communities. The students articulated the following common experiences that influenced their career decisions: parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, college financial advantage or scholarship, employment, perceived college rank and reputation based on selected major, and college proximity. The statements obtained during the student interviews provided valuable insight and aligned with the aforementioned previous researcher's statements linking the conceptual framework and theory with practice.

According to Curtin, Schweitzer, Tuxbury, and D'Aoust, "a limited amount of research has explored those specific factors that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within a school setting" (2016, p.4). "When education intersects with students' real world, powerful learning occurs" (Paul & Steward, 2016, p.321). A qualitative study of rural education and workforce development can make an important contribution. Making education relevant to the contextual realities of the student is essential, and support from research helps to identify issues. The current study was limited and very small. More populous, diverse, and in-depth studies are needed to fully understand and explore those specific factors that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within school settings.

References

- Ali, S. R., & Saunders, J. L. (2006). College expectations of rural Appalachian youth: An exploration of social cognitive career theory factors. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 55(1), 38-51.
- Avery, L. M. (2013). Rural science education: Valuing local knowledge. *Theory Into Practice*, 52(1), 28-35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07351690.2013.743769>
- Barrett, N., Cowen, J., Toma, E., & Troske, S. (2015). Working with what they have: Professional development as a reform strategy in rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education (Online)*, 30(10), 1-18.
- Blad, E. (2016). Positive Climates May Shrink Achievement Gaps. *Education Week*, 36(13), 9
- Curtin, K. A., Schweitzer, A., Tuxbury, K., & D'Aoust, J. A. (2016). Investigating the factors of resiliency among exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, 35(2), 3-9.
- Elliot, R., & Timulak, L. (2021). *Essentials of descriptive-interpretive qualitative research: a generic approach*. American Psychological Association.
- Fishman, D. (2015). School reform for rural America. *Education Next*, 15(3), 8-15.
- Gibbons, M. M., & Shoffner, M. F. (2004). Prospective first-generation college students: Meeting their needs through Social Cognitive Career Theory. *Professional School Counseling*, 8(1), 91.
- Ginsberg, M. B., & Wlodkowski, R. J. (2009). *Diversity and motivation: Culturally responsive teaching* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Harmon, H. L., & Wilborn, S. C. (2016). The math learning gap: Preparing STEM technicians for the new rural economy. *The Rural Educator*, 37(3), 26-40.

- Hlinka, K. R. (2017). Tailoring retention theories to meet the needs of rural Appalachian community college students. *Community College Review*, 45(2), 144-164.
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45(1), 79-122. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1994.1027>
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (2002). *Social cognitive career theory*. In D. Brown (Ed.), *Career choice and development* (pp. 255-311). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., & Bierema, L. L. (2014). *Adult learning: linking theory and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Moon, S. M. (2003). Personal talent. *High Ability Studies*, 14(1), 5.
- Moon, S. M. (2003a). *Developing personal talent*. In F. J. Mönks & H. Wagner (Eds.), *Development of human potential: Investment into our future—Proceedings of the 8th Conference of the European Council for High Ability (ECHA)*. Rhodes, October 9-13, 2002 (pp. 11-21). Bad Honnef, Germany: K.H. Bock.
- Moon, S. M. (2003b). Personal talent. *High Ability Studies*, 14, 5-21.
- Moon, S. M. (2012). Personal talent development revisited. In R. F. Subotnik, A. Robinson, C. M. Callahan, & E. J. Gubbins (Eds.), *Malleable minds: Translating insights from psychology and neuroscience to gifted education* (pp. 165-176). Storrs: The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut.
- Moon, S. M. (2014). Personal talent theory and high-ability youth. In J. Plucker & C. Callahan (Eds.), *Critical issues and practices in gifted education: What the research says* (pp. 493-504). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Mykerezzi, E., Kostandini, G., Jordan, J. L., & Melo, I. (2014). On rural-urban differences in

