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<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/3265>

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MAPPING RURAL LITERACY SPONSORSHIP NETWORKS: LITERACY
INFRASTRUCTURES AND PERCEPTIONS IN ABBYVILLE

By

Amy McCleese Nichols
B.A., Transylvania University, 2007
M.A., University of Louisville, 2014

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the College of
Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in English/Rhetoric and Composition

Department of English
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

August 2019

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A Dissertation Approved on

July 29th, 2019

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Dr. Mary P. Sheridan

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Dr. Eli Goldblatt

DEDICATION

To Ben Nichols

What a blessing to be on this journey together.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It would be difficult for me to name everyone who has contributed in some way to this dissertation, which has truly been a community effort on the part of my personal community as well as the committee and family members who have been most closely involved. Still, I make an effort here to put words to some of the overwhelming gratitude I feel.

To my wonderful committee. To Bronwyn T. Williams: thank you for the mentorship and friendship of the last six years; for emphasizing that children do not erase the potential for an academic life; for patiently reading draft after draft as I wrestled with ideas that were way too big for a dissertation; for encouraging me to send those sketchy drafts in for feedback; and for always modeling that thought and life are not separate enterprises. To Mary P. Sheridan: thank you for your awareness of how the details affect the bigger picture and for always being willing to discuss. To Eli Goldblatt: Thank you for being adventurous enough to let a total stranger ask if you would be on her committee, for taking time out at multiple conferences to check in, and for the thoughtfulness and generosity of your feedback along the way. To Amy Clukey: thank you for pointing to some truly fantastic books along the way and for helping me with the details of the project.

To my family. To Ben Nichols: thank you for saying “of course” when your spouse suggested multiple moves across the state for an M.A., and then a PhD, and then a

job. Your patience, encouragement, and hope for the world have inspired me every day for 15 years, and nothing I can say here will adequately reflect the many ways I admire you as a fellow teacher, scholar, and human being. To Donald and Vickie McCleese: thank you for raising me, for encouraging me to think for myself, for letting me read too many books and stay up too late for 18 years, for supporting me when I quit a “good job” and decided to pursue graduate study in the humanities, and for the many, many times that you have shown up, cleaned my house, watched my children, done my laundry, and never expected anything in return. May I learn how to love others the way you do. To Jamie and Jeremy McCleese and their families: thank you for accepting that I would show up to family events exhausted and barely articulate, and thank you for talking to me anyway. To Elijah and Caleb Nichols, two of the best gifts graduate school offered; thank you for reminding me to play and enjoy every day.

To my colleagues at Berea College. To Leslie Ortquist-Ahrens: thank you for your unfailing encouragement and support for the last two years. To Rebecca Wheat: thank you for reminding me to laugh and not take myself so seriously. To Jamiella Brooks: thank you for your passion for equity in the academy and for sharing the duality worlds of motherhood and scholarship with me. To Khadijah Seay and Mia Rybeck: thank you for good stories and for sharing your food. To Sharyn Mitchell: thank you for being an absolute mine of information on how Kentucky handled desegregation and for showing me how magical archival work can be. To Carrie Mahoney and Megan Naseman: thank you for some truly crucial support on tough days.

To all the employees of the Berea College Child Development Lab and to Jessica Rodenbaugh, for caring so well for my children so that I could do this work in the first

place. It's hard to do academic work with caregiving responsibilities, and I really appreciate everything you do, every day, to educate those in your care.

To University of Louisville mentors and colleagues. Thank you to Karen Kopelson, Stephen Schneider, and Bruce Horner, whose courses and conversations with me on this journey have changed how I look at the world. To Debra Journet: thank you for telling me early on that I had what it took to complete a PhD. I never once believed you until now. Thank you to fellow graduate student friends for their conversation, challenges, and support along the way: Cassie Book, Laura and Eric Matravers, Layne Gordon, Jessica Newman, Ashley Ludewig, Michelle Day , Megan Hartline, Khirsten Echols, Megen Boyett, Jaclyn Hilberg, and Sara Alvarez.

To all my participants. Thank you for the gifts of time, conversation, and trust.

ABSTRACT

MAPPING RURAL LITERACY SPONSORSHIP NETWORKS: LITERACY INFRASTRUCTURES AND PERCEPTIONS IN ABBYVILLE

Amy McCleese Nichols

July 29th, 2019

Recently, the academy has become aware that rural students are choosing to attend institutions of higher education less often than their urban counterparts. Rationalizing why this particular population remains underserved by institutions of higher learning is a new conversation for higher education. And yet, in literacy studies, the perceived urban/rural divide in terms of national politics sometimes seeps into conversations about the perceived “literacy” or culture of rural peoples. This polarization, unaccompanied by detailed portraits of rural community literacy sponsorship, means that rural areas do not benefit from the consistent attention paid to their urban counterparts in New Literacy Studies. In this project, these larger issues of rural representation are meshed with recent calls for more research into literacy sponsorship networks: in particular, calls more detailed pictures of the networks of literacy sponsorship in which those sponsors are located.

This pilot project responds to both of the issues above by offering a concrete mapping methodology in the hopes of encouraging replication by other scholars. In particular, the project forwards research by providing a specific, multiple-methods study focused on mapping the literacy sponsorship network in a single rural community located in the mid-South. Chapter 1 grounds the study in New Literacy Studies, rural contexts, and complexity theories; Chapter 2

details methodological setup, researcher positionality, and visual mapping elements. Chapter 3 paints over the initial visualization by emphasizing narrative detail of current collaborative literacy sponsorship activities in the community of study. Chapter 4 complicates these collaborations, detailing how multiple cultural aspects affect the operations of community collaborations, particular in terms of access to literacy sponsorship roles. Ultimately, this study advances research in literacy sponsorship networks, proposing a new concrete methodological approach for mapping the complexity of an individual literacy sponsorship network and providing a more detailed portrait of a single rural network.

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CHAPTER I

ADDING COMPLEXITY TO THE STUDY OF LITERACY SPONSORSHIP NETWORKS

To my mind, a branching and constantly extending network rather than a closed institutionalized system best fits the multifarious purposes of urban literacy conversations. (Goldblatt and Jolliffe 63 ms page)

[As] I've grown up, there's always been something extension could help me with, especially this office. Now that I'm here, I've built a lot of networking. Being able to grow up here, I've gotten new producers to come in and utilize the office and different things. People that may not have known about it before have started coming in because they know me, or I talk to them at church or different things.” – Jennifer, study participant

I think if you start by going ... ‘I'm from a small rural area’ and say to people, ‘I'm writing about something I'm passionate about and I'm studying something that I'm interested in, but it's not like I'm interested in it because all I did was read about it. I'm familiar with it too ... It would be like me going over to a little village in Greece. I might not know that much about the little village in Greece, but I know what it's like to be from a little village.’ – Dolly, study participant

We were having a meeting, I said ‘You know what, we need to have our own campus right here.’ They're like ‘What?’ I'm like ‘Yes, our own campus. If we're going to dream, we're going to dream big. We might as well dream for a campus of our own so that our children don't have to go to Moresville or Bordeaux or Frankton to get a college education. They can start right here. Hopefully, one day, they'll be able to get a bachelor's right here, or a master's right here.’ –Alice, study participant

A Note to the Reader

I did not set out to write this particular dissertation. This project originally grew out of my interest in and frustration with community engagement literature; I often found myself irked that much more attention was focused on individual partnerships than on the entire ecology which supported the literate life of communities. My background working in nonprofits convinced me that such representations, while helpful in identifying how a university might partner with individual organizations, risk oversimplifying the heavily

networked sets of organizations in which I had participated as a community member and professional prior to returning to graduate school. I was also intrigued by work on rural literacies and the claims by its authors that rural areas are still being treated by the academy (and broader publics) as spaces of lack that can be filled or revitalized only through outside effort and intervention. Such claims resonated with my own experience as a native of the Appalachian region who finds constructed binaries of “academic” and “home” knowledges disturbing. Personally, I feel that studies on such areas are often still read over subjects and participants in essentialist and problematic ways. My interest in feminist and collective methodologies made me want to design a study that privileged my participants’ voices. I knew I wanted to triangulate these interests, and I knew that I wanted to respond to Eli Goldblatt’s calls for more networked models of literacy sponsorship.

Early on in my interview process, things changed. The more I learned, the more my participants articulated to me who they partnered with and what they were working toward as a community, the more I realized that forcing a participatory element into the project would merely be replicating the kinds of behaviors I found frustrating in the academy. What my participants seemed most interested in was the results of my research and using those results to apply to the work they were already doing. In this case, what would be most helpful to my participants given my own limitations as a graduate student who did not live in or near the community was for me to “do my job” in a more traditional role of researcher. Because of this, I decided to change the study, gather information, and bring that information back to participants to do with as they pleased rather than trying to engage participants in new work that would merely replicate what

they were already doing and place new demands on their already full lives.

I begin in this voice, with this explanation, because you, the reader, need to know that this narrative is about more than just my scholarly engagement with this material. I am from the region (though not the town) I study, and those experiences, those lived and embodied moments are built into every corner of my work here. My written register may shift between informal and formal writing in this piece as I navigate between my own felt and lived perceptions and the information I coded during my research in Abbyville. To do otherwise, for me, would be to pretend a distance between myself and this material that would be utterly false to who I am and what I hope this project will be. Now, to business.

Introduction

As conversations around community literacy and community engagement continue to develop within the field of rhetoric and composition and in higher education more broadly, there have been increasing numbers of scholarly conversations about how universities may best partner with nonprofits, K-12 schools, and government organizations. Increasing numbers of scholars emphasize listening and the qualities of mutuality and reciprocity as a way of ensuring that research and community work are indeed beneficial to communities rather than simply serving as a feather in the university's figurative cap (Deans et al.; Restaino and Cella; Goldblatt, "Alinsky's Reveille").

Despite this increased engagement outside the confines of the university campus, more attention needs to be given to how individuals involved in a localized literacy sponsorship networks operate and create connections between their own literacy work and the work of others in the community. While many New Literacy scholars deal with

literacy as a social practice that individuals build both in institutional and familial settings, less work has been done on how literacy as a social practice may be constructed among a set of individuals, organizations, and educational institutions as a collective for specific and articulated community goals. Eli Goldblatt has argued that “literacy sponsorship networks” are an excellent way to build on prior work in literacy sponsorship (Goldblatt, “Imagine a Schoolyard”). In Deborah Brandt’s words, “We need models of literacy that more astutely account for these kinds of multiple contacts, in and out of school and across a lifetime” (Brandt, “Sponsors of Literacy” 179). By studying how multiple actors in a network see the importance of communal literacy goals and understanding narratives, not merely of *gaining* literacy but of *providing* literacy services in professional contexts, the field can gain a greater understanding of how literacy sponsors work together (or fail to work together) to support community literacy.

I see three particular benefits to the field of Rhetoric and Composition from studying literacy sponsorship networks in greater detail. First, by placing more emphasis on how individuals actively construct literacy sponsorship networks in collaboration with one another, researchers can place a greater value on the complex give and take individuals experience as they move among multiple literacy sponsors and as they participate in sponsoring organizations as literacy sponsors themselves. Nor are these two categories of person mutually exclusive to one another - individuals may both require the services of a sponsoring organization and be working members of that organization. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, my participants most commonly told narratives of how they were both consumers of and sponsors of literacy within their organizations; how they interacted with the community to provide different kinds of multiliteracies shaped

their own understandings of writing and the world. How professionals who are not university professors utilize, construct, and disseminate literacy services matters greatly, and their goals for doing so in specific ways deserve further research and attention to increase the accuracy of our theoretical models for a number of different kinds of communities. In addition, the overlapping roles my participants so often articulated as part of the close, intimate setting of their rural community (seeing community members at church, having family in the community, holding multiple official sponsoring roles in the community across multiple organizations) also brings up new questions for how we might build more historically and contextually dense models of studying community literacy. Most studies in our field appear to be written as showcases of community partnerships from the perspective of a university partner or as highlights of individuals' personal literacy journeys, with some secondary scholarship on how rhetoric and composition scholars from various identity backgrounds navigated their personal and professional literacies. While the narrative of the interest of the community partner is common among scholars in community engagement, I have not seen many studies that focus explicitly on asking professionals who interact with literacy sponsorship to explain what they do and who they partner with.

The second benefit I see to studying literacy sponsorship networks concerns the collective, overlapping nature of a literacy sponsorship network and the way a university partner's attention or lack of attention to that collectivity can affect those networks' long-term sustainability. In the specific setting of a rural context, the distribution of materials and resources differs from that of an urban context (even as users of those resources interact with materials and resources in urban contexts). To do community literacy work

well, one must first understand the rhetorical context in detail; “researching the community organization” without understanding its direct and indirect links to other community organizations and populations besides its direct users can be a grave oversight. As Jeff Grabill rightly points out, “To locate ‘public rhetoric’ in a single speech or text produced by a single author understood in either an orthodox or reformed fashion... is to make a mistake in understanding how the work of rhetoric gets done” (Grabill, “On Being Useful” 200). If a single actant is not sufficient to judge where and how public rhetoric is operating, then a single organization will not be sufficient to consider ourselves ethical and careful partners with the community. If a newly created university partnership benefits a single organization but unknowingly replicates or impinges upon an existing partnership or program elsewhere in the community, the entire ecology that existed prior to that partnership may be damaged. Small nonprofits and community organizations do not always have the resources to promote an adequate web presence or the staff to manage an 8am-5pm office phone. The vagaries of university funding models (“our grant ran out”) may also mean that new partnerships are less sustainable than those already set up by community members. It will suffice to repeat, as others have already, that how much time one has spent in the community will matter.

Finally, in addition to adding to our knowledge of literacy sponsorship networks, I want to draw attention to rural literacy sponsorship networks as a particular kind of network that also deserves more attention. Many of our recent literacy studies have been predicated on the notion of *urban* space; that is, on settings where larger cities, with their attendant complexities and peculiarities, are assumed to be the setting for literate activity. Rural communities as specific sites of inquiry around literacy have received much less

direct scholarly attention within our field; Donehower, Schell, and Hogg observe that, of community literacy studies published between 1980 and 2005, fewer than 25% deal with communities that might fall into the category of rurality (Donehower et al., *Rural Literacies* 28); however, David Jolliffe's important work in the Delta region represents a valuable outlier to this trend, though I am only citing one example of several here (Jolliffe). While scholars in other fields a variety of fields such as public health and rural studies have taken up rural communities as sites of study, less research has been done on how the setting of a rural community, with its own complexities and peculiarities, might call for specific shifts in approach to ensure a reciprocal and ethically sound relationship between university partners and various community stakeholders in literacy efforts. Such research is also applicable to efforts in college composition, given the recent recognition that students from rural areas constitute an underrepresented group in university settings (*National College Progression Rates* 5).

This project addresses the above concerns by focusing on the interplay among a variety of literacy sponsors in a rural community in the mid South. By interviewing individuals situated in the literacy sponsorship network of the town I will here call "Abbyville," this case study has two aims. The first is to create a conceptual organizational network map of the entities most involved in literate life within a rural community (their efforts both with the community and interactions with one another). This map can be found in Chapter 2. This visualization intentionally added an extra step on the data analysis portion of the study. My hope is to encourage future community literacy scholars to visualize dense frames of reference for literacy sponsorship networks to attempt more holistic and broad-scale representation. By focusing on the broader inter-

organizational infrastructure of literacy in this community, this project adds further depth to conversations surrounding both community literacy and rural sustainability.

The second goal is, as much as possible, to maintain a feminist research stance toward my site and participants, emphasizing open communication with participants about research results and maintaining open lines toward future collaboration with the goal of letting participants benefit from my research and their collaboration with me. Because of this, the study emphasizes a “listening” stance toward what participants involved in literacy sponsorship in Abbyville, a small rural town in Kentucky, are saying about their work and their existing partnerships, attempting to draw grounded conclusions about participants’ individual understandings of literacy in their own community and privileging their extant experiential and theoretical knowledge of what works and does not work for their own community sites.

Research Questions

I have used the research questions below to guide the project:

- What partners do participants in the study involved in community literacy efforts name as part of the literacy sponsorship network in Abbyville?
- What kinds of relationships and project do various literacy sponsors engage in?
- What other state, national, or global-level flows do participants identify as affecting their work?
- What kinds of activities and/or speech acts do participants detail when discussing their own work with community literacy?
- What strengths and/or weaknesses do participants identify in the community’s literacy infrastructure?

- What material, social, and cultural factors do participants identify as most salient to the work of community literacy in Abbyville?

Review of Literature

In these sections, I map several research areas that have formed a backdrop to and impetus for the project. The sections range widely in an attempt to directly address some common assumptions about my topics and geographic focus. To say “rural” in some circles still automatically conjures up a kind of imaginarium populated by dense yokels who may-or-may-not-be-racist-but probably-are rather than a diverse group of people intimately connected to and aware of the social, economic, and material flows that affect their localized choices every day. To say “global” in some circles still automatically conjures up anything other than rural America. Because of this intentional juxtapositioning, the following sections trace a through-line among scholarship of complexity theories, community literacy and community engagement, and ideas of the rural. In situating these sections thus, I hope to provide some theoretical grounding for the more data-based arguments readers will see in Chapters 3 and 4.

Flows, Assemblages, and Ecologies, Oh My: A Rhetorical Backbone of Sorts

Work in systems and complexity theories is foundational to the kind of work this project undertakes, and I have pulled from several of these theoretical schemas in constructing the dissertation. In brief, multi-disciplinary conversations around globalization, Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, Actor-Network Theory, and ecological models for social relations all seem relevant in providing a background understanding of how to study the complex system of a small rural town. It may be helpful to note early on that, while this project does not engage directly with more abstract theories at the level of

methodology (my more pragmatic approach to multiple methods is detailed in Chapter 2), some background for the project comes out of efforts in many academic fields to respond to and build on various conversations related broadly to systems theories. For my purposes, those systems theories which are related most closely to flows, networks, and ecologies as a way of attempting to describe the kinds of multiple and complex factors which intersect at the moment of any given rhetorical utterance have helped frame my thinking and the kinds of questions I asked. In researching a single rural community, it is still impossible for a single researcher to account for all the material, sociocultural and historical forces at play in community literacy, which is perhaps why large-scale mapping studies of community literacies are fairly rare in the context of our field. To undertake an already-impossible task, one must attempt to understand what happens when researchers try to account for multiple overlapping abstract and concrete factors. Thus, an overview of complexity theories that have influenced the design of the project may be helpful.

In the mid-1990s, Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* began with a proposal of five global cultural flows or -scapes as a method for describing the effects of globalization that "...allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes," as well as the fact that "these are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision, but, rather, that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors" (Appadurai 33). He proposes five such frames - ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples, and ideoscaples - as fixed components that can help describe the always-moving flows that circulate among groups of people and across/over national boundaries. Global ethnoscaples are composed of people who shift

around in the physical landscape: "...tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals" who might not be recognized by traditional understandings of people groups (Appadurai 33). Technoscapes recognize the globalized nature of technology and the ways in which it "...now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries" (Appadurai 34). Sitting on technoscapes are the related concepts of mediascapes and ideoscapes, "...closely related landscapes of images" which are produced and disseminated globally and which affect people's perceptions of themselves via the images contained (Appadurai 36).

Mediascapes relate more closely to media such as news, tv shows, etc., while ideoscapes use the same mediums but relate to the rhetoric of state power, particularly concepts and terms dealing with "the Enlightenment worldview" such as "*freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representations*, and the master term *democracy*" (Appadurai 36). Finally, financescapes recognize that global standards of measuring the economy cannot keep up with the complicated flow of monies across various boundaries, and their close intertwining with other facets of the global landscape makes them difficult to measure (Appadurai 34). With these conceptual landscapes, Appadurai added a multi-dimensional framework to attempt to account for multiple kinds of rhetorical influence in a global economy, and these ideas often still underpin discussions about the effects of globalization on particular locales.

Similarly, proponents of Cultural Historical Activity Theory and Actor Network Theory seem concerned with the complex movement of ideas as relations between actors and actants within specific localized systems. Coming originally out of the field of educational psychology, Cultural Historical Activity Theory is an increasingly popular

interdisciplinary framework for describing the interaction between individuals, physical objects, and sociocultural factors that stretch across time and affect individual actions taking place in contemporary settings. Described in terms of three “generations “ by the University of Helsinki Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, CHAT has built successively on: 1) the work of Vygotsky and his ideas of mediation, 2) Leont’ev’s three-level theorization of the interaction between object-related and conscious goals in addition to the way environment shapes actions, and 3) a third wave of scholarship led by Michael Cole that has led to the term CHAT and adds in more ideas about cultural and historical awareness (“Cultural-Historical Activity Theory,” para.5). My treatment here is, of course, a gross simplification of what has become an increasingly complex theoretical phenomenon that continues to expand as it is taken up across multiple disciplines in both learner-centered, workplace, and everyday contexts. To give one brief example, the activity triangle (see Figure 1, reproduced from Roth & Lee), a common feature of second-wave CHAT scholarship, represents a concretized, easily replicable framework that attempts to understand complexity in specific rhetorical situations (Roth and Lee 189).

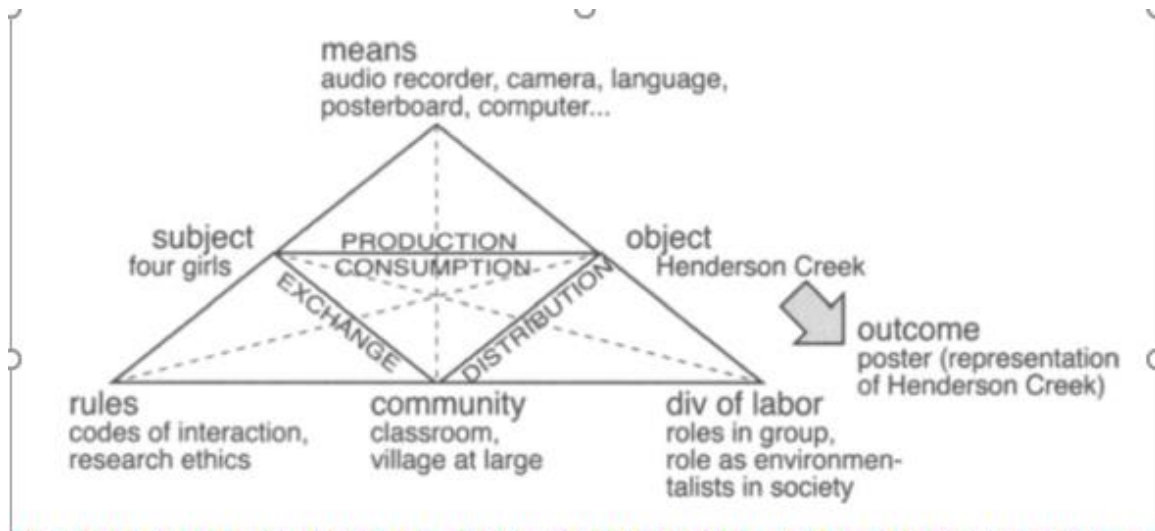


Figure 1. Second-Generation Cultural-Historical Activity Theory Heuristic
 Descriptive text from Roth and Lee: “A widely used second generation cultural-historical activity theory heuristic known as the "activity triangle" for analyzing an activity system. This activity triangle is exemplified using the environmental unit at Henderson Creek” (Roth and Lee 189).

The third generation of CHAT seems of particular relevance to my project. Roth and Lee note that “third-generation activity theory endorses the fact that all activity systems are part of a network of activity systems that in its totality constitutes human society” (Roth and Lee 200). This idea is of particular interest to me, emphasizing not only the everyday practices of small, relatively autonomous groups but also the relationships between the everyday practices of individual organizations and their relationship to a larger whole within the community. For example, within my project, the importance of contextualizing the history of small towns cannot be overstated; residents are often intimately aware of the relationships among people and things both past and present and may be more sensitive to personal and professional histories than citizens of sometimes-but-not-always-decontextualized urban settings. In particular, Chapter 4 details the relationships between African American participants’ access to the literacy

sponsorship network of Abbyville during the historical period of school integration in the American South.

In addition to CHAT, certain iterations of Actor Network Theory seem relevant to my project, particularly for the ways in which they might combine well with the strengths of a CHAT-based approach. Bruno Latour has noted “some ad hoc and makeshift” ground rules for the detailed mosaic of ANT approaches: 1) a specific role given to non-humans as *actors* within situations; 2) a lack of stable definitions of “social” that then explain away certain types of behaviors or situations; and 3) a “more difficult test” that questions whether work aims at “reassembling the social or still insists on dispersion and deconstruction” (Latour 10–11). The primary application of such an approach is well-explained by Tara Fenwick and Richard Edwards, who write that “ANT approaches can enact questions and phenomena in rich ways that discern difficult ambivalences, messy objects, multiple overlapping worlds and apparent contradictions that are embedded in so many educational issues,” and this argument is doubly true when discussing the complex webs of community literacy (Fenwick and Edwards, *Actor-Network Theory in Education* ix). However, they also note the common critiques of ANT approaches, one of which is that “...wherever one puts boundaries around a particular phenomenon to trace its network relations, there is a danger of both privileging that network and rendering invisible its multiple supports and enactments...critiques of certain ANT studies have noted, for example, a predilection to focus on the most powerful or most visible networks, or to simply reproduce network participants' views of their reality” (Fenwick and Edwards, *Actor-Network Theory in Education* 15). Such weaknesses point to a risk of my own study; as I have mapped literacy organizations, reflection on these elements has caused

me to question whether I have been forced (because of time, study structure, or the contingencies of graduate work) to portray only the most socioeconomically powerful representatives of my chosen literacy network. This concern will be discussed more in Chapter 2 but is worth mentioning here.

CHAT and ANT can be seen as radically different approaches. CHAT, with its primary focus on the cultural and historical aspects that affect human relations, tends to follow human actors more closely; ANT, focused more on the material world and objects separated from human relations, tends to follow present-tense relationships between the objects utilized by human beings. Both approaches have strengths and weaknesses; in fact, Paul Prior has argued for combining both CHAT and ANT as a way to strengthen both practices and produce a better way of mapping complex human activities: a combination of “Latour’s call for a flat sociology” (Prior 7) and CHAT’s “attention to artifacts, mediated activity, and learning/development in humans” (Prior 8). I find this mixture of theories particularly compelling as a way of paying attention to multiple levels and layers of literacy infrastructure and circulation as my participants discuss their own experiences, and using both these frameworks offers a promising way to retain 1) an awareness of conversational layers 2) a sense of needed further outside research in community literacy projects (town archives, historical texts ,etc.), and 3) a sensitivity to the ways in which individual elements in the data may link to broader networks and a way to map those linkages.

Finally, and perhaps most promising, recent compositional entries into the study of ecologies provide some needed background for the project. Sidney Dobrin argues that “Writing, of course, is an ecological phenomenon. It is spatial, relational, and complex,

and thus requires that writing specialists develop complex theories in order to attempt to understand its intricacies, functions, and possibilities (2). Dobrin takes this argument one step further, contending that “Writing studies compels not only systems theories or complexity theories as ways of thinking about writing-as-system, but requires a more complex kind of complexity than has yet been proposed simply because writing systems are a different, more complex kind of systems than complexity theories, system theories, and ecological theories have worked to engage thus far” (9). I cannot go quite as far as Dobrin in arguing that writing studies needs its very own complexity theory to be properly studied; however, when one goes in to study writing or literacy more broadly as phenomena in the world, I do believe that a notion of material, ideological, and relational complexity (and a healthy dose of humility) helps the researcher make a helpful beginning. In the same edited collection, Sackey and DeVoss argue that “We believe environmental rhetoric could make greater use of institutional and infrastructural analysis as a means to attending to the complexity of practice” (200) and that “Laying upon textual analysis aspects of institutional lore and life and of infrastructural dimensions of the how of environmental rhetoric... will create a more complete, compelling look at the mediascapes in when rhetoric happens” (Sackey and DeVoss 208).

Each of these variations on complexity theory adds to my own understanding of the limitations and strengths of the project I have undertaken. Ultimately, the emphases above seem to add up to a few key factors that I have tried to attend to in the project below as I listen closely to the ways in which my participants both agree with and push back against the rhetorical understandings that govern these branches of study:

- 1) Life is fluid, and the factors affecting social and material relationships are

always-shifting. Abbyville has changed since I conducted my interviews; some participants moved away, took different positions, etc. New businesses opened and closed; life went on. To assume that a static set of data, a mere snapshot of a slice of community life is representative of the whole would negatively impact the conclusions I am able to draw from that slice of data.

2) Modern life is complex, and a single locale is never only affected by its immediate circumstances but is also always in conversation with multiple regions, nations, etc.

3) Daily human interaction is governed both by social relationships and by material interactions with the physical world, and literacy studies cannot afford to discount those material relations.

Ideally, then, the above framework provides enough rhetorical background to keep the project linked to theorists and rhetoricians who wrestle with what it means to study complex phenomena. While the remaining chapters of this dissertation may not mention the above theorists explicitly, the premises I outline here are part of the theoretical backbone for the work I am doing to map Abbyville's literacy sponsorship network. The visualization schema and descriptions of the town's geography in Chapter 2; the description of current connections and collaborations that characterize Chapter 3; and the attention to history and culture in Chapter 4 are all built out of a combination of participant interview data and an attention to the elements mentioned above. I do not see this project as adding to the initial premises of these theories; rather, I am combining and using them as practical baselines for doing a dense, multiple method study of a small town that I hope yields a more thorough view of literacy sponsorship networks at the

community level.

The sections that follow explore more closely how community literacy scholarship, community engagement scholarship, and rural literacy scholarship have represented various facets of literate life and the ways in which my own project converses with these areas of scholarship.

New Literacy Studies, Community Engagement, and Literacy Sponsorship

Within literacy studies, I align with New Literacy Studies scholars who push against the idea of an autonomous model of literacy as a generalizable skill that somehow rises above the cognitive skills communicated through orality. Rather, NLS scholarship notes that there is insufficient evidence that the autonomous model of literacy has validity and instead advocate for an emphasis on studying literacy practices as used by everyday people in purposeful, goal-driven contexts (Long; Scribner and Cole; B. V. Street; Barton and Hamilton; Heath). Based on the available evidence gathered since the 1970s and before, I believe that literacy is not simply a cognitive construct that can be acquired once; rather, it might be better understood as a social construct that is built over time as one engages with, reads, and produces various kinds of texts for specific social purposes. In practical terms, then, this means that, like Barton and Hamilton, I think that those wishing to study literacy will do well to have started “from the everyday and then moved to education, rather than approaching the everyday with questions framed solely by educational needs” (xvii). Similarly, I align with Brice Heath’s specific focus on literacy practices in particular geographic locales. Her students noted that, for their region, current literacy research of the time used poor categorizations for language habits. Brice Heath explains that “In this geographic region, where far more than half of the families

qualified for in-state social services on the basis of income, socioeconomic differences among children seemed useless as a variable against which to set their language differences” (Heath 3). In this way, NLS studies often privilege participant voices for the ways they can speak back to academic specialists’ assumptions about literacy.

Scholars aligning themselves with New Literacy Studies have since expanded what activities are recognized by scholars as “literate” activity within a society. While some scholars do argue for the relevance of a more restrictive definition of literacy as relating to reading and writing alone, other authors have argued for an expanded definition of literacy that can take into account multiple avenues for literate rhetorical activity in the everyday world, including oral communication. Brian Street argued in the mid-90s when comparing two individuals’ literacy practices that “In this context, it makes little sense to talk of “literacy” when what is involved are different literacies: and equally it makes little sense to compare the two subjects by distinguishing between their oral and literate practices when what is involved are different mixes of orality and literacy” (436). In 2008, Elenore Long argued that, in sum, “literacies organize how people carry out their purposes for going public,” and part of my argument in focusing on my participants’ talk about their efforts toward literacy engagement is that their oral communication around their professional strategies for “going public” is just as, if not more, valuable as any texts they may produce as a result of those already-articulated strategies (22). Harkening back to the ecological model detailed in the previous section, Sackey and DeVoss argue that “...seeing texts in isolation is risky; it limits us to a view where meaning is embedded within texts rather than generated throughout the networks influencing the production, delivery, and consumption of those texts”(Sackey and

DeVoss 196). Similarly, Pahl contends for an "...enlarged understanding of literacy as linked to language, material objects and multimodal choices. Taking a much broader understanding of the process of making meaning involves recognizing the complex interrelationships between writing, speech, material communication and material objects" (Pahl 78). These arguments are very relevant to this project; I argue that part of building a more networked understanding of community literacy is to acknowledge and celebrate community literacy's direct relationship with public rhetoric. The oral and the written cannot be separated if one is to have a more complete picture of the effect of a particular utterance or text as everyday people like myself go public.