- human capital formation: Finding the bottlenecks. *Journal of Rural Social Sciences*, 29(1), 17-47.
- Nelson, I. A. (2016). Rural Students' Social Capital in the College Search and Application Process. *Rural Sociology*, 81(2), 249-281. doi:10.1111/ruso.12095.
- (n.d.). National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Home Page, a part of the U.S. Department of Education. <https://nces.ed.gov>
- Poynton, T. A., Lapan, R. T., & Marcotte, A. M. (2015). Financial Planning Strategies of High School Seniors: Removing Barriers to Career Success. *Career Development Quarterly*, 63(1), 57-73. doi:10.1002/j.2161-0045.2015.00095x.
- Paul, K. A., & Seward, K. K. (2016). Place-Based Investment Model of Talent Development. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 27(4), 311. doi:10.1177/1932202X1666954.
- Powell, P. C., Mobley, A. K., Kemer, G., & Giordano, A. (2014). Examination of a Group Counseling Model of Career Decision Making with College Students. *Journal of College Counseling*, 17(2), 163-174.
- Schudde, L., & Goldrick-Rab, S. (2015). On Second Chances and Stratification: How Sociologists Think About Community Colleges. *Community College Review*, 43(1), 27-45.
- Seidman, I. (2019). *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (5th ed.). Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Sherman, J., & Sage, R. (2011). Sending Off All Your Good Treasures: Rural Schools, Brain-

- Drain, and Community Survival in the Wake of Economic Collapse. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 26(11),
- Smith, W. M., Lewis, W. J., & Heaton, R. M. (2013). Ensuring mathematical learning in rural schools: Investing in teacher knowledge. *Great Plains Research*, 23(2),185-197.
- Sternberg, R. J. (1997). The concept of intelligence and its role in lifelong learning and success. *American Psychologist*, 52(10), 1030-1037. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.52.10.1030>
- Sternberg, R. J. (1999). The theory of successful intelligence. *Review of General Psychology*, 3(4), 292-316. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.3.4.292>
- Sternberg, R. J. (2003). *Wisdom, intelligence, and creativity synthesized*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Sternberg, R. J. (2005). *The WICS model of giftedness*. In R. J. Sternberg & J. E. Davidson (Eds.), *Conceptions of giftedness* (2nd ed., pp. 327- 342). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Stewart, J. B. (1999).
- Workman, J. L. (2015). Parental Influence on Exploratory Students' College Choice, Major, and Career Decision Making. *College Student Journal*, 49(1), 23-30.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

APPENDIX A

COPY OF IRB



Institutional Review Board (IRB)
For the Protection of Human Research Participants

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|--------------|
| Protocol Number: | 03745-2018 | Responsible Researcher: | Donna Dalton |
| Supervising Faculty: | Dr. Christopher Waugh | | |
| Project Title: | <i>Education and Workforce Development in Rural North Georgia.</i> | | |

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **Exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under Exemption **Category 2**. Your research study may begin immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- *Upon completion of the research study all data (surveys, data list, email correspondence & address lists, etc.) must be securely maintained (locked file cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) and accessible only by the researchers for a minimum of 3 years.*
- *To ensure participant understanding the researcher must read aloud the Research Statement before conducting the interview. A copy of the statement must be offered to participants.*
- *Interview recordings must be deleted immediately upon creation of the transcript. Exempt protocol guidelines prohibit the collection and/or storage of audio/video recordings.*

☒ *If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.*

Elizabeth Ann Olphie 05.13.2019

Elizabeth Ann Olphie, IRB Administrator
229-253-2947.

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.

Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or

Revised: 06.02.16

APPENDIX B

Research Statement

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

This Research Statement of Consent must be read out loud to you (the participant) at the start of the recording and it will be included in the final transcript. You are being asked to participate in an interview as part of a research study entitled “Education and Workforce Development in Rural North Georgia: A Basic Interpretive Approach to Qualitative Research”, which is being conducted by Donna Dalton, a student at Valdosta State University. The purpose of the study is to explore experiences that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within a school setting; identify the needs for support and attention with possible different experiences and views from the norm; and add new knowledge to the existing limited knowledge base. You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about college and career readiness; the attrition of youth and adults; post-secondary contextual supports; and experiences that impact adult career decision making processes. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Participation should take approximately 90 minutes. The interviews will be audio taped to accurately capture your concerns, opinions, and ideas. Once the recordings have been transcribed, the tapes will be destroyed. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in the interview will serve as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 years of age or older. Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Donna Dalton at dmdalton@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

VSU MODEL INFORMED CONSENT FORM

(Instructions: Use this model form when the IRB requires documentation of informed consent for research participants 18 years of age or older and who have the capacity to consent for themselves. Include non-italicized text in black typeface verbatim, and tailor the italicized text in black typeface to your study. Guidance for development of consent elements is provided in red typeface, with example wording in blue typeface. If there is more than one researcher conducting the study, use plural case as appropriate. Delete this header before saving and printing the final version of this form.)

VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled “Education and Workforce Development in Rural North Georgia: A Basic Interpretive Approach to Qualitative Research.” This research project is being conducted by Donna Dalton, a student in adult career and education at Valdosta State University. The researcher has explained to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask the researcher any questions you have to help you understand this project and your possible participation in it. A basic explanation of the research is given below. Please read this carefully and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have. The University asks that you give your signed agreement if you wish to participate in this research project.

Purpose of the Research: This study involves research. The purpose of the study is to explore experiences that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within a school setting; identify the needs for support and attention with possible different experiences and views from the norm; and add new knowledge to the existing limited knowledge base.

Procedures: The researcher will conduct a series of three interviews. The interviews will be developed by the researcher and adapted to the specifics of the target population. The steps in administering instruments and collecting data will include on-site, formal, semi-structured, tape-recorded interviews with open-ended questions. There are no alternatives to the experimental procedures in this study. The only alternative is to choose not to participate at all. Participation should take approximately 90 minutes. The interviews will be audio taped in order to accurately capture your concerns, opinions, and ideas. Once the recordings have been transcribed, the tapes will be destroyed. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Include information about the duration of the participant’s involvement in the study and the time requirements (e.g., “You will be asked to come to the library at the High School once a month for 3 months at your appointment time, which will be scheduled at your convenience. Each appointment will take approximately 30 minutes. During that time, you will be asked to provide your perspectives about the following: college and career readiness; the attrition of youth and adults; post-secondary contextual supports; and experiences that impact adult career decision making processes.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

Possible Risks or Discomfort: Although there are no known risks associated with these research procedures, it is not always possible to identify all potential risks of participating in a research study. However, the University has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize potential but unknown risks. As appropriate, participants should be informed that they may request counseling services from Avita Community Partners. The service is free to participants who are indigent. If the participant is not considered indigent, they will be expected to pay for services rendered on a sliding scale based on income. By agreeing to participate in this research project, you are not waiving any rights that you may have against Valdosta State University for injury resulting from negligence of the University or its researchers.

Potential Benefits: Although you will not benefit directly from this research, your participation will help the researcher gain additional understanding of experiences that can foster the development of resiliency for exceptional youth living in rural underserved communities, especially within a school setting; identify the needs for support and attention with possible different experiences and views from the norm, and add new knowledge to the existing limited knowledge base. Knowledge gained may contribute to addressing; college and career readiness; the attrition of youth and adults; post-secondary contextual supports; and experiences that impact adult career decision making processes.

Costs and Compensation: There are no costs to you and there is no compensation (no money, gifts, or services) for your participation in this research project.

Assurance of Confidentiality: Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your information confidential to the extent allowed by law. Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a university committee charged with reviewing research to ensure the rights and welfare of research participants, may be given access to your confidential information. Interviews will be transcribed immediately after the session has ended. Once the recordings have been transcribed, the tapes will be destroyed to ensure that information about the participant will be kept confidential and protected from unauthorized access. Participants are all adults. Confidentiality will be described during the informed consent process and, to protect their privacy, the consent will allow subjects to control the measure of personal information conveyed. The researcher will use pseudonyms to ensure subjects remain anonymous. The researcher does not anticipate collecting names, email addresses, or any indirect identifiers that could be used to deduce subjects' identities. Should any possibility of identifiable data be retained, the researcher would implement procedures such as: creating keys linking subjects' names to unique numbers associated with the data; storing encrypted data on secure servers; removing identifiers when data collection is completed; reporting data in aggregate; and creating misleading identifiers in articles or presentations. The researcher will provide confidentiality by appropriately protecting information the subjects disclose. Data will be collected, managed, securely stored, accessed, rendered anonymous, and destroyed by the researcher. As appropriate, data from the study will be reported in combination with information obtained from other participants and will not be associated with participants by name.

Voluntary Participation: Your decision to participate in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you agree now to participate and change your mind later, you are free to leave the study. Your decision not to participate at all or to stop participating at any time in the future will not have any effect on any

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE IN RURAL NORTH GEORGIA

rights you have or any services you are otherwise entitled to from Valdosta State University. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer.

Information Contacts: Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Donna Dalton at dmdalton@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-333-7837 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Agreement to Participate: The research project and my role in it have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, I am indicating that I am 18 years of age or older. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I would like to receive a copy of the results of this study: _____ Yes _____ No

Mailing Address: _____

e-mail Address: _____

Printed Name of Participant

**This research project has been approved by the
Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board
for the Protection of Human Research Participants
through the date noted below:**

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date