This mixing of oral and written practices constituting a sort of slush of various kinds of literate life attracts me. I feel that such a framework has more strength for describing the totality of public rhetoric than one which orients primarily toward writing. Allowing orality to be an element of literacy-as-social-practice grants more agency to those outspoken, orally-oriented community members who may sometimes be perceived as "less" literate in written communication, which aligns well with my own research stance (see more in Chapter 2) and opens up the possibility of addressing in more depth the collaborative rhetorical work that primarily takes place orally. As D.P. Pattanayak points out, it is certainly possible that "Under conditions of orality, people identify and solve problems by working together. Literacy [defined by him as reading and writing] brings about a different kind of togetherness, cutting across social groups, establishing new interest groups that manipulate the illiterate for furthering the vested interest of these newly found groups" (107–08). If I were to confine the notion of literate practice to merely reading and writing in my study, the rich conversations my participants struck up

about the need for oral fluency and the need for local knowledge only obtained through material interaction with the community might not receive their due attention.

To add to the points made above, I feel that avoiding oral literacies would negatively affect how I as a scholar interpret what literacies the Abbyville community values, creating a mismatch between my participants' loud-and-clear emphasis on the oral *as* literate and some literacy scholars' emphasis on connection to text. Literacy and the embodied, material, social relations that make up human life and human rhetoric are always interconnected, and this project does align with those who argue for a broad-spectrum definition of literacy. In this way, I also argue that the public work of rhetoric "...might be to support the work of others - to help other people write, speak, and make new media and other material objects effectively" (Grabill, "On Being Useful: Rhetoric and the Work of Engagement" 193). Without acknowledging multiple expressions of oral, written, and material literacy, I do not feel that my work would be particularly useful to those most interested in its results.

This is not to say that I believe that writing and oral communication are the same; they are not. Much ink has been spilled (and many words uttered aloud) on the strengths of written language for certain kinds of communication. However, for community literacy to continue moving forward with community partners *as partners*, it will be necessary to see orality and written communication side-by-side as partners: two crucial elements always at play in effective practices of literacy in specific contexts and locales. Oral performances from Cicero to Donald Trump are characterized by a responsiveness, whether wise or unwise, to immediate circumstances, an awareness of present audience at the moment of utterances, of the shifting tumult of bodies in spaces and of the power

structures already extant in the space. Written communication does not have the same tie to the immediate material world, but its potentiality for reaching audiences beyond a moment is undeniable.

Thus, when I say “literacy” in this dissertation, I am referring to a slush of oral and written practices laid over the material, affective, and cultural foundations. It is these practices that constitute the daily interactions of my participants with the public as they pursue professional goals of serving Abbyville in various venues. If we are to value what we term vernacular literacies to their fullest, we must allow speech to hold its necessary performative place in such conversations. If situated literacies are performative, as many scholars have persuasively argued (Long 39), then orality is and ought to be showcased as writing’s equal, regardless of the separate strengths and weaknesses of each type of rhetorical utterance.

Alongside direct research into localized individual and community literacies sits a branch of research that concerns itself with what happens when the university directly engages with (rather than simply studies) communities of individuals. I include community engagement literature here with a review of NLS scholarship because I feel that it is an area where the assumptions that university scholars occasionally make about “the public” and literacy become clarified - sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously – in both positive and negative ways. A brief review of this literature lends itself to my goal of ensuring that, as the university researches and interacts with community literacy sponsorship networks, we remain aware of our own biases. Some community-engaged scholarship roots itself in critical pedagogy, where those who are oppressed by systemic power structures are treated as co-creators of knowledge. Ellen

Cushman's "The Rhetorician as Agent of Social Change," calls for rhetoricians to "bridge the university and community through activism," pointing out the ideological distance between university campuses and the broader community (Cushman 8). Echoing this attempted equalization between community and university partners, Eli Goldblatt uses the work of Saul Alinsky, a community organizer from the 1930s, to argue for a model of involvement that privileges the self-interest of the community organization as well as the university partner: that is, that community organizations need collaborators "...who see individual learners as whole people and university partners sensitive to the entire missions of local agencies, not just researchers studying subjects in sites or educators supervising students in field placements" (Goldblatt, *Because We Live Here*, 123). Linda Flower names "...a prophetic, pragmatic, and intercultural rhetoric of public engagement," which can both uncover "...the often unacknowledged rhetorical agency of the voiceless and the powerless..." and push back against "...current images of a media-controlled public sphere with its closely observed accounts of counterpublics" (Flower 5–6). In much community engagement literature, then, there is an appreciation for practices outside the classroom and explicit value placed on collaboration with communities towards often-activist ends.

Another line of scholarship in community engagement discusses the role of larger institutional structures in community-engaged work, both within the university and outside it. How best to work within (or change) institutional structures and how to structure community-engaged work in such a way that it can be recognized by university structures are of particular concern to scholars in this area. Such scholars might argue that "...nearly all literate activity takes place within or with reference to specific social

institutions, and any attempt to understand literate practices without understanding the institutions that make certain practices possible and valuable fails to account for how and why literate practices look the way they do” (Grabill, *Community Literacy Programs and the Politics of Change* 7). For example, a common issue in community engagement literature is how best to structure university-community partnerships within a university structure that does not always value engaged scholarship as a valid scholarly pursuit beyond classifying it as “service” to the university/community. Some have argued for and set up more institutionalized versions of community work (Grabill and Gaillet; Mathis et al.); others note the delicate tension of “reporting” community activity to the university while balancing the voiced goals of community partners (Nichols and Williams); still others note the need to reveal the often-invisible relational labor that goes into such projects (Sheridan 692).

Much of the research around community engagement has also come to focus on individual contexts; that is, how scholars can best attend to material circumstances such as time, space, and resources while also maintaining an awareness of socioeconomic class, race, culture, and other variables that impact how partnerships are perceived and managed by both universities and community organizations.). For example, Paula Mathieu’s influential *Tactics of Hope* argues for “...a tactical orientation, which understands both temporal and spatial politics. University-community partnerships, in a tactical orientation, would necessarily be rhetorical and changing...would operate situationally, grounded in both time and place” (Mathieu xiv–xv). Likewise, Grabill argues that access to computers must be talked about in terms of “contexts, institutions, issues, and people not commonly considered by scholars in this forum – community

literacy programs, workplaces, work, and class, for example...” (Grabill, “Utopic Visions” 298). Finally, Jessica Restaino and Laurie JC Cella’s edited collection works to continue moving Mathieu’s tactical orientation forward, arguing that “...both new and experienced practitioners can and should incorporate an expectation of risk – of the unknowable – even as they set the stage for a sustained and responsive dialogue with their community partners” (Restaino and Cella 6).

This line of scholarship emphasizes community-engaged work as a situated effort always affected by multiple intersecting factors. Community engaged scholarship around literacy practices combines the theoretical fluxes identified in the first section of the literature review with the attention to literacy practices in the second, representing one on-the-ground setting where these theories are already being tested (whether consciously or not) in our field. In the mess and flow of everyday life, leaving behind the cognitive assumption that we can cleanse the material world’s influence on literate practices in studying them, how is it (or is it) possible to conduct a methodologically sound project that both maps a community literacy sponsorship network and attends to the flows that move around, over, and through that network?

For the purposes of this project, then, a motivating concern has been how to represent multiple, situated, intersecting efforts on the part of multiple institutions that are nonetheless represented by individuals who are part of the very publics with whom they interact with in their professional role. The fact that these institutional representatives are also communicating with one another to a greater or lesser extent (and that I have some personal experience in the community) adds more layers of complexity to understanding where the institutional and the individual (the professional and the private?) intersect or

separate, but, as will be seen in Chapter 3, there is no sussing out which lines intersect where except at the individual level. If the town's mayor grew up and went to school in the town but now serves as the mayor while simultaneously pastoring a local church and running the town's live action theater, how are we to articulate when and where he is a literacy sponsor or a literacy consumer? How are we to sift among these various performances and declare for him a single political, educational, religious, or familial role related to community literacy practice?

Because community literacy work in higher education is always bridging between town and gown, there are always challenges to the work; the necessity of emphasizing relationships, context, power structures, and flexibility is a constantly navigated tension in such work. Therefore, it is increasingly important that scholars desiring to conduct engaged scholarship pay attention to the ways in which all participants define what is "beneficial" within their particular context. For this project, taking place as it does in the rural mid-South, it is important to maintain a focus on the negotiated, current, and shifting circumstances of Abbyville, the specific town under study. Abbyville itself has at least two (likely more) distinct partnerships: a local community college branch that the community is deeply invested in and whose founding will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, and the extension office connected to a nearby large land grant university and whose relationships to the community are longstanding and reflective of the history of extension in the United States (discussed more in a later section of this chapter).

In addition to the above sense of what can be considered beneficial by community members and academics, the divide between policymakers and scholars on the issue of literacy also merits mention. Brian Street explains, "The more that

ethnographers explain the ‘complexity’ of literacy practices, the more policymakers find it impossible to design programmes that can take account of all that complexity” (Street 47). In my view, then, it is necessary for anyone engaging in another local study of community literacy to understand potential political applications of any approach. In this project, I also argue that an attempt to map networks of services and understand what those offering the service are attempting to do *along with* how users navigate those services will yield a more holistic understanding of community literacies in ways that will still have practical applications that can be understood and applied at the policy level. Thus, since there is less attention in NLS studies to a network view of literacy sponsorship, my project does emphasize the view of those who are actively constructing a community network of support for literacy broadly, detailing the relationships discussed in a visual included at the end of Chapter 2. As a brief example of potential political application, when I called a state-level office to ask some detailed questions about the relationships between county and city governments in the state, explaining my project and the attempt to produce a network map, a director asked me if I would send them the finalized map, as “I wish we had one.”

While all of the above conversations are relevant to this project, literacy sponsorship is certainly the core idea to which I try to contribute with this project. Literacy sponsorship, a popular concept first proposed by Deborah Brandt in the 1990s coming out of the NLS framework, pays close attention to how relationships among individuals and a network of sponsoring institutions can promote or deny specific kinds of literacy. Deborah Brandt defines literacy sponsors as “...any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, and well as recruit, regulate,

suppress, or withhold literacy - and gain advantage by it in some way” (Brandt, “Sponsors of Literacy” 166). Individuals’ experiences of their literacy sponsors differ by individual sociocultural background, their perception of their individual agency to move among literacy sponsors, and individual interactions with sponsors among a host of other factors related to time, space, geography, culture, etc. At the same time, Brandt acknowledged that this helpful lens would need more development over time. In particular, she observed that “...workplaces, schools, families bring together multiple strands of the history of literacy in complex and influential forms. We need models of literacy that more astutely account for these kinds of multiple contacts, both in and out of school and across a lifetime” (Brandt, “Sponsors of Literacy” 179). Studies in NLS tend to maintain a focus on how individuals and community groups engage with literacy sponsors from the perspective of the individual’s navigation of a network (Brandt; Webb-Sunderhaus; Donehower for just a few examples), but focusing only on single perspectives of user navigation (even when multiple users of services are studied) can have serious limitations on how literacy scholars view the entirety of the network of service available to a community. Some have argued that placing individual narratives side-by-side allows the reader not to try to “...arrive at a single truth through the artifice of triangulation, or even to suggest plural truths, but to allow each story to trouble the other’s take on what happened” (Burnett and Merchant 267). Some of this technique will be seen in the narrative structure of Chapter 4; however, story stacking by itself may not be sufficient to arrive at a more holistic method for exploring literacy sponsorship at the network level in various kinds of communities.

Recent and forthcoming entries into the conversation around literacy sponsorship

are beginning to take the network view into account, and it is this set of conversations that I myself want to enter with my first scholarly intervention. In the forthcoming Watson collection, *Mobility Work in Composition*, Eli Goldblatt argues for further attention to networks of literacy sponsors and how they function in local context as an extension of the idea of literacy sponsorship. He points out the efficacy of looking at networks of literacy sponsorship in addition to individual interactions with single sponsors:

These agencies, organizations, institutions, and companies may be, in the public imagination, directly associated with reading and writing or only tangentially related. However, in a broader (and yet more specialized) sense of literacy found in Brandt's work, all these categories include crucial sponsors for developing citizens' (and noncitizens') ability to address and advocate for their own needs as well as enhancing the mobility of individuals across activities, jobs, and career trajectories... Thus, interconnected networks of literacy sponsors may serve to enhance or restrict movement across barriers associated with class, race, and other socially constructed identities. (Goldblatt, "Imagine a Schoolyard" 5).

In the above quote, Goldblatt combines a material view of literacy with an expansion of literacy sponsorship notions; the "interconnected networks" of literacy sponsorship are just as worthy of study as individual sponsors (Goldblatt, "Imagine a Schoolyard" 5).

Similarly, in a forthcoming book titled *Literacy as Conversation: Learning Networks in Philadelphia and Arkansas*, Goldblatt and David Jolliffe present an in-depth discussion on how certain aspects of literacy sponsorship networks function in two very different

local contexts. A short excerpt helps build on Brandt's original research: "...where Brandt looks at the effects sponsoring institutions have on individuals at a particular moment in history, I emphasize the function and influence of social institutions themselves" (Goldblatt and Jolliffe 19 -ms page). Their work emphasizes primarily nonprofit groups in the community, since "the most recognizable literacy sponsors are not necessarily the most effective" (Goldblatt and Jolliffe 21-ms page). Arts organizations, learning nonprofits, urban farms, and many others in the nonprofit arena fall under their examination, expanding notions of the kinds of conversations that can be had around networked literacy sponsorship and the ways in which the written, oral, and material elements of community organizations' daily practices underline and shift our conversations about literacy sponsorship. While I cannot do justice to the richness of the many examples in the text in the space I have, Goldblatt's example of an urban farm as literacy sponsor is particularly relevant to my project:

Farms nurture ways of thinking and acting that are quite congenial with literacy, even in fairly traditional definitions of that term. A farm manager can be a literacy sponsor for a new participant – emphasizing sequential operations, revision and editing, scientific knowledge, historical perspective – by teaching crop planning and management, the importance of weeding and pest control, all the while weaving in lessons about the physics of water flow, levers, or evaporation and inculcating a reverence for historical techniques or heirloom species... At the same time, farms – even more than art studios – thrust participants into a world not dominated by written or spoken language, forcing participants to re-imagine the nature of literacy itself. The things we see and touch and taste aren't merely

artifacts of written language, as modern city dwellers tend to assume. The physical world disrupts, sometimes rudely, our experience of language”

(Goldblatt and Jolliffe 126-127 ms page).

Goldblatt and Jolliffe’s entry into this area of scholarship underlines the critical interconnections between materiality, history, and written and oral practice in literacy sponsorship networks.

Literacy sponsorship networks, then, are one of the main concepts on which this dissertation aims to build. I define “literacy” broadly to include oral and material practices consistent with many NLS scholars’ belief that literacy quickly moves around, between, and beyond writing in community settings. I maintain that our field’s attention to literacy settings outside the university necessitates such broad definitions if we are to give due respect to the professional practices taking place in those settings. While charting the ways in which individuals use their agency to navigate between various kinds of literacy sponsors to meet their personal and professional goals is absolutely critical to building on the ideas set forth by Brandt and others, it will not be sufficient to do so without also attending to the ways in which individuals who are part of sponsoring organizations are navigating the promises and pitfalls of offering sponsorship within a broader network of organizations while also moving through their own personal literacy journeys. While some community activists define “community” as a term in opposition to “institutions,” such dichotomous constructions quickly break down. Observing the work of professor and activist John McKnight, Grabill argues: “some of the entities that he describes above as community—churches, enterprises, civic groups – are what I would call institutions” (Grabill, *Community Literacy Programs and the Politics of Change* 92).

The recent interventions into literacy sponsorship conversations above frame my attempt to create a map and attempt to talk to multiple literacy providers in terms of both their professional roles and their place in the community. The interviews, data collection, and creation of a network map constitute an early methodological attempt to address multiple interlocking and overlapping factors and roles among Abbyville residents most connected to literacy sponsorship in the community. To examine a complex society, I argue, it is necessary to look at multiple interlocking and overlapping factors and roles. Our primary attention as a field has been to see how individual users interact with systems, and while I agree that we should assume that users interact with and among multiple literacy sponsors (Donehower), I also want to acknowledge that individuals in rural sponsorship roles are also inhabiting multiple community spaces, affecting both individual users of the network and the fabric of the entire local community. Of course, communities will vary. Not all small rural communities may have dense interlocking webs of service like the one represented in Chapter 2 by the citizen-professionals of Abbyville. What this case study can represent, I believe, is a detailed snapshot of a rural literacy sponsorship network overlaid and complicated by cultural, historical, natural, and national forces and flows.

Critical Regionalism and the Rural: Local and Global

As mentioned above, scholars in New Literacy Studies tend to see the practice of various literacies as a complex, materially and socially constructed phenomena rather than simple individual cognitive processes (Street; Engestrom and Sannino; Fenwick and Edwards, *Actor-Network Theory in Education*; Heath). In this way, it is important not merely to study the individual classroom literacy practices that students engage in but

also to conduct ethnographic research that values the larger contexts out of which individual writers and readers emerge. For my purposes, an attention to the ways in which rural literacies are constructed both by members of rural communities and by the scholars who engage with place and rural communities is important. An effective literacy partnership between a university and a nonprofit in an urban neighborhood may or may not translate well into a rural community, especially when issues such as transportation and available media outlets are taken into account. While some scholarship on the Appalachian region will appear in this section, it is important for the reader to note (as I describe in more detail in Chapter 2) that Abbyville is *not* defined as Appalachian, either in the Appalachian Regional Commission's official map of the region *nor* in the minds of local residents. Most Abbyville residents would consider themselves Kentuckians, small town, rural, etc., but very few if any would describe themselves as Appalachian. In fact, depending on the speaker, some might even critique far Eastern Kentuckian counties in the same ways as some of their urban counterparts.

This project very specifically focuses on a rural site: a small farming-oriented community with no direct interstate access. I chose a rural site in order to make rurality a central component of my argument about literacy sponsorship networks because I perceive that literacy scholars in 2019 are prone to considering rural locales as “lacking” literacy resources, and I explicitly want to work against those assumptions here. The 2010 U.S. Census showed that 19.3% of the U.S. population - 59,492,276 people –lived in areas classified as rural (“2010 Census Urban and Rural Classification and Urban Area Criteria”). However, underlying perceptions often figure rural areas as unimportant and simply lacking in resources when compared to urban areas, as seen in a variety of media

outlets and entertainment mediums. In 2014, a *New York Times* article titled “What’s the Matter With Eastern Kentucky?” featured a version of Kentucky’s “Unbridled Spirit” license plate with the words “HELP ME” spelled out where the numbers would usually go. In the article, author Annie Lowry lists in great detail the challenges facing the hardest hit counties in Eastern Kentucky after the decline of the coal industry, affirming that “The queasy answer that economists come to is that it would be better to help the people than the place - in some cases, helping people leave the place” (Lowrey, para.14).

Such arguments are old, of course. Henry Shapiro noted in 1978 that people outside the region of Appalachia are prone to perceive Appalachia as “a strange land inhabited by strange people” and characterize it as a problem to be solved in typically one of three ways: via preservation, modernization, or abandonment (Shapiro, para.xiii)(xiii). Lowry’s article, with an economic emphasis on large scale industry as the only possible solution for low job growth in a difficult-to-reach rural area, mitigates any possible resources that may still exist in the Kentucky coalfields after the massive destruction caused by the coal industry. The presence of this kind of implicit or explicit bias against rural areas and the frequent generalizations made about rural residents that are based on an essentialist understanding of urban areas as qualitatively “more” (smarter, more sustainable, less racist, etc., etc.) overlooks not only the history of such areas but also makes it critical to include rural areas explicitly in our conversations about community literacy as a way of pushing back against these essentialist understandings.

Added to these difficulties is the continued lack of specificity used in talking about rural areas. What is “rural” becomes a loose catchall term that simply signifies “not-urban” - a rather obvious form of othering. In fact, the underlying assumptions

about rural areas (far from an urban center, unconnected to the larger national scene) may often be rooted in assumptions about what can classify as rural. Rural does not necessarily mean “far from an urban center,” which seems to be a common way to define such areas. Almost any average citizen would automatically describe a farm as “rural,” and yet many farms lie just outside cities and urban nuclei, a fact which does not quite seem to have penetrated the national imagination. Isserman, Feser, and Warren note the following:

In other words, the rural residents of metropolitan and micropolitan areas are integrated with urban areas because their county either includes an urban nucleus or has substantial commuting to or from a county with an urban nucleus. In addition to 30 million rural residents within metropolitan areas, there are 14 million rural residents within micropolitan areas and another 15 million rural residents outside those core based areas (Isserman et al. 4–5).

For Isserman, then, counties are classified (using Donehower et al.’s helpful summary of Isserman’s sometimes lengthy prose) as “...rural, mixed rural, mixed urban, and urban. A rural county, in Isserman’s designation, has fewer than 500 residents per square mile, 90 percent of its population in rural areas, and/or fewer than 10,000 residents in urban areas of the county” (Donehower et al., *Reclaiming the Rural* 7). For the purposes of my study, Abby County, the home county of Abbyville, contains 58 residents per square mile, and Abbyville itself contains about 6,500 residents as of the most recent census, placing it squarely in Isserman’s definition of a rural county, but it also has strong communication with surrounding communities, including the nearby metropolitan area of Frankton, which many participants travel to on a weekly basis. Abbyville itself does not have direct

interstate access, but the nearby town of Johnstown does.

In addition to concerns about how rural towns are classified geographically, Donehower, Hogg, and Schell note another difficulty in the study of rural areas; “It is important to define rural not only demographically and geographically, but culturally as well. The word *rural* functions for many as a marker of identity, regardless of demographic criteria or current location” (Donehower et al., *Reclaiming the Rural* 7). Being “rural” for some can be a shorthand for a kind of cultural understanding of the world.

Of course, there can be no uniform value for a group of 59 million people who live globally informed lives in the 21st century, just as these 59 million rural residents do not come from homogenous ethnic, racial, religious, etc. backgrounds. A self-identified Southerner is not the same as a self-identified Appalachian person in terms of how they construct their identity. A farmer with Scandinavian ancestry who puts raw eggs into his coffee grounds every morning in Iowa is not the same as a biracial woman in West Virginia who grew up nestled among hills and mountains learning to play her grandfather’s banjo. And yet, for the sake of equal representation in a country that judges mainly population density when meting out power, I contend that there are subsets of rural residents for whom their culture is tied to the experience of living in a rural area, despite the inherently diverse ways that people experience rurality. Scott Herring argues in his work on queer metronormativity that:

Even if the “rural” or the “urban” cannot be verified by Census Bureau fact checking, these terms nevertheless subsist as structures of intense feeling that help materialize the geo-representations of urban or rural queerness. Space and place

are as much act and experience as they are dirt and rock, concrete and steel...Recognizing that the term “rural” is historically co-dependent on its binary opposition, “urban,” we should theorize “rural” or “non-metropolitan” locales as performative geographic positions that have often enabled individuals and group subjects to experience themselves as distinct from dominant spatial performatives of the “urban” or the “metropolitan” (13).

Therefore, at the risk of continuing to muddy the waters by using the freighted term “rural,” I do constitute Abbyville as a rural town in this dissertation. As will be seen in Chapters 3 and 4, the relationship between urban and rural is constantly defined and redefined by Abbyville residents in both positive and negative ways, and this negotiation is worth noting here at the beginning.

Historically, the history of the United States as a nation from 1776 until the late 1800s *is* primarily that of a rural nation, and a focus on urban centers in the 20th century does not negate that simple fact. It would be outside the scope of this project to provide a detailed rural history of the American South alone, much less a rural history of the U.S. as a whole. However, a brief sketch of 20th and early 21st century rural history may be helpful for some readers. In the next few paragraphs, I will outline the transatlantic slave trade’s effect on Southern agriculture in the 1800s, the Country Life Movement of the early 1900s, the revolutionization of agriculture after WWII, and more recent movements back to “local foods.” These moments cannot constitute the whole of rural history in the United States, but they do have bearing on some of the historical arcs that will be seen for Abbyville in Chapters 2-4 of this project. In this section, I do lean heavily on David B. Danbom’s exhaustive *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America*, both for its

helpful overview of key trends and as a departure point for some of my own arguments.

The farm trade was an assumed norm in the early years of the United States. While the legacies of slavery will be discussed more in Chapter 4, I want to mention it here as well. The rural South, once a land populated by many tribes and confederacies of Native American people groups, was altered radically by the transAtlantic slave trade in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Groups of African peoples forced to work cotton in the deep South were thrown into an unjust and lifelong servitude that built an enormously economically successful and morally failed system for some (but not all) white landowners. In the mid-South, particularly in Kentucky where this project focuses its attention, the use of slavery was mixed. The mountainous Appalachian areas of the Eastern parts of the state were characterized by small farms, low interaction with the slave trade, and an increasing involvement by outside national corporations such as coal companies who brought “development” in the form of labor opportunities but which also destroyed many ecological resources in the area. The Bluegrass region of the state benefitted from a rolling landscape suitable for larger-scale farming and raising horses, and the Central and Western portions of the state had a much higher involvement in the slave trade than their far Eastern counterparts. What this meant was that parts of Kentucky resembled their deeper South counterparts, while the Appalachian region did not have a great involvement in the slave trade. Indeed, to this day it is common knowledge that Western Kentuckians and Eastern Kentuckians can sometimes inhabit radically different worldviews, and that a person from Louisville may speak slightly of his or her Eastern neighbors (or vice versa). Abbyville, historically a thoroughfare for river traffic in its region, did have a significant enslaved African American population at

one point in its history.

In the period after the Civil War, Kentucky, like much of the rest of the South, had to rebuild and change. Abbyville itself was affected by the violence of the Civil War and the repercussions that followed in the decades after the end of slavery. To fast-forward a bit to the early 1900s, the period that seems to mark the first public delineation of what I will slightly call urban “concern” for rural areas seems best exemplified by the Country Life Movement, a movement initiated by “urban-based educators, religious leaders, social scientists, philanthropists, and other public figures regarding the rapid ascendancy of urban American and the apparent tendency of the smartest and most promising young people in the countryside to move to cities” (Danbom 157). As a result, the Country Life Commission for the government conducted interviews, coming up with recommendations to improve rural America, resulting in the passage of the Smith-Lever Act to create a pipeline of information from universities engaged in agricultural research to local farming communities via the use of extension offices embedded directly in local communities. Danbom explains, “Specifically, the commission called on rural people to beautify their homes and make them more convenient. It argued that the rural church should be re-energized and redirected – that rural schools should be reformed” (Danbom 158). The only problem was that rural people did not always agree with the sweeping reforms that were enthusiastically slated to take place across multiple geographic and cultural rural locales, sometimes without regard for actual local practices already in effect. In fact, Danbom details many examples of the ways in which outside influence, particularly in the areas of university extension offices, was offensive to farming families in the early 1900s due to a lack of cultural understanding on the part of urban-originated

extension agents:

When extension began to operate in rural areas, it was not always relevant to farmer's problems and concerns. Many farm women were frustrated by the gender division of the program and the urban bias it reflected... This division reflected the belief of Country Life reformers and some progressive farm women, such as those with leadership positions in the Grange, that rural women's lives should revolve around the home, but it was insulting to female farmers who played significant roles in the productive side of the farm business" (Danbom 162).

The Country Life Movement seems to represent an important moment revealing shifting perceptions of rural, from central to the makeup of the American ideal to a less-emphasized role; "For most of the history of the country rural had been normal, and urban had been peculiar... Now farmers had become peculiar" (Danbom 163).

Another historic moment in rural history relevant to this project is the production "revolution" that took place in the 1940s-1970s. New methods of farming and new hybrid varieties of plants boosted food production on a per-acre basis for much farmland, and those farmers who were able to stay abreast of (and afford) these methods did well. However, Danbom explained that the revolution "had less positive effects on rural America as a whole, stimulating a massive rural-to-urban migration, strangling small towns, and leaving country schools and churches empty. Moreover, risk returned to farming in the 1980s in the form of an agricultural depression as deep as that of the 1930s, a downturn that bankrupted seemingly successful farmers and devastated rural communities that were already suffering" (Danbom 221). It is this version of rural America that many of my more urban (more urbane?) friends seem to imagine when I

talk about my home background: a desolate wasteland of crumbling storefronts, falling-down farmhouses, and less-than-welcoming locals (white, probably racist) bent on making outsiders feel their status.

My apologies for my tone in the paragraph above. I do not mean here to undermine the reality of what took place in rural America during the production revolution. This was a significant chapter in rural history where power became consolidated into the hands of a few massive producers, and my own childhood was punctuated by hearing that a friend's dad had had to sell a farm or by understanding that my uncle, a successful brick mason on whose farm my own family's 6-acre property lay, was (and remains) one of the "...tiny weekend farmers who refused to go away" (Danbom 221). However, what I want to emphasize here is that the 1980s did not do away with rural areas and that the narratives around rural America do not end with the collapse of the tobacco industry (which I will discuss more in Chapter 2). "We" are still here, though there is no cohesive "we" to speak of. Much of rural land is still farmland, but "by the early twenty-first century only 7 percent of rural people were farmers. The rest of the rural population consisted of a complex variety of truck drivers and nurses, teachers and factory workers, amenity seekers and survivalists, telecommuters and loners living off the grid. They were detached from farmers but, like farmers, were often detached from urban American as well" (Danbom 241). I might add PhD candidates, musicians, artists, potters, activists, professors, entrepreneurs, craft beer enthusiasts, bourbon makers, carpenters, painters, and railroad workers along with noted names such as bell hooks, Silas House, and Wendell Berry just to be contrary, but I am trying to address one stereotype at a time, so I will refrain from further nitpicking; I highly respect

Danbom's work, and the chip on my shoulder is not of his making.

Rural areas are still (like the rest of the nation) in flux. The local foods movement, a rising concern for sustainability in an age when supply chains are incredibly long and require massive consumption of petroleum to maintain, diseases that wipe out underdiversified livestock populations, and ground-level efforts to revitalize small towns mean that the dismal landscape described by Danbom is not a static picture. In Kentucky, I might point to the "Main Street Program," which has collaborated with more than 1,200 neighborhoods and towns in the state to bring new growth and development to small downtowns ("Kentucky Main Street Program" - *Kentucky Heritage Council*). My own childhood memories of creepy boarded-up windows in many of the towns of my childhood have been exchanged, in many cases, for pleasant surprises in the forms of new local businesses, restaurants, and, in one notable case, a local bourbon distillery in towns where I had been trained to expect disrepair and an uneasy sense of vague despair. Danbom himself describes various ways that some rural areas have fought declines; "Places with vigorous and imaginative leadership have reinvented themselves as tourist destinations through renovation of historic downtowns, annual festivals, encouragement of the arts, property giveaways to entice new residents, and so forth" (Danbom 249).

Rural towns and farms, then, continue to position themselves as active players on the national stage. What has remained static, to my mind, is the ways in which urban dwellers *perceive* rural areas: as irrelevant, as secondary, as no longer a driving force in the US, which seems to be the central thesis of Danbom's book. This kind of perception is certainly not, globally, a new phenomenon (What good can come out of Nazareth?), but in the United States, the sense by some rural residents that they have been left out of

the national conversation may have contributed to the political rise of Donald Trump, whose rural supporters “...frequently mentioned their resentment at being ignored and passed by in a nation from which they felt increasingly alienated” (Danbom 250). For me, a rural location is not only an area of personal interest and passion but also, in current U.S. politics, a space of national contention. Is “rural” the space of Charlottesville white supremacists with tikki torches, the space of Kim Davis, or is rural the space of Vicco, Kentucky, which elected an openly gay mayor and became the smallest town to have an ordinance banning discrimination based on gender or sexual identity? It is both, it is all, it is everything in between, sometimes in the same town, replicated across the nation, and the shades that illuminate a rural space are just as complex as those in urban spaces. They are not culturally “the same” spaces, but they are still human spaces, capable of great variation and depth.

Adding to these concerns for me in my own discipline is that research universities by their very locations tend to privilege urban locales and ideals. Large research universities are often located in more metropolitan or at least suburban areas, and researchers are limited by cost, time, interest, and, sometimes, cultural difference even when research universities are located closer to rural communities. In fact, travel time was a limitation in my own study; if I had not had family relatively near the region of Abbyville to stay with, it would have been nearly impossible to do an interview-based study that involved a sufficient number of trips in to the community without significant funding or close friendship or kinship networks in the town itself (though this limitation is of course related to issues of funding as well). In addition, rural students as a whole are underrepresented in the American academy, which compounds the lack of attention. As

of 2016, the National Student Clearinghouse reported that only 59% of rural high school graduates go to college the next fall, as opposed to 62% of urban students and 67% of suburban students (*National College Progression Rates*), and popular media has recently drawn more attention to rural students as an underrepresented minority in higher education (Marcus and Krupnick; Baumhardt and Hanford). The logical net result of fewer rural students attending college is that fewer academic researchers will be from rural backgrounds and see those areas as natural sites for their research, risking, to my mind, a further divide between literacy researchers and rural contexts. As such, “Rurality appears to be something of a blind spot, then. That further supports the view that literacy research, along with educational enquiry more generally, tends to be metro-centric, and organized by a metro-urban normativity, since cities are clearly significant “other” spaces in this regard, with various effects on their external environs, their hinterlands” (Green and Corbett 27).

In addressing the concerns I lay out above, it is worth exploring critical regionalism as a concept. Critical regionalism, an approach in architecture that attempts to counter bland, placeless designs that are universalized and separated from the unique geographic regions in which they are situated (for example, a big box chain store will look very similar in Dayton, Ohio and in Dallas, Texas, despite the inherent differences in the landscape and culture of those areas). Arguments around critical regionalism, then, “in their own way...are all responses to rhetorically flat data,” the notion that the geographic or rhetorical locales of an argument are somehow unimportant (Rice 204). Jenny Rice articulates four premises of this line of thinking: “region is a rhetorical interface” rather than a simple intermediary between global and local (Rice 204); “region

and nation are non-concentric,” that is, they are not simply microcosms at work within a larger national identity but rather may overlap or outweigh such an identity (Rice 206); “regions are folds” in that the concerns of one “region” may temporarily intersect with and fold into the concerns of another region (Rice 208); and “regions are strategies” and their use is always a conscious choice on the part of a particular rhetor (Rice 210). I particularly appreciate this definition of critical regionalism for the way it engages both local and global scales and emphasizes local geography and culture as starting points for consideration; as will be seen in Chapter 3 and 4, a sense of “the local” and understanding locality first was a serious concern of many study participants.

Similarly, in Blackburn and Clark’s “Making Local and Global Connections in Literacy Research for Political Action,” the authors note Wallace’s critique of the local literacy movement championed by Barton and Hamilton is that they do not attend fully enough to the global flows (a la Appadurai) that are always already affecting the local (Blackburn and Clark 13), and the premises outlined by Rice seem like a good foundation for navigating the flows of local and global influence without overlooking a site’s unique positionality. Building on these frameworks, Blackburn and Clark also create a list of tenets for doing the work of the local and global that seem particularly relevant to the project at hand: such research must make the relationship between local and global visible, must come from and return to the local, must make evident the political commitments involved, expand the notion of what can count as evidence of literacy, and must incorporate more imaginative tools to better capture the local/global relationships in play (Blackburn and Clark 20–23). Likewise, research in rural literacies has suggested that “rural literacies are not something for only rural people to pay attention to; rural

should not be seen in opposition to urban but as part of a complex global economic and social network” (Donehower et al., *Rural Literacies* xi). I have tried to attend, then, not just to Abbyville itself but also to the state, national, and global flows that run into and out of the town, which both sustain and diminish its vitality as a community and to which individual participants have a variety of relationships both personal and professional. This attention seems important both as a response to the false imposition of isolation onto rural areas and as a way to give this research its rightful place alongside (instead of opposed to) more urban-centered and globalized community research. Rural America is still part of the world.

Finally, Donehower, Hogg, and Schell have developed a working definition for “rural literacies” specifically that helps me find a focus for the broadscale definitions of literacy I have used for this project. Their goal for rural areas, differing sharply from the imposed structures of modernization, preservation, or abandonment noted by Shapiro, is to focus on sustainability; what will it take to sustain rural community life as an important aspect of urban existence (as many truck bumper stickers observe: “No farms, no food, no future,” and the same can be said of forests, fields, valleys, and rivers). In *Rural Literacies*, the authors argue for the following definition:

For our purposes, we would like to propose a definition that is more appropriate to analyzing the uses of literacy in rural contexts. Rural literacies, then, refers to the particular kinds of literate skills needed to achieve the goals of sustaining life in rural areas - or, to use Brandt’s terms, to pursue the opportunities and create the public policies and economic opportunities needed to sustain rural communities (Donehower et al., *Rural Literacies* 4).

In this study, then, I have focused on sustainability as another rationale (added to those listed above in the section on New Literacy Studies) for adopting a broad definition of literacy in interviews for the purposes of understanding what participants felt was needed to make their community thrive. Ultimately, the goal of literacy sponsorship networks is to build “literate” residents, and the goal of many of my participants was to use those opportunities to help Abbyville remain a “good” place to live.

To summarize this section: inherent urban bias and unawareness of rural concerns and lack of current and developing scholarship on rural literacies (compounded by fewer rural citizens choosing to attend college in the first place) make it imperative that researchers ensure that rural voices are present as active participants in conversations about community literacy. Donehower, Hogg, and Schell claim that “If we are ever to usefully change the terms of debate about rural education and rural literacy, we need more extensive qualitative research in the contexts of rural literacy,” and this represents another area of intervention for this project (Donehower et al., *Rural Literacies* 28). My project responds to these calls for representation by foregrounding rural spaces as contemporary and agentic players in the national conversation on literacy. I chose Abbyville specifically as a site for several factors, including past prior involvement with the community, but also because it was a small rural town located about 20 miles from the nearest interstate exit. These results, then, represent a relatively unstudied type of community in community literacy.

Conclusion

Ultimately, then, this chapter is a scene-setting. In a complex, multifaceted world, where we recognize that intersectional identities and social injustices play out in multiple

contexts, both urban and rural, it is not enough to emphasize that life is complex; we must study multiple contexts to understand what local people think about local and global forces that shape their lives and study theories of complexity to understand various ways in which we might map broader and more complex networks of literate activity. In a nation where the urban context is more emphasized (via allocation of resources and attention both governmental and scholarly), There is a gap in studying how rural communities build literacy. As a field, we must continue to find complex ways to understand how the geographic and social contexts of people's lives affect how they perceive the world, and must conduct studies that represent the unique ways that both rural and urban communities meet the challenges that face them on a daily basis, especially as the conversation in higher education begins to recognize rural students as an under-served group. Likewise, as many have argued, we must let what we already know about literacy via NLS scholarship and rural studies inform how we structure such studies; as will be seen in chapters 2 and 3, a highly historicized methodology is appropriate for gaining the kinds of specific, localized knowledge that inform literate practice in any given community, but particularly so in rural areas where a sense of history (at least in the Eastern half of the U.S.) is sometimes more developed in terms of local culture.

Finally, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I personally and professionally have a stake in this work (which I have likely made obvious in the above paragraphs). I spent my childhood revving up to be part of the brain drain out of my town and my region. I was going to move away and never come back. Instead, I find myself caring that I do not see the full complexity of rural people and places being drawn upon

in literacy scholarship. I find myself working at an interracial, coeducational liberal arts college that provides a full-tuition scholarship to students of all races from the broader Appalachian region and marveling that I do not see these students reflected more in scholarship that ostensibly prides itself on diversity but, in practice, often elides actual diversity, as clearly described by Asao Inoue's 2019 CCCC address and clearly *shown* by the impassioned (and sometimes shameful) debate that followed on the WPA listserv soon after. In scholarship, I see far too few Donehowsers, Schells, and Hoggs, and far too many of the kinds of conference attendees Katherine Keller Sohn describes as having mocked the regional accent of their waitress; she emphasizes that prejudice against "...dialect, birthplace, or class...occurs among educated people who, if asked, would probably pride themselves on their multicultural awareness" (Sohn, *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices Since College* 1). The presence of these kinds of implicit and explicit biases against rural as "lacking," combined with the frequent generalizations made about rural residents in popular media, make it critical to explicitly include rural voices in academic conversations about community literacy, particularly as such prejudices make their way into the first year writing classroom where rural students are increasingly underrepresented (Hayes; Powers; Crotteau).

In that vein, this dissertation discusses the results of 21 interviews with a variety of individuals connected to the literacy sponsorship network in Abbyville, a small rural community in Kentucky. Individuals with either a professional role in or a significant connection to the literacy sponsorship network in Abbyville. Chapter 2 explains the methodological and ethical backbone of the project and describes the town's history and participant demographics. Chapter 3 explains how the literacy sponsorship network in

Abbyville functions collaboratively, centering on efforts to build and continue supporting a community college branch and to become a WorkReady community. Finally, Chapter 4 explores notions of time, culture, and materiality as factors which interweave into the literacy sponsorship network through the narratives of African American participants who lived through the Civil Rights era in Abbyville. By producing scholarship on a rural town that privileges a broad range of voices from those who live, work, and actively support the literacy sponsorship network in Abbyville, this project seeks to develop our fields understanding of literacy sponsorship networks and to continue to invigorate conversations around rural communities as active participants in contemporary North American culture.

CHAPTER II

EXPLORING HOW TO DO IT WELL: RESEARCH STANCE, METHODOLOGY, AND MAPPING THE COMMUNITY

Introduction

Chapter one of this dissertation took the reader through a four-part review of systems theories, New Literacy Studies research, community engagement research, and research related to literacy sponsorship as a concept. Because the project seeks to answer calls for more networked ideas of literacy sponsorship, a sense of how systems theories grapple with complexity helps provide support for that area of the project. New Literacy Studies and how researchers examine literacy practices more broadly helps inform the design of the study. Community engagement research, with its attention to how university and community partners speak about their partnerships, is important for any project whose participants primarily come from outside the university structure. Finally, literacy sponsorship, as my main area of examination and intervention, is the space where I hope to bring these theories together in the undertaking I describe here.

Because the project already draws from a range of academic disciplines, some readers may need a more explicit rationale for a methodology chapter. If the theories from Chapter 1 provide a firm base for my thinking and project design, I see methods and methodologies as the “how” that enables the researcher to attend to those theories once messy reality intervenes. My case study is a pilot project that I hope will help generate frameworks for expanding approaches

to rural community literacy, and detailed attention to methods and methodology seemed warranted. However, I also genuinely care about Abbyville. I have connections there; my husband has friends who live there and are vital members of the community. Maintaining these relationships matters to me, and attending to ethics in design matters to me because I want to remain in the region where I have conducted my research. For me, a long-range sustainable relationship with my research site is of paramount personal and professional importance; word gets around in my home state, and people are very sensitive to disjunctions between researcher promises and what seems realistic. Any application of a long-range, participatory, and relational methodology is always only partially successful as the researcher navigates the natural tensions between community interests and the demands of research production; therefore, it is my conviction that open communication about methods and methodologies is essential to understand the biases at play in any project. Theories will not be enough for the reader to understand the strengths and weaknesses of this project and get a sense of the personal and professional risks involved in its execution. It is because I live here that I wanted my research to be here. In fact, I chose the University of Louisville as my top pick for a doctoral program partially because it was the closest program in my field to my desired research site.

Because of the above goals, this chapter will move through a brief review of literature around methodologies and ethical processes important to this project; explain my own personal research stance and positionality; describe the research site and participant population; detail data collection processes; and explain the results of an experimental mapping exercise. Ending with the mapping exercise lets the reader get a sense of the scale of partnerships in Abbyville and sets the stage for Chapter 3, where a

few key partnerships and collaborations in Abbyville will place a richer narrative layer over this skeletal methodological frame. While no part of this project rigorously adheres to participatory action research or grounded theory methods, the study utilizes elements of those methodologies to design a study that adheres to recommended ethical elements of study design.

Methodological Review of Literature

Feminist research practices represent an important backdrop to this study, including those advocated by Gesa Kirsch in her book, *Ethical Dilemmas in Feminist Research: The Politics of Location, Interpretation, and Publication*, where she applies feminist research methodology to composition work. She argues for the intersection between composition, which deals directly with people marginalized within the academy, and feminist research, which aims to elucidate and shift institutional and societal hierarchies. Since feminist research aims to expose and change harmful power structures, such concepts can help composition researchers, who often work within one institutional context or another, be more aware of the ways they may reinforce harmful hierarchies through the structure of their studies. If one fails to recognize these constructs within research, "...ignoring power and authority forces research participants to shoulder burdens that are rightly ours to bear" (Kirsch 88). For Kirsch, intentionally allowing participants to have input at every stage of the research process, being aware of institutional and cross-disciplinary issues and the pitfalls of working with multiple roles while pushing towards publication, and by allowing readers to see dimensions of these ethical considerations in the final piece, researchers can finally "pool the many insights that can lead composition researchers of all kinds toward practices that are truly

respectful of and useful to research participants” (Kirsch 99).

Brydon-Miller and Bronwyn Williams have also argued that researchers who want gain a better understanding of “literacy and culture can also work with people in the community to identify important issues, generate knowledge that belongs to everyone involved, and work toward tangible social change” (Williams and Brydon-Miller 242–43). The argument here is that if, as researchers, we truly care about social justice and giving voice to groups that have been either marginalized or actively oppressed, then we need to recognize a shift in New Literacy Studies; rather than working from a deficit model (explicitly or implicitly), researchers ought to be “...studying what literacy practices already exist in communities, how community members employ such literacy practices, and how those practices often conflict with and are marginalized by the institutional forms of literacy that represent the dominant culture” (Williams and Brydon-Miller 243–44). While other scholars add further depth to this argument by exploring how members of marginalized communities often make savvy use of institutional forms of literacy (Ashley; Sohn), Williams and Brydon-Miller’s focus on valuing the literacies that are already present in communities seems an important methodological aim for community literacy researchers.

For this project, a background in feminist methods of inquiry, for me, means that I privilege my participants’ voices and narratives over existing theoretical frameworks. Yes, I am certainly researching the literacy sponsorship network in Abbyville, and that frame absolutely makes a difference to what I asked, how I constructed the study, etc. At the same time, I want to ensure that my participants are the ones that are constructing that network as much as possible and that I am not nailing an already-extant theoretical

construct overtop of those narratives. As will be seen in future sections, this has meant that I did use a multi-part coding process for each interview when analyzing data as a way to ensure that conclusions are at least well-supported in the body of interview data, especially given that I do not have a co-researcher with whom to triangulate findings. In addition, Chapters 3 and 4 are purposefully focused on helping the reader understand the complex give-and-take of rural community literacy in Abbyville rather than on theory-building, which I have restricted primarily to my interactions with existing literature in Chapter 1. I do note interactions with scholarship along the way and point to areas where I see participants building on current theories, but I am trying to remain true to the original mapping intent of the study by closely describing what the participants observed about their literacy sponsorship network.

Researcher Positionality

Scholarship on research positionality also plays a key role in this project, given my own personal connections to the region I am studying. In Composition research from the cognitive era, researcher positionality was nearly completely obscured, and methodologies were restricted to the ways in which data was gathered (Flower and Hayes; Hull and Rose). Such practices were subjected to later critique, as found in Gisa Kirsch and Peter Mortensen's 1996 *Ethics and Representation in Qualitative Studies of Literacy*. Tom Newkirk claims that one of the primary concerns of "new" writings on researcher positionality is the way in which data tends to be interpreted over subjects. Using Linda Brodkey's study on teachers' cultural awareness and Hull & Rose et. al's "Remediation as Social Construct" as artifacts, Newkirk observes the ways in which the researcher may (in the case of Brodkey) create a highly contrived situation and then fail

to ask for participants' interpretations of the situation or fail (in the case of Hull & Rose et. al) to allow participants to benefit from information researchers have gleaned.

Newkirk suggests that, in order to avoid falling into such negative practices, consent agreements (particularly those which interact with teachers in a classroom setting) should allow for 1) the possibility that the researcher may observe and discuss ineffective practices with the participant (13); 2) the right of the teacher to respond to negative practices that will be discussed in the final research product and the requirement that the researcher include participant input even if that input disagrees with the researcher's interpretation (13); and 3) the responsibility of the researcher and teacher to work together to address problems they identify over the course of the study (14).

Newkirk's work, then, requires an acknowledgement that the interaction between the researcher and the participants carries with it some responsibilities. While his solution mainly involves changes to formal consent agreements that acknowledge researcher responsibilities, it does seem to represent a step towards formally recording the complicated relationships that develop during such work. Here, I have tried to incorporate practices such as asking participants what their goals for literacy services are and asking follow up questions to understand more clearly what their interpretation of events might be.

In addition, Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater delves into her own practices of researcher positionality. She notes that "The only direct way for a reader to obtain information about how positioning affects methodology is for the researcher to write about it" (123). For Chiseri-Strater, theory construction, methodological disclosure, development of narrative voice, and writing of polyphonic texts have been useful to her ethnographic work, and

she observes that “the use of these discursive strategies more accurately conveys the dialogic way that ethnographers learn from their informants and from their field experiences” (129). This powerful use of narrative and polyphony has affected the methodologies you see here. In particular, Chapter 3 makes heavy use of participant quoting to attempt to better represent a range of voices and give the reader more than one way to interpret study data.

Kimberly Huisman also discusses the conflicting ethics of navigating personal and professional identity. Comparing two different approaches she used in her dissertation project and in her current research, Huisman discusses “...the divide between my sometimes conflicting and shifting identities as a woman, a graduate student, a feminist, and a friend, and as someone who was straddled between working and middle class” (Huisman 379). The tension created by these pulls was added to pressure from the academy to finish her dissertation without accompanying support for her desire to engage in reciprocal research, causing her to struggle. With her participants, Huisman noted different cultural orientations towards time and friendship; in order to be a part of the community, she would often spend long hours in community with her participants, blurring boundaries between research and friendship as she built relationships which she then felt she had to betray in order to complete her work on her dissertation (Huisman 387) . Huisman then compares her past project to her current work, which has grown into a more PAR-oriented approach, noting the ways in which “in my earlier work, I ultimately valued outcome over process” (Huisman 394). Such methodological tensions appeared in this project as well, as I occasionally found myself interviewing old friends and colleagues with whom I and my husband had prior history. The simultaneous

pressure to produce a scholarly and critically sound piece about a community has always sat uneasily alongside my determination to represent my home region “well” and not betray the confidence my participants showed in talking to me.

Given all these complexities, how is a new researcher to navigate such messy terrain? Broad emphases on all stakeholders having input can seem overwhelming, especially within the confines of producing a dissertation project, which places unique demands on time, funding, space, and one’s own lack of power within an institution that might lead to lack of attention to ethical positionality. Self-reflective practices have been touted as helpful, but Ellen Cushman and Terese Guinsatao Monberg complicate the notion of self-reflexivity with the necessity of using what they call social reflexivity. Here, they argue that while ethnographers have been “...experimenting with various forms of writing in an effort to portray the dialogic, complex nature of cross-cultural/intercultural encounters that surround the author(ity) of any ethnographic text,” some of the more commonly used techniques such as polyvocality and self-reflexivity carry with them risks to the participants (Cushman and Monberg 168). Such techniques, used poorly, may sensationalize or exoticize participants (in the case of polyvocality) or devolve into mere study of self or navel-gazing (in the case of self-reflexivity). In this case, then, Cushman and Monberg warn that “Unless personal reflection is tied back to larger social, cultural, political, methodological, or theoretical issues, we are hard pressed to see what such self-reflection offers to us as readers, or to composition scholarship overall” (Cushman and Monberg 170). The tension I describe in the previous paragraph ideally acts as a double check to my representative choices. The social pressure of researching in my home region and the critical demands of the dissertation mesh in what

is ideally a socially reflexive process, though that process comes with its own attendant risks for both my professional and personal roles.

These personal risks also intersect with elements of personal identity. Research warns of of pressure to exoticize or sensationalize particular identities in scholarship; “The politics of self-disclosure center around the social and cultural forces that press certain individuals to ‘bare all’ and press other individuals to closet themselves, all because their stories are or are not valued as consumable ‘goods’” (Brandt et al. 57). My decision to include aspects of my personal background in this research carries with it several kinds of inherent risks. My academic standing with committee members who may see me differently after learning more about my personal background, my standing with future scholars who may read this text in a setting divorced from my own physical person, and my personal privacy are all at stake here as I “perform” to try and help my audience understand the setting of Abbyville.

Overemphasizing self-disclosure also risks replication of a hierarchical model of research – reading one’s own narrative over any other narratives that may exist and replicating a problematic participant/researcher divide. Cushman and Monberg argue that a socially reflexive approach forces the researcher to confront the self and the world outside the self in more helpful ways: “When we position ourselves in a variety of social networks, we’re more likely to break down some of the prejudices and misconceptions we hold and begin to identify with people outside the ‘comfort zones’ inequality produces” (Cushman and Monberg 178). Positioning oneself in a variety of networks, even outside our comfort zones, then, is a key element of what Cushman and Monberg argue for within academic positionality. In representing Abbyville, I have tried to get

perspectives from multiple social networks within the community, although my success is, of course, limited by the study's focus on literacy "professionals" and the people to whom I have direct access.

Given the above suggestions regarding positionality, the methods section closer to the end of this chapter contains a researcher positionality statement disclosing parts of my personal background, my prior affiliation with Abbyville, and prior relationships with some participants. I have not provided an exhaustive personal background on myself as a way to avoid some of the pitfalls described above. I do not feel the need to narrativize my entire experience with my home state and region. Too much emphasis on such explanation would distract from my project's goal of remaining centered on what my participants had to say about their own services in a rural community.

Participatory Action Research: Philosophic Background

As mentioned above, one of my original goals for the project was sustainability, both for the project and for my relationships with participants. One method that attracted me early in the design of this study was that of participatory action research. via its stress on engaging participants in the design, implementation, and publication elements of a research project with a focus on benefitting the participating community, PAR directly incorporates many of the tenets of feminist research practice. Brydon-Miller et al claim that "While participatory action research falls under the broader framework of action research approaches, all of which share a belief that knowledge is generated through reflection on actions designed to create change..., PAR is distinct in its focus on collaboration, political engagement, and an explicit commitment to social justice" (Brydon-Miller et al. 388). The focus on collaboration could be particularly important for

new researchers, who often work in isolating conditions brought on by institutional demands for scheduling and publication. In addition, a team of researchers is more likely to bring multiple perspectives to interpretation. Likewise, the links between theory and method intentionally set up by such frameworks also seem useful, since “Methods for collecting, analyzing, understanding, and distributing data cannot be separated from the epistemologies, social theories, and ethical stances that shape our understanding of the issues we seek to address” (Brydon-Miller et al. 389). In this way, the research process is ideally less harmful to the participant population, since participants have a direct say at all levels of the process.

Of course, designing a fully PAR-oriented study is difficult under the material conditions of a working graduate student (Gibbon; Klocker). Due to constraints of time and availability (in addition to the necessary distance between my rural research site and my urban university), it would have been difficult to establish the kind of regular presence that the literature suggests would be needed to build a fully participatory study that would include participants at each stage of development. While authors like Natascha Klocker and Marion Gibbon do also argue for the possibility of successfully completing a PAR dissertation project, they, along with scholars such as Judy Burgess, have noted the inherent tensions in attempting to undertake participatory methodologies as a graduate-level student required to make certain moves to receive a doctorate, Burgess explains that, due to outside pressures related to time-to-degree and other factors, “...contrary to participatory action principles, by taking control of the research process, I jeopardize the defining partnership of PAR” (Burgess 420).

In light of the constraints noted in the literature and those that were part of the

unique situation of this project, I ultimately shifted the approach of the project to a less participatory model for the following reasons: 1) nearly all my participants had full-time jobs or were full-time volunteers despite being technically retired, and adding a participatory project to their workload would have added a burden on their already busy lives; 2) as it turns out (and unsurprisingly), my participants already do a significant amount of collaboration with one another without researcher interference; and 3) my program's distance from Abbyville, combined with the chronological and financial constraints of my regular trips in during data collection, meant that I could not maintain a sufficient community presence to allow for more natural collaboration. Originally, I had proposed to do a second community planning phase of the project that would be more participatory in nature, but I concluded that this element would not be feasible nor particularly helpful to my participants. I came to such conclusions alone without direct participant input, but I came to these conclusions after listening to early interviews. While they were open to a collaborative project, participants were not sure what they might get out of such a project. PAR, then, represents a philosophic background and a set of values that informed but was not ultimately implemented in this study.

Ultimately, I drew from a background in feminist research practices, scholarship on researcher positionality, and the values of participatory action research in constructing the study described in more detail below. The scholarship described above helped me make what I hope are several ethical decisions in structuring the study: 1) that it was necessary to completely code each interview transcript, 2) that I needed to group codes so that trends in the data could be noted and explained in more detail with examples, 3) That it would be necessary to reveal aspects of my own positionality, and 4) that my

participants needed opportunities to receive study updates and a chance to give feedback on the conclusions I am drawing. In the following section, I deliver on the promised researcher positionality statement.

Researcher Positionality

The area I am writing about is in my home region; I definitively and undeniably entered this project informed by what I might name “gut feelings” regarding rural community literacy, my background study on Appalachian communities and culture and rural rhetorics, and my own prior personal and professional connections to the area. On to a few relevant specifics, then: I worked in Abbyville between 2009 and 2010 as a library assistant and writing coach at the county high school prior to moving on to another job before graduate school. While I did not live in the community or have previous familial or communal ties there, my husband was also an employee of the school system for five years, one of which included the time I was employed there. I knew four of my interviewees from my previous work but had not been an active member of the community since the time of my employment. Because of this positionality, I began the project in Fall 2016 with some basic awareness of the community’s history and current position in the region; however, my previous perspective was primarily built through conversations with fellow staff and teachers at the school.

In addition, I grew up in a small town located roughly 45 minutes away from this community, which obviously negates any potential claims about researcher neutrality that I might make about the region under study. My conversations with participants were flavored by my affiliation with the region constantly. Some participants very obviously felt more comfortable speaking with me because they felt I “understood” my home region

and would handle the material I collected carefully, and conversations with new participants sometimes began with a common variation of the “six-degrees-of-separation” game as they tried to figure out if we had any regional acquaintances in common. The well-documented historical relationship that exists between university representatives who come to collect, and “fix” the Appalachian region in particular before promptly exiting (Shapiro; Williams) is pervasive in other rural areas as well, as discussed in Chapter 1’s narrative of the first extension agents to live in rural communities. Caution on the part of potential study participants in rural areas, then, seems well-founded and wise to me rather than unreasonably paranoid.

Thus, while I have put into place attempts to safeguard what my participants said from my own felt and lived experiences in the region, it is important to be open about who I am to this geographic and cultural place, and that positionality is complex, multi-layered, conflicted, and anything but neutral. Culturally, I somewhat “fit in” despite my outsider status; my accent, cisgender self-presentation, and rural language practices unconsciously become much more pronounced when I am in my home region. I am able to speak semi-knowledgeably about local practices such as farming (I grew up on one), faith (I am a practicing Christian), and local politics (I am cheerfully called a “liberal” by those espousing more conservative policies). And yet I never “fit in” in my own hometown for a variety of reasons; my own religiously and politically diverse extended family mean that I am definitely not the stereotype of rural America that some urbanites uphold, and my ideas about what political leanings my chosen faith can accommodate are often shocking to family and friends both inside and outside my home region.

Insider or outsider status aside, I cannot claim true objectivity, if such a thing

exists, about either the area or the participants in my study. However, I agree with Johnny Saldana that “Objectivity has always been an ideal yet contrived and virtually impossible goal to achieve in quantitative research. So why should qualitative inquiry carry their baggage? We do not claim to be objective because the notion is a false god” (Saldana 41). Indeed, these same risks made it possible to conduct my research in the first place; participants occasionally raised their eyebrows at some of my questions, but they still answered them, and I hope that successive chapters in this project may help the field develop more specific language than “insider” for exactly why that might be so. Knowing that trust is a key issue for rural communities when dealing with university representatives, one of my questions to all participants at the end of each interview was how I could be a good researcher in the area while conducting the project. Over and over again, I was told to play up my connections, to be honest, and to respect the knowledge that was already in the town. As Dolly noted:

I think if you start by going ... ‘I’m from a small rural area’ and say to people, ‘I’m writing about something I’m passionate about and I’m studying something that I’m interested in, but it’s not like I’m interested in it because all I did was read about it. I’m familiar with it too.’ I think just giving them your perspective... It would be like me going over to a little village in Greece. I might not know that much about the little village in Greece, but I know what it’s like to be from a little village.

In this way, then, my complex positionality in this project is the very thing that I feel has made it possible.

In addition, based on the scholarship prior to this section, my own research stance is as follows: as a feminist, communitarian scholar, I am invested in research that increases the number and diversity of voices heard in the academy, creates reciprocal relationships between the researcher and participants, and acknowledges my own positionality within the research. My leanings toward participatory action research philosophies (of which CBR is a variant) meant that it was important to me that relationships with participants be left open-ended to allow for future projects to develop spontaneously out of the community's interests and goals, as I am planning to remain in the region indefinitely. Likewise, paying attention to ethics and methodologies in project design seems crucial when examining areas that have been traditionally portrayed in terms of lack by previous scholarship, as is often the case with rural communities. Part of the reason that I wanted to conduct a mapping project that involved those most closely involved with community literacy in Abbyville was that, in many community literacy studies I had seen, the voices of community participants were more commonly about an individual's personal life than about any potential professional connection to literacy. There were certainly detailed accounts of individual literacy lives and how they navigated various sponsorships; however, there were few accounts that privileged participants' own explanations of how the community "did" literacy by privileging their extant practitioner knowledge. Finally, because of my unique positionality to this project, it was obvious to me that a section on researcher positionality would be critical in providing my readers much-needed context for the methods employed.

In the sections that follow, I will detail the participant population, explain data coding methods, give a brief overview of Abbyville's history as a community, and

explore the results of the mapping activity. Combining data collection and coding with an initial overview of the town's history and a sense of the literacy sponsorship network is intended to give the reader greater context for the more narrative foci of chapters 3 and 4.

Participant Population, Methods, and Ethical Processes

This study was a semi-structured interview study focusing mainly on participants involved in formalized literacy efforts in the rural community of Abbyville. I utilized online research of existing institutions as well as my own pre-existing social network (as noted above) for an initial round of interviews and then proceeded to utilize snowball recruiting and additional rounds of research to “map the network” of literacy services branching out from my initial contacts. Here, I explain the participant population demographics and discuss data analysis related to participant interviews, which were analyzed using open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Neff 128).

Participant Population

The interviews took place at multiple community sites in Fall of 2016 and Spring of 2017 and included participants affiliated with multiple community literacy sponsors and stakeholders. Participants at the school system, county library, extension office, local nonprofits, county and city government, local businesses, and retirees who were still volunteering in the community were recruited through multiple avenues, including email invitations, phone calls (if I was already in the area), walking into an office in-person to introduce myself during my visits, and one community meeting where I was introduced to multiple community partners.

Potential participants had to meet the following criteria:

- Be current or prior residents of the County OR work primarily in the county;

- Be interested in or invested in one or more literacy efforts within the county;
- Be at least 15 years old in order to facilitate likelihood of understanding of interview questions.

In addition to the basic criteria above, I primarily focused on professionals who seemed to be well-connected to the literacy sponsorship network in the community through one avenue or another; either in current or previous professional or volunteer roles. Because of the snowball recruitment method, there were also a few “clumps” of participants centered around specific organizations in town. Because I did not ask explicitly about home background or upbringing, I cannot speak to some issues of race/class/gender in the study. Some participants spoke openly about their familial and class background; others did not choose to do so. Most conversations centered around what participants thought of Abbyville as a community promoting literacy and the intersections of their own work with those efforts, meaning that personal information in the study was sometimes limited. While many of my participants “seem” middle class, I hesitate to make assumptions about whether or not their perceived class backgrounds matched the surroundings of their upbringing, given that I myself am a middle-class white woman who grew up working class. I chose to interview this group of participants as professionals and retirees interested in literacy sponsorship in Abbyville, and my detailed knowledge of some participant’s personal circumstances and upbringings was matched by an utter lack of information in other cases.

Likewise, while I can make a guess about the ages of my participants, I did not ask for their birthdates and cannot provide accurate information regarding age. 9 participants identified as men, while 12 participants identified as women. I did not collect

data on whether participants identified as LGTBQIA+ community members. My general perceptions would suggest a fairly broad age range, with most participants being between 20-60 years old. Roughly 2 participants were perceived to be between 20-30 years of age; 6 between 30-40 years old; 4 between 40-50 years old; 4 between 50-60 years old; and 5 who were likely 60 or older. Seven participants spoke openly of a church affiliation in town. Church affiliations in this study all refer to Protestant or Catholic Christians: there are no synagogues or mosques in Abbyville, but there are at least nine churches in town, with many more small congregations located in Abby County¹. While racial backgrounds are also similarly based on perception, participants who identified as African American tended to do so openly during their interview, making my guesses in this area a bit more educated. Five participants openly identified as African American; the rest appeared to be of white ancestry. A table with the professional (paid and volunteer) institutional affiliations mentioned by participants is included below; however, as will be seen in Chapter 3, such affiliations often elide less formal connections via family, religious, athletic, and social groups.

¹ One participant, Jim, said that the last time he had checked, there were a total of 70 churches (most very small) in Abby County.

Pseudonym	Race	Institutional Affiliation	Past Institutional Affiliations
Abbie	Caucasian	Health Department	
Alice	African American	Retired	Teacher - High School
Alanna	Caucasian	U.S. Navy	
Anna	Caucasian	High School Librarian	
Arthur	Caucasian	County Judge Executive	
Belle	African American	Retired	
Bernice	African American	Extension Office	
Candace	Caucasian	County Library - Youth Librarian	
Charles	Caucasian	Health Department	
Dolly	Caucasian	K-12 School System	
Harry	Caucasian	Pastor	
James	African American	Retired	Coach and teacher
Jennifer	Caucasian	Extension Office	
Jim	Caucasian	High School teacher	
Lauren	Caucasian	Community Nonprofit	
Mary	African American	Retired - community volunteer	Hospital
Pam	Caucasian	Extension Office	
RJ	Caucasian	Sheriff	
Robert	Caucasian	Retired; Salvation Army	various boards
Samuel	Caucasian	Mayor, Pastor, Radio Host, Theater Co-Owner	
Tom	Caucasian	Local Production Facility	

Figure 2: Participant Demographics and Institutional Affiliation.

Because of research design, the end-point of the interviews was limited mainly by the researcher’s stamina and ability to regularly travel back to a research site and hold down duties as a graduate student. This pilot project, then, includes 21 interviews with various stakeholders in the community. Stakeholders were interviewed across a range of professions and included the mayor, the sheriff, the county judge executive, three employees of the extension office (representing family and consumer sciences, horticulture, and agriculture), the youth and family librarian at the county library, the librarian and a current teacher at the high school, the chief academic officer for the K-12 school system, the supply chain manager at a local production facility, a member of the US Navy who attended school in Abbyville K-12, a retired nurse, several retired teachers and administrators, a center manager of a local nonprofit addressing poverty, a retired employee of the state department for social services who supervised the county, a pastor

at a local church, and two employees at the health department. While it is by no means an exhaustive list of the kinds of literacy sponsorship roles held in the community, this group of people represent a corpus of knowledgeable and active citizens who have played a vital role in Abbyville's existence over the last 40 years, as literacy sponsors, producers of knowledge, and consumers of the literacy services offered.

Stage 1: Data Collection – Interviews and Documents

Participants in this study were interviewed individually at least once by the co-investigator. Interviews lasted anywhere from fifteen minutes to one hour as determined by availability. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions formatted to encourage a conversational exchange between participants and coinvestigator, and questions were shifted slightly over the course of the study to respond to questions and concerns raised by previous participants (see Appendix A for interview questions). The goal of the interview and questions was simply to allow space for the concerns and thoughts of the participants to surface and direct the conversation. The project did not focus on individual life histories or literacy narratives as the work of Brandt and others has done because I chose to speak to those with a vested interest in the community's literacy. I wanted to hear their perspectives on strengths and weaknesses of Abbyville's approach to encouraging a literate citizenry. Individual literacy narratives, for me, would have meant that I as the researcher would have to interpret heavily in order to say anything about the community. By directly valuing and asking about extant meta-knowledge in my participants, these interviews ideally decrease the possibility that I have merely used the data from participants to assert my own previously drawn conclusions about rural literacy in Abbyville. This design ideally draws from the more participatory and feminist research

practices I outline above.

In order to be able to compare literacy perceptions among individual providers, most of the interviews were individual, though a few were conducted in a group setting where participant affiliations were similar (for example, two of my interviews were with groups: a close circle of friends who met together at one participant's house and two co-workers at the local extension office). A few informal conversations and/or emails prior to interviews were typically necessary in order to give participants a clearer idea of my project and to move through approval processes to gain access to the institutions and organizations of interest to the project.² I usually explained and discussed the variety of tasks/skills that can constitute a working definition of literacy with participants before interviews began to help calibrate responses and avoid having participants default to "I don't know anything about literacy." Interviews were designed to be semi-structured, meaning that interview questions merely served as a starting point for my conversations with participants and that there was significant, intentional flexibility in my project methods to deviate from this script as participants and I conversed about their unique experiences with community literacy.

Document collection was part of the project as well. If there were public documents on display (as was the case at several locations, including the community college, the library, and the extension office), I picked up materials and used them as

² Some organizations were stricter about what their employees could/could not say than others.

For example, Tom had to make it very clear that he was participating as an individual involved in multiple community networks and not as a representative of the nationally owned local factory. In addition, I agreed that I would not use the name of the company anywhere in my project texts.

reference materials to add more detail to my understanding of participant conversations. Likewise, I used publicly available websites to add to my understanding of what participants spoke about in their interviews. For example, in Chapter 3, I discuss the community classes available at the community college during a given semester - this data came directly from materials collected during a site visit, while other data on numbers of classes was pulled from the registrar's current listing on the website.

In addition, if a participant mentioned that they used specific materials in communicating with the public, I usually asked if they would be willing to give me examples of those materials. For this reason, I was also able to obtain a copy of the WorkReady document used in Chapter 3. Similarly, some of the educational history of the town used both in this chapter and in Chapter 4 comes from a site visit to the local museum, where I took pictures, purchased at least two books about the town, and received a respectable pile of historical documents from very helpful museum volunteers. For the purposes of this pilot project, I am primarily and fundamentally interested in what people engaged in particular kinds of literacy work have to say about those efforts. I have ultimately privileged people's historical and current narratives about themselves and their town over the interaction with texts and objects that stems from and helps create those narratives. Therefore, while the document data was not coded formally as part of this project, it does represent an added layer of reference that I consulted as part of constructing the written text of the dissertation.

Ethical Protections and Processes

IRB-approved consent forms were signed by all participants, and pseudonyms have been used to protect all identities unless participants indicated or requested

otherwise in writing. Audio recordings and transcriptions were kept on an encrypted password protected computer; any printed materials were kept in a cabinet in a locked office. The consent forms describe the protection of subjects' rights, including the right to anonymity, to withdraw from the study at any time, and to decline to answer questions. As much as possible, I attempted to write the consent forms using a plain language approach, though one participant still laughed at the formality of the language. Participants were not forced to reveal information they believed was inappropriate or irrelevant to the project.

Each participant received a copy of their signed consent form for their records along with a project summary, a card with the researcher's updated contact information, and any updates that happened as the project proceeded in the format (email or paper copy, since some participants do not choose to use email) of their choice. For example, when it became clear that a Stage 2 participatory project was not feasible for either me or my participants, I sent a project update to prior participants to try and maintain transparency while completing a revision to the study through the university's institutional review board. When I completed an initial network map, I sent it to all remaining participants and asked them to make corrections, and several participants responded with either agreement or small edits which are reflected in the final version of the map. Likewise, participants were given a complete draft of the document to review following an initial round of committee interviews; any suggested changes they may have had regarding how their information was used are included in the final version of this document. One participant, Anna, left her position during the intervening period between data collection and data analysis. She did not live in town, and I was unable to find

forwarding information for her. Thus, Anna was the only participant not to receive study updates (the network map, a link to the full draft text of the dissertation, etc.).

In addition, it is of primary importance to me that I keep the name of the town in this study anonymous. There are many kinds of harm a researcher might do, and my study could risk increasing prejudice towards rural areas by raising awareness of a community with my research only to limit any social status it might gain in the academic community in the future. My participants are all invested in the success of their town, and the struggles and successes they shared with me are a mark of trust that I want to honor. Therefore, while I am citing some statistical data on the town itself in this chapter, there are some citations that have been redacted to limit the chances that my research might hurt the community members that have granted me so much trust. Just as individuals deserve to be protected from harm by researchers, it is my belief that the collective life of the community ought also to be afforded some measure of anonymity; in a small town, word gets around, and I believe that anonymity will allow greater freedom for in-depth discussion of my results. I will be referring to the community throughout this dissertation as Abbyville and its surrounding county as Abby County. I have also changed the names of key surrounding towns as needed: Moresville, Iansburg, Johnstown, Frankton, and Henryville are all aliases for surrounding towns. In order to be specific about some aspects of history that are important to the study, the study does reference the state of Kentucky; however, the state has more than 100 counties with corresponding county seats, and it seems a relatively safe risk to run.

Stage 2: Transcription, Coding, and Mapping

Transcription was primarily done through the website Rev.com thanks to a grant.

Only one transcript was hand-produced by the researcher. For coding, I used NVivo, a CAQDAS program. I did not create an initial list of codes prior to reading transcripts. Rather, I allowed codes to proliferate during first-cycle coding and began to refine my code list during second-cycle coding as themes began to become more clear (Saldana 24–25). During the first or “open coding” stage, I used a “splitting” approach to code data in NVivo. Transcripts were coded based on the topic being discussed by the participant in a more or less line-by-line manner, resulting in 151 individual codes (which NVivo calls “nodes”). This method was utilized as advised by Charmaz, who notes that “line-by-line coding reduces the likelihood of imputing your motives, fears, or unresolved personal issues to your respondents and to your collected data” (Qtd in Saldana 24). A full list of individual codes can be found in Appendix B.

During the second stage of coding, axial coding was implemented to begin grouping codes into broader themes, resulting in 23 larger coding groups (or “node clusters” as referenced by the program). I also began to produce analytic memos on the qualities of the themes I was seeing, although I did not produce an analytic memo for each coding group. During this process, I also continued to return to coding and rereading documents for themes that had not yet been coded or which might sit in opposition to trends I had initially noted. Figure 3 below shows the names of coding groups along with frequency of occurrence in interview transcripts.

After the coding process was finished, I used NVivo to produce the visualized network map that was one of the major goals of the project and is explained in more detail later in this chapter. For each organization, I drew a line with arrows to any other organization that was mentioned by one or more participants as partnering with their

organization. Organizations that were connected directly in some way (for example, a larger organization that hosts a particular program) were connected directly with lines. After completing the network map, I shared it with all participants and solicited feedback for correction. Two participants chose to make corrections to the map to improve accuracy of representations.

Node Cluster Name	# of Nodes	# of References
Cultural Context	10	95
Collectivity	12	93
Education	13	78
Family	8	63
Technology and Media	15	46
Jobs and Job Training	6	40
Events and Meetings	6	39
Reading, Books	7	39
Community Health and Fitness	14	34
Funding and Finances	6	30
Government and Law	10	28
Business and Industry (includes ANR)	8	26
Physical Interaction	7	25
Other Communities	4	18
Interconnectivity	3	17
Spirituality	5	15
Drug Problem	2	11
Physical Infrastructure	3	11
Access and Accessibility	5	10
The Arts	2	8
Futures Planning and Vision	3	5
Aging Population	2	2

Figure 3: Coding Groups or “Node Clusters” from Stage 2 Coding in NVivo.

This figure shows the results of Stage 2 coding in terms of overall themes identified by the researcher. “# of Nodes” represents the number of individual themes falling under the larger coding group name, while # of references combines the number of times nodes within that coding group were mentioned overall. A complete list of codes can be found in Appendix B.

Research Site Description

For³ this project, site selection was based on several criteria: 1) it is a community in which I have some existing local connections, enough to begin building a project without coming in as a total outsider; 2) it is a small community with a population under 10,000 that still has strong cultural connections to the farming areas surrounding it; and 3) it is not next to a major interstate and is about a 45 minute drive away from the nearest mid-size city. I hoped that mapping the literacy services available in this kind of locale might help directly address the kinds of misconceptions described by Donehower et al and discussed in more detail in Chapter 1 (Donehower, Hogg, and Schell, *Reclaiming the Rural* 17).

In terms of population and geography, Abbyville has a population of roughly 6,500 people; however, the county has a total population of 18,846, meaning that a significant chunk of the area's population lives in the surrounding rural area in either very small townships or on/near local farms. The city has an area of four square miles, while the county sits on an area of 310 square miles in a region characterized by rolling hills that are mostly open pasture for grazing livestock but also contain small creeks and small areas of wooded land. Abbyville sits beside a tributary river of a major regional river on a flood plain and is located a 30 minute drive from the nearest interstate crossing. It is also located about 28 miles from the nearest large city of Frankton, which numbers roughly 300,000 in population. According to the 2013 American Community Survey, the average

³ In this section, as mentioned previously, I have elected to leave out citational information as a way of preserving the anonymity of Abbyville. All the information in this section is a summary pulled from a visit to the town's museum, a photo history book of the town, several local history articles found online, the quotes of participants, and my own prior knowledge.

income in Abby County was around \$36,000 per household.

Statistics are one way of introducing a site, but the leaders of the community have chosen to represent the town in specific ways online. A cursory Google search on the name of Abbyville results in a top hit of the town's up-to-date webpage with a greeting from the mayor, himself a native of the area. The greeting highlights the town as a safe, vibrant community that has good schools, businesses, and neighborhoods and a city government (police, fire department, utility and public works, and city commission) that cares about its citizens. The webpage itself contains links for current government and nonprofit services, a posted plan for a bicycle and pedestrian path, links for bill payment and a downloadable smartphone app, and connections to local history.

Geographically, parts of Abbyville are situated on a lowland that is prone to some flooding from the nearby river (two major floods have occurred in living memory: one in the 1940s and one in the 1990s, meaning that many lower-lying residential areas of town, including most of the downtown, have been subjected to water damage). Other parts of the town are situated on the surrounding hills, including many mixed-income neighborhoods, the hospital, the high school, the extension office, and the community college. Traditionally, residents from more impoverished backgrounds have lived in the town's flood zone (unsurprising), but this cannot be generalized, as the areas near the river were also historically where African American families lived, and there are several older historical homes built by African American families from mixed-income backgrounds, including the one built by Alice's grandfather which appears in Chapter 4.

Founded in the late 1700s, the town has a long history that bears the impression both of its state's connection to the slave trade, its location on a river, and the ups and

downs of rural living in the 21st century. Situated next to a tributary river that allows access to the Ohio River, its geographical situation made it a travel hub in the 1800s, as people desiring to access the river system would travel by land to Abbyville as a jumping off point. The town prospered and gained railroad access in 1854, and this historical wealth is worth emphasizing to readers who may automatically think of simple clapboard buildings and a generalized mountainous location up an imaginary holler. Situated among gently rolling hillsides, good soil, and having access to a main travel thoroughfare made this town a small but mighty powerhouse in the early 1800s, and this history of generational wealth still shows in the construction of beautiful brick and stone church buildings, old warehouses, and a historic town theater.

The town was also the site of two Civil War battles, one of which destroyed most of the existing downtown, so it is safe to say that there were no residents, white or black, who were not directly affected by the war. Following the Civil War, Abbyville continued to do well with an economy that relied on bourbon and tobacco growing as staple exports. At one point in the early 1900s, there were over 30 distilleries located in Abbyville alone. To give some scope to the production of tobacco, at one point in the early 1980s, Abbyville's tobacco warehouses sold more than 42 million pounds of tobacco in a single year. In the mid-1950s, the influx of department stores into the area affected the small downtown businesses that had previously thrived. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the combined decline of tobacco use in the US, removal of government quota systems for tobacco farmers, and pressure from global imports of tobacco caused Abbyville to lose its primary staple cash crop.

In terms of education, Abbyville, like many rural towns, was subjected to school

consolidation as part of a long wave of shifts that took place after the beginning of the Country Life Movement detailed in Chapter 1. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were an estimated 18 schools (including small, one room schools in outlying areas) in Abby County; as school consolidation progressed in the period between 1920-1970, that number was eventually reduced to 7 schools in the present-day system, including one high school, one middle school, one area technology center, and four elementary schools.

Present-day Abbyville, then, is a town that still feels the effects of several waves of economic changes and whose citizenry is actively grappling with how best to maintain a strong community in present-day circumstances. The major employers in the town now are a couple of factories, the K-12 school system, and the hospital. Efforts at revitalizing downtown via local efforts and statewide funding have met with some success, and the community now holds events in its downtown again. The local theater has reopened thanks to the efforts of the town's mayor, and several local restaurants continue to do well. Some abandoned tobacco warehouses have been repurposed; notably, one of the derelict buildings is now a large event venue close to the high school, and at least one high school prom has been held there. Several downtown businesses boast murals of characters from a popular national comic book series authored by an Abbyville native.

Alongside these positive community efforts, however, are the issues faced by many rural communities in the United States. As of the 2017 American Community Survey, while 82% of the population in town had graduated from high school, and 39% had attained some college; however, only 15% of residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher. The heroin epidemic has been a particular problem for the city, with heroin deaths jumping from 7 in 2015 to 23 in 2016 based on county statistics from the state's Office of

Drug Control Policy. 2017 numbers found only 10 overdoses, suggesting that the town's efforts to curb the problem have been somewhat successful thus far.

In addition, free and reduced lunch numbers indicate that a high percentage of children in the district may experience some poverty. A single free and reduced lunch number may not always be an adequate representation of the population's economic need, however; in several personal conversations with a colleague during my time as an employee in the school system, they noted that high school students in the region will often avoid declaring themselves for free and reduced lunch even if they had been eligible previously due to the stigma associated with being tagged as a "poor kid." Elsewhere in the region, my own nuclear family qualified for free and reduced lunch during my childhood, but my parents did not fill out the paperwork, being reluctant to take what they perceived as unwarranted assistance. For the 2017-2018 year, 1,279 out of the district's 1,422 elementary school students were enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program for a percentage of 89.9%, while only 380 of the 686 middle school students were enrolled for a percentage of 55.3%. Finally, out of 870 high school students enrolled, only 425 were enrolled in the program for a number of 48.8%. Such drop offs may have other explanations, of course, but my friend's claim certainly seems to have some credence.

Overall, then, Abbyville as a rural community represents a hybrid mix of local and global forces: an active rural community positioning itself both with and against the economic and cultural forces that are always at play. While some historical elements will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4, this overview ideally gives the reader a sense of place from which to begin hearing the narratives of the later chapters. The

following section will discuss the literacy sponsorship network map as another way to help orient the reader to Abbyville as a community setting.

Experimental Interlude: Network Mapping as Research Practice

Since this section represents a new entry into literacy sponsorship research, some background may be necessary. As discussed in Chapter 1, my rationale for this project was based in a desire to conduct specific research on networks of rural literacy sponsorship. Calls for more study of literacy sponsorship networks in the field of rhetoric and composition are still relatively new (Goldblatt, “Imagine a Schoolyard”), and collections on rural literacy more commonly take a single point of analysis as the primary focus: a county fair (Green and Corbett), a particular educational effort, individuals’ literacy sponsorship experiences within a community (Donehower; Heath), a regional tourism ad program (Kelly), etc. The landmark Lancaster study detailed by Barton and Hamilton, with its intense focus on the English community of Lancaster, details the contemporary and historic cultural environment of the town as a backdrop for individuals’ literacy practices, essentially “starting from the everyday and then moved to education, rather than approaching the everyday with questions framed solely by educational needs” (Barton and Hamilton xviii). Barton and Hamilton zeroed in primarily on individuals as individuals with a concomitant focus on individual narrative. While my study draws from Barton and Hamilton’s dense descriptive approach to the context, the primary focus is on how the participants view themselves as simultaneously community members, members of institutions, and as individuals operating in that larger community and institutional context on their own personal literacy journeys.

Because of this both/and emphasis, I am also not explicitly doing institutional

work. This is not a case study of a single institutional unit (Grabill, *Community Literacy Programs*), nor is it an in-depth analysis of an institution's structures and processes for the purpose of critique and advocacy (Porter et al.). Rather, my experimental mapping efforts attempt to understand where participants perceive cross-institutional linkages to be occurring and understand those linkages against the larger sociocultural context of Abbyville's literacy sponsorship network. I feel it important to *show*, not merely discuss, the dense and web-like nature of the structures I have had a sense of from my prior professional and personal experiences in the region

The concept of visual mapping as a tool certainly has precedent in the field. Jeff Grabill has made consistent use of the concept of postmodern mapping in his work, building on Sullivan and Porter's work with postmodern geography. He writes "Tactics for reflexivity and visibility are ways to get at the problem of how to *do* theory. Mapping is simply and not so simply how I represent the work of others. Of course, this is not an innocent practice. Acts of representation are also acts of interpretation. Mapping is a practice of representation that doesn't allow one to forget this." (Grabill, *Community Literacy Programs and the Politics of Change* xvi). Conceptual and network mapping is a representational schema that allows the researcher to see more complex realities visually and to remain aware of the partial nature of the work that represents a slice of that reality. In this project, mapping represents a practice that serves as a tool toward both self-reflexivity and toward representing in meaningful ways the data that I have collected; that is, it is both a partial representation of the much larger reality discussed and created by my participants' description of their work and simultaneously a more complete representation of that data than I would otherwise be able to describe using text-only

methods.

In my own efforts to map the literacy sponsorship network in Abbyville, I am trying to attend to what my participants described in a more holistic way. By “holistic” here, I mean that I am attempting to broaden my focus beyond individual actors or programs and attend to the material and social context of the relationships between various partners that were mentioned in the interview data in ways related to the discussion of complexity theories in Chapter 1. Such relationships took various forms; they spanned from conducting a yearly program together to ongoing resource and information sharing that took place both virtually and in real time. The work of mapping complexity is necessary in order to gain a better understanding of how community literacy operates. Visualizing these mentioned relationships is both risky and necessary if scholars are to develop more robust models for mapping literacy sponsorship networks across different kinds of communities: risky because visualization adds another layer to the potential for misrepresentation but necessary in order to represent complexity that cannot be adequately described with text alone. Here, I try to understand better how the rhetorical work of helping citizens become literate is constructed by participants actively involved in constructing that rhetorical network, relying only on the information they gave during interviews and conversations with me. While I am interested in following lines of sponsorship between institutions and actors, my mapping methodology follows primarily the relationships between people based on what study participants said and does not explicitly attend to actants and the material world apart from what was shared in those narratives.

Abbyville’s literacy sponsorship network represents just one pilot case study of

the ways in which understanding complex networks may be central to understanding rural literacy sponsorship and the concept of literacy sponsorship more broadly. As interviews began to accumulate, the construction of a network map also provided a secondary way of coding the data - who mentioned whom? What organizational affiliates identified themselves as connected to other organizations? In addition, the construction of a visualization schema also helped me to understand which aspects of the literacy sponsorship network my research was *not* covering, constantly enforcing to me the partial nature of my research results. The construction of a more thorough version of a network map would take years of investment in and participation within a network. This fact ought to give community literacy researchers pause when tempted to conclude that we have completed the work of understanding the complex and overlapping contexts of literacy sponsorship.

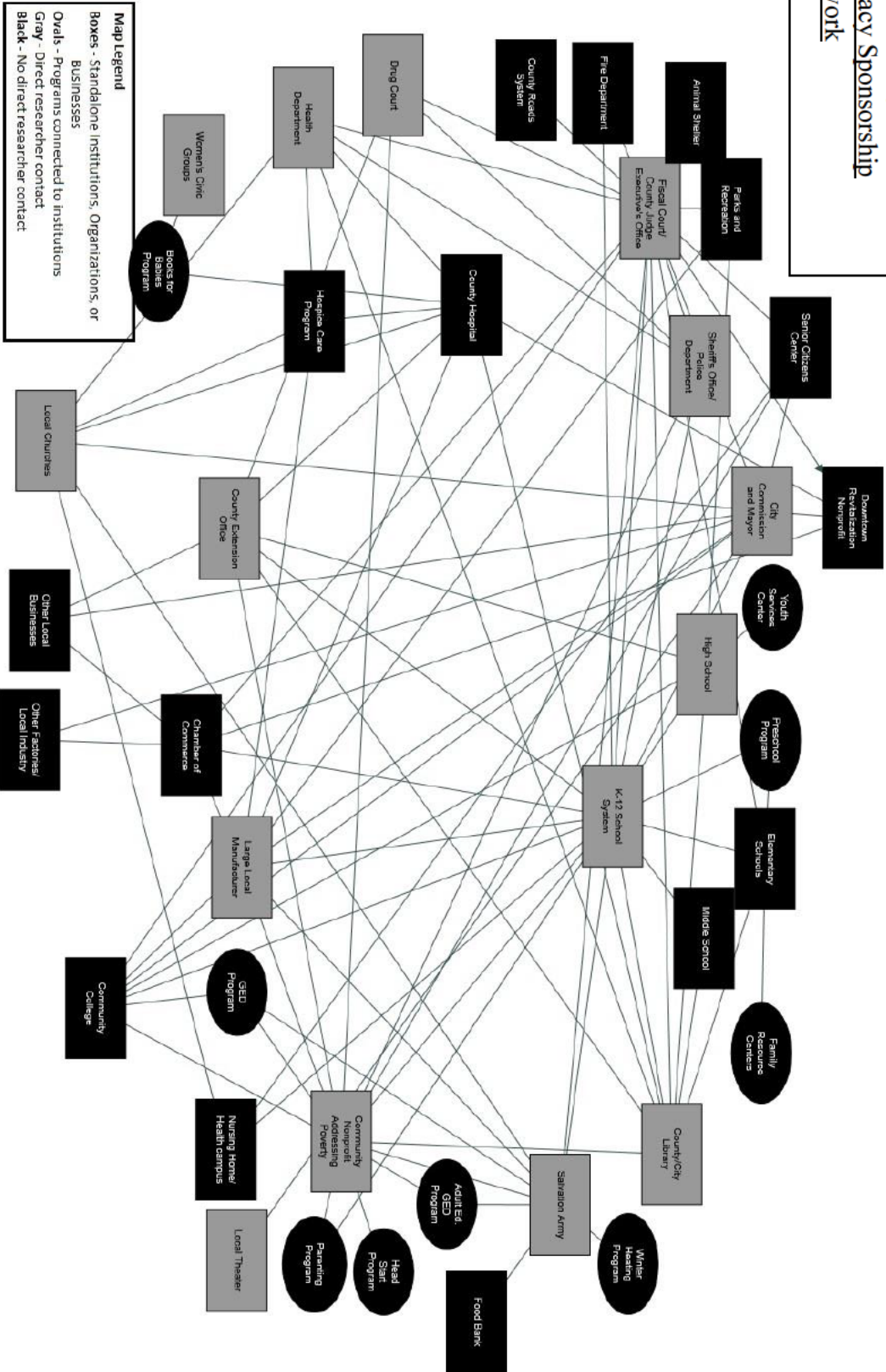
The mapping part of the project, then, asks a simple question: what does the literacy sponsorship network in Abbyville look like when constructed from the interview data? Without focusing on a particular partnership or set of activities, might it be possible to get a rough snapshot of a literacy sponsorship network in a way that might inform our understanding of that network? The image below represents the partnerships mentioned by my participants (active professionals and/or retired professionals mostly). These are simply the partnerships that were mentioned explicitly by at least one participant; other partnerships may (and likely do) exist that are not represented here.

The map was constructed using very simple criteria. Whenever one partner mentioned a relationship with another partner, I drew a line. I also drew lines between direct affiliates who are structured together automatically within larger systems.

Rectangular boxes represent standalone organizations, which are sometimes also affiliates of larger systems (such as the high school's relationship to the district offices for the K-12 school system). Ovals represent offshoots or branches of larger organizations. Organizations and/or branches with gray coloring are organizations where a study participant currently worked; I did not mark organizations where retirees had worked in years prior. For example, I interviewed a retired nurse who worked at the Abby County Memorial Hospital, but she currently serves as a community volunteer, so I did not mark having direct contact with the hospital on the network map. Organizations/branches with black coloring are organizations no direct current affiliate was interviewed for the study, although I had some email contact with organizations that did not result in an interview, such as attempting to set up an interview with a representative of the community college who was holding down two jobs while a colleague was on leave.

A few other non-participant contacts may be worth mentioning in addition to those seen above. I spoke informally with a professor at the community college during one of my site visits; we talked about the role of the community college, and he provided me with information, but he himself did not end up being a participant in my study. For some organizations, I interviewed participants as representatives of one role who also held roles in other organizations. For example, the town's mayor, Samuel, was interviewed in his mayoral role, but he also runs the local community theater and pastors a local church, giving me simultaneous contact with three sponsoring institutions; another pastor was interviewed only in his role as pastor.

**Figure 4. Abbyville's
Literacy Sponsorship
Network**



The map also went through several stages of editing for accuracy. After wrestling with the number of entities that run through the county and city government structures, I called the state association of counties and the state's justice department to try and better understand the structures of government for Abbyville's home state of Kentucky. While the office was able to send me a large pdf file of various governmental structures and elucidate a few connections (such as the fact that Drug Court is a separate state-level entity with local branches apart from the county and city governments in this state), there was no visual schema representing these governmental structures and their relationships. In fact, during one such conversation, a representative of the state association of counties asked if I would share my project map with them when I was finished, as their office needed to begin visually representing such relationships. Such visual representations, then, have use value beyond my theoretical activity of mapping the literacy infrastructure of a community; an updated and more complete version could also have political value for helping average citizens understand and navigate complex governmental structures.

Once I completed a draft of the map, I sent it back out to participants for review. While not all participants responded, Dolly stated that the document "looks accurate...and complicated...which is the truth" (personal email, June 2018). Tom requested a few additional partnerships with the large local manufacturing company to be noted, and Samuel clarified that the senior citizen's center and downtown revitalization nonprofit were directly administered by city government and funded by the county government and suggested a physical shift to better represent those relationships. Charles had no edits to make, but shared a public health "jelly bean model" that the local health department uses that looks somewhat similar to my map.

Originally, I chose to show one-way and two-way relationships; that is, if Organization A said it partnered with Organization B, I put an arrow from A to B, but if B did not reciprocate, I did not put an arrow back. This technique did not pan out, however; representing the relationships this way created a visual advantage for the organizations where my participants worked and seemed unfair. The final iteration, then, simply draws a line between two organizations whenever a direct partnership was mentioned; in addition, lines between larger organizations and branches/offshoots simply indicate a direct institutional relationship of this-belongs-to-that.

And yet, even the relationships mentioned above are not always clear-cut. For example, the high school is a subsidiary of the district office of the county school system with its own administrative structure but also houses a family resource center which also has its own relationship with the district office. For a researcher desiring to work with the family resource center, the question of how many affiliates one would have to maintain contact with in order to understand the larger circumstances surrounding the work of the family resource center could plunge one into a seemingly endless series of conundrums complicated by whether or not the administrator at the high school has interpersonal conflict with the administrator of the family resource center⁴. Chapter 3 will work more closely with the interpersonal collaborations that underpin the visual map.

As future researchers continue to experiment with visual representations of literacy sponsorship networks, a few notes may be helpful. This section represents a pilot effort at visualizing a complex network schema based solely on the narratives of participants; thus, the map cannot be used to draw any far-reaching conclusions on the

⁴ This is a purely hypothetical example and is **not** drawn from study data.

nature of sponsorship in Abbyville via closer analysis of the numbers of relationships (though I did create a brief table of those connections during the analysis phase of the project). The map itself is difficult to use; while I myself can identify which organizations are affiliated with whom, there are weaknesses in representation (crossed lines, etc.) here which would only be solved by more efforts with visual design software. Training in multiple ways of representing data continues to be a crucial need in our field. Several of my own questions about the map remain unanswered at the time of writing; who really owns the Adult Education GED program - is it a truly collaborative effort between the Salvation Army and the community nonprofit, as seems indicated by the visual relationship, or does each unit own and run certain parts of the project? How does collaboration get defined and redefined in the day-to-day practices of each organization?

What does the above map - partial and created out of narrative and interpreted by an outsider to the community - tell us about literacy sponsorship in Abbyville? I argue that the construction of the above visual as a rhetorical interface, despite being partial, narrative-based, and interpreted by an outsider to the community, does engage in important work that is useful to community literacy studies as this area of research continues to evolve. Taken as a whole, the map makes obvious and glaring, as mentioned by Dolly above, the sheer complexity, the dense and interwoven nature of partnerships among just those institutions that I myself personally made contact with in Abbyville. Additionally, the map only represents one layer - institution-to-institution - of the relationships that undergird literacy sponsorship in Abbyville. As will be seen in Chapter 3, if a secondary layer of familial and social relationships and connections were mapped and overlaid onto the existing map, the visualization would become even more

overwhelmingly dense.

What I do hope this representation makes forcefully obvious is that there is almost no such thing as a stand-alone organization in a town the size of Abbyville and that it would be unwise to assume that the lack of a single organization devoted to “literacy” means that only the school system, the college, and the library are engaging in such work at the institutional level. Rather, as discussed in Chapter 3, literacy efforts in the town rise up at both the level of individual organizational effort and as the result of close collaboration in terms of both shared material and intellectual resources. Such collaborations are seen as the most beneficial way to ensure that efforts in the town are sustainable and make the best use of limited monetary and human resources. As Tom noted of his employer’s work with the community: “The one concern with our facility is that we don’t want it to be the lone supporter of a project in the community. If we’re the lone supporter, is it something that we want to take place, or is it something the community really needs, and will it be sustained?”

Final Notes

This project, then, represents my best efforts at a feminist research project that participates in the tradition of community-based research. By maintaining open lines of communication with participants, staying aware of my own positionality and biases (and writing about them here), drawing on insights from participatory action research and grounded theory approaches, and visualizing relationships as detailed by participants, this project seeks to maintain a respectful stance toward the power of my participant’s voices as members of their community, as both consumers and providers of literacy services, and as those who ultimately have the most knowledge when it comes to how Abbyville

responds to community opportunities and challenges.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I will focus on the thematic data that rose up from my coding of participant interviews to help readers see multiple layers of operation for this literacy sponsorship network. Chapter 3 centers around a few successful and ongoing collaborations among multiple institutions in the community, while Chapter 4 discusses the ways in which time, materiality, and history operate to influence the operations of literacy sponsorship in this particular rural community. In this way, the study utilizes multiple approaches in order to paint a densely layered portrait of how the literacy sponsorship network in Abbyville operates.

CHAPTER III

“HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK”: COLLECTIVITY IN RURAL NETWORKED LITERACY SPONSORSHIP

In Chapter 1, I explore the ways in which the intersection of rurality with higher education has largely been relegated to specialists in a few select fields: researchers who, for whatever reason, are already invested in the interests of rural communities. In contrast, I argue, rural communities (like their urban counterparts) need to be foregrounded as an essential element in complex social networks and ecologies, and a logical conclusion of that argument seems to be that more close studies of rural communities as networks need to be conducted. Chapter 2 explains the methods used for the study and presents a larger contextual background for Abbyville as a community along with the visualized literacy sponsorship network map I created as a secondary coding measure.

Against this backdrop, Chapter 3 adds an interpersonal layer, explaining in more detail the ways in which participants in the study attended to the construction and maintenance of the literacy sponsorship network in Abbyville via shared goalsetting and visioning, regular face-to-face check-ins, and regular correspondence. As Figure 5 shows, the top three categories of participant discussion based on the results of second-cycle coding were all related to participant’s placement within the community literacy sponsorship network; it is all about relationships, both personal and professional. In order to maintain these relationships, the level

of intentional communication among those multiple stakeholders, along with the constant overlap of professional and personal literacy practices and goals created by the rural community setting, creates a blurring of boundaries between “literacy sponsor” and “community member” that I particularly want to highlight, particularly within the context of a rural community. In a town where everyone knows your personal business already, literacy sponsorship is also everyone’s business.

The chapter is laid out thus: I first provide an initial section to explain how coding resulted in a focus on collectivity and interconnectivity for this chapter. Next, efforts to locate a community college branch in Abbyville will be discussed from multiple participant perspectives as a specific, large-scale example of how collectivity operates in community literacy efforts. A section on the collective maintenance of the literacy sponsorship network in Abbyville showcases several smaller examples: the community leaders’ vision to reach “Work Ready” status (a program linking educational resources with workforce development), monthly stakeholder meetings at a local restaurant, and partnerships beyond Abbyville. Finally, a section on the ways in which overlapping personal and professional roles play a part in the operation of Abbyville’s literacy sponsorship network reflects on the individual activities that govern the larger operations discussed previously.

Before I move forward, it may be useful to note a particularity in the structuring of the chapter: block quotes will appear with a high frequency in this text. Because of the researcher values discussed in Chapter 2, I want study participants’ actual words to be represented well. In this chapter, the frequent block quotes represent an intentional

rhetorical choice to promote a balance between the researcher’s voice and interpretations of the data with the actual words of participants with their own interpretations of their own experiences. By designing a more polyvocal text in this way, I hope to limit somewhat the inequities of the researcher/participant divide and allow my readers to see (and interpret for themselves) more of the words actually spoken by my participants along with my interpretation of those words. While this can be interpreted as an unorthodox move for a dissertation, it has plenty of precedence in the area of New Literacy Studies; for example, Barton and Hamilton’s *Local Literacies* includes not just a discussion/description of results but also full-page textual portraits of individuals in the study.

Overview: Networked Literacy Sponsorship in Abbyville

During the coding process, **collectivity** and interconnectivity were two of the most common themes brought up by Abbyville participants, seen in Figure 5 below (Collectivity was the largest category across study data; interconnectivity is so closely related to collectivity that I have grouped them together for the purposes of this chapter):

Collectivity		Interconnectivity	
Collaboration	46	Overlapping Roles	16
Citizenship	19	Interconnected Factors	2
Community Improvement	14	Change	1
Recognition by Community	7		
Building Relationships	4		
Belonging	3		
Helping Each Other Out	3		
Community Identity	3		
Lack of Collaboration	2		
Participation	1		
Empowerment	1		
Centralized Services	1		

Figure 5. Coding Nodes Referencing Aspects of Collectivity and Interconnectivity in Interview Data.

Many participants talked about the ease with which they were able to collaborate across

institutional lines to make community projects happen. While my questions were skewed toward partnership (I explicitly asked who they partnered with most), I was surprised by the number of times participants were unable to list just a few. Whether answering my questions about partnership or in pursuit of other topics, my participants consistently spoke about relationships, underscoring the necessity of expanding the boundaries of literacy sponsorship beyond an institution-by-institution view. I suggest that Abbyville's geographical context plays a role in these two results. Participants showed a high level of awareness of what it meant to them and their partners to operate in a specifically rural community, especially a small community where financial and social resources benefit from being maximized and shared across multiple organizations. As a single example of the many that follow, the supervisor of instruction for the local school system, Dolly, discussed the summer literacy programs offered in Abbyville:

Of course, we sponsor in conjunction with the public library summer reading programs. In summer reading, the library does what I call a really great rewards community-based program and, conversely, we do a thing where we feed children in our recreation park in the summer. We have a lesson. We have teachers volunteer. The children's librarians run it at the public library and then we kind of hand off back and forth. I think those promote literacy among young children and young families. Each of our elementary schools has a literacy night, but it's somewhat of a misnomer to say it's "our" literacy night and "the school's" because so many organizations give so much to make those possible.

Similarly, what I termed "interconnectivity" also came up several times. This was

a theme that was not particularly foregrounded by study questions. In this larger category, “Overlapping roles” were brought up by nine participants for a total of 16 coded mentions, so this subcategory represents the bulk of what participants spoke about when they spoke about interconnected factors. As will be seen below, the idea that participants only inhabited one role quickly blurs in the context of a small rural town where the professional and the personal often blur together due to repeated, daily contacts as daily life is lived in a smaller geographical space. People mostly talked about how crucial their personal life was for their professional efforts and vice versa.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I will detail two functional examples of Abbyville’s literacy sponsorship network in action. Several examples of the literacy sponsorship network in collective action are included, followed by a section on the ways that overlapping personal and professional roles blurred boundaries for many participants. Loosely termed, the themes of the remaining sections here are that of a dense and intentional network and the idea of overlapping nature of professional and personal roles in literacy sponsorship.

Collective Effort: Establishing and Maintaining a Community College in Abbyville

In each of the interviews with those who might be considered current “professional” sponsors of literacy, attending closely to potential and current partnerships with other organizations in town was a consistent concern of those involved because of the way resources were distributed across the town. For most of the organizational representatives I spoke with, working together with other businesses, nonprofits, and/or government entities to make the best use of limited resources was the best way to provide quality services to both the town and the county. In addition, the town’s leadership,

headed by efforts on the part of the county judge executive and the town's mayor, had spent several years trying to make connections between services stronger by hosting monthly meetings to understand what services each organization was offering to the community, avoid overlap, and foster collaboration.

One example of the kind of close collaborative work across multiple community partners would be the installment of a small community college branch in Abbyville. Started in 1989 in a small rented space, the community college has grown over time and become a valued part of the community with its own dedicated space. Geographically, the college's brick building is located on land originally owned by the school system just across the street from the county high school, on a hill that rises up from the town's main area (see Figure 6). Thanks to this setup, dual enrollment students can quite literally cross the street to take college courses. The local extension office is also located at the top of the same hill just across the road.



Figure 6. Early picture of current building for Moresville Community College

Moresville Community College represents a small branch of a larger regional

system; it is one of six campuses that comprise a regional community and technical college system linked to an even larger statewide community college system. In 2016-2017, the regional system graduated 813 students and awarded 1,957 credentials in a variety of areas, including arts and sciences courses for associate's degree programs or for transfer to four-year institutions, technical courses, and certificate-bearing courses in a variety of fields and workforce training areas. For the Fall 2018 semester, the Abbyville campus offered courses in anatomy, public speaking, art, finance, computers, interpersonal and intercultural comm, criminal justice, programmable logic, writing, history (local and global), early childhood education, math, nursing, government, psychology, and comparative religion. In addition to more traditional course offerings, the campus also hosts more community-oriented programs for GED acquisition, workforce training and technical degrees, personal enrichment, and children's programming, making it a vibrant addition to the educational offerings available to local citizens. This active campus had its earliest beginnings in courses taught all over Abbyville beginning in the 1980s.

Unfortunately, several attempts to interview participants from the community college did not pan out due to scheduling and workload issues on the part of potential participants; however, I did have several informal conversations with representatives of the college. My account of setting up the community college, then, is flavored by both my participants' recounted experiences and by an article written about a woman I will call Sam Roma, who was not a participant in the study. Roma was named by participants as one of the primary drivers behind efforts to bring Moresville classes to Abbyville on a regular basis. Roma was a teacher in the school system who, according to a news article

about the founding of the community college “watched students in her high school reach a dead end after graduation” (Flairty). In 1996, Roma received a request from a representative of Moresville Community College asking if she’d like to teach a class in Abbyville. She agreed but immediately saw the need for further local infrastructure to the program. According to Flairty, Roma noted “You registered the first night at class and you might buy a book out of the trunk of a car.” As more classes began to be offered, Roma began to receive help from community members. “‘A lawyer in town found me a basement to use free,’ she explained. ‘The Rotary Club paid for our phone bill for three months, and [the local production facility] gave us some used furniture’” (Flairty). Roma and her colleagues also utilized local radio, service clubs, churches, and the town newspaper to drum up support.

Alice, a student in the program at the time who was a remarkable local advocate for the program, helped bring enrollment levels up by using her social connections in the community. A current retiree and native of Abbyville at the time of this document’s writing, Alice noted that opportunities for further education were not as convenient when she first returned to her childhood home after years spent working in Ohio for a large airline parts manufacturer. Her experiences trying to gain further education without leaving her hometown again gave her a passion for providing more localized educational opportunities to future students. An African-American woman, Alice grew up when the Abbyville was still segregated. The K-12 school for black children was staffed by a number of able instructors and administrators, and Alice learned to read at a young age under the tutelage of her grandmother, who served as a teacher at the school. Reading came very naturally to her, and she remembers knowing how to read when she entered

first grade: “I had to learn to read, so my reading stuff was newspapers, medical journals, those books like that, other textbooks that she had.” While the cultural and historical forces around the African American school in Abbyville and its closing will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, it is worth noting here that Alice over and over again discussed literacy as a way to create material change in the minds of others and in the world around her.

Despite difficulties in re-assimilating into her hometown and gaining employment, Alice persisted and continued to work her way through an associate’s degree, ultimately receiving a bachelor’s degree and teaching certificate and serving as a certified teacher in the county high school for five years prior to her retirement. She noted the importance of the community college system’s earliest iterations to her as she tried to balance the care of her son and elderly mother:

“I got my associate’s degree at Moresville Community College. At that time, we had school at the high school, at the middle school, at the local factory, at the Christian Church. We had classes all over town, because we didn't have a place to have it. When I graduated, I knew that I couldn't get any more education from Moresville and that I would have to leave and go someplace else, which was the hardest thing for me to do, because I’ve got a son, my mom is ill, you know, and I’m taking care of her. How can I afford to leave town and go to a college full-time, because I'm going to have to, to finish my degree? “

While Alice did ultimately receive her bachelor’s degree from an in-state institution, the experience of having to travel further for her continuing professional development made a deep impression on her. While getting her associates in town, she

was active on several committees for the community college, serving as a mentee and (in her own words) “go-for girl” in the group of women serving as administrators of the program. She recounts:

We were having a meeting, and I said "You know what, we need to have our own campus right here. If we're going to dream, we're going to dream big. We might as well dream for a campus of our own so that our children don't have to go to Moresville or Frankton to get a college education. They can start right here.

Hopefully, one day, they'll be able to get a bachelor's right here, or a master's right here...Because it's hard, I'm getting ready to have to do this. I'm going to have to take that leap of faith and take a leave of absence from my job where I know I've got money coming in, and hope that I can live off of the school money that I got and go to school and take care of my son...I don't want that for our children. I want our children to wake up, and just drive up here on the hill and go to college.

Alice shared that, while Roma and her colleagues focused on getting funding, class schedules, and other infrastructure in place, she volunteered to help bring up enrollment for the needed 1,000 students to make the program qualify for funding by using her community connections. According to Alice, the first semester, 1,500 students enrolled. When Roma and others expressed surprise, Alice shared “We got 1,500 students, we got a cushion. A hundred can say they can't come, we still got plenty.” Ultimately, then, Alice played a critical role as a community advocate within the program for a more permanent community college in the area, drumming up support among fellow students and helping bring in the required enrollment numbers to qualify. Later, she also worked with the local resource and conservation development council to get free landscaping for

the new location.

Many of my participants' stories about literacy accomplishments in the town came from this period of time. Robert, who used to serve as the principle at the area technology center (part of the high school system which holds classes offering skills-based training in subjects such as woodworking and automotive repair), played a key role in allowing the building to be built. He notes that, originally, the vocational center had been deeded a large property across the street from the high school building that was not being utilized fully. Sam Roma, along with a small team that ultimately became administrators at the college, had presented to the governor's office and received 2.5 million in funding to build a building (Flairty). In the early 2000s, the community college branch (which had been housed in a variety of spaces across town) received permission to build on land which had been deeded to the high school's vocational center. Robert explains:

...they were looking for a place to put the community college. I said 'We will never use that property...Why don't we work up a deal so the community college can get a reasonable place to put a facility?' And myself and the director - or whatever you want to call it - of the community college, the president or whatever, at that time, we worked very closely together and had that vision of that quadrangle of education available.

The existence of an Abbyville branch of Moresville Community College, then, was an intensely collective effort across multiple stakeholders. For Roma, it was "a collaborative effort through the generosity of the people of this community who helped me make it happen" (Flairty). While the volunteer efforts of a single woman were critical

in beginning the conversations, the surge of support that ultimately resulted in the construction of a permanent home for the community college provides an example of the kind of collaborative effort that many of my study participants saw as one of the greatest community accomplishments of the previous decades.

Efforts to support the community college continue across multiple stakeholders. For Jim, also an Abbyville native and an experienced social studies teacher at the high school, the community college represents an important extra avenue for students to gain college-level experience without leaving the area - ideally, a stepping stone to further college. He notes that the community college "...gave our kids some option and another avenue for formal education..." Elsewhere in his interview, Jim discussed the efforts of the high school to help at-risk and first-generation students in Abbyville to view college attendance as a real and tangible option. A recent program had taken at-risk students to a nearby four-year liberal arts university and brought admissions counselors in to talk about how to fund college, etc. In Jim's view, the college represents a localized avenue to get students without familial backgrounds in higher education to understand what college classes are like and give them experience within their home communities. In fact, Jim believed in supporting the community college so strongly that he used it as part of a rationale for not offering AP Psychology at the high school.

...one of the options I had was to teach AP Psychology. I know that if I do that, I immediately have two sections of kids because it's going to be so popular. One of our requirements as a school is that all seniors take a social studies elective, because we want them to be literate in social studies. If I offer it, then mathematically, we don't have any place for the rest of those kids to go.

Moresville is across the road, they can take it there, it's a great option for those kids, and then it gives me an opportunity to continue to work with...the low[er level] kids, and being able to help get them where they need to go.

In this case, what might be considered to be an unmitigated good for the high school (more AP offerings in-house) was seen by Jim as a potential replication of services that might prevent him from serving his more high-risk students. By choosing not to offer AP Psychology, he aimed to both strengthen the partnership between the school and the college and to maximize educational support for students who are not yet succeeding academically. While this may also be Jim's preference, it also seems to represent an example of collectivist thinking. By choosing to think of the community college as a collaborator and partner rather than as a potential threat to his AP course, Jim sees it as an opportunity to both send business to the community college and serve students who he perceives need his intervention more.

In addition to providing support for the community college in professional roles, several participants noted their personal involvement as students. For example, Tom, who works at a local production facility, explained that the community college had been an important part of his family's personal development after they moved to Abbyville: "I don't think everyone recognized how important that building was and so those that helped initiate that, there's not enough thanks and our community should really be thanking them... My wife went through that program and got a lot of her basic skills until she transferred out to another college." During his wife's educational development, Tom was able to participate in a state-history course field trip as part of her learning experience. He remembers:

“...she had to take a history class and absolutely I consider it the most beneficial class for me... one of the options was a [state] history class and it was taught on Saturday mornings. The entire class meets and they all go and visit a historical site in the state... So every Saturday they'd do that and then they'd write a paper on that and what was even more amazing is the students - my wife was a student - they were encouraged to bring their families with them.”

For Tom and his family, then, having a community college in town represented an opportunity for both personal development and a localized opportunity to pursue continuing education while raising a family in a more integrated and convenient way. In addition, the opportunity to gain understanding of local history both materially and theoretically seems to have been an important aspect of having access to such programming in his home community. He noted, “I probably wouldn’t have been able to, or probably wouldn’t have even been interested if it weren’t for the cost and the availability of the community college.”

In addition to offering opportunities for personal advancement, Tom also noted that the community college represents a valuable workforce training element for the large production facility at which he works professionally: “...my employer, on a regular basis, works within the college, works within the college and some work ready grants, workforce grants through the state, and makes good use of that college.” More than this, however, Tom observed that supporting education within Abbyville is an important element for the production facility:

“I can tell you as part of the company’s community affairs team, we’re very active in trying to support education, because the belief is that we need good,

strong employees, and so it's very important that they get that education at the high school level and then whether they go on to college or trade school, or wherever that may be, we are always trying to support them. Even once they come to the facility, the goal is to try and find areas where we can even continue to help them learn.”

Tom's observation effectively highlights the collective nature of the work being done by both the production facility and the community college. Tom, employed by a local production facility interested in workforce training, sees the community college as *both* an avenue towards a more educated workforce *and* as a source of personal enrichment for himself and his family. For the production facility, the maintenance of an employable workforce means that they situate some of their work-ready grants within the community college as institution. This is a practical step - an educated workforce means a better pool of new hires and a home for continuing training opportunities; for example, a community-focused Fall 2016 community education pamphlet for the community college in partnership with Workforce Solutions included courses in basic blueprint reading, applied fluid power, and gas tungsten arc welding, all key skills that would make someone more employable in an industrial setting. At the same time, Tom is not separate from the systems he and his colleagues help maintain; he is and has been a personal user of the literacy sponsorship services that he and a host of community partners contribute to. He contributes both as a literacy sponsor and as a citizen who pays for classes at the college.

The above examples represent just a few of the ways in which participants interacted with the community college in its role as a literacy sponsor for the community. Of note is that no single participant could be classified only as someone *gaining* literacy

through the community college. In almost all cases, participants identified themselves as both consumers of literacy services and as active proponents of both constructing (physically or rhetorically) the intellectual space of the sponsoring institution, suggesting a need to extend and complicate current conceptualizations of literacy sponsorship, at least as related to literacy in small communities. While the institution of the community college (both the local affiliate and the regional network of which it is a part) certainly benefits from the sponsorship via tuition dollars paid, the community members who were a part of this study had each made efforts to support it in various ways in addition to being users of the services offered. Whether teaching classes for the college, working with the GED program, helping set up the original physical space, or finding ways to ensure that enrollment levels remained viable for the regional system, participants felt a sense of ownership over the community college as a public good to their community. In this way, the confluence of sustained support to the community college over time suggests that this particular literacy sponsor exists in a flux of interdependent and shifting relationships with the various community members who both utilize its resources and (depending on their roles) help it to persist as a part of their own goals for the community as a whole.

Collective Maintenance: Constructing and Maintaining the Literacy Sponsorship Network

In the above example, an organic set of interrelated partnerships made it possible for Abbyville to gain a permanent local branch within the regional community college system. In this case, the actors named above used community and local resources to mobilize support for the community college. It is important to note, however, that the

community network that supports literacy and other material services in Abbyville was not simply serendipitous; it is intentionally constructed and maintained via shared vision documents produced by government, business, and education leaders in the community, consistent community meetings of literacy providers to share services and updates, and through complex relationships with a host of regional, national, and transnational institutions that themselves act as either affordances or challenges to local literacy sponsorship development. In this section, I outline several avenues through which various literacy sponsors and community leaders reify a collective sense of shared vision through a series of collaborations, some ongoing and others centered around specific goals.

WorkReady Community Application: Educational and Industry Connections

For Abbyville's mayor, Samuel, the pulling together of multiple stakeholders to accomplish mutually beneficial goals for the community has been a primary goal. Prior to his election, he worked as the president of the chamber of commerce board in Abbyville, which at that time was starting the Work Ready Community certification process through the state of Kentucky. From the website:

A Kentucky Work Ready Community certification is a measure of a county's workforce quality. It is an assurance to business and industry that the community is committed to providing the highly-skilled workforce required in today's competitive global economy. Through this effort, Kentucky communities can assess their own workforce strengths and follow a process to become certified as Work Ready or Work Ready in Progress.... It encourages counties to take a credible inventory of the current and future workforce, identify the gaps and carry

out strategies to achieve a more knowledgeable, trained workforce.

Martin discussed the process of gathering community stakeholders to engage in initial conversations around the initiative:

...we got the leaders of our industry, hospital, in the same room with our school system, superintendents and assistant superintendents, and the college, and government officials, and we just had a sit down... A lot of our industry has entry level tests that they want their workforce to pass. You'd have 100 people apply for a job, and 60 percent of them couldn't pass a basic literacy test. So, those first meetings were kind of rough because these guys were telling the school system "Well, what you're producing is not what we need." And so there's been some changes in the last three years, where people start listening to one another, talking to one another, industry going into the school system and talking about the jobs they have and what the kids need to do. So, we've come a long, long way in just a few years. We still have a ways to go, but people are working together now, school system and industry.

In this way, then, the perception by local government officials that basic literacy skills were essential to help sustain the community's workforce and attract any new potential employers that might continue to rebuild the local economy was a central driving goal in creating opportunities for conversation among industry, nonprofit, educational, and governmental entities in Abbyville. These conversations focused on increasing the community workforce's overall educational attainment level via a multi-area focus on high school graduation rates, certification attainment opportunities, and GED programs in Abbyville. The result was a community WorkReady application that

included strategic community goals, which Samuel shared for the purposes of this study.

The larger mission statement for Abby County was as follows:

Our mission is to create on-going partnerships between education, industry, business, and community leaders to address and improve the workforce quality in Abby County to meet the needs of our business community, improve the economic well-being of Abby County, and provide greater opportunities for our citizens.

In support of this larger goal, the collaborators involved in the construction of the document listed in the application (from around 2014) contain the following:

- “Priority 1: Increase the [high school] graduation rate to 98% by 2022
- Priority 2: Increase the percentage of working age adults holding an NCRC [National Career Readiness Certificate] to 9% by 2018.
- Priority 3: Increase the education attainment rate to 25% by 2018
- Priority 4: reduce the percentage of working age adults without a high school diploma by 3% by 2018.”

Both Samuel, the city mayor, and Arthur, the county judge executive, explicitly named the WorkReady community goals as an essential part of their long-term vision for Abbyville’s economic and civic sustainability: In Bennet’s words, “...we’re working with the school system, and with industry, and with the community college to get those numbers up.” In addition, the list of 29 collaborators on the WorkReady plan for Abbyville includes representatives from the government, the chamber of commerce, the county school system, the high school, the community college, the community nonprofit, and several in-town employers including two factories and the local hospital. Taken

together as a whole, the initiative, while not involving every literacy sponsor in the community, does encourage a significant number of educational and workforce powers in the community to espouse a shared set of community goals, representing a more holistically linked approach to classical institutional sponsorship a la Brandt in Abbyville. Even here, however, it is important to add that the shared goals here were created by community leaders and maintained by them as both users and creators of the literacy sponsorship system even as the services involved were utilized by other community members who were not involved in the initial goal-setting process, so that there can hardly be a designated monolith of “institution” as directly opposed to “individual” even in this more institutional example.

“The Meeting at Mandy’s”: Monthly Check-Ins

Initially, I knew that I wanted to interview individual literacy sponsors across Abbyville and map how they interacted, and I was unaware of the many ways in which those sponsors had established regular correspondence and face-to-face interactions with one another. I managed to interview Arthur, the county judge executive, by virtue of walking into his office and asking him if I could. After hearing about my project and prior to our interview, he asked me if I knew about the meeting at Mandy’s (I did not). He immediately called RJ, who was serving as the organizer for the meetings at the time and got me a spot for a meeting happening the following week. What I found out was this: many of the government services and nonprofits in town meet regularly at a monthly breakfast meeting at a local restaurant called Mandy’s. At these meetings, over biscuits and coffee, multiple service providers from around the community come to simply report what their organization is doing and hear what others are doing. In this case, then,

organizations maintain a regular, face-to-face check-in that makes visible and audible the relationships (both existing and potential) among the different organizations. For non-attendees each month, a note-taker takes summative notes and sends them to each organization on the list.

I attended one such meeting on November 14, 2016.¹¹⁵ Representatives from the community action nonprofit, the health department, the community college, the city/county library, a state-level mental health organization, and the chief of police were all in attendance. Speakers were asked to “keep it short” so that each organization would have time to share its updates, and I briefly shared the nature of my project and its goals between food orders. Each organization then shared numerous updates on their efforts. While many updates on various kinds of programs were shared, one common theme at this meeting was the town’s recently implemented needle exchange program. At the time of this meeting, fewer counties in the region had implemented a needle exchange program to combat the heroin problem sweeping the state (as of 2019, there were roughly 44 needle exchange programs in the entire state). In some counties, the programs were difficult to establish due to the community perception that those using drugs would be enabled by the exchange program. In Abby County, a program had been successfully established, and multiple organizations were collaborating on an informational community meeting to be held at a local church the following week to answer common questions and discuss the results of the program so far (in this case, fewer reports of first

^{5 1 1} The meeting I attended was not audio-recorded, as the serendipitous nature of my attendance there meant that there was no way to get all attendees (many of whom were meeting me for the first time during the course of the meeting) to sign a consent form. My field notes, then, are the only body of data I have from this particular meeting.

responders being stabbed with needles and fewer reports of needles on the ground in Abbyville).

During this meeting, I was introduced to three people who later agreed to be study participants: RJ, Charles, and Abbie. RJ, the town's chief of police, described in detail the historical exigence of the meetings in his interview:

The Family Services in Abby Square had put a call out for people to get together and they want to have a meeting and go over some stuff and meet the partners. The cabinet was getting hit with all this stuff, didn't know which services were actually available because a lot of the people at the time that worked there didn't live here. They lived all over [the state] and they were coming in here, so they didn't know what was there. Then it just hit off from there. The cabinet got the courts involved, got the county attorney's office involved, got the Health Department involved, got the Housing Authority involved, got law enforcement involved, the fire department involved. It's just something that - somebody had an idea, and it was slow to get off the ground, but then all of a sudden it gradually started to pick up.

Along with monthly meetings and an organizational structure (the organizers maintained rotating roles of meeting leader, secretary, and a few other key roles), this loose confederation of organizations also produces and maintains a binder of services, organizations, and contacts at organizations in Abbyville and Abby County. Attendance at each meeting varies month-by-month. RJ, who had served several times as the meeting organizer, emphasized that meetings continued regardless of lapses:

...I've had it where that room where we were at last month was full, and I've had

it when we might only have had three people there, but we still meet. Because it's like, "We'll discuss what we know and then we can contact the others whether it's by phone or email and say, "We missed you. What happened?" and then "this is briefly what we've talked about today."

Regardless of whether individual collaborators are available to meet each month, the meetings continue with updates from those available, creating a set of tacit expectations for participants to show up in order to have their organization represented and interests communicated to everyone.

The narrative of these monthly meetings and their beginnings seems instructive in thinking about community literacy's tie to locality. The exigency for these meetings was simple; people working in the community commuted from elsewhere. Because their lack of local knowledge of services produced an issue (the inability to provide and refer services in the community), action was needed. As Wendell Berry has noted, "One of the primary results - and one of the primary needs - of industrialism is the separation of people and places and products from their histories. To the extent that we participate in the industrial economy, we do not know the histories of our meals or our habitats or of our families. This is an economy, and in fact a culture, of the one-night stand" (Qtd in Brooke 15). This claim seems to be illustrated in above example, as professionals working in the community were unaware of the basic services offered by the community and had to create a group in order to reconstruct local knowledge into a more portable format - the binder. For the university-as-community-partner, this issue is particularly salient given the culture of academia and its typical emphasis on scholars as portable resources who are often transplanted into a region from whence they do not originally

come. For those interested in community engagement, the meeting at Mandy's provides a needed reminder on the importance of understanding the community's existing structure first.

Collectivity Beyond the Local: Links to State, Regional, National, and Transnational Forces

In the discussion about the founding of the community college in the sections above, I mentioned that the community college was part of a regional network of community colleges with branches in several regions of the home state of Abbyville. This point is worth returning to briefly, as it points to the ways in which Abbyville cannot be separated from the state, regional, national, and global forces and organizations and flows that affect the rest of the planet. This may seem to be an obvious point, as most people are aware that the local and state governments in any given city are connected; however, in literacy research, there can be an underlying assumption (particularly regarding rural areas) that small towns are "cut off" in some way from the larger world in which they live, whether or not such an assumption is true for that individual context. Such an assumption is not true for Abbyville any more than it is true for any town in the United States that has internet access and a local government, and it seems worth pointing to some specific examples here.

The close regional ties between smaller communities and larger communities came up several times during my interviews with participants. The community action nonprofit branch in Abbyville is actually a branch of an organizational hub located in the city of Frankton, about 45 minutes away, with branches in 4 other counties. Lauren, the center manager of the Abbyville branch, discussed what she viewed as the affordances of

having relationships to a larger organization:

...they definitely listen to us on what we need in our county... Like the League program with the GEDs, it started about three years ago and it was because I knew that there was a need in our community, so then I went to our main office and to our grant writers and I was like ... "I want to apply for that for my county." I'm kind of an advocate for what our community needs and then we go to Frankton for our main discussion and that type of stuff. My supervisor - she's housed in Frankton.

In this case, Lauren, who operates exclusively within the Abbyville context, knew that GED programs were a current need for the community. If her nonprofit were an independent entity, she might not be able to afford to pay a grant writer, but the location of a larger central hub in Frankton gives Lauren regular access to grant writing services without moving outside of her own organization, both troubling and reifying the distinctions between "rural" and "urban." Here, she notes the importance both of her linkage to the larger hub at Frankton and of her role on the ground in Abbyville, setting up a symbiotic relationship that requires the influence of both partners in this networked nonprofit. The central hub benefits from knowledge conveyed by program directors located in smaller towns. Lauren also noted the presence of conversations on different strategies needed for county branches vs. the main location in Frankton:

There's lots of communications about what we need. I think it's been kind of a barrier, but it's getting better - like the needs in Frankton's county are not necessarily the needs in the rural counties. It's different, so that's why that they look for guidance from us to be able to tell them what we need, because the

population's different; everything's different.

Not everyone who spoke about a regional or state-level partner or hub discussed them as unmitigated positives. Tom, the supply chain manager at a local production facility, was among the most vocal of my participants about the limits of systemic relationships among local and state or regional-level entities. By the time of our interview, Tom's daughters had both graduated from the local school system, but he had served on the school board and the site-based council for the school system in years prior when they were still students. One of his concerns was how to return local control to the school systems to help reduce class sizes and use available resources well. A structure that concerned Tom involved how the state had organized funding for public school systems. In an effort to reduce local power (and perceived/actual nepotism) in the state school systems in the 1970s, the state ordered that local school systems receive money in two separated accounts. The first is for instructional usage, and the second is for facility management. Tom explained that the buildings in the Abbyville system were old but well-maintained and in good condition; "They don't necessarily need to build a new school, at least not in the immediate future, but they still have that pot of money where they can't...they have to let three teachers go because their instructional money, the money from [the state capitol] keeps getting reduced."

In this case, Tom's primary concern was not only an insufficient amount of funding coming from the state level, but that the money given was portioned out in ways that prevented local schools from having control over how to best maximize their dollars. By earmarking resources for building maintenance that Abbyville did not at that point in time need, the state, in Tom's view, was further limiting what the school system

was able to do for its students in terms of having up-to-date resources and small class size. For Tom, “It's just amazing some of those restrictions. Again, I understand completely why they were put in place, but some of them are a little archaic and we need to revamp or re-look at some of those systems.” In this case, then, the limits of state-level funding that did not pay sufficient attention to the local community’s needs created a pot of unused funding year after year. While this is only one participant’s perspective on the issue of school funding and cannot be considered representative of the range of politicized perspectives on state government in Abbyville, Tom’s critique points to the relationship between the local community and the state-level entities whose involvement affects the local in very real, tangible ways.

Finally, a sense of Abbyville’s communication (or not) with the nation at large and beyond arose during participants’ discussions of their literacy experiences. Abbyville is part of the world and is affected by more than just regional forces. International trends discussed in Chapter 2 such as the rise and fall of tobacco as a commodity in the U.S. or bourbon’s historical (and current) export value have always had and continue to have an impact on Abbyville, but the town-as-literacy-sponsorship network may not currently prepare its citizens in their early years to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds without other interaction with a broader world. In fact, two successful and retired citizens in Abbyville, Alice and James, noted the importance of travel to their formative years when discussing younger citizens’ perceived ability to succeed in the broader world outside Abbyville:

James: Yeah, just one of those kids that have never been out of town.

Alice: No, never went nowhere, no insight to go nowhere.

James: We had been blessed because we had opportunity. When I was five years old, my parents put me on a train out in the state of Washington, sent me across country by myself to Cincinnati. Today they put your parents in jail for things like that. I had this little thing around my neck with destination and all and I never had a problem traveling anywhere or doing anything.

Alice: That's what I did for Jim [her son]. Jim was five years old. At that time, you could get babysitters for airplane flights, so, at five years old, Jim is on the airplane flying to Cleveland Ohio to his grandmother.

Key in this interaction is that travel and physical interaction with a larger world is seen by both Alice and James as a necessary part of development for children; the speakers were “blessed” by their “opportunity” to have travel experiences as children, and early travel is something Alice “did for” her son.

Similarly, the youngest participant in the study, Alanna, discussed the ways in which her education growing up in Abbyville did and did not prepare her for her present career in the military. Alanna appreciated her hometown’s emphasis on helping each other and credited participation in the JROTC and vocational courses for much of the practical knowledge she gained in high school (showing up on time, general people skills, gaining job skills, etc.) but also noted that she did not feel as prepared to interact with colleagues from multiple backgrounds:

But what I didn’t learn a lot in high school was the cultural differences...I didn’t realize how big of a difference it was until I actually moved out to a different state, or actually went to boot camp and was living with 87 females that were all from different places...because we were all grown up different. We were all

raised differently. We were all raised in different communities... We had people come from all kinds of different countries.”

There was, then, some contradiction in application of Alanna’s overall education to her career in the military. Alanna felt that, while her community had inculcated her with communal values of caring for others and being an overall good citizen, she was not as well-prepared to interact with a more racially and culturally diverse group of people in her workplace when she left home.

The narrative above is not surprising, given the general cultural homogeneity of Abbyville, but it does bring up a tension that I found in the research. It appears that some participants believe in the crucial role played by experiences with locales outside Abbyville as necessary to prepare the town’s youth for further experiences inside and outside the community. Abbyville is part of the global stage, and more than one participant felt that “being literate” mean being able to navigate that global stage gracefully as a representative of one’s hometown.

While the examples listed above cannot cover the full range of Abbyville’s complex and interdependent relationships with its state, regional, national, and global partners, they do begin to point to the way in which any single literacy organization (or network of organizations) cannot be assumed to be simply a “local” product when working with literacy analysis. Attention to the kinds of intentional network maintenance are already taking place in Abbyville via shared goalsetting and visioning, regular face-to-face check-ins, and regular correspondence with a variety of regional and state-level entities, along with the ways in which individuals are able (or not) to take regular advantage of these flows between civic units to broaden their literate and cultural

capacity: all of these are necessary to understanding the ways in which the literacy sponsorship network of Abbyville is maintained.

Overlapping Personal and Professional Roles

In one of the previous sections of this chapter, I ended a discussion on the intentional and collectively produced goals that community leaders put into place with a mention of the ways in which the county and city cooperated. In particular, the mayor and judge executive of the town, both of whom have known each other since childhood, both mentioned that they collaborated well. For Abby County and Abbyville, this means that the city and county governments then have the ability to work well together at the top levels. The individual nature of relationships and the ways in which the personal and professional levels overlap in Abbyville was a result of the study that made me question my ability to construct the organizational map detailed in Chapter 2. There, I focused mainly on organizational mapping: that is, mapping official affiliations between individual organizations. Although organizational relationships and affiliations were certainly important to participants in the Abbyville study, one result that came up over and over again in interviews was that nearly all participants had multiple and sometimes overlapping roles in the community that they perceived had a direct effect on their work in their more official roles.

An illustration of such partnerships even revealed itself in the snowball recruitment; Jim put me in touch with Tom and Robert, who he knew through his membership in a local Lion's Club chapter (an international social organization that asks its members to engage in community service). While all three men held separate organizational roles (though both Jim and Robert had both worked for the school system),

they were linked to one another during their extracurricular social activities. Likewise, church affiliations, children's athletic events, and community events represented important connections that shaped participants' work in their more official roles. While almost all participants spoke about the importance of community involvement as a factor in their efforts at community literacy, four participants in particular – Jennifer, RJ, Candace, and Samuel - spoke about the importance of their interwoven personal and professional roles.

Jennifer, the agricultural extension agent working in Abbyville for a large research university based in Frankton, serves as an excellent example of a literacy sponsor who inhabits overlapping roles. Her family has lived in Abbyville for a long time, and Jennifer's youth was spent entirely as a resident. As she grew older, Jennifer attended a large research university about 40 minutes from her hometown in the larger city of Frankton and then returned to the community as an employee of the university engaged in agricultural extension work. Her husband is a full-time farmer, and Jennifer essentially works two jobs as both a farmer at home and an extension agent to the farming community in the area. The overlap between her professional and personal lives, then, could be considered fairly seamless.

For Jennifer, early experiences with Future Farmers of America translated into her later interest (and career) in extension work in her home community. Early in our interview, she emphasized the overlapping nature of her work:

...There's always been something extension could help me with, especially this office. Now that I'm here, I've built a lot of networks- Being able to grow up here, I've gotten new producers to come in and utilize the office and different things.

People that may not have known about it before have started coming in because they know me, or I talk to them at church or different things.

Jennifer's familial and cultural background in the area and her appreciation for the kinds of literacies offered to her by the extension office in her youth seem to have directly factored into her later career choice. Growing up as a consumer of the services offered by the extension agents helped grow Jennifer's agricultural literacy (for a more detailed discussion of the intentionally broad use made of the term "literacy" in this project, see Chapter 1) but then also carried over into her adulthood as she moved from being sponsored by an institution into playing a key literacy sponsorship role to a particular community group while still maintaining her identity as a working member of the group she serves.

For the town's sheriff, RJ, being embedded in multiple, overlapping roles also serves as a strength to his work. When asked what experiences had most built into his own personal literacies in town, he named his time serving as the facilitator for the Cabinet for Family services group in Abbyville, which he has been continuously involved in for more than 10 years.

...as time went on, I saw the services that we offer... They get somebody that they heard was sleeping in a car or living out of a trailer or something, they'll pass the information on, we can look into it, and then get these people the help. Where before...you would just check them out, and then if they didn't have warrants or something like that you'd just tell them they can't stay there and move them on, not realizing that's their home. If they had kids and the kids are in the school system, of course if they take off then the kids don't go to school so they lose out.

I guess being with that group ... I probably been with them 10 years now. I learn something new every month. Plus it keeps me up-to-date on the different things that each group's putting on. You pick up the paper and you may not see when they've advertised, but when you go to this group, you're getting the information before it gets out to the public.

For RJ, the opportunity to serve in another role that made him more aware of multiple services offered in the community also changed his perspective of how he and his officers might treat those with whom they interacted, moving from a policing-only response to a more holistic understanding of how to meet individual and community needs. This understanding of the larger community network involved informed how RJ chose to conduct his own work as a police officer and chief of police. He explains:

A lot of people know me; I've been doing this 24 years. I can go anywhere in this town and Johnstown and somebody from Abbyville [or] Abby County is there and they know me and if they have a question about something, I'll take the time to talk to them. It's not like, "Wait. Come back Monday at 9:00 o'clock," and people appreciate that. You have to take time. Like I said, like I tell the guys all the time, you just don't go down here, drive around, respond to calls. Pull up your car, get out, and mingle with the community. Let them know who you are. If you get a call, get back in the car and respond to the call. When you get done, go back. The kids love it. They like it. You still get some kids that are a little leery of us, but then again it depends on how many times the police have been to their house. All we can do is keep trying to let them know that we're there if they need us and we're not going to arrest everybody.

Working with multiple community partners and becoming more aware of a network of service in Abbyville not only gave RJ overlapping roles between “volunteer” and “professional” but also made him see the possibilities for helping citizens beyond just law enforcement. In addition, as seen above, RJ now sees law enforcement itself differently; the idea of being a police officer for him now involves being a participating member of the community and is an ideal he tries to impress upon the police force of Abbyville.

Another participant, Candace Finch, the town’s youth librarian, felt that her personal roles in Abbyville were assets to her professional work and integral parts of being a literacy sponsor:

One of the big things about people that are involved in literacy need to realize that they don't need to be just literacy-focused, they need to be involved in the community. For instance, my daughter is in Girl Scouts, so I see all the people at Girl Scouts. My son is in Boy Scouts, so we're involved in Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts. When I go out to the schools, people see me not just as, ‘oh, that's the librarian.’ I'm Danny's mommy or Andrew's mom. Dolly [another participant], her son is involved in Cub Scouts. He's involved in T-ball. People that are involved in literacy, they're out in the community. They're out in the churches...whether it be sports or whether it be scouts. They need to be not just focused on their area of business, their area of expertise, not just at the school but out within the community.

Civic involvement in this case goes much, much further than volunteering at a single local organization; it literally means being invested in the regular, day-to-day groups that

make up the lifeblood of the town. Children's sports and activities, town gatherings and markets are seen as integral elements of Finch's literacy work; she discussed multiple times the way that her home life with her children informed her work as a youth librarian.

Of course, such interlinked roles come with inherent challenges. Jennifer discussed such issues in her deeply networked personal and professional existence. She noted:

It can be a strength and a curse, I think, sometimes, because people come in and they're like, "Well, I knew you whenever you were knee-high to a grasshopper," or something like that. Sometimes they don't see me as a professional, necessarily, in this role. They see me still as a kid and their neighbor growing up. Definitely, it has its strengths because I know the different contacts around the community. If I have a question, there's somebody I can call if I don't know the answer.

Growing up in the community meant that Jennifer automatically inhabited multiple roles simultaneously; as a church member, student, and friend, she was already able to access areas of the community in her professional life that might have been barred to someone living outside the community. At the same time, such ingrained roles occasionally made it difficult for some community members to interact with her in her professional role; that is, it seemed that it was difficult for farmers in the community to perceive her in her professional role apart from their already-built personal perceptions of her as a youthful student or young church member. Ultimately, though, Jennifer felt that her connections to multiple groups in the community served as more of a help than a hindrance to her work persuading farmers to try new techniques or access the latest research through the university, enabling her to be a true liaison between farmers working

their land to produce goods and the university systems' continued efforts to encourage use of alternative approaches to farming.

For Abbyville's mayor, Samuel, overlapping roles are both natural (he grew up in Abbyville and has many personal relationships around town) and necessary for his financial maintenance. When discussing his perceived role as someone who helps create a community vision and community buy-in for that vision, Martin mentioned that the mayoral role in Abbyville was only part-time. When asked what he did with the rest of his time, Samuel explained:

I have cobbled together a few different jobs. I'm a preacher on Sundays. I run a local theater here, which doesn't make any money - I'm one of three partners that run that. And I do a radio show on the local radio station just to make a full-time salary... You'll find in most small towns, the mayor is part-time. So they're either someone who's retired, someone who's independently wealthy and doesn't have to work that much, or someone like me that has three or four jobs. That's typical.

In this case, the overlap between professional and personal runs in multiple directions. As a minister, Samuel is intimately connected to the religious life of the town; as a partner in the local theater (which shows both live performances and movies), he is a driving force behind the arts scene in town; as a radio host, he has a public voice beyond his mayoral role; and as mayor:

I have to have the approval of the commission to do anything that I want to do.

So, I see the mayor more as you set the vision, you set the agenda kind of thing, you set the direction that you want to see the city go, and then you have to go out there and rally

the people behind the vision and get them to buy in so that you can get there. However, Samuel's roles go far beyond the professional; ministers already have overlap between personal and professional, and his existing relationships with multiple childhood companions who still live in town make him particularly embedded in the life of the town.

Ultimately, the overlap between professional and personal roles in Abbyville means that relationship building and maintenance is a critical activity in both personal and professional realms. Many times during the study, I was told to continue to utilize my personal connections to the region and to the town, and my family's existing relationships with friends and former coworkers in the town proved essential to the study. Tom said it well: "...if you [meaning the researcher] were to call me on the telephone, I would probably say 'No, I don't know.' By using some of those contacts, if Jim calls me and I know Jim...and [we are] on the site-base... So [if] he calls me, I'm going to say 'Oh yeah. If you're behind this, go for it.' So it's trying to use some of that network and you need to use those contacts."

Such relationship building and maintenance takes a significant investment of time and energy on the part of participants. This is not a new observation; writers have long seen the "everyone is in your business" side of small towns from the Rural South in the United States to England to Botswana. Such context-dependent qualities of a culture have also been named by Edward T. Hall in *Beyond Culture* as high-context elements, which are often talked about with more frequency related to Asian cultures but which are highly applicable to conversations about small rural towns. The tight-knit network created by such relationships has definite rewards; those able to access the network created by such

dense social webs are able to evoke considerable change within their community. The drawbacks of constant visibility, according to the narratives above, can be in static perception of one's identity that may interfere with a professional role or in being unable to "get away with anything," as at least two participants noted. The idea of a high-context culture and the potential drawbacks that some Abbyville participants experienced firsthand will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, where I explore what has happened when certain community members are partially or completely cut off (either consciously or unconsciously) from personal/professional networks of influence.

Conclusion

The literacy sponsorship network in Abbyville is complex, constantly maintained, and reaches across both personal and professional lines for individual citizens. The participants in this study could not be separated from their own sponsorship by the institutions they themselves helped to set up and maintain, and I see this observation as a much-needed addition to the field's understanding of the complexity of literacy sponsorship. While some participants, such as Jennifer, moved linearly from being sponsored by Future Farmers of America to becoming a sponsor with clout from a nearby R-1 university, other participants, such as Tom, helped support organizations professionally through their work as community leaders while also receiving concurrent sponsorship from that organization on topics unrelated to their work lives. This consistent crossover between roles for multiple participants suggests that more study may be needed on crossover between sponsor and sponsored in communities both large and small; however, this may be a particularly salient point for smaller and/or more dense community structures (i.e. not just rural communities but also urban neighborhoods with

distinctive local identities). At the same time, as Chapter IV will detail, some participants who did successfully “cross over” into sponsoring roles also moved through multiple barriers in order to do so. Alice, detailed in this chapter as an active, energetic collaborator in the collective creation of the local community college branch, also appears in Chapter IV, as her arrival back home as an African American woman in the 1980s brought with it some challenges in re-acclimating to home.

Also important to this section is the notion of sustainability. For each participant, the question of what would sustain the life and cultural situation of the town in ways deemed most desirable (whether through attracting corporations that would build factories, bolstering of small businesses and a downtown culture, adding more varied educational opportunities, or a combination of all these) was always at the forefront. Development in terms of large businesses moving into the area was not considered to be the only potential good; attention to workforce readiness was also balanced against the goals of reviving cultural events and historical venues such as the local opera house. Alice was particularly concerned about students needing to leave town permanently in order to further their personal literacies and, by extension, their economic prospects. For others, such as Samuel, the memory of what the town had been before tobacco left acted as a catalyst toward working to ensure that Abbyville remained a good place to live. The project of finding a home for the community college was a unique fusion of multiple stakeholders deciding that the placement of the college within the community would help meet those goals of sustainability for the community.

At least one implication of this kind of interconnected and somewhat closed system of relational operation is that real knowledge takes time. The idea of really

“knowing” a place and people, of knowing people and understanding who they are and why they operate the way they do in any given context, of knowing how history and place play a role in those operations and being invested enough to take the time to learn all that information in the first place – this takes not merely familiarity but a length of time that is at odds with the breakneck speed of knowledge production that I have seen evidenced in my time as an academic. As Julie Lindquist and others have persuasively argued, there are certain kinds of knowledge that require significant time to produce (Lindquist), and I will add that personal experience or at least an in-depth engagement with why a particular community culture operates the way it does is also necessary in community literacy settings. This small, limited pilot study took me two years to produce, and I grew up near my research site, *and* I still left out a lot of detail. Brice Heath’s direct experiences with Roadville and Trackton took place over a decade (5); Barton and Hamilton lived in Lancaster for 16 years, and the interview project itself took four years (xiv–xv).

In this chapter, I have focused primarily on the ways in which the Abbyville participants in this study were active in constructing and maintaining a network of mutually supportive literacy resources (defined broadly) in the town. As will be seen in chapter 4, the above snapshot focuses primarily on successful collaborative efforts and leaves out moments of disjunction. Who is not represented in the community literacy sponsorship network? What does it take to get “in” to a literacy sponsorship role, and what cultural or historical factors affect access to those roles? Chapter Four will discuss in more detail a few key examples of participants who struggled to break into literacy sponsorship roles due to racial ideologies operating during their early careers. These examples will add yet another layer over the initial literacy sponsorship network map

produced in Chapter 2 to grasp at just a few of the cultural underpinnings and ideologies that can operate under the surface of the obvious activities within a literacy sponsorship network, making it capable both of nurturing and/or hindering sponsorship-level access to individuals.

CHAPTER IV:
HIGH-CONTEXT CULTURAL ELEMENTS IN ABBYVILLE: HOW CULTURE AND
HISTORY SHAPE ACCESS TO SPONSORING ROLES

Introduction

The network map in Chapter 2 provides a visual representation of the current network of partnerships articulated by participants in the study. Chapter 3 then added a more detailed discussion of participants' focus on collectivity and interconnectivity, using several community collaboration examples to describe the partnerships and how partners meshed available resources to create positive net results for the community. Building on Goldblatt and Jolliffe's notions of networked literacy sponsorship, I claimed that, particularly for small rural towns, collective identity structures mean that a monolithic focus on one or two literacy sponsors may not adequately represent the complex web of interdependent small organizations that make up this kind of dense structure. I also noted the highly permeable barriers between those being sponsored and those offering sponsorship. Most participants related multiple instances where they had been both offering services to and receiving sponsorship from institutions at the same time – sometimes within the same institution and at the same time. Chapter 3 ultimately represents a description of the present-tense spatial and locational aspects of community partnership: the physical, geographical, and social interactions and

collaborations that culminate in “making something happen” in positive ways for Abbyville’s literacy sponsorship network.

In this chapter, I move to the second most-referenced set of terms in this study. Time and sociocultural factors influence the claims I made in the previous chapter regarding literacy sponsorship in Abbyville, and I link these nodes to Edward Hall’s ideas of high-context and low-context cultures later in the chapter. As will be seen below in Table 2, fifteen participants referenced the idea of staying local in the study, and twelve participants referenced the importance of what I named knowing the context — understanding the local culture in depth. References to history, class, time, culture, race, poverty, how participants talked about me as the researcher, and close-mindedness were often-interrelated discussions that covered very similar topics. The sociocultural factors named in Figure 7 were just as important to my participants as the collective civic values I discuss in Chapter 3; however, while some factors (locality and context) were discussed by most participants, other factors (such as race) were only covered by a select few participants but in great detail.

As will be seen in the remainder of the chapter, the nodes above represent a cluster of sociocultural elements that lay another layer on top of Chapter Two’s network visualization. The early sections of this chapter will discuss these elements more generally as a group along with some shorter examples of the way those elements arose in the data. However, the latter sections of the chapter deal with a single set of specific, historical examples related by a group of participants who struggled to gain access to sponsorship roles in the community due to some of these interrelated factors in order to maintain an emphasis on detailing complexity (discussed more in Chapter 1) and avoid

diluting the argument by dispersing it equally among all the elements featured in Figure 7.

“Cultural Context” Individual Nodes	# Participants Who Referenced Topic	Total # of References
Locality – “The local”	15	32
Knowing Context	12	21
History	7	11
Culture	7	7
Time	6	6
Poverty	5	6
Race	5	19
Perception of Researcher	4	5
Class	3	6
Close-Mindedness	1	1

Figure 7: Nodes Referencing “Cultural Context” in Participant Interviews

While it would probably be a misnomer to dub the narratives in the final section of this chapter “counter-narratives,” - existing as they do alongside and sometimes in support of other narratives about more positive civic experiences in Abbyville - alternating moments of agreement and disjunction speak to the ways literacy sponsorship in Abbyville functions. Together, the 21 narratives function not as a single unified whole but as a constant flux of compromises, interpellations, and breakages between and among highly interwoven social and institutional relationships. The idea of who can gain access

to literacy sponsorship under what circumstances in specific localities has certainly been explored in the field of rhetoric and composition (Brandt; Donehower; Goldblatt, *Because We Live Here*). As will be seen below, participants in my study who talked about questions of access to literacy sponsorship were often most concerned with who was allowed (or not) to gain a place in a sponsoring role.⁶ While I argue in Chapter 3 that the relationship between being sponsored and serving in a sponsorship role was highly permeable and linked, certain community members in the study, particularly three participants, related receiving relatively easy access to literacy sponsorship in their formative years but encountered barriers in their efforts to become members of the sponsorship network itself in more institutionalized professional roles.

This chapter explores the idea of “belonging” within the sponsoring roles of a literacy sponsorship network that is by turns both porous and rigid and always affected by the dimensions of time and local context. Because of the way that narratives and identities complicate the claims in Chapter 3, the current chapter focuses on time and the historical dimension that shape understandings of who gets to be a sponsor in the network at any given moment. Through the stories of three participants of color - James, Mary, and Alice (who also appears in Chapter 3) - I explore some of the interrelated temporal and cultural constructs that affected their ability (or not) to access the porous sponsored/sponsoring roles discussed by participants in Chapter 3. By doing so, I argue that, while literacy sponsorship is certainly all about power and access, who is allowed to be a literacy sponsor is just as important as who is able to receive sponsorship. The complex ways that the participants in this chapter experienced access (or lack thereof) to

⁶ Of course, since the participant set is primarily composed of people in literacy sponsorship roles, this particular focus is not particularly surprising.

sponsorship roles in their professional careers affected the community's network. In addition, the continued identification of these participants with their hometown and their persistence in remaining there also affected change (not radical change, but change nonetheless) in the community's literacy sponsorship network during the time of their professional careers. Cathy Burnett and Guy Merchant, in their work on Baroque sensibilities and literacy acquisition, use what they name "story stacking." They explain that "By stacking these stories together, we are not attempting to arrive at a single truth through the artifice of triangulation, or even to suggest plural truths, but to allow each story to trouble the other's take on what happened" (Burnett and Merchant 267). The narratives below – the flux of congruence and breaks involved placed against the communal efforts detailed in Chapter 3 – paint another layer over the network map from Chapter 2.

These broad-scale questions find the beginnings of an answer in the narratives below: which community members can move porously between being sponsored and sponsoring others in any given temporal moment, and which community members find it more difficult to move from being "sponsored" to gaining membership in the network of those doing the sponsoring? What elements of time and culture play a role in the creation of such distinctions, and how long, culturally, does it take those distinctions to break down? The ways that educational integration of the K-12 educational system in Abbyville against the larger backdrop of institutionalized racism in the US affected the literacy sponsorship network's operations in the 1970s and 1980s is important to continuing to complicate and identify the patterns that weave through and around the present-day sponsorship network.

Why Would a Rural Area Be Resistant to Change? Generational Memory and Notions of Time and Space

Before moving on to the specific example I have chosen as an illustration, I want to wrestle with cultural notions of time and space raised in the initial section of this chapter. For some participants, perceptions of time in Abbyville differ from those in faster-shifting metropolitan areas or intentionally placeless suburban communities. The elements discussed here were obvious “facts of life” for myself and for many of my participants who had grown up in the region: 1) That “a long time” may be just as much about the oral narratives you have heard from previous generations as about what you learn during your own lifetime and 2) that this long historical memory is firmly embedded in social networks and can create barriers for those with less economic, political, or cultural capital. While the previous claim can certainly be true for any town, metropolitan neighborhood, or hamlet in any location on the globe, small rural towns with intact generational structures of families and strong ties to land and place can create pockets where the notion of time is measured by longer spans than those experienced in more de-contextualized areas. Robert Brooke builds on studies of suburban communities to claim that “Suburbia is ahistorical,” explaining that “Because the built environment of suburbia is so recent, it is harder for suburban dwellers to develop, understand, and act from any deep sense of regional history” (Brooke 13). The opposite can be true in Abbyville, and intermingling ideas around cultural context were oft-repeated and oft-interrelated topics across study data.

Approximately half the participants referenced history or ideas of time during their interviews with me, often along the same topics and in responding to my final

question, which was “How can I do good research here?” I usually followed up by explaining that I wanted to be a good community partner and that any advice they had would be helpful. Of the 13 respondents who replied to this question directly, six explicitly referenced using personal connections and networks. In Abbyville, your history and even the history of your entire family if you are generationally placed in a region, matters and can affect both work and personal situations.

As one example of a potential generational understanding of knowledge, Jennifer discussed the way that notions of time affected her work with farmers in the area:

....coming in and not trying to change what they've done for a hundred years...

With farmers, I'll go out to some elderly farmers that are in their 60s and 70s, and they'll say, "I've been farming longer than you've been alive. I don't need to hear your new-fangled ways." Then I go out to younger generations and they're doing it like grandpa has always done it, maybe with conventional tillage instead of trying out no-till, because their papaw says it can't work. That sort of thing.

Sometimes it's a challenge working with the younger farmers even though they're my age group; they've just done it like grandpa has done it.

This narrative is also reflective of the history of the Country Life Movement discussed in more depth in Chapter 1. A new and “more efficient” method like no-till⁷ requires an investment of time and does not always immediately increase crop yields, but a method that doesn't work well for a year or two during an adjustment period can devastate a small family farm (Danbom 175). As Jennifer points out, this longer sense of chronology

⁷ I do not here have space or time to give to the larger pros and cons of no-till, which relies heavily on the use of surface pesticides but does preserve some of the soil nutrients that are lost in conventional tillage. Its use is both controversial and complex, and farmers' varied responses to being encouraged to implement it by extension offices would be yet another chapter.

sometimes means that it is not only older family leaders who may be unwilling to attempt a new method of farming. With strong intact familial structures, great stock is placed in what one's family does; a grandchild who has seen their grandfather farm successfully his entire life will be unlikely to immediately trust a new method (even a trusted fellow community member) bringing ideas have not been tested in a longer chronological timeframe through the familial structure.

Jennifer went on to share the following:

That's kind of how a small town works, I guess... You have to respect what they've built. Their whole family lives here and they take a pride in their community, and not trying to come in and change anything right away or make suggestions that might be against their beliefs.

For Jennifer, then, it was not that change could not occur among the farming community in Abbyville (though the debate around tillage, no-till farming, and the relative harm or benefit to the environment continues), but that an emphasis on a longer timeframe would be necessary; the emphasis is not to “change anything right away” versus not making any kind of change at all. The key phrases of “respect,” “pride,” and “right away” are key markers - to call a community's operation out requires time and investment in the community, to be one of the community. The statement above might be too-easily read over to state that change in such an environment could not occur, but that does not appear to have been Jennifer's meaning. As discussed in Chapter 1, the assumption that rural people in general are “against” change not only undermines the many kinds of specialized, change-resistant, and orally communicated knowledges that exist outside the K-12 and university educational complexes but also makes far-reaching

and unfair generalizations about a population of millions of people grounded in historical mistrust of outsiders who come to “fix” systems and people that are not necessarily more broken than their urban counterparts.

Familial embeddedness or the lack thereof was also mentioned several times in the study; those whose parents, grandparents, or beyond had been part of the Abbyville citizenry seemed to have higher feelings of belonging than those who had moved from elsewhere (of course). Tom, supply chain manager for one of the local production facilities, answered my question about conducting good research in the following way:

So, I am speaking from experience. The one thing about a rural community is they're very close knit and as much as I say that, I am still an outsider and I've been here 20 years now. I'm more welcomed as an outsider than others, but that becomes a struggle. So always trying to build those relationships...

There are two items of interest in this statement. First, for Tom, considering himself “an outsider” may be surprising when considering that part of his professional position with a local manufacturer is helping interface with the community and that he has been involved with an incredible variety of community organizations during his 20 years in Abbyville: the local school board, the site-based council, the local Republican party chapter, the Lion’s Club, etc. While he felt “more welcome” than some outsiders, his identity was still that of someone who had come in from elsewhere. Secondly, as has already been mentioned in more detail in Chapter 3, Tom himself felt that, had I simply asked him to participate in the study, he would likely have not been interested. Our mutual friend, Jim Perkins, had been instrumental in Tom’s willingness to speak to me in the first place. Tom went on to explain that, if I as a researcher had simply called him on the phone and

asked to speak to him about my study, he probably would have refused, but because Jim Perkins had reached out to him first and told him about the study, he was willing to be a participant. My own existing connections to the town were critical in my ability as a researcher to even have Tom be willing to speak with me.

Overlapping roles and connections have, of course, been discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, but this small repetition also seems critical in explaining the underpinning notions of time that several of my participants appear to be discussing in the examples above. Many participants had known other participants and community partners for much of their lives, and this deep, felt sense of “knowing” someone, of having seen them in various life stages and understanding their role in the community and personal backstory, is something that is not easily replicated for a newcomer. When I asked Alice my recruiting question, we had the following interchange:

Alice: Are you in a rush like now? Because the reason I say that...I could call and see if James is at home, and see if you could go to talk to him while you're already here.

Amy: Let me look at my schedule.

Alice: Not saying that he's available.

Amy: And he may not want to; some people don't.

Alice: He's gonna want to when I finish talking to him.

Alice knew that she could rely on her friendship with James to cold call him in the middle of the day and that, if he was available, he would likely come over to talk to me - a complete stranger - on the strength of that friendship. This is exactly what happened. A few hours later, I returned to Alice's house, and James agreed to be a participant in the

study (Alice also sat in on his interview and occasionally added information during my interview with him). At one point, they had the following exchange when James was discussing the implied and overt racism in his experiences as a coach for the high school basketball team:

Alice: You dancing around being nice. Don't be nice. Go say it. Amy's all right.

James: Yeah I know, it's okay. She can do what she wishes, that's fine, but my martial arts training taught me to be temperate and try to be intellectual...People say, "Why don't you say what you wanted to say?" I like to know what I'm talking about before I speak. There are many ways of doing and I don't want to come across as one of these jilted lovers or something like that.

Alice also trusted in the strength of her friendship to be able to “call out” when she felt that James was circumventing a story she felt should be told in more detail. And James himself felt comfortable enough with their friendship to defend his approach to her in front of me on tape. In this case, my suspicion is that Alice vouching for my intent was considered a crucial step by all parties involved. “I don’t know you” for most of my participants meant “I don’t know your family, I don’t know where you come from, and I don’t know if you have my community’s best interest at heart.” In the case of two participants of color sharing their story with a white woman who was also from the region, the issue of racial divide adds another layer of complexity to trust; for me to be “all right” may have been a way to identify me as a white person who might be able to at least faithfully hear narratives related to race.

Place and space can also be very interconnected with time for multigenerational families in Abbyville. One particular example stands out; my interview with Alice took

place in a beautiful brick two-story on a small street that faced a neighboring park next to the river; when I entered her living room, I commented on the unusual wood mosaic pattern on the floor, and she shared that her grandfather had built the entire home by hand. In the 1990s, when this part of town flooded under the onslaught of twelve inches of rain in a three-day period, her house had been one of the few with only superficial damage because her grandfather had built it well above the requirements for flood stage. She had learned this information prior to the flood, visiting the local courthouse to learn more about her family home. Because of this detailed knowledge of the material details of the house's construction (she knew that it was built 16 feet above flood level based on historical records, well above the required 12 feet), Alice was able to successfully avoid having to make modifications to her home after the flood despite state workmen trying to convince her that it was necessary. Her familial connections, her own youth in the house, and her continued locality meant that her access to government records on the house translated into a very practical verbal defense at a particular kairotic moment. This knowledge and action, put into practice only by virtue of having lived, materially, in one location and taken advantage of localized information about that location, reveals how intertwined notions of time and place can allow for a kind of cultural literacy that is impossible when those two factors are lacking.

Finally, a brief side note on an existing anthropological framework that may help the reader understand the claims I make above from an anthropological perspective. The cultural structures that undergird the literate life of Abbyville appear to share some elements with what Edward T. Hall names "high-context cultures." First proposed by Hall in 1976 in his monograph *Beyond Culture* and since applied mainly in intercultural

communication studies for application in international business settings, high- and low-context have become helpful tags to apply to elements of cultural practice that require more or less oral/written communication and insider knowledge of the culture involved. Important to the concepts is that no culture is a binary; all culture, in this framework, will have both high- and low-context communicational elements. The framework asserts that high-context cultural elements are those which require an in-depth understanding of the cultural context of the actors involved, while low-context cultural elements are those which do not require intimate extant knowledge of cultural context:

High context cultures make greater distinctions between insiders and outsiders than low-context cultures do. People raised in high-context systems expect more of others than do the participants in low-context systems. When talking about something that they have on their minds, a high-context individual will expect his interlocutor to know what's bothering him, so that he doesn't have to be specific. The result is that he will talk around and around the point, in effect putting all the pieces in place except the crucial one. Placing it properly - this keystone - is the role of his interlocutor" (Hall 113).

What this overall framework adds holistically to the discussions above is the sense that rural culture is, like other cultures, built on rules that make sense for the way that people relate to one another in a given space and time. When everyone knows your business already and your family lives in a town that is roughly four square miles, you often do not have to add extraneous explanatory information; the context is *so* critical that it can be taken for granted, and it is only those who are not members of the community who require excess explanation of layers of embedded meaning. A shrug and an eye roll in the

middle of a conversation might be enough to reference a decades-old scandal during a discussion of civic relationships (not drawn from study data). Or, as came up during a discussion between James, Belle, and Alice, their home community was so deep, the network so interconnected, that they could not go out into Abbyville as teenagers in the 1960s without their parents already knowing about all their previous activities in town before they arrived back home. Of course, as this chapter also makes clear, breaks and disconnects happen between groups of people just as they do in every human community. The high-context elements of time and place in Abbyville culture are worth naming as such, and no small, interconnected network of literacy sponsorship can be truly understood without making a concerted effort to understand how geography, time, culture, history, and the flows of people have played a role in creating what exists in the ever-moving present tense.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I focus on a single period in Abbyville's history that came up across several participant narratives in order to provide a more concrete example of the ways in which high-context factors may affect the level of mobility certain individuals experience in moving between sponsored and sponsoring roles. I begin by providing an overview of Kentucky's racial history for the reader before moving on to participant-specific data as a way of attending to the contextual factors discussed in this section.

Kentucky's Racial History: A Brief Summary, Reconstruction-Present

Some historical background on Kentucky's place in the racial history of the United States may be helpful in understanding the narratives below; indeed, as the sections above discuss, it is crucial to have a more in-depth understanding of the

historical and social contexts in operation. Before the Civil War, slaveholding was less common in the state's Appalachian regions, but its urban centers and some of its flatter farming areas were economically dependent on slavery, and larger cities certainly served as hubs where the buying and selling of African Americans took place. In addition, the enslaved population grew rapidly in the 75 years preceding the Emancipation Proclamation. Greg Kocher writes that, in 1790, enslaved African Americans made up 6 percent of the state's population; by 1830, they comprised 24 percent of the total population of Kentucky (Kocher, para.7). Reflecting this checkered experience with slavery, Kentucky never declared an affiliation for the Confederacy during the Civil War; citizens of the state appeared deeply divided during this period. After struggles with the federal government during the civil war, many pro-union sympathizers in the state felt betrayed and turned away; ultimately, the state of Kentucky did not ratify the 13th amendment to abolish slavery until 1976 (Kocher).

In the postwar era, education offered to African Americans was equally checkered. Unlike many other Southern states, interracial education was not originally outlawed in Kentucky until 1904, well after the Civil War. During the period of 1904-1954, Kentucky's racial history was marked by the Day Law, a state-level ruling put into place mainly to stymie the efforts of Berea College, a small liberal arts school in the state built on principals of education for all men and women of all races. The Day Law declared it "unlawful for any person, corporation, or association of persons to maintain or operate any college, school, or institution where persons of the white and Negro races are both received as pupils for instruction" and further ruled that "...no private school could maintain an integrated branch within a twenty-five-mile radius of the parent institution"

(Wilson 83). After failing to gain its case in *Berea College v. Kentucky* in 1908, the College split its endowment and created the Lincoln Institute, located near Louisville, Kentucky, for the education of its black students, but education for African Americans suffered during this period, as Kentucky State, an HBCU, was not able to provide the diversity of majors available to white students at other institutions (Castrenze). While the Day Law was amended in 1950 to allow black students to attend white colleges if they could not find similar courses at Kentucky State College, the law was not struck down until 1954 (“Day Law Amendment Is Approved by House”).

When the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling went through in 1954, Kentucky state attorney general J.D. Buckman Jr. “...announced that the *Brown* ruling ‘knocks out the Day Law’ and ‘nullifies all requirements for segregation’” (K’Meyer 47). On the state level, Kentucky appeared to comply relatively well with federal orders to integrate, although levels of resistance varied greatly from town to town. In a *Time Magazine* article from September of 1955, 17 states in the South and mid-South were rated on how they were moving to comply (or not) with the *Brown* ruling to desegregate with “all due speed,” ranging from A (Missouri and West Virginia) to F (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina). Kentucky rated a B+ along with Oklahoma in this comparative rating (“Report Card: Progress of the States”). Jeffrey Hampton observes in his work *Leaving Children Behind: Black Education in Covington, Kentucky* that “By 1956, there was some form of integration in every school system in Kentucky” (Hampton 87). For some school systems in the state, there were no black students at all. A 1955 newspaper article claimed that “Integration is by no means a state-wide problem in Kentucky,” listing that the 42,052 children of color between 6 and

18 made up only 6 percent of the school-age census (Trout). To have integration formulated as a “problem” jars my contemporary ears, but it is numerically true that not all school districts in the state had to deal with integration on any in-depth level. Out of 223 K-12 school districts, only 158 had African American students; 38 districts had no African American children, while 27 districts had 10 or fewer each (Trout). This sweeping claim also does not delve into why there were so few African Americans left in rural school districts; in Western Kentucky in particular, campaigns of harassment and violence in the late 1800s had driven many African American farmers away from the areas they had called home previously (Wright 5).

Low levels of resistance continued throughout many Kentucky districts, the integration process seemed to go peacefully early on, with only two protests taking place out of 120 integrating districts. In this way, school desegregation proceeded relatively quietly among the 220 counties of the state. In Abbyville, students who were among the first class of African Americans to integrate into white schools said that, while they themselves were tense, there was no recorded outward display of racial prejudice during integration.

Despite this apparent peacefulness, the period following integration did not provide a full integration of the benefits of education for students of color. John A. Hardin explains:

The 55 black high schools that African American communities had supported under segregation were gradually transformed into different facilities or, in some cases, destroyed by neglect. Some black teachers were gradually reassigned from their segregated environments into integrated settings. Within most of these

settings, African American teachers were no longer visible to black students and in many circumstances not even to white students (Hardin 162–63).

In a more specific illustration of the effect of this ostensible “integration” on black faculty, Jeffrey Hampton observes in his work on African American education in Covington, Kentucky in 1965 that, “Upon arriving at Holmes that fall, blacks, who had been so concentrated in the Lincoln Grant facility, were swallowed up and dispersed in the physical size of the Holmes campus and a sea of white faces that outnumbered them many times over” (Hampton 96). More specifically, he details the transformation that occurred among black faculty; “...the number of teaching staff of color declined from 11.6% in 1954-55 to only 4.8% in 1988-89 while the number of black students in the Covington school system rose from 8.5% in 54-55 to 16.8% in 1988-89” (Hampton 97).

This problem of losing black professional talent was replicated across educational settings; as Berea College archivist Sharyn Mitchell observes, “Although blacks were recruited for their athletic prowess, they were overlooked at the coaching/teaching/owner/board room levels. Black teachers who excelled in their studies often chose not to teach as they could command higher pay in non-educational work environments” (Message to author 02 May 2019). George C. Wright also sums it up well; “All over Kentucky the desegregation of the public schools ultimately exacted a high price from Afro-Americans – the elimination of blacks as teachers and school administrators” (Wright 205). This particular area of racial history will be important the narrative section following this one, as it points to a larger trend of black educators being “reassigned” or slowly phased out of academic leadership roles during integration, at least in Kentucky.

School desegregation proceeded then, not always peacefully, not usually fairly, but such “progress” elides two other areas of concern for the state. As George C. Wright notes, while white newspapers in Louisville were congratulating themselves on the integration of education, “This idyllic white view of the positive changes occurring for blacks in Kentucky carried over to two areas – housing and employment – where blacks clearly were subjected to a continuation of racial discrimination” (196). The integration of housing at the state-level in particular was met with serious opposition; there continued to be black and white areas to most Kentucky towns. One case in Louisville stands out: Andrew and Charlotte Wade, an African American husband and wife, bought a house in the all-white Shively neighborhood of Louisville in 1954 with the help of white acquaintances and allies Carl and Anne Braden. They moved in with their 2-year old daughter, Rosemary, and were met with a campaign of harassment and violence ending with the dynamiting of the home by perpetrators who were never identified or charged with the crime (thankfully, no one was in the house at the time of the explosion). Ultimately, the Wades were forced to move back to West Louisville (K’Meyer 63–73). While the Shively neighborhood is now one of the most racially integrated in the city, Louisville does remain a racially divided city in the present time.

What is Kentucky’s racial present? No generalities can be drawn with regard to how individual citizens felt about integration historically; the state allowed desegregation of schools to go through, but town-by-town adherence to the law was extremely checkered, and mixing of neighborhoods was met with hostile resistance. The state is no exception to the widespread racial prejudice present in the South during and after the era of reconstruction, nor is it exempt from the effects of the current racial climate in the

United States writ large. Ultimately, Kentucky is indeed a border state - its mountainous, rural, and isolated geography near the Appalachian Mountains on one side, its constant traffic with the North via the Ohio River, and its flatland regions' ties to the slave culture of the South make it difficult to predict what any given Kentuckian in the 2000s may think about race without asking. Writer and thinker bell hooks contrasts her upbringing in the isolated rural hills of Kentucky and her childhood move to a segregated Kentucky town in her book, *Belonging: a Culture of Place*. She claims, "I can see now in retrospect that there were always two competing cultures in Kentucky, the world of mainstream white supremacist capitalist power and the world of defiant anarchy that championed freedom for everyone" (hooks 11). If true, this claim may best synthesize the complex history laid out above.

Abbyville was certainly situated within this state-level history. Unlike some other smaller rural towns, it did have its own school for African American students, begun about 1868 and named after a famous African American from the 1800s (I have anonymized the name of the school here by naming it after Elijah McCoy, famous for improving the steam engines of the 1800s). Statistics from the 1920s and 1930s show that, during that period, the McCoy School educated an average of 26 high school students and 117 elementary school students (statistics drawn from Abbyville's heritage newsletter). There were also a few one-room black schools in Abby County, though these numbers fluctuated and records are somewhat scarce for both white and black one-room schools from this period. 1921 listed 8 such one-room schools for African American students; 1927 listed four.

For the McCoy school, as in schools across the U.S., conditions were typically

lower quality than those experienced at the white school. The school went through three buildings in its 95-year tenure. The first, a brick building near the river built for the purpose, provided a poor learning environment for students. The president of the Board of Education in 1917 explained “The conditions in our Colored School are deplorable and the least said about it the better, but no blame can be attributed to our faithful and efficient principal and teachers...considering the handicap under which they are compelled to work by reason of the dilapidated old building which is inadequate in every respect” (Abbyville Heritage newsletter). The original structure was vacated in 1920 for a large brick house in town which had previously been used as the local hospital, and this building was in turn replaced by a new facility built in 1937 with federal funding. This building was utilized until the school closed; integration began with 10th-12th grade high school students in 1956, who were integrated into the town’s Abbyville High School, while the McCoy school continued to serve African American students grades 1-9 until the school system finally integrated fully in 1963. Local accounts of integration from both black and white residents do not detail any violence at the time of integration, but participants’ accounts were mixed on how the African-American community in town had responded to the process. For some, integration represented an equalization in terms of access to funding and better school materials. For others, the closing of the McCoy school resulted in a dilution of mentoring from black faculty, only some of whom were hired on into the main school system.

When placed against a larger state-level backdrop, Abbyville was similar to its civic counterparts in its participation in desegregation; however, as mentioned above, this lack of outward resistance did not bury the racial history that played out in access to

literacy sponsorship roles in the community during the 1970s and 1980s. The following section outlines the experiences of three participants in the study who identified as African American and how their experiences with K-12 education and in their professional lives in Abbyville both reflected and resisted the history outlined above.

Interlude on Positionality

Before moving on to the specific participant narratives that deal with access to sponsorship roles in Abbyville in the 1970s and 1980s, some repetition of my own positionality (covered in more detail in Chapter 2) seems necessary. Here, I, a white woman from the region who grew up working class, discuss what four participants of color had to say about the history of racial integration in Abbyville and their personal experiences coming back to their hometown. I do not take this on lightly. I am sharing narratives that are not my own, that cannot be my own. I fear that my own lack of knowledge and experience may cause me to tell these stories poorly or with a mitigating slant. My working-class rural Appalachian Irish-American background certainly informs how I see issues of power and privilege, but my own attempts to understand race will always be formed in a white body that moves through the world being seen as white, regardless of other cultural and economic markers that make my home life and worldview differ sharply from the assumed Midwestern ideal of the culture-less upper middle class white woman in the U.S. My goal in this section is to do full justice to the narratives that James, Alice, and Mary were kind enough to share; I hope that here I am not just adding to the scholarship on literacy sponsorship but am also bearing witness to an important history.

The personal data described above may not be directly relevant to my argument,

but it is relevant to how much I can be trusted. What *I* most desire for the sustainability of my region and its health is a place where all people from all backgrounds feel welcome. While I deny categorically the idea of the urban space as unequivocal utopia for feelings of welcome and belonging, I fully acknowledge the many kinds of racial and gendered hurt that have been and are still perpetrated in rural communities in the Southern and (less obvious) the Northern areas of the US. I am not immune to my own upbringing and all the baggage, bad and good, that may come with it. I have wondered if I have the right to speak about the African American experience in Abbyville, but it seems better to risk bungling a narrative that is not mine on paper in order to share it than to remain silent about it and its significance to Abbyville as a community. If I have failed to do these stories justice, I take that responsibility here and would hope to be educated further on a better way to approach them.

“I was ‘Overqualified’” - Insider/Outsider Status in Allowed Literacy Sponsorship Roles

In *Literacy in American Lives*, Deborah Brandt includes a chapter on African American literacy experiences, explaining that:

Over most of the twentieth century, however, few of the channels by which literacy was being stimulated and subsidized were equally open to African Americans. Further, because of entrenched racial discrimination in employment, African Americans who attained high-level literacy and advanced education often found that their skills did not have the same status and tradable value as those of the white population. The full worth of their literacy usually was honored only within the African American community itself. (Brandt, *Literacy in American Lives*, 106).

This section will draw primarily from three participant narratives to illustrate how the literacy sponsorship network in Abbyville is affected by sociocultural factors, particularly in terms of movement between sponsored and sponsoring roles. In these examples, resistance to change in the network came in the form of institutional racism in the 1970s and 1980s. Denying several African-American Abbyvillians access to professional literacy sponsorship roles after school integration affected the K-12 schooling faculty demographics in the community. Such experiences played a crucial role in shaping how these important and well-recognized agents of literacy sponsorship moved through their professional lives in Abbyville.

I do not believe that my audience will require an explanation of why the 16 white participants likely did not refer to race in their interviews, but the normalization of whiteness in our culture merits a brief mention. Race could be nearly “invisible” in Abbyville to those with white skin. As will be mentioned below, at least 92% of the residents in Abbyville are themselves white. With this kind of demographic makeup, white privilege is even more invisible than it would be in a more diverse setting. For example, issues such as poverty are not immediately connected to people of color because most of the poor people in Abbyville are still white, and it would be very easy to grow up there not understanding the ways whiteness confers some immediate, automatic privileges⁸. As will be seen below, this has not always been the case in the history of the town; however, the fact that white participants did not speak about issues of race directly is unsurprising, given that white Abbyville residents mirror the national norm described

⁸ See Crosley-Corcoran’s “Explaining White Privilege to a Broke White Person” for a simultaneously in-depth and easy-to-access discussion on the subject of white privilege for impoverished white people.

by Peggy McIntosh in the 1980s: “whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal” (McIntosh).

Five out of 21 participants in the study identified as black or African American. Of these five, four were natives of Abbyville and knew one another well; in fact, my interviews with James, Belle, and Mary all originated through Alice, who knew my husband and me from the time of his employment in the community⁹. James is a now-retired employee of the K-12 school system who worked as a coach for many years; Belle worked through the state’s department of Social Services supervising health services for two counties; Mary worked as a nurse and shift supervisor at the local hospital for many years; and Alice served in a variety of roles in the K-12 school system, including as a certified teacher running a “safe” room where students who had been removed from class for behavioral issues could continue to complete school work until their return.

These Abbyvillians emphasized an area of the town’s history that was not discussed elsewhere in the study data and which illuminates another aspect of the rural community literacy network under study. For most members of this group, a complicated negotiation ensued when they returned to Abbyville after gaining further educational and professional credentials that would typically merit their placement as literacy sponsors within the community. James and Alice related difficulties in attaining employment in the school system, while Mary discussed initial discriminatory behavior on the part of her new colleagues. While all three were highly successful in their careers and ultimately became valued community members with access to sponsoring roles within the literacy

⁹ The other African American participant, Bernice, lived in Frankton and was a relative newcomer to the Abbyville community

sponsorship network of Abbyville, these historical narratives provide an example of the ways that this community's long historical and cultural memory is an integral (if sometimes invisible) component in any given literacy sponsorship network, sometimes creating barriers (either permeable or not) for specific groups of people. For this group of participants, a moment of cultural flux related to race meant that being from Abbyville did not guarantee an easy re-entry or avenue to becoming literacy sponsors within the community.

Growing up in Abbyville, Alice began her elementary education in the segregated school system but was moved to an integrated elementary school a year or two into her education. She felt the loss of faculty who looked like her and understood her, and she spoke often in our interview about her feelings of loss as many of the black faculty chose to leave the area after integration. After graduating from Abby County High School in the early 1970s, Alice moved away from the area and obtained a job as a data entry operator for a large corporation, where she worked for 17 years. Despite this excellent professional background, she had difficulty finding a job when she moved back home in the 1980s to raise her son in a place, as she told the local newspaper in 2016, "where I knew people and people knew me" and take care of her mother, who was ill. In her interview with me, she shared:

"I was "overqualified," is what they said. But I'm qualified enough to work at the sheriff's department, because I tried to get a job down there at the county sheriff's department, where you take your county taxes. I can do that. I tried at the water department. I tried at the courthouse, and eventually, I made it my mission to try every daggon' job, every place in Abbyville. I went to all three

banks, I went to every gas station... I went through the school system, and I kept after them. It took them eight years to finally give me a job. I was a teacher's aide. I was head data entry operator for Rockwell International in Columbus, Ohio, where Governor Regan flew in to give us - and all I can get is a teacher's aide job.”

As shared in previous chapters, after gaining further education and through her persistence working in the school system, Alice was eventually able to work her way into a full-time teaching position operating the high school’s self-contained room for students with behavior problems, where she saw over and over again how crucial her role as one of the only black faculty in the school was for students. Prior to her role in the high school and during her time as a teacher’s aide for one of the town’s elementary schools, she helped to bridge cultural gaps between teachers and incoming students. During a kindergarten program to help students begin the transition into school, teachers approached her with a simple problem; they were unable to get children of color to provide a home phone number. She explained:

So...maybe two or three days into it, I had a few teachers come to me because I was the only African American working within this school system [aside from one teacher working in a contained unit]...so they came to ask me and I said, well you asked them “what's your phone number,” and they're going to tell you they don't have a phone. They said, “that's what they said; and then their parents give me a phone number.” I said, if you ask my son John, what's your phone number, he's going to tell you he don't have a phone. “My mama got a phone, my daddy got a phone, but I don't have a phone, because I don't pay any bills. They pay the

phone bills.” I said so that's the difference, so you need to ask them “what's your parents' phone number?” They said once they started asking that, then they could get that information that they needed... you gotta be a little bit more specific.

Over and over, she saw her role in the school system as providing a crucial communicative bridge between students of color and teachers who were overwhelmingly white.

This is a simple translation, but it was important to building an understanding between white teachers and their students of color. When a white teacher, who already holds power in granting literacy sponsorship to students of color, cannot obtain basic home information from students of color, the racial history of the U.S. creates a moment fraught with tension. Some teachers may assume a lack of understanding on their own part, but others might assume that such moments of disconnect are on the part of the child; that, somehow, it is the child's aptitude or intelligence that is in question rather than the teacher's lack of cultural understanding. Simple moments of cultural misunderstanding can greatly affect how a child is treated within their educational system, and Alice understood herself as (and was seen as) an important translator for two communities who did not always communicate easily. In this way, being able to attain a literacy sponsorship role as a faculty member was absolutely critical for Alice, the white faculty members, and the children in terms of cultural translation.

Alice's sense of the cultural disparities between how children of color were raised and how white children were raised made her believe, strongly, that students of color needed teachers who understood their background. For Alice, taking on a sponsorship role in the school system was an important step in addressing the gap she

saw rising up from the way Abbyville's approach to integration had gone; the African American school in town was closed, and many of the black faculty moved away, making them part of the Great Migration (1916-1970) of African American citizens from the South to the North and the West Coast of the United States. George C. Wright explains that "Like their counterparts farther south, black Kentuckians were migrating from rural areas to cities both large and small within the state," concentrating in larger cities and leaving behind more rural areas (2). As noted in the previous section, Alice's narrative of the faculty shifts due to integration matches with those of other cities in Kentucky. While most cities in the state of Kentucky did not have violent or physical resistance to integration in the same way that those of the Deep South did, the city-by-city response to integration was varied. Alice's fight to be accepted as part of the literacy sponsorship network in the town suggests that the trend of black faculty moving away from school systems during integration (see previous section) may have also been at play in Abbyville when the McCoy school closed.

While Alice spent her entire childhood in Abbyville, James came to Abbyville from Washington State at the age of five. His parents put him on a train from Washington back to the mid-South, and his grandparents picked him up and brought him back to Abbyville. His parents followed soon after. James grew up working and being educated as one of Abbyville's own. He went on to immediate success post-high school, graduating in 1964, attending college and becoming an All-American baseball player, playing semi-pro football for a year, serving in Vietnam with the Air Force, graduating from a large school in the region with a master's degree, and then moving back home. Like Alice, James made the decision to stay near Abbyville to take care of his aging parents. Unlike Alice,

James was able to gain employment at a local elementary school working with special needs children, after which he was offered a position at the local high school working with at-risk students. He initiated a highly successful work experience program for his students and also coached what became a winning middle school basketball and the high school freshman football team, ensuring that all students kept their GPA and behavior in line and offering after-school tutoring to help them meet his expectations.

Based on this academic and athletic record of success, James seemed primed to become head coach when the job came open: "They had some vacancies that would open up along the line and stuff like that and everybody was supposed to move up because they had made a statement... [the head coach] retired and so I'm next in line." Despite this standard expectation and procedure within the community, this time, a coaching search was announced. When James arrived for his interview, he was the only person dressed in a suit:

I was the only one dressed appropriately, whatever, and this still stands out in my mind. One of the people that was on the board asked me, "Where are you preaching tonight?" See, a lot of people don't understand the context of that because that is looked upon as a kind of a slur to your person as far as, not directly racial but you can say from the standard of living or whatever, "Where are you preaching tonight" instead of being someone applying for a job or whatever. You can look at it any way you want because I cannot get inside their mind and know what they're thinking. I'm not trying to do that.

During the interview, James highlighted his successes, gave paper copies summarizing his successes to the committee, and was told that they would let him know. After the

interview, he went to a nearby convenience store only to hear from a fellow community member that a new head coach had already been hired from out of town.

That's somebody from outside the system. I said, "Well okay." I've been around long enough to know what the deal was there. That didn't work out too well for me. They lost a lot and I had a lot of kids and a lot of parents that were very upset about it.

For James, what had seemed an expected insider-track progression into a head coaching job (very common at the time in Kentucky school districts) became a block to his continued professional visibility in the community. While James generously and emphatically did not want to be seen as making assumptions surrounding the hiring process, the circumstances (his strong track record with athletes, at least one committee member's flippant attitude during his interview, the immediate news that an outside candidate had already been hired) implied strongly that his race may have been a deciding factor in not receiving a promotion.

Despite being denied the opportunity to advance to a head coach position, James remained in the community, continuing to mentor students through a mix of academic and athletic opportunities in the school system until his retirement. His proudest accomplishment was his role as literacy sponsor to at-risk youth in the community:

one of the things I'm most proud of with that was that I was put in the position to use my own ideas as to what might work because when I first started out, the attrition rate as far as students who would come in who are at risk... They were losing, out of every ten students that would come in there, we were losing eight and after my first year, I got it down to where it was totally reversed so we were

keeping eight out of ten - and then there was some years in between where we didn't lose anyone. I'm most proud of that. I was invited to participate in some state-wide things and I spoke in a convention about what we were doing and some of those ideas had been adopted and implemented state-wide. They didn't have my name on them but I know where they came from. That's okay, like the saying goes, the most important thing is not who did it but how it was done and that it was actually done.

In fact, I learned later that James was still serving in the school system when my husband worked there; he continued to run an after-school program with at-risk youth. James' mixed emphases on both physical and intellectual attainment made him a great resource to at-risk youth; he saw physical involvement as crucial to attaining intellectual discipline and often used one focus to strengthen another. Able to use his own theories and ideas to reach students, James continued to excel as an educator in the community. He used the analogy of a man walking along the beach throwing starfish back into the ocean for his work with at-risk youth: "It makes a difference to that one."

In contrast to James and Alice's stories, Mary was able to gain immediate access to a job that suited her experience and training. Mary's father was the principal of the McCoy school in Abbyville, and her mother was a teacher at the same school. She discussed their firm emphasis on education for all their children, stating "They would do whatever they could because they valued education and they knew then that that was the only thing that would open doors for us...was that you had a degree." In addition to formal schooling, Mary's parents ensured that she and her sister went to larger cities to take advantage of museums, cultural exhibitions, and concerts, determined that they

should know as much about the world as possible. She described her experiences in the segregated school system as a mixed bag; she valued the ways that “the teachers tried to make the most of it because you can’t always change City Hall...” but that:

...it was separate and unequal because when the high school got new typewriters we got their used. When they got new books, we got the used. That's the way it was. We accepted that because that's the way it was. That was the excuse, when we said why, because that's the way it is.

Mary’s parents emphasized educational attainment as an absolute necessity for their children – a way to open doors in an unfair society. Both continued to be literacy sponsors in a professionalized role in the community for at least some period after integration took place; Mary’s father took a position as a science teacher at the junior high school (a step down from his previous role) until his early death from cancer, and her mother held a position, first as a elementary teacher and then as a librarian at another elementary school after earning her MLS.

When she returned to her hometown after receiving a bachelor’s degree at Ohio State University in nursing in 1965, Mary experienced discrimination from peers at the local hospital who did not want to share shifts with her. At the same time, she credited her education with what happened next: “...the lady hired me for another shift because I had a bachelor of science in nursing. None of the rest of them had it. So then... when I started here, education still opened doors.” In this case, the sponsorship Mary’s parents had worked so hard to give her and her sister, along with her own achievements in college, opened up the opportunity to use her professional skills in her home community and get her foot in as the first African American nurse to ever work at the hospital. The

extra certification of her BN degree was a powerful tool in achieving a position, but Mary's story suggests that she had to be more qualified than the other nurses in order to overcome the racialized norms of the area. In this case, gaining access to the professional role of nurse seemed to require that she be "more" than would be expected of a white candidate for the position in order to break this particular barrier: more educated, more competent. Hired initially as a third-shift nurse because some staff did not want to work first shift with her, Mary believed that her competency overcame many of these socialized barriers as she "proved" herself. She ended up becoming the shift supervisor in her long career at the hospital. Of her experience, she concluded: "...you can't always change people. Some you can."

Now retired, Mary has not been idle. A valued volunteer in the community, she detailed some of the activities she had engaged in since leaving her professional role:

I just got involved in everything. The food pantry, literacy -I came here [our interview was in the local library] for classes with students, I did transportation for people to Frankton for dialysis and medical appointments. I was on the board at senior citizen center. I was on one of the citizen committees at one of the nursing homes. The scholarship committee through the United Methodist Church - I'm still on that - plus my church. Let's see, well I've served on, let's see, trying to think what the current name of it is. It's the local community fund that gives money to things in the community - I was on that. Then I've been on things for the school, boards and things like that. I finally had to cut back.

Despite having "cut back" on her activities, on the day of our interview, we had to make sure to end our time together on time so that Mary could make it for her shift at the

Salvation Army.

As a retiree, Mary feels known and valued by Abbyville for her various roles and commitments over the years, and my interactions with other Abbyville citizens seemed to bear this out. When I asked the Abbyville museum whether they had any resources on what happened during desegregation in town, Mary and Alice were immediately recommended to me as the best community resources; in fact, both were recommended to me as participants multiple times during the snowball recruitment phase of the study.

Combined with the history of desegregation in Abbyville, the three stories above seem to reveal a situation where a separate-and-unequal sponsorship network (the segregated school system) was dismantled, but the remaining network served some gatekeeping functions for access to literacy sponsorship roles. James and Alice's narratives reveal a particular set of issues. They were able to access the networks of literacy sponsorship as those who were "sponsored" by the community network, giving this literacy sponsorship network the credit of having offered education for its youth of color during a contentious historical period; however, in coming back after gaining education and experience, their ability to access sponsorship roles themselves as professionals was more limited. Such experiences point to what Brandt has named the "stratification of opportunity" that "continues to organize access and reward in literacy and learning" (*Literacy in American Lives* 169). While James was able to work with "the kids nobody wanted" and excelled at this professional role, being passed over for head coach blocked him from moving forward in his endeavors to educate young athletes (although the barriers to professional mobility did not lessen the extent of his achievements). It took Alice years to become a full teacher at Abby County High School,

and the cultural conversations she had to have with her fellow teachers in her role as teachers aide before that point to the very real cultural gulfs that needed to be spanned in the school system, not just during desegregation but long after and in the present time. While Mary was also able to gain a job when moving home due to her education level and ultimately received a promotion, she endured workplace discrimination until she could “win over” enough white colleagues.

In their efforts to come back home and continue to be near family, these professionals endured much. As Abbyville natives, Mary, Alice, and James would seem to have enough insider status to have been as valued by Abbyville all along as they are now; all are recognized as accomplished, esteemed Abbyville residents who have contributed greatly to the community. On Alice’s wall sits a citizenship award for both her efforts to lobby in Washington D.C. after the town flooded in the ‘90s and for her many editorials educating the town about its accomplished black citizens throughout history. All three have now been featured in the local newspaper in articles that share parts of their stories and laud their continued civic involvement. But because of racial structures in the USA and the historical moment of their hiring, they had to find ways to “earn” a place in the literacy sponsorship structure.

Most members of this core group emphasized a struggle to re-assimilate - through access to jobs, social acceptance, and career advancement - back into their hometown when they returned home. For these three, the same community values articulated in Chapter 3 governed their choices for their careers and for their retirement. For James, the ability to work with “the kids no one wanted” in the county school system became his driving mission; for Alice, a career of civic involvement both at the volunteer level and,

later, as a teacher in the school system ultimately led to her recognition with a community service award from the citizens of Abbyville; and for Mary, years of service as a night shift supervisor at the local hospital culminated in her retirement and continued service as a volunteer at her local church and several nonprofit organizations in town. Mary, James, and Alice all made a difference to their town – by gaining access to literacy sponsorship roles, they were able to educate not only the populations they worked with directly but also their coworkers and other peers.

The narratives above show that, at least for these three participants, the ability to move into the sponsorship network of the 1970s and 1980s was not completely blocked; rather, a series of quiet barriers were put into place behind the scenes that made their entry and/or advancement difficult. Factors that continue to make rural America be seen as a “white” space are beyond the scope of this dissertation; however, statistically, there has not been a shift in the demographic makeup of the town or the K-12 faculty since the time of Mary, James, and Alice’s experiences. Based on the state’s report card for the Abby County school district, the student body as of the 2016-2017 year *is* mostly white: 92.3% were listed as white, 1.7% as African American, 3.4% Hispanic, .3% Asian, .2% Native American or Pacific Islander, and 2.1% as two or more races. However, these statistics do show that 7% of the student body is non-white in terms of classification. Unfortunately, similar to the situation shared in Hampton’s work in the historical section above, the faculty body still does not represent the student body in terms of overall racial diversity. Of 179 teachers listed in the school’s state report card for 2016-2017, there were 0 faculty of any other race listed, meaning that Alice’s retirement three years ago left a complete gap in faculty diversity in the school system. The factors for the

persistence of people of color moving away from Abbyville are multivaried of course but, combined with the actions taken during the desegregation of the school system, the narratives above suggest that the literacy sponsorship network in this community may, for whatever reason or reasons, still be affected by the historical events that originally caused the initial exodus of black educators from this particular literacy sponsorship network.

What this section also points to are messy issues of belonging at stake in the cultural and historical context of Abbyville. James, Mary, and Alice truly *belong* in Abbyville, but as a group, James and Alice in particular worried about the sustainability of the community and the black community in particular based on their own personal struggles gaining access to the network as sponsors. Alice and James were both present during Belle's interview (along with a community friend who was not a participant in the study), and the following conversation occurred:

Belle: And young people are going to go where there's going to be ...

James: Opportunities ...

Belle: Yes, and they're going to open and continue to open for them.

James: And not only opportunities, but in addition, opportunities for advancement. Rather than something that's just going to be ... You know, you can only go so far.

While each of the study participants also expressed these concerns for white youth in the community, they all felt that the black community they had experienced as youth no longer existed in the same way. James and Belle also had this interchange:

Belle: There's a lot of young people that have left the community ...

James: Absolutely ...

Belle: And if there was something available, even if they stayed maybe five years to get their feet in the ground.

James: See the other thing that that does too, that gives some of the younger people coming up. Kind of like, we had role models. And they can look at these people and say, "Oh! This is how they do it." And it's working. Rather than going out here and standing on a corner...It's frustrating sometimes, you know. I was telling - we were brought up in a time where the community, like the African proverb, you know they raise the child. Careful to tell me what to do and vice versa.

Belle: And you got that from them by the time you got home – some of them didn't even have a phone.

James: But they still found out. I still don't know how that happened.

This group of participants then went on to relate the ways that their community had both encouraged and policed their behavior when they were young, relating some of the same types of stories that white participants gave about being raised in a tight-knit community.

For these participants, some of the qualities that had made their own upbringing strong – multiple role models, a tight-knit community that cared for them as youth – seemed to be slipping away from the youth of color they were now meeting. While their concerns mirrored those raised by the rest of the town's literacy sponsors who are pursuing the WorkReady application for the town, this group of participants had particularly seen a tightly knit black community slip away during their lifetime. The black educators they had relied on and learned from were gone, replaced by an integrated

system that gave everyone “the same” opportunities but did not provide black mentorship for young people of color. Their concerns for the sustainability of the town, then, were related to both cultural openness and being able to see around difference but also to keeping the youth in town, close to home – local.

These stories make clear that one might receive services from a literacy sponsorship network but not be able to move porously between sponsored and sponsoring roles, and this lack of porosity affected a sense of belonging to the whole community. Mary mentioned how the history of segregation mattered deeply to her but noted that her own children seemed to think it didn’t matter, that the past was over. For this group, issues of who might feel that they did or did not belong in Abbyville mattered, and such issues did crop up elsewhere in the interview data, though other participants did not go into the same level of detail.

James, Mary, and Alice all lived through a period of massive societal change, both locally and nationally. James and Mary both grew up in a segregated Abbyville; Mary graduated from a segregated system, James transitioned to the integrated city school during high school, and Alice began school in a segregated system with a cohort of black students and teachers and then transitioned to a mostly white elementary school during phased desegregation. While they were “welcome” in the sense that they received literacy sponsorship from the town’s educational system without question, coming home to be a professional in that same network proved challenging.

Conclusion

This chapter’s focus on space and time, and on a particular moment in time that affected access to sponsoring roles within Abbyville’s literacy sponsorship network,

helps flesh out a concern that many of my participants raised: that those who come in to rural areas from urban universities and organizations often underrate the cultural sub-layers upon which the network is built. As mentioned in chapter 3, the network map from Chapter 2 is only helpful in identifying one layer of relational and cultural webbing that makes up the undergirding in this particular literacy sponsorship network. One's personal, familial, religious, and educational connections create a series of connections and breakages to individual and networked organizations, and very few assumptions can be made about where connections or breakages will occur. The theoretical work of intersectionality makes it obvious that being a white woman originally from a rural area is not the same as being a black woman also from the same rural area, but to stop there unnecessarily limits a conversation about community literacies. In a town as small as Abbyville, just as racial, cultural, or economic differences create breakages, the alignment that individuals experience across other values that are more than just professional or cultural - shared civic goals; religion, shared football games, children in the same classrooms, stubbornness in the face of opposition because of love of place and family - such values can also create connections that can erode the differences that might otherwise lock people away from one another in a larger metropolitan setting where it is easier to "get away" from people who may be different than oneself.

Understanding these moments of connection and breakage between individuals and organizations helps continue to complicate and frame how our field looks at literacy sponsorship. Within the more nuanced context of daily life, it is sometimes hard to distinguish at what point a community's network will resist changes and porous spots where it will allow new perspectives in, but remaining aware of the fact that each

network has not merely points of resistance but also areas of porosity expands what we expect to see when researching community literacy contexts. The three participants who shared narratives around the process of desegregation in Abbyville met resistance in their employment process, but that resistance did break down in certain cases (an eventual certified teaching job for Alice, colleagues' respect for Mary), meaning that participants could weave their way into the sponsorship network given time.

For James and Alice in particular, the idea of "open-mindedness" was what they most wanted for their hometown; to have a power structure that maintained the collective care of community members for one another while allowing for more diverse perspectives and ways of being in professional roles of offering sponsorship. They both noted the need for more jobs to encourage all graduating high schoolers to stay, but implicit in these arguments was the idea that particularly children of color did not stay in their home community after graduating. Alice explained:

this is something that's kind of been on my mind since I retired. See, I've been running around Abbyville, and I'm going in a variety of stores and shopping and I don't see any black faces working there. I'm like "Oh my God." You know, "What is this?" You know, we're in 2017 now, and we've had lots of African American children over the years that just can't seem to get a job where they live at.

These trends are multifaceted; an emphasis on metropolitan ways of living, continued racial prejudice, the limited job availability to all new graduates already discussed in Chapter 3, and many other factors may be at play. What needs to be emphasized, however, is that this group of participants in particular desired that children of color who grew up in Abbyville could feel like they had mentors and could stay and be contributing

citizens to their home communities.

Incidentally, this same goal was reiterated by Alanna, the youngest participant in the study, a white woman in her mid-20s who expressed a wish that her upbringing had exposed her to more diversity:

But what I didn't learn a lot in high school was the cultural differences. We kind of did, but it wasn't ... I didn't realize how big of a difference it was until I actually moved out into a different state, or actually went to boot camp and was living with 87 females that were all from different places... We were all raised differently. We were all raised in different communities.

For Alanna, not quite knowing how to interact with colleagues from very different environments – not having a baseline sense of how to approach new cultural situations – made her transition into her Navy career more difficult than she expected. She talked about the ways that her colleagues from the Philippines had been raised and stressed that her education had not prepared her for interacting with people who were very culturally different from her. The job skills she most wanted from her school literacy sponsorship were those that would help her navigate a diverse world, which adds a note of complexity to the workforce skills discussed in Chapter 3 as part of the WorkReady town application process for Abbyville.

The projects outlined in Chapter Three - the completed efforts to house a community college branch and the ongoing efforts to meet Work Ready Community requirements – were efforts to address some parts of the issues raised above.

Collaborating to provide adequate education, training, and employment for all citizens are goals that the literacy sponsorship network in Abbyville already has on their radar.

Missing from this dissertation due to lack of space and time are the very real efforts to improve early childhood education for impoverished families and increase health and family outreach to “underserved” sections of town, and the heroic efforts to improve public health in the town’s needle exchange program as the heroin epidemic continues to hit Kentucky towns hard.

In the pursuit of those larger goals, however, the narratives above add a call to engage in more aggressive pursuit of a culturally diverse education (via hiring processes and through encouraging explicit curricula on local, national, and international cultural diversity) to enable graduates and citizens to interact with a broad range of people groups throughout the globe, both for the graduates who will leave the town and to create a sense of belonging and encouragement for youth of all backgrounds who might stay. For Alice, encouraging youth to come back home is a whole-community task that is not about one race versus another. For all children, she felt that the kinds of jobs and volunteer opportunities they are able to receive in their schooling:

It's not just African American children, it's all our children, because it seems like the only place our children can get a job is at McDonald's, Hardee's - our children need to be working at Rite Aid as a clerk, cashier. Our children need to be working in doctor's offices. Don't make them just go work. I have yet to see a high school student working at the public library. Why aren't they? They want to go to school to be a librarian, you know?

There were many other ways that participants across the study stressed the importance of context (historical events, local knowledge, a sense of place and space)

during this project. I have not had sufficient space to discuss the ways that the farming community embraces literacy, nor the shifts in academic positionality required to think well about those literacies (see Goldblatt and Jolliffe). I have also not had time to talk about the personal histories shared by many participants that they viewed as critical to the present-tense of the literacy sponsorship network in Abbyville. It is important, then to see the ways that history layers over the network map from Chapter 2 and the present-tense narratives of collaboration detailed in Chapter 3. Each represents only one layer to a very dense structure built on, surrounded by, and affected daily by prior histories and narratives. Without placing human narrative alongside history and understanding the locales in which those narratives and histories were created, it is impossible to draw a reasonably complete picture understanding of any community's literacy sponsorship network.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: MUSINGS FROM A PILOT STUDY: RESEARCHING RURAL LITERACY SPONSORSHIP NETWORKS

The Short Version

I wanted to go listen, in person, to rural people who are actors in their local community literacy sponsorship network and who by and large do not work in a university setting, hear what they said, code for common themes, and see if their words might tell me something new about literacy sponsorship in some kind of evidence-based way. I also wanted to visualize the dense relationships I saw because visual evidence is helpful and seriously underutilized in the humanities.

I did that to the best of my ability, and then I wrote it all down here.

The Long Version

In the previous four chapters, I showcase the results of a pilot study to explore potential future directions for the study of literacy sponsorship. To briefly review: Chapter 1 situated the study among scholarship related to New Literacy Studies, Rural Literacies, and complexity theories; Chapter 2 attended to methodologies and my own positionality to the project and discussed pilot efforts to visualize the network. Chapter 3 emphasized the current network of literacy sponsorship in Abbyville using collaborative efforts to support higher education and workforce development in the town as standout examples of that network's operations. Chapter 4 then complicated this present-tense collaborative picture, adding dimensions of time, culture,

place and history by discussing the narratives of several African American participants who struggled to attain professional sponsoring roles in the 1970s and 1980s. In this conclusion, I reflect on the overall results of the study and explain insights that may be applicable to studies

focusing on rural literacy sponsorship networks.

Answering Calls for Studies in Networked Literacy Sponsorship

As discussed in Chapter 1 in more detail, I find persuasive Goldblatt's call for more attention to the networks of literacy sponsorship (Goldblatt, "Imagine a Schoolyard"). Literacy sponsors, these benevolent or nefarious agents that disseminate, circulate, repress, or fold literacy into neat origami swans for consumption by humans, do not themselves operate in a vacuum. These institutions are staffed by human beings who are also the recipients of sponsorship that circulates throughout a material, social, and historical, and culturally connected network of human habitation. In addition, the kinds of dense literacy sponsorship networks I had known in my early life in a rural town and my nonprofit career in more urbanized spaces did not yet seem to be adequately represented in the scholarship. I also wanted to put a rural community at the forefront of the study to try and add to the limited literacy sponsorship research already in place on smaller communities.

I have cast my net widely here. This dissertation moves through a background net of theories and baseline scholarship at the beginning, sets up some strict methodological parameters in chapter 2, and then describes a few instances of the town's past and present that seem instructive to how we think about literacy sponsorship, particularly for rural areas. My goal here is to thickly describe a dense network in order to underline one

example of how rural literacy sponsorship can happen in community. As a result, I am making a few targeted suggestions to continue adding to how we think about literacy sponsorship in more networked ways that take into account relationship, materiality, time, and culture.

1) Density of rural community literacy networks. In a small town, financial resources are often less prolific than in urban areas; a single service may do the work that is spread among multiple organizations in a larger community. Because of this structural difference, understanding and mapping what relationships already exist between organizations is crucial to ensuring that potential university partnerships are beneficial to the community. In addition, the notions of history, time, culture, and place that Brandt outlines as elements in individual sponsorship also replicate on a massive scale in each community locale, adding another relational layer of depth to any given literacy sponsorship network. The organizational map in Chapter 2, the community collaborations outlined in Chapter 3, and the interweaving of cultural and historical bias described in Chapter 4 all work together to represent, at least partially, a more complex whole that cannot be replicated fully in writing and provide a pilot effort at developing a more concrete method for representing community mapping work in terms of layers for scholars in our field.

2) Overlapping Roles and Positions. My first claim helps explain my second, dealt with in detail in Chapter 3. In an urban area, anonymity is assumed; I can visit Kroger after work and be pleasantly surprised if I see someone I know. In the small rural town where I now live, I am guaranteed to see multiple coworkers in passing during the day, pass them again as they leave the daycare and I enter, and then chat with them at a local farmer's

market on a Saturday while our children (who go to daycare together) spontaneously play. This repeated, incidental contact over time means that I am well “known” by these folks even if we do not have long heart-to-hearts each week. They know me as mother, writing center director, and lavender enthusiast merely by living in my vicinity.

The study data from Chapter 3 also discusses the ways in which participants inhabit multiple community roles simultaneously, continuing to trouble the distinction between professional “literacy sponsors” and those who are merely sponsored. This dense positionality to a community affects the operation of the literacy sponsorship network in Abbyville in multiple ways. A daily give and take blurs the boundaries between institutional and personal involvement with literacy in the town and between local, regional, and global concerns. Without attending at least somewhat to the relational sublayers that operate in these multiple community roles, scholars in our field may struggle to understand the otherwise seemingly obscure operations of smaller literacy sponsorship networks that do actively attend to those sublayers.

3) Access and Barriers to Sponsoring Roles. Deborah Brandt discusses literacy as a “key resource, a raw material, for the American economy of the twentieth century, and that in turn has had untold impact on the ways that literacy is accessed, learned, and rewarded – it affects the materials we use for literacy, the routes we have or don’t have to learning it, the public meanings that are ascribed to it, the social inequities that cling to it” (*Literacy in American Lives* 188). There are usually injustices in literacy sponsorship as in every other aspect of life, and my pilot study is no exception. In this case, the ways that the African American participants in the study gained access (or not) to sponsorship roles in the community after educational integration had taken place speaks to the ways

in which small communities may police sponsorship roles in ways that restrict certain individuals' ability to move freely between the role of sponsored and sponsoring.

In this case, then, access to literacy sponsorship roles, so typically porous in the constant overlap of rural community life, may serve a further gatekeeping function that points to the cultural, historical, and place-based elements that are less quickly changed than in metropolitan areas that appear to see time as more quickly-flowing than in rural communities; however, the very factors that typically create porosity in sponsored/sponsoring roles can also help erode those barriers. Once one is "known" and accepted, other commonalities can create certain kinds of individual trust even when the overall cultural barrier is not removed. Ultimately, then, resistance to change is sometimes predicated on who is initiating the change, though this is not generalizable.

4) The central importance of researcher positionality, methodology, and ethics.

Because of the points I make above, I believe that research into rural literacy sponsorship networks makes it imperative that the researcher have a clearly articulated ethical and methodological frame, including methodologies that privilege close listening and a firm commitment to representing the community in rich detail. Rural areas have been inundated with people who "come to teach" them things they already know, to "help set goals" for initiatives leaders may already be pursuing; in short, 21st century rural areas as represented both in my experience and in the literature are quite accustomed to outsiders who do not listen well. On the other hand, rural areas are also tight-knit communities, and an insider stance can be both strength and weakness for a researcher. For any researcher who wants to come into a rural community and study the network as a whole, coming to a project with a sense of humility and the ability to learn from participants is not optional

or something that can be relegated to a concluding section or one-off paragraph. Because of this, and because I myself am relatively new to participant-based research, this project spends Chapter 2 discussing background literature on ethics and methodology as well as my own stance and positionality toward the region before introducing the research site. The development of humility, then, can at least be encouraged by a rigorous attention to reflexivity and context in project development; it is at least more difficult to overlook researcher bias and obvious historical community events if significant sections are dedicated to relating them.

At the same time, many of the methodologies I researched in developing this project were not an exact fit for the kind of work I wanted to construct. I could not parachute into Abbyville, proclaim myself knowledgeable, and demand more time from already busy people to attempt some sort of vague new community project. A listening stance, then, ended up being one of the best checks on the project's structure. For example, attracted by the values of PAR, I originally designed a project that would have a participatory 2nd phase; after a few interviews, I figured out that a participatory project would only replicate work that was already being done and add work to already heavy loads. A rigorous adherence to one kind of model for doing this research would have resulted in me embarrassing myself multiple times, and my later interviews only confirmed this idea for me as I learned more and more just how much work was being done and how interconnected community members already were to one another.

5) Pilot Mapping Exercise - In this project, I have also suggested that we add more visual methods to community literacy work. To understand communities effectively is to be able to represent them more holistically, however many other dimensions we may

have to stack on top of a visualization to make it fly. I created an experimental map of the network described by participants, and I see multiple ways that more attention to practical aspects of mapping could be helpful in political applications for the work of New Literacy Studies. To develop more easily understood representations of the work we do eases the translation of our work beyond “literacy is complicated” and into something that a politician with power to change the educational system can comprehend in a targeted, 15 minute meeting. At the same time, my “simple” visualization is then layered over by two detailed narrative chapters that explain how incomplete the network visualization is, resulting in a bit of a theoretical quagmire. I demand easily portable visualizations despite the fact that my work insists that no visualization is complete. Regardless, my conviction that we must translate literacy work to outside audiences remains, and I hope that future work will let me and others in the field continue to think about how to reach public audiences with our work and make clear how that work can be utilized in a day-to-day environment.

In the end analysis, I am a public scholar - what matters most to me is that barriers of access to various kinds of literacy are lowered, and what I want most is for my scholarship to have easily understood value and application for those outside the university. At the same time, I want to make visible and understandable the mess and complexity of literacy as a concept, and, ultimately, I do not see these twinned goals as dichotomous. At the same time, this project has enforced for me that “participatory” methods are not always so participatory, and that I must attend to what I am asking of participants and what they can reasonably expect to get in return from anything I ask of them. In this case of this project, a one-hour interview ultimately was more than enough

of a commitment for busy community members who would likely see little tangible result from talking with some researcher from the University of Louisville.

With sufficient attention to the different audiences with a stake in literacy theorization and policymaking, attending simultaneously to pushing the boundaries of what “counts” as literacy and to helping the average citizen understand a canned version of that complexity are both laudable uses of academic time, though the different products that will reach those audiences are sometimes difficult to develop. I have spoken with the Kentucky Association of Counties about the results of the mapping efforts, and they were interested in discussing the idea for application across county contexts to help residents understand how the county government systems operate across the state. I am planning to send them an anonymized copy of the map, suggesting applications for civic governments in small towns to help clarify various available services to citizens who might not know what is available. For instance, I personally had no idea what the difference between a city mayor and a county judge executive was in terms of their duties and, as a citizen, would have had trouble advocating for myself or knowing which community services served what purpose. I cannot imagine that I am the only state resident who would benefit from a clearer sense of what services are available across a series of small community networks.

In terms of intervening in the area of community literacy studies, I hope that listening closely to what community members in Abbyville said about their own goals for the town’s literacy has yielded a few insights for how we might approach the work of understanding literacy sponsorship networks more broadly, particularly when thinking about rural communities.

Study Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, I am aware that what I have tried to do here is a bit ambitious for a dissertation. Really solid work in community literacy on the level of Shirley Brice Heath, David Barton and Mary Hamilton, and Deborah Brandt (whom I consider aspirational models for the kind of project I am doing) requires years and years of in-depth study, knowledge, and participation in a community, and I do not feel that I am able to live up to those aspirations here. There are gaps resulting from my lack of locality, the demands on my time, my geographical distance from my research site, and the lockstep march through exams, prospectus, and dissertation production that is so at odds with the time-intensive, shifting, and inexact work of mapping a community's literacy sponsorship network. Likewise, one of my great frustrations as a researcher in this project is that, while I believe this project has interventions to make in my particular field of study, I do not feel that I have successfully created a product that my community of study will be able to use practically, though there are state-level applications of the work. It is difficult for a graduate student to do this kind of work well. I highly recommend that new graduate students considering community literacy work (and those mentoring them) take advantage of the extant literature on how graduate students may successfully (or unsuccessfully) construct community-based projects in the early planning stages (Klocker; Burgess; and Chiseri-Strater for a few very helpful starters).

In addition, as I have discussed in detail throughout the project, my positionality to the research brings both strengths and weaknesses. I believe that having some connections in the community enabled me to do a kind of project that would have been

more difficult than someone from outside the community; at the same time, being from the region may give me blind spots that someone with an emic standpoint might not struggle with. Because I have emphasized breadth of data in a relatively short time frame, it is possible that I have missed critical components of the literacy sponsorship network in Abbyville despite my best efforts. Finally, the lack of a team setup to help with data triangulation and checking my results has been a real gap that I have seen throughout the project.

Future Goals and Final Observations

In a hypothetical future where I have time to set my own research agenda (I run a campus writing center as a 12 month staff member, but you never know), I would replicate this study in rural communities around my state year-by-year, interviewing multiple people at each organization in a given community at a variety of hierarchical levels (ideally, as part of a team who could help with data triangulation). What particularities might stand out in each locale? Are there generalities that rise up from close study across multiple communities? What might the variations among these small communities, along with a rich description of the geographical constraints, historical background, and cultural details surrounding each one, tell us about the ways in which people construct small-scale literacy sponsorship networks from the ground up? Above all, how can we add to our evidence-based knowledge of community literacy without making unfair demands on community partners' time? A book project with this kind of breadth and depth would be an exciting prospect for what it might add to our conversations around community literacy.

Ultimately, this is a pilot project that I hope to see replicated across multiple communities. If our field takes seriously the notion that literacy sponsorship matters across contexts, then developing a few semi-standardized ways to map those contexts and discuss their place-based particularities (all along understanding that such representations are not holistic) will be instructive to us. This initial foray into mapping a literacy sponsorship network in detail points to the need for methodologically complex approaches. My own preference, given my emphasis on multiple audiences, favors reductive visualization of literacy sponsorship networks sitting alongside intentional narrative complication of that visualization, allowing for a story-stacking approach to detailing what networks of literacy sponsors see as “the greater good” when offering services. Imagine what we would learn about the circulation of community literacy among large groups of sponsorship actors from different positionalities if we had an archive of rich portraits of individual communities. The differences (or similarities) among successful collaborations and kinds of barriers to either initial sponsorship or sponsoring roles, stacked and compared, might allow our field to draw conclusions useful to both fellow academics and to community organizers attempting to create various kinds of change.

What about Abbyville? The leaders, regular citizens, retirees, librarians, extension agents, police officers, teachers, principals, nurses, doctors, artists, business owners, and factor managers who are doing the work of literacy in Abbyville, who are both participating in and structuring opportunities for learning - they are the ones setting the agenda and the goals that envision a future for the town. Like citizens of most rural towns, they want a sustainable home place - a “good” and “safe” place to live, work,

grow, and play - and they are working to define what that means in this particular geographical space in 2019, when I am finalizing this dissertation. They want their young people to stay and to have a livelihood when they do. Their active efforts to provide entertainment at the town's old theater, the downtown revitalization project to get more small businesses to return to the town, the community college to provide educational opportunity past K-12, the WorkReady application to create collaboration between local industry and schools to attract more employers without losing their small town feel - these are all in play.

While this may be seen as controversial by some colleagues, I am intentionally refusing to “make recommendations” for the town here consistent with my commitment to being a different kind of researcher who does not assume that I am the locus for change within the community. My research on rural communities in Chapter 1 shows, I believe, that I have not been a participant in the community long enough to make aggressive, emphatic calls for any kind of change. My participants are aware of their own history in a way that is palpable, and the unconscious effects of that history on the way they disseminate literacy services in the town are still being worked out. Chapter IV openly identifies certain missing elements in access to sponsoring roles, but I will let participants read and trust that their intelligence can comprehend those gaps and that the community can come up with more localized ways to address them. Each of my participants gets a copy of the dissertation, and I wonder if any will choose to read it in full. More realistically, I suspect they will skim the sections I tag for them and move on with their busy lives, and I am grateful for the time they took to help me understand what they are doing and why. Regardless, their trust, their professional efforts, their resistance

to moments of injustice, and their vision for the future of their rural community are at least one picture of the ways a rural community provides literacy services.

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APPENDIX A:

Interview Questions

- If affiliated – What is your primary role in your organization?
- What other roles (for unaffiliated – substitute “What roles”) do you hold in the community?
- If affiliated - What do you see as your organization’s main role in developing community literacy?
- If affiliated - What other community partners do you see as most important to your work?
- If affiliated - How do you talk about your topic to community members in order to educate them in your area of expertise?
- If affiliated - What kinds of written materials do you produce or bring to community meetings to hand out?
- What elements of literacy do you feel your community “does” well as a whole, that is, what programs/organizations most benefit the community?
- If you had unlimited resources, how would you (or would you?) change/expand organizations in town to contribute to community literacy?
- What do you see as the primary literacy needs of the community?
- What kinds of benefits (physical, social, educational, etc.) do you see to community literacy in [REDACTED]?
- What kinds of barriers (physical, social, educational etc.) to community literacy do you see in [REDACTED]?
- What kinds of literacy projects do you think would be most helpful to the community as a whole?
- Which organization in town has contributed the most to your personal literacy?
- What do I need to know about the town to build good relationships and do good research here?
- Do you know other people or organizations that I should include in my study?

APPENDIX B

FULL CODEBOOK: NODE GROUPS, INDIVIDUAL NODES, AND REFERENCES EXPORTED FROM NVIVO 12

Nodes\\Access and Accessibility

accessibility	1	3
availability	1	1
disability	1	1
internet access	1	1
transportation	2	4

Nodes\\Aging Population

aging population	1	1
seniors	1	1

Nodes\\Business and Industry

business	4	8
economy	1	1

Nodes\\Business and Industry\\Agriculture and Natural Resources

animals	1	1
farming	2	10
farming equipment	1	1
GMOs	1	1
Land Grant University System	1	1
plants	2	3

Nodes\\Collectivity

belonging	1	3
building relationships	2	4
centralized services	1	1
citizenship	11	19
collaboration	20	46
community identity	3	3
community improvement	8	14
empowerment	1	1
helping each other out	2	3
lack of collaboration	2	2
participation	1	1

recognition by community	7	7
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Nodes\\Community Health and Fitness

assessment	2	2
athletics	2	5
certification	1	1
food	6	8
health	3	4
health literacy	3	4
hospital	1	1
perception of service	1	1
policy	1	1
recreational facilities	1	1
smoking	1	1
sports	1	2
statewide organizations	1	1
YMCA	2	2

Nodes\\Cultural Context

class	3	6
close-mindedness	1	1
culture	7	7
history	7	11
knowing - context	12	21

locality	15	32
perception of researcher	4	5
poverty	5	6
race	5	19
time	6	6

Nodes\\Drug Problem

drugs	7	10
rehab	1	1

Nodes\\Education

challenge	6	10
college education	9	20
community college	4	5
community mentoring	2	3
enjoyment, fun	1	1
GED	2	2
holistic learning	4	5
home school	1	1
K-12 education and schooling	15	30
life skills	2	2
role models	2	2
standardized testing	1	1
writing	1	3

Nodes\\Events and Meetings

community event	2	4
community meeting	2	2
getting out into community	7	15
shame	3	3
small groups	1	1
speech speaking	7	14

Nodes\\Family

children	10	17
discipline (family)	1	1
early childhood education	2	2
family	17	32
family education	2	4
parenting	3	3
pregnancy	2	3
youth	2	2

Nodes\\Funding and Finances

debt	1	1
decreased funding	1	1
finances	2	3

funding	12	20
New Node	0	0
New Node	0	0
money	4	4
volunteers	1	1

Nodes\\Futures Planning and Visioning

future	1	1
revitalization	2	3
vision	1	1

Nodes\\Government and Law

agency - choice	3	4
court system	1	2
fear	1	1
law	2	2
local government	4	4
loss	1	2
national government	1	1
police	1	2
protection	1	1
state government	7	9

Nodes\\Interconnectivity

change	1	1
interconnected factors	2	2
overlapping roles	10	16

Nodes\\Jobs and Job Training

adult education	6	9
employment	8	18
resume	2	2
social fluency	6	7
soft skills	2	2
workforce development	1	2

Nodes\\Other Communities

leaving	3	3
nearby communities	2	2
rural-urban	5	8
travel	3	5

Nodes\\Physical Infrastructure

buildings and structures	2	2
housing	2	2

physical environment	5	7
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Nodes\\Physical Interaction

bodies	4	8
hands-on experience	2	2
manual labor	2	2
physical danger	1	1
physical incentives objects	2	2
physical presence	2	2
presence	5	9

Nodes\\Reading, Books

audiobooks	1	1
illiteracy	2	2
literacy	5	7
reading for personal knowledge	1	3
reading for work	2	2
reading, Bible	1	1
reading, books	10	23

Nodes\\Spirituality

church	3	5
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faith, God	4	5
prayer	1	1
religion	1	1
sermons	2	3

Nodes\\Technology and Media

accurate information	3	3
apps, applications (phones)	1	1
computers and tablets	2	3
email	1	1
internet	4	4
marketing	2	2
media	1	1
multiple modalities	1	2
newsletter	4	5
newspaper (2)	2	2
newspaper	2	2
radio	1	1
smartphones	2	6
social media	4	7
technology	7	13
TV	1	1

Nodes\\The Arts

art	3	6
music	2	2

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University of Louisville Creative Writing Award for Poetry
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PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES: National Council of Teachers of English

PUBLICATIONS:

“Centering Partnerships: A Case for Writing Centers as Sites of Community Engagement.” (co-written with Bronwyn T. Williams). *Community Literacy Journal*, vol 13, no.2, 2019.

PUBLICATIONS (CONTINUED):

“On Multimodal Composing.” (co-written with Sara P. Alvarez, Michael Baumann, Khirsten L. Echols, Layne M.P. Gordon, Ashanka Kumari, Laura Sceniak Matravers, Jessica Newman, Caitlin E. Ray, Jon Udelson, Rick Wysocki, and Danielle DeVoss). *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*, vol. 21, no. , 2017, <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/21.2/praxis/devoss-et-al/index.html>

“Pass the Parcel: The Ever Expanding Impact of Critical Utopian Action Research.” (co-written with Mary Brydon-Miller, Patricia Gaya, Paul Noone, Alice Willatt, Cassandra Book, Stephen Cohen, Laura Tetreault, and Bronwyn T. Williams). *Change and Knowledge: Science for People and with People. Festschrift to Birger Steen Nielsen*, edited by Janne Gleerup et al., Department for People and Technology. Roskilde University, 2017, pp. 9–20.

NATIONAL MEETING PRESENTATIONS

“High-Fiving a Fist Bump: Performing and Valuing Linguistic Diversity in Peer Tutor Training” with Jamiella Brooks	Conference on College Composition and Communication	March 2019
“Mapping Literacy Infrastructure: Networked Sponsorship in a Rural Community”	Conference on Community Writing	October 2017
“Melding University/Partner Perspectives”	Thomas R. Watson Conference	October 2016
“The WPA Course: Pursuing Miller’s Intellectual Bureaucrat”	Conference on College Composition and Communication	March 2016
“Rewriting Appalachia: Towards an Updated Research Heuristic”	Conference on College Composition and Communication	March 2015
“Divine Law, Human Words: The Mosaic Prologue and the Alfredian Conceptualization of Law”	Newberry Graduate Student Conference	January 2014

NATIONAL MEETING PRESENTATIONS (CONTINUED)

“Bridging the Gap:
Creating Alignment for
High School and College
Instructors”

Kentucky Philological
Association Conference

April 2013